

EXPLORING THE TRAGEDY OF JUDE: A BILDUNGSROMAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The Bildungsroman theory, rooted in Germany, has been a subject of fascination for scholars of German literature. Translated as Bildungsroman, Entwicklungsroman, or Erziehungsroman, this literary style encapsulates personal growth and education. The theory delves into the transformation of individuals in the process of self-exploration, reflecting their inner struggles and their evolving relationship with society. This paper aims to explore the essence of Bildungsroman by dissecting the protagonist's journey, the conflicts they encounter within society, and the internal contradictions they grapple with during their spiritual quest. In essence, it endeavors to unravel how the protagonist, in the crucible of external influences, shapes a unique inner self through the growth process. The theory Bildungsroman, as explained by Marx, revolves around the young hero's pivotal experiences of pain, worldview transformation, personality evolution, or a combination thereof. This transformation marks the transition from innocence in childhood to the complex, real world of adulthood. This thesis employs the Bildungsroman theory to dissect the tragic life of Jude in Thomas Hardy's literary masterpiece, "Jude the Obscure."

Keywords: Bildungsroman Theory, Protagonist Development, Inner Struggles, Self-Exploration, Thomas Hardy's "Jude the Obscure"

Introduction

The theory Bildungsroman originated in Germany, and German literature researchers have translated this literary style as Bildungsroman, Entwicklungsroman, or Erziehungsroman. The former tends to show personal characteristics and privacies, while the latter focuses on regulating and disciplining the educated from the standpoint of the educator. "Man is created according to the image of God, and the fall of man leads to the distortion of the image. In order to atone for the crime, man reshaped his image through self-review and reflection, and confession literature came into being. This partly explains the origin and connection between confessional literature and bildungsromances".¹ What we intend to discuss here in this thesis is the literary theory Bildungsroman. By sorting out the protagonist's growth path, the conflicts between the protagonist and society are presented, and the inner contradictions of the protagonist are explored through the analysis of the protagonist's spiritual exploration, so as to understand how the protagonist "forms a unique inner self stimulated by the external environment in the process of growth". In the context of "what is a bildungsroman", Marx pointed out: "bildungsroman shows the young hero has experienced some kind of pain, or change the original worldview, or changed his personality, or both. This

change freed him from the innocence of his childhood and eventually led him to a real and complex adult world."² This thesis will apply the theory Bildungsroman to analyze the tragic life of Jude in Hardy's masterpiece *Jude the Obscure* [1-2].

1. Analysis of Jude's Growth Progress

Bakhtin made a systematic investigation of the historical themes of Bildungsroman, pointing out that Bildungsroman are different from other types of novels in the past, mainly because "the image of the hero is not a static unity, but a dynamic unity. The hero himself, his character, becomes variable in the formula of this novel. The change of the main character has plot meaning".

2.1 Understanding Jude the Obscure

Jude the Obscure, as Thomas Hardy's best bildungsroman novel, has an immeasurable impact on individuals and society. Living in the transitional period of English society from old time to modern time, Thomas Hardy insights sensitively the evil of the industrialization of the Bourgeoisie. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy exposed the decadent social system and unfair moral laws of the Victorian period through the tragedy of a teenager's growth, attacked the hypocrisy of the capitalists, and sympathized with the miserable situation of the people at the bottom. Jude pursued and longed for social justice and higher knowledge all his life. However, he must reluctantly accept the cruel social reality, which makes Jude's pain more intense after he feels the huge contrast. Such a strong shock makes readers pay close attention to Jude's tragic fate and sympathize with his helpless disillusionment[3-4].

2.2 Three Stages of Jude's Life Journey

Jude experienced three stages in his growth: naivete and pursuit, confusion and suffering, epiphany and disillusion.

2.2.1 Jude's Ambition and Innocence

The story begins from the time when Jude is only 11 years old, his parents have died, and he is poor and lonely but full of ambition. As an orphan, he suffers a lot in the village, however he never loses his heart in pursuing a bright future. In Jude's view, the only way to success for a poor boy like himself, who was born a peasant, was to go to college and enter a seminary. In Jude's mind, the best path to success for a country boy is to accept high education or to learn theology in order to become a priest. His original family has no experience of the high society, so Jude has to chance to know the truth of the upper class.

2.2.1.1 Jude's Fantastic Admiration to Christminster

Mr Phillotson, an educated man, is the only knowledgeable person who acts as the night school teacher in the poor, laggard and isolated place, influenced Jude a lot. The story begins with the farewell scene of Mr Phillotson's leaving, and he exhorts Jude repeatedly: "you know what a university is, and a university degree? It is a necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything to teaching. By going to live at Christminster, or near it, I shall be at headquarters, so to speak, and if my scheme is practicable at all, I consider that being on the spot will afford me a better chance of carrying it out than I should have elsewhere." (20) These words plants the seeds of hope in Jude's heart, he regarded Christminster as an ideal place to fulfill his glorious grand life plan, and from that time on his dream is to study in

Christminster. In Jude's eyes, the christian city is: "On that stretch of scenery, within a certain range, there is a place where there are little spots of light, like red topaz, shining brightly. Regardless of whether the scene was an illusion or not, Jude's fascination with the Christian Temple continued to grow: "Suddenly something came to him from the wind - as if it were a mission from the city - as if it were from someone who lived there." Yes, it was the voice of the clock, the very voice of the city, faintly and sweetly calling to him, 'Happy here we are! "' (22)

Jude became fond of reading and began to utilize all his spare time to study. Even if his aunt did not have much money for his education, Jude was willing to study hard on his own. In order to make a living and lighten the burden of life, Jude followed his uncle's footsteps and became a stone cutter apprentice.

2.2.1.2 Jude's Ludicrous Marriage with Arabella

Jude's hard studying and his insatiable pursuit in the knowledge ocean was interrupted by the appearance of Arabella, a cow-breeder's daughter, whose world value is quite different with Jude's dream, however, Jude was attracted by her beautiful appearance and voluptuous figure, which leads to the tragic marriage life of the protagonist. " 'What a nice-looking girl you are!' he murmured, though the words had not been necessary to express his sense of her magnetism." (29) Jude's weakness and innocence of the relationship between male and female is the first blasting fuse of Jude's tragic life.

Their relationship has no emotional foundation and what promotes them to approach each other is only the Hormone of the young people. Jude once decided to abandon his dream and condescend himself to get used to the country life. However, Arabella's despising of his pursuit for knowledge makes him cannot breathe. "As she warmed she saw some of Jude's dear ancient classics on a table where they ought not to have been laid. 'I won't have them books here in the way!' she cried petulantly; and seizing them one by one she began throwing them upon the floor". (56) And this drives Jude into unrestrained irritation: 'Leave my books alone!' he said. 'You might have thrown them aside if you had liked, but as to soiling them like that, it is disgusting!' In the operation of making lard Arabella's hands had become smeared with the hot grease, and her fingers consequently left very perceptible imprints on the book-covers. She continued deliberately to toss the books severally upon the floor, till Jude, incensed beyond bearing, caught her by the arms to make her leave off. Somehow, in going so, he loosened the fastening of her hair, and it rolled about her ears." (57) This fierce quarrel doomed their separation and they left each other to find their own pleasure.

2.2.2 Jude's Confusion and Suffering

The failure of the wrong marriage reminds Jude that he still has something more exalted to fight for, so he leaves Marygreen, the hometown where he grew up and goes to Christminster in order to realize his ideal. However, the life in Christminster and his love with his cousin Sue gives him another stroke. He just escapes from a morass and steps into fire immediately. In front all of the failure and blow from the environment and the tradition of the society, he walks every steps awkwardly and stand again at the edge of disaster.

2.2.2.1 Jude's Confusion During his Studying Career

In order to realize his dream, Jude makes efforts to learn Latin, Greek, mathematics, geometry and history. During the ten years' apprenticeship as a stone cutter, he grasped a lot of knowledge, so he writes to the dean of Biblioll college with confidence, however, the dean refused him ironically: "Sir, - I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do. Yours faithfully T. tetuphenay. To Mr. J. fawley, Stone-mason." The response from the proud dean T. tetuphenay, together with the truth that his teacher Mr Phillotson has never been to study in the College pushes Jude into an abyss of disappointments.

After the refusal, Jude went to drink in an inn with some college students and scholars from Christminster and he found out that the academic circle has no attention to study at all, on the contrary, what they care about only the fame and power. In the inn, Jude was mocked by an undergraduate: "'You always was fond o' books, I've heard,' said Tinker Taylor, 'and I don't doubt what you state. Now with me 'twas different. I always saw there was more to be learnt outside a book than in; and I took my steps accordingly, or I shouldn't have been the man I am. If you are such a scholar as to pitch yer hopes so high as that, why not give us a specimen of your scholarship? Canst say the Creed in Latin, man? That was how they once put it to a chap down in my country.'" After Jude speaks out the famous quotation loudly, the whole place becomes quiet, however, they do not know what Jude was talking about, and that annoyed Jude deeply. In the material society, few people care about the truth of the world, the profound knowledge, the theology. He realizes that what he pursued during the past 10 years is entirely imaginary and for the upper class people Learning in the church and College is only the convenient way to get the position or power in the Church or School[5-7].

2.2.2.2 Jude's Confusion about his Love with Sue

During his short life, the appearance of Sue, his cousin, is the only sunshine and happiness for Jude. They hold the same opinions on their current society, despising the shallowness of the high class who abandoned the good virtue, hating the stubborn doctrine of the church. The bound of so many pedantry make them cannot breathe, so Sue escaped from the window of the church and decided to elope with Jude, however, that annoyed many hypocrites who considered themselves the guard of right tradition and good virtue.

Although Jude loves Sue, their status prevents them to marry, for Sue is the cousin of Jude and, even worse, Jude is still in marriage with Arabella, and Sue has engaged with Mr. Phillotson whom she cannot accept from her inner heart. "And then we are cousins, and it is bad for cousins to marry. And - I am engaged to somebody else. As to our going on together as we were going, in a sort of friendly way, the people round us would have made it unable to continue. Their views of the relations of man and woman are limited, as is proved by their expelling me from the school. Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire." Their love were not blessed by the environment and the society, so wherever they go or

however hard they work, they were rejected and despised by the crowds. The suffered a lot for their irregular love relationships.

2.2.3 Jude's Epiphany and Disillusion

As young couple with new ideas who endeavor to rebel the decayed tradition, they fight against their destiny and eager to live with their own will, so they breaks away from the bound of the tradition and married with each other. During their daily life, Sue always feels unstable, for in her eyes, the love which is not blessed by God will be punished. Her son, Small Time Old Man murdered another two children, and that pushed the whole story into climax, and proved the unsafe feeling of Sue. "Her inquiries were incessant, and at last Jude came down and told her there was no hope. As soon as she could speak she informed him what she had said to the boy, and how she thought herself the cause of this." (295) Sue believes that is the punishment from God. "The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the in auspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died." This extremely bloody accident throw the young couple into despair, and they have no strength to fight for their ideal life any more, and that resulted in the departure of Sue, returning back to her dull marriage with Mr. Phillotson.

In front of the tragedy of the children's death and Sue's leaving, Jude was defeated by the God of fate, and he begins to reflect. He has suffered a lot and fought only for love and knowledge, however, he faced setbacks everywhere, he was defeated completely by the society and the people, the tradition of his time. The frequent strikes destroys Jude's health and mind. He becomes very weak and returned to Arabella. Lying on the death bed, Jude expressed his anger to the unfair society: "As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago - when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless - the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us. And so the resistance they met with brought reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin on me! ..." (358) It is the evil society, which has no kindness and mercy to the poor people who embrace knowledge and noble heart, destroyed Jude's happy life and eventually push him to death[8-10].

3. Conclusion

Through the analysis of Jude's growth track, it is not difficult to find out that Hardy's masterpiece *Jude the Obscure* has distinctive features of Bildungsroman, however, unlike Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*, Hardy's heroes and heroins are more rebellious than ambitious, and they suffered a lot of traumas during their growth progress, which eventually push them into tragic darkness and abyss. The failure of Jude's growth into a strong-minded adult lies in his indifference of the social condition and customs. His poetic and fantastic expectation of the Christminster doomed his failure in studying their. His original family background keeps him away from the gate of the higher class circle, for, in that kind social circumstances, it is impossible for the poor to enter the circle of noble class. The source of Jude's tragedy is that he insists on his ideal life view and ignores the obstruction of the rotten society. If he could

insight the cruel reality of the darkness of his time and adjust the destination of his life journey, his life may be another story.

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