

Karin Svensson (830113-3206)
Degree Essay Course in English Literature
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Lund University
Supervisor: Eivor Lindstedt
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Old Traits and New Fiction
The Role of the Bildungsroman in Contemporary Fiction

**A Comparison Based on Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*
and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations***

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Introduction

The reader of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* was educated in the values of the Victorian society; the importance of moral and manners. The reader follows the protagonist's growth from childhood into adulthood on his quest for a better life and by the protagonist's encounters with other characters, values and behaviour, the reader learns to distinguish good moral from failing even in the non-fictional world. This is what makes the genre of the Bildungsroman so interesting; it serves as an intermediary between the moral values of society and the maturation of a fictive character.

The fact that *Great Expectations*, as so many other Bildungsromane, was written in the mid eighteenth-hundreds raises questions about whether or not the main purpose of the genre – to convey the moral values of the surrounding society – still works in the contemporary society of a new millennium. Is the reader still receptive (and perceptive) to moral education through fictional “handbooks” and in what way is the message being delivered?

The aim of this essay is to study the key characteristics of the Bildungsroman and examine if the same traits still are in use in contemporary fiction and what values that are being mediated. The aim is also to focus on the style in which the pedagogical message is being delivered thus highlighting the possible differences and similarities between an old-fashioned Bildungsroman, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, and a contemporary one, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Brief Summary of the Novels

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* was written in the 1860s and is a typical Bildungsroman in the way that the reader follows the young protagonist, Pip, in his maturation from child to adult. Pip is raised by his hot-tempered sister and her kind and honest husband Joe Gargery, and he is intended to be trained as a blacksmith, following in Joe's footsteps. Through Pip's encounters with various characters - the fake Mr Pumblechook, the vengeful old spinster Mrs Havisham, the cold-hearted Estella, the slick attorney Mr Jaggers, the coarse Bentley Drummle and many more – his values and behaviour are tested and directed into his own beliefs and understanding of the world. Through all his encounters and various trials he eventually develops into a good-hearted gentleman with great expectations.

While Pip learns to distinguish good moral from failing in the fictive world of Dickens' London, the real reader is supposed to be able to do the same in the non-fictional world. The values of society and the importance of manners and education are conveyed through *Great Expectations* in the way of a typical Bildungsroman, and the novel itself can be seen as a sort of 'handbook' of correct manners according to the Victorian society.

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* was written in 1990 and the reader follows the young protagonist, Karim, and his search for identity and inner peace during some years in the 1970s. In the same way as with Pip, Karim's moral beliefs and values are directed by the different characters he encounters throughout the novel. However, the characters are fairly more developed and rounded in comparison with the ones in *Great Expectations*, thus making the characters and the story more authentic.

The fact that Karim's parents are of different cultural background adds another perspective to the young protagonist's way of maturation. Apart from this, identity, sexuality, fame and self-realization are prominent themes through which the values of the England of the 1970s are conveyed. As with *Great Expectations*, the story in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is narrated from a first person point of view with the protagonist as narrator.

Definition of the Term Bildungsroman

A Bildungsroman is a novelistic genre that arose during the German Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, following the dissolving of the feudal system and the spreading of democratic ideas. The genre focused on new ideas about the psychological, moral and social shaping of the personality of a protagonist in relation to society. As Buckley argues, it might be tempting to use synonyms of the term Bildungsroman; the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation or even the life novel – but none of these synonyms fully substitutes the label Bildungsroman since the genre is about the process of maturation rather than the state of being (vii-viii).

There is little agreement on what the term Bildungsroman actually means, but since Goethe was the one to write the very first Bildungsroman, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*¹, the proposal is to apply his definition of *Bildung*, which suggests that personal growth cannot be restrained arbitrarily by fixed rules of conduct:

¹ *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeships* was published in 1795-96.

His [Goethe's] definition includes the idea of reciprocal growth or change in which the individual and his environment are engaged in a process of mutual transformation, each shaping the other until the individual has reached the point where he or she experiences a sense of harmony with the environment. Because Goethe places the individual rather than society at the center of the Bildungsprozess [...] we may conveniently use this definition in evaluating Bildungsromane of our time. (Gohlman, x)

What can then be said to be the main traits of a Bildungsroman? According to Gohlman, any novel containing a young hero (usually male), a wide range of experiences and a sense of the ultimate practical value of these experiences in later life can be said to belong to the Bildungsroman genre (4). Furthermore, a classical Bildungsroman generally takes the course of the protagonist's growth from child to adult, and according to Buckley, the child must be of some sensibility and he or she (mostly he) grows up in the country or in a provincial town (Buckley, 17). Moreover, the protagonist must have a reason to embark upon his or her journey. Usually, loss or discontent at an early stage in the protagonist's life jars him away from home and family. As stated by Buckley, this discontent could be either a social or intellectual constraint placed upon the free imagination (ibid.). Additionally, the protagonist's family and especially his father proves persistently hostile to his creative instinct or flights of fancy and is quite impervious to the new ideas gained from unprescribed reading (ibid.). The process of maturation is long, arduous and gradual, involving repeated clashes between the hero's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by a rigid social order. Buckley states that the protagonist's first schooling may be frustrating since it may suggest options not available to his present setting; he therefore leaves the repressive atmosphere of home to make his way independently in the city. There his real "education" begins, not only his preparation for a career but also his direct experience of urban life. The experience of urban life involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing and one exalting, thus demanding that in this respect and others, the hero reappraise his values (ibid.). However, the spirits and values of the social order eventually become manifest in the protagonist who is ultimately accommodated into society. The novel ends with the protagonist's appraisal of himself and his new place in society, usually manifested by a social contact, most commonly in the shape of marriage since this is regarded as a kind of physical and psychical bond between man and society.

A Bildungsroman does not only examine the hard facts of growing up, but focuses deeply on the youth's soft feelings and thoughts about them. Gohlman states that the term has been used to describe any work of fiction that served as a useful handbook to correct

moral behaviour, but points out the importance of the Bildungsroman not just as a novel of development, but as a novel in which the hero actively shapes himself both from within and without. This creates personal harmony and balance between the hero and the world.

(Gohlman, 12-13)

From 'Vorbild' to Redemption

To be able to understand the core of the Bildungsroman genre, a closer look at the word itself is useful. The word Bildungsroman derives from the word *Bild* that was originally used by the church fathers and the scholastics to refer to the restoration of the image of God:

Man was created in God's image (Vorbild) but through the Fall he became "deformed"; to redeem himself man had to re-build himself, so to speak, through self-examination and meditation.[...] During the Enlightenment this religious conception of Bildung gradually became secularized and by the late eighteenth century it referred specifically to the humanistic ideal or perfected man (Gohlman, 17).

According to Kontje, the concept of *Bildung* changes during the eighteenth century; "[i]nstead of being a passive recipient of a pre-existent form, individuals now gradually develop their innate potential through interaction with the environment" (2). Kontje concludes that "[t]ransformation into the perfect unity with God turns into the development of one's unique self" (2). This is important since the meaning of the term suggests how firmly rooted *Bildung* is in the context of personal growth and the attainment of inner peace.

Genetics and Freedom

Adding to the discussion above on the quest of maturation and inner peace as main traits in the definition of the Bildungsroman, the concepts of gender and freedom are also important traits to examine further. According to Kontje, the classical theories of *Bildung* were mainly based on the role of gender with its radical biological differences between men and women – men were regarded as active, rational and associated with freedom, while women were regarded as passive, imaginative and associated with nature - and the pedagogical treatises concerning the proper way to raise children of different sexes (6-7). However, Kontje argues that *Bildung* in the first instance referred to organic growth; the development of the seed to fruit according to innate genetic principles and thus stresses the necessity of freedom for human development and the view of personal cultivation as a continuing project (3-4). Kontje continues this line of reasoning by adding that *Bildung* is the primary goal of humanity, that

our true purpose in life is to cultivate our diverse talents into a balanced whole; nature has provided the “seed” but it is up to humans to develop to their full potential through active engagement with the world around them. Therefore, freedom becomes the first and essential prerequisite for personal *Bildung* (4).

The confidence in the human ability to shape destiny and the assumption that man needs freedom to fulfil the primary goal of humanity by interacting with the environment contradicts the idea that the individual is only genetics. The idea that man is maturing into what he is destined to become is no longer valid since the idea of climate also adds to the development and maturation. As a result, *Bildung* thus becomes a mix of innate genetic potential under the influence of the geographical and cultural setting.

Similarities in the Use of Traits

The old-fashioned, classical Bildungsroman, *Great Expectations*, and the contemporary, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, show the main characteristics of the Bildungsroman. Adding to this, the presence and importance of some kind of faith and the search for inner peace are key traits which are highly prominent in both books. After a close look at the definition of the Bildungsroman and its historical background, and the prevailing circumstances, an evident similarity between the novels lies in the notion of faith the protagonists hold, even though *what* they believe in, the nature of faith, might have changed somewhat. This suggests that belief and search for inner peace could be considered key traits and that these notions function as ingredients for a fulfilled life, since both faith and inner peace are present and as important and prominent in the contemporary Bildungsroman as it is in the old-fashioned one.

In *Great Expectations*, the reader is continuously reminded of the presence of Christian values and morals which shaped the society and its members during the nineteenth century. This can be seen in short sayings such as ‘Lord bless the boy’ (Dickens, 14), ‘gracious goodness gracious me’ (Dickens, 30) etc., or as daily routines, such as saying a prayer before meals or before going to bed, or even as clear morality lessons about being grateful and respectful towards your parents. This presence of Christian values becomes even more prominent since the narrator, also the protagonist, gives a somewhat bewildered impression when referring to different values and viewpoints, as if he does not know the actual meaning of the values;

It began the moment we sat down to dinner. Mr. Wopsle said grace with theatrical declamation – as it now appears to me, somewhat like a religious cross of the Ghost in Hamlet with Richard the Third – and ended with the very proper aspiration that we might be truly grateful. Upon which my sister fixed me with her eye, and said, in a low reproachful voice, “Do you hear that? Be grateful.” “Especially,” said Mr. Pumblechook, “be grateful, boy, to them which brought you up by hand.” (Dickens, 25)

These values eventually become questioned by the protagonist in favour of other values based on own experiences and reflections; Pip is in due course no longer treated as a debased and lesser human, but as an independent kind-hearted gentleman. However, Pip’s values are still based on Christian beliefs, but he has found the morality in those beliefs on his own terms and therefore also gained a personal approach on what the values actually mean. An example of this is when Pip has found out that Magwitch is his secret benefactor:

Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading wretched me with his gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping! If I had loved him instead of abhorring him; if I had attracted to him by the strongest admiration and affection, instead of shrinking from him with the strongest repugnance; it could have been no worse. (Dickens, 318)

The contemporary Bildungsroman, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, deals with faith and confidence in a similar way; not necessarily based on Christian or even religious values, but based on the innate potential in every man/woman to believe in himself/herself and to question the surrounding lifestyle and the future set by someone else. The ruling morals and values shaping the protagonist’s childhood and teenage years in the England of the 1970s are not automatically based on Christian beliefs, but on a mix of cultures and beliefs, something that might be called spiritual values or world-view. As in *Great Expectations*, the values present are eventually questioned by the protagonist in favour of other values based on his own experiences and reflections.

The protagonist’s father’s interest in yoga and meditation is especially prominent as an important contrast to the questioned standard way of self-examination and beliefs, which could be interpreted as a factual and physical questioning of the values of society. As a contrast to the values and lifestyles imposed on people from society, Karim’s father raises the question of the meaning of life:

‘I’m leaving my job. I’ve given my notice. The years I’ve wasted in that job.’ He threw up his hands. ‘Now I’m going to teach and think and listen. I want to discuss how we live our lives, what our values are, what kind of people we’ve become and what we can be if we want. I aim to encourage people to think, to

contemplate, to just let go their obsessions. In which school is this valuable meditation taught? I want to help others contemplate the deeper wisdom of themselves which is often concealed in the rush of everyday life. I want to live intensely my own life! Good, eh?' [...] 'We foreclose on reality prematurely, Karim. Our minds are richer and wider than we ever imagine!' (Kureishi, 266)

For the reason that the father's perception of the meaning of life is different to that of other characters or the society in general, the father could be said to function as an antagonist - questioning and affecting Karim's values and beliefs. An interesting note on this subject is also that it seems as if much of the appreciation for other values comes from the parent generation, as opposed to the younger generation which is usually typical of a Bildungsroman. The father's view on the importance of inner harmony fits well with the discussion of self-examination as a typical trait of a Bildungsroman and his thoughts also adds to the discourse when it comes to the issue of success and everyday accomplishments. The following quotation describes Karim's view on his father's beliefs and how they separate him from his surroundings in the 1970s:

A few days later I went to see Dad again. There he was, sitting in one of Eva's armchairs in his pyjamas, with a pallid young man on the floor in front of him. The man was intense, weepy, despairing. Dad was saying: 'Yes, yes, this whole business of living is very difficult.' Apparently these kids from Dad's classes were always turning up at the flat, and he had to deal with them. This he considered to be 'compassionate activity'. He was now saying that, for the sake of 'harmony', each day of your life had to contain three elements: scholarship, compassionate activity and meditation. Dad was teaching this several times a week at a nearby Yoga Centre. I'd always imagined that Dad's guru business would eventually fall off in London, but it was clear now that he would never lack employment while the city was full of lonely, unhappy, unconfident people who required guidance, support and pity. (Kureishi, 279)

This line of reasoning goes well with what Kontje says about self-examination and maturation seen from an eighteenth century perspective; that "[o]rganic imagery of natural growth replaces a model of divine intervention. Transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one's unique self. In this view, no fall from grace has occurred; humans, like the rest of God's creation, are essentially good. God no longer stands apart from the world but becomes a force of nature – indeed, a part of nature's pantheistic unity" (Kontje, 2). Owing to this, the characteristic ending of a Bildungsroman typically confirms Kontje's line of reasoning about the protagonist being at ease with himself and his surrounding after the long and arduous process of self-examination and reflection. This also fits well with what Gohlman says about the contemporary Bildungsroman as a violation of the spirit of the

Goethan principle that the hero actively creates an image of himself in relation to society that is valid for himself and no one else. Still, they can end up with middle-class ideals but the hero is now in a position to say “I think I can live with it now” (Gohlman, 25). An evident example of this is what Karim expresses at the end of the novel when he reflects on the past and the future in the following way:

I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggle to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way. (Kureishi, 283-284)

In *Great Expectations*, the ending might be somewhat bewildering due to the two different endings provided which leaves much to the reader's own imagination. However, the protagonist seems at ease with himself and his beliefs in the future when he is reunited with Estella;

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her. (Dickens, 479)

Education and Apprenticeship

Another key trait closely connected with the core of the genre, and highly prominent in both books is the importance of education, which functions as a necessity for the protagonist to start his quest for maturation. Note, however, that the concept of education in this context is rather wide. As stated by Gohlman; “the protagonist gains knowledge of the self and the world through direct experience, as opposed to indirect means of acquiring knowledge – as, for example, formal education” (ix).

In *Great Expectations* this process takes the form of the classical apprenticeship followed by the more elevated education in the city; Pip is intended to become a blacksmith, following in Joe's footsteps but is offered the opportunity to move to London and become a gentleman. The protagonist's view on ambition and values in life is reflected through his choices that being a blacksmith would be a sign of low ambitions while becoming a gentleman would gain him elevated social status.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the point about formal education is a less prominent theme for the protagonist. However, the same search for success and high ambitions is just as present. To begin with, the protagonist undergoes a more or less conventional apprenticeship

(traditional schooling), but more importantly he is later on offered the same kind of opportunity equivalent to the one Pip received from his unknown benefactor in *Great Expectations*, when Karim is discovered by a famous producer and offered a part in a play.

In this sense, both novels are good examples according to Gohlman's reasoning about the protagonist's active search for experiences. She states that the protagonists begin their true *Bildungsprozess* after having passed through a more or less conventional apprenticeship since it is not until then that they can make the decision to actively seek out those experiences that will provide them with an understanding of the relationship between themselves and their environment. Moreover, Gohlman adds that the process is reciprocal in the sense that as the protagonists are gradually shaped by their contacts with the world, they in turn shape and modify the world in accordance with the image that they are developing of themselves. Finally, Gohlman declares that this reciprocity might continue indefinitely, but once the protagonists reach the stage where they feel that their relationship with the world is both a satisfactory and workable one, their *Bildungsprozess* can be said to be complete (xi).

A closer look at the protagonist's perception of the different forms of education is necessary to unfold this line of reasoning. Firstly, the protagonists never really seem to fit into the system; as stated in the definition - perhaps because of a restless search for identity or an unstable family situation, and this is valid for both novels. This is especially noticeable in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where the protagonist is being bullied at school which could be interpreted as a clear evidence for not fitting into the system. At one point Karim even refers to Dickens, saying "fuck you, Charles Dickens, nothing's changed" (Kureishi, 63). Adding to this discussion there is the impression that Karim's father expects him to become a doctor and constantly reminds him of this when it comes to Karim's choice of occupation. However, Karim's interest in acting is aroused and by chance he receives an opportunity that turns out to be both exacting and enlightening. The protagonist's struggle between fulfilling his parents' wish on the one hand, and society's standards on the other, can be seen as the core of the quest for fulfilling the required standards imposed by society and at the same time obtaining personal fulfilment.

There is a slight difference between the two novels connected to education as one of the main traits of the Bildungsroman genre. This difference lies in the presence of the city and the urban education about the city's opportunities and hardships. In *Great Expectations*, Pip is not familiar with the urban setting thus making adjustments harder. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, on the other hand, Karim is already accustomed to the city setting

and very conscious about the world around him and could therefore be said to have a bit of an advantage before he starts his *Bildungsprozess*.

Differences in the Use of Traits

Two main differences that appear to be prominent while studying the presence and the use of Bildungsroman traits in the novels are the different aspects on the contract with society and how the pedagogical message is being delivered to the reader. These two issues are interesting to investigate, since they are highly representative of its time and thus take us one step closer to the notion about the role of the Bildungsroman in contemporary fiction.

Contract with Society vs. Freedom

There is a close tie between the notion of the so called social contract set between the protagonist and society in a Bildungsroman. In *Great Expectations*, it takes the form of the protagonist's ambition to get married after having undergone a formal education. Even though the novel has an open ending and the fact that the reader never really knows how Pip's and Estella's relationship work out, the aim for marriage as key to a fulfilled life is still present. This is noticeable in the way that Pip refers to other people's marriages and in the end of the narrative referred to earlier where Pip indicates that he does not intend to part from Estella ever again. According to Moretti, marriage has been discussed as a way for the protagonist to resolve the tension between his ego and society; the protagonist realizes that he must adjust to the norms and values of society by getting married. In Moretti's words, 'marriage is the classic comedic symbol for the self-limiting social contract' (Jeffers, 51).

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, on the other hand, the protagonist is restless and in a state of permanent revolt, eventually coming to terms with his identity and sexuality in a multicultural world. Nevertheless, the protagonist is still a restless, bisexual and somewhat searching character at the end of the novel. However, there is nothing that could resemble a social contract as proof of the protagonist's acceptance of his place within society; he has come to terms with his surroundings as they are right there and then, but there is nothing that could be said to represent marriage as a contemporary social contract. Moreover, there is no suggestion that the protagonist would eventually choose to accept society's demand of working nine to five as a contemporary social contract either, even if that itself could be regarded as a common sort of contract.

Moretti refers to the critique that has been raised against the Goethean ideal of “happiness” and “maturity” and its attendant marriages and reclassifications by arguing that “freedom” and “youth” are celebrated as the hero’s dynamic metamorphoses that both dismantle the very notion of personal identity as well as privileges adventures of adultery, over the insipidities of marriage. He continues this line of reasoning by asking why you would accept the “somebody”-role closely related to occupation and social status given to you by society – “when you can hit the road and become “anybody” you please?” (Jeffers, 51)

This line of reasoning fits well with the contemporary view on marriage as a social contract in *The Buddha of Suburbia* where the protagonist chooses partners of both sexes thus creating a freedom of choice when it comes to relationships. The protagonist’s choice of occupation also adds up to this line of reasoning since being an actor presupposes the notion, or rather the search for, personal identity.

Differences in the Way of Delivering the Message

The other major difference that appears prominent in a comparison between the two novels has to do with how the pedagogical message is being delivered to the reader. In the case of *Great Expectations*, the discrepancy between good and poor values, or right and wrong deeds, is fairly plain and easy to estimate because of the way the values are being delivered to the reader. The flatness of the characters together with the author’s choice in names, such as Estella (derived from ‘star’, indicating the protagonist’s constant reaching out for her), Magwitch (possibly derived from ‘magpie’ and ‘witch’, thus perchance indicating that the character is a thief) and Bentley Drummel (possibly chosen as a synonym for ‘rascal’) gives an expressive hint about what kind of values the characters represent. This creates a distance between the implied and the real reader, thus making it easier for the real reader to recognize the pedagogical lesson and its moral. Obvious names that imply characteristics help convey pedagogical messages about morals in an almost obvious way.

However, in the case of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the pedagogical message is not as over-explicit, but somewhat more discrete. The characters, as opposed to Dickens’ gallery of eccentric characters, are more rounded and none of the characters have names with a semantic significance. The distance between implied reader and real reader is not as large, thus making the pedagogical lesson and its moral more subtle. In *Great Expectations*, this is especially prominent since the story is narrated from Pip’s point of view as a first person narrator. As Pip grows older the voice of the narrator changes from being dissonant to become

more consonant and thus gives emphasis to the character's maturation (Keen, 36). This suggests that the basis lies in the authors' use of stylistic traits, such as the shaping of characters and the credibility of the story; whether the characters are round or flat and whether the story is a pure fairy tale or a work of fiction with anchorage in a reality similar to the reader's world. Following this line of reasoning, this could also be regarded as an indication that the values conveyed for a certain era, follow the way in which the era itself is represented. In the Victorian era, the values were set and firm in another way than they were in the seventies where the protagonist seems to have more options. Furthermore, this is a strong indication that as the society develops into a bustling concoction of cultures, religions and values – the pedagogical lesson will have to follow in that track and give room for the reader (as well as for the individual) to select what bits and pieces of the moral lesson to follow.

The Values of Society

As stated in the Introduction, one of the most interesting things about a Bildungsroman is the way that the genre conveys the social values of the time during which the novel was written. On the other hand, different aspects of different values from different periods in time are very complicated to compare and discuss.² Gohlman argues that writers are the children of their time, and states: “[w]hat more could writers have been than mirrors of the values of their time?” (207). Writers were influenced by political movements at the time as well as views on freedom and identity. The Bildungsroman can therefore be regarded as an epic where the values expressed are the values of the contemporary society of the era. By using stylistic and narrative traits, the author conveys social criticism and opens up for pedagogical moral lessons suitable for the contemporary society.

Fame, Money and Personal Fulfilment

Despite obvious differences in the social values of each time period represented in *Great Expectations* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, some values seem to be prominent for the protagonists and their surrounding, namely those concerning fame and money. Note, however,

² An interesting note is that Gohlman divides critics into two categories: those who argue that a Bildungsroman must be informed by clearly defined values which the protagonist must come to terms with and ultimately accept as his or her own; and those who argue that a Bildungsroman is not – and cannot be – informed by any preconceived standards of conduct or behaviour since it is the protagonists' task, in fact their *raison d'être* to create out of their own experience those standards by which they must live (Gohlman, ix-x).

that personal fulfilment or inner peace is another important value that seems to be a timeless social phenomenon and therefore an equally important trait, regardless of what time period it represents. However, personal fulfilment and inner peace have already been discussed thoroughly in this essay, why it is only mentioned briefly in connection with the values of society.

In *Great Expectations*, both fame and money could be said to be represented by the protagonist's task to become a gentleman and thus gaining elevated status in society. The protagonist's ambition for elevated status by becoming a gentleman with fortunes is the reason why he sets out on his quest for maturation in the first place and is a prominent theme throughout the novel.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the notion of fame is represented by the protagonist's efforts to become an acknowledged actor. Moreover, the protagonist's reference to his step-brother, Charlie Hero, as a successful musician adds to the discussion about fame as something that carries success in itself. Furthermore, the presence and the value of money lies as a constant reminder of money as a purpose in itself since money is represented as a measurement of fulfilment.

The *Bildungsprozess* and the Role of the Contemporary Bildungsroman

In the beginning, the notion of *Bildung* had a strong political implication since political revolutions were condemned as unnatural. Public interest was best served by a monarchy that allowed individuals to develop freely within a minimum of state intervention. However, after various political changes and the export of the genre to other countries and cultures, the idea about the rebellious youth regarded as a problem instead of an asset changed significantly. The interest in personal cultivation increased and thus placed the individual, rather than society in the centre of the *Bildungsprozess*. Kontje traces the idea about *Bildung* and the *Bildungsprozess* by referring to the nineteenth-century critics' view on *Bildung* as an organic process culminating in personal maturity and integration into an affirmed society. He adds that:

[t]his point of view lent itself to first nationalist and then fascist appropriation as the organic theory of the individual became the model for the nation. Opposition to the stress on personal harmony and social affirmation harmony and social affirmation in the Bildungsroman began early with the Romantics, continued along liberal critics of the *Vormärz*, and became the dominant trend in postwar literary criticism. [...] this export of the Bildungsroman to foreign cultures has

provoked indignation among German scholars. [...] The Germanist is likely to insist that the Bildungsroman develops in a particular political and cultural climate in Germany, and that its history in critical discourse remains intimately linked to the shifting fortunes of German history. In contrast, those outside of German studies downplay the national connection and stress the genre's close ties to modernity in general. (110-111).

A Bildungsroman follows consciously and artistically a representative youth along each step of his development, with each experience having a particular value of its own and serving at the same time as the springboard to the next experience (Gohlman, 15-16). Gohlman refers to Berger by saying that the Bildungsroman and its capacity to accommodate itself to the ever-changing *Bildungsprozess*, is predicted to become an even more significant literary form in the future than it has been in the past (Gohlman, 9).

Kontje develops this line of reasoning by referring to Bakhtin who argues that the hero of a Bildungsroman is the lens through which we see the world and the changing of epochs; he emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself and as the foundations of the world are changing, man must change along with them (40-41). Kontje also argues that since the idea of the Bildungsroman as portraying historical change entails adoption to new eras, it also involves transformation to the public sphere, where the restructuring of family, the codification of gender roles, etc are prominent traits (111).

Based on this, *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an evident and excellent example of a contemporary Bildungsroman: not only does it follow the classical course of the protagonist's maturation, but it also deals with a change in terms of the transformation of the public sphere and contemporary political issues. Furthermore, Kontje states that the genre will have to develop or explore its applicability to non-Western cultures as well as having to deal with homosexuality or other contemporary political issues (111)

Conclusion

The similarities between the old-fashioned *Great Expectations* and the contemporary *The Buddha of Suburbia* are evident; the protagonists' follow the same course in their maturation and eventually come to terms with the present values of society. Both novels deal with contemporary issues, yet with different themes based on the different values from the different centuries in which the novels were written. Dickens' protagonist is a typical

Bildungsroman protagonist in the sense that he is male and European. Adding to this, the protagonist is suggested to consent to the traditional social contract with society through a possible marriage, and this is supposedly the ultimate evidence showing that the protagonist has come to terms with himself and his role in society.

Kureishi's protagonist, on the other hand, is half Indian; he is the child of an English mother and an Indian father, raised in a fusion of cultures where ethnic as well as sexual belonging becomes important features. Another obvious difference between the novels is the absence of social contract with society. Adding to this is the fact that the social contract in the form of an old-fashioned happy marriage is violated over and over by characters being unfaithful to each other, by divorce or by arranged marriages based on cultural grounds. A social contract is something else in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and might convey the notion that in the non-fictional contemporary world, the social contract is something else than it once was, or even that such a contract no longer exists.

What is the role of the Bildungsroman genre in a new millennium? As stated above, literary critics seem to agree that the genre is still developing because of the way it focuses on human development; therefore, it is still of interest to the reading public. In the same way as society develops, the genre also expands to include a deepening human consciousness and human experiences. A genre focused on questioning and developing man's values, and consequently, also dealing with the eternal mystery of all life, can never get out of fashion. Personal harmony, inner peace and a balance between the self and the world is something that might even become a yet more prominent theme in the future. The genre will become more global in its setting and ideals due to multiculturalism and global political issues, which would be an interesting topic for further research.

What about the way the pedagogical message is being delivered in an old-fashioned Bildungsroman compared to a contemporary one? As described in the essay, it seems as if the contemporary *The Buddha of Suburbia* is more subtle in its way to deliver pedagogical messages and moral lessons and this could be interpreted as evidence that the real reader, as well as the fictive characters in the novel, want to have the possibility to choose what parts and what lessons to follow. The members of the 1970s' society had options and choices and this is reflected in the way the story about Karim is being told. As a contrast, the members of the Victorian society did not have that many options regarding lifestyle, occupation or beliefs, and this is mediated through *Great Expectations* as a good example of a handbook for correct moral behaviour.

It has been claimed that the hero of a Bildungsroman is the lens through which we see the world and the changing of epochs and that the author – by using stylistic and narrative traits conveys social criticism and opens up for pedagogical moral lessons suitable for the contemporary society. The concept of the Bildungsroman has developed over time due to political changes within society. The concept has been exported to other countries and cultures; *The Buddha of Suburbia* can be regarded as proof of this since it clearly shows a mixed ethnic-national culture vastly more complex than the old-fashioned *Great Expectations*. This could be interpreted as evidence that the concept of the Bildungsroman still works today.

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