# University of Algiers 2 Abou El Kacem Saadallah
## Faculty of Foreign Languages
### Department of English



## The Innovation in the Bildungsroman in British Literature: A Comparative Study
### *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens and *Neverwhere* (1997) by Neil Gaiman.

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of a Master of

Literature and Civilization

**Submitted by:** Haider Abderrahamane Mansouri

**Supervised by:** Dr. Kenza Tegaoua

**Academic Year: 2021/2022**

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

I am duly informed that any person practising plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary sanctions issued by university authorities under the rules and regulations in force.

Date: June 27th 2022

Signed: …………………………

Mr Haider Abderrrahmane Mansouri

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Kenza Tegaoua for the guidance and help she gave me during the research process. I am also grateful for the members of the jury Pr. Asia Kaced and Mr. Gasmi Ahmed for having accepted to examine this dissertation. I would also like to express my thanks to the department of English of Celal Bayar university for the help they provided me during my stay in the city of Manisa, Turkey.

# Dedications

*To my family for their freely given help*

*To old friends for their unsolicited but not unneeded support*

*To new friends and acquaintances for their unexpected guidance*

**Abstract:**

The bildungsroman is one of the richest bodies of literature in Anglo-Saxon culture, flourishing from the Victorian era until nowadays. Cawelti's concepts of formula, invention and convention helps decode the ways in which two very important novels of the type *Great Expectations* and *Neverwhere* demarked themselves from such a vast number of other novels dealing with the same subject as well as investigating the cultural significance of such narratives. The comparative analysis aims to convey the unnecessary nature of the division of highbrow and lowbrow literature as the comparison was able to demonstrate how a canonical and popular work were able to affect a whole genre. The dissertation reaches this goal by comparing the two texts in a block format by using as criteria how they are placed in the invention/convention spectrum and determining whether they bring any cultural addition to the genre. according to the meanings produced from the analysis both works despite coming from different classification brought various inventions to the bildungsroman as wells as reinventing the formula and made it stay relevant in contemporary times.

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

The division of literature in a classification of highbrow versus lowbrow plagued the literary criticism field for years, yet change in perspectives is slow to come. The uneven quantities of academic publications between the two types are one of the prominent consequences of such a view. While literature was always judged according to certain standards that differed depending on the period then put in a ranking, the issue got more complex after the setting of academic standards in literary criticism. The complications that came with questions of canon, gatekeeping, bias and standards are but a few to plague the academic study of literature especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. One of the biggest outliers in this mediatised age is the place of popular culture and literature in academic discussions. Based on the number of research done on those subjects and the newness of the issue it is imperative to inquire more on the subject to reach a workable conclusion on whether popular fiction is truly lowbrow and not meant to be true literature or that it matters and should be thoroughly studied. The chosen genre to be studied was the bildungsroman which since its inception went from being a body of work that belonged to the literary canon to be appropriated by popular fiction and become one of the most widely produced genres in contemporary times.

The evolution of the bildungsroman genre, more commonly referred to as coming of age stories, continues to this day as a way to try and understand society and the world at large. It is on the contemporary bildungsroman that this research will focus. More than two centuries have passed since its inception yet the core characteristics of the genre remain unchanged since their codification in British literature. As a tool to write narratives of change and transformation, it remained the premiere variety to touch upon issues regarding the individual's relationship with their culture and society. As part of the same classification, a comparative study between novels of this genre, in this case Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), a canonical work, and Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1997), a contemporary popular fiction novel, must be made to try and determine the change in its established conventions as well as the innovations that were made.

The main problem that this dissertation investigates is the scarcity of research done in academia on popular fiction works. Thus, one of the questions that the research will tackle is about the formulaic structure of popular fiction and whether it is

a unique component. In turn, it creates a controversial bias in academic studies and publication. This dissertation attempts to deal with one such bias which is the harsh criticism of popular fiction by academics and its relegation to the status of lowbrow literature through a comparative analysis of two bildungsroman *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman. By using Cawelti's concepts of formula, invention and convention; the research aims to show that both works possess the relevant cultural weight to be studied in academic circles no matter what they are classified as.

The bildungsroman first appeared in 18th century Germany through the foundational work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) which was later translated to English and became popular in Victorian Britain. In the beginning, many authors would go on to write works that tried to come as close to the original as possible. Later, other Victorian writers went outside the conventions of the genre to bring something new and British to it, making the model integrated in their cultural framework. The authors who were considered to have invented the British bildungsroman were Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Jane Eyre and Thomas Hardy but it is Dickens who brought the genre to the popular sphere that the study will emphasise. The shift in basis to a culturally defined genre in this research was done to put the comparative analysis in line with the concept of formula which is always limited in scope to a specific culture or subculture. The classification then underwent several stages of evolution and growth going from a Victorian realist movement to a more modern novel where the focus was on the artist's role in society to the postmodern phase where the plurality of perspectives gave rise to numerous subtypes. Those new forms of bildungsroman gave voice to many minorities who before that era were ignored. Some of the pioneering changes observed in the contemporary version of the type were attributed to the author Neil Gaiman who, through his various works, was able to blend various other categories to the bildung to produce something new and unique. The innovative ideas he brought to the bildungsroman was rapidly becoming part of the canon of popular fiction which shows parallels to Dickens' work in Victorian literature.

There were some attempts to explain the concept in the English Language by authors or scholars, and the coined concepts were novels of apprenticeship or novels of formation. The two appellations focus on the transformative aspects of the bildung as its basis is taking a young male protagonist through a process of spiritual change until he reaches the age of maturity and secure his place in society. Those definitions rode on the back of other philosophies that dominated Victorian Britain which were self-help and self-culture. Both words originated from a Calvinist dogma of bettering the self through work according to society's rules. In other words, the purpose of the change was not freedom to express the inner self but to conform to society.

The dissertation consists of a comparative analysis of two novels belonging to the bildungsroman genre through the framework of Cawelti's theory of formula. The conjecture is based upon the dichotomy of the concepts of convention and invention. As understood in his book *Mystery, Violence and Popular Culture* (2004). Convention "represents familiar shared images and meanings and they assert an ongoing continuity of values" (Cawelti, 7). It means that these conventions are what help the audience make sense of a text when put in relation to the rest of the literary body. Meanwhile, innovation is confronting the audience with new perspectives or meanings they have not realised before (Cawelti, 7). For Cawelti, the two concepts generate a spectrum in which any literary work exists, as novels contain a mixture of both convention and innovation. Authors would use conventional elements in a new way which would add new works to the body of text that follows the same formula yet pushes its boundaries at the same time. From these two concepts, the formula is born as a conventional way to structure cultural products. In the case of Cawelti's work, he focuses on the spectrum between formula and form or conventional and innovative work in a cultural cadre not an aesthetic one.

The concepts encountered in Cawelti's conceptual framework will serve the comparative work in shifting the focus to a cultural viewpoint. As the scholar wanted to sidestep the complex problem of aesthetic determination in popular culture, he focused on a different part of the debate which was the cultural importance of such literature. It is precisely this aim that the research wants to serve. The comparison of the two novels belonging to two different classifications the first as part of the

bildungsroman genre which they both belong to, and the second being one of highbrow versus lowbrow classification is a matter of consensus.

As a fairly new domain to study in literature, the literature written on popular culture and fiction is still sparse. On the one hand, the articles written recently about *Great Expectations* like 'Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*: A Reflection of the Victorian Era's Social Dynamics*' (2022) by Zeynep Hazal Yıldız, an English literature doctor at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart university, deals with sociological aspects of Victorian society through the novel's perspective. 'Charles Dickens' display of social space and class hierarchy in Great Expectations (2022)' by Irfan Dupovac tackles approximately the same questions. On the other hand, some of the academic publications written on *Neverwhere* such as 'A Critical Companion to Neil Gaiman's *"Neverwhere"*' (2022) by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, a professor of English at Central Michigan University, who wrote extensively on popular fiction, deals with intertextuality and the fantasy genre. While another publication 'A Journey Through Parallel Worlds: The Quest for Self-Discovery in Neil Gaiman's Coraline and Neverwhere' (2021) by Witos Magdalena centres around the quest for self-discovery. In this dissertation, the application of Cawelti's concepts to a canonical work as well as a work of popular fiction simultaneously is done for the purpose of levelling the field for the comparison of both novels on the ground of cultural significance which is a new angle which should not be overlooked. The new perspective offered by the theory bypasses the division of literary works in highbrow and lowbrow text and focuses only on how they were shaped by the cultural zeitgeist of their particular settings.

This makes the field a fertile ground for scholars to unearth all the insights possible from it. While the used sources for the dissertation were some of the most relevant in their respective fields, no work was found that combined all the parts together. Taking into account the relevance of the theoretical framework on the chosen corpus, the dissertation is expanding the academic research done on a recent field. It also makes use of certain other concepts that are linked to the bildungsroman genre which clarify certain aspects of both novels and differentiate between the conventions of the genre and what the analysed works brought to it.

The comparative work seeks to show how inventions interact with literary conventions to make the formula more polyvalent and able to adapt to different cultural bases. It also attempts to show the double standards found in academia when it comes to studying lowbrow literature. Another objective of the research is to try and expand on this field of study to make it more relevant and credible in academia. All of these aims are chosen to allow popular fiction to be studied under scholarly standards as the focus on canonical texts right now leaves too much relevant material from being studied. All of these issues feed the bias found at that level concerning popular fiction and its place compared to more traditional text or literary fiction as it is called, which can also be observed in the number of academic journals dedicated to canonical literary productions compared to those that deal with contemporary works.

The choice of works to be used in the comparative analysis was made taking into consideration the criteria of convention and invention in the bildungsroman, a genre that stayed pretty stable in British literature for two centuries. As one of the most prolific writers of realist novels during the Victorian era, Charles Dickens was an appropriate choice as his popularisation of the genre through many of his novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1837) *David Copperfield* (1849) and lastly the subject of our study *Great Expectation* where the author pushed the boundaries of the genre and set a new foundation by allowing the formula to grow. The novel deals with the story of Pip who lives with his sister and her husband who he apprenticed under as a blacksmith. After an episode involving escaped convicts, Pip is sent to visit Miss Havisham and entertain Estella. After viewing her wealthy world, he does not wish to become a blacksmith but instead dreams of a gentleman's life. Pip comes into a mysterious sum of money and eventually goes to London to learn to be a gentleman where he learns that his mysterious money came from one of the convicts he previously helped. Pip feels responsible and tries to get the man out of England. He discovers Estella is to be married and attempts to change her mind. After suffering tragedy, Pip flees to Cairo for 11 years. Upon his return, he sees Estella, now a widow, and it appears they may eventually be together. As part of the new convention the novel will be compared to another one that was published in the late 1990's to show that the formula is always evolving by being introduced to more inventions.

As someone who expanded the boundaries of different genres and media, Neil Gaiman serves as an appropriate example of an author who was still able to innovate a two hundred years old genre. One of the first novels that Gaiman wrote is *Neverwhere* which had an odd history. The novel blends the aspects of bildungsroman and fantasy to produce a unique style and perspective on the type. Neverwhere follows the progression of the protagonist Richard Mayhew, who finds himself entangled in with a mysterious girl called Door. He helps her escape from her non-human assassins, and as a result loses his entire life as no one remembers him anymore. Determined to get his life back, he finds himself in London Below, a world underneath the real London where he gets entangled with Door's fate once again, and this time, to help her discover her parents' murderers. Another objective of his was to regain his old life back which he rejects at the end as his experiences in London Below opened his eyes to a new perspective and he gets taken back to his new world by the Marquis who played the role of guide in this uncharted land.

The comparative analysis will be divided in two chapters that will each deal with one novel through the lens of Cawelti's theories. The first chapter will focus on *Great Expectation*. The study aims to show how literary conventions maintain the stability of genres and inventions make it less rigid, more apt to adapt to the changes in the cultural zeitgeist. The overarching link in that part in the Victorian bildungsroman. Following this, the second chapter moves to tackle the contemporary bildung through *Neverwhere* where the classification evolved and deals with contemporary questions which were brought to the forefront of the public via popular fiction.

**Chapter I**:

*Great Expectation* as a Cornerstone of the British Bildungsroman

# I. A Victorian Coming of Age:

As a literary genre, the bildungsroman is one of the most enduring and popular forms ever written. Depicting the journey a person takes from youth to maturity, and their struggles to reconcile their inner world and aspirations and society at large. This type of narrative exhibits a very distinctive set of features as Martin Swales, an emeritus professor of German at the university College London, asserts: "[a]s long as the model of the genre is intimated as a sustained and sustaining presence in the work in question, then the genre retains its validity as a structuring principle within the palpable stuff of an individual literary creation" (Swales,12). This assertion shows the bildungsroman as stemming from a clear model that differentiates it from other genres and is not too broad in definition; in other words, it possesses enough clear and shared characteristics between the novels belonging to the body of work. The bildungsroman of the first part of the nineteenth century at its core had a Calvinist philosophy which promoted that a person could only thrive and find his place in society through work or action. This notion was at the heart of the work of Johannes Goethe's work *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1865)* which was the most largely translated German bildungsroman and as such served as the model for other works in Europe at first. The works that were written then formed a cohesive body of work.

As social novels, the works made by Victorian authors used the characteristics of the bildungsroman to expose the many ways where the individual's desires and goals conflict with what is imposed on them by their cultures and societies. The popularity of the genre is explained by Richard Salmon as being the genre's ability to combine diametrically opposed values of Victorian society (Graham, 5). It is then that the bildungsroman or the novel of formation as it was known became a British trademark of nineteenth-century literature and beyond.

According to Richard Salmon, the idea that the Bildungsroman's origin in British literature is solely due to the influence of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister* is too narrow of an explanation to truly explain the genealogy of the genre to its fullest

and still remains to this day a contended point in academic circles. Yet, it still is a turning point in the history of British literature and in the exploration and extraction of the conventions and characteristics that formed the British bildungsroman and forms an agreed-upon starting point in the discussions centred around it. The term Bildungsroman itself was not used in Britain, and an investigation would find that the term was not added to the dictionary until 1910 in "Encyclopaedia Britannica". There were other terms in use in the 19th century, however, that approximated the meaning of the original such as "novel of apprenticeship" or "of self-culture". There are still other scholars who eschew this model and opt for a different point of origin. For example, Susan Fraiman, professor of English at the University of Virginia, rejects the Goethean model and traces the point of origin to female writers starting from 1770 writing novels of development. Another scholar, Franco Moretti, argues that the Bildungsroman starts with Goethe and Jane Austen (Moretti, p58). Coming back to *Wilhelm Meister*, its influence was felt in the literary scene from the moment it was translated to English, as a great number of well-read authors took note of it and tried to produce works close to its form or themes.

## II.    *Great Expectation***: From Invention to Convention**

Convention is a term used by John Cawelti to explain how these genres are perpetrated and maintained. According to him "Conventions represent familiar shared images and meaning and they assert a continuity of values" (Cawelti, 7) which in the context of the 19th-century British bildungsroman was in its early stage a product of pure German values and meaning which was later on mediated and represented through British values and cultural norms. This was defined by Cawelti to use an alternative concept from the "myth", a term that gained popularity in cultural and literary studies during the 20th century. He wanted to use culture as the foundation of his theories and concepts rather than focusing on narrative and archetypes which he found to be too vague and ambiguous. The part of the 19th century saw the emergence of the British bildungsroman and the establishment of its conventions in the literary and cultural spheres; it was thus no longer a product of German literature but a body

of work that was steeped in British values. Those works served to place these conventions in the British cultural field but also to stabilise said culture.

Contrary to the narrow focus of the genre around the period of its translation, its future iteration and the body of work which stemmed from authors who were well read in German or not familiar at all assimilated British values in their novels. Some of the best and most popular Victorian authors contributed to this genre's success and reimagination. Authors like the Bronte sisters and Charles Dickens were perhaps those who were able to see in the genre the greatest potential and bring it to the surface with Dickens being the author who really popularised the genre in every social class in England. As Salmon explains,

> As I have argued elsewhere, the 1830s and 1840s saw the publication of many similar narratives of literary apprenticeship, in which the generic template of the Bildungsroman was used to enable and examine the construction of new professional identities, Dickens's David Copperfield (1849–50) being now the most celebrated example of this sub-genre (Salmon, 63)

Here Salmon focuses on what he perceives to be the essence of the established conventions of the British bildungsroman, further solidified by Dickens' masterful use of the genre. Dickens was able to make use of the formula coined by John Cawelti and restructured its element to create something different from what his predecessors in the genre were able to accomplish. What was different were his inventions which Cawelti defined as a new perception or meaning the readers were previously not aware of. This dichotomy is present in all bodies of literature that share a similar foundation. With all that Dickens and his contemporaries brought to the genre that was leaning too heavily toward the conventional side of the spectrum, they set new standards for the genre and established or renewed the conventions that were associated with it.

With Dickens being such an influential author of Victorian realist novels, a bestselling author of his era, he was able to shape part of British literature through the sheer success of his novels and the number of people who read and internalised his writing, setting a new standard for literature at that time. One of the reasons for the

success of his novels and the genre in wider terms was the emergence of a discourse of "self-help" and "self-culture". This rise of a culture of self-help helped to propel the bildungsroman which was also called a novel of formation for it spread the same values to a foundational genre. While Dickens wrote many bildungs, one of the most interesting and most innovative in the genre is *Great Expectation* in which the protagonist Kip did not follow the conventional apprenticeship or formation narrative as other more conventional bildungsromans do. While the focus of the novel is still on the conflict between personal aspirations and societal expectations, the protagonist follows a different path to resolving this issue. Compared to the optimistic and more conventional *David Copperfield (1850)*, *Great Expectation* was more innovative in its approach to the genre. In *David Copperfield* the protagonist understood that social mobility is only possible through work and success. Whereas, in the later novel the protagonist's approach to life was different as he became disillusioned with a life of labour as he states "I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year all this was changed. Now it was all coarse and common." (Dickens, 188). This quote reveals a shift from the usual course a conventional bildung should have taken. While Pip thought about this belief, he was in fact unconvinced of the veracity of the statement as he came to resent his status in life after encountering Estelle.

When dealing with inventions in the bildungsroman and especially in Dickens' works the focus should be on the protagonist's perception of life as there are two contradictory views on social mobility and on work or being an active agent in your own life. As Solomon states:

> Whereas in David Copperfield Dickens maintains the equivalence between 'self-culture' and 'self-help' which Smiles sought to emphasise – David achieves material success and social mobility only through the self-realisation of authorship and literary fame – in Great Expectations this is no longer the case. Pip's determination to 'get on in life' and to be thought 'uncommon' is the expression of his shame at being derided as a 'common labouring-boy' by Estella, but it results not in a dialectical sublation of labour as the source of cultural and economic value (at least not until near the end of the novel), but rather in his complicity with the view that to become a 'gentleman' is to be 'above work' (Solomon, 66).

By delving deeper into Pip's psyche, a realisation about his inner development is made and that is a break from more conventional bildungsroman. Pip did not seek or view work as a way to be socially mobile and use it to better himself or his station. Instead, he sought to raise his social status to get rid of the need for work and his tedious life. As an immature youth he thought himself full of great expectation that he ought to possess a better station in life "the possessor of such great expectations,—farewell, monotonous acquaintances of my childhood, henceforth I was for London and greatness;" (Dickens, 261). Starting his life as an apprentice is a significant image in the genre as it is often referred to as a novel of apprenticeship. His subsequent years where he goes to London to reshape himself into a gentleman who is ashamed of his origins show that even with the expansive education he received there was very little personal growth. "All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself." (Dickens, 251) this quote shows the self-deception that Pip is living in and the lack of growth he would be experiencing if the novel followed a more conventional scheme. This reaffirms that work is the key to the cultivation of the self and in turn for social mobility, a value supported by Dickens in *Great Expectations*. It was in fact the family and friends he left who underwent the greatest change. This illustrates how his newly acquired greater economic means and leisure time which should have helped him achieve a bigger personal growth were in fact hampering him. He finally reaches spiritual maturity; as he states later in the novel: "I have done nothing to raise myself in life, and that Fortune alone has raised me" (Dickens, 463). Which is a significant point in the plot as G. B. Tennyson, an influential scholar on the bildungsroman, describes it as the Victorian concept of bildung where Pip passes through hardships on the road of self-improvement to finally reach spiritual fortification (Graham, 32). He also argues that the process of stripping the subjective truths of the protagonist to let him start a process of reconstruction further differentiates the novels from other bildungsroman written at the time even by Dickens himself.

Tennyson also sees the division of the novel into three parts to be a link to the German origin of the genre. While the German bildung's apprenticeship was more figurative and only symbolised the period of education in a young man, Dickens was

more interested in the literal definition of the word or in the social ramification of his period of education. The first part of Pip's journey is his apprenticeship with the blacksmith who is also his adoptive father. A binding process that Pip, after he matured, laments due to his earlier immaturity. He first saw the apprenticeship as indentured labour but later as honest work that would have helped him develop spiritually.

One other character that underwent a similar trial to Pip was Estelle who was being shaped by Miss Havisham as a copy of herself. However, she later becomes free from this fate as she confronts her mistress by telling her that what she suffered under her tutelage made her grow and gain wisdom. "So, I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me" (Dickens, 545). After finally achieving maturity, she understood that life's harsh lessons on how wrong Miss Havisham's outlook on life was that staying stuck ruminating in the past over done deeds was unhealthy. The old Miss in her decrepit house symbolises a stagnation within the character who was incapable of growth and change. This finally ended in her death as she was unable to accept no other perspective then her own. House Satis symbolises an old relic of bygone times: the stagnant British aristocracy and their disdain for work and innovation was, according to the novel, something that must be changed. The change came in the form of new ideas about the industrial revolution and all the ideas it brought to the forefront of British society mainly about the value of honest work.

Pip's greatest conflict in the novel stemmed from two divergent perspectives, the first is him seeking to raise his station in life to gain Estelle's love which he will find to be his downfall as she was incapable of loving him. The second being his disdain of work which in his mind is the sign of an inferior man as his treatment of Joe in the first half of the novel shows. Pip later in the novel matured enough to understand the value of what he lost as he said

> "I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration: simply, I suppose, because my sense of my own worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. No wisdom on earth could have given me the comfort that I should have derived from their simplicity and fidelity; but I could never, never, never, undo what I had done."(Dickens, 376)

Following this we can start to see a kind of wisdom being gained through the trials that he faced. It also put into perspective his definition of what a gentleman is, as he felt himself a fraud that was blinded by his new material means and position in the eyes of society. These two different perspectives are the true beginning and ending of the novel as the setting for them is the same making the plot a circular one. As it was not until both characters grew and gained wisdom through their trials that they were able to reunite in the end.

When seeing the novel through Cawelti's concept of formula, it is clear that the elements that truly mark the genre in this particular Victorian culture are more on the spiritual growth of its characters than the physical parts of the plot. It is neither the setting nor the plot that matters in a bildungsroman but the inner growth and the character's changing perspective on how to balance personal aspirations and their society that is at the core of the genre. Self-culture and social mobility are the central concepts of the Victorian bildung, and an ideal resolution of novels dealing with them would be a reconciliation between both. Nonetheless, there are certain cases where a break happens between the two concepts as is the case with *Great Expectations* which critique how Victorian society operates. In a sense, this concept of shaping and bettering the self may not always be in accord with societal expectations. In the case of the ending of the novel, the most interesting point is that despite Pip attaining some form of wisdom by passing his trials he was not able to return to his apprenticeship at the forge even after coming to value the work he did there. Here the forge as a place and symbol of transformation was both a starting and ending point for the journey Pip underwent through the social hierarchy and through time and space. As one avenue of self-development is closed to him, he at least has the necessary maturity to seek another kind of work.

The Victorian bildungsroman never ceased to evolve and adapt to the increasingly changing British society. As the early Victorian bildungsroman was conforming to the German formula it did not gain enough traction in the literary scene from both readers and scholars. The emergence of a philosophy of self-help and self-cultivation also greatly increased the popularity of this kind of novel. As a very prolific writer, Charles Dicken was able to spread and bring attention to the genre by

perfecting the formula for the bildungsroman. He was able to use conventional structures in ways that his predecessors perhaps lacked the distance or an existing body of work to accomplish. The later part of the 19th century saw the apparition of more bildungs, these texts were characterised by a greater degree of innovation. It was then that Dickens truly shine as an author who through the publication of his works in magazines brought this type of the novel to the general public. In *Great Expectations*, he set new inventions in the bildung, the most interesting of them being education through hardship. He does not guide Pip in the novel as he stumbles through his erroneous expectation into many problems that shape him later and help him gain the wisdom he lacked during his apprenticeship and gentleman life. This trial by error made him realise that honest work would have been more beneficial to his personal growth rather than being made a gentleman through means outside his control and without having worked for it. "Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but - I hope - into a better shape." (Dickens, 865) Estelle says this to Pip after they meet again at the end of the novel reflecting on how the trials they passed through purified them and changed for the better. The stance Dickens took in the novel was that maturity and wisdom are only possible through efforts, work and hardship, and that as a gentleman Pip lacked all the qualities that constitutes one. Until he finally acknowledged that Joe was the better man and that he only lived in a lie that he started to believe in.

> "I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe." (Dickens, 521)

It was not until he faced his biggest hurdle in life that he was able to acknowledge the harsh and immature way he treated Joe. for all the wealth he acquired and squandered because of his foolishness Pip was able to gain something more essential spiritual growth and a new appreciation for things he previously overlooked.

The novel's many parts all served to convey certain themes that became more cemented in the genre as the work gained popularity and prestige. From his first apparition in the novel Pip was searching for an identity for himself. On the one hand, he thought that becoming a gentleman and winning the love of Estelle was his sole

purpose as it would make society acknowledge him as a successful man married to a lady that he fell in love with. On the other hand, as he learned from the mistakes he made along his journey, his outlook on life started to change. No longer did he feel that his identity as a gentleman made him better than others, but he started to see the value of honest work. The wisdom that Joe gave him during their dinner together after Pip's change of fortune is proof of it:

> "Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Diwisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there's been any fault at all to-day, it's mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and beknown, and understood among friends." (Dickens, 397 )

The bildungsroman finally cemented its place as a defining genre of mainstream British literature. As such, various authors from the end of the 19$^{th}$ century to the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century produced more works that fall under the same umbrella. However, compared to the works that came before them the works of Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and James Joyce were more innovative. These authors went on to explore spaces previously unwritten in the genre and the bildungsroman as a genre started to slide into the modern time. Those times were characterised by a very fast pace of change in the world and not all of it was positive. So, the genre's overall tone started to slide toward a more pessimistic and alienated narrative. It was getting harder and harder to reconcile society and self-development. As the conventions and formula of the genre let it be a great medium to express British sentiment toward modern times. As the young have to educate themselves and gain a new perspective on the world, so does British society educate itself and reframe its perspective on the rapidly changing world.

# Chapter 2:

# *Neverwhere*: Pushing the Boundaries of a Genre

As a tool to write narratives of change and transformation, the bildungsroman remains the premiere genre to tackle issues regarding the individual's relationship with their culture and society. As part of popular literature nowadays a comparative study between novels of this genre must be made to try and determine the change in its established conventions as well as the innovations that were made. It is in this specific field of popular literature that the concept of formula finds all its utility as a tool to understand the various genres through the lens of cultural studies. The study of the inventions brought on by Neverwhere to this type of literature will investigate the evolution of it as well as how different the formula became compared to what it started as in British literature. The purpose of this specific novel is centred around revealing the many similarities found in the genre despite the changes that a body of work dating from the Victorian era appears to be at first glance.

As one of the most widely read genres, the bildungsroman found the greatest number of different productions in the field of popular fiction. From children, young adults, women and minorities, it became a sandbox for all authors to give voice to many societal issues. If we take into account its role as a novel of education or formation, we can see its role as a tool to help readers find themselves through the different perspectives given a voice or as a way to shed light on buried problems. In the plethora of texts belonging to that genre in the 1990's one author demarks himself from the lot in his approach to the genre and the innovations he brings to it.

Nail Gaiman, as an author and comic book author, pushed the boundaries of the genre as he wrote to produce some of the most unique and recognizable works in contemporary fantasy literature and comic books. The analysis of *Neverwhere* will show that the novel, while presented as a work of the dark fantasy genre, read as a fresh take on a bildungsroman. The work focused not on the progression of a young man to maturity but on the journey the protagonist, an already established man, undergoes to redefine himself. It was not only in the different age of the protagonist compared to more traditional works, but also in the peculiar setting the author created that we see innovations in the genre. In the surreal London he created, Gaiman takes his protagonist through a long yet short journey that shows the effects of modern

society on the aspirations and identity of an adult by leading him in a completely unsuited role for him. It is through the various innovations brought by the genre's authors that the bildungsroman was able to maintain its relevance.

## I.      The Contemporary British Bildung.

As stated previously, the contemporary bildungsroman shed most of its historical characteristics and was reduced to its core elements. Those elements are of a novel of becoming rather than being and in contemporary times it was used to speak about the becoming of all groups and minorities. It thus gained a universal scope while still following the same formula which, as Gregory Castle considers as "enormously elastic" (Castle, 4) while maintaining a certain "resiliency" (Castle, 5). It means that the bildung as a genre is capable of a great deal of adaptability and is able to accept a lot of innovations while staying true to form. As through the two centuries since it was first coined, the bildungsroman is still a genre with a great capacity to produce relevant texts now.

In addition, the genre with its characteristic young protagonist in the process of maturing became the most read in the children and young adult stages. This reading made it an integral part of the youth culture and closely linked to their own development. Especially with the diversification of the authors who produce in this genre and the multitude of characters and societies they portray with it. This plurality of perspectives and narratives started with the postmodern movement and continues on as one of the most persistent characteristics of this era's literature. This in turn shows the bildung's capacity to adapt and not lose its own identity which we will see in the analysis of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. In addition, the concept of innovation as applied to Cawelti's theory of formula needs to be touched upon to build a basis for the analysis of Neverwhere.

As understood in Cawelti's book *Mystery, Violence and Popular Culture (2004),* innovation is confronting the audience with new perspectives or meanings they have not realised before (Cawelti, 7). For him the two concepts generate a spectrum in which any literary work exists, as novels contain a mixture of both

convention and innovation. Authors would use conventional elements in a new way which would add new works to the body of text that follows the same formula yet pushes the boundaries of it at the same time. In Neverwhere this translates to the protagonist brutally being forced to adapt to a different world containing a separate set of rules, communities and conventions. The madness that slowly crept on him was caused by his unmooring from all the familiar symbols he already used to navigate the world. Thus, the work in broader meaning really defines the importance of a healthy balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar in a person's life.

## II. Neil Gaiman and Novels of Self-Becoming

As an author who expanded the boundaries of different genres and media Neil Gaiman serves as a very appropriate example of an author who was still able to innovate in a two hundred years old genre. His unique style and the impact he left in fantasy literature and comic books is still felt today. According to Marie Schnietzler, "at their core, all of Gaiman's novels feature the bildungsroman narrative, irrespective of their protagonists' age" (Schnietzler, 16). She adds to this by saying that their atypical age generally falls in the 20+ category while others may vary. To keep the youth aspect of the bildungsroman present, he instead blends his works with another genre which is fantasy literature. Schnietzler expounds upon this by saying:

> Gaiman draws on familiar genre building blocks and uses them to forge a recognisable type of *bildungsroman* fantasy. The process of *bildung* in his novels is one of enlightenment, not one of physical maturation. *Bildung* is equated with an epistemological process that can only be fully realised through contact with the fantastic, thus indicating and resolving a lack that is manifest in the 'real' worlds" (Schnietzler, 17).

It is this peculiar blend of genres and the way in which he uses the fantastic elements of the fantasy genre to reshape his protagonists' world and delve deep in their inner world that is truly innovative. Through the mirrored setting, the novel explores how the city lets people fall through the cracks when they stop meeting its expectations. After losing his fiancée and job, Richard became invisible to them, it also reflects his unmoored state after he gets deprived from the identity he previously constructed for himself. "As a child, Richard had had nightmares where he simply wasn't there, in

which, no matter how much noise he made, no matter what he did, nobody ever noticed him at all" (Gaiman, 59). In this case, the invisibility is real in the setting but also a fear the protagonist has had since his childhood to be deprived of identity; people in London above no longer saw or acknowledge him.

### III.    *Neverwhere* **and Contrasting Perspectives**

*Neverwhere*'s plot blends the genres of the bildungsroman and fantasy in truly new ways in their juxtaposition with the realist background and Gaiman's interpretation of the protagonist's clash with life in the city of London. The novel begins with the prologue where Richard Mayhew, the protagonist, is preparing to move from Scotland to London.

The world that Gaiman created to serve as the setting for his novel is striking. Through the juxtaposition of London Above and London Below the audience is presented with two different worlds residing side by side. The first is a world of expectations of conformation to what the city or the society residing there wants from individuals. The second is made as a world of convention where the individual loses his sense of self to become part of the whole. In Richard's case he was driven by his fiancée to become a better version of himself according to her and society at large. On the other hand, the world of London Below is home to the alienated who were driven from the above for not conforming to society's unspoken rules and conventions as well as the most fantastical elements of the novel's world such as different races and magic abound in that hidden world. The world there is more individualist with its inhabitants' desires and wants at the forefront. Chief among their desire is to rejoin the city above, showing that even those who were shunned by society wish for its acknowledgment. One of the defining characteristics of the setting is the unseen and invisible status of London Below and its denizens. The mentality of out of sight out of mind, is reminiscent of how any society deals with the unwanted parts of its population. In the novel's case the inhabitants of the city Below are the homeless, the mentally ill and the criminals. All rejects from society who made their own

communities in the unwanted parts of the city or under it. It is also similar to how the alienated were dealt with in Charles Dickens own novel *Great Expectations*.

The characters who inhabit this double world are truly unique and varied. Starting with the protagonist, he is a non-conformist according to the formula of the bildungsroman but who is nonetheless adapted seamlessly to the genre through the unusual setting that took Richard back to the state of childhood and innocence. His inexperience in this second world gave him a sense of freedom of being unburdened by expectations "For a moment, upon waking, he had NO idea at all who he was. It was a tremendously liberating feeling, as if he were free to be whatever he wanted to be: he could be anyone at all, able to try on any identity; he could be a man or a woman; a rat or a bird, a monster or a god." (Gaiman, 339). At the start of the novel, the mature Richard is already established in his life with a fiancée and rising through the ranks in his professional life. It can be said that he is already at the end of his bildung if we read it as a conventional bildungsroman. However, in this novel it just marks the beginning of his journey, as we delve in Richard's psyche, we see that he is unfulfilled with his life and is searching for something. "I thought I wanted a nice normal life. I mean, maybe I am crazy. I mean, maybe. But if this is all there is, then I don't want to be sane. You know?" (Gaiman, 371). Here we stray from the convention, Richard already finished the conventional journey at the beginning of the novel but now he is rejecting it as it was something that was chosen for him not something he desired. His introduction to London Bellow takes him back to an inner state of youth and innocence, where he sees himself and is seen as a youth trying to navigate an unfamiliar world with unknown rules. The conditions for the start of the bildungsroman start in the city below. His journey through this new reality challenges him as well as helps him seek his identity and his desires outside of the confining world above with no guiding hand but his own. His interactions with the other characters that populate London Bellow makes him understand that even though certain aspects of his life were accomplished as was expected from him by society, he was alienated and only following a script written by a hand that saw him as part of a great conventional whole. He finds his own path at the end of his journey where even

though he gains the opportunity to re-joins society and London above at the end he instead rejects it and goes back to explore himself in London Below.

Richard's growth was also fuelled by his interactions with the different characters that populate the novel. The first character that really impacted narrative was his fiancée Jessica who played the role of the speak person of the conformist society. All her interaction with Richard shows how she tries to dictate the way he lives his life and how he should appear to the rest of the world:

> "Now when you are talking to Mister Stockon, you must make sure you don't interrupt him. Or disagree with him - he doesn't like to be disagreed with. When he makes a joke, laugh. If you're in any doubt as to whether or not he's made a joke, look at me." (Gaiman, 24)

Here, his fiancée filters his interaction with other people to project a very redacted facade in line with the city's conventions and persons belonging to a higher class. She wanted to shape his growth to raise her own status and better her own image. "And Jessica saw in Richard an enormous amount of potential, which, properly harnessed by the right woman, would have made him the perfect matrimonial accessory" (Gaiman,12).

The characters that originate from that alternate version of London all share one interesting characteristic which is their uniqueness. They possess qualities that differentiate them from all others be it their appearance, gender, job or abilities. None of them are interchangeable or shaped from the same mould. In Hunter, a woman of colour we observe many aspects that conventionally are aligned with male characters, she is a hunter and a bodyguard who lives in a world of violence, a domain originally belonging to men. Other characters have unique identities that are reflected in their appearances. From the eccentric Marquis De Carabas who "wore a huge dandyish black coat that was not quite a frock nor exactly a trenchcoat, and high black boots, and, beneath this coat, raggedy clothes. His eyes burned white in an extremely dark face" (Gaiman, 46). Compared to them, Richard starts as a very flat character and only after a first contact with them does his transformation begin.

It was only after his encounter with Door, an injured girl from London Below, that he was finally able to reject Jessica and start his journey. The name of the character Door is symbolically tied to her ability to create doors to everywhere; she was the catalyst of the journey as well, for she let Richard explore the unknown far from the influence of society. This in turn shows that one way of resolving the conflict between self and the outside world is through removing oneself from that world. The shift of worlds and the return to a kind of new youth for Richard was helped by his interactions with the Marquis and Anaesthesia who played the role of mentors and guides for him. His interactions with the denizens of London Below left him feeling like a child "she looked at him rather sadly, like a mother trying to explain to her child, that yes *this* flame was hot, too. *All* flames were hot. Trust her, please" (Gaiman, 85). This was his feeling after being guided in this new world by a young woman; whereas, normally he would have been older and more mature here he found himself guided by someone more knowledgeable and younger than him. Later in his quest, Richard starts to feel the change he is undergoing when he said "he had gone beyond the world of metaphor and simile, into a place of things that *are*, and it was changing him." (Gaiman, 311). Where at first, he was afraid of the unknown "and afterwards he remembered only the sense that he was leaving somewhere small and sensible that made sense for somewhere huge and old that didn't;" (Gaiman, 2). As he still did not learn the rules that governed London Below. It signals to us that the world he lived in was previously a reality shaped by unspoken rules, conventions and expectations that did not make sense to him which he later left behind.

The last peculiar character in this novel is Islington, the antagonist who embodies the desires of the alienated denizens of London Bellow to re-join society and no longer be alienated and invisible. His obsession with using Door's ability to go back to heaven leads him to use drastic measures to accomplish his goals. His end in the novel confirms that his objective is wrong, going back to a society that rejected him while his identity was still the same and his character did not evolve is impossible. It contrasts the end that Richard chose for himself as he saw that even if he was able to get back to London Above, he still felt alienated, confined to a life that

is being dictated to him by society's expectation. After his change of perspective, he became afraid of a fate he would have gladly accepted before his journey.

> "In a year or less he would marry the girl from Computer Services, and get another promotion, and they would have two children, a boy and a girl, and they would move out to the suburbs, to Harrow or Craydon or Hampstead or even as far as distant Reading.
>     And it would not be a bad life. He knew that, too. Sometimes there is nothing you can do" (Gaiman, 365).

This is a path that he previously lost, an identity that was already his but no longer appealed to him which pushed him to find an alternate path, a self that he is responsible for constructing not one imposed on him by others' expectations. This became the reason for his choice to venture again into the unknown rather than continuing to feel alienated. He differs from Pip, in *Great Expectations,* who after his life as a gentleman and his disappearance preferred to rejoin society after learning from his mistakes as he always longed for that sense of belonging.

The ending of the book may seem like an oddity if we follow the conventions of the bildungsroman genre, a close reading of the book may show that at its core it resembles an anti-bildungsroman. However, the core of the genre is the search for an identity whether it is defined by society's standards or by personal values was not a defining characteristic of this type of novel. Yet in his rejection of London Above, Richard joins another society, one which regroups people who could not adapt, who made for themselves new standards to live by independently from the city's own. On the other hand, there are people in the city Below who could not accept their rejection and still had as a goal to rejoin a society that did not want them. Islington as a character embodies this perfectly, in a sense he represents a more conventional bildung protagonist who longs to rise in station and find acceptance from a group that no longer sees him. His quest at the end proved to be futile but not before upending the lives of many others. Richard's return to London Bellow with the marquis represents him accepting that to live in a society, its rules must be followed and, in their rejection, alternative paths must be sought. Instead, following the Marquis to the other side comes after realising that alternative paths in life exist and not all of them follow the expectation set by the conventions of society.

In conclusion, the chapter aims to demonstrate the elasticity and polyvalence of the formula of the bildungsroman. Indeed, the combination of genres and application of literary conventions in new ways showcase the concept of innovation as defined by Cawelti. His unique style of blending different genres mainly the bildungsroman and fantasy as well as the fairy tale was able to push the former to take new forms and negotiate with its audience new perspectives. The novel's plot may sometimes seem as if it is an anti-bildungsroman yet it is able to stay faithful to the core principle of the genre by clever use of fantasy elements to reshape and enhance the depth that can be divided into when it comes to novels of formation and coming of age. No longer is the bildung a matter of male youth but of any character regardless of age, sex or ethnic background. This postmodern approach to the genre made it a mainstay of popular and literary fiction. We can thank a number of authors who were able to breathe new life and maintain a genre that traces its origins to late 18th century German literature. As even Gaiman mentioned the influence of certain comic book authors in his approach to writing and on his drive to invent using what was already present in the literary canon.

# Conclusion

By analysing the novels *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens and *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman through John Cawelti's concepts of Formula, invention and convention the research has shown that the two bildungsroman works studied both contain many inventions in the genre. The conceptual framework used in this dissertation consisted of literary conventions and inventions according to Cawelti in his concept of formula which can be described as a specific arrangement and use of cultural and literary conventions in literature in a specific period and culture. On the one hand, the first chapter's analysis of *Great Expectations* revealed that while the work can be considered as a conventional bildungsroman in contemporary times, in the Victorian era it was quite innovative. The invention that Dickens made then transformed the formula and made it adapt to its period as he set a new formula and conventions for others to follow. On the other hand, in contemporary times *Neverwhere* once again reshaped the genre by introducing even more changes to the formula. This did not mean that the classification was losing its meaning but that the core characteristics of it were being distilled. It let the formula become more polyvalent, capable of accepting more changes while still being unique enough to define a specific genre.

Considering the similarities in treating both novels and the innovation they both brought to the bildungsroman and literature at large, the canonical nature of one work compared to the other lost its meaning. By focusing on the cultural implication of the works and omitting the aesthetic parts of the discussion, Cawelti's theory gives more credit to popular fiction and makes a serious study of it. Further study of popular culture using these concepts would yield more insights in the evolution of genres and trends in literature. As aesthetic values change overtime and depending on the culture, more concrete evidence on cultural and literary change would allow for a redefinition of classics or canonical texts.

To take this research further an analysis of the criteria used to determine the quality and importance of literature should be made. Literature and literary criticism are a field that is rapidly growing because of the sheer amount of literature produced in addition to the transmedia component of literature nowadays. It is imperative to re-evaluate on which characteristics should literature be judged. While also determining if a canon is truly beneficial or detrimental to the health of the criticism

domain. One other aspect that should be discussed would be the social implication of such classification and the reasons behind maintaining this division. The study of the multiple actors behind this gatekeeping would bring the research to a more sociological context. This different perspective would also bring the study to focus on the issue of production and consumption of literature in contemporary times and its impacts on the audience reception of literary texts.

# Bibliographie

**Primary Sources:**

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. UK: Wordsworth, 1992.

Gaiman, Neil. *Neverwhere*. UK: Avon Books, 1997.

**Secondary Sources :**

**Books :**

Bennett, Kelsey L. *Principle and Propensity: Experience and Religion in the Nineteenth-Century British and American Bildungsroman*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2014.

Berberich, Christine. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Castle, Gregory. *A History of the Modernist Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

—. *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2004.

Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Graham, Sarah. *A History of the Bildungsroman*. New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2018.

Storey, John. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture : An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2017.

—. *Theories Of Consumption*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Tennyson, G. B. *The Bildungsroman in Nineteenth Century English Literature'in Rosario Armato and John M. Spalek (eds.), Medieval Epic to the Epic Theater of Brecht*. University of South Carolina Press, 1968.

Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *A Critical Companion to Neil Gaiman's "Neverwhere"*. UK: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2022.

**Articles :**

Dupovac, I. ""Charles Dickens' Display of Social Space and Class Hierarchy in Great Expectations"." *MAP Education and Humanities* 2.2 (2022): 1-13.

Witos, Magdalena. "A Journey Through Parallel Worlds: The Quest for Self-Discovery in Neil Gaiman's Coraline and Neverwhere." Jagiellonian University, Oct 2021. <https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/handle/item/280263 >.

Yıldız, Z. ""CHARLES DICKENS' GREAT EXPECTATIONS: A REFLECTION OF THE VICTORIAN ERA'S SOCIAL DYNAMICS"." *Journal of English Language and Literature Club* 4.1 (2021): 6-9. <https://dergi.ingilizedebiyati.net/cuidek/article/view/304.>.