



A Comparison of Jane Eyre and Purple Hibiscus as Bildungsroman

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Abstract:

The research paper is a modest attempt to provide a comparative analysis of two bildungsroman novels, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte and Purple Hibiscus by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The study explores the similarities and differences between the two novels in terms of their themes, narrative techniques, and character development. Through a close reading of the texts, the paper argues that both novels share common features of the bildungsroman genre, such as the protagonist's coming-of-age journey and the exploration of identity, morality, and social norms. However, the two novels differ in their treatment of issues such as race, gender, and colonialism.

The paper examines the similarities and differences in the protagonists' development, the themes of patriarchy, religion, and colonialism, and the stylistic and structural devices used by the authors. The paper also highlights the cultural differences between the two novels. Overall, these two novels offer valuable insight into the human experience and the challenges of growing up and finding one's place in the world. It highlights the significance of the comparison of Jane Eyre and Purple Hibiscus as bildungsroman. The comparison offers insights into the enduring appeal of the genre and its ability to address universal human experiences across cultures and time periods. Ultimately, the novels serve as reminders of the transformative power of individual agency and the importance of self-realization in achieving personal and social freedom.

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Purple Hibiscus, Bildungsroman, protagonist development, patriarchy

Introduction

Jane Eyre is a novel that chronicles a girl's transition from infancy to maturity. It was published in the 19th century, during the Victorian era. Purple Hibiscus, which was written more than 150 years later tells the tale of a little girl. It is set in postcolonial Nigeria, a nation plagued by political unrest and economic hardships. The paper is a modest attempt to compare Jane Eyre and Purple Hibiscus as novels of development.

Both novels are frequently referred to as “novels of development” since they both chronicle lives from childhood to maturity despite being published in separate decades. In order to analyse the protagonist’s growth, this paper examines the contrasts and resemblances that are discovered when the works are examined in light of the Bildungsroman’s basic structure. These protagonists exhibit commonalities when this is analysed in regard to their interpersonal interactions and individual identities because they pursue similar concepts: freedom and self-discovery.

A work that often follows a character from childhood onward on his or her path to adulthood is referred to as a novel of development, sometimes known as a Bildungsroman. One of the most significant literary trends in German literature's history is the Bildungsroman. “Roman” means “novel”. “Bildung”, a key concept in medieval theology, means “one God”, that is, “according to the image of God.” The name "Bildungsroman" introduces major principles, and its ultimate goal is to encourage individuals to strive for a deeper relationship with God and progressive perfection.

A Bildungsroman, also known as a novel of formation, novel of education, or coming-of-age narrative in literary criticism, is a literary genre that concentrates on the protagonist's psychological and moral development from childhood to maturity (coming of age), and in which, as a result, character transformation is crucial. A Bildungsroman describes the experiences of one or more characters as they mature, showing how the character's thoughts and psychology change through time. Therefore, the Bildungsroman should be restricted to the story from the protagonist's known state into the adult world state. In other words, the protagonist has made a significant step towards maturity, making this style of book a Bildungsroman.

The Bildungsroman, also known as a coming-of-age novel, is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist as they transition from youth to adulthood. The paper is an attempt to compare and contrast the Bildungsroman elements in two novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The comparison of these two novels will explore how the Bildungsroman genre is used to develop the protagonist's growth, themes of education, loss of innocence, and romantic love. Furthermore, the research will also highlight the cultural differences between the two novels, which shape the experiences of the protagonists.

Background information of Jane Eyre and Purple Hibiscus

"Jane Eyre" is a novel written by Charlotte Bronte and was first published in 1847. It is a Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age story, that follows the life of the eponymous protagonist, Jane Eyre, from her childhood as an orphan to her eventual marriage to Mr. Rochester. The novel explores themes of social class, gender roles, religion, and the search for identity. The novel is set in 19th-century England and opens with Jane as a young girl living with her cruel aunt and cousins after her parent’s death. She is eventually sent to a boarding school, Lowood, where she forms a close friendship with a fellow student named Helen Burns. After graduating, Jane becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall, where she meets the enigmatic Mr. Rochester. Despite their class differences and the obstacles in their path, Jane and Rochester fall in love. However, their happiness is short-lived when it is revealed that Rochester has a mad wife locked in the attic of his house.

The novel is known for its feminist themes and its portrayal of a strong, independent female protagonist who defies the social conventions of her time. Jane is a complex character who is both rebellious and obedient, passionate and restrained. The novel has been adapted into numerous film, television, and stage productions, and remains a beloved classic of English literature. Early in the story, Jane's questions of belonging connect the novel to the bildungsroman genre. "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am free human being with an independent will". (23, Jane Eyre)

"Purple Hibiscus" is a novel written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and was first published in 2003. It is a Bildungsroman that follows the life of the protagonist, Kambili Achike, as she navigates her adolescence in Nigeria under the oppressive rule of her fanatically religious father. The novel explores themes of colonialism, postcolonialism, domestic violence, and the search for identity. The novel is set in postcolonial Nigeria and is narrated by Kambili. She is the daughter of Eugene Achike, a wealthy and influential businessman who is a devout Catholic and tyrannical father. Kambili and her brother, Jaja, are subjected to their father's strict religious and moral code, and their home is a place of fear and oppression. However, when they visit their aunt and cousins in Nsukka, they experience a different way of life and are exposed to new ideas and perspectives.

The novel is known for its nuanced portrayal of Nigerian culture and its exploration of the complexities of identity and belonging in a postcolonial society. Adichie's writing is praised for its vivid imagery and lyrical prose, and the novel has won numerous awards. It is considered a seminal work of African literature and has been translated into several languages

Protagonist Development

Charlotte Bronte's ground-breaking work "Jane Eyre" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book "Purple Hibiscus" respectively foster and instruct two extraordinary female characters: Jane Eyre and Kambili Achike. Though they are separated by geographic boundaries, Jane Eyre and Kambili may be viewed as two sides of the same coin since they are both female figures that share the same intelligence, emotions, suffocation, and suppression. In contrast to Kambili, a native of Nigeria who was exposed to colonial violence, political turmoil, and religious rigidity, Jane was raised in England in an environment characterised by Victorian morality, class consciousness, and patriarchal authority. However, the ups and downs of their lives continue to be important in revealing the shared qualities that keep them close to one another, demonstrating that they are two bodies with similar attitudes and goals that have always flourished for self-progression.

Jane was an orphan and was raised by her aunt Mrs. Reed under her stern and merciless supervision, where she was left to develop into lonely and devoid of any individuality. This is similar to how Kambili felt pressured to conform to the norms established by her father. Both continued to be victims of societal injustice and domestic abuse. Jane was put through a lot of hardships by her harsh aunt, and although she was innocent, she was objectified as a liar in front of the entire society. Kambili was in a similar position. Kambili was treated like a puppet who had to dance to the beat that her father had created. Ironically, Kambili was frequently given a hot cup of tea by her father as a sign of his affection. Papa maintained his practise even though he was aware that the tea scorched Kambili's delicate tongue. Furthermore, the explanation offered by Dad for pouring the

boiling water over Kambili's little leg, that "she had sinned" is just another illustration of the abuse she had to face since she was a young girl. As a result, domestic violence was a constant in both Jane and Kambili's childhood.

Both Jane and Kambili undergo significant changes throughout the novels. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's journey from an orphan to an independent woman who refuses to compromise her principles is marked by her experiences at Lowood School, her employment at Thornfield Hall, and her reunion with Mr. Rochester. In contrast, Kambili's growth from a timid and sheltered girl to a strong and self-assured young woman is driven by her relationship with her father, her exposure to her aunt, and her experiences during the political unrest in Nigeria. While both protagonists experience challenges that force them to confront their beliefs and values, Jane's journey is more inward-looking, whereas Kambili's is more contextualized.

In both "*Jane Eyre*" and "*Purple Hibiscus*," the protagonists undergo significant development and transformation throughout the course of the novels. In "*Jane Eyre*," the eponymous protagonist begins the novel as an orphaned, timid young girl who is mistreated by her cruel aunt and cousins. However, Jane is also shown to possess a strong will and sense of self, which is evident in her refusal to conform to her aunt's expectations. Her experiences at Lowood, where she befriends Helen Burns and learns to assert herself, further develop her character. At Thornfield Hall, Jane falls in love with Mr. Rochester but ultimately decides to leave him when she discovers the truth about his mad wife. This decision is a significant moment of growth for Jane, as she chooses to prioritize her own moral code over her desire for love and companionship. In the final section of the novel, Jane inherits a fortune from her uncle and becomes financially independent, allowing her to assert her autonomy and marry Rochester on her own terms.

Similarly, in "*Purple Hibiscus*," Kambili Achike begins the novel as a shy, obedient daughter who is conditioned to obey her father's strict religious and moral code. Kambili is a sympathetic character who is clearly suffering under her father's oppression, but she also struggles to assert herself and challenge his authority. However, her experiences in Nsukka with her aunt and cousins open up new possibilities for Kambili. She begins to question her father's beliefs and to explore her own identity, culminating in a scene where she defies him by refusing to follow his orders. Kambili's development is further demonstrated by her growing relationship with Father Amadi, a young priest who represents a different way of life than she has known. By the end of the novel, Kambili has undergone a significant transformation, becoming more confident, assertive, and independent.

In both novels, the protagonists undergo a process of self-discovery and personal growth that is driven by their experiences and interactions with other characters. Both Jane and Kambili start the novels as vulnerable, powerless figures who are subject to the will of others, but they gradually gain agency and autonomy over the course of the stories. Their development is also linked to the themes of the novels, which explore issues of identity, social class, gender roles, and the search for meaning and purpose in life. Overall, the protagonists of "*Jane Eyre*" and "*Purple Hibiscus*" are complex, dynamic characters who represent powerful examples of personal growth and transformation

Themes

Patriarchy is a significant theme in both novels, with the protagonists struggling to assert themselves in a male-dominated society. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane resists patriarchal control through her refusal to marry Mr. Rochester without love or financial independence.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili challenges her father's strict Catholicism and authoritarianism by developing a relationship with her grandfather, who provides her with a sense of belonging and identity. Religion is another prominent theme in both novels. Jane's search for spiritual fulfillment contrasts with Kambili's rejection of her father's faith in favour of a more inclusive and tolerant worldview. Colonialism is also explored in both novels, with Jane's experience as a governess in the West Indies reflecting the imperialist mindset of the time, and Kambili's exposure to the corrupt political system in Nigeria highlighting the post-colonial challenges faced by many African nations.

"*Jane Eyre*" and "*Purple Hibiscus*" share several themes that offer insight into the human experience. Both novels explore the journey of the protagonist towards self-discovery and personal growth, making them bildungsromans, or coming-of-age stories. One of the most prominent themes in both novels is the search for freedom. In "*Jane Eyre*," Jane struggles to find her place in the world as an orphaned, lower-class woman, and must grapple with questions of identity and purpose. Similarly, in "*Purple Hibiscus*," the protagonist Kambili faces the oppressive control of her father, and must break free from his grasp in order to find her own voice and agency. Both novels show how the pursuit of freedom can take many different forms, from physical liberation to emotional autonomy.

Another shared theme is the role of religion. In both novels, religion is portrayed as a double-edged sword, capable of both providing comfort and causing harm. Characters in both books use religion to justify their actions and beliefs, but the novels also critique the ways in which religion can be used as a tool of oppression and control. "*Jane Eyre*" highlights the hypocrisy of religious dogma, while "*Purple Hibiscus*" shows how religious beliefs can be used to justify violence and abuse.

Social class is also a recurring theme in both novels. In "*Jane Eyre*," characters are divided by their wealth, education, and social status, with Jane's position as a governess putting her in a unique position between the worlds of the wealthy and the working class. Similarly, in "*Purple Hibiscus*," characters are marginalized and oppressed based on their class, gender, and religion. Both novels show how oppressive systems are maintained and reinforced by those in power.

Finally, family is a significant theme in both novels. In "*Jane Eyre*," the protagonist's relationships with her family and later, her romantic interests, shape much of the plot. Similarly, in "*Purple Hibiscus*," Kambili's relationships with her father, mother, brother, and extended family drive much of the story. Both novels explore the complex dynamics of family relationships and the ways in which they can both support and hinder personal growth.

In conclusion, "*Jane Eyre*" and "*Purple Hibiscus*" share several key themes that offer insight into the human experience. As bildungsromans, both novels portray the journey of the protagonist toward self-discovery and personal growth. Through their explorations of freedom, religion, social class, and family, the novels highlight the complexities of the human experience and the many different factors that shape our lives

Religious Dogmas and Hypocrisy

The two girls' lives were poisoned by the religious practices and hypocrisy prevalent in England and Africa. The Christian and hypocritical Pope Eugene maintained public appearances as a virtuous man celebrating freedom, but at the same time revealed himself as a man of religious doctrine and dictatorship in front of his family and children. Jane was the victim of a betrayal by a hypocritical man named Brocklehurst who used religion to establish his own future.

Religious dogmas and hypocrisy are central themes in both "Jane Eyre" and "Purple Hibiscus," highlighting the negative impact of rigid belief systems and the way they can be used to justify oppressive behaviour.

In "Jane Eyre," religion is used by various characters to maintain their social and moral superiority over others. This is particularly evident in the character of Mr. Brocklehurst, who runs Lowood school and imposes strict religious discipline on the girls. He uses religion to justify harsh punishments and to create a sense of fear and obedience among the students. Similarly, St. John Rivers, a clergyman whom Jane meets later in the novel, is obsessed with the idea of religious duty and self-sacrifice, to the point where he is willing to sacrifice his own happiness for the sake of his calling. The novel portrays these characters as hypocritical and oppressive, using religion as a means of controlling and subjugating others.

Similarly, in "Purple Hibiscus," religion is used as a tool of oppression by Kambili's father, Eugene Achike. He is a fanatically devout Catholic who imposes his beliefs on his family, using violence and intimidation to maintain his control over them. He believes that his strict adherence to religious dogma gives him the right to impose his will on others, even if it means breaking the law or causing harm. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that his religiosity is a facade, masking deep-seated anger and insecurity. Kambili's own relationship with religion is complex, as she struggles to reconcile her father's oppressive beliefs with her own spiritual needs and desires.

In both novels, the portrayal of religious dogma and hypocrisy highlights the danger of using belief systems as a means of control and domination. The characters who adhere most strictly to religious dogma are often the ones who are the most oppressive, using their beliefs to justify their own power and authority. However, both novels also suggest that there is a way to be spiritual without being oppressive, as seen in the character of Helen Burns in "Jane Eyre" and Father Amadi in "Purple Hibiscus." These characters embody a more compassionate and inclusive approach to spirituality, one that recognizes the humanity and dignity of all people, regardless of their beliefs or social status.

Stylistic and Structural Devices

The authors use a range of stylistic and structural devices to convey their messages. Bronte employs first-person narration, allowing the reader to experience Jane's thoughts and feelings directly. Adichie uses third-person narration, giving a broader perspective on Kambili's experiences while also allowing for a nuanced portrayal of other characters. Both authors use imagery and symbolism to convey deeper meanings, with the "madwoman in the attic" in Jane Eyre representing repressed desire and the purple hibiscus in Purple Hibiscus symbolizing resilience and resistance.

"Jane Eyre" and "Purple Hibiscus" are both bildungsromans that use a range of stylistic and structural devices to convey the growth and development of their protagonists.

One key structural device used in both novels is the use of flashbacks to reveal the characters' pasts and provide context for their present experiences. In "Jane Eyre," the novel begins with Jane as an adult reflecting on her childhood, and the narrative frequently shifts between past and present. Similarly, in "Purple Hibiscus," the novel begins with Kambili and her brother Jaja visiting their aunt's home, and then flashes back to their life with their abusive father. This use of flashbacks allows the reader to understand the characters' development in a deeper and more nuanced way.

Another structural device common to both novels is the use of multiple settings to highlight the characters' growth and change. In "Jane Eyre," the protagonist moves through a series of different environments, from the oppressive Lowood School to the gothic Thornfield Hall, before finally settling into a more stable life with Rochester. Similarly, in "Purple Hibiscus," Kambili and Jaja move from their strict, oppressive home to the more relaxed and accepting atmosphere of their aunt's home. These changes in setting allow the characters to experience new perspectives and challenge their previous assumptions.

In terms of stylistic devices, both novels use first-person narration to convey the protagonist's internal thoughts and emotions. This technique allows the reader to experience the characters' growth and change in a more immediate and personal way. Additionally, both novels use symbolism to convey important themes and motifs. For example, in "Jane Eyre," fire and water are recurring symbols that represent passion and repression, while in "Purple Hibiscus," the hibiscus flower is a symbol of both beauty and fragility.

Another stylistic device used in both novels is the use of foreshadowing to create tension and suspense. In "Jane Eyre," there are several hints early on in the novel that suggest Rochester is not what he seems, building towards the revelation of his dark secret later in the book. Similarly, in "Purple Hibiscus," the reader is aware from the beginning that Kambili's father is abusive, but the full extent of his violence is gradually revealed over the course of the novel.

In conclusion, "Jane Eyre" and "Purple Hibiscus" use a range of stylistic and structural devices to convey the growth and development of their protagonists as bildungsromans. The use of flashbacks, multiple settings, first-person narration, symbolism, and foreshadowing all contribute to the rich and complex portrayals of the characters' journeys towards self-discovery and personal growth.

Conclusion

"Jane Eyre" and "Purple Hibiscus" are both powerful examples of Bildungsroman, with the protagonists' journeys reflecting the complexities of identity formation in different cultural and societal contexts. Through a comparative analysis of the novels, this research paper has highlighted the similarities and differences in the protagonists' development, the themes of patriarchy, religion, and colonialism, and the stylistic and structural devices used by the authors. Overall, these two novels offer valuable insight into the human experience and the challenges of growing up and finding one's place in the world.

In conclusion, the novels "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë and "Purple Hibiscus" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are two remarkable works of literature that share many similarities to Bildungsroman. Both novels depict the journey of a young protagonist's personal growth and development through adversity and struggle. The characters of

Jane Eyre and Kambili both experience harsh environments and oppressive family dynamics that ultimately lead to their transformation and self-realization.

While the novels share many similarities, there are also differences in the narrative structure, cultural context, and themes explored. Despite the differences, both novels demonstrate the universal theme of the human struggle for self-identity and freedom.

Overall, the comparison of Jane Eyre and Purple Hibiscus as bildungsroman provides insight into the power of literature to explore complex themes of personal growth and development. Both novels offer a unique perspective on the challenges of adolescence and the journey towards self-realization. The stories of Jane Eyre and Kambili serve as a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of individual agency.

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