

# Initiation, apprenticeship

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## Fiche

In the world of Art, the novel of education, the coming of age stories, the Bildungsroman can be justly included. These genres deal with the evolution of one character from their early age to a more comprehensive version of themselves. This evolution can encompass various forms which may be intellectual, psychological and moral, but also an ontological quest for the main sin seeking their true self.

## Initiations

Most of the time, before getting initiated, the characters do not know their true potential. They do not necessarily realize it will help them. As the story unravels, each step, be it positive or negative, whether it be inspiring or detrimental, will make them become more mature and responsible. It is a way for them to open up and to broaden their horizon. It is not just a question of physical changes where the body symbolizes their new self and shows a new identity through a series of transformations. It is mainly moral and psychological evolution because what they meet will act as an **epiphany** and will reveal some hidden aspects of their personality. The characters at the beginning are in a kind of chrysalis which will gradually evolve to become someone freer, more open-minded and more aware of the role they have to play. They indeed become more self-confident and self-reliant.

In *A Christmas Carols*, by Dickens, the main character Ebenezer Scrooge, a greedy and hateful rich man, receives the visit of three ghosts: the Ghost of the Past, the Ghost of the Present and the Ghost of the Future whose role is to make him realize how unfair and selfish his acts are. These three visions of his greed and the consequences of his acts on the persons close to him turn out to be beneficial for Scrooge's behavior. He finally realizes his mistakes and decides to be generous and to change for the better.

## Obstacles

It is through chaos that characters find a new order and this Shakespearean evolution is what we can find in many novels of education and apprenticeship. Everything seems to be in order until we discover that the situation is not as perfect as it seems. The protagonists have to face **obstacles** that prevent them from moving forward and from meeting their expectations before finding out that this is how they will become the person they are meant to be. Some can call this **fate** but one thing is certain. These characters go beyond their social environment, defeat a certain **Social Darwinism** that predicts that only the fittest can survive; but these novels or movies show that nothing is planned in advance and that we can all survive and adapt ourselves to all kinds of situations.

## The reader

The readers are indeed also evolving as they turn the pages of their book. They can identify themselves with the main characters, goes through, to understand them without excusing them, to respect them in spite of opposing opinions; but no matter their reactions, they undoubtedly, sometimes unconsciously, find elements in the narratives, some food for thoughts that help them figure out who they are. Thus, they become someone different, a better person because these stories enables them to reach another level of understanding themselves as well as others.

## The school environment

As we can see through such examples, childhood is a privileged moment in the construction of one's character and values. It is indeed the first stage of any Bildungsroman. Besides, numerous stories occur in a school environment. It can enable the artists to tackle the cultural specificities of every country or system. It can be the rigorous and austere atmosphere of a dark and isolated mansion in *Jane Eyre*; it can be the harshness of the punishments undergone by a child in *Boy* by Roald Dahl; it can be the discovery of the fraternities in American universities and the road to acceptance and self-awareness in the TV show *Glee*. Whatever the situation or circumstance, we can follow them step by step, from their origins to their self-achievement.

## Alice in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll's novella *the Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* epitomizes this relationship to childhood. Alice is a young girl living in a stiff, strict and severe Victorian society and from the beginning we know that she is not ready to abide by the rules of this society, that she has no wish to submit to the role that is assigned to women in the late 19th century, hence the word "adventures" in the title. When she falls into the rabbit hole, pushed by her being "*curiouser and curiouser*", she finds herself in another world and this fall can be compared to her getting a new birth and as soon as she is in Wonderland, she is confronted with situations in which she has to make up her mind to choose the right door. All along her adventures, she meets amazing characters and each one of them will build her up and will mirror her self-constructing identity.

Besides, in "Wonderland", there is "wonder" which shows that she is questioning who she is. She is encompassing wonder before all the personalities of the people she meets: the wit of the blue caterpillar, the madness of the Mad hatter, the mischief of the Cheshire Cat etc. Through these encounters she becomes stronger, she becomes that young adult who has to face her own fears as a last step towards her own achievement: emancipated woman. It is embodied by *the Jabberwocky* she has to defeat as the symbol of defeating what prevents her from growing up.

## Adolescence

This transition from childhood to adulthood enables authors to explore many different themes and to take note of the different steps of the initiation. We can study the relation between children and their parents as shown by the movie *Boyhood*. However, this passage is above all the possibility to explore the torments of adolescence.

For instance, J.D Salinger depicts the difficulty of the teenager Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*. He was once more expelled from his school and he came back to New York without informing his parents. The novel narrates his journey and his encounters. He tries to look older and self-confident making the others believe that he is a pleasant person to be with but in fact his cynicism hides his loneliness and his inner wounds.

The metaphor of adolescence is perfectly expressed and described in the TV serial *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. Through killing vampires and monsters, Buffy explores her adolescence and the difficulties a teenager has to meet and to face in growing up. The vampires and monsters actually symbolize all the torments and vicissitudes the teens can meet: homosexuality, the demise of a parent, divorce, the love of someone that we should not love and all the experiences which test their limits. They have to build themselves with reference to some social codes or on the contrary, to a society which is at odds with these codes.

## Loss of innocence

Characters can also grow up through their involvement, their commitment in a political or social cause like the feminists who express themselves through their fight for equality or others through their fight against slavery. People are sometimes victims of painful and brutal experiences that lead them into a sudden and unexpected situation. This situation forces them to grow up more quickly and to think about their "new" place in the world that surrounds them. Whether it is grief, cruelty, or violence in childhood or in the adult world. Learning can occasionally end with a **feeling of failure** that can be educational and inspiring if people manage to cope with it to become stronger. In that case, a failure is conducive to self-achievement.