

BILDUNGSROMAN TRADITION IN KING HORN

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Özet

Bu makalenin amacı, King Horn'daki bildungsroman özelliklerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, bildungsroman özellikleri romansa uygulanacaktır. Makale, konusu Türkiye'de işlenmediğinden ve İngiliz edebiyatında şiirde, roman özelliklerini yansıttığından önemlidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *King Horn, bildungsroman, romans, Ortaçağ İngilizcesi, Ortaçağ edebiyatı, gelişim, Hristiyanlık, Şövalyelik ülküsü.*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to study the bildungsroman traits in King Horn. In this context, bildungsroman characteristics will be applied to the romance. The article is important because its subject is not studied in Turkey and it depicts the novel traits in poetry.

Key words: *King Horn, bildungsroman, romance, Middle English, Medieval literature, development, Christianity, chivalric ideal.*

King Horn was written c. 1250 and was the earliest extant Middle English romance (Allen, 1984: 99). It tells the story of invading Saracens, symbolic of Scandinavians killing King Murray of Suddene, representing southwest Scotland. His teenage son Horn is set adrift with Athulf and Fikenhild. In the Mull of Galloway at Westernesse country he is befriended by King Ailmar who has a daughter called Rimenhild that falls in love with Horn. When the lovers are betrayed to Ailmar, Fikenhild is secured

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banishment of Horn. Horn kills the champion of plundering Saracens in Ireland and achieves chivalric ideal. When he returns he is in disguise of a pilgrim to prevent Rimenhild's marriage to King Mody. He reconquers his kingdom with the aid of Irish soldiers and slays the unscrupulous traitor Fikenhild and the lovers marry.

The romance is adapted from a work entitled *Horn* (c. 1180) that is an Anglo-French romance by one Thomas (Day, 1963: 49). *King Horn* also retains traits of old English verse in a time when French-speaking Normans influenced English culture. Although the plot differs, the styles of *Horn et Rimenhild* and *King Horn* are similar (Bennett, 1986: 135).

Although *King Horn* is a poem, it depicts the traits of *bildungsroman* which is a German term signifying the novel of education or the novel of formation. It portrays the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences. The love-interest or the love-development in the Middle English romances operates on various levels. One level is that of strongly felt human relationships. On another, love is an ennobling and civilizing force. On again another love is the inspiration to transcend one's present self by means of action on behalf of a lady. This is love as part of the process of growing up, of growing away from self-centredness and mere self-assertion towards a civilised social identity. *King Horn* shows that achieved love leads to social integrity: King Horn's and Rimenhild's first free acts are acts of loyalty to the other characters involved. Horn's loyalty protects his men from the Saracens (lines 540-541).

In the romance-manner of story-telling all the action and all the other characters are to be seen as reflecting the development of the protagonist. Therefore it is in *King Horn* that one can see the education that leads to the perfect love achieved in the end, and typically, his love-education follows the pattern of what from classical antiquity had been recognised as man's fundamental desires: his *libido*. That *libido* had been split into three kinds or levels: the *libido sciendi* ("the desire to know"), the *libido dominandi* ("the desire to dominate"), and the *libido sentiendi* ("the desire to feel, to be emotionally involved") (Ovid, 1997: 150-152). One can recognise the *libido sciendi* in the emphasis on Horn's going to school and on his being so dependent on instructions from others to achieve his ends. King Horn receives directions and is taught the tricks-here in the form of plots and ruses-how to cope with life. The *libido dominandi* is brought out in his many struggles against repression, in which he successively overcomes Saracens, and in a love-story such as *King Horn* the *libido sentiendi* is dominantly present. Horn's quest for his chosen love-partner is a quest for integrity, for a place and an identity in the grown-up world. The *libido*

sentienti is brought out by Horn's trying to attain a pattern of relatedness and mutual loyalties.

When Horn and Rimenhild are in love with each other, his royal identity is kept secret and he appears to be helpless, but he has divine looks (1.85) to protect him. He is trained as a knight by Athelbrus and this is outstanding for his development. At this stage his sense of occupation develops, and his private and public selves improve.

Horn is educated at love affair (1.256) when Rimenhild appears as an aggressive wooer. In Horn's growth, Fikenhild's treachery causes the sense of vulnerability, and when he is sent to exile for this, his growth to ideal knight and ruler starts. Before he achieves something, he refuses Rimenhild's marriage proposal on account of his so-called low-birth, and he explains his reservations: "Rymenhild that sweete thing/Wakede of hire swowing" (1.447-448). This is the stage when Rimenhild realizes his development and both of the characters are faced with mental recovery. Horn works hard to gain his individual existence to fulfil chivalric deeds and responsibility to be a real king. Emotional attitude of Rimenhild is of great help. He wants to attain the desired-control towards maturity. Rimenhild gives him a ring as an amulet and it symbolises her moral support and his courage. When Fikenhild lied about Horn he was a fish caught in the net as in Rimenhild's dream, but when he becomes a knight, he becomes more mature as well. As the fish that broke out of the net, Horn broke out the social barriers in exile when he is in Ireland where he regains his public acclaim. He proves his knightly prowess and fulfils his Christian mission as a hero and slays the murderer of his father.

King Horn depicts the exile motif. The story begins when Horn's father is killed at the hands of Saracens who send Horn and his twelve companions into exile. Horn finds himself abandoned in Westernesse. Rimenhild persuades her father for him to be a knight after valiant deeds when he is fighting. He kills the Saracens and Fikenhild is jealous of this and he lies the king that Horn will kill him. Exile motif is introduced and he is sent to Ireland to kill Saracens. Irish king Thurston offers his daughter in marriage as a reward, but Horn is faithful to Rimenhild even in exile. He defeats the Saracens who murdered his father and when he returns he learns Fikenhild has forced Rimenhild to marry him and thus kills him.

Horn turns out to be an adult from a frightened noble child in exile. According to the romance, there are four stages in his development. 1. His destruction (lines 1-152) 2. His development (lines 153-756) 3. Initiation (lines 757-1008) and 4. Reconstruction (lines 1009 to the end). He waged war against the enemy three times and he increased his skills as in his hunting and love experience that repeat in the story. Therefore, one can see

Horn growing from child to independent man and master of men when he reconquers his own country.

In exile he has good and bad friends. Athulf stands for loyalty. Fikenhild symbolizes the evil in *King Horn*: “Wurste moder son” (l. 837), and all these traits teach morality to him as a *bildungsroman* character. He learns the “Christian values,” (l. 986) when he fights with Saracens and learns to be a lover to Rimenhild at the end. Exile and return, sea voyages, revenge and marriage are part of the romance elements in the development of King Horn. In the development of loyalty and betrayal Horn learns life and becomes an adult. Horn wants to gain confidence all the time:

He o makede faire chere
 And tok him bi the swere.
 Of teh he o him keste,
 So wel so hire leste.

Welcume Horn, heo sade,

So fayr so Crist thee made!

An even and amorege
 For the the none reste
 (lines 409. 616)

In sum, life is an experience and development for Horn from childhood to youth.

In *bildungsroman*, a spiritual crisis is converted into the recognition of the hero's identity and role in the world as in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Somerset Maugham's *The Magic Mountain*, and David Storey's *A Prodigal Child*. Spiritual crisis is a difficult and painful process in exile, and is illustrated by the fact that on seven different occasions on the way Horn does the unmanly thing: he weeps, either for frustration or fear or joy (lines, 15-16, 80,90,240,300,305). This pattern of growth might made for dramatic variety and tragic depth, as it had done in the epic narratives that preceded romances in time. But neither is to be found. The hero is a stereotype protagonist for the interest mainly lies in the action, not in the character of the hero. He is an embodiment of virtue or of growth towards virtue. His story cannot be tragic, because if he dies, the virtue he embodies perishes with him, whereas romance sets out to show the virtue literally for what it is worth. This does not mean that there is

nothing explorative to romances. The tensions and conflicting motives underlying the ideals are brought about by the action, not by dramatic conflicts within the character. The action is the full drama of the portrayed ideal, and the various characters, including the hero, personify various facets of the complex experience of trying to attain that ideal. The hero enacts the striving towards the pure ideal, while the other characters are representatives of the checks imposed by reality and by the co-existence of other fundamental passions. Because the protagonist is the example or type aimed at, all characters other than the protagonist are only important in relation to the protagonist, not in relation to each other. They are the action.

According to Mary Hynes-Berry, the narrator of *King Horn* depicts a situational omniscience that provides the “elimination of concern for person and motive” (Hynes-Berry, 1975: 654). This shows that *King Horn* is actually originated from oral performance with limited receptive and listening audience. The oral origin of the romance shows the stylistic inferiority of the poem (Quinn, 1982: 33). However, Dieter Mehl discovers “the hand of a conscious artist” (Ganim, 1983: 45). Therefore, in the romance, allusive motivations and tensions underlie the surface narrative, and the romance has “local successess” with “flimsy and one dimensional” (Ganim, 1983: 39) wholeness.

In *King Horn*, there are systematic signs and clues. This may be an undercoding as a system of signification different from the “completely coded elementary signs”, as in Umberto Eco’s *Looking for a Logic of Culture*, that form the discourse (Eco, 1984: 10). In his *Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco writes that undercodes refer to the “operation by means of which, in the absence of reliable pre-established rules, certain texts are provisionally assumed to be pertinent units of a code in formation (Eco, 1976: 135-136). By this method, the romance reader dwelled on the “tentative and hypothetical gesture” (Eco, 1976: 135) in analysing undercodes. In exile experience, the decoding of signs shows that Athulf is a good man, Fikenhild is a bad person, but Horn’s gullibility is obvious and ironically Fikenhild is “faire gome” (1.96). This shows his degree of innocence and Fikenhild symbolises the idea of disorder in Horn’s life. Macroscopic portions lead to the decoder in this sense and undercoding takes place. From the point of view of King Horn his father is a “God king”, (1.51) but ironically enough Saracens kill him immediately when he enjoys a pleasure ride that leads to catastrophe. Therefore, there is a need for the hero’s growth to adulthood and maturity.

In a time when Horn trusts the future of his own country, the churches in Suddene fall to Saracens and his people are forced to quit Christianity. Horn’s mother prays for him continuously when he is exiled by the pagans. At this stage, the narrator summarizes the exile situation and immaturity of

Horn and says that Horn had never been in such distress before. His “God-given” (1.63) help saves him from death. This shows the superiority of the romance hero. He has some mastery over himself at this stage, but he is a victim of exile as well.

Horn is put into final testing when he learns the impending marriage of Rimenhild with another man. When he rescues her from this man he gains another experience. Sea voyages symbolise exile and wandering for him, and Rimenhild stands for security. He is able to beat the sea, exile and immaturity to his destination. He is the fisher now, not the fish entangled in a net.

Künstlerroman (“artist-novel) is a subtype of the *bildungsroman* that represents the growth of an artist into the stage of maturity that signals the recognition of the protagonist’s artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft as in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In *King Horn*, the child Horn cannot “writ good vers” (1. 82), for Rimenhild, but he keeps developing himself, and tries hard to “writ cortly writ” (1.931).

Horn’s disclosure of his royal identity, maturity and marriage to Rimenhild indicate his growing sense of control over his private and public selves. He is ready to face with public commitment and success and will bring peace to his own country. Thus, he mastered his environment as a lover, knight, artist, and king.

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