

British Children's Literature on Crimean War: Alfred Henty's *Jack Archer: History of Crimea*

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In this article the author analyses G. A. Henty's *Jack Archer: History of Crimea* (1883) not only as one of the few British novels directly using the 'Crimean' storyline, but as a novel for children that inherited the tradition of British Bildungsroman and appeared to be a new stage in development of this genre in British literature.

Key words: British literature, A.G.Henty, Bildungsroman, Crimean War.

In Britain, the Crimean war became one of the most controversial issues in political discourse, in which the novelists also became involved. Already during the Crimean War, that is, in the period from 1853 to 1856, the responses to military events are found in four major novels (*North and South* by E.C.Gaskell; *Little Dorrit* by C.Dickens ; *Westward Ho!* by C.Kingsley; *Warden* by A.Trollope), whereas the corpus of "Crimean" novels consists of 13 novels, the last having been written in 1883. Nevertheless, among these novels there is only one that belongs to the genre of children's literature - the novel *Jack Archer* by Alfred Henty written in 1883. This novel will yield insight into literary landscape of the Crimean War and the history of British Bildungsroman.

Looking at British literary history, it can be seen that Crimean hostilities and their evaluation is present in the key novels of 1850-1890. For example, in the image of the Circumlocution Office from *Little Dorrit* by Dickens, where Dickens writes in the preface to the 1857 edition: "If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war ... " [Dickens I ]. The British Government during the war was subject to unprecedented criticism for its 'circumlocution' and absolute imprepation for war. The (c) 2016 *The Middle Ground Journal* Number 12, Spring 2016 <http://TheMiddleGroundJournal.org> See Submission Guidelines page for the journal's not-for-profit educational open-access policy

Crimean War was, indeed, the first major conflict of the British Army after Waterloo. The War Department has changed little over the past forty years, and the appointed commander was Lord Raglan, a 66-year-old officer who spent the previous 39 years in Whitehall.

It should be noted that the image of the Circumlocution Office as a reflection of the shortcomings of the British government during the Crimean War, was perceived by Russian magazines as their enemy press which desired such news. For example, Russia's most famous journal *Sovremmenik* in the fifth issue for 1856 tells about the 'new novel' by Dickens and draws readers' attention to the image of "ministerstva okolichnosloviya" describing it [the Circumlocution Office] in the same vein as Dickens does.

Notably, Dickens at once indirectly represents an opportunity to identify important features of Novel studies during the Crimean War. The Crimean War also affected the British publishing business. Stefanie Markovits observes that the demand for new books fell so much that publishers began to look for cheaper ways of publishing: an attempt in 1855 by the publisher Richard Bentley to produce cheap editions of novels was due to the fact that the Crimean War led to a sharp drop in demand for books [Markovits 63]. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, an English novelist, wrote that "literature in England is very weak for the reason that no one bothers to read anything except the telegraph reports " [Ibid].

Naturally, not only the war itself was the cause of the search for new ways of publishing. It began even before the events of the Crimean War: a high tax on paper, which would be repealed in 1861, the Chartist movement in 1848. These events set the stage for change.

The publication of series of novels became popular in Britain not long before the Crimean War. Such novels stood for a field library of British soldiers. Publication as a supplement in a newspaper or magazine was a way for writers and poets to respond to military events.

Alan Horsman in the introduction to the "Oxford History of English Literature" even suggests that the state of the publishing industry in the mid-19th century in the UK developed

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'appeal to curiosity' in readers, which, in turn, affected ultimately the development of the realistic novel .

The history of British literature of 1850-1900s, especially children's literature, is impossible to study without the study of Bildungsroman or the novel of education in British literature of that time. Jack Archer seems to bear all the features of a Bildungsroman. The history of this genre is of interest for the discussion.

The term 'Bildungsroman' was first used by Karl Morgenstern in his lectures in the 1820s. Morgenstern identified two purposes of this genre: firstly, to show the process of formation, the education (Bildung) of a protagonist from his birth to a certain finality, and, secondly, the reader's formation under the influence of this genre together with his hero. Despite the theory of Morgenstern, the term 'Bildungsroman' and the concept of Bildungsroman became popular only after the publication of *Life of Schleiermacher (Das Leben Schleiermachers, 1867-70)* by Wilhelm Dilthey.

Additionally, this genre was of interest in Russian literary studies. The Russian literary research on Bildungsroman was first raised by Bakhtin in his work *The Novel of Education and Its Importance to The History of Realism (on the example of Goethe)*:

"There is a special version of the novel genre, which bears the name of Bildungsroman (Erziehungsroman or Bildungsroman) <...> It [Bildungsroman] draws certain typical recurring way of becoming a man from youthful idealism and dreaminess to mature and sober practicality. This path can be complicated at the end by varying degrees of skepticism and resignation. This type of novel is characterized by the formation of an image of the world and life as an experience, as a "school" through which every man has to go and render the same result - sobering with varying degrees of resignation "

[The translation is mine – NS] [Bakhtin 188].

It is noteworthy that Bakhtin gives two German notations for the term 'novel of education' - 'Erziehungsroman' or 'Bildungsroman'. Notably, there is a common subgenre of Bildungsroman, 'Künstlerroman', the novel, which tells about the formation of an artist (a vivid example - *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis). Moreover, 'Erziehungsroman' is a variation of the novel of education and can mean not only the formation of character, though, namely his character, his personality. Nevertheless, as it can be seen from Bakhtin's quote, these two concepts can be used interchangeably.

The anglophone bibliography of Bildungsroman seems to be more extensive. The classic and fundamental research work is recognized to be Franco Moretti's 'The Way of the World. The Bildungsroman in European Culture'. The author expresses the main theoretical aspects of the study of the genre Bildungsroman in this work<sup>1</sup>.

However, the pre-war and war years were no less important for the development of the novel of education in Britain. English writers (primarily, E. Bulwer and Benjamin Disraeli), inspired by reading Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a reference Bildungsroman of the 19th century, open this genre in English literature and bring English features and the echoes of English life (in particular, magazine culture) in it. The first direct echo of Bildungsroman in England became Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming*, written in 1832.

The following year, Duke Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer, the author, known for his novel *England and the English*, wrote the novel *Godolphin*, pointing in the text that he inherits the tradition of Goethe. Bulwer takes Goethe's plot as a basis and transfers the action on English soil for the first time, while adding details of British politics of the time.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, the following works are important for further study of this genre: Swales M. The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse; Howe S. Wilhelm Meister and his English Kinsmen: apprentices to life; Hardin J.N. Reflection and Action: Essays on Bildungsroman; Summerfield G. New perspectives on the European Bildungsroman; Buckley J.H. Season of Youth. The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding; Tennyson G.B. The Bildungsroman in Nineteen-Century English literature.

By mid-century English novel of education creates a classic pattern - William Thackeray's *Pendennis*. Thackeray's least studied novel tells the story of Pen from the moment when "the innocence has left him"[Thackeray 20] to the end - "this day or tomorrow will wind up the account of my youth: a weary retrospect, alas! A sad history with many a page I would fain not look back on!" [Thackeray 460].

Pen, indeed, goes through all stages of life: from a carefree childhood, an unhappy (incredibly ironic) story of first love, to the salvation of the good uncle from marrying a provincial actress. Then Oxbridge, first novel publication, the career of a journalist, rejection and disappointment in everything and, of course, the peak of his Bildung: a true understanding of life and, as an integral part of Bildung, a happy marriage. Thackeray adds – a marriage to an English lady, because a "high-bred English lady is the most complete of all Heaven's subjects in this world» [Thackeray 18].

The development of the English novel of education does not end on "Pendennis," and the war only helps its development. The best example of this process is *Jack Archer*.

George Alfred Henty was a contemporary of Howard Russell, the first war correspondent and one of the key figures in the history of British military journalism. Henty became famous for his letters from the Crimean War, which were published in *The Morning Advertiser*. By these letters, Henty was a no less successful war correspondent than Russell. Although, his literary career is much more interesting: Henty was one of the most influential writers of children's novels from 1850-1900.

Henty wrote *Jack Archer* as an already renowned author and war correspondent. It is one of few novels by Henty that are based on his war memories and where he used his and others' diaries and journal articles about the Crimean War and Sebastopol.

According to Niall Ferguson, «from the pen of G.A.Henty – a product of Westminster, Gonville and Caius, Crimea and Magdala – poured forth countless novels with titles by *By Sheer*

*Pluck* and *For Name or Fame*. Primarily a hack writer of historical fiction, Henty's most overly  
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imperialist works were those inspired by relatively recent military campaigns: *With Clive in India* (1884), *With Buller in Natal* (1901) and *With Kitchener in th Soudan* (1903). These were hugely popular: in all, total sales of Henty's novels were put at 25 million by 1950s» [ Ferguson 347].

The novel *Jack Archer* inherits the tradition of Bildungsroman. It can be connected with the novel *Schooldays Thomas Brown* (1857) by Thomas Hughes, which also contains echoes of the Crimean War. The novels *Schooldays Thomas Brown* and *Tom Brown at Oxford* were very popular in the years after the publication largely because they touched upon an incredibly acute topic of education reform. The controversy around education reform had become so intense that it led to the establishment of the famous Clarendon Commission of 1861, which audited nine public schools for the educational system and the general state schools. The result of the work of this commission was the Public School Act, which affected the seven largest boys' schools in Britain, and led to a significant change in the education system across the country.

Returning to Henty, his novel *Jack Archer* writes the story of a boy growing up in the context of the war. Jack's adventures and shenanigans will take place against the backdrop of historical events of the Crimean War. Not coincidentally, the text mentions another English novel with a similar plot - *Peter Simple*. Written in 1833 by Frederick Marryat, the novel tells the story of a young gentleman who goes to the naval service of Her Majesty during the war with Napoleon. *Jack Archer* is developed almost in the same way as *Peter Simple*. For example, Jack and his friend go ashore in Gibraltar to explore the bay and are captured by a gang of local bandits. Freed from captivity by Jack's cunning plan, they get on a ship, the captain of which agrees to help them catch up with their ship. Subsequently, it turns out that the ship on which they had boarded was the first British ship sent to Crimea: «The boys found that they were on board the transport "Ripon", having the Coldstream Guards on board, the first detachment of the army on its way east" [Henty *Gutenberg.org* ].

Magazine-style descriptions of military events and historical anecdotes, based on the numerous memoirs, are added to a classic Bildungsroman. War years were the heydays of the caricature genre, which developed a new language and narrative poetics, largely influencing linguistic and stylistic space of Dickens and Thackeray's novels.

The text of *Jack Archer* displays all of the problems that worried English society during the war: military unpreparedness for war of lax government. At the beginning of the novel, when the main character, a young man, enters the service of the ship "Falcon", the first thing he hears from a mate is a complaint about the lack of time and money:

«But I must be going on board. I have a message from the admiral to the captain and every moment is precious, for the things are terribly behindhand. The dockyard people are wellnigh out of their wits with the pressure put upon them, and we are ordered to be ready to sail in a week. How it's all to be done, goodness only knows" [Ibid. ].

Later, Henty will point to the shortcomings of the army, as did his fellow countrymen themselves:

«Enormous numbers of pack animals and bullock-carts were at work, and even at this early period of the campaign the immense superiority of the French arrangements over the English was manifest. This was but natural, as the French, like other European nations, had been in the habit in time of peace of regarding the army as a machine which might be required for war, and had therefore kept the commissariat, transport, and other arrangements in a state of efficiency. In England, upon the other hand, the army had been entirely neglected, and had been made the subject of miserable, petty economy in all its branches, and the consequence was that war found us wholly unprepared, except that we possessed an army of seasoned soldiers such as, in the nature of things under the new regulations, England will never see again ... " [Ibid.]

Henty's novel also describes what the British saw as they were entering the city of Sebastopol, a passage that is not found in Russian literary works about Crimea. It dramatically complements 'Crimean' plot with a literary description of the abandoned city:

«The houses of the portion of the town nearest the batteries were found full of dead men who had crawled in when wounded in front. As a considerable number of the Russian steamers of war were still floating under the guns of their batteries on the north side, preparations were made at once to mount two heavy guns by the water-side; but the Russians, seeing that the last remains of their fleet would speedily be destroyed, took matters in their own hands, and on the night of the 11th the six steamers that remained were burnt by the Russians.

After the din which had raged so fiercely for the previous four days, and the dropping fire which had gone on for a year, the silence which reigned was strange and almost oppressive. There was nothing to be done. No turn in the trenches or batteries to be served, nothing to do but to rest and to prepare for the next winter, which was now almost upon them " [Ibid.].

The novel ends with the end of the war, when Jack meets Russian count Preskoff, who invites Jack to marry his younger daughter Olga.

Nevertheless, Jack is not the same boy who was taken into service from the school bench in the middle of Latin class, «he was now three-and-twenty, and having been twice mentioned in despatches, was looked upon as a rising young officer» [Ibid.]. Jack has made a career and the only thing lacks as a classic Bildungsroman hero is a wedding and happy marriage.

It was not long in coming, though Archer didn't marry an Englishwoman, but an exotic Russian countess. One of the last lines of the novel reads as follows: «There does not exist, at present, a happier couple in England than Mr. and Mrs. Archer». [Ibid.]

Despite the classic Bildungsroman story, *Jack Archer* cannot be called the novel, which continues the tradition of Thackeray's *Pennendenis*. On the contrary, this novel is not the next step

in the development of the novel of education. Rather, this is the novel that was to be written by reading Goethe, but not after reading Thackeray.

*Jack Archer* is more like a children's tale of noble knights and it is incredibly important to the history of Bildungsroman. *Jack Archer* is a novel of upbringing as if from the pages of the weekly *Boys' Own Empire* on dizzying adventures in the vast Empire.

Furthermore, the novel, written in 1883, stands as a symbol of decay, a dim memory of the past prime (not by chance that he describes the events of that time, when Bildungsroman flourished).

In 12 years, there would be another novel of education written, after which the classic novel of education would no longer be possible - *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy. Jude's story is an example of how a novel of education should never be and how it happens in real life.

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