

ANALYSIS OF BILDUNGSROMAN ELEMENTS IN “*THE CRUEL PRINCE*” BY HOLLY BLACK: ALIGNMENT AND DEVIATION

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Abstract: This research focused on the alignment and deviation of Bildungsroman element in “The Cruel Prince”. This research aims to identify the Bildungsroman elements that presents in “The Cruel Prince” as well as analyze the alignment and deviation of those elements with classical Bildungsroman tradition. This research utilized the qualitative descriptive method, Golban (2003) theory of Bildungsroman, and Stanton (1965) theory of narrative element. The results found that “The Cruel Prince” contains all ten elements of the Bildungsroman as outlined in Petru Golban’s (2003) framework, while simultaneously transforming these elements to reflect contemporary concerns and fantasy genre conventions. Through systematic analysis of plot, character, and setting elements, this research reveals a complex pattern of preservation and innovation that characterizes contemporary fantasy coming-of-age narratives. This study is limited to the first book of “The Folk of the Air” trilogy by Holy Black.

Keywords: *bildungsroman, fantasy novel, narrative structure, the cruel prince*

INTRODUCTION

The Bildungsroman, or novel of formation, is a literary genre that traces the intellectual, moral, spiritual, or artistic development of a young protagonist into maturity. Stanton (1965) explains that this genre is similar to the autobiographical novel, except that it does not need to be based on a real person’s life; instead, it focuses on the process of maturation. The term originates from the German words Bildung (education or formation) and Roman (novel), meaning a narrative that chronicles a protagonist’s growth. The genre became widely recognized with Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship (1795–1796), which follows a young man’s journey of self-discovery and social integration (Boes, 2006; Thamarana, 2015). During the Victorian period, the Bildungsroman flourished as a dominant literary form, often reflecting society’s emphasis on moral development and social mobility Golban and Karabakir

(2019).

A defining feature of the Bildungsroman is the protagonist's movement from childhood to maturity through experiences of conflict, education, and eventual self-realization. Howe (1930) emphasizes that the journey often involves leaving home, encountering social relationships, facing moral dilemmas, and finding a place in society. Classic examples include Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where young protagonists overcome adversity to achieve integration into society. More recent studies have noted the genre's adaptability. Moretti (1995) argues that the modern Bildungsroman reflects the pressures of globalization and individualism, while Slaughter (2007) highlights its engagement with themes of marginalization and resistance. These perspectives suggest that the Bildungsroman is not static but responsive to changing cultural contexts.

Recent scholarship continues to highlight the versatility of the Bildungsroman across different contexts. Fen and Qiaoyan (2023), for instance, apply the framework to *The Catcher in the Rye*, emphasizing Holden Caulfield's psychological confusion and adolescent struggles, but their study does not explore how narrative elements structurally shape this development. Similarly, Kafshgarkolaie and Kami (2022) analyze Ibsen's *A Doll's House* through a feminist lens, showing how Nora's growth challenges patriarchal constraints, though their focus remains primarily on thematic transformation rather than narrative construction. Complementing these applied studies, Rügge-meier (2023) offers a comprehensive theoretical overview of the Bildungsroman, stressing its adaptability across literary traditions while underscoring self-cultivation as the genre's central purpose. Building on these insights, the present research integrates both Golban's (2003) elements and Stanton's (1965) narrative categories to assess not only whether the Bildungsroman elements appear in *The Cruel Prince* but also how they are narratively configured to reflect alignment and deviation within a fantasy context.

In contemporary literature, the Bildungsroman has increasingly been adapted into fantasy narratives. Fantasy settings introduce unique social systems, magical hierarchies, and non-human societies, which reshape the conditions under which personal development occurs. These altered environments raise questions about whether classical developmental arcs such as leaving home, seeking vocation, and undergoing spiritual trials, retain the same meaning when transferred into fantasy contexts. As a result, analyzing the Bildungsroman in fantasy requires

not only identifying its core elements but also assessing how those elements are transformed by genre conventions.

The Cruel Prince novel by Black (2018) provides a compelling case for this inquiry. The novel follows Jude Duarte, a mortal girl raised in the High Court of Faerie after the violent death of her parents. Her struggle for identity, power, and survival resembles classical trajectories of formation but unfolds in a hostile fantasy world that complicates traditional paths toward maturity. While previous scholarship has examined the Bildungsroman in realist and canonical texts, little research has systematically applied Golban’s (2003) ten-element framework to contemporary fantasy. Existing studies of young adult fantasy often emphasize themes of identity, ambition, or marginalization, but they rarely test whether the genre’s structural elements align with or deviate from classical Bildungsroman conventions.

This gap highlights the need to investigate how *The Cruel Prince* preserves and transforms the Bildungsroman model. By applying Golban’s (2003) framework in conjunction with Stanton’s (1965) narrative aspects of plot, character, and setting, this study addresses the central problem of whether the Bildungsroman can extend beyond realism into fantasy while maintaining its structural integrity. Understanding this process not only clarifies the adaptability of the Bildungsroman but also contributes to scholarship on young adult fantasy literature, where questions of identity and power remain central.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, which emphasizes the interpretation and analysis of textual data. The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it focuses on literary analysis, relying on meaning, context, and depth rather than numerical measurement. As Cresswell and Creswell (2017) explains, qualitative research involves collecting and interpreting data to explore how meaning is constructed, allowing the researcher to inductively identify patterns and themes within a text. This approach is well suited to interpreting the narrative and thematic elements of a literary work.

In this study, the qualitative method is applied through formalist textual analysis, which focuses on the internal features of the text, such as plot, character, and setting. The formalist approach aligns with the intrinsic literary perspective, emphasizing structure and meaning within the text itself, without considering external factors such as the author’s biography or

historical context. This strategy is particularly appropriate for identifying structural and thematic elements related to the Bildungsroman genre within a fictional narrative.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Bildungsroman Elements in *The Cruel Prince*

a. An Orphaned Child

Golban (2003) notes that the Bildungsroman often begins with an orphaned child whose condition initiates the journey of formation. Jude's childhood ends abruptly when her parents are murdered.

First, the novel situates her in a normal domestic environment: "Jude sat on the living room rug and ate fish sticks, soggy from the microwave and dragged through a sludge of ketchup" (Black, 2018: 3). This ordinary life is shattered when Madoc intrudes violently: "The tall man drew a curved blade from beneath his leather coat... Dad fell to the vestibule carpet... Mom and Dad were dead. They were never going to move again" (Black, 2018: 5–7).

These passages establish Jude's orphanhood and displacement, fulfilling Golban's (2003) first element.

b. Conflict with Parental Figures

The second element involves conflict with parental figures (Golban, 2003). Jude's adoptive father Madoc, who is also her parents' killer, becomes the focus of this conflict.

When Jude expresses her desire to become a knight, Madoc dismisses her capability: "'I want to make my own way at the Court,' I say. 'You're no killer,' he tells me... 'What you lack is nothing to do with experience'" (Black, 2018: 30).

This opposition recurs in other conversations, where Madoc continues to deny her ambitions: "'After the coronation,' he repeats. I want to scream at him: Do you know how hard it is to always keep your head down? To swallow insults and endure outright threats? And yet I have done so" (Black, 2018: 30).

These passages show the clash between parental authority and Jude's emerging identity, exemplifying the second element.

c. Departure from Home to Enter a Larger Society

Golban (2003) identifies the third element as departure from home to enter a larger society. Jude departs from her dependent position in Madoc's household when she joins the

Court of Shadows.

Prince Dain offers her the role: "I need someone who can lie, someone with ambition. Spy for me. Join my Court of Shadows. I can make you powerful beyond what you might ever hope" (Black, 2018: 62–63).

Jude deliberates on the opportunity, showing awareness of the risks: "I want power so badly. And this is an opportunity for it, a terrifying and slightly insulting opportunity. But also an intriguing one" (Black, 2018: 63).

She seals her departure through a formal oath: "Right then and there, I go down on one knee on the ancient rug in Madoc's study and swear myself into Prince Dain's service" (Black, 2018: 64).

These passages demonstrate her transition into a larger society, fulfilling the third element.

d. Institutionalized Education and Self-Education

The fourth element of the Bildungsroman is institutionalized education and self-education (Golban, 2003). Jude undergoes all three: formal schooling, domestic training, and espionage instruction.

At the palace, she receives lessons alongside faerie children: "We learn about the movements of constellations... the languages of birds and flowers and people... the bow and the blade" (Black, 2018: 21–22). Madoc also trains her directly: "Madoc personally instructed us in the art of fighting with the cutlass and dagger... Many nights I drifted off to sleep to his rumbling voice reading from a book of battle strategy" (Black, 2018: 9–10). Later, the Court of Shadows hones her espionage skills: "The Roach orders me to practice moving through the crowds... The Bomb teaches me how to find the weak spot in a building... The Ghost teaches me how to hang from rafters" (Black, 2018: 108).

Together these passages demonstrate Jude's formation through multiple forms of education, satisfying the fourth element.

e. Search for Social Relationships

The fifth element of the Bildungsroman involves the search for social relationships (Golban, 2003). Jude's search is complicated by her human status in Faerie.

She finds tentative belonging with the Court of Shadows: "He and the Ghost and the Bomb are not precisely my friends, but they actually seem to like me... I have a place with

them and a purpose” (Black, 2018: 161–162). This contrasts with her isolation in other social encounters, where she is reminded of her difference: “‘You’ll never be our equal,’ Nicasia says. ‘Your only purpose is to create more of your kind before you die some pointless and agonizing death’” (Black, 2018: 111).

Together these passages illustrate Jude’s attempts to seek connection despite constant rejection, fulfilling the fifth element.

f. Search for Vocation and Social Accomplishment

The sixth element concerns the search for vocation (Golban, 2003). Jude first aspires to knighthood but later embraces espionage as her path.

She declares her ambition to Madoc: “‘I am going to fight in the Summer Tournament, and I want to declare myself ready to be chosen for knighthood’” (Black, 2018: 28–29). Madoc denies her, reinforcing her determination: “‘You’re no killer,’ he tells me... I thought if you saw I could take whatever came at me and still smile, you would see that I was worthy” (Black, 2018: 30). Dain later redirects her toward espionage: “‘Spy for me. Join my Court of Shadows. I can make you powerful beyond what you might ever hope’” (Black, 2018: 62).

These vocational shifts demonstrate Jude’s search for accomplishment within Faerie society, satisfying the sixth element.

g. Ordeal by Society

Golban (2003) defines the seventh element as the ordeal by society, where the protagonist’s professional abilities are tested. Jude faces trials both as an aspiring knight and as a spy.

Cardan threatens her tournament participation: “‘It’s not for mortals,’ he informs us, voice chilly. ‘Withdraw, or wish that you had’” (Black, 2018: 24). She faces harsher ordeals as a spy, beginning with her mission to Hollow Hall: “‘Go to Hollow Hall tomorrow, sweetmeat,’ it chirps, cutting me off. ‘Find us a secret the king won’t like. Find treason’” (Black, 2018: 75). Her dangerous work continues as she infiltrates faerie strongholds: “‘I stow my cloak outside between the logs of a woodpile and enter through the kitchens, where supper is being prepared’” (Black, 2018: 78).

These passages illustrate Jude’s ordeals as professional tests, fulfilling the seventh element.

h. Trial by Love

The eighth element of the Bildungsroman is the trial by love (Golban, 2003). Jude experiences this through her relationship with Locke, which begins as validation but becomes manipulation.

Locke first expresses interest in her: "His tawny fox eyes meet mine and widen in surprise... then one corner of his mouth lifts. He winks, as if in acknowledgment of being caught out" (Black, 2018: 18–19). Their intimacy deepens during the tower scene: "He turns me toward him and then slowly brings his lips to mine... I grip the railing hard to ground myself in what's happening" (Black, 2018: 116). Locke later tests Jude with manipulative questions: "'Tell me, could you love me? What would you do for me? Would you forswear a promise for me?'" (Black, 2018: 162).

These passages depict Jude's sentimental career as a painful education in trust, fulfilling the eighth element.

i. Passes Through Moments of Spiritual Suffering

The ninth element involves moments of spiritual suffering (Golban, 2003). Jude experiences this after orchestrating Cardan's coronation.

She reflects on the moral weight of her choices: "I have done the thing, and now I must live with what I have done. I have lied and I have betrayed and I have triumphed" (Black, 2018: 256). Her sense of exhaustion underscores her suffering: "I feel as tired as I have ever felt, and yet, for seven years, I will not be able to truly rest" (Black, 2018: 254).

These moments capture her spiritual conflict and isolation, exemplifying Golban's (2003) ninth element.

j. Epiphany Leading to Final Formation

The tenth element of the Bildungsroman is the protagonist's epiphany, which signals final formation (Golban, 2003). Jude's epiphanies occur after Cardan's coronation.

She recognizes the limits of her power: "'I have a bargain with him for a year and a day. I have a year and a day to come to a bargain for longer than that. And not for one minute more'" (Black, 2018: 257). The Court of Shadows confirms her new identity: "'We came up with your code name,' she mouths... 'What else? The Queen.' It turns out I still don't know how to laugh" (Black, 2018: 254).

These epiphanies indicate partial but significant formation, fulfilling the tenth element.

This confirms that Black's (2018) novel contains the full trajectory of the Bildungsroman. However, the ways these elements function show both alignment with and deviation from the classical model.

2. Alignment and Deviation of Bildungsroman Elements

Several of Golban's (2003) elements align closely with the classical Bildungsroman structure in *The Cruel Prince*. These include orphanhood, conflict with parental figures, education, and the search for social relationships.

a. Orphaned Child

The Bildungsroman conventionally opens with orphanhood, establishing vulnerability as the foundation of formation (Golban, 2003). Black follows this structure but intensifies it. The novel begins with domestic ordinariness: "Jude sat on the living room rug and ate fish sticks, soggy from the microwave and dragged through a sludge of ketchup" (Black, 2018: 3) before it is violently destroyed: "Dad was trying to pull the axe free from the doorframe when the man plunged the sword into Dad's stomach" (pp. 5–7). The blunt statement "Mom and Dad were dead. They were never going to move again" (p. 7) collapses exposition and inciting incident, producing what Boes (2006) calls an "abrupt awakening."

Jude's helpless resistance: "I run at the man, slamming my fists against his chest, kicking at his legs. I wasn't even scared. I wasn't sure I felt anything at all" (Black, 2018: 5) marks her starting point as weak and ineffectual, consistent with Moretti's (1995) argument that the genre begins with dependency. Her development here lies in the *immediate loss of innocence*: unlike classical protagonists who gradually shed naivety, Jude is thrust into survival mode. This shift defines her subsequent arc. Her self-perception as alien: "Here, I am the strange one, with my blunt fingers, round ears, and mayfly life" (p. 10) cements her character as an outsider whose formation will be shaped by exclusion rather than gradual socialization.

The transition from suburbia to Faerie dramatizes this shift. Jude moves from familiarity to a realm where "there are no fish sticks, no ketchup, no television" (Black, 2018: 7). Stanton (1965) reminds us that setting actively shapes narrative. Here, the environment becomes not just a backdrop but a perpetual threat, embedding alienation into Jude's formation. Her character develops by being forced to adapt: orphanhood transforms her from a protected child into a survivor in a world where her mortality makes her permanently vulnerable.

b. Conflict with Parental Figures

The second element, parental conflict, functions classically as an obstacle that pushes the protagonist toward autonomy (Golban, 2003). In *The Cruel Prince*, this occurs when Jude declares her ambition: “I am going to fight in the Summer Tournament, and I want to declare myself ready to be chosen for knighthood” (Black, 2018: 28–29). Madoc dismisses her outright: “‘You’re no killer,’ he tells me... ‘What you lack is nothing to do with experience’” (p. 30). Stanton’s (1965) notion of plot as causal sequence applies here: parental denial forces Jude to seek alternative paths, specifically espionage under Dain.

This conflict catalyzes Jude’s assertion of identity. Her frustration: “I want to scream at him: Do you know how hard it is to always keep your head down? To swallow insults and endure outright threats? And yet I have done so” (Black, 2018: 30) reveals her refusal to accept passivity. Developmentally, this marks her transition from powerless orphan to self-conscious agent. Yet her characterization is shaped by contradiction: “I came to love him. I do love him. It’s just not a comfortable kind of love” (p. 10). Unlike classical heroes who resolve parental conflict through reconciliation or separation, Jude grows by inhabiting this paradox. Her development is defined not by resolution but by learning to thrive amid ambivalence—an adaptation Slaughter (2007) links to contemporary survival narratives.

The household setting amplifies the conflict. At Madoc’s table, Jude sits amid “silver plates piled with food” and “bowls of salt” for protection (Black, 2018: 27–28). The home, which in classical novels symbolizes stability, becomes instead a site of instability and danger. Character development is visible here: Jude learns to navigate power even in supposed safe spaces, developing resilience in environments that constantly remind her of her precarious status.

c. Departure Into Larger Society

Departure is a key turning point in Golban’s model, signifying transition from private to public life. In Black’s novel, this occurs when Prince Dain offers Jude a role: “‘You wanted to give me your oath and your sword. I accept. I need someone who can lie, someone with ambition. Spy for me’” (Black, 2018: 62–63). Jude accepts: “I go down on one knee... and swear myself into Prince Dain’s service” (p. 64). In Stanton’s causal framework, this marks a decisive redirection of the narrative.

Jude's departure is her first act of true agency. She admits: "It's frightening to have a choice like this... I want power so badly" (Black, 2018: 63). This reflection shows her development from reluctant dependent into ambitious actor. Unlike Pip's shameful desire for gentlemanly status, Jude's ambition is unapologetically about power. Her character changes here by redefining departure not as integration into a respectable institution, but as entry into secrecy and manipulation.

The environment embodies this redefinition. Jude enters "a narrow platform above what appears to be the palace's wine cellars... a network of passageways worming below the palace" (Black, 2018: 89–90). Unlike the outward expansion of realist protagonists into visible cities, Jude's departure is subterranean, into hidden spaces. Her character development here is explicit: she learns that advancement means thriving in shadows, not in the public eye. Setting thus crystallizes her arc from aspiring knight to clandestine operator, confirming that in Black's fantasy, *Bildung* unfolds through secrecy rather than visibility.

d. Institutionalized Education and Self-education

Education is central to the *Bildungsroman*, preparing the protagonist for maturity (Golban, 2003). In *The Cruel Prince*, Jude undergoes three forms of training: palace schooling, Madoc's domestic lessons, and covert espionage instruction. In the palace, she joins faerie children: "We learn about the movements of constellations... the languages of birds and flowers and people" (Black, 2018: 21–22). At home, Madoc drills her in combat: "He played Nine Men's Morris, Fidchell, and Fox and Geese with us before a fire... Many nights I drifted off to sleep to his rumbling voice reading from a book of battle strategy" (pp. 9–10). Later, the Court of Shadows imposes practical missions: "The Roach orders me to practice moving through the crowds... The Bomb teaches me how to find the weak spot... The Ghost teaches me how to hang from rafters" (p. 108). These episodes function causally, in Stanton's (1965) sense, as preparation for later ordeals.

Jude's education catalyzes her development from a powerless outsider into a skilled, self-directed agent. At first, she is dependent on external instruction, but soon she embraces autonomous self-education: "The final piece, I put on my tongue... Mithridatism, it's called... eating poison to build up immunity" (Black, 2018: 107). This moment marks her transition from passive recipient to active shaper of her own development. Unlike classical protagonists who gain moral clarity through education, Jude acquires resilience and cunning. Her character

changes by valuing deception, strategy, and survival over traditional virtues—a deviation Slaughter (2007) identifies as typical of contemporary narratives of formation.

The variety of learning environments dramatizes Jude's shift. Palace classrooms emphasize her outsider status, Madoc's household imposes paternal authority, and the hidden chambers of the Court of Shadows symbolize her new independence. "Down here, beneath the hill, I am learning secrets that few in Faerie know" (Black, 2018: 149). These settings reinforce her development: from marginalized student to clandestine expert. Jude's Bildung thus unfolds not in safe schools but in perilous environments, where failure could mean death.

e. Search for Relationship

Golban (2003) identifies the search for social bonds (friendship, community, love) as essential for self-formation. Jude's plotline dramatizes this through her involvement with the Court of Shadows, where she finds tentative belonging: "He and the Ghost and the Bomb are not precisely my friends, but they actually seem to like me... I have a place with them and a purpose" (Black, 2018: 161–162). Yet other encounters stress exclusion: "'You'll never be our equal,' Nicasia says" (p. 23). These conflicting experiences advance the plot by showing how her quest for connection is both necessary and perpetually frustrated.

Jude's development here is defined by compromise. Unlike Pip or Jane Eyre, who eventually secure deep relationships, Jude accepts partial and conditional bonds. Her ability to acknowledge limited belonging: "not precisely my friends" (Black, 2018: 162) shows her shift from craving full acceptance to valuing functional alliances. Characterization here stresses pragmatism: Jude matures not by overcoming exclusion but by learning to endure it and still derive strength from fragile ties. Her development lies in redefining belonging: community is no longer about intimacy but about utility and shared purpose.

Settings reinforce this fragile belonging. The Court of Shadows, hidden beneath the palace, functions as the equivalent of private gardens or drawing rooms in classical texts: intimate spaces where authentic bonds can form. "I follow the Roach through the palace... he opens a cupboard and climbs inside" (Black, 2018: 88–89). Unlike public courts where she is humiliated, the secret chamber offers provisional safety. This contrast underscores her development: she learns to forge identity not in public validation but in marginal, secretive spaces.

f. Search for Vocation and Social Accomplishment

Vocational aspiration is a structural driver in the Bildungsroman. Jude first pursues knighthood: “I am going to fight in the Summer Tournament, and I want to declare myself ready to be chosen for knighthood” (Black, 2018: 28–29). Madoc’s rejection redirects her path. Later, Dain offers espionage: “I need someone who can lie, someone with ambition. Spy for me” (p. 62). In Stanton’s (1965) causal framework, this shift reorients the story from public ambition to secret labor.

Jude’s development here is crucial. Initially, she seeks vocational legitimacy—knighthood as a way to prove worth. Her reflection, “I thought if you saw I could take whatever came at me and still smile, you would see that I was worthy” (Black, 2018: 30), reveals her desire for recognition. But when excluded from that path, she embraces espionage, reframing her identity around power rather than approval: “Instead of being afraid, I could become something to fear” (p. 63). Her character evolves from a recognition-seeker to a strategist willing to exploit marginality. This marks a fundamental shift in her arc, redefining Bildung not as integration but as tactical subversion.

Vocational spaces embody this change. Madoc’s training grounds represent the traditional, visible path of knighthood, while the Court of Shadows’ secret chambers embody clandestine vocation. “‘Welcome,’ says the Roach, ‘to the Court of Shadows’” (Black, 2018: 91). These settings visualize Jude’s development: she cannot thrive in public institutions, but she excels in hidden spaces. Vocational accomplishment thus shifts from social recognition to secret mastery, emphasizing how fantasy transforms Golban’s element into survival-oriented formation.

g. Ordeal by Society

Golban (2003) identifies ordeals as tests of readiness for adult roles. Jude experiences two: the Summer Tournament and her espionage missions. Her ambition is first blocked when Cardan tells her, “It’s not for mortals... Withdraw, or wish that you had” (Black, 2018: 24). This rejection shifts the causal direction of the story. Later, the Court of Shadows assigns her to infiltrate Hollow Hall: “Go to Hollow Hall tomorrow, sweetmeat... Find us a secret the king won’t like. Find treason” (p. 75). These ordeals are structurally classical—tests that determine progress—but their content emphasizes survival over social recognition.

Jude develops resilience and adaptability through these ordeals. After humiliation, she reflects: "I hate myself most of all. I hate that I am weak, that I am fragile. But if I am, then I can improve. I can become strong" (Black, 2018: 38). Her growth lies in refusing despair; she channels rejection into determination. Later, in Hollow Hall, her improvisation: "'You're lovely,' I say, trying to sound awed and a little confused" (p. 79) shows her ability to strategize under pressure. Unlike classical protagonists who earn social approval, Jude's development is measured by her capacity to endure danger and weaponize cunning.

The public tournament grounds function as arenas of humiliation, while Hollow Hall embodies the hidden, hostile spaces of espionage. "The circular room I come to is paneled in bookshelves, filled with manuscripts, scrolls, golden daggers, thin glass vials" (Black, 2018: 82). These lethal surroundings normalize danger as part of her profession. Her development is clear: Jude learns that her career will never be about honor in public spaces but about survival in secretive, violent environments.

h. Trial by Love

Love is traditionally a trial that complicates and enriches self-formation (Golban, 2003). Jude's romantic subplot begins with Locke's attention: "His tawny fox eyes meet mine... then one corner of his mouth lifts. He winks" (Black, 2018: 18–19). Their intimacy escalates in the tower: "He turns me toward him and then slowly brings his lips to mine" (p. 116). Yet Locke's manipulative questioning: "'Tell me, could you love me? What would you do for me? Would you forswear a promise for me?'" (p. 162) shifts the trial into psychological testing. Plot-wise, the romance does not culminate in stability but in disillusionment, deviating from classical expectations of reconciliation.

This trial changes Jude by hardening her rather than deepening her emotional life. Initially shy and inexperienced: "I want to pull him closer and push him away at the same time" (Black, 2018: 117). She moves toward detachment: "I feel better than great. I feel nothing, a glorious emptiness" (p. 48). Her development lies in learning that desire can be dangerous and must be managed strategically. Unlike Jane Eyre, who integrates love with integrity, Jude transforms romantic vulnerability into pragmatic caution.

Romantic encounters unfold in deceptive spaces. Locke's estate offers apparent refuge: "We sit at the long, empty banquet table and eat cheese and bread" (Black, 2018: 117) but quickly reveals danger, as Jude realizes she could have ended up enslaved like the human girl in Hollow Hall (p. 115). The tower scene literalizes emotional risk: "Up we go, up and up and

up. I feel dizzy” (p. 115–116). Settings externalize her development: what looks like intimacy becomes a lesson in manipulation. Jude’s character arc shifts from yearning for love to understanding it as another battlefield.

i. Emotional Suffering

Golban (2003) emphasizes that the Bildungsroman requires a stage of spiritual crisis. In Black’s novel, Jude suffers most acutely after apparent success. Following Cardan’s coronation, she reflects: “I have done the thing, and now I must live with what I have done. I have lied and I have betrayed and I have triumphed” (Black, 2018: 256). Unlike classical crises that follow defeat, her suffering arises from victory, inverting the traditional pattern.

Jude’s development here is the acceptance of moral ambiguity. She questions herself: “What have I done?... What in the world have I done?” (Black, 2018: 256). Instead of clarity, she embraces pragmatism: “I have a bargain with him for a year and a day” (p. 257). This marks her growth: she learns to live with contradiction rather than resolve it. Slaughter (2007) notes that contemporary Bildung emphasizes survival within hostile systems; Jude exemplifies this by turning guilt into renewed strategy. Her arc transforms suffering into determination rather than humility.

The coronation court frames this crisis. While others celebrate: “Crystal rings. More wine flows. More laughter sounds” (Black, 2018: 254). Jude feels exhausted and alone. Stanton’s (1965) reminder that setting amplifies meaning is clear here: public festivity intensifies her isolation. The setting externalizes her development: she learns that triumph can coexist with emptiness, that power does not alleviate solitude.

j. Epiphany Leads to Formation

The final element, epiphany, is meant to synthesize experience into identity (Golban, 2003). Jude’s decisive moment occurs at the coronation when she crowns Cardan: “I put the crown on Cardan’s head myself, the weight of it heavy in my hands” (Black, 2018: 347). The action concludes the causal chain of refusals and ordeals, yet instead of resolving conflict, it opens new ones. Plot-wise, her epiphany affirms ambition rather than harmony, signaling a reconfigured formation.

Jude’s character arc culminates in embracing her identity as strategist and manipulator. Earlier, she admitted, “I want power so badly” (Black, 2018: 63); by the climax, this ambition defines her. When the Court of Shadows dubs her “The Queen” and she admits, “It turns out I

still don’t know how to laugh” (Black, 2018: 254), the irony is sharp. Her epiphany is not moral enlightenment but pragmatic self-knowledge: she understands that her survival depends on power and deception. This development departs from classical Bildung, which ends with integration, and instead embraces functional incompleteness.

The coronation hall, filled with danger and spectacle, stages her transformation. “The crowd parts to let him through... He walks to stand to one side of me and Oak” (Black, 2018: 252). Positioning Jude at the center of political power, the setting embodies her new role. Yet her private chambers, described as “a vast sitting area... a dressing area with empty closets” (p. 256), signal emptiness rather than comfort. Setting underscores her development: Jude gains authority but not belonging. Formation here is provisional, contingent, and laced with vigilance.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that *The Cruel Prince* (2018) preserves the ten elements of the Bildungsroman while transforming their functions to suit the logic of a hostile fantasy world. Using Golban’s (2003) framework alongside Stanton’s (1965) narrative elements, the analysis traced how plot, characterization, and setting together reconfigure the tradition of formation.

On the level of plot, the novel follows the classical arc: orphanhood, parental conflict, departure, education, vocational search, ordeal, love trial, suffering, and epiphany. Yet the content of these stages shifts. Orphanhood is sudden and violent, not gradual. Departure is psychological rather than geographical. Education is urgent and dangerous, not leisurely cultivation. The structural skeleton remains intact, but its meaning is recast in survivalist terms.

Through characterization, Jude Duarte’s arc departs most sharply from tradition. She begins powerless, seeks legitimacy, and ends as a strategist who secures power through secrecy and manipulation. Her development is not moral refinement or social reconciliation but pragmatic adaptation. Instead of resolving contradictions, she learns to inhabit them—loving and resenting Madoc, desiring and distrusting Cardan, celebrating triumph while suffering its cost. Her Bildung is thus marked by resilience rather than harmony.

Setting externalizes this transformation. Suburbia gives way to Faerie’s hostile courts; the domestic table becomes a stage for threat; subterranean corridors replace the public city as arenas of growth. Most strikingly, the coronation hall, traditionally a site of resolution, stages

Jude's epiphany but underscores her isolation. Environments continually remind the reader that identity is forged in precarious, unstable conditions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that *The Cruel Prince* does not abandon the Bildungsroman but adapts it. The genre's durability lies in its flexibility: its elements can accommodate new anxieties about exclusion, power, and survival. *The Cruel Prince* exemplifies a Bildungsroman of survival, where formation is partial, provisional, and incomplete. This reconfiguration underscores the genre's ongoing vitality and its ability to illuminate the fractured processes of identity in contemporary literature.

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