

Variants of the Romantic »Bildungsroman« (with a short note on the »artist novel«)

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1. The »Bildungsroman« (novel of formation): Towards a definition

Although the term »Bildungsroman« belongs to the tried and tested tools of literary criticism there seems to be astonishingly little consensus on its exact meaning. There are probably two reasons for this confusion: the anachronistic origin of the term and its successful globalisation.

The anachronistic origin of the term is, so to speak, its congenital defect. Most scholars will agree that the *Bildungsroman* originated in the German literature of the late 18th century, with Christoph Martin Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* (The History of Agathon, 1766/67) as its first example, Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser* (1785–90) as the first negative *Bildungsroman*, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship Years, 1795/96) as the seminal model of the genre. Yet the term »Bildungsroman« was invented almost a century after the publication of these novels by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. (In fact, he re-invented it, for the word had originally been coined by a rather obscure professor of rhetoric named Karl von Morgenstern (1770–1852) in 1810 [for details cf. Martini, 1991], whose lectures and essays on the genre were, however, little read and soon completely forgotten.)

Dilthey used and defined the term for the first time in his biography *Das Leben Schleiermachers* (The Life of Schleiermacher, 1870), but a broader reception did not start until the appearance of his much more popular collection of essays entitled *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (Poetry and Experience) in 1905. Here we read the well-known sentences:

Hyperion belongs to the *Bildungsromane* which, under the influence of Rousseau, originated in Germany from the tendency of our [i.e. the German] spirit towards a culture of inwardness. Among these, the novels by Goethe and Jean Paul, Tieck's *Sternbald*, Novalis's *Offerdingen*, and Hölderlin's *Hyperion* have proved to be of lasting importance. Starting with *Wilhelm Meister* and *Hesperus*, they all present the youth of their times as he steps into life in blissful ignorance, searching for related souls, experiencing friendship and love, as he then struggles with the hard realities of the world, and thus, in manifold encounters with life, matures, finds himself, and comes to know his mission in the world. [...] The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as necessary transitional stages of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony.¹

1. »Der Hyperion gehört zu den Bildungsromanen, die unter dem Einfluß Rousseaus in Deutschland aus der Richtung unseres Geistes auf innere Kultur hervorgegangen sind. Unter ihnen haben nach Goethe und Jean Paul der Sternbald Tiecks, der Offerdingen von Novalis und Hölderlins Hyperion eine dauernde Geltung behauptet. Von dem Wilhelm Meister und dem Hesperus ab stellen sie alle den Jüngling jener Tage dar; wie er in glücklicher Dämmerung in das Leben eintritt, nach verwandten Seelen sucht, der Freundschaft begegnet und der Liebe, wie er nun aber mit den harten Realitäten der Welt in Kampf gerät und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserfahrungen heranreift, sich selbst findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiß wird. [...] Die Dissonanzen und Konflikte des Lebens erscheinen als die notwendigen Durchgangspunkte des Individuums auf seiner Bahn zur Reife und zur Harmonie« (Dilthey 1970, 272 f.).

Dilthey, Georg Lukács in his *Theorie des Romans* (The Theory of the Novel, 1916; Lukács uses the term »Erziehungsroman«, i.e. novel of education), and Melitta Gerhard in *Der deutsche Entwicklungsroman bis zu Goethes »Wilhelm Meister«* (The German Novel of Development until Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, 1926) not only established the concept of the genre but did much to inaugurate its popularity in the German literature of the first half of the 20th century. Only in this fourth phase of the history of the genre — after its beginning in the late Enlightenment, its Romantic and its Realist version —, however, could the authors be aware that what they wrote was a *Bildungsroman*. In Romanticism and Realism there was no such concept; but there was a clear awareness of an intertextual connection: All 19th-century German novels which we today call *Bildungsromane* refer back to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship Years* as their common pre-text.

This intertextual relationship led to a broad variety of correspondences concerning themes, character-constellations, motifs, and literary devices. The most important common denominator, however, was the concept of »Bildung« as a process of organic or quasi-organic development. The exact definitions of this process differed considerably in the late Enlightenment (where it was conceptually influenced by Enlightenment anthropology), in Romanticism (conceptually influenced by the philosophy of German Idealism), in Realism (with its decidedly anti-Romantic anthropology), and in the early 20th Century (where it was influenced by the »Lebensphilosophie« [philosophy of life] of Dilthey, Nietzsche, and Bergson). These differences are crucial for the understanding of the history of the concept of »Bildung« and of the history of the genre »Bildungsroman« alike. Scholars using the term — from Dilthey's days to the present — have, however, tended to ignore these differences almost completely. Instead, they read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in the light of the Realist versions of the genre (e.g. by Stifter, Keller, Freytag) and base their definition of the genre on a ideal type of the *Bildungsroman* which never existed. The resulting difficulties lead to a growing discontent with the genre among Germanists and, ultimately, to a widespread doubt about its usefulness as a descriptive technical term.

Just when the value of the *Bildungsroman* had reached an all-time low in German studies, however, its stocks started to soar on the Anglo-American market. This strange renaissance of the term was to a large extent due to its increasing popularity among feminist literary critics (cf. esp. Abel/Hirsch/Langland, 1983). The successful export of the term from the area of German studies did, however, much to increase its vagueness. As long as the term »Bildungsroman« had been used for German texts only its scope had been defined by a set of novels which were considered as the most important representatives of the genre; almost all of them were intertextually related to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. When scholars tried to apply the term to non-German novels (most of which had, of course, in no way been influenced by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and his »relatives«) the number of potential *Bildungsromane*, male or female, quickly multiplied — and all historic and systematic criteria which had been suggested by Germanists were soon forgotten. The fateful all-inclusiveness in which the successful »globalisation« of the *Bildungsroman* has resulted is well illustrated by the following definitions given in two of the current standard dictionaries:

a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity (Chris Baldick, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: University Press 1991).

This is a term more or less synonymous with *Erziehungsroman* — literally an ›upbringing‹ or ›education‹ novel [...]. Widely used by German critics, it refers to a novel which is an account of the youthful development of a hero or heroine (usually the former). It describes the process by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life (J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin 1992).

Small wonder that here all sorts of novels are quoted as examples: Goethe's *Werther* as well as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) — and why not even Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918–22) and Proust's *Recherche* (1913–27). Of course, one *could* use the term »Bildungsroman« in such an inflated way. It is, however, highly doubtful whether such a genre-concept could claim any descriptive value whatsoever. Moreover, I cannot see any reason why it should be baptised with such a difficult and tradition-laden name as that of the *Bildungsroman*. Why not simply call it »novel of adolescence«, »novel of maturation«, or, for that matter, »novel of development«?

Literary terms, too, have a tradition and a history of their own, on which their heuristic value is largely based. So all scholars who want to use the term *Bildungsroman* should remember the systematic and historic distinctions on which its descriptive value depends: the *Bildungsroman* is (a) a subgenre of the *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of development) — just as the *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education, e.g. Rousseau's *Émile*, 1762); (b) it originated in the late 18th and flourished in the 19th century; (c) all later versions must be related, however vaguely, to this important part of the genre-history. In the remaining part of this chapter I will try to suggest a definition which is based on three assumptions:

(1) *The »Bildungsroman« is a novel of character*, i.e. as a rule it has one, and only one, central figure. This distinguishes the genre from the novel of place (»Raumroman«, focused on the portrayal of a geographic space), the novel of time (»Zeitroman«, focused on a certain epoch, like the historical novel), the social novel (»Gesellschaftsroman«, focused on the portrayal of social structures), the novel of ideas (»Ideenroman«, focused on the discussion of philosophical questions), and the novel of action and adventures (»Geschehnisroman«, »Handlungsroman«, »Abenteuerroman«).

(2) *The »Bildungsroman« is a novel of development*. Its main person is a full character with psychological depth that changes (»develops«) continuously and gradually in steps or stages. This process may — or may not — start in childhood; its focus, however, is always the crucial period of adolescence. This second characteristic implies a definitive *terminus post quem*. Novels of development in this strictly defined sense do not exist before the last third of the 18th century. The hero of a picaresque novel cannot be said to »develop« — he may change at the beginning (picaresque initiation) and at the end of his career (resulting in »desengaño«, or integration into society), but these changes are abrupt and have no psychological motivation. The character change in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) is of similar abruptness: The hero never »learns« anything; at the end of the novel he changes from the state of an adolescent (with all its minor faults which are well balanced by a fundamentally »good« character disposition) to that of a grown-up — a pattern of character change which reminds us of that of the comedy which, of course, had deeply influenced Fielding's concept of the novel as a »comic epic poem in prose«.

The discovery of the »history« of the individual (paralleled by the discovery of history as such) is one of the most important innovations of the 18th century. It is based on a widespread interest in psychology, in the »inner« history of characters (cf. Karl Friedrich von Blanckenburg's *Versuch über den Roman* [Essay on the Novel, 1774] and the rise of the epistolary novel), and an interest in the interaction between (so to speak) genetic disposition and social-cultural influences, and between body and soul. All these developments are, quite obviously, side-effects of the European-wide triumph of empiricism and the resulting transition from rational to empirical psychology. In Germany this even led to the rise of the new discipline (or proto-discipline) of »anthropology«, a new »study of man«, based on the work of »philosophical doctors« (»philosophische Ärzte«). Ernst Platner, whose *Anthropologie für Ärzte und Weltweise* (Anthropology for Doctors and Philosophers, 1772) firmly established the new discipline, defined anthropology as the consideration of »body and soul in their mutual conditions, limitations, and relations«. ² This led to the ideal of the »whole man« as a unity of body and soul but it also tended to confirm the darker findings of empiricism and materialism: As a product of nature, man is entirely subjected to its laws, determined by inherited tendencies and outer circumstances, and motivated by an egoistic striving for self-preservation and pleasure; so in the late Enlightenment the freedom of the will, the universal validity of ethical rules, and the immortality of the soul were more and more considered as rather dubious ideas. This negative concept of universal determination gave rise to a new counter-concept: the idea of »Bildung«.

(3) In the »Bildungsroman« the development of the hero is not a process of social or biological determination but a process of formation (»Bildung«). This, obviously, is the most difficult as well as the most crucial aspect of a definition of the genre. Only a concept of »Bildung« can distinguish the *Bildungsroman* from the novel of development. However, as I have already pointed out, the idea of formation, of its pre-conditions, its modes, even of its possibility, underwent considerable changes between the late 18th and our early 21th century. Any attempt to define the term will have to steer a middle course between too narrow a definition (based on the discussions around 1800) and one that is too wide (suspending the distinction between »formation« and »development«). To define the process of »Bildung« in the *Bildungsroman* I suggest the following three criteria:

(a) »Bildung« is not simply education and still less training, schooling, the mere acquisition of knowledge and technical skills; »Bildung« is the *formation of a character, an individual personality*. The *Bildungsroman* is inseparably linked to the idea of modern individuality and to the awareness that the structures of modern society tend to threaten or even thwart the development of a harmonious personality. This anti-modernist impulse is the very origin and *raison d'être* of the genre.

(b) Formation can but does not have to be modelled on the idea of organic growth. It does imply, however, an interaction, *a dialectic interplay between character and environment, individualisation and socialisation*; and therefore some sort of compromise or even synthesis between mere self-realization, subjectivity, and a mere adaptation to reality, objectivity. Ideally, the *Bildungsroman* will end with the hero's integration into society. A positive ending is, however, not

2. »Körper und Seele in ihren gegenseitigen Verhältnissen, Einschränkungen und Beziehungen« (Platner 1772, xvii).

a *necessary* ingredient of the genre; there are also numerous examples of a *Bildungsroman ex negativo* in which the process of formation fails, either because of the hero's own fault, or because of deficits in the society of the time. What definitely is needed, however, is the concept of an ideal, desirable *and* possible process of character-formation.

(c) Therefore »Bildung« is not merely an element of the plot but also *the central subject* of the *Bildungsroman*. These novels not only *narrate* the character formation of their hero but also *discuss* their concept of »Bildung« in an implicit or explicit way.

So much for my attempt of a systematic definition. In the main part of this chapter I will try to describe the specific characteristics of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*. I will base my description on two assumptions:

(1) Whatever Romanticism may be, it certainly is not Realism. After all, Realists define themselves in the 1840's/1850's all over Europe by declaring themselves decidedly as anti- or non-Romantics. So there must be a significant difference between the Romantic and the Realist *Bildungsroman*. (Quite generally speaking, the best way to define literary epochs is always to describe their differences vis-à-vis their predecessors and their successors.)

(2) As far as Romanticism is concerned, there is, however, an important watershed roughly in the midst of the epoch. Following — not in every detail, but in the general line of argument — Virgil Nemoianu's seminal study *The Taming of Romanticism*, I will draw a line between the »strong« variant of the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode and the »weaker« versions. I will use the term »High Romantic« or »High Romantic mode« however rather in a systematic or typological than in a historical sense. As a rule, one will find texts written in the High Romantic mode more often in German and English Romanticism than in that of the literatures of the Romance languages, and one will find them more often in texts written before 1815 than in those of a later origin. But this is a rule only, with many exceptions, many of which were quite obviously caused by the reception of High Romantic texts.

For the comparatists, a *historical* use of the terms »Early«, »High«, and »Late« Romanticism is extremely difficult, as the definition of these subunits will vary considerably from country to country. To give just two examples: In *Germany* Early Romanticism (combining, from a comparatist's point of view, the Germanist's »Klassik« *and* »Frühromantik«) will start in the early 1790s and last to about 1805; High Romanticism (combining, from a comparatists point of view, the Germanist's »Hochromantik« *and* »Spätromantik«) will start at around 1805 and last to 1815 or 1820; Late Romanticism (equalling in parts the Germanist's »Restaurationsliteratur« or »Biedermeierzeit«) will start at around 1815 and last till 1848. In *France* one could distinguish between an »early« phase (1800–15), the time of the formation of the Romantic movement (1815–30), and the main phase of Romanticism (1830–50). In spite of these national differences, 1815 and 1848 seem to be fairly global watersheds in mental, intellectual and political history, at least as far as Europe is concerned.

2. The *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode

2.1 *Beginnings: Goethe's »Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre« (Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship Years, 1795/96)*

Goethe started to work on his *Wilhelm Meister* project on February 16, 1776, about two years after he had finished his immensely successful first novel, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (The Sufferings of Young Werther, 1774; 1787); progress was slow, however, and it was not until November 1785 that he managed to complete Book VI. A copy of the lost manuscript of this first (partial) version of the novel was rediscovered in 1910 and first published in 1911 under the title *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Calling). The second workphase began in March 1793, i.e. after Goethe's journey to Italy (1786–88) and in the author's »classical« period. First, Goethe copied and considerably revised the six books of the *Theatralische Sendung*, turning them into books I–IV of the *Lehrjahre*; then, between February 1795 and June 1796, he wrote the remaining four books. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* appeared in three instalments in 1795/96.

A detailed knowledge of the long and complicated genesis of the *Lehrjahre* is important because its two versions represent two different types of the *Bildungsroman*: The *Theatralische Sendung* belongs to the anthropological type of *Bildungsroman* of the Late Enlightenment, whereas the *Lehrjahre* launched the new type of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*.

When Goethe started to write the *Theatralische Sendung* he had conceived the text as something like an Anti-*Werther*, as an attempt to overcome his own Storm and Stress period. *Werther* had been a typical enthusiast (»Schwärmer«), a prototypical representative of the young intellectuals of Storm and Stress and the Late Enlightenment alike, who deeply suffered from the gap between their ardent feelings and their idealist creed on the one hand and the prosaic reality and the rationalistic and materialistic attitude of the society of their time at the other. As the enthusiast is gifted with a very strong imaginative power he can, in his best moments, imaginatively and emotionally transform the reality around him into a meaningful and sympathetic universe. This Herculean effort of the imagination will, however, not last for very long, and the resulting confrontation with reality throws the enthusiast into the abyss of a deep melancholy. The enthusiast is thus caught in the vicious circle of a manic-depressive pattern of behaviour — which may well result in his final ruin (as, for instance, in *Werther's* suicide).

Curing the enthusiast without turning him into a disillusioned and materialistic bourgeois was the aim of the anthropological *Bildungsroman*. Its prototype is Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* (History of Agathon; first version in 1766/67), its negative versions — negative, because here the enthusiast remains uncured — are Karl Philip Moritz's *Anton Reiser: Ein psychologischer Roman* (Anton Reiser. A Psychological Novel, 1785–90) and Ludwig Tieck's *Geschichte des Herrn William Lovell* (History of Mr William Lovell, 1795/96).

Goethe's *Theatralische Sendung* was quite obviously planned as a positive version of this anthropological type of the *Bildungsroman*. As a typical enthusiast, Wilhelm is gifted with a strong imagination and with high ideals and confronted with a prosaic reality: his commercialist surroundings (his father is a merchant who, of course, wants his son to become his successor), and the distress of his parents' unhappy marriage (his mother has a lover, and his father

knows about it). The Christmas present of a puppet theatre gives Wilhelm's vague longing for a different life a decisive direction: He wants to become a dramatist, actor, director, even the founder of a German national theatre. This practical use of his talents and the »objective« medium of the drama would, at the (yet unwritten) end of the novel, probably have enabled Wilhelm to (more or less) overcome his enthusiastic subjectivity and to perceive his surroundings and his fellow characters without imaginative projections.

This successful cure of an enthusiast would have been the exact antithesis to Werther's doom — just as the form of the *Theatralische Sendung* had been conceived as an exact antithesis and »correction« of that of *Werther*: This had been an extremely subjective, almost lyrical and highly emotional version of a mono-perspectival epistolary novel. The *Theatralische Sendung*, in comparison, is dominated by an auctorial narrator continually commenting — sometimes ironically, sometimes in good humour — on Wilhelm's faults and mistakes. The reader will thus also assume a distanced attitude towards the hero.

The *Lehrjahre* are a product of Goethe's classical period. In many ways, they reflect the new anti-mimetic and autonomous turn which Goethe's aesthetics had taken in the years of his Italian journey and in his collaboration with Schiller. But, of course, Goethe could — and perhaps would — not change the text completely. From the point of view of genre-history the *Lehrjahre* therefore remain a transitional work: They retain traces of the anthropological version of the *Bildungsroman* — and they already show important characteristics of the new, »transcendental« and symbolic version of the *Bildungsroman* of the High Romantic mode.

The paradigm shift between these two genre types is marked by three important differences between the *Theatralische Sendung* and the *Lehrjahre*: (1) Goethe reduced the anthropological motivation of Wilhelm's development by pruning away all *particular* determinations. For instance, there is no longer a particular family conflict caused by the infidelity of Wilhelm's mother but just the general conflict between the narrow economical and utilitarian worldview of Wilhelm's merchant father and that of his early friend Werner on the one hand and Wilhelm's desire for a more »universal« development of his character on the other. The detailed realism of the first version is thus transformed into a more generic approach. (2) Goethe considerably and progressively reduced the voice of auctorial comment — in the last two books it has become almost non-existent. So the text, with its contrasting biographies and its rivalling concepts of character-formation — mutually reflecting and commenting (as Goethe says: »mirroring«) each other — and its complex symbols, is made to speak for itself: The narrative mode of »telling« is substituted by that of »showing« (for details cf. Engel 1993, 266–275). (3) Goethe adds two new layers to the text which supplement its *pragmatic nexus* (i.e. the causal — socially, genetically, and psychologically motivated — chain of events which forms the plot). A new *conceptual nexus* is established by the introduction of the mysterious »Turmgesellschaft« (Society of the Tower), a new *poetic nexus* by several chains of symbolic images.

Despite all these changes, the plot-line of the *Theatralische Sendung* remains basically intact: Young Wilhelm is still an enthusiast who is deeply dissatisfied with the narrowness of his family surroundings and the dire outlook of becoming a merchant like his father. And still the present of a puppet theatre fixes his hopes and interest on the theatre. As a young man he has an affair with the actress Mariane, falsely believes himself cheated by her, and leaves her

without knowing that she is pregnant (later she will give birth to his son Felix, and die a few days afterwards). The main part of the novel is a long journey which starts for Wilhelm as a business trip but soon turns into a *tour d'horizon* of different forms of theatrical practice in the Germany of the 18th century. By a series of coincidences Wilhelm becomes the leader of an actors' company, takes care of a strange girl called Mignon, who insists on dressing as a boy, and of a melancholy old street musician called Harfner (i.e. harp player) — only at the end of the novel will he find out that the Harfner is Mignon's father who had had an incestuous relationship with his sister —, has several love affairs, is assaulted and wounded by robbers and saved by a mysterious »amazon« (who later turns out to be Natalie, his future fiancée), and finally joins the renowned actors' company of Serlo and his sister Aurelie. There he first meets his son Felix (whom he wrongly believes to be Aurelie's son), and performs as actor playing the title-role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1602) — the climax and end of his theatrical career.

In the last two books of the novel Wilhelm enters the world of the Society of the Tower, which had already tried to influence and direct his life several times. He learns that Felix is his son, and accepts the role of a father. He gives up all plans of a theatrical career, is betrothed to his beloved Natalie, and becomes a member of the Society and its projects of social reform and of an active, practical way of life. Mignon and the Harfner, however, cannot be integrated in this new existence: Mignon dies of grief when she learns about Wilhelm's marriage plans and the Harfner commits suicide.

Of course, this is nothing but a barren and in many ways incomplete sketch of a complicated and multi-layered plot, which I cannot discuss in detail. The all-important question for an interpretation of the *Lehrjahre* as a *Bildungsroman* is naturally that of the mode and the result of the hero's development. Even my sketchy summary will have shown that Wilhelm's long journey — a typical plot-device of the *Bildungsroman* — has brought him into contact with many individuals, many ideas, and many different spheres of society. He has also come to understand that he is neither a born actor nor a born writer: He has always remained a »dilettante« (in Goethe's and Schiller's definition of the term), using literature and the theatre as a means to express himself and being unable to view them as autonomous art. As Jarno, one of the members of the Society of the Tower, tells Wilhelm: a man »who can only play himself is no actor«.³

So does the *Lehrjahre* tell the story of the successful cure of an enthusiast who has, in the end, learned to come to terms with reality? This, at least, is the happy ending that we would expect in a *Bildungsroman* proper. Yet the ending of the novel remains strangely inconclusive. Of course, there have been changes in Wilhelm's character and behaviour which definitely are improvements: His new role as a father forces him to take a new and more objective interest in his surroundings: »the child's [i.e. Felix's] curiosity, his thirst for knowledge, first made him realize what little interest he himself had taken in external things, how small his actual knowledge was. [...] being called upon to teach he felt the necessity of learning«.⁴ He has renounced his theatrical ambition and, still more, »along with the feeling of a father, he had acquired all

3. »wer sich nur selbst spielen kann, [ist] kein Schauspieler« (Goethe 1988, 552).

4. »die Neugierde, die Wißbegierde des Kindes ließen ihn erst fühlen, welch ein schwaches Interesse er an den Dingen außer sich genommen hatte, wie wenig er kannte und wußte. [...] er fühlte die Notwendigkeit, sich zu belehren, indem er zu lehren aufgefordert ward« (Goethe 1988, 500).

the virtues of a citizen«. ⁵ His early friend Werner finds him »taller, stronger, straighter«, more clearly defined in his character, and more amiable in his behaviour«. ⁶

All this may certainly be true — yet what about the gravest fault in Wilhelm's character: his enthusiastic disposition with its manic-depressive ups-and-downs? When, in the very last chapter of the novel, Wilhelm has to believe that Natalie will remain unreachable for him he, once again, immediately falls prey to the darkest melancholy, crying out:

Again and again have my eyes been opened to my conduct; but it was always too late, and always in vain! [...] We are wretched, and appointed for wretchedness; and what does it matter whether our faults, higher influence or chance, virtue or vice, wisdom or folly plunge us into ruin?⁷

If this is the result of a long process of character formation in the archetype of all *Bildungsromane* we have every reason to be disappointed. Moreover, Wilhelm's »character formation« is, as my plot-summary may have shown, largely the result of a chain of happy coincidences and of a series of more or less fatal mistakes. In the end, it is Natalie's brother Friedrich, another member of the Society of the Tower (and not a particularly respectable one, for that matter), who brings about the happy ending. And he adequately comments on its coincidental nature with a biblical comparison: »to my mind, you [i.e. Wilhelm] resemble Saul, the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom«; ⁸ Goethe himself used another metaphor for this paradoxical combination of chance and finality, namely that of the »Umweg« (detour) which, in the end, however leads the hero right to his goal.

So, quite obviously, the pragmatic nexus of the novel can hardly be described as that of a continuous and successful process of character formation. The same is true as far as the interventions of the Society of the Tower are concerned; they, too, remain curiously ineffective (for details cf. Engel 1993, 277–279). By introducing this Society — which somewhat resembles the »machinery« of gods in old epic poems — into the final version of the novel, Goethe provided himself with an opportunity to explicitly discuss problems of character formation. But none of all the rival concepts which diverse members of the Society expound within the text can claim more than a merely relative validity, none of them is the »master-concept« on which the novel is modelled.

So the novel's claim to be a *Bildungsroman* can neither rest — at least: not solely rest — on the pragmatic nexus of the plot nor on the conceptual nexus of the »Bildung«-discussions. In fact, it mainly rests on the poetic nexus of several chains of symbols running through the novel. Here I can discuss only the most important of these symbolic links (for more details cf. Schings

5. »mit dem Gefühl des Vaters hatte er auch alle Tugenden eines Bürgers erworben« (Goethe 1988, 504).

6. »größer, stärker, gerader, in seinem Wesen gebildeter und in seinem Benehmen angenehmer geworden« (Goethe 1988, 500).

7. »Aber und abermal gehen mir die Augen über mich selbst auf, immer zu spät und immer umsonst. [...] Wir sind elend und zum Elend bestimmt, und ist es nicht völlig einerlei, ob eigene Schuld, höherer Einfluß oder Zufall, Tugend oder Laster, Weisheit oder Wahnsinn uns ins Verderben stürzen?« (Goethe 1988, 607).

8. »du kommst mir vor wie Saul, der Sohn Kis, der ausging, seines Vaters Eselinnen zu suchen, und ein Königreich fand« (Goethe 1988, 610).

1984; Engel 1993, 275–299): the painting of »The Ailing Prince«. This picture was part of the collection of Wilhelm’s grandfather, was bought by the Society in Wilhelm’s youth, and finally came into the possession of Natalie. It is one of Wilhelm’s earliest memories, and it plays an important part in the happy ending of the novel — so, in a way, it acts as a frame for Wilhelm’s life-story (and is mentioned again and again throughout the novel). The painting depicts a scene from Old Syrian history: The ailing Prince is Antiochos, son of King Seleukos I. His illness is actually a psychological one: The Prince is lovesick because he longs for his stepmother Stratonike. He is cured by a wise doctor, who finds out the emotional cause of the illness and informs King Seleukos who generously gives wife and kingdom to his son. A story with a happy ending — but this is not what young Wilhelm used to see in the painting:

How much did I pity and how much do I still pity a youth that must shut up within himself the sweet impulses, the fairest inheritance which nature has given to us, and conceal in his own bosom the fire which should warm and animate himself and others, so that his innermost self is consumed by unutterable pains! How much do I pity the ill-fated woman who has to devote herself to another man when her heart has already found the worthy object of a true and pure affection.⁹

This is, of course, a flagrant misinterpretation — and shows that melancholic mistrust in the ways of the world which is the typical reaction of a disappointed enthusiast. At the very end of the novel, in his answer to Friedrich’s biblical comparison (quoted above), Wilhelm explicitly corrects his earlier view of the world: »I know not the value of a kingdom [...] but I know that I have attained a happiness which I have not deserved, and which I would not exchange for anything in the world.«¹⁰

Both meaning and form of this symbolic nexus are typical of the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode. Character formation is always based on a dialectical interplay, on some sort of compromise between subject and objects, the inner impulses, urges, longings of the hero and the necessities of nature and the rights of his fellow creatures. To achieve this compromise or synthesis, the hero has to somewhat reduce his subjectivist view of the world. But this alone could never guarantee a successful process of character formation if reality itself was nothing but an ensemble of dead objects and given social structures without anything like an inner connection and an all-encompassing inner purpose. This negative picture of a disenchanted universe had been the result of the Enlightenment’s successful critique of all forms of metaphysics. The Romantics sought to compensate this loss without recurring to traditional metaphysics. The success of character formation depends — this was their basic creed — on the belief in a pre-established harmony between subject and object, between the individual and »nature« as a whole.

9. »Wie jammerte mich, wie jammert mich noch ein Jüngling, der die süßen Triebe, das schönste Erbteil, das die Natur uns gab, in sich verschließen, und das Feuer, das ihn und andere erwärmen und beleben sollte, in seinem Busen verbergen muß, so daß sein Innerstes unter ungeheuren Schmerzen verzehrt wird. Wie bedaure ich die Unglückliche, die sich einem anderen widmen soll, wenn ihr Herz schon den würdigen Gegenstand eines wahren und reinen Verlangens gefunden hat« (Goethe 1988, 69).

10. »Ich kenne den Wert eines Königreiches nicht [...], aber ich weiß, daß ich ein Glück erlangt habe, das ich nicht verdiene, und das ich mit nichts in der Welt vertauschen möchte« (Goethe 1988, 610).

For Goethe, Hölderlin and most of the German Romantics, the existence of such a harmony could never be grasped — according to Kantian terminology — by »theoretical reason«: it could be conclusively proven neither by philosophical reasoning nor by scientific research. Yet the presupposition of its existence was a necessary postulate of »practical reason«, i.e. a transcendental necessity. Only if we believe that we can find in nature the »antwortende Gegenbilder« (corresponding — literally: »answering« — counter-images) — a metaphor which Goethe coined in his biographical study *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert* (Winckelmann and his Century, 1805) — to our inner longings will we be able to act confidently and feel at home in the world, only then will we be able to overcome the deep melancholy and the attitude of mistrust and antagonism which we would feel in a mechanical, »disenchanted« (»entzaubert«, Max Weber) universe.

This is exactly what the painting of the »Ailing Prince« suggests: In the end, the deepest longings of the individual will *not* be thwarted, in the end happiness *will* be possible. And, in fact, this is what the *Lehrjahre* as a whole suggest. And they do this in a way which is possible and plausible only in a work of literature. In an age in which the old metaphysical systems had been shaken and in which philosophy — at least as long as it respected the boundaries drawn by Kant — could formulate metaphysical speculations only as postulates of practical reason, literature and art became the legitimate heirs of religion. This is what Nietzsche would later call »Kunstmetaphysik« (metaphysics of art).

The *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode turns the transcendental postulate of a pre-established harmony between the ego and the world into (fictional) reality, i.e. it provides symbolic images and a symbolical form for a re-enchanted universe. Therefore I have suggested the use of the genre-term »transcendental novel« (»Transzendentalroman«) for this type of the *Bildungsroman*.

2.2 Novalis's »Heinrich von Ofterdingen« (1802): A radical version of the »Bildungsroman« in the High Romantic mode

The *Bildungsroman* of the High Romantic mode or »transcendental novel« flourished in the German literature of Early Romanticism and it dominated the novels and narrations of High Romanticism. Even Goethe's *Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeymanhood, 1829) — in many aspects a clearly Post-Romantic novel — still echoes the genre in its complex form and in the newly invented episode from Wilhelm's youth, which clearly corresponds with the ending of the text. As it is not possible to discuss all of the many variants of the genre type in the novels of Hölderlin, Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel, Jean Paul, Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Joseph von Eichendorff and others, I will restrict myself to one example only: to Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Henry of Ofterdingen, 1802) which presents us with one of the most avantgardistic versions of the transcendental novel.

Because of Novalis's early death the *Ofterdingen* remained a fragment. The first part, entitled »Die Erwartung« (Expectation) had been finished, the second and last one, entitled »Die Erfüllung« (Fulfilment), just barely begun. The novel was published posthumously in 1802 by the author's friends Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck.

The story of the book is easily told: it is set in the Middle Ages — but this is of little importance. The idealization of the Middle Ages is typical of High, not of Early German Romanticism;

Novalis's Middle Ages are characterised by the same problems as his own time, the only difference being that the contradictions are somewhat less extreme, so that their mediation is more easily possible than in the present. Heinrich's situation at the beginning of the novel is similar to that of the *Lehrjahre*: Just as young Wilhelm, young Heinrich is not really at home in the bourgeois world of his family in Eisenach. And just as Wilhelm's dissatisfaction was simultaneously increased and newly directed by his grandfather's painting and the present of a puppet theatre, so Heinrich's discontent is amplified and newly focalised by the tales of a visiting stranger (»ein Fremder«): He tells the family about a mysterious »blue flower«, of which Heinrich dreams in the following night and which he cannot forget. To cure their son's increasing melancholy, the parents decide to send him on a journey: Heinrich's mother has long planned to visit her father Schwaning, a rich merchant, — and so she, her son, and some merchant friends of his grandfather's depart for Augsburg. It is a journey without adventures — but with many encounters and conversations: Heinrich discusses poetry and the role of the poet with the accompanying merchants; at a castle he meets Zulima, a girl from the Orient, and learns about the crusades; in a village, he meets a miner, and in a nearby cave an aristocratic hermit, and listens to their opinions on natural history and on the history of mankind. In the cave, Heinrich finds an illustrated book written in an unknown language, which seems to tell his own life-story. All of these encounters and conversations are in some way related to the Golden Age of the past, to poetry and the poet, and all of them include the telling of legends and/or the singing of songs as epic and lyric interludes. What they offer to young Heinrich is not an encyclopaedia of scientific or empirical knowledge but an initiation into a new world-view in which natural philosophy and poetry are deeply interlinked, in which the world becomes re-enchanted — »poetisiert« (poetised) as Novalis calls it —, and subject and object prove to be interlinked in multiple ways.

Arrived at Augsburg, Heinrich meets the poet Klingsohr (he had seen his picture already in the strange book) and immediately falls in love with his daughter Mathilde (who reminds him of the blue flower of his dream). Soon they are engaged and a marriage is arranged. In the preceding weeks there are, once again, long conversations on nature and poetry, this time between Heinrich and Klingsohr. The latter also tells a long, highly symbolic fairy tale, which ends the first part of the novel.

At the beginning of the second part, Heinrich has once again started off on a long journey. In the time gap between the two parts, Mathilde has given birth to a child, but both have died (these events are not directly narrated, but had only been foreshadowed in another of Heinrich's dreams). We have to rely on the recollections of Ludwig Tieck for information on the main part of this second section of the novel (Novalis 1977–88, I: 359–369): Whereas the first section had been devoted to Heinrich's private life, he was now to be portrayed as a public figure: He would become a general, a friend of the son of the Emperor Friedrich II, travel to Greece and Jerusalem, meet the Emperor himself, find the blue flower deep in a mountain (who will turn out to be Mathilde). The end of the novel would have converged with the end of Klingsohr's fairy-tale: the end of history and of time and the beginning of a new Golden Age.

This information on the second part of the novel is much too scarce to base an interpretation on it. Yet, even my summary of the first part tells us almost nothing about the text — apart from the obvious fact that there is hardly any action in it. Whereas Goethe in the *Lehrjahre* had merely *complemented* the pragmatic nexus of the plot by a conceptual and a poetic one, Novalis

comes close to completely *suspending* it. The chapters of the novel tend to turn into isolated units which are connected more by a complex system of horizontal and vertical thematic and symbolic links than by the plot.

The horizontal system of poetic links resembles that of the Bible (at least in its traditional theological interpretation): the plot-units of the *Ofterdingen* are »figurally« or »typologically« interrelated like the episodes and persons of the *Old Testament* with those of the *New Testament* (e.g. the tree in Paradise with Christ's cross). Thus, for instance, the »blue flower« is explicitly linked with all the women whom Heinrich meets (Zulima is prefiguring Mathilde, just as Zyane is postfiguring her — and all are pre- and postfigured by the blue flower which at the end of the Heinrich's dream had assumed the face of a woman).

The system of vertical links is even more complex: The construction of the novel is based on the principle of self-similarity or self-reflexivity. Each chapter is not only — like a Russian doll — a *mise en abîme* of the novel as a whole but contains in itself at least one (sometimes two or three) further and, so to speak, more condensed *mises en abîme*. This, of course, is what the Romantics called the device of »Potenzierung« (potentiation).

Again, I have to restrict myself to the discussion of one example only: Heinrich's dream of the »blue flower« (Novalis 1977–88, I: 196 f.). It consists of three parts: The first one is a sequence of all sorts of adventures mirroring (or prefiguring) the extensive totality of Heinrich's life, whereas the second and third part are symbolic condensations and generalisations. First Heinrich climbs up a mountain, finds an opening, enters it, and thus reaches a large cave deep inside the mountain. The metaphor of the mine and other poetic signals mark this part of the dream-journey as a regression in time, back to the arch-scene of creation itself: In the cave, Heinrich sees a mysterious fountain whose »mighty jet« (»mächtiger Strahl«) is atomised into »countless sparks« (»unzählige Funken«) — an obvious image for the primeval act of creation in which the »Absolutes« (Absolute) divides itself into the sensual manifold. Heinrich swims in the large basin of the fountain and experiences in its »bluish« (»bläulich«) water a fluid, quasi »oceanic« state of being in which the borderline between subject and object has not yet been fixed:

a heavenly sensation flowed through his inner self; in heartfelt lust countless thoughts strove to mingle within him; new, never seen images arose which also interfused and became visible beings around him, and every wave of the lovely element clung to him like a tender bosom. The flood seemed to be a dissolution of charming maidens who at once embodied themselves as they touched the youth.¹¹

This regression to a state of primeval creation, in which subject and object, body and soul, mental and sexual arousal have not yet been separated, is followed by a rapid progress in time in the third part of the dream: After a short sleep Heinrich awakes (of course, as part of his dream) and finds himself lying on a meadow near a fountain. All of the scenery is coloured in different

11. »eine himmlische Empfindung überströmte sein Inneres; mit inniger Wollust strebten unzählige Gedanken in ihm sich zu vermischen; neue, niegesehene Bilder entstanden, die auch in einander flossen und zu sichtbaren Wesen um ihn wurden, und jede Welle des lieblichen Elements schmiegte sich wie ein zarter Busen an ihn. Die Flut schien eine Auflösung reizender Mädchen zu sein, die an dem Jüngling sich augenblicklich verkörperten« (Novalis 1977–88, I: 196 f.).

shades of blue. Near the fountain, he sees a blue flower that strangely attracts him. Suddenly it starts to change into a girl. Right at this moment, his mother calls and Heinrich awakes.

For any reader who is well versed in the natural philosophy of German idealism the meaning of the dream is of almost allegorical transparency: As a flower, the strange plant is part of the organic world without consciousness; in its blue colour, it unites the »watery«, fluid all-unity of the beginning with the »spiritual« colour of the sky and thus with the final spiritualisation of all objects. In its metamorphosis into a girl, it prefigures the metamorphosis of the alienated world of objects from a mere »Nicht-Ich« (non-ego) into a loving and beloved »Du« (Thou). Whereas the second part of the dream symbolised a regression to an absolute beginning, the third part thus prefigures the first steps to an absolute ending, the final state of harmony and unity which — following the triadic system of the Idealist philosophy of history — will be a potentiated version of the harmony and unity of the beginning.

Heinrich's dream is thus not only an abimization of the hero's life-story — his various regressions to the experience of a foregone »Golden Age« and his final progress to a »poeticized«, re-enchanted universe —, but also of the triadic pattern of history. Heinrich's walk *into* the cave and *out* again is a metonymy of the dialectics of Heinrich's (and all human) formation. Once we realize that the seemingly antagonistic »urges« of the ego — its »centripetal« and »centrifugal« longing (Fichte), the »inward« and the »outward« way, or, as Novalis calls it, the »Weg der innern Betrachtung« and the »Weg der Erfahrung« (way of inner contemplation — way of experience; Novalis 1977–88, I: 208), action and contemplation, the life of the »poet« and that of the »hero« (p. 280 f.) — ultimately lead to the same end, the polarities of subject and object, self and nature, soul and body lose their antagonistic appearance.

In the meaning of its symbols and in its symbolic, self-referential structure the *Ofterdingen* is thus what Novalis calls a »*symbolische Construction* der transscendentalen Welt« (symbolic construction of the transcendental universe; Novalis 1977–88, II: 536), a symbolic model of the transcendental laws of the universe.

2.3 *The genre-type and its variants*

The type of the transcendental novel dominated the narrative literature of German Romanticism. (Differences between Classicism and Early Romanticism on the one hand and High and Late Romanticism on the other will be sketched in Section 3.2.). Basically, all of these texts share the following characteristics:

(1) The *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode (»transcendental novel«) is anti-mimetic. Its authors are not primarily interested in the representation of a detailed life-story with highly individual psychological motivations and sociological determinations. This level of the text — which I call the »plot-layer« or »pragmatic nexus« — loses much of its structuring force by the reduction of causal and psychological motivations, by ruptures of narrative continuity, and by the introduction of supernatural and fantastic elements.

(2) The traditional modes of narrative integration are further reduced by the open form of the texts and the integration of epic, essayistic, lyric, sometimes even dramatic insertions and interludes.

(3) To substitute the pragmatic nexus and to achieve epic integration the authors use (a) a conceptual nexus in which the process of formation, its transcendental preconditions, and the artistic means of adequately portraying it are explicitly discussed (self-reflexivity); (b) a poetic nexus, formed by symbols, myths, pre- and post-figurations, potentiation and abimisation.

(4) In their narration, their symbols, and their symbolical form, these novels present a symbolic picture of the universe, which is the exact antithesis to a mechanical and »disenchanted« view of the world. With poetic means only — i.e. without recurring to traditional metaphysics —, these novels try to re-build the symbolic view of the world which the Enlightenment and natural science had destroyed: a world, in which subject and object, man and nature, soul and body, natural and human history, are »related« in an emphatic sense of the world and in which their relationship does not rest on strife and the domination of one part by the other but on consubstantiality and mutual affinity. Character formation is thus but a metonymy of all forms of natural formation and of natural and human history as a whole. Quite often, it is modelled on the triadic scheme of paradise / fall / redemption, or — in the terminology of German idealist natural philosophy — of unity / division / unity regained at a higher level.

In Anglo-American terminology, the development of longer prose fiction in the course of the 18th century has been described as the way from »romance« to »novel« (or »history«). The *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode in its attempt to re-enchant the world tries to overcome the »novel« — not by simply returning to the old »romance« but by creating a new symbolic type of romanesque narration: the transcendental novel.

Why did this particular type of the *Bildungsroman* flourish in Germany — and in Germany only? There are, I think, basically three answers to this question:

(1) German Idealism — a project on which authors like Schiller, Hölderlin, Novalis, and the Schlegel brothers actively collaborated — had formulated the strongest and most avantgardistic version of Romantic natural philosophy and of Romantic aesthetics (cf. Engel, Lehmann 2004).

(2) Only in Germany the novel was considered as the Romantic genre per se; in all other countries — especially in those where the tradition of Classicism was still strong — it was assessed as a »low«, popular, or even subliterate form. The high estimate of the novel in Germany was based on the poetic innovations of Goethe's *Lehrjahre* which in its poetic form (not in its content) had been universally acclaimed by the Early Romantics. It was the *Lehrjahre* which motivated Friedrich Schlegel to consider the novel as the most adequate genre for the Early Romantic project of »progressive Universalpoesie« (progressive universal poetry): because of its comparatively loose and unregulated form the novel could and should integrate all other forms of poetic and non-poetic writing.

(3) Germany was one of the few European countries in which Romanticism in a fully developed form had begun already in the 18th century. So an important part of German Romantic writing belongs to the first period of Romanticism, which preceded the historical and psychological watershed of 1815. Many of its texts still shared the historical optimism that flourished in the wake of the French Revolution and was definitely broken in the European-wide process of restoration following the Vienna Congress. In an epoch dominated by »Weltschmerz«, »Byronism«, »ennui«, and »mal du siècle«, the transcendental novel could never have been invented.

Does this mean that the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode was restricted to German literature only? The answer must be: yes and no — yes, for fully fledged examples of the genre; no, for at least partial realizations or similar projects. These latter cases were either independent parallel projects, or resulted from a reception of German literature and of the philosophy of Idealism and its aesthetics. In the remaining part of the chapter I will present a few examples for these variants.

British Romanticism started at about the same time as the German one — first as a parallel project in a parallel reaction against the deficiencies of the Late Enlightenment, then, with Wordsworth's and especially Coleridge's contacts with German culture, at least partially as a reception of key ideas of Idealist philosophy and of German literary texts.

Contrary to Germany, however, in Britain the reputation of the novel as a literary form was rather low. So the Romantics who had the highest possible vision of literature wrote few novels — and so the British novel of the period was largely based on the continuation of Enlightenment traditions of narration (as, for instance, in the novels of Jane Austen, which cannot be called »Romantic« even in the vaguest sense of the word). Small wonder, then, that we have to turn to another genre when we are in search of British equivalents to the German *Bildungsroman* of the High Romantic mode. If we compare the literary systems of Romanticism in both countries, the closest equivalent to the German »high« form of the novel in its newly romanesque form is the verse epic (verse romance, long verse narration, long narrative poem). So the best equivalent we can find for the German transcendental novel are texts like Wordsworth's *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1799, 1805, 1850), Keats's *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* (1818) and *Hyperion: A Fragment* (1820), or Shelley's *Alastor* (1815). In an admittedly looser sense, we might also add Coleridge's »Rime of the Ancient Mariner« (1798), or some of Blake's verse narrations (e.g. *Milton*, 1809).

A simplified, but suggestive formula for the comparison of these texts with the German transcendental novel could be the equation: »verse romance = transcendental novel — novel«. In most of these British verse romances the layer of symbols, myths, inserted poems and fairy tales, which in the transcendental novel was *added* to the pragmatic nexus of the plot layer, has become the text itself. And most of these verse narrations create — just as Novalis tried to do — a new myth for the triadic pattern of unity, fall, unity regained. (An even more radical, albeit non-fictional, version is Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka: A Prose Poem* of 1848, which might be called a »*Bildungsroman* of the universe«.)

Among these texts, it is Wordsworth's *Prelude* which best fulfils the genre criteria of the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode. The first to notice this affinity was M.H. Abrams, who called the poem »a fully developed poetic equivalent of two portentous innovations in prose fiction, of which the earliest examples had appeared in Germany only a decade or so before Wordsworth began writing the poem: the *Bildungsroman* [...] and the *Künstlerroman*« (Abrams 1971, 74).

The Prelude was the poetic work of Wordsworth's lifetime as a poet. Begun in 1798 — and originally intended as an introduction for the (never written) philosophical work *The Recluse* (thence the title) —, it was continually revised and remodelled, and not published until after the poet's death. Today, we usually distinguish between three versions of the text: the two-part

Prelude of 1799 (first published in 1974), the thirteen-book *Prelude* of 1805 (first published in 1926), and the fourteen-book *Prelude* of 1839 (published posthumously in 1850 by the poet's wife Mary). The following discussion will be based on the 1805 *Prelude*.

Although the subtitle of the poem *Growth of a Poet's Mind* was chosen (just as the main title) by Mary Wordsworth, it adequately describes one of the two layers of the text: *The Prelude* combines a biography of the author (of course, in a highly stylised version) with what could be called a *Bildungsroman* of the poet's mind, or, more generally speaking, a *Bildungsroman* of the »mind of man« (Wordsworth 1979, 46, i: 340 — henceforth the *Prelude* 1805 will be quoted with book-number and verse only). For the poet represents nothing but the highest level that the mind of man can reach in the development and active use of the imagination (which, for Wordsworth, serves as the key agent in all human cognition).

This is the characteristic two layer-model of the *Bildungsroman* of the High Romantic mode. Typically, too, the more abstract pattern of the history of the mind in the interaction of subject and object, man and nature — expressed in the visionary »spots of time experiences«, or even in dreams — dominates the layer of the story proper: biographical events are selected and re-ordered according to the controlling pattern of the text (for a detailed interpretation cf. Abrams 1979, 71–140). This pattern is, basically, a variant of the triadic scheme: In his childhood, the poet lived in harmony with nature. He lost it by his contact with the modern world: his life in cities, his disappointed belief in the French revolution and in the materialistic philosophy of William Godwin. At this stage, he had

sacrificed
 The exactness of a comprehensive mind
 To scrupulous and microscopic views
 That furnished out materials for work
 Of false imagination, placed beyond
 The limits of experience and truth.
 [...]
 till, demanding proof,
 And seeking it in every thing, I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.
 And for my future studies, as the sole
 Employment of the inquiring faculty,
 Turned towards mathematics, and their clear
 And solid evidence. (x: 843–848, 896–904)

Even at this nadir of despair, however, the narrative voice — the »narrating I« who always knows better than the »narrated I« — predicts the regaining of the lost unity: »lastly Nature's self [...] conducted me to open day« (x: 921–923). The »narrated I« will reach this stage only at the end of the poem, in the famous Mount Snowdon-episode (which in Wordsworth »real« life took place in 1791, that is, in actual history, *before* the depressing and disillusioning stay in France). Here the poet finally regains his belief in the active power of the mind and in its conformity with the force of Nature itself: »Hence sovereignty within and peace at will,/ [...]»

Hence cheerfulness in every act of life;/ Hence truth in moral judgements; and delight/ That fails not, in the external universe« (xiii: 114–119). In the 18th century, that might well have been called »theodicy achieved«; as Wordsworth's belief in nature needs no personal god, Abrams has, quite aptly, suggested the term »biodicy« instead. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth »translates Providence into an immanent teleology« of nature (Abrams 1971, 96). So, like a true *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode, the poem is a new secular Bible, proclaiming the Romantic religion of the belief in the unity of being, in the existence of a meaningful universe, in which subject and object are in pre-established harmony.

A second example of a non-German *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode is Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (literally translated: The Taylor Re-Taylored). The book was written in 1830/31, and first published anonymously in sequels in *Fraser's Magazine* (1833/34). 58 remaining copies of these instalments were sewn together for a private book issue in 1834. The first public book-edition of *Sartor* was sponsored and prefaced (anonymously) by Ralph Waldo Emerson; it appeared in Boston in 1836 — and soon became the Bible of the American Transcendentalists. The British edition of 1838 was the first to bear a subtitle: *The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (literally translated: Mr. Devil's Dirt).

In the case of Carlyle, the parallels to the German transcendental novel were, of course, the result of an intense reception of German literature and philosophy. Carlyle had, to give just a few examples, translated Goethe's *Lehrjahre* (1824) and *Wanderjahre* (1827), written a *Life of Schiller* (1825), and published the first English study on Jean Paul (1827).

Sartor Resartus is a highly artistic novel, influenced less by Goethe than by Jean Paul, perhaps also by Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, and certainly by Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67). The book consists of three parts: In the first and third the »editor« gives an account of, comments on, and tries to understand a strange book written by the German scholar Teufelsdröckh; its bibliographical data are given as: »*Die Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken* [Clothes, their Origin and Influence]: *von Diog. Teufelsdröckh, J.U.D. etc. Stillschweigen und Co^{gnie}: Weissnichtwo, 1833*« (Carlyle 1987, 6). The middle part contains a biography of the author, based on the rather dubious authority of »six considerable PAPER-BAGS« of autobiographical notes, »written in Professor Teufelsdröckh's scarcely-legible *cursiv-schrift*« (60).

The tripartite form obviously echoes the all-inclusive novel theory of »progressive Universalpoesie«, and, quite generally, the theory-laden and highly self-reflective tradition of the transcendental novel. The middle part, once again, gives a fairly abstract biography — a mental biography, we might call it — of Professor Teufelsdröckh based on the triadic scheme of »unity — fall — unity regained at a higher level«. And once again, the crisis is brought about by an infection of the hero with materialist Enlightenment thought at a »Rational University [...] hostile to Mysticism« (87) — but also by the loss of his beloved Blumine (Teufelsdröckh's personal, rather unworthy version of the »blue flower«). This nadir of despair is called »the Everlasting No« (123), and described in this way:

To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on in its dead indifference, to grind me from limb to limb. O the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death! Why was the Living

banished thither companionless, conscious? Why if there is no devil; nay unless the Devil is your God? (127)

Abruptly, however, and without psychological motivation — modelled on the sudden elevation to the »sublime« (»Erhabenes«) in Kant and Schiller —, the hero is saved and reaches the new unity of the »Everlasting Yea« (140). The »Editor« comments:

Thus have we [...] followed Teufelsdröckh through the various successive stages and stages of Growth, Entanglement, and almost Reprobation, into a certain clearer state of what he himself seems to consider as Conversion. [...] He has discovered that the Ideal Workshop he so panted for, is even this same Actual ill-furnished Workshop he has so long been stumbling in (150).

The religious vocabulary is no coincidence. Carlyle, too, aims at something like a new Bible. He and his hero know that »the Mythos of the Christian Religion« has lost much of its convincing power in the 19th century, and that it would be necessary to »embody the divine Spirit of that Religion in a new Mythos, in a new vehicle and vesture, that our Souls, otherwise too like perishing, may live« (147). Basically, Teufeldröckh's strange philosophy of clothes is a part of this new myth: a symbol or metaphor for the necessity of »looking through the Shows and Vestures« of the mere world of appearances.

The third and last example of a non-German *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode which I will discuss here, is Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia, ou le Rêve de la Vie* (Aurélia, or The Dream of Life, 1855); as it is a short text narrating only a comparatively small part of a life-span (autobiographically speaking: less than fifteen years), we might perhaps call it a *Bildungs*-novella.

Just as Carlyle, Nerval may well be called a connoisseur of German culture. He had translated poetry by Klopstock, Bürger, Goethe, Schiller (*Poesies allemandes*, 1830), Heine, and, above all, both parts of Goethe's *Faust* (1826/27, 1840), and he had travelled widely in Germany and Austria. Last not least, he was an omnivorous reader who knew the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann as well as Georg Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (Symbolism and Mythology of the Ancients, 1812).

Aurélia is a deeply autobiographical text, dealing with a severe crisis in the author's life and attempting to solve it by fictional means. And though it failed on a biographical level — soon after he had finished the book Nerval committed suicide — it is a fascinating and highly avant-gardistic work of Romantic literature. It was first published in two sequels in the *Revue de Paris* (January/February 1855); a posthumous book-edition appeared in the same year.

The book is famous for its first sentence: »La Rêve est une seconde vie« (»The Dream is a second life«, Nerval 1961, 6): What from a rationalist point of view might well be called a journey into madness — and what from a biographical point of view certainly was the author's struggle against several attacks of schizophrenia — is portrayed as a voyage into a visionary world and, once again, modelled on the pattern of fall and redemption. The way down starts with an experience of loss and guilt: The nameless first-person narrator loses his beloved Aurélia. This loss is closely connected with a feeling of guilt, yet the narrator's offence is never specified. Quite obviously, however, it must be a personal variant of the general »original sin« in Romanticism: The fall of the ego into the sensual world in which it forgets its spiritual, immortal side and its links with the whole of the universe — and thus becomes guilty of pride and

egoism. A series of visionary dreams (which clothe well-known topoi of Romantic thought into the symbols and images of Nerval's eclectic private mythology) soon confirms the existence of a spiritual universe and the immortality of the soul, the continuous presence of a Golden Age of pre-Adamite innocence, the structural identity between the history of the universe and that of the individual, the subterranean links between the myths and religions of all ages. Yet all this knowledge cannot save the ego as long as it is tormented by feelings of guilt — not, at least, in an age in which belief has become so difficult:

for us born in the days of revolutions and thunderstorms, when all beliefs have been shattered, raised at best in that vague faith that is content with a few external observances, the indifferent adhesion to which is possibly worse than impiety and heresy — it is very difficult for us, as soon as we feel the need, to reconstruct the mystic edifice whose ideal figure the innocent and the simple admit into their hearts. »The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life!« Yet can we ban from our minds all the good and evil that so many intelligent generations poured into them? Ignorance cannot be learned.¹²

Thus, salvation does not begin with knowledge but with an act of compassion and of caring for others: During his third and last incarceration in a mental asylum, the narrator is introduced to a fellow patient who is in an even worse state. The narrator takes care of him, helps him — and in this social act loses his feeling of guilt. The second and final step to salvation is the narrator's decision to become the conscious subject of his dreams:

»Why,« I said to myself, »not [...] dominate my sensations instead of being subject to them? Is it not possible to tame this fascinating and frightening chimera, to impose an order on these spirits of the night which play with our reason? Sleep occupies a third of our life. [...] After a dazed state of a few minutes a new life begins, freed from the conditions of time and place and doubtlessly similar to that state which awaits us after death. Who knows if a link does not exist between these two existences and if it is not possible for the soul to unite them already now.«¹³

With this return from a »descent into hell« (»descente aux enfers«, Nerval 1961, 160) the triadic scheme of the text is completed. Just as in the other transcendental novels described in this chapter, the pragmatic nexus of the text is of secondary importance only. The outer stages of the hero's development — including his repeated stays in mental asylums — are but vaguely

12. »pour nous, nés dans des jours de révolutions et d'orages, où toutes les croyances sont brisées, — élevés tout au plus dans cette foi vague qui se contente de quelques pratiques extérieures et dont l'adhésion indifférente est plus coupable peut-être que l'impiété et l'hérésie, — il est bien difficile, dès que nous en sentons le besoin, de reconstruire l'édifice mystique dont les innocents et les simples admettent dans leurs cœurs la figure toute tracée. »L'arbre de science n'est pas l'arbre de vie!« Cependant, pouvons-nous rejeter de notre esprit ce que tant de générations intelligentes y ont versé de bon ou de funeste? L'ignorance ne s'apprend pas« (Nerval 1961, 82).

13. »»Pourquoi, me dis-je, ne point [...] dominer mes sensations au lieu de les subir? N'est-il pas possible de dompter cette chimère attrayante et redoutable, d'imposer une règle à ces esprits des nuits qui se jouent de notre raison? Le sommeil occupe le tiers de notre vie. [...] Après un engourdissement de quelques minutes une vie nouvelle commence, affranchie des conditions du temps et de l'espace, et pareille sans doute à celle qui nous attend après la mort. Qui sait s'il n'existe pas un lien entre ces deux existences et s'il n'est pas possible à l'âme de les nouer dès à présent'« (Nerval 1961, 156).

sketched. The text is focused on the »romanesque« mythological and symbolical nexus of the series of visionary dreams and on the pattern of fall and redemption.

3. From the *Bildungsroman* to the novel of disillusion

3.1 »Weak« variants of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*: »Romance« vs. »novel«

Even if fully fledged versions of the transcendental novel are rare outside of German literature, some of its key characteristics can be found in almost any Romantic novel of development (or, more generally speaking, in all of the life-stories which are told in Romantic novels or autobiographies): Many of them have a strong symbolic nexus, and in most of them the pragmatic nexus of psychological and sociological causes — and with it that of a purely rationalist explanation of the universe — is at least partially suspended or supplemented. There are two basic modes for this reduction:

(1) The hero's life is determined by one or more events which form a transrational chain of causes: some fateful sort of predetermination, »election«, which singles out the hero from the very beginning (extreme examples of such an »election« are, for instance, the protagonists of Balzac's *Louis Lambert* [1832] and Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* [written 1886–91]), and shapes his life into a pattern of transindividual meaning and/or of a supernatural linkage between events, a »fateful« unity of being in which everything is connecting in the framework of a higher order. These mysterious »links« cannot be grasped by reason, and they are not simply identical with the concepts of traditional metaphysics (i.e. Christian religion), though they can be clothed in traditional metaphysical terminology. Therefore they have to be expressed by poetic means: by symbols and myths, by supernatural and/or fantastic elements, quite often by premonitions and dreams. This, of course, is, once again, the »romance«-element in Romantic narration, which in narrations of the High Romantic mode tends to dominate or even substitute the »novel«-, or (in the terminology of the 18th century) »history«-element of the text. In all of the Romantic narrations in the »low« Romantic mode we find different variants of narrative compromises between »romance« and »novel«. Accentuations may vary, but in the historical development of global Romanticism, the »romance«-element is increasingly backgrounded without being completely lost (its complete loss would be one of the »markers« which indicate that the period change from Romanticism to Realism has been completed).

(2) The hero's innermost longing is directed at some ideal, some absolute goal which — though it can, of course, assume the concrete form of a person (usually the beloved) or an object (usually a highly symbolic one) — is more than an earthly one; certainly it is not material success or anything like the hedonist version of a »good life«. Even in the texts of the High Romantic mode this goal is hardly ever reached (Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* would have been an exception, had the novel been finished). But, at least, the protagonist succeeds in overcoming his personal crisis and feels at one with himself and the world. Once again, we can observe a pattern of change in the historical development of global Romanticism: The less the hero is able to achieve a successful formation of his character, the more often the ideal is externalized into an outer unreachable goal. At the same time, the quest for this »absolute« becomes more and

more ambiguous in its value: It remains the only way of transcending the narrow, rationalist and philistine world-view — but striving for it is dangerous and destructive for the protagonist. The best-known example for such a disastrous quest for the absolute is, of course, Captain Ahab's hunt of the White Whale in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick: or, The Whale* (1851).

These two characteristics (which *can* but do not *have to be* combined) serve as minimal markers for a Romantic story of character formation; if both of them are missing, even in the most rudimentary form, it is highly doubtful whether the text should be classified as »Romantic«. Examples and variations for this integration of »romance«-elements into a novel-frame are countless; so any attempt to even approach something like an extensive overview would be futile. Instead, I will try in this sub-chapter to illustrate the »romance«-element in Romantic narrations by two comparisons between (more or less related) texts which either accentuate the »novel«- or the »romance«-aspect. In the remaining part of the subchapter, I will discuss at least one example of a protagonist's fateful striving for the »absolute«.

The most obvious example for a comparison of romance- and novel-elements *within one text* would, of course, have been one of the most important transcendental novels of the second phase of German Romanticism: E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern* (Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr, along with a Fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeister [conductor] Johannes Kreisler in Stray Printer's Sheets, 1820/21). Here, it is the life-story of the philistine tomcat which is organized as a novel: with a clear pragmatic plot-nexus, a chronological order of events, and an observation of the psychological rules of *vraisemblance* — with, of course, the obvious exception of (satirically) choosing a tomcat as the (only all-too-human) protagonist. By associating the narrative mode of »novel«-telling thus with a philistine and trivial hero and his world view, it is quite obviously poetically »stigmatised«. The life-story of Kapellmeister Kreisler, on the other hand, is told in the »romance«-mode: fragmentary, split into erratically dispersed narrative-units, replete with aesthetical and philosophical reflections, symbols and myths. Quite obviously, Hoffmann considers this romanesque mode as the only form of the novel which can claim poetic dignity: It is the truly »Romantic« form of narrating the life of a truly Romantic hero (for details of the organisation of the text cf. the articles by Albert and Spiridon in this volume). As this chapter is, however, devoted to »weak« variants of the Romantic *Bildungsroman* I will use two other pairs of texts.

My first comparison will be one between two versions of Romantic autobiography. Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (first published anonymously in the *London Magazine* in 1821) certainly had a Romantic subject — after all, the »fascinating powers of opium« (Preface, De Quincey 1956, 348) were an obvious means to enrich the imagination, the Romantic faculty *per se*. But the autobiographical style of the *Confessions* showed but few traces of a Romantic *Weltanschauung*. In the German terminological tradition, the book might well have been called an »anthropological novel«, a case-study, which not only describes in great detail the effects of opium but narrates in even greater detail the prehistory of De Quincey's first use of the drug. To cut this very long story short, the chain of events might be summed up in the causal sequence: poverty — hunger — pain (»a most painful affection of the stomach«, 350) — opium.

Twenty-four years later, in 1845, De Quincey published *Suspiria de Profundis: Being a Sequel to the »Confessions of an English Opium-Eater«* (a first version appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*). The subtitle is misleading — for rather than being a mere »sequel« the *Suspiria* presents a new, and this time truly Romantic version of De Quincey's life-story. Not only does the book contain a considerable number of poetic inserts, in which De Quincey builds up a mythology of his own, but it also presents two completely new reasons for the author's use of opium.

The first is a critique of the non-poetic or rather anti-poetic character of modern life, which has severely diminished man's »power of dreaming«: social and technological revolutions have »dissipated and squandered« »the action of thought and feeling«, »tumult« and »eternal hurry« have led to a »decay of solitude« (De Quincey 1961, 448). The second reason is a personal one, yet not the mere psychological result of a chain of events in an individual life-story. Early experiences of »intolerable grief« »drove a shaft [...] into the worlds of death and darkness which never again closed« (452 f.) — and turned De Quincey into an archetypal Romantic, a »stranger« on earth.

The »primal scene« of this early character-formation is impressively recounted: De Quincey was two and a half when his sister Jane died. Yet as death meant little to a child of this age, his grief was easily overcome: »Summer and winter came again [...] why not little Jane?« (461). In the »unity« of childhood, De Quincey did not and could not yet distinguish between the »natural« and the »spiritual« side of human existence. When, however, his second sister Elizabeth died, too, about four years later, things were very different. All on his own, young De Quincey went to the chamber where the dead corpse lay to take his last farewell. There he suddenly had a vision:

A vault seemed to open in the zenith of the far blue sky, a shaft which ran up forever. I, in spirit, rose as if on billows that also ran up forever; and the billows seemed to pursue the throne of God; but that also ran before us and fled away continually (468).

This was but the first of many similar visions — yet it was enough to make the child aware of »the sublime attractions« of the grave« (484), alienating him forever from the joys of earthly life.

My second example is a sketchy comparison between two novels of the Brontë sisters: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* (first published in 1847 under the pseudonym of Currer Bell, allegedly the mere »editor« of the text; in later editions the subtitle was deleted), and Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (first published in 1857 under the pseudonym of Acton Bell as the third volume of a three-volume set, including Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*).

There are obvious plot- and genre-affinities between these two novels: Both tell the story of a young girl/woman with a sharp intellect and a strong personality, who sets out into the world with the social handicap of poverty, works as a teacher and a governess, has to suffer all sorts of hostility, degradation, and insults from representatives of the upper classes, and in the end finds a modest form of happiness with a beloved husband, without having to give up her spiritual independence. Both novels might well be called *Bildungsromane*, as both tell the life-stories of their heroines in the important period of character-formation, aim at an ideal state of compromise between the claims of individualisation and socialisation, and explicitly discuss — both

heroines are educators — the principles and circumstances of character formation. Yet with all these similarities, one difference is more than obvious: Only *Jane Eyre* can be considered as a Romantic novel. Why is this so?

Agnes Grey combines traits of the *Bildungsroman* with those of the social novel: it tells — quite often in a highly satirical vein — an exemplary story of the class and gender conflicts of the time. Agnes is a person of sound character, raised and educated by loving and sensible parents; there is a lot she has to learn about the conceited, heartless and immoral manners of the upper classes, and about the limits which these will impose upon the work of even the best educator; there are some weaknesses she has to overcome — as for instance that of a »mauvaise honte« (A. Brontë 2003, 54) — but in the end she will prevail, and find the values confirmed upon which her character and her life are based. So, from the point of view of literary history, *Agnes Grey* is a striking proof for the continuity of the »novel«-tradition, leading from the 18th century right into Victorian Realism. The most important intermediary link — consisting of texts of an even higher literary rank — is, of course, the narrative work of Jane Austen.

Jane Eyre is different in at least two respects — and exactly these characteristics turn the book into a Romantic text. Of course, it has all the »novel«-elements which can be found in *Agnes Grey*; yet they are combined with others which lie beyond the scope of a »realist« social novel. (1) On a conceptual level, the development of the heroine is described not only in terms of psychology and sociology but also on a more general scale: From the very beginning (starting with the rightly famous »primal scene« in Chapter 1, when the orphaned ten-year-old girl for the first time violently and passionately rebels against the abuses of her fourteen-year-old cousin John and, as punishment for this transgression, is bound and locked away), Jane is confronted with the need to find a compromise between »passion« and »imagination« on one hand, and »reason« on the other. »Passion«, the depth and strength of one's emotions, and the power of the »imagination« naturally belong to the key values of Romanticism. Of course, the very search for such a compromise is typical of Late Romanticism (that version of European Late Romanticism which Virgil Nemoianu has tried to describe as »Biedermeier«). Undoubtedly, Charlotte Brontë vividly depicts the »night sides« of an uncontrolled reign of passion and the imagination — Bertha Rochester, her future husband's mad first wife, who is locked away in the attic, is nothing but an emblem of these dangers, and Mr Rochester himself, a rather Byronic character, is severely punished for a similar, if somewhat less severe, lack of reasonable self-control. Yet, dangerous as passion and imagination may prove to be in their unchecked reign, they are nevertheless also the qualities on which the strong character and the independent spirit of the heroine and her husband rest. So they must not be given up completely — mere self-abnegation and mere self-denial are, for Charlotte Brontë, not the ideal goal of character formation (as is demonstrated by Jane's school-mate Helen Burns and by the fervent evangelist St. John Rivers who woos Jane and asks her to join him as missionary in India). Thus, Charlotte Brontë modifies Romantic key values by moralising them — but does not simply discard them.

(2) The second Romantic characteristic of *Jane Eyre* is its elaborate poetic nexus: the dense network of metaphors and symbols (e.g. »fire«, »moon«), of premonitory compositional links, premonitions by dreams (e.g. C. Brontë 2001, 187 f., 198, 272), and »supernatural« occurrences and coincidences. The most obvious example is, of course, the way in which the (after all) »happy ending« is brought about. When Jane is just about to give in to St. John's wooing, she

asks »Heaven« to »show [her] the path« (C. Brontë 2001, 357). All of a sudden, she hears the voice of Edward Rochester, crying out for her. She follows the call, travels back to Thornfield Hall and learns that the house had been burnt down by Bertha (who committed suicide by jumping from the burning roof) and that Rochester had been blinded and disabled by the fire. Most important, however, she finds out that in the very same night, when she was miles away, Rochester had indeed called out for her in desperation — and had heard her reply: »I am coming; wait for me« (381). The overtones in which this obviously supernatural romance-element is discussed are Christian in appearance — but in appearance only. Jane, who no longer can be fooled by mere imagination, comments on the mystic experience with the words: »Down superstition! [...] This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature« (358), and Rochester speaks of »the beneficent God of *this earth*« (380; my italics). In a thin Christian disguise, Charlotte Brontë thus ultimately reaffirms the Romantic belief in the natural/supernatural unity of being.

The last text in this sub-chapter is Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (part of the book was first published in two sequels in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1837, the complete text in book-form in 1838). The plot-line of the novel can be divided into three parts and an epilogue: (1) The first part gives a brief history of the hero's youth, centred around a first sea-faring adventure: one stormy night, sixteen-year old Pym and his (very drunk) friend Augustus, the son of a Captain Barnard, take Pym's sailboat, set to sea, are shipwrecked and just barely saved by a passing ship. (2) Eighteen month later, Pym puts to sea again: smuggled on board and hidden as a stowaway by Augustus on his father's whaling-brig *Crampus*. From the very beginning, the trip is full of the most dreadful horrors: mutiny, murder, distress at sea, hunger, thirst, cannibalism, to name but a few. (3) Pym and the sailor Peters, as the only survivors of the *Crampus*, are finally saved by the schooner Jane Guy. Rather abruptly, the voyage changes into a discovery-trip: The ship crosses the Antarctic ice barrier and approaches the South Pole, which turns out to be a strange continent, peopled by hostile »jetblack« natives who loathe the colour white (when the novel was written no man had yet reached the South Pole, and Poe's description of a continent beyond an ice barrier and even his hint at a maelstrom-like water connection between the Poles were based on current speculations about the area). The natives lure the crew into an ambush and kill most of them. After some rather puzzling adventures — most important, a series of strange hieroglyphics found in a strangely shaped chasm (Poe 1986, 223–225) — only Pym and Peters, once again the sole survivors, escape in a boat and head further south. It is a voyage into an ever-increasing, all-encompassing whiteness. The last impression Pym has, before the boat is drawn into a cataract, is that of a gigantic »shrouded human figure« whose skin »was of the perfect whiteness of snow« (239). (4) The remaining two or three chapters of the »report« have been lost — so the »editor« tells us in a »note« which closes the book as a sort of epilogue. Somehow (we may gather: via a subterranean water-link) Pym was saved. He returned to the United States, wrote down his report — and died soon afterwards.

From the point of view of genre-typology, the text is something like a hybrid between the novel of adventures and the Romantic *Bildungsroman*. The elements of the novel of adventure are obviously the dominant ones; the *Narrative's* claim to be also a *Bildungsroman* rests

primarily on its first episode. As part of the plot it could be considered as rather superfluous — the voyage of the main part might have been motivated by merely mentioning young Pym's persistent longing for sea-faring adventures. In Poe's design, however, the episode has an important function: It serves as one of the »primal scenes«, which single out the protagonist and, so to speak, »brand« him as a »Romantic hero«. The key passage — in fact, a key to the understanding of the whole novel — lies in the conclusions which the hero draws from his first adventure at sea:

My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrows and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires — for they amounted to desires — are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men — at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfill (Poe 1986, 57).

Of course, these »desires« will be fulfilled in every detail. They turn Pym into the ideal hero for Poe and his personal version of an aesthetics of the sublime: The horrors for which he asks and which he will experience condition and intensify a longing for the supernatural, a quest for the absolute. And it is exactly the fulfilment of this disposition which turns the text into a transcendental novel, even though the hero never realizes what he is looking for. In the symbolical realm of the South Pole, the polarities of human nature seem to disintegrate into its »dark« (animal) and its »white« (spiritual) half — this is at least what the strange hieroglyphics tell us which the »note« explains as Ethiopian and Arabic signs for the verbal roots »to be shady« and »to be white«. (Had Poe known about the unfathomable pitfalls of postcolonial criticism, he might have been more explicit about the metaphysical meaning of his colour symbolism.). Of course, the experience of ultimate »whiteness« can neither be told (therefore the missing last chapters) nor survived in the continuation of an ordinary life (hence Pym's »sudden and distressing death« [240]). The search for the »absolute«, for the ultimate sublime, is a deadly undertaking.

3.2 Towards the »novel of disillusion«

After 1815 (to give a very rough date), *Bildungsromane* that tell of a successful character formation tend to become rare. (They will reappear in the latest phase of Romanticism in a more moderate variant: Here, as for instance in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the Romantic strife for absolute synthesis will be toned down to a much more practical ethos). As most of the resulting life-stories can no longer be called *Bildungsromane*, I will merely sketch three of the most important types.

(1) *The »duplicity of being«* (»Duplizität des Seins« [Hoffmann 1978, 4: 65]): This handy formula was coined by E.T.A. Hoffmann in his famous tale of the hermit Serapion at the beginning his cycle of novellas called the *Serapionsbrüder* (The Serapion Brotherhood, 1819–21). The protagonists of narrations of this category are hopelessly and helplessly torn between their desire for sensual and for spiritual fulfilment. In the »strong«, transcendental versions of this type, the heroes are doomed to perpetual suffering, madness, or death, yet the narrative text itself reaches — by the humour and irony of its narrative organisation — something like a tolerable

balance between the extremes. Most of Hoffmann's texts belong to this type — just think of the fate of Kreisler in the (already mentioned) *Kater Murr* (Tomcat Murr), or of Nathanael in the *Sandman* (The Sandman, 1817).

In the »weak« variants of the type even this aesthetic balance is missing — the texts merely expose an aporetic conflict. A good example is Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie. Souvenirs du Valois* (Sylvie. Remembrances from the Valois, 1853), which was later included in the collection *Les filles du feu* (Daughters of the Fire, 1854). Here the narrator's love for the actress Aurélie reminds him of a love-affair of his youth; so he travels back to his hometown in the Valois. This geographical journey soon turns into a journey back into time and memory, with a complicated mixture of various time-levels. In fact, however, nothing has changed and nothing will ever change: In his youth the narrator could not decide between his love for two women: Sylvie (lovely and very real) and Adrienne (sublime and ideal), because they were like the two halves of *one* love. Only their combination would have satisfied his double longing, so he lost both of them — just as he will lose Aurélie in the present.

(2) *Stories of unfulfilled love*: Again we can distinguish between two subtypes: The stories of an *amour passion*, which remains unfulfilled because the beloved proves to be unreachable — these texts follow the pattern of the »Wertherism«-complex (for details cf. the article by B. Dieterle in this volume). The even worse (and later) version is the Byronic one (modelled on the melancholy hero of Byron's *Childe Harold*, 1812–18): Here the love-affair never really gets started as the lovers-to-be (and especially the male ones) have no trust in their feelings. Examples for this second type are Aleksandr Pushkin's verse narration *Evgenii Onegin* (Eugene Onegin, 1833), in which, to grossly simplify a psychologically complex story, Evgenii and Tatiana twice miss the chance to realise their love because Evgenii has read too much Byron, and Tatiana too many sentimental novels; and Alfred de Musset's *La confession d'un enfant du siècle* (Confessions of a Child of His Time, 1836), in which the hero Octave, the »child« of his disillusioned post-Napoleonic age, after a series of futile love-affairs, wilfully destroys the true love of his life.

(3) *Towards the »novel of disillusion«*: In the novels of the »duplicity of being« and of unfulfilled love the *Bildung* of the protagonist never even begins, because he persists, from the very beginning, in an aporetic and hopelessly melancholic state; so both types must be considered as suspensions rather than as modifications of the genre model. The novels of the third group *are Bildungsromane*, yet most of them belong to its negative type. Here the protagonist either clings to his version of the Romantic ideal and is destroyed by a society which leaves no room for a Romantic existence, or he gives up his ideals.

The best known example for the first version is certainly Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir: Chronique du XIXe siècle* (The Red and the Black: A Chronicle of the XIXth Century, 1830). Admittedly its protagonist Julien Sorel is, at first glance, a rather improbable Romantic hero: an overly ambitious social upstart from the province, who will commit any crime, from mere hypocrisy to attempted murder, to raise himself in society. Yet, Julien *is* a Romantic, after all: It is not money or the boring, timid, and petty life of bourgeois success which he is aiming at, but a (Napoleonic) vision of heroic grandeur. Admittedly, his Romantic ideals are strongly compromised because he aims at realizing them *within* the framework of a corrupt society, but his passion, his sensibility, his rich imagination, and the sheer energy of his will still single him out among his average fellowmen, earn him the passionate love of two remarkable women, and

enable him, at the end of the novel, when he is imprisoned and has lost his outer freedom, to reach a new, inner liberty with new and authentic feelings. Thus, although Julien is executed in the end, his Romantic ideals ultimately triumph.

The same is basically true of Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (Lost Illusions, 1837–44), yet with an important difference: Just like Julien, the young poet Lucien Chardon (or de Rubempré, as he later calls himself, assuming the title of his mother) leaves the province and moves to Paris, full of hopes and ambition. But other than Julien, he readily gives up his Romantic ideals and turns into a journalist as this seems to be the more promising career. Yet even this betrayal of his original values earns him but short-lived success; in the end — in the sequel novel *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (Splendour and Misery of the Courtesans, 1838–44) he will even commit suicide. So Julien's ideals are »illusions« merely in the sense that they do not conform with the structures and values of a fundamentally commercialised society and cannot be successfully realised within its scope. Nevertheless, they remain intact as *values*, as a normative point of view from which the French society of the late restoration can be criticised. With Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, the Romantic *Bildungsroman* has been transformed into the novel of disillusion, but the borderline to Realism has not yet been definitively crossed. This will happen in Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Sentimental Education, 1845; 1869); here the Romantic ideals have become illusions in the full sense of the word: the Romantic attitude is shown as both deceptive and harmful.

4. Conclusion: The *Bildungsroman* in the genre-system of Romantic fiction (with a short note on the »artist novel«)

In a way, the Romantic *Bildungsroman* was a highly precarious, almost paradoxical undertaking. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* originated in the late 18th century, and it flourished in the Age of Realism. In both epochs it was closely aligned with the »novel« or »history« type of the long prose narration — many misunderstandings about the *Bildungsroman* in the Age of Romanticism rest not only on one-sided interpretations of Goethe's *Lehrjahre* but also on the assumption that the genre had simply remained within the boundaries of the novel-type. This, however, would neither have conformed to the world view nor to the poetics of Romanticism, as the novel with its strongly developed plot, its causal motivations, and its chronological order, was closely linked with a rationalist view of the world.

So, the Romantic *Bildungsroman* in its radical version — the transcendental novel or the *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode, as I have called it — is a result of the attempt to »romanticise« the novel-form by turning it as completely as possible into a romance. The *Bildungsroman* in its »weak« Romantic form, on the other hand, might be described as the much more modest attempt to merely infuse select thematic and/or formal romanesque elements into the novel-form. In Late Romanticism, when Romanticism started to integrate more and more elements of a Realism *avant la lettre*, the Romantic *Bildungsroman* gradually returned to its roots, i.e. to the novel-tradition — either in reformulating the Romantic ideals of *Bildung*, or in directly thematising the conflict between these ideals and a commercialised and corrupt society. This conflict had, of course, been the very reason for the formation of the genre. The

Early Romantics, however, had still had hopes of actively changing, of »poeticising« the realm of modernity, which the Late Romantics no longer cherished; this growing scepticism is also reflected in the partial convergence of the *Bildungsroman* and the social novel. In the Romantic novel of disillusion Romantic values are still affirmed by the text — but no longer by the hero. The borderline between Romanticism and Realism is definitely crossed when either (a) the novel of disillusion actively attacks Romantic ideals (e.g. in Flaubert's *Éducation sentimentale*) or (b) when a new Realistic version of the *Bildungsroman* has been established in which the successful character formation of the hero depends on his avoidance of Romantic values and habits (e.g. in Stifter's *Nachsommer* [Indian Summer, 1857], Keller's *Grüner Heinrich* [Green Henry, first version 1854/55, second version 1879/80], Dickens's *David Copperfield* [1849/50] and *Great Expectations* [1860/61], or Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* [1884]).

To better understand the precarious position of the *Bildungsroman* in the Romantic Age it will be helpful to consider its position in the genre-system of (longer) Romantic fiction. Basically, this system is formed by the *Bildungsroman* and three other types (which, of course, can be mixed in many ways):

- (1) *The fantastic novel and the Gothic novel* (the latter being a subgenre of the first, in which a historical setting and the stock-elements of the genre considerably facilitated the task of creating a fantastic, romanesque world; for details cf. the chapters by Van Gorp and Steigerwald);
- (2) *the love-story* (for details cf. the chapter by B. Dieterle);
- (3) *the historical novel* (for details cf. the chapters by V. Nemoianu and M. Bernauer).

Type 1, quite obviously, aims at a direct renaissance of the »romance«-tradition. In comparison, type 3 provides but a minimal »romantisation« of the »novel«-form: here, the »poetic« or »Romantic«, or, quite simply, »anti-modernist« element is basically the choice of a setting from a »poetic« past. Because of its strong affinity to the »novel«-tradition, the genre could be easily continued, with only slight modifications, into the Age of Realism. Type 2 is formally but loosely defined. Once again, the Romantic element is primarily a thematic one: the subject of »absolute« love, mostly following the pattern, if not always the style, of Goethe's *Werther*; the more the elements of psychological analysis and of the expressions of sentiment are accentuated, the more the »novel«-element will be reduced.

This short survey of the three genres clearly implies that the first one will, in all probability, provide the most spectacular *poetic* innovations in Romantic narration. This will occur not in the Gothic novel — which, from its beginnings, is a restricted and highly stereotyped genre, a simple return to the romance tradition — but in fantastic fiction, where the form of romance is re-invented. Here we will find devices like a blending of genres, use of metaphors, symbols, dreams, and myths, etc. It is here that the Romantics try hardest to find a new poetic language for their new anti-rationalist world-view: their new view of a subject, deeply integrated into nature, and of a natural world, which has, once again, become a disenchanting universe.

The function of the *Bildungsroman*, as the fourth type in the Romantic genre-system of prose narration, is predetermined by the genre-specific attempt to find a compromise between individualisation and socialisation. In the Romantic context, this marks the genre as the zone of conflict between the Romantic aims and values of the hero and those of a »philistine« and

»prosaic« society. The *Bildungsroman* in the High Romantic mode aims at nothing less than the Romantic transformation of society and the substitution of its rationalist and materialist world view — which, poetically speaking, means a transformation of the »novel«-form into a »romance«. In their poetic innovations these texts will, quite often, even surpass those of the fantastic type, as they do not simply escape from the world of modernity but have to actively transform it. »Weak« variants of the *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, will be content with introducing elements of the »romance«-tradition in the novel form, which they leave fundamentally intact. Texts from the late phase of the Romantic *Bildungsroman* tend to return to the novel-tradition, sometimes even tend to converge with the social novel. So the Romantic *Bildungsroman* is the genre where the conflict between the narrative traditions of novel and romance is acted out most clearly — and most productively, as far as poetic innovations are concerned. Of all the Romantic genres of narrations, the *Bildungsroman* is therefore the one which is most deeply related to the narrative revolutions of Modernism.

And what about the genre hardly mentioned in this article: the »artist novel«? What is its relation to the *Bildungsroman*? The genre definition of the »artist novel« (»Künstlerroman«) is but a loose and merely thematic one: any novel in which the hero is an artist (and in which, consequently, art is a central subject) may be called an »artist novel«. This is a fairly broad definition — which is practically useless for the Romantic *Bildungsroman*. To somewhat overstate my point: it is of hardly any importance whether the hero of a Romantic *Bildungsroman* is *explicitly* called an artist (as many are, indeed) or not.

In High Romanticism (and not only there) the artist is considered as the ideal representative of mankind. The key faculty on whose active use the dignity of a human being ultimately depends in Romanticism is the imagination — and art is nothing but the most active and creative use of this faculty. The Romantic anti-type, the »philistine« bourgeois (»Philister«), does not even know that he *has* an imagination. So in one way or the other *all* of the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* in the high Romantic mode are »artists« — and in most of these texts literature and/or art are explicitly discussed as essential elements in the process of character formation. The question to ask is therefore not *whether* the protagonist is an artist but *what sort of* artist he is. A painter? — which may be dangerous, as this medium is closely connected with the sensual world. A musician? — which may be even more fateful, as music is the most spiritual art. Or a poet? — this might be the best choice, as the poet not only assumes a middle position between the painter and the musician but also has poetic devices like irony and humour at his disposal, which enable him to assume a distanced stance towards the antagonisms of life. (For details cf. the chapters by G. Maertz, M. Szegedy-Maszák, and C. Albert.)

It is only in Late Romanticism that the »artist novel« proper comes into existence: When Romantic values can no longer be realized within a hopelessly materialistic and commercialised society the artist, who lives at the margins of the social realm, becomes the only remaining representative of a Romantic existence in the modern world.

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