Theory of the Novel

A Historical Approach

Edited by Michael McKeon

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Contents

Acknowledgments xi
Introduction xiii

Part One
Genre Theory

1. NORTHROP FRYE / From Anatomy of Criticism:
   Four Essays 5

2. E. D. HIRSCH / From Validity in Interpretation 14

3. CLAUDIO GUILLÉN / From Literature as System:
   Essays toward the Theory of Literary History 34

4. JONATHAN CULLER / Toward a Theory of
   Non-Genre Literature 51

5. MARTHE ROBERT / From Origins of the Novel 57

Part Two
The Novel as
Displacement I:
Structuralism

6. WALTER BENJAMIN / The Storyteller 77

7. CLAUDE LÉVI-STERAUSS / From The Savage
   Mind 94 / From The Origin of Table Manners 100 /
   How Myths Die 104 / From The Naked Man 113

8. NORTHROP FRYE / From Anatomy of Criticism:
   Four Essays 122 / From Fables of Identity: Studies in
   Poetic Mythology 131 / From The Secular Scripture:
Franco Moretti

From The Way of the World: The *Bildungsroman* in European Culture

Nothing I had, and yet profusion:
The lust for truth, the pleasure in illusion.
Give back the passions unabated,
That deepest joy, alive with pain,
Love's power and the strength of hatred,
Give back my youth to me again.

*Goethe, Faust*

**ACHILLES, HECTOR, ULYSSES**: the hero of the classical epic is a mature man, an adult. Aeneas, carrying away a father by now too old, and a son still too young, is the perfect embodiment of the symbolic relevance of the "middle" stage of life. This paradigm will last a long time ("Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita . . ."), but with the first enigmatic hero of modern times, it falls apart. According to the text, Hamlet is thirty years old: far from young by Renaissance standards. But our culture, in choosing Hamlet as its first symbolic hero, has "forgotten" his age, or rather has had to alter it, and picture the Prince of Denmark as a young man.

The decisive thrust in this sense was made by Goethe; and it takes shape, symptomatically, precisely in the work that codifies the new paradigm and sees **youth** as the most meaningful part of life: *Wilhelm Meister*. This novel marks simultaneously the birth of the *Bildungsroman* (the form which will dominate or, more precisely, make possible the Golden Century of Western narrative), and of a new hero: Wilhelm Meister, followed by Elizabeth Bennet and Julien Sorel, Rastignac and Frédéric Moreau and Bel-Ami, Waverley and David Copperfield, Renzo Tramaglino, Eugene Onegin, Bazarov, Dorothée Brooke . . .

Youth is both a necessary and sufficient definition of these heroes. *Aeschylus's Orestes* was also young, but his youth was incidental and subordinate to other much more meaningful characteristics—such as being the son of Agamemnon, for instance. But at the end of the eighteenth century the priorities are reversed, and what makes Wilhelm Meister and his successors representative and interesting is, to a large extent, youth as such. Youth, or rather the European novel's numerous versions of youth, becomes for our modern culture the age which holds the "meaning of life": it is the first gift Mephisto offers Faust. In this study I hope to illuminate the causes, features and consequences of this symbolic shift.

I

In "stable communities," that is in status or "traditional" societies, writes Karl Mannheim, "Being Young is a question of biological differentiation." Here, to be young simply means not yet being an adult. Each individual's youth faithfully repeats that of his forebears, introducing him to a role that lives on unchanged: it is a "pre-scribed" youth, which, to quote Mannheim again, knows no "entelechy." It has no culture that distinguishes it and emphasizes its worth. It is, we might say, an "invisible" and "insignificant" youth.

But when status society starts to collapse, the countryside is abandoned for the city, and the world of work changes at an incredible and incessant pace, the colorless and uneventful socialization of "old" youth becomes increasingly implausible: it becomes a problem, one that makes youth itself problematic. Already in Meister's case, "apprenticeship" is no longer the slow and predictable progress toward one's father's work, but rather an uncertain exploration of social space, which the nineteenth century—through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost, "Bohème" and "parvenir"—will underline countless times. It is a necessary exploration: in dismantling the continuity between generations, as is well known, the new and destabilizing forces of capitalism impose a hitherto unknown mobility. But it is also a yearned for exploration, since the selfsame process gives rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an *interiority* not only fuller than before, but also—as Hegel clearly saw, even though he deplored it—perennially dissatisfied and restless.

Mobility and interiority. Modern youth, to be sure, is many other things as well: the growing influence of education, the strengthening of bonds within generations, a new relationship with nature, youth's "spiritualization"—these features are just as important in its "real" development. Yet the *Bildungsroman* discards them as irrelevant, abstracting from "real" youth a "symbolic" one, epitomized, we have said, in mobility and interiority. Why this choice?

Because, I think, at the turn of the eighteenth century much more than just a rethinking of youth was at stake. Virtually without notice, in the dreams and nightmares of the so-called double revolution, Europe plunges into modernity, but without possessing a culture of modernity. If youth, therefore, achieves its symbolic centrality, and the "great narrative" of the *Bildungsroman* comes into being, this is because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much to youth, as to modernity.

The *Bildungsroman* as the "symbolic form" of modernity: for Cassirer, and Panofsky, through such a form "a particular spiritual content [here, a specific image of modernity] is connected to a specific material sign [here, youth] and intimately identified with it." "A specific image of modernity": the image conveyed precisely by the "youthful" attributes of mobility and inner restlessness. Modernity as a bewitching and risky process full of "great expectations" and "lost illusions." Modernity as—in Marx's words—a "permanent revolution" that perceives the experience piled up in tradition as a useless dead-weight, and therefore can no longer feel represented by maturity, and still less by old age.
In this first respect youth is "chosen" as the new epoch's "specific material sign," and it is chosen over the multitude of other possible signs, because of its ability to accentuate modernity's dynamism and instability.^{4} Youth is, so to speak, modernity's "essence," the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past. And, to be sure, it was impossible to cope with the times without acknowledging their revolutionary impetus: a symbolic form incapable of doing so would have been perfectly useless. But if it had been able to do only this, on the other hand, it would have run the risk of destroying itself as form—precisely what happened, according to a long-standing critical tradition, to Goethe's other great attempt at representing modernity: *Faust.*

If, in other words, inner dissatisfaction and mobility make novels such as modernity's "symbolic" of modernity, they also force it to share in the "formlessness" of the new epoch, in its protean elusiveness. To become a "form," youth must be endowed with a very different, almost opposite feature to those already mentioned: the very simple and slightly philistine notion that youth "does not last forever." Youth is brief, or at any rate circumscribed, and this enables, or rather forces the a priori establishment of a formal constraint on the portrayal of modernity. Only by curbing its intrinsically boundless dynamism, only by agreeing to betray to a certain extent its very essence, only thus, it seems, can modernity be represented. Only thus, we may add, can it be "made human"; can it become an integral part of our emotional and intellectual system, instead of the hostile force bombarding it from without with that "excess of stimuli" which—from Simmel to Freud to Benjamin—has always been seen as modernity's most typical threat.^{4}

And yet—dynamism and limits, restlessness and the "sense of an ending": built as it is on such sharp contrasts, the structure of the *Bildungsroman* will of necessity be intrinsically contradictory. A fact which poses extremely interesting problems for aesthetics—the novel as the form "most open to dangers" of the young Lukács—and even more interesting ones for the history of culture. But before discussing these, let us try to retrace the internal logic of this formal contradiction.

II

"Youth does not last forever." What constitutes it as symbolic form is no longer a "spatial" determination, as in the case of Renaissance perspective, but rather a temporal one. This is not surprising, since the nineteenth century, under the pressure of modernity, had first of all to reorganize its conception of change—which too often, from the time of the French Revolution, had appeared as a meaningless and thus threatening reality ("Je n'y comprends rien," wrote De Maistre in 1796, "c'est le grand mot du jour"). This accounts for the centrality of history in nineteenth-century culture and, with Darwin, science as well, and for the centrality of narrative within the domain of literature. Narrative and history, in fact, do not retreat before the onslaught of events, but demonstrate the possibility of giving them meaning and meaning. Furthermore, they suggest that reality's meaning is now to be grasped solely in its historico-diachronic dimension. Not only are there no "meaningless" events; there can now be meaning only through events.

Thus, although there exist countless differences (starting with "stylistic" ones) among the various kinds of *Bildungsroman,* I shall organize this study around *plot differences:* the most pertinent, in my opinion, for capturing the rhetorical and ideological essence of a historico-narrative culture. Plot differencing or, more exactly, differences in the ways in which plot generates meaning. Following basically Lotman's conceptualization, we can express this difference as a variation in the weight of two principles of textual organization: the "classification*" principle and the "transformation*" principle. While both are always present in a narrative work, these two principles usually carry an uneven weight, and are actually inversely proportional: as we shall see, the prevalence of one rhetorical strategy over the other, especially in an extreme form, implies very different value choices and even opposite attitudes to modernity.

When classification is strongest—as in the English "family*" romance*" and in the classical *Bildungsroman*—narrative transformations have meaning insofar as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable—definitive, in both senses this term has in English. This teleological rhetoric—the meaning of events lies in their *finality*—is the narrative equivalent of Hegelian thought, with which it shares a strong normative* judgment* of events acquire meaning when they led to an ending, and one only.

Under the classification principle, in other words, a story is more meaningful the more truly it manages to suppress itself as story. Under the transformation principle—as in the trend represented by Stendhal and Pushkin, or in that from Balzac to Flaubert—the opposite is true: what makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being as open-ended process. Meaning is the result not of a fulfilled teleology, but rather, as for Darwin, of the total rejection of such a solution. The ending, the privileged narrative moment of taxonomic mentality, becomes the most meaningless one here: *Onegin's* destroyed last chapter, Stendhal's insolently arbitrary closures, or the *Comédie Humaine*’s perennially postponed endings are instances of a narrative logic according to which a story's meaning resides precisely in the impossibility of "fixing" it.

The oppositions between the two models can obviously go on ad infinitum. Thus, on the side of classification we have the novel of marriage, seen as the definitive and classifying act par excellence: at the end of the *Bildungsroman*’s development, marriage will even be disembodied into an abstract principle by Eliot's Daniel Deronda who marries not so much a woman, as a rigidly normative culture. On the side of transformations, we have the novel of adultery: a relationship inconceivable within the Anglo-Germanic traditions (where it is either totally absent, or appears as the sinister and merely destructive force of *Eiective Affinities* or *Wuthering Heights*), it becomes here, by contrast, the natural habitat of an existence devoted to instability. And in the end adultery too becomes a disembodied abstraction with Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau who, in perfect parallelism with Daniel Deronda, no longer commits adultery with a woman, but with the immaterial principle of indetermination.

An equally sharp contrast appears when we view these differing narrative rhetorics in terms of the history of ideas. Here, the classical *Bildungsroman* plot posits "happiness" as the highest value, but only to the detriment and
eventual annulment of "freedom"—while Stendhal, for his part, follows just as radically the opposite course. Similarly, Balzac's fascination with mobility and metamorphoses ends up dismantling the very notion of personal identity—whereas in England, the centrality of the latter value generates an equally inevitable repugnance to change.

Moreover, it is clear that the two models express opposite attitudes toward modernity: caged and exercised by the principle of classification, it is exasperated and made hypnotic by that of transformation. And it is especially clear that the full development of the antithesis implies a split in the image of youth itself. Where the classification principle prevails—it is emphasized, as in Goethe and in the English novelists—that youth "must come to an end"—youth is subordinated to the idea of "maturity": like the story, it has meaning only insofar as it leads to a stable and "final" identity. Where the transformation principle prevails and youthful dynamism is emphasized, as in the French novelists, youth cannot or does not want to give way to maturity: the young hero senses in fact in such a "conclusion" a sort of betrayal, which would deprive his youth of its meaning rather than enrich it.

Maturity and youth are therefore inversely proportional: the culture that emphasizes the first devalues the second, and vice versa. At the opposite poles of this split lie Eliot's Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda, and Flaubert's Sentimental Education. In Eliot's novels, the hero is so mature from the very start as to dissociate himself suspiciously from anything connected with youthful restlessness: the "sense of an ending" has suffocated any appeal youth may have had. In Flaubert, on the other hand, Frédéric Moreau is so mesmerized by the potentialities inherent in his youth that he abhors any determination as an intolerable loss of meaning: his prophetic and narcissistic youth, which would like to go on without end, will abolish maturity and collapse overnight into a benumbed old age.

With perfect symmetry, the excessive development of one principle eliminates the opposite one: but in so doing, it is the Bildungsroman itself that disappears—Eliot's and Flaubert's being the last masterpieces of the genre. However paradoxical it may seem, this symbolic form could indeed exist, not despite but by virtue of its contradictory nature. It could exist because within it—within each single work and within the genre as a whole—both principles were simultaneously active, however unbalanced and uneven their strength. It could exist: better still, it had to exist. For the contradiction between conflicting evaluations of modernity and youth, or between opposing values and symbolic relationships, is not a flaw—or perhaps is also a flaw—but it is above all the paradoxical functional principle of a large part of modern culture. Let us recall the values mentioned above: freedom and happiness, identity and change, security and metamorphoses: although antagonistic, they are all equally important for modern Western mentality. Our world calls for their coexistence, however difficult; and it therefore also calls for a cultural mechanism capable of representing, exploring, and testing that coexistence.

A particularly "strong" attempt to control this contradictory coexistence and to "make it work" is to be found, once again, in Faust. Here, amidst the many souls of modern culture—amidst the desire for happiness ("Stop, thou art so beautiful...") and the freedom of streben that "sweeps us ever onward" amidst the irrepressible identity of the protagonist and his countless historical transformations—here Goethe suggests the possibility of an all-embracing synthesis. Yet this synthesis has never managed to dispel our doubts—the doubt that Gretchen's tragedy, and that of Philemon and Baucis, can never be erased; that the bet has been lost; that Faust's salvation is a sham: that synthesis, in other words, is an ideal no longer attainable. And so, in the same decades as Faust, the enormous and unconscious collective enterprise of the Bildungsroman bears witness to a different solution to modern culture's contradictory nature. Far less ambitious than synthesis, this other solution is compromise: which is also, not surprisingly, the novel's most celebrated theme.

An extraordinary symbolic stalemate thereby develops, in which Goethe does not cancel Stendhal, nor Balzac Dickens, nor Flaubert Eliot. Each culture and each individual will have their preferences, as is obvious: but they will never be considered exclusive. In this purgatorial world we do not find—to refer to Lukács' early essay on Kierkegaard—the tragic logic of the "either/or," but rather the more compromising one of the "as well as." And in all likelihood it was precisely this predisposition to compromise that allowed the Bildungsroman to emerge victorious from that veritable struggle for existence between various narrative forms that took place at the turn of the eighteenth century: historical novel and epistolary novel, lyric, allegorical, satirical, "romantic" novel, Künstlerroman... As in Darwin, the fate of these forms hung on their respective "purity": that is to say, the more they remained bound to a rigid, original structure, the more difficult their survival. And vice-versa: the more a form was capable of flexibility and compromise, the better it could prosper in the maestrom without synthesis of modern history. And the most bastard of these forms became—the dominant genre of Western narrative: for the gods of modernity, unlike those of King Lear, do indeed stand up for bastards.

All this compels us to re-examine the current notion of "modern ideology" or "bourgeois culture," or as you like it. The success of the Bildungsroman suggests in fact that the truly central ideologies of our world are not in the least—contrary to widespread certainties; more widespread still, incidentally, in deconstructionist thought—intolerant, normative, monologic, to be wholly submitted to or rejected. Quite the opposite: they are pliant and precarious, "weak" and "impure." When we remember that the Bildungsroman—the symbolic form that is more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization—is also the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world socialization itself consists first of all in the interiorization of contradiction. The next step being not to "solve" the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool for survival.

III

Let us begin with a question: how is it that we have Freudian interpretations of tragedy and myth, of fairy tale and comedy—yet nothing comparable for the novel? For the same reason, I believe, that we have no solid Freudian analysis of youth: because the raison d'être of psychoanalysis lies in breaking up the psyche into its opposing "forces"—whereas youth and the novel have the
opposite task of fusing, or at least bringing together, the conflicting features of individual personality. Because, in other words, psychoanalysis always looks beyond the Ego — whereas the Bildungsroman attempts to build the Ego, and make it the indisputable center of its own structure.

The Ego’s centrality is connected, of course, to the theme of socialization — this being, to a large extent, the “proper functioning” of the Ego thanks to that particularly effective compromise, the Freudian “reality principle.” But this then compels us to question the Bildungsroman’s attitude toward an idea very embarrassing for modern culture — the idea of “normality.” Once again, we may begin with a contrast. As is well known, a large part of eighteenth-century thought — from Freud, let us say, to Foucault — has defined normality against its opposite: against pathology, emargination, repression. Normality is seen not as a meaning-ful, but rather as an unmarked entity. The self-defensive result of a “negation” process, normality’s meaning is to be found outside itself in what it excludes, not in what it includes.

Leaving aside the most elementary form of the Bildungsroman (the English translation of the “insipid” hero — a term which is the culinary equivalent of “unmarked,” and was used by Richardson for Tom Jones and by Scott for Waverley, and which also applies to Jane Eyre and David Copperfield), it is quite clear that the novel has followed a strategy opposed to the one we have described. It has accustomed us to looking at normality from within rather than from the stance of its exceptions; and it has produced a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful as normality. If the Bildungsroman’s initial option is always explicitly anti-heriotic and prosaic — the hero is Wilhelm Meister, not Faust; Julien Sorel and Dorothea Brooke, not Napoleon or Saint Theresa (and so on to Flaubert, and then to Joyce) — these characters are still, though certainly all “normal” in their own ways, far from unmarked or meaningless in themselves.

An internally articulated, interesting and lively normality — normality as the expulsion of all marked features, as a true semantic void. Theoretically, the two concepts are irreconcilable: if one is true, the other is false, and vice versa. Historically, however, this opposition becomes a sort of division of labor: a division of space and time. Normality as “negation,” as Foucault has shown, is the product of a double threat: the crisis of a socio-cultural order, and the violent reorganization of power. Its time is that of crisis and genesis. Its space, surrounded by peculiarly strong social institutions, is the purely negative area of the “enclosed.” Its desire is to be like everyone else and thus to go by unnoticed.

Its literary expression, we may add, is nineteenth-century mass narrative: the literature of states of exception, of extreme ills and extreme remedies. But precisely: mass narrative (which, not by chance, has received ample treatment from Freudian criticism) — not the novel. Only rarely does the novel explore the spatio-temporal confines of the given world: it usually stays “in the middle,” where it discovers, or perhaps creates, the typically modern feeling and enjoyment of “everyday life” and “ordinary administration.” Everyday life: an anthropocentric space where all social activities lose their exacting objectivity and converge in the domain of “personality.” Ordinary administration: a time of “lived experience” and individual growth — a time filled with “opportunities,” but which excludes by definition both the crisis and genesis of a culture.

Just think of the historical course of the Bildungsroman: it originates with Goethe and Jane Austen who, as we shall see, write as if to show that the double revolution of the eighteenth century could have been avoided. It continues with Stendhal’s heroes, who are born “too late” to take part in the revolutionary-Napoleonic epic. It withers away with 1848 in Flaubert’s Sentimental Education (the revolution that was not a revolution) and with the English thirties in Eliot’s Felix Holt and Middlemarch (the “Reforms” that did not keep their promises). It is a constant elusion of historical turning points and breaks: an elusion of tragedy and hence, as Lukács wrote in The Dialectic of Art, of the very idea that societies and individuals acquire their full meaning in a “moment of truth.”

An elusion, we may conclude, of whatever may endanger the Ego’s equilibrium, making its compromises impossible — and a gravitation, in contrast, to those modes of existence that allow the Ego to manifest itself fully. In this sense — and all the more so if we continue to believe that moments and occasions of truth, despite everything, do still exist — the novel must strike us as a weak form. This is indeed the case, and this weakness — which, of course, is ours as well — goes together with the other features we have noted: its contradictory, hybrid and compromising nature. But the point is that such features are also intrinsic to that way of existence — everyday, normal, half-unaware and decidedly unheroic — that Western culture has tried incessantly to protect and expand, and has endowed with an ever-growing significance: till it has entrusted to it what we keep calling, for lack of anything better, the “meaning of life.” And as few things have helped shape this value as much as our novelistic tradition, then the novel’s weakness should strike us perhaps as being far from innocent.

... Bildungsroman. A certain magnetism hovers around the term. It stands out as the most obvious of the (few) reference points available in that irregular expanse we call the “novel.” It occupies a central role in the philosophical investigations of the novel, from Hegel’s Aesthetics to Dilthey to Lukács’s Theory of the Novel. Found in the broad historical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin and Erich Auerbach, it is even discernible in the models of narrative plot constructed by Yuri Lotman. It reappears under various headings (“novel of formation,” “of initiation,” “of education”) in all of the major literary traditions. Even those novels that clearly are not Bildungsroman or novels of formation are perceived by us against this conceptual horizon; so we speak of a “failed initiation” or of a “problematic formation.” Expressions of dubious usefulness, as are all negation definitions; nonetheless they bear witness to the hold of this image on our modes of analysis.

Such semantic hypertrophy is not accidental. Even though the concept of the Bildungsroman has become ever more approximate, it is still clear that we seek to indicate with it one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict
between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization. For two centuries now, Western societies have recognized the individual’s right to choose one’s own ethics and idea of "happiness," to imagine freely and construct one’s personal destiny—rights declared in proclamations and set down in constitutions but that are, as a result, universally realizable, since they obviously give rise to contrasting aspirations. And if a liberal-democratic and capitalist society is without a doubt one that can best "live with" conflict, it is equally true that, as a system of social and political relationships, it too tends to settle into an operational mode that is predictable, regular, "normal." Like all systems, it demands agreement, homogeneity, consensus.

How can the tendency toward individuality, which is the necessary fruit of a culture of self-determination, be made to coexist with the opposing tendency to normality, the offspring, equally inevitable, of the mechanism of socialization? This is the first aspect of the problem, complicated and made more fascinating still by another characteristic of our civilization, which, having always been pervaded by the doctrines of natural rights, cannot concede that socialization is based on a mere compliance with authority. It is not enough that the social order is "legal"; it must also appear symbolically legitimate. It must draw its inspiration from values recognized by society as fundamental, reflect them and encourage them. Or it must at least seem to do so.

Thus it is not sufficient for modern bourgeois society simply to subdue the drives that oppose the standards of "normality." It is also necessary that, as a "free individual," not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as one’s own. One must internalize them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call "consent" or "legitimation." If the Bildungsroman appears to us still today as an essential, pivotal point of our history, this is because it has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equaled again. We will see in fact that here there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification. One’s formation as an individual and for oneself coincides without rifts with one’s social integration as a simple part of a whole. These are two trajectories that nourish one another and in which the painful perception of socialization as Entfaltung, "enunciation" (from which will emerge the immense psychological and narrative problematics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) is still inconceivable. The "comfort of civilization": perhaps the Bildungsroman’s historical meaning can best be summarized in these words.

The classical Bildungsroman as the synthesis that nullifies the previous opposition of Entwicklungsroman (novel of "development," of the subjective unfolding of an individuality) and Erziehungroman (novel of "education," of an objective process, observed from the standpoint of the educator). The classical Bildungsroman as a synthetic form: and yet, as I progressed in my work, I realized that this definition accounts for one aspect only of the works under examination. To use an analogy, it is as if the structure of the classical Bildungsroman consisted of two large planes partially superimposed. The common area is the domain of synthesis: it occupies the center of the figure, but not the whole, and neither, perhaps, is it meant to. More than depicting the two opposing tensions of modern existence as coextensive and isomorphic, the synthetic vocation of the classical Bildungsroman presents them as complementary. In organic balance, certainly, but also—or better yet, precisely because—they are profoundly different and distant.

If the area of synthesis is then the starting-point of our analysis, the second and third sections of this chapter will be devoted to quite different phenomena. In the second I will deal with those aspects of narrative structure that emphasize individual "happiness": the space of "aesthetic" harmony, of the free and open construction of personality, of narrative juss. In the third section, the other side of all this: the world of social vigilance, of "organic" inequalities, of necessity, of the fabula.

Different values, ascribed to different areas of existence, and governed by different perceptual modes and narrative mechanisms. Different, and distributed with a masterful asymmetry: so captivating as to seem almost deceitful. Because the values and experiences that gratify the sense of individuality are always in the forefront; flaunted, bright, full, they constitute the main part of the narration: the juss. But there is no juss without a fabula, and even though the former may be a thousand times more fascinating, appearing to be the "dominant" aspect of the work, the latter—essential, logical, wholly self-contained—remains in any case its "determinant" element: less visible, but far more solid.

Beyond organicistic synthesis, what appears here is that indelible image of bourgeois thought—exchange. You would like such and such values to be realized?—fine, but then you must also accept these others, for without them the former cannot exist. An exchange, and one in which something is gained and something is lost. Precisely what we shall try to establish.

Notes

1. For reasons given in the first chapter, I shall use the term "classical Bildungsroman," when necessary, to distinguish the narrative model created by Goethe and Austen from the Bildungsroman genre as a whole. "Novel of formation" or perhaps the more precise "novel of socialization" are other possible generic labels, which have not been used however to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Let me also justify, in passing, a double exclusion that would not have displeased General De Gaulle: that of the Russian novel (represented here only by authors closely linked to the Western European tradition, such as Pushkin and Turgenev), and the American novel (missing completely). As for Russia, this is due to the persistence of a marked religious dimension (be it the "politicco-national" version of War and Peace, or Dostoievsky’s ethico-metaphysical one), which attaches meaning to individual existence in ways unthinkable in the fully secularized universe of the Western European Bildungsroman. The same is true for American narrative, where, in addition, "nature" retains a symbolic value alien to the essentially urban thematics of the European novel; and where the hero’s decisive experience, unlike in Europe, is not an encounter with the "unknown," but with an "alien"—usually an Indian or a Black.

3. Especially striking has been the constant antipathy between School and the Novel: School condemns novel reading as having bad effects on students—and the novel, for its part, requires its hero to leave his studies early on, and treats school as a useless interlude that can be done without.

This opposition indicates the dual nature of modern socialization: an objective-specialistic process aimed at “functional integration” into the social order, which is the task of institutionalized education—and a subjective-generic process aimed at the symbolic legitimation of the social order, which is the task of literature. In other words: institutions such as schools act to socialize behavior, regardless of individual belief (one must *know one’s lesson*—not believe in its truth). Institutions such as the novel aim at socializing what *The Theory of the Novel* calls our “soul”: they see to that more or less conscious “consent” that guarantees continuity between individual existence and social structure. The enigmatic success of the *Teufelsbrück* in modern culture—which surely has no fear of hell—is a sort of allegory of this second process: not only does modern man have a soul, but he can sell it, and there are always bidders.


5. This also explains the *Bildungsroman*’s fondness for middle-class heroes: while the limits of the social spectrum usually remain relatively stable (conditions of extreme wealth and extreme poverty tend to change slowly), “in the middle” anything can happen—each individual can “make it” or “be broken” on his own, and life starts to resemble a novel. What makes the middle class an ideal sounding board of modernity is thus the co-presence of hope and disillusion: the very opposite of the Anglo-Saxon “middle-class theory of the novel,” which explains the link between the novel and the middle class in terms of the “rise” and social consolidation of the latter. When this actually does take place—with the great bureaucratization of the past hundred years—it means the end of the Western novel in its original form: its two prime subversors, Kafka and Joyce, have very vividly portrayed, among other things, the metamorphosis of the middle class in this century.

6. On the thematic level we see this process of “regularization” in the novelistic hero’s socialization. A young, intelligent, single male newly arrived in the city, this socially mobile and undefined hero embodies modernity’s most tempestuous aspects: that is why it is precisely him, and not his more faded companions, who must be given “form”—even if it means, as is often the case, weakening his more lively features.

7. The four principal types of *Bildungsroman* highlight different problematic aspects of the formation of the Ego. The English *Bildungsroman* typically emphasizes the preliminary fear of the outside world as a menace for individual identity, while the Goethian ideal of harmony as a delicate compromise of heterogeneous commitments focuses on the Ego’s internal dynamics. The French novelists take a more indirect course, which downplays the Ego proper, and emphasizes the dangers of an excessively forceful Super-Ego or Id, embodied in Stendhalian “idea of duty” and Balzacian “passion.” In the latter instances—where, at the “story” level, the Ego is much weaker than in the former—the “discourse” level symptomatically becomes more important, and the narrator’s *déesse* restores that equilibrium which the hero no longer possesses.

8. “Everyday life,” “ordinary administration,” “anthropocentrism,” “personality,” “experience,” “opportunity”: each of these terms will be discussed at length in the first chapter, since we find them most fully and coherently expressed in the classical *Bildungsroman*. Although much remains to be done here, I have nonetheless plunged for-ward, hoping to have contributed somewhat to an area of study extremely interesting and rich in possibilities.

9. Dostoevsky, *precisely because* he is a novelist of final truths and of tragic and exceptional circumstances—as Bakhtin himself has noted more than once—never wrote a *Bildungsroman*. And Adorno, who as always insisted on art’s vocation to truth, has never shown much interest in the *Bildungsroman*, or in the novel in general.

10. We should not be surprised then if, in tracing the various narrative rhetorics of nineteenth-century historiography in *Metahistory*, Hayden White mentions comedy, romance, satire and tragedy—but never the novel. Although the novel and historiography flourish during the same period, the former creates in fact—with “everyday life” and “ordinary administration”—a sort of *parallel temporality* which nineteenth-century historiography does not perceive as truly historical. The history of mentality and of the *longue durée* of course changed all that, so that the object, and at times even the categories of much contemporary historiography reveal strong similarities to those of the novel.