Chapter 2

The Idea of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman*

Having examined Goethe's treatment of the *Bildungsroman*, I now want to place it in relation to the German tradition and, my main concern, to the Anglo-American. As I mentioned in my Prologue, the idea of *Bildung* was conceived by the late-eighteenth-century Weimar classicists, and in the following century was adopted in England by writers such as Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, and Pater, and in America by Emerson, Thoreau, and other transcendentalists—all romantics or heirs of romanticism—who helped create the climate of concepts and assumptions that novelists in their day and after worked within. Germans, Englishmen, and Americans sustained the idea of *Bildung* in different ways. Very simply, the Germans tended to focus attention on the individual's cultivation, while neglecting responsibility for the national culture. The English tried, with marked success, to be attentive toward both: one's development as an *I* depended not only on the richness of one's inner life, but on the affiliations one had with the people—family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers—who constituted and shared one's social environment. The American note, which I won't sound till my chapters on James and Santayana, was struck somewhere between the German and the English. Nineteenth-century Americans could be very civically responsible, but material conditions—from the greater privacy afforded people within a still largely rural or small town population, to the cushion provided by widely shared wealth—favored a Germanic sort of profundity about the individual self.

This is highlighted in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* or its serio-parodic successor, Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), each a magnificent inquiry into how a young man's sensibility spirals through a sequence of impulses, passions, and dialectically opposed philosophies till a well-articulated but still changeable ego is formed. Other people are essential to the hero's growth, and it is a tribute to Goethe's or Mann's skill at characterization that we feel as complexly sympathetic toward them as we do. Still, as I have noted in Clavdia Chauchat's remark, these other people are plainly subordinate: their job is to water, fertilize, and prune the growing "plant," the *Bildungsheld*, whose nursery is the world. Take, on the other hand, the hero of a typical English

Bildungsroman, Thackeray's *Pendennis* or Dickens's *David Copperfield*, who is usually presented quite otherwise. He is decidedly part of his social milieu, and his social milieu is part of him. Intersubjectivity—life with, for, and through other people—is an inextinguishable determinant of his identity, and the question of his responsibility to them isn't sidestepped. The *Bildungsroman* in England has been an intensification of what Q. D. Leavis called the novel of family life, works such as *Clarissa*, *Mansfield Park*, or *Middlemarch*, which ground individuals' destinies in complicated domestic settings, and which she regarded as a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon achievement.[1] Finally, a representative mid-nineteenth-century American novel of family life such as Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* is known for its almost morbid interiority, while James's *Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Princess Casamassima*, and *What Maisie Knew* (to cite his best novels combining themes of family life and an individual's growing up) manage to present a complex interiority without the morbidity, while aspiring to but never achieving the dense exteriority, the thick description of social setting that Thackeray and Dickens were famous for. Santayana's *The Last Puritan*, as we will see, leans still more toward Germanic inwardness, though with an English-inspired chariness about what he called "the egoism of German philosophy."

That phrase comes from the vigorous discussion, undeservedly neglected, conducted by Santayana and the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) during and after World War I, when intellectuals on both sides went behind the military conflict to analyze the philosophical contradictions between German and Anglo-American (indeed Western European) ways of thinking. The discussion vividly situates the English idea of *Bildung* in relation to the German, and from it one can draw appropriate inferences about any distinctly American idea. Here then is the order of this chapter's topics:

(1) Troeltsch and Santayana; then (taking a step backward)
(2) the development of the specifically German idea of *Bildung*, growing out of the Reformation, in Schiller's *Aesthetic Education*;
(3) Carlyle's introduction of the German idea into English thought;
(4) Mill, Arnold, and Pater's appropriations of the idea, which helped establish the climate of opinion the novelists worked within; and
(5) a definition of the *Bildungsroman* as such, which grew out of Goethe's novel.

Obviously, I have thought it best to begin with Goethe's novel before proceeding to the ideas that fed into and grew out of it. After this chapter, in any case, we will have enough philosophy to appreciate the achievements of the English and American novelists with whom I feel a stronger affinity.

Troeltsch and Santayana

Professor of philosophy and civilization at Berlin from 1915 till his death, Troeltsch wanted to know why the war had happened; to find out, he wrote in 1922 a short history of the idea of natural law, which can also be read as a history of *Bildung*. He argues

that the balanced medieval emphases on God-given natural rights and duties—on what the state owed to individuals, and on what individuals owed to the state—gave way, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, to an increasingly singular emphasis on natural rights, from then on the school of natural law as such. "Enough about *you*," the new man said to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, "let's talk about *me*!" Leave people alone, contract-theorists such as John Locke and Adam Smith eventually insisted, and they will simply pursue their self-interest, solving (in Troeltsch's phrase) "every problem rationally by the standard of utility,"[2] whereby the aggregated good of all will both be created by, and will guarantee, the good of each. Of course the hidden hand that would bring about this general happiness was sometimes very hidden indeed, and in late-eighteenth-century Germany there was a philosophical revolt, particularly in the works of Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and their fellow historicists. Man in the abstract—the *homo economicus* of Locke or Smith's vision—could have no natural rights or duties. Only concrete, flesh-and-blood individuals can have such things, and always in their own way, for flesh-and-blood individuals are fundamentally different from one another, depending on which "organic" group, which nation state, they belong to. God reveals Himself not to a generalized humanity, but piecemeal, each community expressing its mind (*Gemeingeist* or *Volksgeist*) through its inspired leaders, and each struggling against all the others in a war to glorify His infinite diversity, His own psychomachia. The hegemonic torch would be passed, over the years, from reluctant player to eager player, England to France, France to Germany, and so on. Talking about *me* was all right, as long as it was incorporated into talk about *us*, with the *us* defined racially, ethnically, and culturally over against *them*—who naturally from their own perspective regard *us* as *them*.

In Germany, the political circumstances for the evolution of these historicist themes were unfavorable. Given the return to "the old enlightened despotism" after 1815, the failure of democratic revolution in 1848, and then the relentless work of national unification, German thought had no chance for the free, unprejudiced dialectic that might have corrected and purified its principles by experiment. The romantic idealism of Herder finally sank into the political realism of Bismarck, "the conception of a wealth of unique National Minds turn[ing]," in Troeltsch's words, "into a feeling of contempt for the idea of Universal Humanity" (214). Today we recognize this debasement of Herder's relish for cultural diversity into the ethnocentrisms that would subdivide America if they could, and that are subdividing, what in innocent phrase we used to call the comity of nations, into Samuel Huntington's clashing civilizations. But in the eighteenth-century historicists' day, Troeltsch helps us remember, the romantic stress on the individuality of the person was a genuine moral advance beyond the homogenization of people according to religious confession, social position, family or "birth," or (among philosophers) an abstract notion of the human being—just as, in Herder, the stress on the individuality of the community was "surely something richer and more living . . . than any conception of 'contracts' and 'controls' intended to secure a common diffusion of prosperity" (219).

Yet in practice the ethics of German romanticism, in its own variation on a Lutheran theme, subordinated the individual's needs and rights to those of the community (there was no German counterpart to Robinson Crusoe) and confined the blessings of community to Germany alone—partly, as Mann suggested, because of her geographic,

cultural "in the middle" status between a rationalist French ethos on one side, and a mystic Polish–Russian ethos on the other. Thus when German writers thought of the individual's self-cultivation, it was usually of its happening in relative isolation: his duty was to realize that portion of godhead that lay within him, with little emphasis on his fellow Germans' claims, and a great deal of emphasis on non-Germans' otherness. But what if others started pushing *their* claims, and political life, on the international stage at least, became unavoidable? Then the state would do the individual's thinking for him, and tell him what to do.[3] Thus, with ample glosses by me, we have Troeltsch's hypothesis—the war had happened because in Germany *I* and *we* were always finally German, and because the *we* hadn't developed democratic institutions.

Santayana's "English Liberty in America," the final chapter of *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1920), extends a thesis already found in his remarkable wartime polemic, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916), and anticipates and fills out Troeltsch's history at many points. According to Santayana, because the Weimar humanists had nothing more than a toy state to administer, they were driven inward to the things of the mind. Their successors were more perversely solipsistic: they brooded on their a priori ideas about good organic communities and, given access to large areas of Europe and other continents, they tried to impose those ideas upon them, regardless of what people there might think. "Liberty" after all signified, to these German transcendentalists, being forced to be free—in a mold of the perfect state as fashioned by a heroic leader. That isn't how the English have practiced politics. Their idea of liberty is that everyone should give in a little and, knowing that competing groups in fact have many compatible interests, should go along with the majority vote. "It makes impossible," Santayana contends, "the sort of liberty for which the Spartans died at Thermopylae, or the Christian martyrs in the arena, or the Protestant reformers at the stake"—for these died out of a refusal to cooperate, "to lead the life dear or at least customary to other men."[4] Like these martyrs, German thinkers have been fanatically self-referential, at "liberty" to be themselves forever, and summoning others either to be free in the same way, or to be liquidated.[5] Viable politics, as Santayana and Troeltsch—meaning *democratic* politics—both contend, requires persons and communities to give up lost causes, however dear, and to negotiate the compromises that they and their opponents can accept. If Germany for so long lacked a viable politics, it was because her writers were excessively bound to their own egos, and this, to complete the circle, because the communities they lived in were excessively bound to their governing nobilities and their small territories. It was under such conditions fairly easy to pretend that other people and places did not matter, or even exist.

Thus the development of the theory of *Bildung* in Germany remained incomplete till Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, where Naphta, the death-loving Jesuit–Communist, may always win the arguments, but where Settembrini, the life-loving republican, "means well, means better"—an object lesson for the Weimar Republic in the 1920s that didn't, in that decade, take deep enough root. The practice of *Bildung* went better in West Germany after the destruction of the Nazi Reich, and since the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification, it has made progress in former East Germany too. No one would accuse Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, or Siegfried Lenz (Christa Wolf is another matter) of neglecting either sort of cultivation. The point however is that these recent writers are playing—that Goethe himself was already playing—catch-up.

In England and, Santayana believed, in America, the concept of *Bildung*, thanks to a more tolerant political climate, has enjoyed a fuller development, in both theory and practice. Novelists from Dickens to Forster and Lawrence to Santayana himself saw, more responsibly than most of their German counterparts, that the self would grow up only at the moment it came to terms with the demands of other people—with the exigencies of marriage, of vocation, and of socioeconomic realities. If these novelists still to some extent evaded the exigencies of political commitment, it is because the liberalism that made them open to other people made them chary—not always but most of the time—of absolute ideas, which, they feared, might be *imposed* on those other people. Besides, England and America have, not always but most of the time, enjoyed the benefits of a liberally open market economy, on which political freedoms, and the general absence of demands for absolute life-and-death political commitment, really depend. The politically exigent, in short, has with us English and Americans often kept itself in abeyance, freeing us for more personalistic pursuits. That is one reason why we are, politically, often asleep at the switch, but we are nonetheless sufficiently socialized to wake up and recover.

From the Reformers to Schiller

The German Romantics' emphasis, clearly shared by the Anglo-American tradition, on "personalistic pursuits"—on the *duty* to realize our individual uniqueness—can be traced back to the Reformation. Medieval philosophers believed that a person's work, indeed his very identity, was divinely sanctioned, inasmuch as the hierarchy of jobs and stations was a manifestation of God's will. It was considered impious to stir from one's God-given niche. While Martin Luther generally shared this presumption, he introduced a notion that effectually overturned the tables in the medieval temple: he said that an active life in the marketplace pleased God more than a passive one in the monastery, and was accordingly an immediate, positive means of salvation. Hustling in the marketplace created new fortunes, while not-hustling ruined old ones, and the resulting shifts in status and political power made people wonder whether their social niches were God-given after all. Hence the equivocations of the English reformers. Emphasizing the past tense, they translated I Cor. 7:20 as "Let every man abide in the same calling to which he was called," but in the Prayer Book's catechism they emphasized the future: "My duty towards my neighbour is . . . to submit myself to all my governours . . . and masters . . . and do my duty in that state of life, unto which it *shall* please God to call me" (my italics). That "shall" suggests what would become increasingly commonplace by the nineteenth century, and had been implicitly acted on since the seventeenth at least, namely the understanding that the station one was born to was only the beginning; the station God *would* call one to depended on one's own talents and perseverance. One's father might be a cooper, but one might at age 30 find oneself an agent for the sherry importer who always bought father's casks, and at 40 an independent importer, opulent enough to endow a school or hospital, and so on. It was evidently not enough to say, with Luther, that worldly work was a means to salvation. One must *listen*, as Calvin said, for one's call, attending to intellect,

sensibility, and physical prowess, to see where one's best, most profitable work lay. And this, not primarily for the sake of material aggrandizement, but to demonstrate that one was of the elect. God after all would not allow his saints to fail in the world, although troublingly He could, to test them, allow some of the nonelect to succeed. Besides, a saint had the duty of cultivating those capacities God had endowed him with, a task impossible if he chose the wrong work—coals for Newcastle instead of sherry for Hull. Just as important could be his choice of mate, with whom he might pray, read the scriptures, rear children according to the Commandments, and of course keep the family business sailing boldly on, an outward sign of inward grace. In short, the Protestant youth had some decisions to make.

All the Weimar humanists did was to widen the problem: one had to select not only a vocation and a mate, but an ideological and ethical point of view. This was something that the premodern man of the Catholic and then the early Protestant consensus had comfortably inherited from his elders and betters, his parents and teachers. It was the modern man's anxious opportunity to find it out—to think it through—for himself. This anxious opportunity was the later, secular upshot of Protestantism: what Luther, and Joan of Arc for that matter, had said about the individual's relation to God, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Schiller said about the individual's relation to everything. It was first and last his or her own business.[6] Between first and last a great many intersubjective factors must be dealt with, of course. But that was something Weimar had to wait for Goethe to insist on.

The supreme Weimar meditation on *Bildung* is Schiller's 1793 work, *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*). It not only focuses the implications of one's duty to realize an innate individuality; it also projects a history of and a model for such realization that would influence Goethe and the English novelists who came after. The Terror in France had persuaded Schiller that men could not solve the political problem until they had solved the aesthetic—until, in his transcendental idealist terms, they had clarified their sense of the Beautiful, and of the Good and the True that the Beautiful subsumes. This educational project would be less intellective than emotive: it was men's enervated, selfish, and obtuse feelings that, once recharged and ethically sensitized, needed to be integrated again with the rational faculties. Modern Europeans would find their best models for such an integration among the ancient Greeks. Schiller imagines that among *them* "sense and intellect" were cooperatively and equally alive, each person manifesting in large measure the potentialities of the species. The Greek citizen did so many things well—from gymnastics to music, from fighting to reciting Homer, from amateurishly practicing an art or craft to patronizing those who were truly good at it. Among "us Moderns," however, each person seems reduced to one "stunted" specialty—the merchant, the soldier, the singer, who is that and nothing else. Yes, one must pay for scientific, economic, and intellectual advancement: Newton didn't have time to be a poet as well as a mathematician (and when he tried to theologize, played the fool); Kant could not have written his critiques if he hadn't narrowed his mind to abstractions, and left concretions to somebody else.

However, what has been good for the race has been bad for the individual, and something might yet be done to better his or her life. The Good, the True, and the crowningly Beautiful: these reside in individual lives or, for practical purposes, nowhere

at all. And while we must be thankful for the benefits of specialization, which have brought us from the Chaldeans and Thales to Newton and Kant, it is now, Schiller says, "open to us to restore by means of a higher Art the totality of our nature which the arts themselves [the specializations of intelligence] have destroyed."[7] This "higher Art," as Arnold would later argue in England, is culture. The Schiller–Arnold thesis is straightforward: brainwork can—if the brain is properly, aesthetically educated—put back together the Humpty-Dumpty wholeness that brainwork has broken. All we have to do is entrust the work not to the king's horses and men, but to the nation's clerisy—its teachers, preachers, writers, and public intellectuals.

But of course not all the young broken Humpty Dumpties are the same. Schiller indicates two roads for the desiderated acculturation—a high one for the few, a low one for everybody else. The high one is for those with potential to become artists and connoisseurs, the people who create and contemplate the beautiful forms that, in their regulated grace and elegance, are above mean considerations of usefulness, money, or duty. As Schiller famously puts it, man "*is only fully a human being when he plays*" (107), though mythically it is the gods alone who, in their "*idleness and indifferency*," can play without ceasing. This *homo ludens* conceit will do very well for fastidious *Bildungshelden* like Joyce's young artist and Santayana's young mystic, who seem specially elected to "play" at thinking, forming, or writing from a very early age, either rapidly compassing or blithely skipping the "work" less gifted tyros have to perform. For these less gifted tyros, Schiller marks a low but broad and perfectly respectable road that recapitulates the three stages gone through, ideally, by the race as a whole. First is the sensuous stage, where man is mostly intent on material provision, but where he does have the laws of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful written on his heart—or, as we would say, genetically coded in his unconscious. Second is the rational stage, in which he becomes *aware* of these laws, and his intellectual character awakens—conscious of distinctions between good and evil, true and false, beautiful and ugly. In the sensuous stage, nature has led him automatically from want to satisfaction to new want. In the rational stage, "the hand of *Nature* is withdrawn from him," and he becomes free to choose what he will do (137). At the moment he *knows* he is free, he enters the third, the aesthetic stage. It subsumes the other two, since to educate him for Beauty is also to educate him for physical health and for intellectual and moral understanding. This, because physical health and intellectual and moral understanding are, well, *beautiful* in ways comparable to a song, a poem, or a statue being beautiful. Cultivating "the whole complex of our sensual and spiritual powers in the greatest possible harmony," Schiller insists, the aesthetic individual achieves the comely *Humanitätsideal* that was the ideological center of Weimar humanism (141).

This third stage of the low road takes ordinary people up into the rarefied air where the playful artist and his audience spend much of their time, and by implication makes them capable, in a leisure hour, to join that audience—see a play, look at a picture, read a book—and even, dilettantishly but harmlessly, to dabble at acting, painting, writing. The modern European may not be able to develop himself as fully and harmoniously as the Greeks, but he is still their heir, in his civilized condition free to rise above the search for animal comforts and to delight in appearance, ornament, and play for their own sakes—not to deceive anyone, but for the sheer joy of disjoining and recombining the stuff of nature. And like Wilhelm, he may do this without

needing to be a professional painter or a playwright, a scientist or an engineer. The everyday social world, where people have to get along with each other, is itself a sphere for creative engagement, whether on the notable occasions of writing constitutions, as the American founders had recently done, or in the quotidian process of developing manners. Like Molière's Philinte, in *The Misanthrope*, defending polite "*aesthetic semblance*" against the uncouth criticisms of Alceste, Schiller reminds the boor within us that

> Only a stranger to polite society . . . will take the protestations of courtesy, which are common form, for tokens of personal regard, and when deceived complain of dissimulation. But only a bungler in polite society will, for the sake of courtesy, call deceit to his aid, and produce flattery in order to please. (199–201)

The "aesthetic" burgher needs to cultivate the social graces quite as the troglodyte cultivated ornament and dance: he must be happy no longer in what he *owns*, though having "things" is necessary, but in what he *is* (211). What he *is* can be as pleasing as the arts he contemplates. Gentling and invigorating by turns, those arts can still transform the Philistine into the aesthete, just as, through their manifold depictions of chivalry, they once transformed the robbing and pillaging barbarian into a knight—"the sword of the victor spar[ing] the disarmed foe, and a friendly hearth send[ing] forth welcoming smoke to greet the stranger on that dread shore where of old only murder lay in wait for him" (213–15). We are, to a great extent, what we are conditioned to be: the chivalric epic now and then turning berserkers into knights, the sentimental novel turning marriages of convenience into love matches, and so on—just as morally debasing art, which we usually call not art but pornography or propaganda, can turn amorists into onanists, the religious into terrorists.

That Schiller was joined in this project of morally uplifting art education by Wieland, Herder, Humboldt, and Goethe, shows that burgher-bred intellectuals were becoming conscious of their own importance, wishing to pursue aesthetic ends previously reserved for the nobility. On the ground, in other words, they not only aspired to be creative artists: they wanted to be connoisseurs and critics, and to speak, dress, dance, and converse like cultivated men, combining what the English Lord Chesterfield called "the graces" into a beau ideal, the gentleman. This was an advance beyond the ambitions of the eighteenth-century English middle class, at least as reflected in their novels. The readers of Defoe, Richardson, Tobias Smollett, Fielding, and the rest most frequently left the Chesterfieldian program to the lords and lordolators. For themselves, as for Robinson Crusoe, it was enough to produce things and turn a profit, or like Tom Jones, to live adventuresome, energetic, and finally morally upright lives. Milton's earlier injunction to make their lives like a poem, in which all their pursuits would be woven into a harmoniously colored, symmetrically patterned cloth, seemed to them frivolous—a typically impractical poetic fancy. But it was hardly frivolous to Schiller and his implied audience. Their lives, like Milton's, *could* be poems. To Goethe, the *Aesthetic Education* was like a call for a fictional portrait of such a poetic life, a projective experiment to see how far, under modern conditions, a promising youth might go toward putting his several parts all together. Hence, as we have seen, *Wilhelm Meister*, which he began seriously to revise just as Schiller's book came out.

Translation into English: Carlyle and His Contemporaries

Goethe's novel having been introduced to English readers by Carlyle's 1824 translation, it was reissued in America in 1865 and reviewed, as noted, by the young Henry James: "It might almost be called a treatise on moral economy,—a work intended to show how the experience of life may least be wasted, and best be turned to account. This fact gives it a seriousness which is almost sublime."[8] To compress the story of the English appropriation of Goethe's work is to acknowledge the Victorians' sense of their belatedness vis-à-vis both him and his cherished Greeks, and to underscore, for all that, the Victorians' convictions about the importance of such a sublime "treatise on moral economy." One could become *Il Ponderoso* at this point and do a Harold Bloom description of Victorian sons wrestling with—misreading, appropriating, and overcoming—their great precursor, whom Arnold called "Physician of the iron age." But one has no real need of *that*. The Victorians were themselves pretty clear about what they were up against with this Teutonic immortal, and we can follow them in their own terms.

Carlyle translated *Lehrjahre* as "apprenticeship" rather than the more expressive but vulgar "trampship," a Scots term for the journeying wild-oats time of youth before the stay-at-home productive time of adulthood.[9] This hesitation over the title was in fact part of a deeper uneasiness about the book's value. For one thing, it did not correspond to what he and his wife Jane Welsh, along with most of their contemporaries in the 1820s, thought a novel should be: of sentimental love interest it had none, and of pathos little. More damning in Welsh and Carlyle's eyes, however, was the presentation of Bohemian sexual activity—the several hoppings into bed and the unmarried pregnancies that sometimes follow—which we now would call nothing more than frank, but which they, as much as William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey, considered profligate and bestial: all these "players and libidinous actresses," Carlyle wailed, rendered in "floods of insipidity, which even I would not have written for the world."[10] On the other hand, "There are touches of the very highest most etherial genius in it," which make him want to "fall down and worship" the novelist: he may be "the greatest ass" in three centuries, but he is also "the greatest genius" in one.

Carlyle's public expressions, to be sure, were straightforwardly reverent: Goethe had after all saved him from the cultivated, indolent despair of the Werther, the Everlasting-Naysayer, inside himself. "For I was once an Unbeliever," he wrote to Goethe, "not in Religion only, but in all the Mercy and Beauty of which it is the symbol." So alienated and despairing had he been, "that Faust's wild *curse* seemed the only fit greeting for human life, and his passionate *Fluch von allen der Gedult!* [*sic*] was spoken from my very inmost heart" (4.248). It was *Wilhelm Meister* that had saved him, in an epiphany he was to recall half a century later:

> I had at length, after some repulsions, got into the heart of *Wilhelm Meister*, and eagerly read it through;—my sally out, after finishing, along the vacant streets of Edinburgh (a windless, Scotch-misty Sunday night) is still vivid to me: "Grand, surely, harmoniously built together, far-seeing, wise and true: when, for many years, or almost in my life before, have I read such a Book?"[11]

Carlyle had had a metaphysical problem. Goethe's novel taught him, in effect, to get over it: what mattered was its idea of *Bildung*, the ethical assertion of the individual's capacity to shape some part of his own life. Taking Goethe at his word, Carlyle turned his back on his metaphysical anxieties and, very much on his own hook in works such as *Sartor Resartus* and *Past and Present*, he told his countrymen to do the same. Then he told them to get to work: believe in Spirit, disbelieve in Mammon, and proceed with the matter-transforming task that it is the essence of Spirit to perform. As he told William Allingham in 1877, Goethe had shown him "that the true things in Christianity survived and were eternally true; [he had] pointed out to me the real nature of life and things."[12] Not that Goethe would have accepted Carlyle's version of essential Christianity and "the real nature of life and things," his dismissal of "happiness" in favor of a spiritual clarity, or his "Worship of Sorrow," once practiced under "the Cross of Christ" but now looking for a different symbol. Goethe's approach to life was rigorous yet at bottom eudaemonistic. True, the *Wanderjahre* does give reverence for Christ-like Sorrow a place in its Pedagogic Utopia's religious instruction, but it is an exclusively small place, and Carlyle's excessive fondness for it, like the Puritanic, self-annihilating emphasis he gives to Goethe's *Entsagung* (renunciation), is an instance of a critic straining from an author what he needs—or what he can.[13]

A Scot of Carlyle's background was almost bound to find a soul-saving message in Goethe, just as an Englishman of Arnold's background was bound to find a prescription for the diseased psyche. But hadn't Heinrich Heine pertly said that "When the spirit was denied existence here in France, it emigrated, as it were, to Germany and there denied the existence of matter"?[14] It was almost enough for Carlyle that, in this sense, Goethe was a proper German. Carlyle was blamelessly unable to follow all the arguments of Kant and the transcendentalists, but he could tell that the German romantics knew, first, that though the medieval "divinities and demons, the witches, spectres, and fairies, are vanished from the world, never again to be recalled . . . the Imagination which created these still lives, and will for ever live in men's soul"; and second, that the burden of imagination is henceforth to create *new* "angels and demons . . . of another and more cunning fashion than those that subdued us" in old time. Earlier idealizations decay, but fresh ones can be invented. Whether he knew it or not, Goethe had effectually begun this remythifying. He had, to switch to Carlyle's best-known trope, woven some of the new philosophical clothes people required, now that their Judeo-Christian fashions (to say nothing of the thin stuff spun by what he called the logic mills of the eighteenth century) no longer fit their sensibilities. And the style of the new clothes? Carlyle recommends that we look directly to Goethe's own well-rounded development, an embodiment of successful *Bildung*. To be sure, he specialized (as we have noted) in writing literary German instead of pursuing painting or botany, but considering how many *kinds* of literary production came from him, it is "an obvious cavil" to suggest that he ought to have concentrated only on lyric poetry or travel literature, in order to gain greater perfection of form, and thus greater fame. Goethe knew "that intellectual *artisanship*, however wondered at, is less desirable than intellectual *manhood*."[15]

Carlyle's mode of praise—"wisdom" is the recurring word—became standard among the Victorians who followed him in admiring Goethe, much to the annoyance of many post-Victorians who have thought "wisdom" boring. But Carlyle's sentences,

if we pierce through their rhetorical *sfumato*, make Goethe's wisdom the reverse of boring:

> This is the true Rest of man; no stunted unbelieving callousness, no reckless surrender to blind Force, no opiate delusion; but the harmonious adjustment of Necessity and Accident, of what is changeable and what is unchangeable in our destiny; the calm supremacy of the spirit over its circumstances; the dim aim of every-human soul, the full attainment of only a chosen few. ("Goethe," 1.24–25)

This may be a falsification, but if we slow down to weigh each phrase, we will begin to understand that Carlyle's portrait is less distorted than those sketched by Wordsworth, Francis Jeffrey, or De Quincey, who when his translation of *Wilhelm Meister* came out jeered at that low-minded kraut over in Weimar.[16] What Carlyle grasps is Goethe's conjoining of humanism and pessimism, and he is faithfully paraphrasing nodal passages in the novel, particularly the one in which, as we have seen, the First Stranger rebukes Wilhelm's fatalism (1.97–98). Goethe displayed a serene belief in free will that appealed to Carlyle, who had lost his old religious faith. It was all right, Goethe seemed to say, in a voice that carried its own divinity:

> He knows the good, and loves it; he knows the bad and hateful, and rejects it; but in neither case with violence: his love is calm and active; his rejection is implied, rather than pronounced; meek and gentle, though we see that it is thorough, and never to be revoked. ("Goethe," 1.27)

Like God or Shakespeare, Goethe is "a builder-up"—not, like Mephistopheles or Voltaire, a "destroyer."

Godlike writers aren't to everyone's taste, and for every Carlyle, Arnold, Lewes, or James there was in the Victorian age a denying Wordsworth, De Quincey, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, or Max Beerbohm—all of whose dissatisfaction was summed up by Henry Sidgwick when a German visitor remarked that in English there was no word quite corresponding to "*Gelehrte*": "Oh yes there is. We call it 'prig.'"[17] Decidedly humorous but really just an excuse not to do one's homework. To appreciate Goethe, the English would have to overcome their aversion to thinking. Their true difficulty, as Henry Crabb Robinson saw, lay not with *Wilhelm Meister*'s sensuality—"like the crossing of flies in the air," Wordsworth told Emerson[18]—but with its "directly philosophical purpose," as earnest and witty as *Don Quixote* itself.[19]

Mill, Pater, and Arnold's Appropriations of the Idea of *Bildung*

The Englishmen notoriously non-averse to thinking—Mill, Arnold, and Pater—were fascinated by Goethe's intellectualism and by all of what Nietzsche called "the dull lustre, the enigmatic Milky-Way shimmer" still glowing round classic Weimar culture.

"Could it be," Nietzsche imagines the English asking, "that the Germans have quietly discovered some corner of the heavens and settled down there? We must try to get closer to the Germans."[20]

Initially it was Humboldt to whom Mill tried to get closer. He cites him in *On Liberty* as the champion of the idea of self-cultivation, but recognizes in the *Autobiography* that he was only part of "a whole school of German authors" headed by Goethe, who pushed "even to exaggeration" "the doctrine of the rights of individuality, and the claim of the moral nature to develop itself in its own way."[21] Mill's immediate inspiration came of course from Coleridge and Carlyle, who had naturalized German ideas about how an intuitive, emotive education, open to the importance of passion, community, natural beauty, and feminine presence, had to be called in to complement and correct the sort of rational, quantifying education Mill had received from his father. The theory behind this humanly necessary balancing act was resplendently told in Mill's essays on Bentham and Coleridge. In practice the act was difficult—as it would be for any of us if we had Mill's IQ and early conditioning. He had an extraordinary dream about the Herculean choice between virtue and pleasure, each embodied in female form. He quite rightly wanted to have both: why could not "a sincere friend & a sincere Magdalen" live chastely side by side, in his ideal woman as in himself? But "the woman [in the dream] said 'no, that would be too vain'—whereupon I broke out 'do you suppose when one speaks of what is good in itself, one must be thinking of one's own paltry self interest? no, I spoke of what is abstractly good & admirable.' " How "queer" dreams are. When he heard the remark about a "sincere Magdalen," Mill thought "it wrong & that the right words were 'an innocent Magdalen' perceiving the contradiction."[22] There is no call to scoff at Mill's sexlessness, as the young Freud did; we need only underscore the special individual Mill was. He wished to transform the sensuous woman who would be "sincere" when she kissed, into an "innocent" who would simply not know about kissing—which would be like fusing Goethe's Philina with the Beautiful Soul. One can appreciate the pathos of such a young man's dream.

As the first draft of the *Autobiography* shows, Mill had abundant and bitter knowledge of the practical and affective debilities imposed on him by a Benthamic education. To know about one's debilities, however, isn't necessarily to be rid of them. Mill could never approach the choice between pleasure and virtue as robustly as, in 1773, Goethe had done: "If I had really met those two ladies, you see, I would have grabbed one under this arm, the other under that arm, and forced both of them to come along!"[23] That is the true Goethean vim, in a style banteringly attractive—"Oh, to be so cool!"—and bullyingly repellent—"Here's another person telling me how I ought to live!"

Mill's father had done enough of that, and the son needed all the backing he could get, German and otherwise, for his desire to be a separate individual. Separate and unique, not according to any paradigm, which is what he mistakenly thought Goethe was forwarding: "his idol was symmetry: anything either in outward objects or in characters which was great & incomplete, or disproportioned (*exorbitant* as Balzac says of a *visage d'artiste*) gave him a cold shudder." As Mill protested to Harriet Taylor, no modern person can achieve symmetry in his life or work. However tightly he laces himself, he has more bits to balance than the Greeks ever dreamt of. No, "it is too soon by a century or two" for symmetry either in art or in character. "We all need to be

blacksmiths or ballet dancers with good stout arms or legs, useful to do what we have got to do, & useful to fight with at times—we cannot be Apollos & Venuses just yet."[24] As we have seen, Goethe *too* had understood the need to postpone the Schillerian goal of complete, many-sided, symmetrical development for "a century or two," that is, indefinitely. Wilhelm Meister cannot be an Apollo "just yet"; he has to specialize—to become a sort of blacksmith or ballet dancer—like everyone else.

Mill's ambivalence toward Goethe comes down to this. He very much wanted, on the one hand, to effect a Goethe-like "rounded completeness," synthesizing the rational analytic Benthamic and the emotional intuitive Coleridgean sides of his nature. On the other hand, he rebelled against what he took to be Goethe's Apollonian prescriptiveness—rebelled in the name of his deepest desire, which was to be his own necessarily jagged and incomplete self. Man isn't a machine or a work of art, to be either meanly Gradground or lovingly sculpted into an ideal form. Man is an organism like "a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing."[25] No bonsai nipping, no pollarding: just let the tree grow as it will. Which, as we have observed, is precisely the creed of the Tower in *Wilhelm Meister* and the tenor of Goethe's remarks throughout the *Conversations* and the letters. There is no template for development, Greek or otherwise, which one is supposed to conform to; there are only the trial-and-error experiments to discover what peculiar shape, in the play between aptitude and circumstance, nature wants one's life to take.

Like Hegel, Ernest Renan, and Jules Michelet, Goethe provided Pater with a lode of ideas first to mine, then to compound and transmute in the white heat of his imagination—a slapdash but not plagiaristic procedure which yielded essays that were works of art. The first such essay he published, "Winckelmann" (1867, reprinted six years later in *The Renaissance*) contains an invaluable assessment of Goethe's *Bildungsidee* derived primarily from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, a book that, among other things, caused him to burn his poetic juvenilia.[26] Winckelmann was the source of Goethe's love of "balance, unity with one's self, consummate Greek modelling," though Goethe realized, as Pater correctly says, the impossibility nowadays of achieving such a balance, whether like Phryne "by Perfection of bodily form, or any joyful union with the external world," or like Pericles or Phidias by the narrow "exercise of any single talent." One must choose, as William Butler Yeats would later say, perfection of the life or of the work. Only, one must be resigned to getting neither. Moving on is more important than bringing a project to an exquisite close. As Pater writes, "Goethe's Hellenism was of another order, the *Allgemeinheit* and *Heiterkeit*, the completeness and serenity, of a watchful, exigent intellectualism. *Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren, resolut zu leben*"[27]—meaning by *im Ganzen* an absorbing of the essence of one special pursuit after another, straight through the whole curriculum.

There ought to be no obsession with either body or mind. Goethe's "gift of a sensuous nature" was such that he might easily have "let it overgrow him," just as he might "easily and naturally" have let his "otherworldly" nature expand into the Beautiful Soul's "ideal of gentle pietism." To his "large vision," however, each nature, sensuous and spiritual, was in its extreme form but "a phase of life that a man might feel all round, and leave behind him." Exactly so. Where Pater errs is in attributing to Goethe more belief than he really had in the possibility of a person's becoming an *uomo universale* who would be and do all things human, taking them one by one.

This is a Renaissance aspiration obviously dear to Pater, and it isn't surprising that like Mill he should have projected it onto a writer whose enthusiasm for Periclean Athens seemed to match Schiller's own. But, to repeat, Goethe maintained that a man is called to be Somebody, not Everybody, and like Wilhelm he must renounce certain experiments that don't truly suit his capacities and find a particular work that does.

Nothing is to be gained, at this time of day, by emphasizing how Mill, Pater, or in broader ways the biographer Lewes misprized one of Goethe's central themes. Winckelmann, Schiller, Byron, and the Elgin marbles had taught them a love of Greek wholeness that they would project onto Goethe willy-nilly, and when they thought of *Bildung* it was in terms of the Greek ideal. Not a fatal mistake, since the great novelists were on hand to correct it, quite as Goethe himself had done in *Wilhelm Meister*.

Finally there is Arnold, who in principle applauded Mill's call for individual development, but who in 1867, the year Pater's essay on Winckelmann appeared, worried in *Culture and Anarchy* that in England ungoverned self-cultivation had gone too far. People's doing "as they liked" would not be a trustworthy program till they learnt to "like" the best that had been thought and said. That best was what "culture" offered, and by schooling people to harmonize their Hebraic-moral and their Hellenic-intellectual capacities into a living *whole*—there is that word again—culture could defeat "anarchy." *Pace* his critics then and now, Arnold's brief for culture was not being argued for the sake of the state, instrumental as, through its schools, say, the state could be for culture's purposes. Arnold's brief was for individuals—starting with those class-transcending intellectuals whose task it was, as writers, teachers, and ministers, to educate the classes, whom Arnold dubbed the Barbarians, the Philistines, and the Populace.

The phrases Arnold uses to describe the properly acculturated individual sometimes derive from Humboldt—"the harmonious expansion of the individuality," the "unified and complementary" ordering of "all elements" of one's personality, and so on. But more often they derive from Goethe, whose praise of the ancient unity of sensibility—especially in the "Antikes" section of his essay on Winckelmann—yielded *Culture and Anarchy*'s famous definition of perfection as "a harmonious expansion of *all* the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature."[28] No more than Mill and Pater does Arnold notice Goethe's sense of the obstacles facing the modern paladin of culture in pursuit of such a harmonious expansion. He simply remembers his first reading of Goethe's *Bildungsroman* with fond excitement: "The large, liberal view of human life in *Wilhelm Meister*, how novel it was to the Englishman in those days! and it was salutary, too, and educative . . . [with all its] poetry [and] eloquence."[29] Well, the excitement was justified, if not by any endorsement of Arnold's dream of Greek completeness, then by Goethe's conservative–liberal endorsement of free individual choice, which as I have said was quite revolutionary enough for his time and place. Arnold did get it right in "German and English Universities," where he says that for Germans "*the essential thing*" is that the individual become what he will "*not out of youthful habit, vague disposition, traditional obedience, but . . . upon scientific appreciation, critical verification, independent decision*."[30] The charge of the major English (and American) *Bildungsromane* was to dramatize, concretely and complexly, the possibilities of independent decision. They were not infinite, needless to say, but they were larger than authors before Goethe had supposed.

Defining the *Bildungsroman*

Now to cut to the chase. Everyone says that *Wilhelm Meister* is the prototypical *Bildungsroman*, but exactly what type of fiction is that? It is best not to say too exactly, as any perusal of precisionist taxonomies will show.[31] A stringent definition will limit the number of bona fide *Bildungsromane* to two or three, a result so frustrating that critics usually drop their arms and let in novels as widely varying ones as Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder* (*Joseph and His Brothers*) and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*.[32] Some traditional markers are nonetheless worth noting. German critics refer to two near relations of the *Bildungsroman*. One is the *Erziehungsroman* or novel of education, such as Rousseau's *Émile* or Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's *Lienhard und Gertrud*, which is explicitly and pointedly pedagogic. The other is the *Entwicklungsroman* or novel of personal development, which is broadly about the evolution of a hero—Lambert Strether in James's *The Ambassadors*, say—from any one stage of life to another. The *Bildungsroman* is between these, not as narrowly pedagogic as the one—being about general acculturation or, as Martin Swales says, "the clustering of values by which a man lives"[33]—and not so merely transitional as the other—being about the early childhood-to-young-adulthood stages of life.

The term *Bildungsroman* itself was first coined by Karl Morgenstern in lectures in the early 1820s, with specific reference to *Wilhelm Meister*: "it portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness; . . . further[ing] the reader's *Bildung* to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel."[34] The term didn't gain currency, however, till Wilhelm Dilthey used it in *Das Erlebnes und die Dichtung* (*Poetry and Experience*) in 1913: the *Bildungsroman* examines a "legitimate course" of an individual's development, each stage having its own specific value and serving as "the ground for a higher stage," an upward and onward vision of human growth nowhere "more brightly and confidently expressed than in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*."[35] That novel projects the normative pattern that, optimistically, parents, teachers, and adolescents themselves like to contemplate: life is a tussle, no question, and Goethe isn't shy about pointing this out, but children become youths and youths become happily initiated grown-ups, ready to invest their talents in *Liebe und Arbeit*, the love and work of the civil society they belong to. Which presumably is why Dilthey designated the novel's plot as "legitimate," and why Morgenstern had been able to recommend it to younger readers, who might themselves be seeking models for, or reassurance about, their own movement toward adulthood.

Susanne Howe's foundational study, *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen* (1930), in effect takes over Dilthey's idea of the type:

> The adolescent hero of the typical "apprentice" novel sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counsellors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. . . . Needless to say, the variations of it are endless.[36]

The snag is that she demands a *successful* coming of age—the normative comic ending that Morgenstern and Dilthey had in mind—and therefore appears to think more of

Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham* or Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* than of *Richard Feverel, The Mill on the Floss, Sons and Lovers*, or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which end with heroes dead, blocked, or deracinated, to say nothing of *Pendennis* or *Great Expectations*, whose heroes aren't intellectually interesting to her. Well, different professors, different syllabi. Howe is, though, most informative about the non-Goethean prototypes for the *Bildungsroman*, ranging from the Bunyanesque hero looking for salvation through a world peopled with allegorical representations of virtue and vice, to the picaresque hero whose adventures take him instructively through various strata of society, to the quester hero like Parsifal, who learns through painful experience how to reach his goal, and what his goal is worth.[37]

The *Bildungsheld* stands not only for a synthesis of these various earlier heroes, but for modern, post-Enlightenment youth in general. Someone like Wilhelm Meister, as Howe finely says, is

> Every Young Person. Only in this light can we be very much stirred by him. His enthusiasms and his confidence, his indecision and his errors, his spongelike way of absorbing every influence to which he is exposed without profiting visibly thereby, his lack of humor—all these are vaguely touching only as youth is always touching, when it is not maddening.[38]

And of course we find him "touching" as well as "maddening" because the writer of a *Bildungsroman*, exploiting the confessional vein opened up by Rousseau, Byron, and Goethe's own *Werther*, has made us privy to his hero's thoughts and feelings. An intensely Jamesian center of consciousness he need not be, but a focus on the development of his inner life is nevertheless essential. His social relationships matter less for themselves than for the *Weltanschauung*—the "lay religion or general philosophy of life," as W. H. Bruford says—they help him articulate.[39] He is thus more likely to be a dreamer, even an artist, than a man of action. Hence any novel about such a coming-of-age is what, in his postscript to *The Magic Mountain*, Mann called "the sublimation and spiritualization of the novel of adventure,"[40] the picaresque become *Seelengeschichte* or spiritual history, wherein what is inside a character—how he loves his mother, misses his father, prefers the theater to the stadium, and so on—is as important as what is outside—how his father is a merchant or a miner, his school nurturing or dehumanizing, his first girlfriend sexually shy or eager, and the like. Not just the hard facts of growing up, but the youth's soft feelings and thoughts about them.

One study of this kind of novel, referred to briefly in my prologue, is Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World* (1987), which, for all its Marxizing and constitutional distaste for Victorian works like *David Copperfield* that strongly appeal to me, is superior to Mark Redfield's subsequent book, *Phantom Formations* (1996).[41] Mr. Moretti reads these "inward" stories in the "outward" context of modern European political history, "modern" dating from its most decisive event, the French Revolution of "year zero," 1789. The Revolution dissolved the "feudal" system in which young people grew up to fill the social roles they were born to—a dissolution that, as I have said, can be traced back to the Reformation and to the revolutionary political events occurring in England well before France's 1789, but that, after the Reformation, failed to become fully political in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Germany (which is why between *Wilhelm Meister* at the one end and *Buddenbrooks* or *The Magic Mountain* at the other there are scarcely

any German *Bildungsromane* now worth reading). Growing up became a problem when people's roles ceased to be "feudally" prescribed, and could to some extent be written by themselves—just as their forms of government could be written and rewritten. This, says Mr. Moretti, made youth "a specific image of modernity": restless, semi-inchoate, in a state of what Karl Marx called "permanent revolution" (Moretti, 5). A *Bildungsroman* is a fiction that could not be written before the era of democratic revolutions, since the coming-of-age of any such bygone youth was too socially straightforward to be interesting. The modern youth, representative of the coming democracy, is a self-expressive ego confronted with the community's demands for self-repression—demands that don't go out the window just because barons have given way to burgomasters and villeins have become citizens. In the modern state, all are "free," but only within the constraints of citizenship. They can't, and shouldn't, always do as they like.

Mr. Moretti's argument continues thus: *Wilhelm Meister* resolves the conflict between the individual's ego and the community's requirements for compromise in paradigmatic fashion. Wilhelm realizes he has got to fit in, that is, in a mature can't-beat-'em-join-'em accommodation, he internalizes the community's norms by getting married, that classic comedic symbol for the self-limiting social contract. The same is true in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Waverley*, *David Copperfield*, and *Jane Eyre*, which narrate "how the French Revolution could have been avoided" or, since it was too late for that, how it might be "disavowed" or undone. (If everyone would only marry and stay married, and just do their jobs, then we wouldn't see barricades and guillotines in the streets!) In France too there was a reaction, but the spirit of the Revolution had gone too deep (Moretti, 72–73). Stendhal and Balzac renounced the too-cozy Goethean ideal of "happiness" and "maturity," with its attendant marriages and reclassifications. They celebrated "freedom" and "youth," the hero's dynamic metamorphoses that (a) "dismantl[ed] the very notion of personal identity"—why be a son, father, tinker or tailor "somebody" when you can hit the road and become "anybody" you please?—and (b) privileged the adventures of adultery, where so much seems dangerously to happen, over the insipidities of marriage, where so little does (Moretti, 8).

Now (still following Mr. Moretti) Jane Austen, Walter Scott, and their successors in England sought to disavow, avoid, or undo the French Revolution because their own society had *had* its "glorious" middle-class revolution a century before. Which, for a Verso critic, must be a species of joke: "A revolution that appeals to a 'pedigree' of privileges, while disregarding normative and universal principles! . . . [that] aims at the revival of the 'original contract,' and has no interest in future utopias!"—isn't very revolutionary. Mr. Moretti is sufficiently historically minded, however, to acknowledge that this "legal" revolution did give England a culture of justice, in which rights were protected by the courts—a "legacy . . . which the more pulsating and plastic continental Europe (and certainly Italy) can only envy dusty old England" (207), and which has spread its justice from protection of commercial rights to protection of civil rights. Not bad for a polity unguided by universal norms and utopian visions.

We have a fundamental division here between those who dislike and those who like and are grateful for liberal democracy, with its attendant free market and class structure. Santayana and Troeltsch liked it and were grateful, not least because such a society had yielded high aesthetic dividends, its economic mobility and social heterogeneity giving

artists a lot of life to look at, and from many perspectives. Mr. Moretti dislikes it and can see only aesthetic losses, liberal democracy having afforded less life and fewer perspectives, and given us artists who are too moralistic. Because English novelists assume that the rule of law reigns everywhere, "Any type of conflict or diversity—whether of interests, ideas, ethical options, or erotic preferences—is removed from the realm of the questionable and translated into the fairy-tale-juridical opposition of 'right' and 'wrong' " (Moretti, 210). Instead of interesting plots of "transformation," we allegedly get inert, convoluted plots of "classification"—Bertha Mason burnt, Micawber exiled, and Jane Eyre and Copperfield married to their respective dears. Charlotte Brontë and Dickens leave Moretti with an "empty stomach. One enjoys oneself, without ever being carried away; one finds plenty of certainties, but no way of addressing problems. . . . Let us therefore say that, due to a unique historical conjunction, the novel was born in England precisely when the ideology of the law reigned supreme. The result was the worst novel of the West [he means *Copperfield*, absurdly], and the boldest culture of justice" (214).

This is the return of Mario Praz, and it is characteristic of the left-radical attack on what G. K. Chesterton long ago called the Victorian Compromise. It has at times invigorated nineteenth-century literary studies, if only by shaking them up, but it has in the long run more often depressed them by producing shelves of utterly predictable celebrations of diversity, uncertainty, and the subversive, hand-in-hand with denigrations of unity, assurance, and consensus. One must not err by over-correcting, however. I have no desire to offer a reactionary defense of the stabilities of a Goethean or Dickensian *Bildungsroman*, precisely because such novels are also rich with their own "transformations," their own sexual and ethical aporias, just as the Stendhalian or Balzacian *Bildungsroman*, *The Red and the Black* or *Lost Illusions*, gives us heroes who are transformed within typifying if constantly shifting social "classifications." It is a matter of degree, each tradition doing what it needs to do, and well-advised to learn what it can from the other.

That is why I recommend the late Jerome Buckley's able study, *Season of Youth* (1974), also mentioned in my prologue. Tolerating and profiting from European and Anglo-American traditions alike, Buckley defines the *Bildungsroman* by reference to an archetypal plot. A sensitive child grows up in the provinces, where his lively imagination is frustrated by his neighbors'—and often by his family's—social prejudices and intellectual obtuseness. School and private reading stimulate his hopes for a different life away from home, and so he goes to the metropolis, where his transformative education begins. He has at least two love affairs, one good and one bad, which help him revalue his values. He makes some accommodation, as citizen and worker, with the industrial urban world, and after a time he perhaps revisits his old home to show folks how much he has grown. No single *Bildungsroman* will have all these elements, Buckley says, but none can ignore more than two or three.[42]

This synopsis is adequate as far as it goes, but I would supplement it with a list of initiatory tests that every inwardly developing *Bildungsheld* must at least try to pass, and that constitute the rite-of-passage peripeties of Buckley's archetypal plot. There are three such tests. First is the sexual test, in which the *Bildungsheld* moves beyond (if he or she doesn't absolutely reject) the affections of one or both parents, and finds someone else—an appropriate partner outside the family—to love. Second is the vocational

test, in which the *Bildungsheld* must find a way of relating himself not just to someone but to everyone in the society at large. He must do work that will contribute to the commonwealth, and as I insist along with Mr. Moretti, compared to his forebears he has more freedom—it is both a burden and an opportunity—to choose how he will contribute. Some canonical *Bildungsromane*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, or *Great Expectations*, for example, follow *Wilhelm Meister*'s lead by featuring heroes who aren't artists. Their authors wanted to transcend the narrowly autobiographical by portraying characters that ordinary people—those on Schiller's low road of aesthetic education—could see themselves in. No few canonical *Bildungsromane*, however, shade into the *Künstlerroman*, the novel about the growth of the artist (Joyce's *Portrait* preeminently, and *Copperfield*, *Pendennis*, or James's *Roderick Hudson*), or project the hero as artist manqué, someone not talented enough to be an artist but sensitive enough to be a critical member of the audience, and reflective enough to philosophize about the cultural scene. Instances would include *The Magic Mountain*, *The Last Puritan*, or Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, though one must admit that even these novels skirt around the problem of what, aside from ruminating about art, ethics, and metaphysics, a person who doesn't live year-round up at Bread Loaf is supposed to do in the everyday loaves-and-fishes market down the hill. The third test, back up the "magic" hill, is that business of ruminating, but specifically about the *connections* between art, ethics, and metaphysics, the practical stress falling on the middle term. Happily, the novelistic presentment isn't as schoolish as my last sentence makes it sound. It is a hero's lived experience of keeping or not keeping promises, of telling or not telling the truth, of being faithful or unfaithful to parents, friends, and spouse, with or without respect to income and class, that gives rise to his conceptual beliefs about (to conjure up Schiller's traditional categories once more) the Good and the True, or fashions his taste for some instance of the Beautiful.

Significant work toward our understanding of ego development was done throughout the twentieth century by psychologists from Freud, Carl Jung, and Jean Piaget to Erik Erikson, D. W. Winnicott, and Robert Kegan (I leave Jacques Lacan to those who find him *lisible*), but their observations and theories are simply part of the deep background of my analyses in this book. For one thing, though I can ask questions or remain silent with the best of them, I have no credentials in psychology. For another, reading Adolph Grünbaum and his disciple Frederick Crews has persuaded me that it would be vain to seek scientific truths—the kind that stand up to experimental trial and have predictive value—in psychoanalytic writing. The founding father himself offers more as a poetic genius than as an empirical researcher. Hence, my manifest sources are literary—and chiefly the novels under consideration here.

They are of course constructs of the human mind—that is a high-school realization, I would think—and like all constructs they are governed by formal conventions that build on and react against one another. To some degree, for example, it is a convention of the *Bildungsroman* to have a young man go through several love affairs, in order to make him aware of what kinds of female presence satisfy what kinds of male needs, just as it is a convention to have him weigh a commercial career against an artistic one, or to have him throw off the intolerable bonds of the village in order to take on more tolerable ones in the city. Nor is it only the novelist who is making his hero conform to conventions. The hero himself has often read young-man-from-the-provinces stories, as

Copperfield has read *Roderick Random* and *Tom Jones*, and will therefore recognize the type of situation he is in and respond appropriately. The coherence of the *Bildungsroman* tradition, then, can to some extent seem artificial—a line of authors who, wittingly or unwittingly, have organized their tales around some arbitrary conventions or semiotic flags.

But for my money the ability to recognize a story of *Bildung* depends not merely on literary training, necessary as that obviously is, but on the story's imitation of patterns of development endemic to the race itself, the psychic round the ego must pass through, analogous to the biological round the body must pass through. Thus what Northrop Frye might have called the archetype behind the archetype of *Bildung*, the tale of a god's growing up and finding his "vocation" as a messiah for a people, or as a slayer of the Evil One, whether dragon, father, or mother, would itself emanate not from an earlier literature—for in theory one could go back to a point where there *was* no earlier literature—but from the psychophysical experience of human beings themselves, leading, in sidereal time and ecospheric space, their creative but bounded lives. Their culture, their stories, which Frye modestly did not want to go behind, must ultimately derive—in ways understandably difficult for academic intellectuals to imagine—from the pre- or scarcely linguistic, largely physical, homo-erectian encounter with the world. The view from the faculty club or the local Starbucks doesn't usually extend that far, but we should, as "common readers," try. Life comes before literature, however true it is that literature (and then more life) then comes after literature. Lawrence, as we will see, says it better, but the "it" amounts to this: in the black dawn of the world there was no Word, just the stuff that words have for millennia endeavored to be about.