

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

**NCLC**

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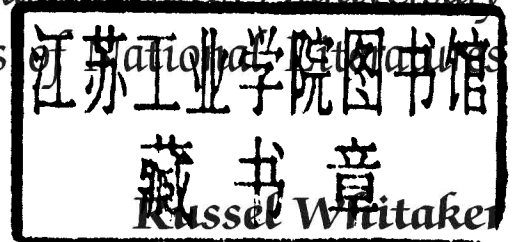
**TOPICS VOLUME**

Volume 152

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Topics Volume

Criticism of Various  
Topics in Nineteenth-Century Literature,  
including Literary and Critical Movements,  
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# Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)* has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, *NCLC* has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *NCLC*.

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*NCLC* is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, *NCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *NCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

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*NCLC* continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting



those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Berstein, Carol L. "Subjectivity as Critique and the Critique of Subjectivity in Keats's *Hyperion*." *After the Future: Postmodern Times and Places*. Ed. Gary Shapiro. Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990. 41-52. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 121. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 155-60.

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# The *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century Literature

The following entry presents criticism on the *Bildungsroman*, a literary genre that focuses on the personal development and maturation of a main character. For further information on the *Bildungsroman* in nineteenth-century literature, see *NCLC*, Volume 20.

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars consider the *Bildungsroman*, or apprenticeship novel, the most significant German contribution to the novel genre. Used to describe works that deal with the psychological growth of a central character from adolescence to maturity, the term *Bildungsroman* is most closely associated with a small group of German novels written in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96; *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*), is the most famous example of the *Bildungsroman* and is generally regarded as the prototype of the genre. The designation *Bildungsroman* was first used by the critic Karl Morgenstern in lectures presented in the 1820s at the University of Dorpat. Morgenstern specified a two-fold purpose of the genre: first, to portray "the hero's *Bildung* (formation) as it begins and proceeds to a certain level of perfection," and second, to foster "the *Bildung* of the reader to a greater extent than any other type of novel." However, it was not until the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (see Further Reading) applied the term in his *Das Leben Schleiermachers* (1867-70; *The Life of Schleiermacher*), that the concept of the *Bildungsroman* gained wide critical acceptance.

The typical *Bildungsroman* traces the progress of a young person toward self-understanding and a sense of social responsibility. Usually, the protagonist is a sensitive and gifted young man who encounters numerous problems and makes several false starts before he accomplishes his goals. The *Bildungsroman* focuses on one central character who undergoes an important transformation; further, the scope of the novel is limited as a rule because the protagonist's life before his self-awakening begins and after finding his place in society remains unknown. Structurally, the *Bildungsroman* typically emphasizes dialogue over plot development, thereby keeping the reader's attention squarely on the growth of the hero or heroine's character. These features of the *Bildungsroman* are well illustrated by its chief example, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. When

the novel opens, a wealthy, naive young man, unsure about the direction his life should take, has fallen in love with an actress. Learning that she has been unfaithful to him, he decides to go into business despite his avowed love for the theater. Soon persuaded to support a troupe of actors, his interest in the theater is rekindled and he begins to perform on the stage. Much of the novel deals with the actors's intrigues, Wilhelm's friendships with the various members of the troupe, and his failed love affairs. At the end of the novel Wilhelm has reached a more mature understanding of his creative capacities and social identity.

Goethe's novel was emulated by later German authors, but they also departed from the pattern he established. In his *Hyperion; oder, Der Eremit in Griechenland*, (1797-99), Friedrich Hölderlin concentrated more on style than on characterization, striving for a kind of verbal perfection that would overshadow *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Novalis, in his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, published posthumously in 1802, differentiated his *Bildungsroman* from Goethe's by setting the action in the medieval period. One of the most highly regarded *Bildungsroman*, Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer* (1857), is considered especially original because its outcome is evident and ensured from the very beginning of the novel. In terms of structure, Gottfried Keller expanded the *Bildungsroman* in his *Die grüne Heinrich* (1854-55), by providing information about both the protagonist's childhood and his later life.

Although the *Bildungsroman* is primarily associated with German novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the genre, particularly as exemplified by *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, proved extremely influential. Stressing the importance of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* to its era in Europe, Thomas Mann wrote that it was, "an educational and cultural epic so far-reaching, so all-embracing, that a shrewd romantic critic could say that the French Revolution, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* were the three great events of the period." Thomas Carlyle was so impressed by the work that he translated it into English in 1824 and imitated it in his *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34). Other nineteenth-century English authors produced similar novels—Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) are generally considered examples of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Though these novels resemble their German counterparts, scholars have noted that transplanted to England, the form took on some unique characteristics. The En-

glish *Bildungsroman* tended to have a more confessional quality, it often involved the protagonist's move from the country to the city, it was more concerned with the theme of religious doubt, and it ended less optimistically than the German variety, often portraying society as a somewhat destructive force. This last characteristic is also true of French *Bildungsromane*; for example, in Gustave Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* (1869) and Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* (1830)—the protagonists's youthful desires are not idealistic and naive; they are realistic, reasonable desires that society will not fulfill. Because English and French novels of development tend to deviate in these ways from classic *Bildungsroman* conventions, some critics exclude them from the scope of the genre. Similarly, while some critics place late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American works such as *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1868) within the genre, others exclude American novels, finding them concerned with specifically American themes such as young nationhood and confrontations with "alien" culture. In the twentieth century, the *Bildungsroman* has continued to evolve. Mann's "Joseph und seine Brüder" ("Joseph and His Brothers") novel series (1933-43) and his *Der Zauberberg* (1924), for example, offer an innovative approach to the *Bildungsroman* through the ironic use of various elements of the tradition. In addition, critics have started to explore the female *Bildungsroman*, which follows the growth of a young woman toward emotional and social maturity, as a variation on the type. Criticism frequently focuses on the difficulties of achieving maturation and inner development while constrained by the limitations inherent in being female in a patriarchal society. While its themes and techniques continue to interest modern readers, lively critical discussion about the scope and characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* persists, attesting to the pervasive influence and enduring relevance of the genre.

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Jane Austen

*Pride and Prejudice: A Novel* (novel) 1813

*Emma: A Novel* (novel) 1816

Charlotte Brontë

*Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* (novel) 1847

Thomas Carlyle

*Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (prose) 1833-34; published in *Fraser's Magazine*

Kate Chopin

*The Awakening* (novel) 1899

Charles Dickens

*Great Expectations* (novel) 1861

Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff

*Ahnung und Gegenwart: Ein Roman* (novel) 1815

George Eliot

*The Mill on the Floss* (novel) 1860

Gustave Flaubert

*L'Education sentimentale, histoire d'un jeune homme* [*Sentimental Education: A Young Man's History*] (novel) 1869

Theodor Fontane

*Effi Briest: Roman* [*Effi Briest*] (novel) 1895

Benjamin Franklin

\**The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (autobiography) 1868

Gustav Freytag

*Soll und Haben: Roman in Sechs Büchern*. 3 vols. [*Debit and Credit*] (novel) 1855

Elizabeth Gaskell

*North and South* (novel) 1855

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

†*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre: Ein Roman*. 4 vols. [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] (novel) 1795-96

Eliza Haywood

*The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. 4 vols. (novel) 1751

E. T. A. Hoffmann

*Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern*. 2 vols. [*The Educated Cat*] (novel) 1820-22

Friedrich Hölderlin

†*Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland*. 2 vols. [*Hyperion; or, the Hermit in Greece*] (novel) 1797-99

Karl Leberecht Immermann

*Die Epigonen: Familienmemoiren in neun Büchern*. 3 vols. (novel) 1836

Gottfried Keller

†*Der grüne Heinrich: Roman*. 4 vols. [*Green Henry*] (novel) 1854-55; revised edition, 1879-80

Rudyard Kipling

*Kim* (novel) 1901



Thomas Mann

*Der Zauberberg: Roman*. 2 vols. [*The Magic Mountain*] (novel) 1924

‡*Die Geschichten Jaakobs* [*The Tales of Jacob*] (novel) 1933

‡*Der junge Joseph* [*Young Joseph: Joseph and His Brothers II*] (novel) 1934

‡*Joseph in Aegypten* [*Joseph in Egypt: Joseph and His Brothers III*] (novel) 1936

‡*Joseph der Ernaehrer* [*Joseph the Provider: Joseph and His Brothers IV*] (novel) 1943

Herman Melville

*Redburn: His First Voyage. Being the Sailor-Boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service*. 2 vols. (novel) 1849

Eduard Mörike

*Maler Nolten: Novelle in zwei Theilen* (novel) 1832; revised edition, 1877

Karl Philipp Moritz

*Anton Reiser: Ein psychologischer Roman*. 4 vols. [*Anton Reiser: A Psychological Novel*] (novel) 1785-90

Novalis

‡*Heinrich von Ofterdingen: Ein nachgelassener Roman* [*Henry von Ofterdingen*] (unfinished novel) 1802; published in *Schriften*. 2 vols., edited by Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck

Wilhelm Raabe

*Der Hungerpastor: Ein Roman in drei Bänden*. 3 vols. [*The Hunger-Pastor*] (novel) 1864

Sir Walter Scott

*Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*. 3 vols. (novel) 1814

Stendhal

*Le Rouge et le noir, chronique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. 2 vols. [*Red and Black: A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century*] (novel) 1830

Adalbert Stifter

‡*Der Nachsommer: Eine Erzählung*. 3 vols. [*Indian Summer*] (novel) 1857

Elizabeth Drew Stoddard

*The Morgesons* (novel) 1862; revised edition, 1889

Ludwig Tieck

*Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen: Eine altdeutsche Geschichte* (novel) 1798

Christoph Martin Wieland

*Geschichte des Agathon*. 2 vols. [*The History of Agathon*] (novel) 1766-67; revised and enlarged as *Agathon*, 1773; revised and enlarged as *Geschichte des Agathon*, 1794

\*Written between c.1771 and c. 1790.

†These works are widely accepted by critics as *Bildungsromane*. Some critics contend that the *Bildungsroman* genre has a very narrow scope, and would not consider the rest of the works on this list *Bildungsromane*.

‡Part of the "Joseph und seine Brüder" ("Joseph and His Brothers") novel series, published together as *Joseph and His Brothers*, translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter, in 1948.

## OVERVIEW

**Todd Kontje (essay date 1993)**

SOURCE: Kontje, Todd. "Bildung and the German Novel (1774-1848)." In *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*, pp. 1-22. Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1993.

[In the following essay, Kontje traces the origins of Bildungsroman theory, and the impact and critical reception of Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.]

The belated introduction of the term *Bildungsroman* into the general critical vocabulary requires us to trace two separate strands of thought in writing the history of the genre, namely the concept of *Bildung* and the theory of the novel (*der Roman*). During the last decades of the eighteenth century several prominent German writers began to redefine *Bildung*: the formerly religious term now became a secular humanistic concept. This transformation occurred at a time when the Germans witnessed an astonishing increase in the number of novels published each year. As novel production soared and suspicion of the reading habit grew among church and state authorities, a few critics began to take tentative steps toward granting aesthetic dignity to at least certain types of the modern genre. They did so by singling out two novels that seemed to portray the *Bildung* of the protagonist, Christoph Martin Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* [*The Story of Agathon*] (1766-67) and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Thus the German theory of the novel begins with the appropriation of the concept of *Bildung*. Indeed, much subsequent dissatisfaction with Bildungsroman criticism stems from the fatal first step of substituting a concept of *Bildung* for a close reading of a particular *Roman*.

### THEORIES OF BILDUNG

The German word *Bildung* originally referred to both the external form or appearance of an individual (*Gestalt*, Latin *forma*) and to the process of giving form

(*Gestaltung, formatio*). Medieval mystics and eighteenth-century Pietists conceived of *Bildung* as God's active transformation of the passive Christian. Through Original Sin humans have fallen out of their unity with God; they have become deformed, *entbildet*. The penitent believer must therefore prepare to receive God's grace. The Catholic believes in the ability to work toward this state of receptivity, whereas the Protestant must rely on faith alone. In the final analysis, however, the believer remains passive in both cases: God impresses His image onto the fallen individual, effecting a redemptive transformation of the disfigured sinner back into the image of God. As the Pietist Gottfried Arnold puts it, "wir müssen zerstört und entbildet werden, auf daß Christus in uns möge formieret, gebildet werden und allein in uns sein" [we must be destroyed and *entbildet* so that Christ may be formed, *gebildet* within us and be in sole possession of us] (in Vierhaus 1972, 510. On *Bildung* see also Stahl 1934, Lichtenstein 1971, and Cocalis 1978).

This concept of *Bildung* changes significantly in the course of the eighteenth century. Instead of being passive recipients of a preexistent form, individuals now gradually develop their own innate potential through interaction with their environment. Organic imagery of natural growth replaces a model of divine intervention. Transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one's unique self. In this view, no fall from grace has occurred; humans, like the rest of God's creation, are essentially good. God no longer stands apart from the world but becomes a force of nature—indeed, a part of nature's pantheistic unity. Thus the concept of *Bildung* takes part in the general transformation of Western thought that occurred during the last decades of the eighteenth century. Christian faith in a Second Coming that would mark the end of history yielded to the struggle for human progress in an open-ended process of historical change (see Blumenberg 1966 on the imprecise notion of "secularization").

Johann Gottfried Herder was the most influential disseminator of this new concept of *Bildung*, particularly in his lengthy essay *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* [Also a Philosophy of History on the Bildung of Humanity] (1774), followed by the monumental *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity] (1784-91). Herder begins with the primacy of genetics: "Die genetische Kraft ist die Mutter aller Bildungen auf der Erde" [The genetic force is the mother of all life forms on earth] (1784-91, 1: 266). Each individual is unique and born with the genetic material in place. All creatures strive, therefore, to mature into that which they are destined to become. At the same time, external forces affect the development of a given individual or people. Herder refers to these forces with the broad concept of climate (*Klima*), which

includes not only the weather and geographical setting in a particular area but also cultural factors such as food and drink, occupation, clothing, habitual posture, and the arts. In describing the effects of climate on indigenous cultures Herder varies the familiar Pietist adage that our lives are merely "clay in the hand of the potter [God]" to argue that we are all "ein bildsamer Ton in der Hand des Klima" [malleable clay in the hand of climate] (1784-91, 1: 261).

For Herder, then, *Bildung* involves the development of innate genetic potential under the influence of a particular geographical and cultural setting. In the *Ideen* he sets out to write nothing less than the history of the world in general and of human civilization in particular. He insists that all human beings are part of the same species, but that different "climates" produce cultural differences between peoples. There is a strong sense of environmental determinism in Herder's work, which leads to a seemingly broad-minded cultural relativism. Thus, he cautions his readers not to condemn past figures on the basis of current standards. Whether we like it or not, they are the inevitable products of a particular time and place (1774, 41). By the same token, Herder claims that he cannot answer the question as to which people in history was the happiest, other than to state that each civilization has its own pinnacle of development. This view of the past also leads to a certain generosity involving present cultural differences, a view that emerges most strikingly in Herder's bitter critique of eighteenth-century colonialism. Europeans have abolished slavery at home only to enslave the world in a misguided attempt to annihilate cultural differences, a practice that contains the seeds of future disaster for Europe (1774, 89, 93, 128-29).

Nevertheless, Herder does not consider all stages of a given culture equal. Like plants and individuals, cultures too have their natural phases of growth, flowering, and decline. Left undisturbed, a culture will eventually attain full maturity. More often than not, however, migration uproots a people from its native soil before it can ripen fully. Just as individual cultures move through an organic cycle, so too humankind as a whole progresses. Already at the pinnacle of creation, it is our duty to move on to an even higher stage. Herder ridicules the notion that humans should devolve into minerals, vegetables, or animals: "soll er [der Mensch] rückwärts gehen und wieder Stein, Pflanze, Elefant werden?" (1784-91, 1: 177-78). Thus Herder overlays his historical determinism and cultural relativism with a teleological narrative that enables him to condemn both past and present cultures, including his own. An improved understanding of the way things necessarily were and are yields to exhortation to his own people to become what they ought to be. This same pedagogical impulse will recur in nineteenth-century discussions of the Bildungsroman, as critics grow impatient with exist-

ing literary production and encourage writers to further the progress of the German novel.

The concept of *Bildung* also played a central role in the work of the Weimar Classicists Goethe, Schiller, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. In the first instance, *Bildung* referred to organic growth, the development of the seed to fruit according to innate genetic principles. Goethe took an active interest in the natural sciences and gave his theory of organic development poetic form in "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" ["The Metamorphosis of Plants"] (1799) and "Metamorphose der Tiere" ["Metamorphosis of Animals"] (1820). Humans also must develop in accordance with their destiny, as he writes in the late poem "Urworte: Orphisch" ["Primal Words: Orphic"]:

So mußt du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen  
So sagten schon Sibyllen, so Propheten;  
Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt  
Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.

(1817, 1: 359)

[As the sibyls and prophets said long ago, that is the way you must be; you cannot escape yourself. And no time and no power can tear apart imprinted form that develops in the course of life.]

In his autobiography Goethe stresses the freedom necessary for human development and views personal cultivation as a continuing project of the highest ethical significance: "Auf eigene moralische Bildung loszuarbeiten, ist das Einfachste und Tulichste, was der Mensch vornehmen kann" [To go to work on one's own moral *Bildung* is the simplest and most advisable thing that a person can do] (1811-14, 10: 88; on the concept of *Bildung* among the Weimar Classicists see Müller-Seidel 1983).

Humboldt also identifies *Bildung* as the primary goal of humanity in his *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen* [Ideas toward an Attempt to Determine the Limits of State Authority] (1792). Our true purpose in life is to cultivate our diverse talents into a balanced whole (1: 106). Humboldt shares Herder's belief in the primacy of genetics and employs organic metaphors to describe human development. Yet passive ripening is not good enough for human beings. Nature provides the "seed," but it is up to humans to develop to their full potential through active engagement with the world around them. Thus, freedom becomes the first and essential prerequisite for personal *Bildung*: "Zu dieser Bildung ist Freiheit die erste, und unerlassliche Bedingung" (1: 106).

Schiller shares Humboldt's belief in the human ability to shape destiny. In one of his earliest theoretical writings he argues against Johann Kaspar Lavater's concept of physiognomy, which was based on the belief that

one's physical features determine one's moral character. Schiller insists that the free intellect impresses its stamp on an individual's outer form, and not vice versa: "In diesem Verstande also kann man sagen, die Seele bildet den Körper" [In this sense we can say that the soul shapes the body] (1780, 5: 318). For the animal, *Bildung* is simply what nature makes it, whereas human freedom turns *Bildung* into an achievement of the will (5: 454). In his major theoretical works Schiller maintains his belief in the importance of freedom but seeks an equilibrium between ethical demands and physical needs as the goal of human *Bildung*. In his view, the ancient Greeks came closest to attaining this ideal; their achievement stands as an inspiration to the current age, in which we live in a state of alienation and fragmentation.

The notion of *Bildung* has strong political implications for all three Weimar Classicists. Each opposes the violence of the French Revolution with the concept of steady, organic growth.

Was das Luthertum war, ist jetzt das Franztum in diesen  
Letzten Tagen, es drängt ruhige Bildung zurück.

(Goethe, "Revolutionen" ["Revolutions"] 1796, 1: 211)

[In recent days France has become what Lutheranism was; it stifles tranquil *Bildung*.]

Humboldt begins his *Ideen* by condemning political revolution as unnatural and goes on to argue that the public interest is best served by a monarchy that allows individuals to develop freely with a minimum of state intervention (1792, 1: 129). Finally, Schiller maintains in his *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* [On the Aesthetic Education of Humanity] (1795) that *Bildung* through art renders political revolution unnecessary. In the ideal work of art, form and content stand in perfect harmony; contemplation of such a work reconciles conflicting drives in human beings and thereby completes the *Bildung* of the individual and helps to establish the utopian community of the aesthetic state.

Certain shortcomings in the classical notion of *Bildung* become evident early on. Schiller formulates his ethical ideal as a true liberation of the individual from rational constraint as body and mind, physical desire and moral restrictions coexist without conflict. Yet viewed from a more critical perspective, his program of aesthetic education serves as a means to discipline desire so that one's wishes no longer exceed social limitations. Humboldt also urges his readers to restrict their endeavors to the narrow sphere in which they are most competent to act (1796-97, 2: 12). The theme of willful limitation is already central to Goethe's concept of *Bildung* during the classical period. "So ist's mit aller Bildung auch beschaffen," writes Goethe in the programmatic sonnet "Natur und Kunst" ["Nature and Art"],

Wer Großes will, muß sich zusammenraffen  
In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister,  
Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben.

(1800, 245)

[That's the way it is with all *Bildung*. . . . He who seeks greatness must pull himself together. The master reveals himself first through limitation, and only the law can give us freedom.]

This theme becomes extreme in Goethe's late novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Travels*] (1821-29). In an encounter with the character Montan (Jarno in the *Lehrjahre*), Wilhelm Meister makes a feeble appeal to eighteenth-century optimism, recalling that a many-sided *Bildung* had once been considered advantageous and necessary. Montan abruptly corrects Meister's outdated views, insisting that now is the time for one-sidedness. In his view, one ought to restrict oneself to the practice of a single trade (37). Slightly later Meister reads a maxim about education that underscores Montan's advice: "Eines recht wissen und ausüben gibt höhere Bildung als Halbheit im Hundertfältigen" [To know and practice one thing well yields higher *Bildung* than imperfection in hundreds of things] (148).

Even this compromised ideal was only available to a small percentage of the German population. Schiller published the opening letters of the *Ästhetische Erziehung* as the first contribution to his new literary journal *Die Horen*. In this highly ambitious project Schiller hoped to unite Germany's best writers in working toward the realization of the cultural and political ideals articulated in his theory. The journal did not have the expected success, and Schiller abandoned the project two years later. In the last of his letters on aesthetic education he had already conceded that for the time being, at least, his "aesthetic state" was restricted to a narrow elite ("einigen wenigen auserlesenen Zirkeln" 1795, 669). Precisely this group is of interest for the history of *Bildung* in a social context. Weimar Classicism sought an alliance between progressive members of the nobility and cultivated members of the middle class that cut across traditional social class distinctions determined by birth. In doing so, however, they unintentionally began to split German society along new lines, namely between those who had access to *Bildung* and those who did not. In the course of the nineteenth century *Bildung* would become the exclusive possession of the educated members of the middle class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, rather than the collective achievement of a unified people (Engelhardt 1986).

A final point worth mentioning in this context concerns the role of gender in classical theories of *Bildung*. Thomas Laqueur has argued that the concept of radical biological differences between men and women emerged

for the first time during the late eighteenth century (1990). Not coincidentally, this period witnessed the proliferation of pedagogical treatises concerning the proper way to raise children of different sexes. Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) spawned numerous German tracts on the subject, including a popular work by Wilhelm von Humboldt's childhood tutor Johann Heinrich Campe entitled *Väterliche Rath für meine Tochter* [*Fatherly Advice for my Daughter*] (1782). Humboldt, in turn, produced two philosophical treatises on the "natural" differences between the sexes: "Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur" ["On Sexual Difference and its Influence on Organic Nature"] (1794) and "Über die männliche und weibliche Form" ["On Masculine and Feminine Form"] (1795). From today's perspective Humboldt's arguments sound like an attempt to place a pseudoscientific veneer on his contemporary cultural prejudices. Thus, he concludes that women are naturally passive, men active; men are rational, women imaginative. He associates the masculine with freedom, while identifying women with nature. In his slightly earlier essay *Über Anmut und Würde* [*On Grace and Dignity*] (1793), Schiller had written the same cultural stereotypes into his aesthetic theory, ascribing beauty and grace to women while reserving dignity and the sublime for men. Neither Humboldt nor Schiller means to degrade women. Both are delighted by the seemingly natural symmetry between the sexes, and both conceive of a human ideal that would unite the two opposites in one. Yet the way in which they formulate sexual difference effectively precludes the possibility of female development. As both Humboldt and Schiller stress, human freedom is absolutely necessary for personal growth; by equating women with nature, they deny women any chance of participating in the process of *Bildung* (see Bovenschen 1979, 244-56).

Taken together, these eighteenth-century theories of *Bildung* provide much raw material for future studies of the novel. On the surface, the authors profess an optimistic belief in progress for both the individual and society that will carry over to early discussions of the Bildungsroman. Yet the same theories also hint at a less appealing state of affairs in which *Bildung* is a form of social discipline that requires personal resignation, is restricted to a cultural elite, and for men only. The critical backlash against the affirmative interpretation of the Bildungsroman will locate in the novels themselves aspects of the negativity that are already incorporated in the concept of *Bildung*.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF BILDUNGSROMAN THEORY

Christoph Martin Wieland published the first version of his novel *Die Geschichte des Agathon* in 1766-67. Set in the Mediterranean lands of classical antiquity, it tells of the eponymous hero's eventful life. Throughout the



novel Wieland makes ironic use of the sort of escapades the reader might expect to find in a sensational adventure story: within the first five chapters Agathon is abducted by pirates, sold into slavery, and seduced by a famous courtesan. Wieland's primary concern, however, lies in the depiction of his protagonist's psychological growth. We follow Agathon from childhood to maturity as he experiences love, war, and politics. By the end of the novel the youthful enthusiast (*Schwärmer*) has been sobered by life's vicissitudes and goes into retirement.

Within a few years Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg published his *Versuch über den Roman* [Essay on the Novel] (1774), which is recognized as the first significant German theory of the novel. To be sure, the Prussian officer's five-hundred-page treatise is long-winded and repetitious, and he takes many of his examples from drama rather than from the novel. Nevertheless, Blanckenburg recognizes that Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* is a new type of novel that deserves to be taken seriously. Blanckenburg goes further, countering the commonly assumed supremacy of Greek culture and the notion of historical decline. While the Greeks had their epic, he argues, the novel is the appropriate genre of the modern age. Thus, Blanckenburg defends the integrity of his indigenous culture and encourages young writers to produce a German national classic (xvii-xviii; also 72. On Blanckenburg's significance, see Lämmert 1965, 575).

Blanckenburg's understanding of his theory as a set of instructions to young writers, as a sort of literary cookbook, reveals his indebtedness to an older Enlightenment poetics that stressed craft over innovation, as does his repeated assertion that all artists should seek to instruct through delight. His most original comments come in connection with *Agathon*. He claims that Wieland unifies his novel by portraying Agathon's inner development in strict accordance with the laws of causality. The ancient epic portrayed "Thaten des Bürgers," public events, whereas the modern novel focuses on the inner life, "das Seyn des Menschen, sein innerer Zustand" (17-18). By emphasizing Wieland's concentration on the psychological development of one central protagonist, Blanckenburg identifies the beginning of a German novel tradition that will come to be called the Bildungsroman.

Several aspects of Blanckenburg's discussion deserve particular notice. Blanckenburg is in search of authors who cultivate good taste and better morals. Thus, he will condemn picaresque novels because they corrupt society by preventing the spread of "the true, the good, and the beautiful" (307-8). In holding up Wieland's novel as a salutary counterpart to these salacious works, however, Blanckenburg remains insensitive to Wieland's irony in the depiction of his hero. As we shall see, willful blindness to irony will characterize the reception of

Goethe's work as well, and indeed, it becomes a standard feature of much Bildungsroman criticism up to the present day (on Blanckenburg's lack of irony, see Lämmert 1965, 558).

Blanckenburg's theory of the novel also marks an early stage in what has been termed the "dichotomization" of German literature, the split between elite and popular culture (Bürger 1982). Blanckenburg begins by recognizing the widespread prejudice against the novel as a form of entertainment written only for the masses. He goes on to claim, however, that two or three novels—or maybe only one—stand out among the crowd. These exceptional works deserve to be read differently: whereas the novel of adventure offers entertainment for one fast reading, the superior novel invites repeated study (378). In making this distinction Blanckenburg is responding to the changing reading habits of the German public. Rolf Engelsing has argued that former "intensive" rereaders of the Bible became "extensive" consumers of secular fiction during the last decades of the eighteenth century (1974, 182-215). Whereas earlier readers concentrated on repeated study of a single text, the new readers devoured vast quantities of disposable fiction. In his *Versuch über den Roman*, however, Blanckenburg maintains that certain works of fiction should be studied with the care formerly reserved for religious texts. His work thereby marks the beginning of a consistent pattern in histories of the German novel: the Bildungsroman will become the only form of the novel granted canonical status as the secular scripture of German literature.

The nascent split between the popular novel and a select number of demanding works becomes particularly evident in the reception of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Novel production in Germany had increased dramatically in the thirty years that separate the *Lehrjahre* from *Agathon*, and the reading habit had taken hold in the emerging bourgeois public. Yet most critics continued to consider the novel a minor genre, and voices of authority in the government and the pulpit railed against the moral corruption spawned by the "reading obsession" (*Lesesucht*) or "reading madness" (*Lesewut*). While younger readers contributed to the sensational success of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* [The Sufferings of Young Werther] (1774), members of an older generation soberly condemned its apparent justification of suicide. Some twenty years later Goethe disappointed the expectations of many members of the public again, this time because his new novel lacked the immediate appeal of *Werther*. Yet the disapproval was not universal, as some of Germany's foremost writers celebrated the *Lehrjahre* as the most significant German novel to date. Comments by Friedrich Schiller, Christian Gottfried Körner, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) are of particular importance in the history of the Bildung-