

countryside, joins a theatrical group, falls in love with a countess, and eventually is taken up by an esoteric group of people called the “Tower Society.” In a bizarre scene towards the end of the long novel, Wilhelm is led into a mysterious chamber and placed in a chair in front of a curtain. The curtain is withdrawn several times to reveal various people who have influenced his direction and choices throughout the novel. Wilhelm thus sees that there was a plan for him, guided and directed by this tower society; after recollecting his own history, he is given a certificate of the completion of his apprenticeship.

The weird goings on of this novel merely make obvious the paradox of self-reflexivity structuring the notion of *Bildung* in its relation to narrative. On the one hand, the formation of self follows a narrative pattern—a novel of a life. On the other, a self is presupposed as the origin and telos of this pathway, as the mastermind behind the life story. *Bildung* thus has an unavoidable authoritarian structure, for someone has to ‘authorize’ the story, and provide the image to which the life is supposed to match up.

Humboldt and Fichte, at the end of the 18th century, theorized that education should be a kind of *Bildung* of the citizen that shapes him in conformity with the needs and conditions of the state. The masculine pronoun is apt, here, since *Bildung* is destined to form a male subject. The specific individual thus is made homogenous with a generic model in gaining reflective distance over its own history and education—in reading the novel of its own life, just as Wilhelm does when he receives his apprenticeship papers. The trouble is that the act of reading—whether Wilhelm’s or ours—cannot be included in the story, but always provides an excess that cannot be controlled by the narrative model. No text can completely program its reading, for reading will always entail an extra incalculable, unexpected, unforeseeable element. Thus the *Bildungsroman* can never really catch up with itself and is sometimes considered to be a failed genre and a failed concept, yet it remains resilient within the vocabulary of literary history.

SUSAN BERNSTEIN

BITCH

The grim and liberating bark of a limit.

MIRANDA F MELLIS

BLISS

GEOPHAGY

Humming underwing, vast sky erupts from | dirt and gravel road. Our animal creeping returns | me, tamed, to land: every loss balanced. In the middle of | a wood, there is a water table and a well, uncovered, drinking rain. | A lull, a rumble. My throat, elongated supple sponge | absorbs defiant syllables with soft resolve; | the earth bellows, rushing in.

DURIEL HARRIS

BLESSINGS

SEE

BLESSINGS IN COLOR ART PORTFOLIO

BLOOD

BLOODED

(THE KAROO, SOUTH AFRICA, 1907)

The boy was first.

The father strode behind, beaming, the buck slung over his shoulder. Its body warm, still pliable. Only its lower legs had begun to stiffen.

The blood congealed down the boy’s cheeks like cooling red wax.

The boy’s arms had a thin consistent quality, shoulder to wrist. Muscles still slept beneath his skin. It would be a few more years before they began to puff and expand throughout his body. The boy relished the feel of the dark buck blood as it sunk into his pores, crackled as he smiled. There would be a photograph taken and hung above the hearth.