

An American Bildungsroman? On the Evolution of a Genre

Anna De Biasio

As the codified genre pivoting on the formation and social integration of young protagonists, the Bildungsroman has long been viewed as alien to the American literary tradition. The essay focuses on this critical controversy, arguing that the current widespread use of the term Bildungsroman in relation to US literature depends on two key factors: a wider and more flexible understanding of "Bildung" and a focus on the refashioning of the genre's aesthetic and ideological codes in ethnic literature. The essay highlights the tendency to posit the existence of as many "Bildungs" as there are gender, racial, ethnic, and sexual differences, a conspicuous legacy of the 1970s "identity politics" in the literary debate. Finally, by turning attention to the special issue, it points out the two main interpretive trends of the featured essays: while the first three analyze examples of anti-Bildungsromans (a long-lasting presence in US literature), the last three essays concentrate on the ways in which contemporary works of ethnic literature revive the Bildungsroman genre, retrieving and simultaneously rewriting its conventions.

"I haven't what's called a principle of growth": *The Awkward Age*, or the impossible Bildung

Fiorenzo Iuliano

The story of Nanda Brookenham narrated in *The Awkward Age*, Henry James's 1899 novel, challenges the Bildungsroman as a genre featuring the growth and the social and moral fulfillment of its middle-class protagonists. *The Awkward Age* denies the revolutionary and emancipatory essence of the bourgeoisie, which, as the nineteenth-century ruling class, had gradually relinquished its past revolutionary aspirations. The novel's adult protagonists, thus, reiterate obsolete and repressive practices of power that annihilate, rather than encourage, Nanda's growth and emancipation. Moreover, the novel questions the very principle of growth as individual improvement. This assumption is exploded as purely ideological rather than natural or neutral. Whereas humanistic thought and tradition have postulated the universality of any individual aspiration to achieve maturity, as a condition of both moral and social fulfillment, James's novel reframes human temporality as singular, fragmented and not necessarily teleologically constructed.

No Trauma, No Bildung, No Party: F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Jazz Age and Basil Duke Lee

Sara Antonelli

F. Scott Fitzgerald did not allow his characters to reach adulthood. Amory Blaine (*This Side of Paradise*), Benjamin Button, Jay Gatsby, and many others, are exemplary of the author's intention to comment on the immaturity that characterized what he had termed "the Jazz Age". Basil Duke Lee, a young character to whom he devoted nine stories at the end of the Twenties, is particularly relevant because he represents Fitzgerald's first step into a sustained critique that developed into the epochal "Echoes of the Jazz Age". In this essay, following Basil from childhood to late adolescence, I want to argue that the series presents an anti-Bildungsroman which captures the arrested development of the age.

"The worst lesson that life can teach": *American Pastoral* as Neoliberal anti-Bildungsroman

Alice Balestrino

This essay explores the anti-Bildungsroman nature of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. By pointing out the static trajectory of the protagonist, the Swede, this essay

reflects on how the novel presents and then bends the formal features of the Bildungsroman to represent the Swede's failure to come of age as the failure of the *homo œconomicus* to come to grips with the fallacy of his own principles. This denied Bildung is, then, to be read against the background of US neoliberal society and as grounded in the economic logic according to which every sphere of human life is subjected to the "neoliberal circle" of failure and uncritical reinvestment. In this sense, the Swede's anti-Bildungsroman reflects the tensions underlying the formation of subjectivity in the neoliberal age.

"The loss, the search, the story": The paradigm of initiation and the reflection on identity in *The Skin Between Us* (2006)

Cristina Di Maio

By placing Kym Ragusa's memoir, *The Skin Between Us* (2006), in the context of the Italian American Bildungsroman and memoir, this article identifies Ragusa's as a pivotal text, diverging from the "traditional" Italian American coming-of-age narrative. Through the analysis of the interstices, thresholds, and entry/exit rituals present in the memoir, I propose a reading of *The Skin*

Between Us as a narrative of initiation. Such a shift in interpretation entails a refunctionalization of some specific features of the Italian American Bildungsroman and configures *The Skin Between Us* as a turning point in the Italian American literary canon. In fact, the reflection carried out by the author on her dual African American and Italian American cultural belonging does not solely revolve on the negotiation between ethnicity and mainstream American community, but rather incorporates an element of additional otherness (the racial one) in the definition of an Italian American subjectivity. In this sense, the lyrical reflection that ends Ragusa's memoir is investigated as a potential reconceptualization of the self that indicates a new, transnational threshold of existence.

"Who doesn't like resembling an ancestor?": *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as a Multi-Bildungsroman

Daniele Giovannone

At first glance, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) may appear as a traditional Bildungsroman. Yet, while in a classical Bildungsroman the main character is usually the novel's only real interest, Oscar, the epon-

ymous character in Díaz's novel, spends a surprising amount of time off-scene: almost half of the novel tells the story of Oscar's relatives (his sister, mother, and grandfather). This essay suggests that a better label to describe Oscar Wao's narrative structure could be Multi-Bildungsroman: a novel composed of multiple, shorter Bildungsroman, tied together by a net of family relationships. Borrowing from Michail Bachtin's idea of the cyclical nature of Bildungsroman and from György Lukács' concept of "novel of disillusionment", the essay intends to critically define the Multi-Bildungsroman as a narrative form. Thematically, the Multi-Bildungsroman appears to recast identity formation as a communal phenomenon, pertaining not only to the individual but to the whole community they belong to. Therefore, by recasting the fulfillment of the individual as inextricably connected to their family history, the Multi-Bildungsroman presents itself as a refutation of the myth that lies at the core of American traditional literary canon, which usually sees family relationships as the obstacle that prevent the main character from achieving their goals.

The Postcolonial Bildung in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013): African Feminism at Work

Milena Kaličanin

The article aims to depict Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) as a postcolonial coming-of-age novel by focusing on the developmental stages of the main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze. Through the portrayal of these analogous Bildung processes, Adichie points to pervasive binary oppositions of the privileged, dominating North and underprivileged, global South and investigates the issues of migration, diaspora, displacement, racism, nationality, gender, and identity. In the article, special attention is paid to the exploration of gender issues, particularly to Adichie's constant questioning of traditional conformity to gender roles. In this respect, the concept of African feminism is discussed, as well as its (in)congruity with the Western feminist model. The crux of its ideology relies on the blending of Africa's colonial history and traditional African values that view gender roles as complementary. The idea that men are viewed as partners in the struggle against gender oppression rather than enemies serves as a valid confirmation of Adichie's celebration of the myth

of androgyne in *Americanah* and has the purpose of inventing new forms of cultural understanding between the West and Africa. The theoretical framework of the article relies on the critical insights of Adichie, Bhabha, Fanon, Okuyade, Villanova, Odhiambo, Mekgwe, Mikell, Ntseane, and others.

The Historiography of the Vietnam War: An Update of Translations into Italian

Stefano Rosso

This essay presents an overview of the historiographical works on the Vietnam War translated into Italian, arguing that prejudices against military history have influenced the editorial decisions of Italian publishers. However, other historiographical areas have also been insufficiently covered in Italy such as oral histories, the Vietnam War and American politics, and the question of the veterans, leaving too much space to Hollywood blockbusters. In recent years, one can detect a new interest in the Vietnamese perspective on the war, to which the following essay by Giacomo Traina is devoted.

Memory in the Plural: The Vietnamese People, War, and Italian Publishing

Giacomo Traina

This essay gives an overview of the Italian publishing industry with regard to Vietnamese perspectives on the Vietnam War. It argues that in Italy the memory of the war still carries both the mark of Hollywood's influence and of the wartime sympathies for the Vietnamese communists' cause. The author advocates the translation of more recent scholarly works that question old assumptions about the war and its aftermath.

From the Blacklist to the New Hollywood: The Relationships between MPAA, CIA and the White House

Massimiliano Studer

This essay focuses on the relationships between the Motion Pictures Association of America and American politics, from the second half of the 1940s onwards. After the reforms by William Hays, the MPAA decided to put at its top people who had strong links with the most influential political organizations in Washington. The personal and professional careers of Eric Johnston and Jack Valenti,

Hays' two successors, show how the Hollywood film industry collaborated with the White House and its most strategic institutions, including the CIA.