

The poem thus satisfies the male audience by presenting the husband as triumphant; by extension, this view endorses the values of the patriarchal society. Closure can be recognized by any member of the audience, male or female, but it is centered on the male point of view, as the masculine-oriented reading reveals that to have a happy marriage a man need only ensure that his wife finds happiness, no matter how unorthodox the manner in which her happiness is achieved. The illusion of ambiguous closure arises from the temporary misconception that patriarchal values are being subverted. The humor of the tale emerges from the clash between this misconception and the final realization that the status quo is maintained.

Structural closure exists in the individual tales. One must reach beyond the expected, play Chaucer's game, to discover the surprise that the poet has in store.

PHYLLIS N. BRAXTON
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Reply:

Phyllis N. Braxton's letter is less a critique of my views than an effort to state her own. As such, it should be judged on its own merits.

MICHAELA PAASCHE GRUDIN
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History and the Novel of Development

To the Editor:

I read Susan Fraiman's "*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics, and the *Bildungsroman*" with considerable dismay (108 [1993]: 136–50). I have no quarrel with the idea that, among other things, George Eliot intended in *The Mill on the Floss* to "call" the *Bildungsroman* "into question" (138), but Fraiman's comments both on the form and on the critics, most especially Jerome Buckley, seem to me to misapprehend the nature of history and of criticism. To begin with, Fraiman appears to suffer from a serious confusion between the making and the writing of history. I grant the line between them is not as clear as one would like it to be, but there is a substantive difference. It was not Buckley, as Fraiman claims (144), who was responsible for constructing the genre of the *Bildungsroman* as a narrative that centered almost invariably on men. It is a purely historical fact that

this is the narrative as it was written. I agree it is regrettable that women were not in the past able to engage in those actions novelists of *Bildungsromane* liked or needed to write about, and I certainly hope the future will correct this gross injustice. Nevertheless, things were what they were, and it does not do for critics to pretend that they were otherwise.

Given this historical fact, it is no wonder that women novelists writing about women characters often felt the need to call the very genre into question, although they also adapted the genre to serve their ends in other ways, and it is a narrow view of the form not to allow for this critical subcategory. Fraiman does not mention that Eliot employed the genre above all, especially in *The Mill on the Floss*, in which Maggie is a perfect instantiation of the paradigm, as a study of moral *Bildung*. (We do, of course, have to remember that for most in the nineteenth century "moral" was a normative term.) But this calling of the genre into question is important. Novels, however, concerned with doing so are not logically *Bildungsromane*. They are *Bildungsromane* manqué, and they were written not only by women and about women in the century. Many novelists in fact invoked the form of the *Bildungsroman*—*Barry Lyndon*, *Desperate Remedies*, and *Phineas Finn* come quickly to mind as works in dialogue with that form—as well as many other genres, using them as conceptual frames from which, for one reason or another, the lives of their characters diverged. Fascinating studies indeed might be written on the subject of the *Bildungsroman* manqué, and Fraiman's book, announced in the journal as forthcoming, might perhaps be one of these. But the *Bildungsroman* manqué is not the subject of Buckley's study, and, unless we want to be in the business of assigning topics on which critics must write, I think it best perhaps to let everyone do what he or she wishes.

Finally, I am disturbed by Fraiman's dogmatism in areas that are, at the least, susceptible of many points of view. One example will have to serve. In yet another kind of confusion, between the prescriptive and the descriptive, Fraiman objects again to Buckley's description of the *Bildungsroman* as a genre in which a "special child" is "set off from an inimical environment" (138). He should have discussed, she states in her ending, "the inescapable relatedness of circumstances and subjectivities" (147). But, quite apart from the fact that most of the authors of *Bildungsromane* did, as Buckley rightly demonstrates in his *Season of Youth*, believe that the individual soul could break free of the limitations that bound it to its time and place, why does Fraiman think she has the right to require everyone to share her latter-day Marxist premises—

that individuals are determined by socioeconomic forces, that no one can or ever could escape the prison of race, class, and gender, and that it is these questions only that it is important to ask? Fraiman is entitled certainly to her assumptions. What she does not seem to realize is that so is everyone else.

FELICIA BONAPARTE
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Reply:

Felicia Bonaparte charges me with confusing “the making and the writing of history.” Jerome Buckley, she argues, did not make the history of the *Bildungsroman* but simply wrote it down. Any bias in favor of male development is therefore “purely historical fact,” no reflection on the historian-critic. This equation of history with a set of stable, irrefutable facts, objectively recorded by scholars, is fundamental to traditional historiography. My view of history, by contrast, has been shaped by those revisionists, such as Hayden White, who affirm that the past cannot be understood or even known apart from the stories scholars invent about it. I take for granted, then, that the genealogy of the novel of development is a matter not only of historical facts but also of historical narratives, each of which proposes a particular definition of growing up and so calls attention to some books while ignoring others. Such a view would seem to be supported by the diversity of canons offered by historians of the English *Bildungsroman*: Susanne Howe (1930), for example, proposes *Ernest Maltravers*, *Ranthorpe*, and *The Half-Sisters*, while Jerome Buckley (1974) prefers *David Copperfield*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The purpose of my essay is less to question Buckley’s choices than to recognize them as choices and to explore their implications in relation to the critical milieu of the early 1970s.

Bonaparte is right that I am interested in *The Mill on the Floss* as a failed *Bildungsroman*. But identifying the *Bildungsroman* as an ideological construct, variously phrased by critics from Carlyle to Dilthey to Buckley, allows me ultimately to jettison the official category altogether and to query Eliot’s novel for alternative conceptions of development. To rethink coming of age in terms of social context and constraint rather than of individual transcendence is, I agree with Bonaparte, a political proposition every bit as much as Buckley’s project is. I am puzzled, however, by Bonaparte’s sense that my argument is somehow more

coercive than Buckley’s and hers—especially given that theirs remains the standard account of the form. By expressing my opinion in print I do not “require everyone to share” it, nor am I refusing to “let everyone do what he or she wishes.” In suggesting as much, Bonaparte exemplifies the confusion of those who have taken to crying “censorship” whenever they encounter dissent.

SUSAN FRAIMAN
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Frankenstein—Fact and Fantasy

To the Editor:

Like much provocative interpretive criticism or “construction,” Bette London’s “Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity” (108 [1993]: 253–67) depends on arguments based ultimately on analogy and metaphor. So long as the element of similarity appears to predominate over the element of difference that inheres in all such enterprises, the effect is generally persuasive. But this deconstructive situation can be delicately balanced, and in London’s case this reader’s confidence was somewhat undermined by the presence of one outright error of fact and one interpretive swerve where the interplay of similarity and difference is surely not in London’s favor.

In a typically overnuanced sentence London writes that “it is *Frankenstein*’s claims to preeminent originality that support Rieger’s effort at literary resuscitation—the reproduction of the very text, unavailable for over a century, reconstructed in his contribution to the Library of Literature” (257). She is referring to James Rieger’s 1974 Bobbs-Merrill edition of the original 1818 text of *Frankenstein* and rephrasing a claim in his “Note on the Text”: “The Library of Literature *Frankenstein* reproduces for the first time in more than a century the text published . . . in 1818” (xliii). This is simply not so. As Donald F. Glut observes in *The Frankenstein Catalog* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1984), “[A] single-volume edition of the 1818 text appeared during the latter half of the 19th century and has remained in print at least until the early 1940s. Moreover, a number of the foreign language editions of the novel have been translated from the single-volume 1818 text” (4). The volume published in 1865 by Milner and Sowerby, of Halifax, England, was the source of twenty subsequent editions, the last of which was published in 1942.

What strikes me as London’s most fanciful “con-