

## BETWEEN MARXISM AND ROMANTICISM: CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION IN THE WORKS OF ERNST BLOCH

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### Abstract

Ernst Bloch is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century German philosopher, associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory. The aim of this paper is to explore Bloch's attitude toward childhood and education. My discussion of this topic will be mainly based on the following of Bloch's works: *The Principle of Hope* (1959), *Pädagogica* (1971), *Traces* (1930) and *Literary Essays* (1965). This paper is divided into three parts: The first part describes Bloch's childhood and youth. The second part deals with Bloch's critique of conventional education and with his suggestions for an alternative kind of education. The third part explores the affinities between Blochian and Romantic ideas of childhood and education. For this purpose, I will examine selected poems by the English Romantic poets William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Please note that all translations of quotations from *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*), *Pädagogica*, *Spuren* (*Traces*), *Literarische Aufsätze* (*Literary Essays*), *Geist der Utopie* (*The Spirit of Utopia*), *Experimentum Mundi* and *Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (*Selected Writings*) are my translations.

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### 1 BLOCH'S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

In *Traces*, a collection of stories, aphorisms and essays, Bloch (1930, p. 12) has remarked: "Children like it best at someone else's home. Only, they soon notice what's wrong there too. If it were so nice at home, they wouldn't leave so eagerly. They often sense early that, here as elsewhere, much could be different". Ernst Bloch was born in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in 1885. His parents were assimilated Jews. His father worked for the local railway company. Ludwigshafen was founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. It is located on the Rhine river opposite Mannheim. Mannheim was founded in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century. Bloch noticed the differences between Ludwigshafen and Mannheim at an early age: Ludwigshafen was a workers' city. Mannheim was bourgeois. In Ludwigshafen, the air was dark with smoke. The streets were full of dirt. The workers looked tired and hopeless. But when one crossed the bridge, everything was different: The air was clean. There were old taverns and citizens' houses, which looked clean and well-preserved. Mannheim was a neat and pleasant city (Markun, 1977, pp. 12/13). Its inhabitants, as Bloch (1965, p. 408) has remarked sarcastically, ate "what had been earned by the labor of the workers". Bloch went to school in Ludwigshafen and spent much of his

free time in Mannheim. As Bloch (1965, p. 405) has pointed out, Mannheim was “for the neighboring city of Ludwigshafen a beautiful free afternoon or evening; Sunday, from which one carried back all kinds of cultural treasures”. Bloch loved to go to the Mannheim theater. There, he listened to classical music and watched performances of plays by Goethe and Schiller. According to Bloch (1965, p. 406), the theater cast a magic spell on the city: “The Mannheim theater was always much bigger than the city. It put color into the talk of the deepest petty bourgeoisie. The actors and singers were like guests of honor; they cut through the castes of bourgeois society; the director almost had to represent a reality – the reality of this True, Good, Beautiful, which, until recently, had been different from the empirical reality, as if it had not just been appearance in it”. Bloch also loved to spend time in the Mannheim public library. As he (1965, p. 407) has pointed out, it was housed “in one of the most beautiful and most sublime of Baroque halls”, and its visitors could read books “in the same room in which Schiller recited Fiesco”. The library did not contain any theoretical books written after 1860. Therefore, the young Bloch remained untouched by positivist ideas and instead read the works of the Romantics and of Hegel (Bloch, 1965, p. 407). For Bloch, the books which he read as a high school student in the Mannheim public library were like windows to a new world - a world in which he would dwell and travel for the rest of his life. In addition to the Mannheim theater and the Mannheim public library, Bloch loved the Mannheim fair. He (1965, p. 405) has described this fair as consisting of “six rows of stalls, which show how big the world is”. There, he watched mermaids, magicians, cowboys, who threw knives, and men who swallowed frogs and then regurgitated them (Bloch, 1965, pp. 405/406). Bloch also loved to go to the harbor. At the harbor, there were often ships from distant countries. Talking to the sailors was exciting and a bit dangerous: “On ships, which had come down from Holland, we listened to the sailors, who told us about snakes, which they had eaten; one of us was almost tattooed” (Bloch, 1930, p. 68). Besides, Bloch loved the plains between the rivers Rhine and Neckar. There, he took long walks and played games with his friends. The plains between the two rivers offered them a vast space for playing, talking and acting out imaginary adventures: “Especially on cloudy autumn evenings, the landscape could turn into anything. Sometimes we believed that we were at the Thames, where police boats chased Merryatts, or on the Susquehanna [...] Winnetou hugged Old Shatterhand [...] The blizzard started, the hurricane, the monsoon, swirling from Little Rock into hot, crowded Asia, hurrying to Baghdad and Istanbul” (Bloch, 1930, p. 68). Every stone and every tree could become the hero in a story. Sometimes, Bloch and his friends lived through imaginary adventures. Sometimes, they let themselves be captivated by the beauty and mystery of the landscape which surrounded them: “We were drawn into the beauty of trees, clouds, the evening sky – to such an extent that it hurt and that we suffered from our speechlessness, which almost caused hallucinations” (Bloch, 1930, p. 70). Compared to these pastimes, school was a dull affair. Bloch did not like going to school, and he was not a good student. Once, he even had to repeat a class. However, while he was still a high school student, he exchanged letters with eminent German philosophers, such as Ernst Mach, Theodor Lipp, Eduard von Hartmann and Wilhelm Windelband (Markun, 1977, pp. 16-18). Also, during this time, he wrote his first philosophical essays. One of them was entitled “Renaissance of Sensuality”. In this essay, Bloch (1930, p. 70) has stated the following: “In the system, the ideas are like toy soldiers. One can put them here or there, but one cannot conquer a realm with them. Our philosophies were always hung up on the hook of grammar or the desire of peace and quiet of elderly men. Science is radical, art potential life. And philosophy? Our blood must become like the river, our flesh like the earth, our brain like the clouds, our eye like the sun”. In another early philosophical essay, entitled “On Energy and Its Nature”, Bloch (1930, p. 71) has claimed that “the essence of the world is urge and energy to create, toward the opened secret of life, in every place; the thing in itself is the objective imagination”. Shortly after he had graduated from high school, he discovered the concept which was to become one of the cornerstones of his philosophy: the Not-Yet-Conscious. Moving toward and into the Not-Yet-Conscious is an act of transgressing boundaries. It often occurs in the process of creative work. Bloch (in Markun, 1977, p. 19) has described the Not-Yet-Conscious as follows: “Toil, darkness, cracking ice, peaceful ocean, and happy journey lie around this spot. There rises, if one can break through, the country where nobody has been yet”. Throughout his life, the country where nobody has been yet – utopia – remained at the center of Bloch's philosophizing.

## 2 MARXISM

Bloch's concept of utopia is based on Marx's “realm of freedom”. Marx has described the “realm of freedom” as a state in which all the negative features of capitalist class society, such as poverty, misery, exploitation and alienation, will have been abolished (Bloch, 1959, p. 323). Bloch's view on education has been inspired by Marxist ideas. It has also been inspired by the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Rousseau. Kant has defined enlightenment as “man's emancipation from his self-inflicted tutelage”. He has argued that human beings must achieve this emancipation by living according to the Latin motto “Aude

sapere!", which can be translated as "Dare to know!" or "Have the courage to use your reason!" (Bloch, 1971, p. 113) The guiding image of the Enlightenment period was the *citoyen*. The values of the *citoyen* were the values of the French Revolution: Liberty, equality, fraternity. Besides, the guiding image of the *citoyen* included the Humanist ideal *kalon kai agathon*, which envisions human beings as good and beautiful (Bloch, 1971, p. 21). A corresponding notion is *mens sana in corpore sano*, which can be translated as "a healthy mind in a healthy body". As Bloch (1971, pp. 148/149) has pointed out, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "some noble individuals still wanted to be whole human beings". But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideal of the *citoyen* was driven more and more into the background, because the bourgeoisie started to distance itself from its liberating beginnings. Eventually, the guiding image of the *citoyen* was swallowed up, and with it the striving for wholeness (Bloch, 1971, p. 12). As Bloch (1971, p. 65) has pointed out, capitalism is based on the division of labor. It needs specialists. According to Friedrich Schiller (1795 b, pp. 20/21), a human being who lives in a society which is based on the division of labor can be described as follows: "The human being who is forever tied onto a single, small fragment of the whole becomes himself only a fragment. Because he only hears the noise of the wheel which he keeps in motion, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of developing his nature as a human being, he becomes only the reflection of his business or his science" (my translation). The philosophers of the Enlightenment dreamed of human beings who were whole. By contrast, as Bloch (1959, p. 1090) has argued, capitalist society needs useful and reliable employees. Bloch (1959, p. 1090) has claimed that the ideal employee is "deliberately small", "artificially faceless", "without color", "does not smoke, does not drink, does not play cards, does not look at girls, shall control his instincts and live the life of virtuous trash". According to Bloch (1959, p. 1090), parents and teachers are mouthpieces of capitalist ideology, who teach young people to "accept and endure what is done to them. The will is assaulted and broken, no matter what, one only nods and smiles. The faculty of reason does not stray beyond the boundary of the prearranged questions and answers which arise from the life of the employee". As Bloch (1971, p. 9) has pointed out, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century has produced the bourgeois, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has produced the Babbit. The Babbit perceives capitalism as natural. He strives for a comfortable life in conformity with capitalist goals and values. According to Bloch (1971, p. 9), conventional education has, moreover, produced "the deliberate young Babbit", who has internalized the norms and demands of capitalism. He does not question the society he lives in. He does not even rebel against his parents and teachers. Bloch (1971, p. 12) has argued that conventional education has achieved a "chemical miracle": It produces, through education, "synthetic stupidity". In conventional schools and universities, students are subjected to what Bloch (1971, p. 8) has called "the tyranny of the textbook": "Like slaves, the students have to memorize innumerable blind facts for the exams. In this manner, the students are prevented from thinking by the lack of time". According to Bloch (1971, pp. 25/26), the memorization of knowledge stifles "the living spirit" of the curious and intelligent students and turns learning into "a tiresome, unwilling mechanical routine". Besides, Bloch (1971, p. 12) has claimed that conventional education deliberately conceals the True and the Real from the students by veiling all contradictions. If the teacher called attention to these contradictions, the students would become incited to think about them. Bloch (1971, p. 23) has further argued that conventional education promotes only superficial knowledge. According to Bloch, this kind of knowledge is worthless because it ignores the connections among the bits and pieces of knowledge which have been accumulated by the students. Bloch (1971, p. 31) has also criticized conventional education for assigning to the students a passive role: They are expected to listen to what the teacher says. The teacher is expected to fill the students with "facts". Bloch (1971, p. 46) has rejected the concept of "facts". According to Bloch (1971, p. 46), the concept of "facts" contains "elements of the category 'commodity'". The concept of "facts" creates the illusion that "facts" are neat, unproblematic unities, which can be treated separately. Thus, "facts" resemble products. Bloch (1971, p. 27) has argued that education has become a product. In conventional schools and universities, teachers are like salesmen, who offer knowledge for sale. Students are like customers, who buy and consume knowledge. Besides, the concept of "fact" has become "mixed up with the concept of the 'past'" (Bloch, 1971, p. 46). Thus, "facts" appear as belonging to the past and as unchangeable. However, according to Bloch, the past is not finished and closed. By contrast, it contains undischarged future, which influences the present and the future. Capitalist ideology presents both the past and the future as finished and closed. The concept of "facts" contributes to this falsification of our perception of the past and the future. According to Bloch, the future cannot be predicted. It is not automatically determined. Like the past, it is unfinished and still open (Bloch, 1959, p. 228). Meanwhile, the present is almost non-existent in capitalist class society: It is being drowned in the hectic pace and restlessness of capitalism. As Bloch (1971, p. 114) has pointed out, "[t]he profit drive *per se* is infinite; it never comes to a halt. Therefore, tranquility is not a value of capitalist society". According to Bloch (1971, p. 123), tranquility is an important condition of wisdom. However, as Bloch (1971, p. 123) has argued, "bourgeois society has distanced itself from the concept of wisdom. It has gotten more and more into a chase and empty motion; it is not interested in contemplation and self- reflection". In a capitalist society, money is the highest good.

Productivity is its highest value. By contrast, Bloch has emphasized the value of idleness: “It is good to have time [...]; it is as good as to have space – space to walk and space to create” (1975, p. 107). Idleness is an important condition of thinking and acting. For Bloch, thinking and acting are not binary opposites but supplementary part of a harmonious whole. Bloch has also emphasized the value of courage. However, as Bloch (1959, p. 1) has deplored, unfortunately, in capitalist societies, most people only feel scared and confused. They feel as if they were only passively thrown into What Is and do not understand that they can and should throw themselves actively into What Is Becoming (Bloch, 1959, p. 1). Reality is still unfinished, and the future has not yet been decided upon. According to Bloch (Bloch, 1971, pp. 75/76), the future is an adventure, which demands our courage. He has further argued that we also need a new kind of ethics – true ethics, not the pseudo-ethics of capitalist class society. As Bloch (1971, p. 104) has pointed out, Zenon, the founder of the Stoa, has compared philosophy to a garden: Physics are its walls. Logic is its trees. Ethics are its fruits. However, according to Bloch, these fruits do not grow in capitalist class society. He (1959, p. 1142) has claimed that there is no ethics as long as private property has not been abolished. Similarly, he (1959, p. 18) has argued that, as long as we live in a capitalist class society, education will never be what it could and should be. According to Bloch, the most important goals of education are to encourage young people to become critical and independent thinkers, to help them to assume an “upright gait” and to make them realize that they are subjects in the sense of historical agents. Bloch (1959, p. 2) has defined thinking as “to venture beyond” and “to transgress”. Bloch’s notion of an “upright gait” is closely connected to his notion of human wholeness and dignity. Human beings who perceive themselves as historical agents understand that capitalist society is not natural, but historical, not fixed and eternal, but temporary and changeable. Reality is not only the empirical Real, but also the imaginary Real. Reality is not only what is, but also what can be (Bloch, 1959, p. 271). Expectation, hope and intention toward not-yet-realized possibility are not only features of human consciousness but also of reality (Bloch, 1959, p. 5). Throughout his life, Bloch was committed to utopia and to Marxism. Accordingly, he was primarily interested in knowledge, which is concerned with and contributes to the realization of utopia. As a thinker and as a teacher, he was openly partial to Marxism. In fact, he has argued that everybody is partial to a particular set of values and goals. According to Bloch (1971, p. 78), knowledge is never disinterested, but always serves the interests of a particular group of people. Similarly, knowledge is never objective, because no human being can step out of his/her own subjectivity. Knowledge should never be neutral, because we cannot afford to be indifferent. The world is a process. Every moment of this process contains a movement toward the future – either into the direction of the All or into the direction of the Nothing (Bloch, 1959, p. 359).

### 3 ROMANTICISM

Bloch’s philosophy is a philosophy of utopia and of becoming. So much has not become yet. So much has not even become conscious yet. We only feel longing toward something. Something is missing. This creates a painful feeling of lack. As soon as a baby has entered this world, he/she is confronted with this painful experience of lack: “From the very beginning, we are looking for something. We are desirous through and through. We cry, because we do not have what we want” (Bloch, 1959, p. 21) What is more, often, we do not even know what we want. We constantly try to find out what we want, especially, when we are young: “A child takes up and handles everything he sees, to find out what it means. Throws everything away, is restlessly curious and does not know of what. But already here lives the Fresh, the Different of what one dreams. Boys destroy what one gives them, they are looking for more, unpack it. Nobody could name it and nobody has ever gotten it” (Bloch, 1959, p. 21). Something is missing, but we do not know what it is. As Bloch (1929, p. 249) has remarked in his first important philosophical work, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1923), the answer to the question of what is missing will never be found in a book, in a church or in a philosophical system. Or in a class room, one might add. Bloch’s remarks about school are mainly negative. For example, he (1959, p. 23) has stated that “parents and teachers certainly know how to make a child sad” and that “the suffering in school can be more disgusting than any kind of suffering which is experienced later in life, except the suffering of the prisoner.” For Bloch, the class room is a prison. Students are prisoners, who want to break out of the prison (Bloch, 1959, p. 23). The poem “The School Boy” (1789) by William Blake describes school as a prison and schoolchildren as prisoners. In the poem, the narrator compares schoolchildren to birds, who are locked up in a cage. Locked up birds cannot fly. They often stop singing. Sometimes, they even die. The schoolchildren in the poem are like birds in a cage – imprisoned, silent, sad and hopeless:

“How can the bird that is born for joy,

Sit in a cage and sing.

How can a child when fears annoy,

But droop his tender wing" (in Driver, 1995, p. 4).

The narrator in the poem uses the image of a bird with drooped wings twice: In the fourth stanza (quoted above) and in the third stanza (below). Moreover, both stanzas imply that the schoolchildren are scared (in the fourth stanza, the narrator uses the word "fears". In the third stanza, he uses the word "anxious"):

"Ah! Then at times I drooping sit,  
And spend many an anxious hour,  
Nor in my book can I take delight,  
Nor sit in learnings bower,

Worn through with the dreary shower" (in Driver, 1995, p. 4).

As the lines quoted above indicate, the school boy would rather read a book of his own choice than listen to the words of the teacher, which he perceives as a "dreary shower". Apart from talking a lot, the teacher watches the children with a "cruel eye": "Under a cruel eye outworn,/ The little ones spend the day,/ In sighing and dismay" (in Driver, 1995, p. 4). Like the phrase "many an anxious hour" in the third stanza, the words "cruel", "sighing" and "dismay" in the second stanza indicate that the children are afraid of the teacher and would rather be outside than inside the class room. They would like to break out of it, but they cannot. They can only look out of the window and imagine they were somewhere else. Bloch (1959, p. 23) has described the daydreams of children as follows: "The boy kidnaps himself and rides away on a fast horse, with flying feather into the safety of adventure. The night is full of taverns and castles, in each are furs, weapons, crackling fireplaces, men as tall as trees and no clock". Of course, students cannot look out of the window all the time. The teacher would notice this and reprimand them. However, according to Bloch (1959, p. 22), any kind of object (such as a lizard or a butterfly) can become a window into an imaginary world: "The colorful animal itself is a colorful window, beyond it lies the desired far-away land. It is like the stamp which tells of foreign countries. It is like the seashell, in which the ocean sings, when one holds it very close to one's ear [...]. In the glance at a colorful stone is already much of what the child wishes for itself later in life". Bloch has valued daydreaming highly. He (1959, p. 111) has argued that "daydreams are not empty soap bubbles; they are open windows, and beyond them is the daydream world of a realizable possibility". Daydreaming is a central theme in the poem "Frost at Midnight" (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the poem, an adult male narrator is sitting in front of a fireplace in his cottage. It is midnight. Everything is quiet. Next to him, his son is sleeping in his cradle. The father is looking at the fire, which is already low: There are only a thin blue flame and some pieces of soot fluttering on the grate. The fire reminds him of the fire in the class room of the school which he attended as a young boy. He remembers how lonely and unhappy he was in this school, because he was away from his family and hometown. During the lessons, he would often look at the fire and at the door, wishing and hoping that somebody from his hometown would come and take him with them: "Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,/ My play-mate when we both were clothed alike" (in Driver, 1995, p. 18). Now that he is a father, he thinks about his son's education. In the poem, he states that he does not intend to send his son away to go to school in "the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim", where there is "nought lovely but the sky and stars" (in Driver, 1995, p. 18). He does not want his son to be educated in a school in a big city away from his home. Instead, he wants him to grow up in the countryside and to be educated by nature:

"[...] thou, my babe! Shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,  
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould

Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee" (in Driver, 1995, pp. 18/19).

In the passage quoted above, the narrator refers to nature as "great universal Teacher", who teaches humankind to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of life in every season and at every age. In "The School Boy", Blake (in Driver, p. 4) has also argued that childhood is crucial for the formation of adulthood. Children need freedom, love and attention to develop into adults, who can appreciate life. When parents and teachers deprive children of freedom, love and attention, they become guilty of turning them into emotional cripples. Blake has described the happiness of an unrestrained childhood in "Nurse's Song", which is included in his "Songs of Innocence" (1789). The poem describes the happiness of children, who are allowed to play as long as they want on green meadows and hills. The poem ends with the following lines: "The little ones leaped and shouted and laughed/ And all the hills echoed" (in Driver, 1995, p. 2). By contrast, in the poem "Nurse's Song", which is included in Blake's "Songs of Experience" (1789), the children are not allowed to play as long as they want to. Besides, the mood in this poem is not cheerful but sad. The poem ends with the following address to the children (and the reader): "Your spring and your day, are wasted in play/ And your winter and night in disguise" (in Driver, 1995, p. 3). The atmosphere in this poem is dark and oppressive, a reflection of the kind of life most adults are forced to live: full of anxiety and devoid of love. Blake's "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience" explore the themes of childhood and growing up. They reflect the differences between children's perception of the world and adults' perception of it. Childhood and growing up are also vital themes in the poem "Tintern Abbey" (1798) by William Wordsworth. Like the narrator in "Frost at Midnight", the narrator in "Tintern Abbey" refers to nature as a teacher: "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being" (in Driver, 1995, p. 70). As these lines indicate, the narrator considers nature as connected to morality. Friedrich Schiller has held a similar view. According to him (1795a, pp. 4/5), our love for nature is not aesthetic but moral. We do not love nature itself, but an idea embodied by nature. We love nature, because, when we look at rivers, rocks, trees and flowers, we see and feel "the quiet, creative life, the tranquil inner force, being according to their own laws, inner necessity, their eternal unity with themselves. They are what we once were. [...] They are also representations of our lost childhood, which will always be our most precious treasure, which fills us with nostalgia. They are also representations of our highest realization in the ideal. Therefore, they fill us with a feeling of dignity" (my translation). In "Tintern Abbey", morality is defined as a man's "little, nameless, unremembered, acts/ Of kindness and of love" (in Driver, 1995, p. 68). This definition of the good man corresponds to Bloch's description of utopia: a society which is characterized by "peace and solidarity among all living creatures, [and in which it is possible] to be kind to all" (1959, p. 37). But in a capitalist class society, people are not always kind to each other. The main characteristics of capitalist class society preclude kindness and solidarity. According to the narrator in "Tintern Abbey", society is hostile and harmful to the individual. By contrast, nature has a soothing and empowering effect on human beings. Nature is depicted as a teacher, who enriches and strengthens our spirit, so that the coldness and hostility of society cannot harm or destroy it:

"[...] she [nature] can so inform

The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feed

With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,

Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,

Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all

The dreary intercourse of daily life,

Shall e'er prevail against us [...]" (in Driver, 1995, p. 70).

In "Frost at Midnight", the narrator imagines how his son will grow up in nature and how this upbringing will teach him to appreciate life: All seasons will be sweet to him – summer, with its green grass and eave drops; winter, with its tufts of snow on the bare branches of mossy apple trees (in Driver, 1995, pp. 18/19). And rainbows, one could add. In the poem "My Heart Leaps Up" (1802) by Wordsworth, an adult male narrator sees a rainbow in the sky. Seeing a rainbow makes him feel exuberant joy and excitement: "My heart leaps up when I behold/ a rainbow in the sky" (in Driver, 1995, p. 22). What happens when YOU see a rainbow in the sky? Does your heart leap up? No, probably not. Perhaps you have not even noticed the rainbow! Why? Because you are thinking of something and do not pay attention to your surroundings. As Bloch has aptly

remarked, “[m]ost people in the street look as if they were thinking of something else entirely. The something else is mainly money, but also what could be bought with money” (1959, p. 35). Unlike “most people”, the narrator in “My Heart Leaps Up” does not seem to care about money. For him, the most precious thing in life is his ability to feel joy and excitement when he sees a rainbow. He even declares that he would rather die than lose this ability:

“My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die!” (in Driver, 1995, pp. 22/23)

The narrator in this poem does not want to lose his “child-I”. Of course, most people become adults and do not even notice that they have lost their “child-I”. They just continue to live as adults: busy, worried, anxious and impoverished in terms of their perception, curiosity and imagination. One might say that, when we grow up, we forget our childhood dreams. However, Bloch (1959, p. 28) has argued that we do not simply forget our childhood dreams, but betray them: “[...] there is nothing more disillusioning and insipid than the reunion of former classmates after long years. They have become like the teachers, like the grown-ups of then, like everything one had sworn to fight against. Such reunion appears as if the young faces and dreams had not only, as would be normal, disappeared, but as if they had been betrayed”. The protagonist of the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe resembles the narrator in “My Heart Leaps Up” in several aspects: Werther is young in spirit and uncompromising in nature. He remains faithful to his dreams and to his values, although he cannot realize them in the society he lives in. At the beginning of the novel, Werther leaves his hometown in order to distract himself from an unhappy episode in his love life. He stays for several months as a visitor in another town. There he meets and falls in love with Lotte, who, unfortunately, is already engaged to another man, whom she marries toward the end of the novel. Werther also becomes attracted to another woman, Fräulein B., but a marriage is impossible, because she belongs to a higher social class than Werther. Goethe's novel is a novel about love, but it is also a novel about the conflict between the individual and society. It contains many allusions to social class and to alienation. Werther is painfully conscious of the class differences between the inhabitants of the town in which he has been staying for a couple of months as a visitor. He feels disgusted by how upper class people behave toward ordinary folks: “[P]eople of some standing always keep coldly aloof from the common folk, as if they believe they would lose if they approached them; and then there are irresponsible characters and nasty jokers who appear to condescend, but only to make the poor people feel their cockiness all the more. I know well we are not equal, nor can be; but I maintain that he who supposes he must keep his distance from what they call the rabble, to preserve the respect due to him, is as much to blame as a coward who hides from his enemy for fear of being beaten” (Goethe, 1774, p. 28). Werther is from an upper class family, but he is not wealthy. Therefore, his mother wants him to find a post and to pursue a career. Werther gets the opportunity to work for an ambassador, but he hesitates to accept the post. He is not interested in a career and material gain. In fact, he only feels disdain for worldly ambition: “You say that my mother would like to see me kept occupied, which made me laugh. As if I were not occupied now; and does it make much fundamental difference whether I count peas or lentils? The affairs of the world are no more than so much trickery, and a man who toils for money or honor or whatever else in deference to the wishes of others, rather than of his own desire or needs lead him to do so, will always be a fool” (Goethe, 1774, p. 55). Like the narrator in “My Heart Leaps Up”, Werther does not care about money and success. For him, the most precious thing in his life is his heart, which is the seat of his feelings – feelings of joy and feelings of pain. Unlike the narrator in “My Heart Leaps Up”, Werther cannot achieve peace of mind without fulfillment in love. The narrator in “My Heart Leaps Up” envisions his life as a long string of days filled with “natural piety” (in Driver, p. 1995, p. 23). But Werther cares too much for human beings. For him, nature is less a living being than a canvas onto which he projects his feelings. He cannot live in the distance to Lotte and Fräulein B. which society prescribes for him. Besides, he is painfully aware of how alienated most people are from each other. Social intercourse often saddens and exasperates him. It is a game, which is not free and joyful like the games of children. Playing children run, jump, shout and laugh. They become hot, excited and out of breath. Their eyes and cheeks glow. They are red, warm and alive. By contrast, adults are like cold, hard pieces of wood. In the novel, Werther describes his attitude toward social intercourse as follows: “I play the game myself, or rather am played with, like a puppet, and from time to time I grasp my neighbor's wooden hand and withdraw

with a shudder” (Goethe, 1774, p. 78). Werther prefers the company of children to the company of adults. In a letter to a friend, he states that “nothing on earth is closer to my heart than children” (Goethe, 1774, p. 45). Werther points out to his friend that Jesus Christ also preferred children to adults. Besides, Jesus Christ believed that the world would be a much better place if we all became like little children (Goethe, 1774, p. 45). But, unfortunately, most adults treat children as their inferiors. Werther's indignation and anger at this attitude is evident in the following passage: “[...] we treat them as our subjects, these children who are our equals and whom we ought to consider our models. We claim they have no will of their own! - Do we have none, then? And why should we have an exclusive right to a will? - Because we are older and wiser! - Dear God, when Thou lookest down from heaven, all Thou seest is old children and young; and Thy Son long since declared which of them give Thee the greater joy” (Goethe, 1774, p. 46). In “My Heart Leaps Up”, the narrator makes a similar point, when he refers to children as the fathers of men: “The Child is father of the Man” (in Driver, 1995, p. 23). This line implies that children are superior to adults: They are wiser. Besides, childhood experiences have a profound and lasting effect on our lives as adults. As John Blades (2004, p. 67) has pointed out, in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Wordsworth's claim that childhood is the most crucial phase in the development of human beings was revolutionary. Werther finds people, who believe that they are superior to children, arrogant and stupid, as the following passage shows: “All our learned teachers and educators are agreed that children do not know why they want what they want; but no one is willing to believe that adults too, like children, wander about this earth in a daze and, like children, do not know where they come from or where they are going, act as rarely as they do according to genuine motives, and are as thoroughly governed as they are by biscuits and cake and the rod” (Goethe, 1774, p. 31). Like “The School Boy” and “Frost at Midnight”, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* depicts school as a place of confinement and suffering. By contrast, nature is depicted as a place of freedom – both in a physical and a spiritual sense. When Werther visits his hometown after many years (he had moved with his mother to a bigger city after the death of his father), he passes his old school and thinks of his teacher, “that honest old woman [who had] herded us children into the fold” (Goethe, 1774, p. 86). He also remembers “the restlessness and tears, the heaviness of heart and the mortal fear [he had] endured in that hole” (Goethe, 1774, 86). Then, Werther takes a walk along the river. He remembers how he spent time at the river, when he was a child: “I remembered so clearly how I would stand there gazing at the flowing water, following it with my head full of romantic notions, imagining the exciting parts it would pass through” (Goethe, 1774, p. 86). At the river, he was free. In his imagination, he traveled to far-away, unknown places. The waves of the river carried him away. As Bloch (1959, p. 29) has argued, boys are driven by a desire for “audacity, color, width and height”. They dream of “adventures, which must be lived through, of beauty, which must be discovered, of greatness, which is to be conquered” (Bloch, 1959, p. 29). When Werther leaves his hometown and returns to the town, where he has lived for several months as a visitor, he learns that the walnut trees in the courtyard of the vicarage, where he had spent many pleasant hours talking to Lotte, have been cut down. Werther is angry and sad, as the following sentence shows: “It could drive me crazy, Wilhelm, to think there are people devoid of appreciation or feeling for that little which has real value on earth” (Goethe, 1774, p. 93). A tree is a symbol of life, beauty and wisdom. Trees are living beings, which possess a living spirit. In “Tintern Abbey”, Wordsworth describes the living spirit, which dwells in nature, as follows:

“[...] a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things. [...]” (in Driver, 1995, pp. 69/70).

Like Wordsworth, Bloch has considered nature as a living being, which possesses a living spirit. Unlike many 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers, he has not considered matter as a dead lump, but as a fertile womb, which generates all world forms. According to Bloch, matter is active and knowledgeable. For him, matter and spirit are not binary opposites but form a unity: “Spirit is not its opponent, in which matter evaporates, to be thought of as dead lump, but its own blossom; spirit does not fall out of matter, it does not transcend it” (Bloch, 1967, p. 59). The word “blossom” is an important word in “The School Boy”. In Blake's poem, the narrator compares children to young plants with tender blossoms. A blossom is an apt metaphor of the



beauty and fragility of the hearts, minds and souls of children. The narrator in "The School Boy" implores parents and teachers to treat blossoms with great care. Blossoms should not be nipped as buds. They should be protected from violent wind, hail and snow. One can also associate the word "blossom" with the imagination of children. As Bloch (1971, p. 55) has argued, the young have an affinity to what is better and approaching. They are themselves full of a Not-Yet-Conscious and a Not-Yet-Become. Bloch (1971, p. 55) has argued that "this Not-Yet-Conscious, Not-Yet-Clearly-Known, Not-Yet-Become connects youth with change". In "The School Boy", the narrator argues that children, who are brought up in a loving and free environment, will grow and bear "fruits" (in Driver, 1995, p. 4). According to Bloch (1971, p. 144), "[t]he fruit of our work is human life, which does not have to behave toward the world as toward something foreign and alienated". For Bloch, utopia is a state in which human beings will no longer be forced to behave like strangers toward themselves, each other and the world. Bloch devoted his entire life to this vision. He could have said with Blake:

"I will not cease from mental fight,

Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,

Till we have built Jerusalem,

In [this] green and pleasant land" (in Driver, 1995, p. 5).

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