

Press release:

### Larvenexistenz

The boarding school as the scene of literary action is a self-contained world, a „strange world“, a miniature version of the world in which it is built and where „in such an institute each class is a small state of its own“. Touching on Goethe, one would speak of a „pedagogical province“, since these boarding schools are always located on the edge of smaller Towns, so insignificant as to cause oneself to feel „on the other side of the world“ with only a train station (Törleß) or bus stop (Crazy) near enough to sense the outside. This outside is never reached, however, although most dearly wished for by the protagonists, as „when one is inside, one expects great things of the world“. Especially the depiction of formal regimentation is characteristic of the boarding school novel, as it is through this measure that the educational impact on the pupils becomes omnipotent.

A (modern) society produces and asks for individuals that are capable of executing predetermined (work) processes automatically, that is to say calculable as in controllable and productive. The boarding school novel subverts this typical modern theme of society's clocked, undead automats already by opposing it with another phenomenon significant for modernism: youth. The youthful body alone, not fully grown and unformed - „the ears stuck out greatly, but the face was small and uneven“, the body „an impression of awkward movements“, „the hands with a strange and ugly nimbleness“, „fat, crooked, silent, dumb“ - cannot quite adapt itself to the tact, to that which needs to happen in between the two signs on the clock. „The lean Peter for example can hardly cure himself of his very own, personal nature. Sometimes, when he has to dance, when he is expected to move gracefully and prove himself, he is entirely made of wood. [...]“ Moreover, a side effect of the constant practice of bending and bowing is that a certain flexibility is trained, which the pupils can utilize. By consciously bending, playing pretend, deliberately putting on the „face of perfect pupil“, the pupils assimilate their institution's order, to own the order as actor, not to be possessed by it.

The text quotes from: Robert Walser: Jakob von Gunten, Robert Musil: Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß, Fleur Jaeggy: Die seligen Jahre der Züchtigung, Benjamin Lebert: Crazy