

# **The University in Fictions: Reading, Aesthetic Education and the Campus Novel**

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## Abstract

This thesis attempts to address two commonly held views in the scholarly literature of campus novels: that they do not engage in serious critiques of the university and that they are insufficiently realistic. It does this through readings of John Williams's *Stoner*, Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. The readings of the novels in its third, fourth and fifth chapters demonstrate that these novels contain auto-critical moves beyond their enactment of a university's reality that engage with and critique the persisting importance of university education as *Bildung* project, where *Bildung* can be understood as a transformative nurturing of one's subjectivity. Through a reading of auto-immunity in Spivak to sharpen the understanding of how auto-criticality takes place in these novels, the thesis argues that the auto-critical moves undertaken by the novels enact what Gayatri Spivak defines as aesthetic education, which is the ability to tolerate contradictions. All three novels demonstrate the self-contradictory nature of aesthetic education but they differ in the degree to which they attempt to conceal or resolve this contradiction. In addition to this, the readings demonstrate that the novels' engagement with *Bildung* enables a meta-contextualisation of two sub-fields within University Studies. Lastly, the readings form a trajectory that leads to the proposition of a way to live with the problems of *Bildung* that each novel deals with: *Bildung* is valuable because it allows for its own undoing, and the awareness that we have upon the undoing of our subjectivity facilitates a flexibility in how we try to achieve our political goals.

<b>List of Abbreviations</b>		
<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>
M.H. Abrams	A Glossary of Literary Terms: Seventh Edition	Glossary
M.H. Abrams	The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition	Mirror
Allan Chavkin	Bellow's Alternative to the Wasteland: Romantic Theme and Form in Herzog	Bellow's Alternative
Allan Chavkin	The Problem of Suffering in the Fiction of Saul Bellow	Problem
Thomas Docherty	For the University	University
Thomas Docherty	The English Question	Question
Simon During	Friday Essay: Simon During on the Demoralisation of the Humanities, and What Can be Done About it	Demoralisation
Simon During	The Postcolonial Aesthetic	Postcolonial
J.M. Coetzee	Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews	Doubling
Terry Eagleton	The Silences of David Lodge	Silences
R.W. Johnson	Africa Needs Help – from Blacks and Whites	Africa
Elaine Showalter	Classic Stoner? Not so Fast	Classic Stoner?

Elaine Showalter	Faculty Towers: the Academic Novel and its Discontents	Faculty
Gayatri Spivak	An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization	Aesthetic Education
Gayatri Spivak	Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak	Interview
Friedrich Schiller	On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters	Letters
Jeffery Williams	The Rise of the Academic Novel	Rise

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract .....	4
List of Abbreviations .....	5
Table of Contents .....	7
<b>Intersections between Campus Novels and University Studies: Fertile Ground for Reading Campus Novels.....</b>	<b>9</b>
More than Satire: The Meta-Campus Novel and Critiques of the University Project.....	14
Setting the Scene: University Studies and Its Reaction to Neoliberalism.....	44
Narrowing the Focus: Two Negotiations with <i>Bildung</i> in the University.....	53
Looking Back: Nostalgia for <i>Bildung</i> as Antidote to the Crisis of the University.....	58
Looking Forward: “Literary Theory”, the Neoliberal University and Ambivalence Towards <i>Bildung</i> .....	69
<b>Auto-immunity and The Generation of Double Binds: Gayatri Spivak’s reading of Bateson, Kant and Schiller.....</b>	<b>89</b>
The Operation of Auto-Immunity in Spivak.....	92
The Schillerian Sublime and the Bildung Project.....	121
Kant’s Notion of the Sublime.....	124
Schiller’s (Mis)interpretation of Kant’s Sublime: a De Manian Reading.....	130
Auto-Immunity in Both “Theory” and “Non-Theory” Subfields of University Studies .....	136

<b>The Auto-immunity of <i>Bildung</i> in John Williams’s <i>Stoner</i>: Sublimity as Sustaining Social Privilege.....</b>	<b>156</b>
The Schillerian Sublime: Stoner’s Motivation for Professing Literature.....	163
Gender and Epistemology in the Schillerian Sublime: Solipsism as Auto-Immune Mechanism.....	172
The Schillerian Sublime as Readerly Affect.....	193
<b>Auto-immunity in Saul Bellow’s <i>Herzog</i>: The Cynical Readerly Choice between Auto-immune Bildung or Profligate Consumption .....</b>	<b>204</b>
Herzog’s Problems: The Failure of Both Objective Reasoning and the Social Goals of Romanticism.....	216
The Ambivalent Space of Herzog: The Pain of Romantic Auto-immunity or Profligate Consumption.....	235
<b>Auto-Immunity in Coetzee’s <i>Disgrace</i>: Stupidity as an Epistemological Preparation for the Contemporary Public Intellectual.....</b>	<b>252</b>
The Auto-immunity of David Lurie’s Schillerian <i>Bildung</i> .....	271
The Auto-Immunity of Progressive Politics in the Rationalised University.....	283
Disgrace’s Auto-immune Defence of Romanticism: Feminising the Romantics.....	294
<b>Conclusion: Summary and Discussion of Limitations .....</b>	<b>328</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>340</b>



## Chapter 1

### Intersections between Campus Novels and University Studies: Fertile Ground for Reading Campus Novels

This thesis aims to address the prominent sense in the scholarship on campus novels that the genre has little to offer in terms of critiquing of the university through a focus on their critique of the university. My readings of these three campus novels aim to provide a rebuttal to the notion that campus novels do not treat of the university seriously, while redressing the dominant critical focus on reading campus novels as a realistic enactment of university life through attention to the aesthetic features of the novels. The main goals of my work are as follows.

First, I will demonstrate that John Williams's *Stoner*, Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* belong to a category I call "meta-campus novels" due to their auto-critical exploration of the university project, conduct an investigation into the problematics of the *Bildung* project, where *Bildung* as the goal of university education is understood as a transformative process involving the nurturance of an objective and rational subjectivity that supports egalitarianism in society. Secondly, I will argue that the form of these novels provides a readerly experience that itself is an enactment of an aesthetic education, where an aesthetic education is defined as the ability to tolerate contradiction resulting from the operation of auto-immunity. Auto-immunity in the context of the thesis is defined as a critical mechanism that harms one's aims through one's own actions to achieve these aims. Thirdly, I will propose that these novels offer a valuable

meta-contextual understanding of some scholarship concerned with the *Bildung* project. Fourthly, it aims to provide a solution-of-sorts to the problems of the *Bildung* project through the trajectory of its readings, where this solution involves the undoing of *Bildung* so as to encourage flexibility in the subject.

The thesis also hopes to achieve the following secondary aims. Firstly, it provides an elucidation of how the concept of auto-immunity is central to Spivak's notion of an aesthetic education in her 2012 book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Thus, it aims to effect some mediation between the nostalgic and anti-nostalgic approaches to the university ("non theorists" and "theorists") via a focus on the interaction between cognition and affectivity as aesthetic education. Next, using Spivak's notion of auto-immunity, its readings also attempt to effect mediations between conflicting opinions about *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace*.

In order to facilitate this argument, this thesis is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters aim to provide scholarly and theoretical background respectively to the readings of the novels that are undertaken in the following three chapters. This first chapter is divided into three main sections. The first is focused on examining the scholarly literature on campus novels to make a case for the thesis. It links the unhappiness of many scholars in the field with satirical campus novels to the dominant critical approach that involves judging campus novels by how realistically they enact university life, arguing that the latter mode of reading campus novels stems from a dissatisfaction with the unserious treatment of the university in many satires. The thesis addresses the latter concern by reading three campus novels that treat the goals of university education seriously via auto-critical irony, while avoiding the conflation of this seriousness with a realistic

enactment of the university via close attention to aesthetic features of the novels like form and prose affect. The second conducts a brief survey of the scholarly literature on University Studies to provide some elaboration on how a university education, an education in the humanities and an education in literature have become impossible to disentangle. It clarifies that a substantial amount of criticism of the contemporary university stems from an unhappiness with the neoliberalisation of the institution. The last section elaborates on the sub-sections within University Studies that are concerned with *Bildung* as university education so as to clarify the kind of university education that the three novels under study are interested in, demonstrating the intersection between two sections of scholarship within University Studies and the concerns of the campus novels under study.

The second chapter provides theoretical depth regarding how we can understand the operation of irony in the three novels by examining the relationship between the auto-critical irony of the novels and the concept of auto-immunity. It is divided into three main sections. The first reads Gayatri Spivak's introduction to her book *Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization* to outline the cruciality of auto-immunity as a concept to her notion of an aesthetic education, and to establish how auto-immunity fosters the ability to tolerate dilemmas, where the latter is defined by Spivak as the benefit of an aesthetic education. Auto-immunity, I show, can be understood as the *form* of auto-criticality in *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* that leads to their posing the reader with dilemmas. This notion is crucial in outlining what kind of aesthetic education all three novels offer us via their treatment of the university. In addition to this, it also provides us with some

elaboration of the philosophical grounding behind *Bildung* as discussed in the scholarly literature in Chapter 1, Section 3. The second section provides more philosophical grounding for the understanding of *Bildung* as it picks up on Spivak's elision of how the sublime fosters *Bildung*, paving the way for a discussion of the sublime and *Bildung* in two of the thesis's novels, *Stoner* and *Disgrace*. It does this through a brief discussion of the sublime in Kant and Schiller. The last section thinks through the ethics of reading in the thesis via a discussion of auto-immunity in both sections of scholarship within University Studies as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 3. This discussion carries out the auto-criticality that Spivak demands in her vision of aesthetic education while paving the way for a discussion of the thesis's chapter-by-chapter aims regarding the mediation of conflicts within the opinions about each novel.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters involve the readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* respectively. Chapter 3 provides a counter-weight to the overwhelmingly positive reception of John Williams's *Stoner* as upholding the ideals of a university through a counter-intuitive reading of the novel that shows how the novel undermines its own support of the *Bildung* project. I show that the novel provides space for us to understand how the *Bildung* fostered by its protagonist's appreciation of the sublime leads to him propagating social hierarchies that he thought his education protected him from. I also pay attention to the novel's use of sublimity, demonstrating that the novel's sublime feeling, which discourages us from critiquing the protagonist and the *Bildung* that he advocates for, actually prevents us from putting into action the very criticality that *Bildung* promotes. The tension between the pathos of the novel, which aims to

deflect critiques of its protagonist, and the content that allows its readers to critique its protagonist, form a dilemma that we have to tolerate.

Chapter 4 conducts a reading that acknowledges the contradictions inherent in Herzog's vision of *Bildung* that lead to its collapse, in the process mediating between the positive evaluations of Saul Bellow as a great writer and the dismissals of his work because of his outdated views on race and gender. The novel ironizes its protagonist's vision of *Bildung* by showing how his education in Romanticism leads him to believe (and to behave) in ways that contradict the goals given to him by that very education: progress of democracy, the ability to engage in objective reason and social equality. Yet, the novel undermines its own undermining of Herzog. It suggests, via the exhilarating qualities of Bellow's prose, that enjoyment of the novel without taking on the philosophical burdens that its protagonist struggles with replicates Herzog's final stance, which is to give up fighting for the causes that *Bildung* had encouraged him to fight for. The novel thus poses us with the dilemma of whether to support a *Bildung* doomed to fail because of its contradictions or to give up entirely on *Bildung* and hence give up fighting for its admirable socio-political goals.

The last reading of the thesis focuses on *Disgrace's* handling of the pros and cons of *Bildung*, while taking into account the differences in cultural climate between the previous two novels and the current novel under discussion. In the process, it deals directly with the value of *Bildung* in a neoliberalised university and provides an explanation for how the novel encourages conflicting opinions about both race and Romanticism. Like *Herzog*, the novel ironizes David Lurie's *Bildung* by showing how it leads him to contradict its own goals. Yet, through its own

intertextual references to Romanticism and a portrayal of the change in Lurie's subjectivity, it suggests that *Bildung* is valuable because it allows for its own destruction: in Lurie, this results in a form of bafflement that encourages passivity and openness. The advocacy of this feeling of bafflement, though, is undermined by the novel's support of Lucy Lurie, who takes decisive action in the aftermath of her rape. The novel therefore poses its readers with the dilemma of whether to support the assertiveness of Schillerian subjectivity or the passivity of its destruction. The last chapter in the thesis is a brief conclusion that sums up its achievements and addresses a few possible criticisms of its work.

### **More than Satire: The Meta-Campus Novel and Critiques of the University Project**

In the conclusion to her book *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents* (2005), Elaine Showalter claims that the genre is disappointing because it does not sufficiently depict the trials and tribulations that an academic faces during his/her lifetime:

Now that I have come to . . . retirement, how much did I learn from my decades of reading academic novels? How useful a guide are they to the real life of a professor . . . ? Overall, I think, contemporary academic fiction is too tame, *substituting satire for tragedy*, detective plots for the complex effects on a community of its internal scandals, revelations, disruptions, disappointments, and catastrophes. (*Faculty* 146; emphasis added)

This pessimistic conclusion stems from Showalter's sense that the genre of campus novels is dominated by satire, a form of writing that involves a "glaring . . .

simplification of academic psychology” (Showalter, *Faculty* 147). For her, campus novels are insufficiently realistic in the way they portray “the emotional fallout and the complex sense of absurdity, injustice, foolishness and disillusion that comes with . . . academic scandals (Showalter, *Faculty* 148). This failure to portray the complexity of the psychology of academics leads to the genre’s apparent inability to “[capture] the intensity of academic time, its peculiar mix of the quotidian and minute tasks with the daunting awareness of eternity” (Showalter, *Faculty* 149).

Showalter’s dissatisfaction with the genre is the norm rather than the exception when we examine the scholarship that has thus far been conducted on campus novels. Her plaint echoes the unhappiness of many previous scholars who have written on the subject. According to these scholars, the genre of campus novels is populated by writers who are hostile to academics and therefore interested in satirising the latter. These satires often fail, however, because the writers have little sense of what the world of the university is like. For example, Janice Rossen’s landmark study *The University in Modern Fiction* (1993) posits an antagonistic dynamic between writers of campus novels and the scholars who read them, suggesting in turn that many campus novels are at very least, attacks on the institution of the university:

[The] academic discipline of literary criticism seems in many ways to be a hostile audience for fiction. . . . Novelists are apt to feel that in writing about literary scholars they are attacking the enemy – since critics read and judge their work – and this can infuse their novels with a tone of aggressiveness which academics in turn discern and respond to in their reading. . . . [Book] reviewers, from a certain

point of view, have the last word. . . . Novelists . . . are more apt to be appropriating a culture they know little about. (6)

Showalter's unhappiness with campus novels failing to portray the complexity of an academic's perspective is an iteration of Rossen's claim that novelists are insufficiently familiar with university culture to portray academics realistically. This claim of Rossen's in turn takes its cue from earlier important studies such as Mortimer R. Proctor's *The English University Novel* (1957) and Ian Carter's *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British University Fiction in the Post-War Years* (1990). In his study of the English campus novel, Proctor notes that "treatments of the university theme which were created however seriously and thoughtfully, yet more or less freely from the imagination, are at best likely to be disappointing, and with few exceptions fail to convey anything like a picture of college life" (8). This lack of fidelity to the university experience is similarly deplored by John Lyons in his 1962 study *The College Novel in America* (186).

Proctor's observation applies to well-known Victorian novelists, very few of whom "were university men" who "possessed the intimate knowledge of university life which must lie behind a university novel" (Proctor 8). The portraits of the university drawn by people who are not privy to its workings are unsatisfying for Proctor, and yet at the same time, he claims that many of the campus novels written by people who have been to university "are with only a few exceptions distinctly second-rate as 'literature'" (8). Presumably, the complaints of both Proctor and Carter of a disappointing sameness in the plots of the campus novel are evidence of the general poor quality of the genre (Proctor 1, Carter 15). Critiques of the university, as Proctor and Rossen have implied, are not necessarily



accurate if they come from writers who are unfamiliar with university life. Lastly, there is an aesthetic judgement at work here by both scholars: that sameness of plot and repetition of the same angle on various themes make for poor quality of literature.

There are two further things to note about how antagonism towards the university affects a critique of the university in English campus novels. First, the motives behind these forerunners to the English campus novel in the form of other types of literature could be attributed to two things: one, a sense that “all was not well in the world of learning” (Proctor 16) and two, the “drastic alteration” of the university scene by “the increasing numbers of young men of wealth and birth” (Proctor 23). These two motivations behind the predecessors of the campus novel helped to “establish a pattern as important to the university novel as that which set the wild young men against the studious bores” (Proctor 24). The bathos in many of these novels stems from the contrast between the unstated lofty ideals of the university project that the university is supposedly a space for and the sordid reality of the behaviour of its members.

This contrast between ideal and reality makes university life and university education fertile grounds for satire. As Merritt Moseley notes in his review of scholarship in the genre, a common “line of interpretation assumes that satire is the key determinant of the academic novel” (7). Indeed, if we leave aside novels written by those who have little knowledge of the university and examine other scholarly dissatisfaction with the critique of the university in campus novels, we find that there is a sense that the satirical form of many campus novels compromises the quality of their critique of university life and the aims of

university education. Contrary to what Proctor thinks, therefore, critiques of the university in several campus novels seem “disappointing” (in his words) not because of sameness of plot or recurring themes (1). Rather, the satirical form is to blame for the apparent crudity of ideas regarding the matter. This view is reiterated in one form or another in scholarship such as John Schellenberger’s “University Fiction and the University Crisis” (1982), J.D. Taylor’s *After the War: The Novel and English Society since 1954* (1993), Adam Begley’s “The Decline of the Campus Novel” (1997), Sanford Pinsker’s “Who Cares if Roger Ackroyd Gets Tenure?” (1999) and Bruce Robbins’s “What the Porter Saw: On the Academic Novel” (2006).

In this part of the chapter, I conduct a brief examination of the reasons behind many scholars being unhappy with the satirical form. I posit that the dissatisfaction with the critique of the university in satirical campus novels stems from the fact that many of these novels can be understood as Horatian satires. Briefly, M.H. Abrams defines Horatian satires as satires in which “the speaker manifests the character of an urbane, witty and tolerant man of the world, who is moved more often to wry amusement than to indignation at the spectacle of human folly, pretentiousness and hypocrisy, and who uses a relaxed and informal language to evoke from readers a wry smile at human failings and absurdities” (*Glossary* 276).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.H. Abrams classes Horatian satires under what he calls “formal satires”. In these, there is a “satiric persona who speaks in the first person” (*Glossary* 276). *Porterhouse Blue* and some of the other campus novels that have a similar tone to it do not—regardless, I am using the term “Horatian satire” to describe their sort of satire because of the lightness of tone, the gentleness of their critiques and their aim of providing light amusement to their readers.

For example, Tom Sharpe's *Porterhouse Blue* is useful for demonstrating the notable features of satirical campus novels because of its satirical portrayal of Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> It can be understood as a Horatian satire that pokes fun at how the education at an elite English university consists of the inculcation of conventions specific to the gentlemanly class rather than to gesture towards the socio-political consequences of these practices taking the place of the ideals that are supposed to underpin the existence of the university. Consider the comedy at the very beginning of the novel: "No other Cambridge college can equal Porterhouse in its adherence to the old traditions. . . . *A sturdy self-reliance except in scholarship* is the mark of the Porterhouse man, and it is an exceptional year when Porterhouse is not Head of the River. And yet the College is not rich" (4-5; emphasis added). The reputation of Cambridge as a place for serious learning and thought is mocked here by the insinuation that its "old traditions" involve recruiting and reproducing uninterested rote learners, many of whom excel at sport. The college, the novel tells us, "democratically ignores the inequalities of intellect and concentrates upon the evidence of wealth" in its freshmen (5). Instead of intellectual growth, graduates gain "social cachet" in attending the college (5). The comedy is generated by the contrast between the novel's description of the college's undergraduates and the implicit knowledge of the university project possessed by the intended audience of the novel. The comedy would not be effective if the

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<sup>2</sup> *Porterhouse Blue* can be considered an extreme example of satirical campus novels, and is thus useful for thinking about why scholars in the field are unhappy with the satirical form. Yet many novels in the genre are not as extreme in their satirical comedy. For instance, while Tobias Wolff's *Old School* contains satirical portrayals of prominent writers like Ayn Rand and Robert Frost, it contains meditations on the kind of realizations that reading the classics might prompt one to have, and these often do not have a comic tone.

reader had no idea at all of the loftiness of the university ideal, even though the ideal is not specified in the novel.

There are moments where a more pointed critique of the university ideal is hinted at. For instance, Sharpe cannily links the need to preserve Porterhouse tradition to the death of the British Empire to the education that stamped a graduate “with the assurance that had once been the hallmark of a gentleman” (8). However, this education is then immediately linked to trivial college routines such as there being no speeches at the Porterhouse Feast (Sharpe 9-10). Certainly, the implication that the class markers that indicate “gentlemen” are formed through placing importance on frivolities like college traditions and activities like “drinking and racing” suggests that the said gentlemen are manifestly unfit to run the country and its waning empire (8). Yet, the caricature of English gentlemen as bumbling fools only obsessed with the minutiae of social traditions, drinking and sport is meant to evoke, in Abrams’s words, a “wry smile” of amusement from the reader who recognises this exaggerated portrait of a class that s/he is presumably familiar with. The irony is relatively gentle as it is aimed at mocking the foibles of gentlemen, painting them as harmless, silly and inept. This caricature of gentlemen does not take a strong condemnatory stance towards the more disturbing aspects of the education of the class (for instance, the type of nationalistic ideals that they might be encouraged to believe in) and therefore screens from the reader the disastrous and very real consequences of having such people run university, country and (post-)empire. We are insulated from the latter reality in Sharpe’s fictional world because we realize that this world is unrealistic, built to amuse us with the exaggerated silliness of its caricatures.

This blunting of the failure of the university project recurs when the Dean of the college notes that the business of Oxbridge “is to take Toms and Dicks and Harrys and turn them into gentlemen” so that they become fit to “[run] the affairs of state”, as evidenced by the large number of Oxbridge graduates who have become Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom (182-183). The comedy here again relies on the insinuation that turning out “gentlemen” is a process that leaves much to be desired and is not in line with university ideals, and that ironically, the unpalatability of such individuals becomes a class marker that makes them eligible for leadership. The weight of this critique is quickly removed, however, when the Dean suggests that the education in Porterhouse is dependent on the trivialities of whether there should be self-service in the canteen and whether there should be contraceptive dispensers in the lavatories (183). Again, the irony here is gentle. We are meant to laugh at the implication that an elite English education is dependent on such apparently unimportant variables, and that it therefore turns out correspondingly silly individuals. At a textual level, then, the book encourages us to be amused by the education provided in Porterhouse through a caricature of elite education’s obsession with insignificant traditions. This discourages us from interrogating our own implicit knowledge of the goals of university education that facilitates the amusement we feel at Sharpe’s satire. Moreover, a sense of indignation at the failure of the said education is avoided through the sense that Sharpe’s unrealistic fictional world exists to provide us with amusement through our own recognition of its caricatures.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Given the U.K.’s contemporary politics, *Porterhouse Blue* perhaps feels more political than it does to readers when it was first published. Stefan Stern’s article for *The Conversation* outlines how Boris

The humour in these novels stems from the reader's amusement at the *gaucherie* of the English gentry as well as the deviation of this behaviour from the unstated and unexamined ideals of the university project. A good number of these satirical campus novels, therefore, come from the English side of the tradition. As Showalter says, these satires were particularly prevalent in the 1950s, and their preoccupation with the norms and behaviours of the gentry to the exclusion of other classes is responsible for the sense that campus novels "depict a society with its own rules and traditions, cut off from the outside world, a snug, womblike, and, for some, suffocating world" (*Faculty* 7). Jeffery Williams sums up this state of affairs when he writes, "The academic novel's reputation as a coterie genre is not without justice, since they have often been stagey, set pieces, especially those from the British side of the tradition" ("Rise" 563).

The cloisteredness of novels like *Porterhouse Blue* gives the reader a sense that the world of the university campus is insulated from any harshness that a reader might recognise as characterising his/her everyday reality. This allows David Lodge to make the following generalisation about campus novels:

And here we perhaps approach the ultimate secret of the campus novel's deep appeal: *academic conflicts are relatively harmless,*

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Johnson's adoption of the "habitus of the traditionally educated" allows him not only to gain the goodwill of the British people and his colleagues: they assume he is a well-meaning, if bumbling, individual. Yet, as Stern notes in his article, he has lied repeatedly to the public, prologued parliament unlawfully and tried to abolish parliamentary standards. As early as 2012, Gerald Warner, writing for *The Scotsman*, made a direct connection between the culture of *Porterhouse Blue* and Boris Johnson, warning readers about the dangers of putting Boris Johnson in power. The point that both these writers seem to be making is that the unserious nature of satires like Sharpe's replicates and licenses Boris Johnson's unserious attitude to the world despite its comedy being at the expense of characters who may resemble him.

*safely insulated from the real world and its sombre concerns—or capable of transforming those concerns into a form of stylized play. Essentially the campus novel is a modern, displaced form of pastoral. . . . That is why it belongs to the literature of escape, and why we never tire of it. (34; emphasis added)*

Lodge's position on campus novels, when viewed in light of Proctor's outlining of the motivations behind the genesis of the genre, elides the critique of the ideals of the university implicit in the antics of the campus novels' inhabitants. In order to understand the form of the critique that such novels might take, it is helpful to contextualise Lodge's comment about the genre with Terry Eagleton's view that Lodge's own campus novels "place in caricatured antithesis the ideological poles of his world," one set of which is "theory and humanism", "allowing each [pole] to put the other into ironic question while the author himself disappears conveniently down the middle" ("Silences") This sense of the pettiness of such academic skirmishes dovetails with what Eagleton characterises as an "implied posture of Arnoldian disinterestedness", what he calls the "capacity" of the "ineffectual academic liberal . . . to put itself into amused ironic question" ("Silences"; emphasis added).

Eagleton's observation suggests that any possible critique of the university project undertaken in Lodge's novels and other coterie campus novels lacks teeth precisely because the implied authorial persona in such novels has already

assumed the position of a fully formed subject.<sup>4</sup> The stakes of different metaphysical commitments vanish as the worlds of his novels provide an unstated position of neutrality that can be used as a metacontextual frame whereby different systems of ethics look simply like “disconnected set[s] of doctrines which for some private reason [their protagonists or other characters] happen to hold” (Eagleton, “Silences”). This, as Eagleton rightly points out, is a privileged position, the position of a subject in the “commonsensical world of English middle-class liberalism” (Eagleton, “Silences”).<sup>5</sup> This is in operation not only in Lodge’s novels but also in *Porterhouse Blue*. We can laugh at the gentlemen in Sharpe’s world because we empathise with the privileged implied authorial persona who is able to relax in his position from a “commonsensical world” to laugh at the foibles of gentlemen. This implied authorial persona regards the terrible state of the world as fodder for light amusement, and he is only able to do so because the said struggles in the world do not impact his comfort. This is an indication of his privilege and allows him an ironic distance from the struggles of others that facilitates the light comedy of such novels.

Lavelle Porter’s startlingly original recent book on black academic fiction, *The Blackademic Life: Academic Fiction, Higher Education and the Black Intellectual*

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<sup>4</sup> The author is not equivalent to the authorial persona. I am using the concept proposed in Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). In this book, Booth suggests that our search for meaning in the text is often dependent upon our sense of the author’s “second self” or implied author, an “official scribe, so to speak, for that narrative” (71).

<sup>5</sup> See also Bart Moore-Gilbert’s article “Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: Empire, Race and English Studies in Contemporary University Fiction” (2008). Moore-Gilbert provides an analysis of how Lodge’s campus trilogy, D.J. Enright’s *Academic Year* (1955) and Malcolm Bradbury’s *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), in their own ways, attempt to defend against “the dangerously fragmented state of the [English] nation” by papering over tensions that they themselves portray and subsequently resolve, thus maintaining the positionality that Eagleton lampoons (3).



(2020), reiterates the sense of dissatisfaction with campus novels while championing the potentiality of the genre to contribute to a meaningful discussion about the social purpose of a university education:

Aren't [academic novels] the novels that are always about some horny straight white male professor at some elite East Coast college who is cheating on his wife with some buxom young student? . . . [No], *not all academic novels are like that*. And no, that's not what [*The Blackademic Life*] is about . . . Yes, the academic novel can be playful and melodramatic, satirical and vengeful, but *it should also be read as a genre that addresses the meaning and purposes of the university and the place of black persons in it*. (5-6; emphasis added)

Porter's first sentence in this quotation, which takes the form of a rhetorical question, throws into relief the general perception of campus novels as crude satires that take revenge upon the academic world by suggesting, through the behaviour of its characters, that scholars are less concerned with the issues that their work involves than dealing with their mid-life crises.

Yet, Porter is adamant that not all academic novels conform to this description. While he agrees that some books in the genre may indeed conform to the critique of campus novels launched by Rossen *et al.*, he also suggests that the genre contains novels that allow for a serious investigation into the aims of the university. It is notable that his contention that one can begin to understand the place of black people in universities through the readings of campus novels is metonymically linked (through the conjunction "and") with his suggestion that

some campus novels provide readers with opportunities to revisit the meaning of a university education. Porter is insinuating that the focus on the hijinks of (white heteronormative male) socially privileged academics in many satirical campus novels does not encapsulate the lived reality of a more diverse student body and faculty, and that the refusal of satirical campus novels like *Porterhouse Blue* to take the question of the university seriously might be a stance that privileged classes can afford to take *pace* Eagleton.

Secondly, Showalter's comments on why she reads campus novels are typical of how many scholars approach the genre in that they assume that the degree of realism in such novels is directly correlated to the strength of their critiques of the university. In the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, she asks herself if the novels are "a useful guide to the real life of a professor" and proceeds to evaluate the novels based on this criterion. Porter's study, which shines a much-needed spotlight on black academic novels, is still motivated by a similar unhappiness about a lack of attention to diversity within the scholarly representation of the genre and the corresponding loss of opportunity for a realistic understanding of the struggles of black academics in universities: "The black academic novel shows what the picture of the institution looks like from [the] . . . perspective of those who have been the least protected in the university. . . . Black academics have often needed to play the role of advocates and representatives, as spokespersons on behalf of their 'group'" (9). As Peter Székely, in his survey of the field, states, the academic "reception [of the Anglo-American academic novel] is still organized around one overwhelmingly dominant critical approach: to seek ways of confirming and elucidating how an academic novel

describes, comments on or criticizes the *experiential reality* of higher education” (1; emphasis added). This is a common strategy of reading campus novels, as evidenced by the scholarly work cited thus far, but recently there has been work that pays attention to aesthetic features of campus novels outside of their plots and themes. Péter Székely’s own PhD thesis, *The Academic Novel in the Age of Postmodernity* (2009), and Martin Paul Eve’s *Literature Against Criticism* (2016), are two examples of studies that depart from the scholarly tradition of evaluating campus novels based on the degree of realism evinced in their portrayals of university life.

One of the many things that Székely is interested in is the ways in which a reading focused on the mimetic aspects of the campus novels may elide fictional and metafictional strategies in these novels, where such strategies are “a form of self-investigation, the scrutiny of the art of fiction itself” (4-5). Indeed, in terms of the ethics of reading, this observation serves as a timely and useful reminder about the possible limitations of carrying out readings that focus on the campus novel as a staging of university life. By focusing on what he calls the metafictional campus novel, Székely provides a fleshing out of what aesthetic features of texts may teach us about the writing and purpose of fiction outside of their staging of particular situations that may happen in reality. It also provides a riposte to the notion (held by Rossen, Proctor *et al.*) that campus novels are of poor quality because they repeat plots and themes, or that their critique of the university project is shallow and/or based on an unrealistic picture of the university. Eve’s book continues the study of the aesthetics of campus novels, picking up on Rossen’s intuition of an antagonistic dynamic between writers of campus novels and the academics who

read them, provocatively suggesting that campus novels contain “a series of novelistic techniques that, whether deliberate or not on the part of the author, function to outmanoeuvre, contain, and determine academic reading practices” because “the metafictional paradigm of the high-postmodern era has pitched critical and creative discourses into a type of productive competition with one another” (15).<sup>6</sup> For Eve, campus novels are valuable and interesting objects of study because they “exhibit a ‘resistance to evaluation’—that the ‘world-making power of prose fiction’ in the contemporary era relies upon the ability of the novel to ‘reject or suspend the forms of community that it helps to create’” (15-16).

As far as the campus novel is concerned, Eve’s insights suggest that using campus novels as a staging of an aesthetic education opens one up to some potential dangers. First, these novels may, consciously or not, resist what Eve terms “academic reading practices”, including the practice that thinks of campus novels as staging academic life. Next, focusing only on the protagonist’s journey and the content of the novel may, ironically, lead one to ignore or discount other aspects of a university education that the very reading of campus novels provides. Campus novels that are satires, therefore, appear to offer only “thin and pallid fare” as long as the following conditions are fulfilled: first, they have a “cloistered excitement” and secondly, they are judged by the cloisteredness of their environment (Lyons xvii). The first condition has to do with the tone, form and structure of these

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Scott’s 2004 article recognises the “extraordinary diversity” of the books within the genre in terms of the kinds of characters represented and the way campus novels play with the generical conventions of “mysteries and thrillers, romances, historical novels, and even ghost stories” (86). This supports Eve’s and Székely’s arguments that more critical attention needs to be paid to the aesthetics of these novels.

novels, as touched on in my brief discussion of *Porterhouse Blue*, and the latter condition has to do with the way that one reads these novels.

The observations of Székely and Eve highlight that an evaluation of campus novels based on whether they stage a realistic enactment of the university seems to disregard the fact that they are novels, that is, *aesthetic objects*. Yet, the unhappiness of many scholars with the satiric form shows that they are indeed aware of the fact that these novels are not intended as realistic portrayals of the university. I would suggest that the discontent of scholars like Rossen, Showalter *et al.* has two related causes. The first is the logical conclusion of applying Martin Eve's insights about campus novels resisting critical evaluation to these types of campus novels: the satirical form's use of the university as entertainment may be read as an antagonistic move against scholarly readers. We can choose to understand the use of caricature in these satires as "[disciplining] the academy" through a refusal to provide scholars with the kind of novels that are overtly suited to the practice of their *métier*: they are not novels that tonally invite extended and detailed critical scrutiny (Eve 15). In fact, the lightness of the humour in these novels insists upon the reader's recognition that they are "mere" objects of amusement for the reader; this is another manifestation of their disciplining of scholarly community insofar as they refuse to dignify the university and its goals with a "proper" weighty critique. Relatedly, the second cause of discontent can be intuited from Showalter's quote at the beginning of the chapter that campus novels too often "[substitute] satire for tragedy". Showalter asserts that in the genre of campus novels, satire takes the place of tragedy, that is, it has been employed where *tragedy might be more appropriate*. Showalter's comment indicates a wish

that these novels treated the university's goals, its scholars and its students with more gravitas. As Terry Eagleton notes in his study of tragedy, *Sweet Violence*, what causes grief are the "destructions of what we rate as especially valuable" (2). Showalter thinks that the lightness of comedy in these satirical novels overlooks the fact that many events that have happened in the contemporary university have resulted in the destruction of things (objects, values, or people) worth preserving. The destruction of such worthy things, and indeed, the decline of the academy, as perceived by her, is not something that one should take lightly. To her, such novels fail in recognising *the seriousness of the work* conducted at universities, particularly in English departments.

Showalter's dissatisfaction with the characters in Hazard Adams's *Home* concisely sums up her sense that campus novels can and should engage in a critical investigation of academic work:

[The] questions of the decline and fall of English departments in the twenty-first century are very serious, not just because business, science and technology have so much power, but because *the departments have lost their sense of purpose* and do not have the will to find a new intellectual centre. . . . [Yet] *members of the department act as if they were the centre of the universe*. They continue to squabble about [the job appointment] *and ignore much deeper issues about the future* as they drift into obsolescence, with less self-awareness than the members of the utopian community when faced with their own destruction by outside forces. (*Faculty* 151; emphasis added)

Showalter is unhappy with the focus on interdepartmental academic politics in the novel because she thinks that they distract from the much larger question of the purpose of teaching and conducting research in English at university. This is perhaps overly harsh and somewhat inaccurate; oftentimes the power struggles within departments stem from ideological conflict about the direction of the subject and are therefore the direct result of taking one's field of study seriously. Despite this, however, Showalter's comment is an emphatic statement of her desire to see a campus novel with "a viewpoint that accepts the decline in the ideals of the academy while acknowledging the inevitability of such transformations within institutions" (Showalter, *Faculty* 149). To her, the institution of the university seems to be drifting into obsolescence, and she thinks that campus novels have to reflect this perceived *reality* in order to engage in a critique of the university that is relevant to our times. While she is correct in noting that many satirical campus novels do not treat of the goals of university education seriously, and that some campus novels seem to prioritise academic infighting over philosophical questions about university education, the remedy is not a more ostensibly realistic portrayal of university life: struggles for power are a realistic enough depiction of what happens in university departments.

Rather, Showalter's concerns can be addressed by finding novels within the genre that have as their *thematic focus* a serious critique of the goals of university education and conducting a reading that pays attention to *how* this critique is conducted. While Showalter, Rossen, Proctor *et al.* are right in noting that satires in the genre often fail in giving the university a nuanced critique, their desire for a serious treatment of the university blinds them to their own intuitions that these

satirical campus novels have foci and motivations that involve resisting this very desire. The preoccupation with realism in much of the scholarship is, I posit, the result of the confusion of this desire with the evaluation of these novels: because these scholars are themselves invested in the university project and are aware of its importance to their colleagues working in the university, the omission (intentional or not) of the serious critique of the university that they desire leads to an unhappiness with the genre that they attribute to the failure to enact a realistic portrayal of the lives of academics. Thus, even novels like Adams's that do not belong to the genre of Horatian satires and have as their concern the power struggles within university departments can be deemed insufficiently realistic.

The confusion that I have mentioned leads to two critical oversights. First, it encourages a pejorative evaluation of the satires within the genre of campus novels based on their failure to address the personal concerns of the scholars, thus resulting in the lack of a meta-critical contextualisation of their resistive functions to the academy and the actors within it. Secondly, it causes confusion over what novels that treat of the university seriously might look like. Instead of paying critical attention to the themes and the aesthetic features of the texts, much of the scholarship advocates a more realistic portrayal of the university as the panacea to the perceived problem of the genre. There is therefore an ironic resonance to the preoccupation with realism in the evaluation of campus novels, given that realism itself is an *aesthetic choice* of many fiction writers. In order to address these oversights, I make the following critical move influenced by the emphasis on the aesthetics of campus novels as suggested by the studies of Eve and Székely while taking on board the desire of Showalter *et al.* to understand campus novels as



novels that take the university seriously. In this way, I provide a rebuttal of the opinion that the genre consists of books that launch overly simplistic critiques of the university.

My thesis reads John Williams's *Stoner*, Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* as campus novels that conduct a serious investigation of the goals of university education. In taking this route I follow the lead of William Tierney, who argues that "academic novels enable those of us who work in colleges and universities to gain a socio-cultural perspective about how others see us" and therefore "provide an opportunity to think self-reflexively about academic life" (163). However, my focus and approach differ from Tierney's. His approach is still more focused on the campus novel as an enactment of reality: his reading of Mary Sarton's *Faithful are the Wounds* focuses on how its characters give us an "understanding of the interior dilemmas of an engaged intellectual" (168). Also, his concern is how campus novels handle the issue of academic freedom.

My thesis focuses specifically on how the three novels under study engage with the *goals* of university education in a serious and sustained manner, not only by dramatizing the effect that a university education has had on their protagonists but also through their form, structure and other aesthetic features. I propose the category of "meta-campus novels" as a way whereby the three novels' engagement with the university can be understood. I use this term to indicate that the three novels under examination contain auto-critical moves (that may or may not involve the thoughts of their protagonists) that critique the *basis* of the institution of the university. Through a brief discussion of how satirical campus novels and meta-campus novels are related to the genres of comedy and tragedy, I will outline the

different uses of irony in both types of campus novels. I suggest that the irony in satirical campus novels can be understood as a variety of stable irony as proposed by Wayne Booth and Linda Hutcheon, whereas the type of irony operating within the three novels in my thesis can be understood as unstable and hence auto-critical irony as suggested by the journal entries of Søren Kierkegaard. The former's critique, due to the ironic distance that the reader has from all the characters and events in the novel, does not have a sense of weight. The sense of seriousness in the latter is provided by tragic elements in the three novels, which involve a degree of identification with the protagonists of the novel so that the reader feels the consequences of the shortcomings in university education on a personal level.

Certainly, this is a formidable challenge given the looseness of definition of both tragedy and comedy. Both genres have, by now, generated immense bodies of scholarship in the attempt to clarify their *modus operandi*. These vast bodies of scholarship often cannot reach an agreement on either the definition and/or the operation of either literary genre.<sup>7</sup> This thesis is limited by its scope, and therefore cannot provide a comprehensive discussion of either genre in relation to campus novels. Rather, in the following paragraphs I offer a brief discussion that zooms in on characteristics of both tragedy and comedy so as to sharpen our understanding

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<sup>7</sup> This becomes evident when we examine the introductions to both *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (2009) and *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* (2007). In the former, Eric Weitz says in his preface that the "land of comedy will always frustrate efforts at precise and consistent mapping. Its boundaries shift with critical perspective; its territories remain ever subject to analytical dispute" (x). Andrew Stott's *Comedy* (2005) echoes this idea in the opening sentence of his book: "Providing a simple formula to answer the question 'what is comedy?' is not so easy" (1). In the latter book, Jennifer Wallace outlines how confusing the critical situation is when she asks the rhetorical question, "how can we reconcile [the] different senses of the term, 'tragedy?'" (2). In a more humorous vein, Terry Eagleton's *Sweet Violence* (2003) begins with the witty claim that "no definition of tragedy more elaborate than 'very sad' has ever worked" (3).

of how irony facilitates a critique of university education, with an eye to contrasting the different uses of irony in the three campus novels under study with the use of irony in satirical campus novels like *Porterhouse Blue*. I may add that the amount of scholarly work that has been conducted on irony is perhaps as formidable as the amount of work conducted on both the genres of tragedy and comedy, and it is similarly impossible for me to provide a detailed overview of the subject in relation to campus novels. Instead, I adopt the approach of picking selected salient ideas about irony from different texts on the subject that allow me to zoom in on the operations of the three campus novels under study.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps a good place to begin would be Showalter's earlier-quoted criticism that the genre often substitutes satire for tragedy, and my quotation of Eagleton's observation that tragedy involves the destruction of what we consider valuable. As my brief discussion of *Porterhouse Blue* indicates, the comedy in campus novels often relies on caricatures for the reader's amusement. In the case of *Porterhouse Blue* and other satirical campus novels, many of which are in the English tradition, the irony is directed against the customs of the gentry through exaggerated portraits of the class. As Martha Banta says, when "[a caricature] is grouped with like figures engaged in intercourse with one another, this tableau is transformed into a cartoon situation" focused on "what differentiates 'we' from 'they'" (4). This

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<sup>8</sup> Three of the major texts on irony that I will be quoting from, albeit sparingly, are Søren Kierkegaard's PhD thesis *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, Linda Hutcheon's *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1995) and Wayne Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974). Other prominent works on the subject that I have not quoted include: D.C. Mueke's taxonomical approach to irony as laid out in his two books *The Compass of Irony* (1969) and *Irony and the Ironic* (1982), along with D.J. Enright's book *The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony* (1986). Gary Handwerk's *Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan* (1985), Claire Colebrook's *Irony* (2003), and Katharina Barbe's *Irony in Context* (1995).

cartoonishness prompts the reader to recognise that the text is painting a portrait of events and characters in order to lampoon a social class. Irony, as Kierkegaard has noted, possesses as a defining trait the critical function: in his words, “the ironic orientation is essentially critical” (*TCOI* 293). The focus is on critiquing the gentlemanly class through ridicule: as earlier discussed, the reader is not encouraged to view the disasters that happen in the novel through a tragic lens as the text constantly moves the reader’s focus *away from the human costs* of the failures in university education to focus on the reader’s superiority to the gentlemanly class and its gatekeepers. In *Porterhouse Blue*, this is most clearly illustrated by the fact that the explosion caused by the condoms stuffed up by the chimney by Zipser kills both himself and Mrs Biggs (Sharpe 145-149). Rather than focusing on this loss of life, however, the text encourages us to laugh at Skullion’s (the porter) refusal to open the college gates, and his observation that Sir Godber has “no sense of tradition” because he wants to open the gates of the college for the fire brigade to save lives (Sharpe 148).

It is notable that at this point, the events in the novel begin to take on a tragi-comic tone, but the text’s avoidance of the tragic aspects of its plot quickly steers the reader away from this sense. After we laugh at Skullion’s observations and behaviour, the next chapter shifts us to a conversation between the Senior Tutor, the Dean and the Chaplain that discusses Zipser’s possible motivations for blowing himself up, with the parties involved agreeing that “whatever [Zipser’s] motives, [he] has made [Porterhouse College’s] position extremely awkward” as “it is difficult to argue against the need for change when members of the college make such an exhibition of themselves” (Sharpe 153). The text ridicules the members of

the college through their refusal to take on board the tragedy of a student's death, but in focusing on conducting the ridicule, the text ironically encourages the same oversight in its readers. Thus, we can begin to understand why many scholars think that satires like *Porterhouse Blue* are *unrealistic* portrayals of campus life; many of these scholars find value in teaching students and connecting to them, and even if a death has comic overtones, the loss of a university student whom one has been acquainted with is not something that they can shrug off lightly. Yet, it is not the lack of realism that is so much the issue as the fact that the novel fails to give an *accurate portrayal* of the concerns of academics. A novel may be able to accurately portray the concerns of academics without a setting that is ostensibly realistic. That the events in *Porterhouse Blue* skirt tragic elements by virtue of *framing* indicates that it is the *form* of the novel that determines the treatment of its themes.

The irony in campus novels like *Porterhouse Blue* can perhaps be summed up by Linda Hutcheon's *Irony's Edge*: "Irony is a 'weighted' mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favour of the silent and unsaid. . . . [I]rony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgemental attitude, and this is where the emotive or affective dimension also enters" (37). Applied to *Porterhouse Blue*, the "critical edge" of irony, generated by the "'active cognition of disparity and incongruity" between our notion of what university education ought to be like and the portraits of the inhabitants of Porterhouse College, is thus directed *against* the gentlemanly class (Hutcheon 38). The affective dimension of the critique, its harshness (in Hutcheon's words, irony's edge), is directed *outwards* towards the class, without much sympathy or pity for them because of their predicaments or those who suffer as a result of their bad behaviour. This generates

a comic lightness of tone that ties in with Kierkegaard's notion that irony involves the ability to distance one's self from the object of irony so that the object of irony becomes a completely abstract concept: "What characterizes irony most perfectly is the abstract criterion whereby it levels everything, whereby it masters every excessive emotion, and *hence does not set the pathos of enthusiasm against the fear of death*" (TCOI 115; emphasis added).

Kierkegaard's insightful characterisation of irony as phenomenon explains why these satirical novels lack seriousness: they lack the sense of the weight of existence given by the struggle of the human to live his/her life. There is no sense of the fear of failure in *Porterhouse Blue*; neither is there a sense of the enthusiasm that the student of the university or its scholars may feel in the process of trying to achieve scholarly goals. The irony that is at work in novels like *Porterhouse Blue* is a type of stable irony, where "stable irony" is defined by Wayne Booth as irony that is "stable or fixed, in the sense that once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions" (6). In the context of *Porterhouse Blue*, the reader's moral superiority and his/her distance from its unpalatable characters discourage any identification with them that may cause pain. According to Booth, this kind of irony is quite different from the irony that one feels upon viewing "*Arbeit macht frei*" (work sets you free) at the entrance of concentration camps (6). This type of irony is unstable because the utterance, at some level, is true when applied to the purpose of the camps: the viewer knows that the aim of the concentration camps is the mass murder of Jews. The labour that many of these people performed under

the most inhuman of conditions did lead to their deaths, but these deaths constituted a form of release from their immense suffering.

The two kinds of irony differ in terms of their operations and their emotional impacts. In the instance of stable irony mentioned above, there is little question that the characters are misled as regards to the purpose of education in the university. The reader knows without a doubt that the characters in *Porterhouse Blue* have got education completely wrong: this is one reason why they look utterly ridiculous. In the instance of unstable irony in the inscription of “*Arbeit macht frei*”, however, there is a grain of truth to the utterance. We cannot be comfortable in our superiority to those who carved the phrase because they are not wrong: the sign, taken from Lorenz Diefenbach’s 1873 novel, *Arbeit Macht Frei: Erzählung von Lorenz Diefenbach*, where gamblers experience a virtuous reformation through labour, gains new resonances of meaning through its Nazi use that are not at odds with the original. This prompts a destabilisation of meaning in the original text that performs the uncomfortable elimination of distance between the Nazis and the viewer who might indeed feel that his/her labour is edifying. Irony here destabilises the boundary between “us” and “them” instead of maintaining it, forcing us to ask uncomfortable questions about ourselves and our beliefs.

In terms of emotional impact, these two kinds of irony also differ. In the first kind, as I have mentioned, there is a lightness of tone generated by the sense of abstraction. The reader is asked to deal with the matters-at-hand at a purely conceptual level: the distance that allows for its critiques also result in the lack of emotional weight. The second kind of irony, however, is marked by pain that is a

result of paradoxically being able to enact ironic distance necessary for critique and while experiencing the elimination of ironic distance that allows us to empathise with the perspective that is being critiqued. Kierkegaard gives a very clear example of the emotions involved in this kind of irony not in his book but his journals: “[To] be able to possess [the beloved] all too easily, so that she herself begs and prays to belong to one, and then not to be able to get to her: that is irony . . . Irony is a kind of *hypersthenia*, which may, as everyone knows, prove fatal” (*Journals* 229-230; emphasis added). This feeling of pain can only be made possible if Kierkegaard is simultaneously within and without the ironic situation. The pain occurs precisely because he is critically detached enough from the situation to realize that his own personality and beliefs have made it impossible for him to be with her despite her reciprocation of his feelings.<sup>9</sup>

Hypersthenia is an apt description. Described by the American Psychological Association as “a condition of excessive muscle strength and tension”, it gives the reader a sense of the dilemmas and emotional tensions that characterise this kind of irony. The dilemma stems from an *excessively muscular use of reason*: the ability to insert ironic distance to engage in a critical judgement of one’s self that worsens an already painful situation. The horror of the Holocaust, in the example I mentioned, is painful enough to recollect; yet, the situation for the reader is made even worse through his/her experience of this kind of irony, which encourages a recognition that his/her value system may not be that different from that which

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<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard’s journal entry here refers to his troubled relationship with Regine Olsen, who reciprocated his love for her and who was, at one time, engaged to him. It was Kierkegaard who broke the engagement, resulting in much heartbreak on both sides. For a more in-depth discussion of Kierkegaard’s relationship, see *Kierkegaard: A Biography* by Alastair Hannay (2000).



caused the Holocaust. The irony is directed at one's self, forcing the reader into an ambivalent position where s/he can critique the very values that s/he nevertheless holds dear: such irony thus always has a tragic dimension insofar as it involves the destruction of values dear to the reader, putting into question his/her existential purpose(s) while forcing upon him/her the recognition of the weight of human suffering.<sup>10</sup>

All three novels under examination have a tragic dimension because they allow space for the enactment of unstable irony, which is characterised by its auto-criticality. I propose that it is the auto-criticality of the irony that forms the basis of the distinction between meta-campus novels and campus novels. While *Stoner*, the first of the three campus novels under examination, is a tragedy, both *Herzog* and *Disgrace* can be considered tragicomic. Although the genre "tragicomedy" itself has amassed a formidable amount of scholarship devoted to its definitions and operations, for the purposes of this thesis I suggest a definition of the genre as proposed by Verna A. Foster to indicate that the operation of irony in the latter novels result in "a mix of the tragic and comic . . . so equally balanced" that it "constitutes a special mode of perception and experience distinguishable from

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship of irony to comedy, see Morton Gurewitch's *The Ironic Temper and the Comic Imagination* (1994). Gurewitch not only gives an overview of the important thinkers of irony but also outlines the difficulties regarding tone that arise when irony is present in a literary text. He observes that "the denotations and connotations of irony make up an astonishing clutter" that involves notions as diverse as "ambiguity", "delicate gloating", "an equilibrium of opposed forces", "urbanelly amused aloofness" and "striking discrepancies" among others (15). Given the texts at hand, my focus is on the equilibrium of opposed forces (critical detachment in tension with emotional attachment) and the effects of this tension that tie in with the aspects of the tragic. This sense of irony is not to be confused with tragic irony, sometimes regarded as synonymous with as dramatic irony (such as in *Oedipus Rex*), where the irony stems from the contrast between the reader of the text knowing in advance that the flaw(s) of the protagonist will result in a tragic ending and the protagonist's lack of awareness that this is the case.

‘purer’ or ‘simpler’ forms of tragedy and comedy” (Foster 10).<sup>11</sup> Hence, texts can be thought of as having a mix of tragic or comic elements fairly independently of plot events. Indeed, as Steve Wiegstein observes in his article, “The Academic Novel and the Academic Ideal: John Williams’s *Stoner*” (1994), *Stoner* contains “the typical ingredients of the comic academic novel – the powerlessness of the main character, the gulf between his private ambitions and his public station, the element of forbidden sexual involvement, and the ending of public expulsion” (39). These things “have nothing intrinsically comic in them; as with many comic patterns, they gain poignancy by their *nearness to tragedy*” (Wiegstein 39; emphasis added). Wiegstein’s observations support my argument that the closeness of campus novels to tragedy or comedy determines their treatment of important themes, not necessarily their degree of realism.

The tragic elements present in all three novels do not fit a strictly Aristotelian definition of the genre: the protagonists are not exceptional individuals or divine entities and the episodic nature of the narratives in all three novels prevents them from having a unity of action.<sup>12</sup> What the novels do contain that can

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<sup>11</sup> Brean Hammond’s *Tragicomedy* (2021) and David L. Hirst’s *Tragicomedy* (2022) provide very useful discussions of the term “tragicomedy” and its origins. Of particular pertinence to Foster’s definition is Hammond’s discussion in the first chapter of his book, which characterises the genre as a “newly *blended species*” of theatrical writing in the seventeenth century (2; emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle lays out the requirements that need to be met for a work of art to be considered tragic in *Poetics*. Although it is generally accepted that there are three unities, Aristotle himself seems to focus on unity of action more than on time and place: “the plot of a play, being the representation of an action, must present it as a unified whole, and its various incidents must be arranged so that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted” (68). I particularly recommend reading Aristotle’s work on poetics in the collection *Classical Literary Criticism* (2000) which contrasts his work on art with excerpts from other major thinkers like Plato, Horace and Longinus. George Steiner’s famous work, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), gives a good summary and analysis of classical Greek tragedy.

be considered tragic, however, is the sense of seriousness with which they outline how the education of their protagonists leads to much of their suffering. While all three novels contain plot events that are common in many satirical campus novels like the breakdown of an academic's marriage, the restriction of the reader to the inner workings of their protagonists' minds via free indirect discourse makes them deeply psychological, lending the reader a sense of how much their education has shaped their world view and their interactions with the world and forcing upon the reader an elimination of critical distance so that s/he can empathise with the suffering that each protagonist undergoes. Yet, all three novels can be read with a degree of ironic distance that allows for a critique of the university. Although the insertion of ironic distance results in a counter-intuitive reading of *Stoner*, both *Herzog* and *Disgrace* derive much of their comedy from the ironizing of their protagonists. As my readings of the novels will show, although there are differences between these three novels, the difficulties that arise from the reader's negotiations with being paradoxically within and without their protagonists' perspectives form an education for him/her that may be read as a university education. Moreover, the thesis's readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* form a trajectory that begins with investigating the problems of university education and ends with a suggestion of how to live with these problems.

Some historical and theoretical groundwork needs to be laid before I can continue with my readings of the three novels. In order to argue that these campus novels enact a university education, the links between an education in literature and a university education need to be elucidated. In order to accomplish this, I will first investigate what the notion of what the university project might mean. This

involves a brief overview of scholarly literature on the university project that zooms in on a definition of the university project germane to the kind of education being critiqued in the three novels under discussion before looking into the theoretical underpinnings of said project, briefly outlining the intersections between the concerns of the scholarship and the concerns of the novels under study in the process. I will undertake this task in the next section of this chapter before going on to contextualise the scholarly literature with philosophical readings about the purpose of the modern university in the last section.

### **Setting the Scene: University Studies and Its Reaction to Neoliberalism**

This section will attempt to contextualise and tease out the nuances of two scholarly factions in the field of university education, in the process suggesting that it is now difficult to disentangle the university project, a humanities education and the study of literature. Before I go on to do this, however, some contextualisation is needed to understand the aims of this section in the context of the field of what we can understand as “University Studies”, where “University Studies” broadly refers to scholarship that thinks about the purpose of the university, its problems, and possible solutions to these problems. This section aims to elucidate two salient groups of scholarly literature in the field of University Studies that provide some background context for the critique of the university project in *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace*. In order to avoid confusion, however, it must be clarified that there is currently what we can regard as a sub-field of University Studies called Critical University Studies, a term coined by Jeffery Williams, which has a different tone from some of the other scholarship in the field of University Studies.

An indication of how inextricable the aims of the university are from that of the humanities is that scholarship that examines the purposes/problems of the humanities seems to overlap with scholarship on the purposes/problems of the university. For example, Eleonora Belfiore and Anna Upchurch provide a helpful taxonomy of the field of scholarship in regard to the state of the humanities in the contemporary university, in their introduction to the book *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century Beyond Utility and Markets* (2013). They suggest that the writing in this field can be divided broadly into two strands:

One dwells on the seemingly ineluctable (and ongoing) demise of the humanities as an academic area of scholarship in the context of a progressively more and more marketized higher education sector. The other . . . makes exorbitant claims for the benefits of a humanities-based education and for the wealth-creation and social-regeneration potential of areas of work unfairly presented as obscure, rarefied, and engrossed in an irrelevant love affair with either the past or with opaque French theoretical constructs, or as the privilege of the wealthy. (1)

As Belfiore notes in her essay, “The ‘Rhetoric of Gloom’ v. the Discourse of Impact in the Humanities: Stuck in a Deadlock?”, the first strand of writing, due to its “largely oppositional nature”, forms the field of “Critical University Studies” (19). As Jeffery Williams notes, on his website, much of this scholarship in Critical University Studies “has condemned the rise of ‘academic capitalism’ and the corporatization of the university; a substantial wing has focused on the deteriorating conditions of

academic labour; and some of it has pointed out the problems of students and their escalating debt”.

The second strand of scholarship mentioned by Belfoire and Upchurch overlaps with more optimistic strand of scholarship within University Studies mentioned by Belfoire in her essay: “In light of these widespread symptoms of malaise and perception of beleaguerment, it might seem surprising—and most definitely contradictory . . . that the past ten years should have seen the rise, in parallel to this flourishing rhetoric of doom and gloom, of a more positive (if often instrumental) idiom in debates surrounding higher education policy and funding” (20-21). In my view, the parallel “rise of a more positive (if often instrumental) idiom in debates surrounding higher education policy and funding” alongside the despair and anger evidenced in Critical University Studies does not “seem surprising” or “contradictory”. It seems to me that the simultaneous proliferation of these two oppositional strands of writing is not coincidence, but rather the result of two widely differing reactions to the marketisation of the university lamented in Critical University Studies. Instead of lamenting the state of affairs in the marketized university, the second strand tries to address this state of affairs by attempting to ensure the survival of humanities through the attribution of some sort of market value to a humanities education.

If this is indeed the case, then we can understand the first strand of writing as providing some perspective on the nature of the problem and the second strand of writing as proposing solutions to the problem. It should be noted that although there are books in the field that focus mainly on one of the two strands, several books in the field attempt to combine both strands, that is to say, there are some

books on university education that attempt both a critique of the university and a proposed solution to the university's problem(s), for instance Thomas Docherty's *For the University* (2011). An example of a book mainly focused on the first strand is Stefan's Collini's famous *What are Universities For?* (2012) which attempts to provide some clarification on how to go about "[identifying] the distinctive character of universities" without being focused on the university's money-making capabilities (x-xi). Other fairly recent books in this strand include John Symth's *The Toxic University* (2017), *Higher Education and Social Inequalities* (2017, ed. Michael Ward, Nicola Ingram and Richard Waller), *Feeling Academic in the Neoliberal University* (2018, ed. Yvette Taylor and Kinneret Lahad) and *Neoliberalism, Economism and Higher Education* (2018, ed. Almantas Samalavičius), and Ronald Musto's *The Attack on Higher Education* (2022) among others. Books in the second strand are, perhaps, even more numerous: Christopher Fynsk's *The Claim of Language* (2004), James Duderstadt's and Farris Womack's *The Future of the Public University in America* (2004), Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit* (2010), Helen Small's *The Value of the Humanities* (2013), *The Humanities and Public Life* (2014, ed. Peter Brooks), Sidonie Smith's *Manifesto for the Humanities* (2016), Cathy Davidson's *The New Education* (2017), Ed Bryne's and Charles Clarke's *The University Challenge* (2020), and Louise Lawrence's *Refiguring Universities in an Age of Neoliberalism* (2021) among others.

A quick scan of the titles and the contents of said books provided thus far will give us an insight into the complex relationship between a university education, a humanities education and an education in literature. For example, when Collini attempts to achieve his task of understanding the purpose of the

university outside of its capabilities to make monetary profits, he turns to John Henry Newman's lectures on the university in the mid-nineteenth century (xi).<sup>13</sup> As Collini notes, Newman's claims about the benefits of the university and his justifications for the public purpose of a university are not tied "to any particular subject-matter or canon"; Newman "clearly assumes that a central place will be occupied by traditional genteel studies such as philosophy, the classics, and history, all under the overarching jurisdiction of theology" (50). Despite this, however, Newman "couches his justification [of the university] in terms of manner or tone, of a relation rather than content" (Collini 50), placing constant emphasis not on the skills or knowledge of the would-be students of his university but on "the relation in which they come to stand to their knowledge, the manner in which they dispose of it [and] the perspective that they have on the place of their knowledge in a wider map of human understanding" (Collini 49). Collini demonstrates that Newman's justification of his university depends upon its being able to effect successful *epistemological changes* in its students that would broadly benefit society. Epistemology is within the domain of the humanities, and this epistemological focus of the university mission and its implied benefits for the

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<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to provide an exact year of publication for Newman's work because of the dating of his book is complex. Collini provides an outlining of the book's bibliographical history: "The book we now know as *The Idea of a University* is a composite volume with a complex bibliographical history. The initial lectures which he gave in 1852 he published later that year, together with some further lectures he wrote but did not deliver, under the title *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*, addressed to the Catholics of Dublin. In 1858 he published a selection of the addresses he had subsequently given in Dublin in his role as Rector, under the title *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects*. In 1873 he brought the bulk of the contents of these two books together, in revised form, as *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*, which he re-published, with further revisions, in several later editions, culminating in the ninth edition published in 1889, the year before his death" (43).



public is often in the background when criticism is directed at the current state of the university.

As Collini has pointed out, the emphasis on the changes in epistemological outlook that the university effects in theory applies to all disciplines within it. This explains why it is impossible to complain about the university's degeneration without drawing on at least *some* aspect of the humanities (most commonly literature, philosophy and history), but, as is evident from the collection of titles I have provided, it is possible to make defences of the humanities that do not extend to "the university" at large. Where this is concerned, there is furious debate about what the value of the humanities might be. Rick Rylance discusses this at length in his book *Literature and the Public Good* (2016):

The intrinsic value of art, or scholarly learning, or abstract ideas, or faith beliefs, or one's inwardness with foreign languages, for example, are said to be good in themselves. . . . The rival view claims that instrumental consequences determine value. The use to which a thing is put, and the benefits realized thereby, disclose value, or fail to. The first view is often called categorical, referring to the special nature of categories such as art or learning. The second view is consequentialist in that value inheres in the consequences of a thing and not the thing itself.<sup>14</sup> (14)

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<sup>14</sup> Helen Small's quick summary of the five main scholarly claims for the value of the humanities in her book are also a helpful guide to thinking about the matter (4-7).

Collini's reading of Newman suggests that although the categorical and consequentialist theories of valuing the humanities seem to be opposed to each other, both strands cannot escape instrumentalism. That is to say, even if one should learn because learning is intrinsically good, such learning is still directed towards achieving an outcome perceived as desirable, either for the individual or for the society that s/he lives in. Conversely, what one defines as art or learning will determine how one understands the consequences of either, and one supports or chooses not to support learning/ the arts based on whether they are means to desirable ends. This thesis is focused on the notion of university learning as epistemological transformation highlighted by Collini, which ties the two theories together: in Newman's words, "a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number" (126). As we shall see later in the thesis, the reason for this is that *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* involve themselves in thinking about how a university education in the humanities has impacted their protagonists and their lives.

Regardless of the different strands of value that Rylance has highlighted, the discontent of many scholars in Critical University Studies stems from a reaction against what Almantas Samalavičius has called a "*monoculture of consumption*" that seeks "nothing more than profit" that has turned the current university into a business-driven enterprise, supplanting its previous societal position "as a public instrument of higher education and research" (1; emphasis added). The "*monoculture of consumption*" that Samalavičius is resisting can be understood as the prevalence of neoliberalism in universities. The term "*neoliberalism*" itself is

subject to much debate, but for the purposes of the thesis we can use Wendy Brown's deft definition of the phenomenon in her book *Undoing the Demos* (2015): "a normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality" that "transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are *not directly monetized*" (9-10; emphasis added).

We can understand better the scholarly unhappiness about the contemporary university if we understand much of Critical University Studies as refusing the economic as a frame for the epistemological goals of the university. In other words, the protest stems from a worry that using a system of metrics to value the humanities might compromise the epistemological project(s) that a university education involves. As Rylance notes, "there is a risk that the values belonging more naturally to the arts will be compromised by the uninspiring process of instrumental calculation" (14). This is indicated by Wendy Brown's language in the text that I have earlier quoted: "*all spheres of existence* are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, *even when those spheres are not directly monetized*" (emphasis added). In the words of William Davies: "[The] central defining characteristic of all neoliberal critique is its hostility to the ambiguity of political discourse, and a commitment to the explicitness and transparency of quantitative, economic indicators, *of which the market price system is the model*" (3; emphasis added). The issue becomes less one of making money *per se*, but of a particular worldview that cannot be separated from the

economic, where the economic involves a “specific model” incorporating the characteristics that Davies has mentioned (in Brown’s words). Yet, for many scholars the value of a university education is, as Belfiore and Upchurch have mentioned, largely instrumental, even if they resist the instrumentalism inherent in the neoliberal world view.

The problem faced by scholars who want to resist neoliberalism and yet put forward an instrumental argument of the university mission is, then, the fear that this very act of instrumentalization is the basis behind the model of the market that they are trying so hard to resist. On the one hand, it seems intuitively true that the lofty goals of thinkers like Henry Newman, Wilhelm Humboldt, Emmanuel Kant, Schelling *et al.* should and can extend beyond outcomes that are measurable. This is certainly the sense in Thomas Docherty’s *For the University* in his chapter on the student experience in the university, where he outlines how talk of “‘outcomes’ and of ‘knowledge-transfer’ presupposes a certainty and stability in the process of learning” that “amounts to . . . an *obsession with measurement*” (41-42; emphasis added). Docherty contrasts this neoliberal system of measuring student satisfaction and outcomes with learning as a “process of *transformation*” (*University* 42; emphasis original). This view has its historical and ideological roots in the purpose of the university that thinkers like Newman have put forward. The process of transformation is viewed as opposing or offering some *protection* against neoliberal modes of measuring value. The first neoliberal understanding of learning involves transferring skillsets to an individual so that s/he might have better opportunities in the job market, ensuring that s/he gets “value for money” for the money that s/he has invested in his/her university education (*University* 7). The

second understanding of learning involves transformation of an individual in service of a desired socio-political end and is dependent on state investment in the university, what Docherty calls “money for values” (*University* 7).

These understandings might seem completely opposite: the first is focused on pleasing the individual as consumer while the other is in service of a public good. Disturbingly, though, both views of learning do share the commonality of instrumentalising the individual, albeit to different ideas of the public good. As Docherty points out, the first view does not actually manage to achieve its goals of pleasing the consumer completely, because for society to function its different units need a minimum of workers with different skillsets. The consumers are forced into “choices” by the market, which, like any “‘free’ market . . . has to be rigged to produce certain outcomes,” and be “set up in ways to ensure that we do,” for example, “get enough well-educated engineers and scientists” (Docherty, *University* 166). A neoliberal understanding of university education, therefore, suggests that there has to be a compromise between what the consumer might want and what society needs, and the public good involves trying to satisfy both the needs of the society and the wants of the consumer. A more traditional understanding of university education, of education as transformation, would align the individual (through education) with the values of the public good, resolving the conflict assumed in the neoliberal view of learning, thus rendering operable the “money for values” model.

**Narrowing the Focus: Two Negotiations with *Bildung* in the University**

Of interest to this thesis is the second view of university education as a process of transformation of the individual<sup>15</sup>. This can be understood to have its roots in the *Bildung* project of the Anglo-American university, which involves transforming an individual through the growth of his intellectual and spiritual capabilities.<sup>16</sup> The development of an individual's intellectual and spiritual capacities is viewed as a public good that would work out for the advancement of society. This explains why, whether articulated or not, many of the books in Critical University Studies are reacting to neoliberal ways of thought that they feel are harmful to research, teaching and learning. Belfiore's characterisation of the larger field of university education, mentioned in the previous section, perhaps elides works like Thomas Docherty's 2011 book, where the focus is not on blaming "opaque theoretical constructs" or "the privilege of the wealthy" for the prevalence of neoliberalism in universities (Belfiore and Upchurch 1). Regardless, she is correct in noting that there are a good number of scholarly books where

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<sup>15</sup> This statement means that the thesis cannot give space to other arguments that attempt to address the problem of neoliberalism in universities like the proposition by Moore *et al.* of "a narrative of 'soundness' and 'capacity' that offers . . . the opportunity to focus on practice of productive research and on the crucial role that social communication and criticism plays" (2). Another book in a similar vein is Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University* (2019), which offers an incisive analysis of how the competitiveness of a neoliberal academic market is supported and fostered by an ungenerous approach to other scholars.

<sup>16</sup> The histories of British universities and American universities, of course, differ. I am speaking of the Anglo-American university as a unit for the sake of convenience and also because of the points at which their histories converge, in regard to the study of English: universities in both countries began the study of English in about the nineteenth century, and were also heavily influenced by the Humboltian model of German universities.

blame is placed on “opaque theoretical constructs” as being central to the decline of the humanities.<sup>17</sup>

In many such studies, the solutions involve looking backwards to what I have called the *Bildung* project, which has its roots in Romantic thinkers. Developments in scholarship, particularly the popularity of the “theoretical”, are thought to be the inevitable result of individuals uncritically accepting whatever intellectual trends a capitalist market attributes high value to. Judith Ryan provides a quick gloss on the history of the term “theory” and what the current usage of the word “theory” has come to mean in contemporary literary scholarship:

Throughout most of the period following World War II, “literary theory” referred to the systematic study of literature, including both its nature and its function. It involved categorizing intrinsic features such as style, imagery, narrative modes, genre, and the like. . . . Usage [of the term] began to shift substantially in the early 1970s, when ideas developed in Europe made their way into Anglo-American university curricula. The term “theory” expanded substantially beyond what had previously been meant by “literary theory.” As it became naturalized in the English-speaking sphere, it came to refer to recent European thought that was by no means

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<sup>17</sup> See Michael Bérubé’s ‘Value and Values’, in the book *The Humanities, Higher Education, and Academic Freedom: Three Necessary Arguments* (2015). Bérubé specifies exactly what the problems of the humanities are in relation to the neoliberalisation of the university, debunking the notion that the intellectual value of the humanities is diminishing because of any one intellectual trend (11). For Bérubé, the problems are structural: what he calls “the deprofessionalisation of college thinking” and the adjunctification of academics (11).

restricted to the literary field. Many of these theories emerged from history and the social sciences rather than the humanities . . .

Although the term “literary theory” is still used in connection with the new theories, it extends the notion of the literary very broadly.

This is perhaps the reason why “theory” came to be used as a blanket category.<sup>18</sup> (2)

Given that these thinkers (whom the thesis will henceforth refer to as the “non-theorists”) associate the rise of theory with the vulnerability of universities to unthinking acceptance of popular intellectual trends, their proposed solution involves looking backward to a time where the universities apparently fostered the power of independent thought in its students so that society as a whole would be improved. Thus, for these thinkers, repeating the *Bildung* project wholesale is a solution to the marketized university.

This view is of interest to the thesis given the view of university education proposed in *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace*, particularly the first two novels. Although it does not directly engage with “theory”, the popular resurgence of *Stoner* can be attributed to the novel’s nostalgic attachment to the version of the *Bildung* project promoted by the “non-theorists” that it presents as threatened by the corporatisation of the university and the marketization of scholarly endeavour. *Herzog* occupies an intriguing position *vis a vis* the views of the “non-theorists”.

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<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the term, its history in the literary academy and its influence on assessing students and intellectuals, see Jeffery Williams’s perspicacious book, *How to Be an Intellectual: Essays on Criticism, Culture, and the University* (2014). It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a sustained discussion of the evolution of the term “theory” and the impact thereof within the field of literary studies.



Despite the novel providing a harsh critique of the project that this group of thinkers promotes, the novel's protagonist's views dovetail with theirs because he thinks that the popularity of "theory" in higher education is to blame for the ills of society. The novel itself attempts to convince its readers to support *Bildung* despite its flaws. Tellingly, the decline in Saul Bellow's popularity can be traced to the unhappiness of many critics and scholars with the views about race and gender expressed in his novels. A comparison of the changes in fortune of both novels suggest that ironically, Bellow's reputation has taken a hit due its forward-lookingness relative to *Stoner*: Bellow's direct engagement with the problem of nostalgia for *Bildung* through his novel's exposure how *Bildung* supports social inequalities. The other negotiation with *Bildung* involves trying to reckon with its contradictions, particularly its entanglement with the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century. In these studies, scholars (whom the thesis will henceforth refer to as the "theorists") propose some process of transformation as learning in the university project while trying to account for or deal with what they see as possible flaws in *Bildung*.<sup>19</sup> They look forward to a different (though related) idea of

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<sup>19</sup> Ryan's succinct paragraph provides an insight into the difficulties of nomenclature that one faces in trying to find labels that concisely and accurately characterize the two different groups of thinkers who have differing views on how *Bildung* may be useful in addressing the problems of the contemporary university. Given that "literary theory" pre-World War II used to refer to scholars who worked on features of texts such as style and imagery, and that the etymology of the word "theory" can be traced to the Greek word *theōria*, which has the meaning of contemplation and speculation (*OED*), it seems both inaccurate and disrespectful of the scholarly work performed by the first group of thinkers to refer to them as "anti-theorists". Yet, a salient characteristic of this group of thinkers is that they *oppose* the latter group of thinkers, whom most in the current field of literary studies would think of as "theorists", insofar as their work intentionally incorporates insights from fields like sociology, history, philosophy and political science. I have settled on the term "non-theorists": this gestures towards this sense of opposition for the former group while recognizing the fact that their work involves sustained contemplation and the building of frameworks with which one can understand the problems of the university. For the latter group, I use the term "theorists" to indicate that their work is broadly in line with what the current sense of the word in the academy entails.

learning-as-transformation. This view is of particular interest to the thesis because *Disgrace* involves a traditionally educated scholar trying to deal with the rationalisation of his university. While the protagonist of *Disgrace* thinks of himself as his education enabling him to resist the neoliberal university, the novel demonstrates that this resistance is highly flawed because his belief in *Bildung* is inextricably tied to class, race and gender privilege: this fundamental link structures the misogyny and class privilege at work in both *Stoner* and *Herzog* while providing a racialized context for the politics that each novel promotes. In my next two subsections, therefore, I will discuss some of the scholarly literature in both sub-fields of University Studies while laying out their ideas of how their solutions provide the individual with some resistance to the predations of capitalism. I will suggest that both sub-fields are trying to fight off neoliberalism, although they involve different solutions.

*Looking Back: Nostalgia for Bildung as Antidote to the Crisis of the University*

The group of thinkers who blame “theory” for the irrelevance of the humanities (whom this thesis will henceforth refer to as the “non-theory scholars”) gained prominence in the late 1980s in America. As David Cooper points out in his book, *Learning in the Plural* (2014):

The widespread perception of the humanities’ irrelevance to the public interest was set in motion by a tsunami of highly critical and politically charged reports, beginning with a scathing 1988 National Endowment for the Humanities white paper that blasted literary studies and theory, in particular, for preferring mind-numbing

mental aerobics over fundamental questions of human purpose and moral meaning. . . . While undergraduates stampeded into business majors, the number of degrees awarded in the humanities began to plummet (153).

This political development resulted in “a volley of widely read and reviewed books . . . during the late 1980s and 1990s: *The Closing of the American Mind*, *Killing the Spirit*, *The Last Intellectuals*, *Literature Lost*, *Bonfire of the Humanities*, just to name a few” (Cooper 153). Some of these books, as is evident from their titles, are concerned with the future of the study of literature. But many of these books are, perhaps notably, concerned with the future of higher education, such as *Killing the Spirit* (1997), *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), *The Last Intellectuals* (2000).

Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) is perhaps the most famous of these, and it laments that American universities no longer produce civic-minded or intellectual students. This lament is tied, albeit confusingly, to the perceived decline in importance of what is, for Bloom, classic books. This places the humanities, in particular the reading of philosophy and literature, at the heart of Bloom’s argument. For Bloom, the reading of these books, done at university, *transforms* the individual by bringing his/her passions in line with his/her reason. This allows him to resist the vagaries of trendy thought, particularly what he calls “value relativism” (Bloom 141), where this term is associated with “theory” as a popular trend in the *market* of ideas. I will briefly delineate Bloom’s argument to expose the important assumptions that he makes in his exposition of the crisis of the humanities. I show that as much as Bloom tries to posit himself as an

intellectual open to all cultures, he privileges what he views as American values over the values of other cultures, and that this privileging of American culture cannot be delinked from his advocacy of what he thinks of as the classics or his notion of what the American university should do for its students. Bloom assumes that there is a universal human *nature* that a university education can and should nurture, but this assumption itself is culturally specific. The tension between his assumption and its historicity leads him to decry what he calls “value relativism”. To admit that the assumption is culturally specific means admitting that the project of university education as transformative is one perspective of many and that this view has to compete with other views of education without the benefit of apparent scientific authority.

In his introduction, Bloom complains that “relativism has extinguished the real motive of education, the search for a good life” (34). He thinks that “the radicals in the civil rights movement [1950s and 1960s] succeeded in promoting a popular conviction that . . . American principles are racist” leading to an “*openness* that has driven out the local deities, leaving only the speechless, meaningless country” (56; emphasis added). Bloom suggests that university education ought to lead to *εὐδαιμονία* (*eudaimonia*), but characteristically leaves his reference vague, such that we do not know if he is referring to the Aristotelian definition or indeed someone else’s.<sup>20</sup> Very soon we find out that he is referring to his own definition of

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<sup>20</sup> Juha Sihvola provides a helpful gloss on the concept of “*eudaimonia*” in ancient Greek philosophy in his article “*Eudaimonia*: Happiness and ‘the Good Life’ in Ancient Greek Philosophy”. The word “*eudaimonia*” is generally translated as “happiness”, and is central to how we understand the concept of “the good life”. It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a sustained discussion of the term and its place in philosophy.

a good life, which he defines here: “Education is the taming or domestication of the *soul’s* raw passions . . . of *harmonizing* the *enthusiastic part* of the soul with what develops later, the *rational part*” (71; emphasis added). This is the transformative process that Bloom thinks a university education involves. Undergraduates have their passions harmonised with their rationality through their education at university. In short, to know what it is to be a human being— possibly a better human being— to develop a moral code of some sort— one has to *cultivate one’s self*. This involves a linkage between notions of feeling and the use of reason. Moreover, this notion of what it means to be a better human being cannot be delinked from a privileging of some principles over others: relativism and openness are bad; some principles have to be better than others. This hints at the linkage between a cultural boundary to humanism: the assertions that Bloom is making show that it cannot be universal, and instead involves the prizing of Western culture (if not American culture, in his specific case) over others.

How do we achieve a seamless balance between the passionate and the rational? The answer is, unsurprisingly, Great Books, books that are thought to be cornerstones of Western culture and which have stood (and will stand) the test of time.<sup>21</sup> There is a section in Bloom’s book simply titled “Books,” where he complains that “our [American] students have lost the *practice of and the taste of reading*” (62; emphasis added). Here Bloom makes a direct link between the habits

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<sup>21</sup> Bloom is referencing John Erskine’s brainchild, first conceived as a General Honours programme introduced at Columbia University in 1917, which had a reading list of Great Books, key texts in the Western world that spanned a wide range of disciplines. This was published later by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a series. For a while, Erskine’s programme inspired several other universities to offer Great Books programmes, usually with the aim of providing an education in the liberal arts, although this is rare today.

acquired in reading and an all-rounded, well-developed mature individual who contributes to civic society. This well-rounded individual would have the “awareness that [s/he] owe[s] almost exclusively to literary genius” instead of modern “pop psychology” that young people in the 1980s depended on (Bloom 64). This has several deleterious consequences. First, students become “psychologically obtuse” because they have “only pop psychology to tell them what people are like, and the range of their motives” (Bloom 64). Next, the “lack of education results in students’ seeking for enlightenment wherever it is readily available, without being able to distinguish between the sublime and trash, insight and propaganda” (Bloom 64). Hence, students end up lacking “distance from the contemporary” and indulging their “petty desires” (Bloom 64). Thus, “the failure [of modern students] to read good books enfeebles the vision and strengthens our most fatal tendency—the belief that the here and now is all there is” (Bloom 64).

Here we get to know a bit more about why Bloom’s argument experiences tensions. Despite acknowledging that there is a cultural boundary to his notion of humanism, Bloom would like to think that the bridging of passion and reason through art creates a relatively neutral standpoint, related to human nature (common to all humans), from which the enlightened individual will be able to see issues. This bridging of passion and reason through art, the development of the human soul, is the “task of . . . [fulfilling] *human nature* against all the deforming forces of convention and prejudice” (Bloom 64; emphases added). The development of the critical apparatus through the perusal of Great Books not only gives insight into human psychology but also allows for the critical distance needed for both introspection and analysis of the contemporary world. It is worth noting

that Bloom equates the study of Great Books with the study of nature: “Nature should be the standard by which we judge our own lives and the lives of peoples. That is why philosophy, not history or anthropology, is the most important human science. Only dogmatic assurance that thought is culture-bound, that there is no nature, is what makes our educators so certain that the only way to escape the limitations of our time and place is to study other cultures” (Bloom 38). According to Bloom, a university education, if successful, will allow a student to perform the “difficult and unusual” task of “[getting] a critical distance on what he clings to,” even to the point of “[doubting] the value of what he loves” (71). This process is not artificial: it is a development of what is already there in any human being, a refinement of human nature, and it is also accomplished through the study of human nature through books. For Bloom the purpose of the university, the cultural climate of America, the study of humanities and the study of literature are intimately linked.

Although the Great Books reading list includes texts from all fields, including the sciences, Bloom privileges the philosophical, with some mention of important literary texts from the West. Key texts include Greek philosophers, most notably Plato. The privileging of these over other books, however, means that Bloom resists the opening of the canon in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the accompanying notion that all cultures are equal or should be given equal recognition. This explains why he calls the activists of the 1960s “both professional and amateur . . . culture leeches,” who aim to replace “the *natural* soul . . . with an *artificial* one” (51; emphasis added). Bloom’s argumentation tears itself apart because he highlights the cultural specificity of his notion of university education while insisting that it

allows for critical distance: where does one stand while looking, distanced, at others? Certainly not at an equal distance from everything, and not questioning certain values. To have everything *open* for questioning would lead to Bloom's dreaded bugbear, "value relativism" (Bloom 141; emphasis added).

Several other books in the scholarship that see the reinstatement of *Bildung* as the solution to the university's problems echo Bloom's concerns. Ronald Barnett's *The Idea of Higher Education* (1990) tries to explain the changes in American and British universities' curricula towards "securing more funding from industry," "offering more consultancy and other services to the market place" and a shifting focus in the curriculum (x). Barnett, like Bloom, believes that "the idea of higher education promises a freeing of the mind, but also looks beyond to bringing about a new level of self-empowerment in the individual student" (x). This ideal of higher education, he thinks, has been undermined by two factors: first, the epistemological undermining of liberal humanism by "modern developments in society such as relativism, critical theory and post-structuralism" and secondly a sociological undermining of this ideal by the rapid growth of the academic community, which "has grown in size and influence to such an extent that it has become a pseudo-class in its own right, exerting its own partial claims on the curriculum" (x). Although Barnett is looking at developments in a British context, it is notable that both he and Bloom highlight the apparent tyranny of the majority as a threat to university education, where the said majority is constituted of "theorists".

Yet another scholarly study that contains a lament against the turn towards literary theory is John Ellis's *Literature Lost* (1997): "professors of literature are



now experts on everything. They write authoritatively on sociological topics . . . political and historical topics . . . psychological topics . . . topics in criminology. . . . [S]ome even express themselves trenchantly on economics” (8). The perception is that literature has become concerned with what Eugene Goodheart calls “ideological interpretation,” which, in his view, reduces the complexity of the literary text to socio-politico-historical factors (103). The changes that have happened in literature and English departments cannot be divorced from the role of the university in society: David Simpson’s *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature* (1995) argues that many of the disciplines in the university have taken on several post-structuralist paradigms, and this in turn jeopardises our ability to understand information syncretically as part of a larger narrative.

Simpson’s book, subtitled “A Report on Half-Knowledge,” is, of course, a dig at Lyotard’s *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), where Lyotard famously proposes that post-modernity is characterised by a distrust of meta-narratives, narratives that have a transcendent truth (a centre) that can explain all that we see and experience. Hence Simpson’s warning that Lyotardian over-emphasis on local narratives could lead us to discard syncretic views of a subject. Simpson is making an argument for the metanarrative as a counter-balance to Lyotard, and hence his discontent points us in a direction that gives us an inkling of what books like *Literature Lost* are mourning: what is lost is not “literature” per se, whatever that may be (after all, departments continued studying the subject), but rather the transcendental category of “literature,” something that was *pure* and of itself, *uncontaminated* by interested parties with their own socio-political agendas. Like Bloom, Simpson links changes in literary

studies to the changes in university practices and goals. Also, we can see from Simpson *et al.* that Bloom's notion of the purpose of a university education very much resembles that of the neutrality and criticality that several conservative literary scholars are claiming should result from the study of literature (again, one thinks of Bloom's claim about the effects of being able to read Great Books well), that the purpose of studying literature and indeed its method, cannot be delinked from the purpose (and practices) of a university.

Contextualising this apparent loss of the transcendental category of "literature" by taking a closer look at the power dynamics of the academic workplace gives us a clue to why these thinkers may lay the blame at the feet of the "theorists" when it comes to the decline of university education. As already mentioned, there is a sense of anger at the apparent tyranny of the majority constituted by "theorists" and the uncriticality of those who "simply" follow popular opinion. Harold Fromm's *Academic Capitalism and Literary Value* (1991) states that "the supplanting of New Criticism and dry-as-dust scholarship by feminist, black, deconstructionist, and Marxist methodologies" have indeed produced a "lively, flourishing period for literature studies;" however, "whatever the virtues of these approaches may have been while they were fighting for their lives, the reality is rather different now that they have become the chief corporations of academic capitalism" (210). In his view, "what once served as correctives to monolithic but moribund methodologies have by now become 'hegemonic' monoliths themselves, though they are apt nonetheless to affect an air of violated innocence" (210).

From the scholarly literature discussed above, it becomes clear that there is a reaction not only to a different scholarly approach to literature but also indirectly to capitalism in the form of the neoliberalisation of the university, where the latter involves an *unthinking consumption and dissemination to undergraduates* of whatever society offers to one as good. Ironically, both their stances and their dissatisfaction with “theory” fit fairly well into Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s account of the culture industry: “The man of leisure has to *accept* what the culture manufacturers offer him . . . but industry *robs the individual of his function*. Its prime service to the customer is to do his schematizing [of the value of cultural products] for him” (124; emphasis added). Several thinkers mentioned in this section link the rise of “theory” and the dissemination thereof to the susceptibility of the university to unthinkingly accept the latest cultural crazes.<sup>22</sup> This is evident in Bloom’s perception that America’s youth are unable to engage in critical thinking because of “*pop psychology*” (earlier quoted), “*culture peddlers*” (19). He believes that Americans have “become convinced that there is a basement to which *psychiatrists* have the key” (Bloom 155; emphasis added), and attributes this phenomenon to the “*popularisation of German philosophy*” (Bloom 147; emphasis added), in particular what he called the “darker side of Freud and Weber”,

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<sup>22</sup> This line of thought extends into the literature on the subject in the 2000s. For instance, in Anthony Kronman’s *Education’s End* (2007), Kronman suggests that “the question of value and the purpose of living”, once a main presupposition behind the existence of liberal arts programmes, “survives only in private”, “the depressing conclusion of a historical development that has privatized a subject the humanities once undertook to investigate in a public and organized way, before the modern research ideal and the culture of political correctness made it an embarrassment to do so” (45). Evidence of the popularity of this strand of thought is its recurrence in the public sphere in the form of newspaper articles by scholars. A prominent example is Mark Bauerlein’s article for *The New Criterion*, “What Dido did, Satan saw & O’Keeffe painted” (2013), which makes an impassioned argument that “theory” is the cause of the decline of the humanities.

extending to what he calls “Nietzsche-Heidegger extremism” which, to his mind, leads to value relativism (Bloom 150). Bloom’s language shows a distrust of what he sees as the uncritical acceptance of the latest intellectual trends of academic market, including the openness of the establishment to German philosophy, as does Roland Barnett. This distrust of the popular understandably leads him to fall back on what he views as Great Books.

According to Fromm, the decline in vitality of “theory” can be attributed to its incorporation into the academic establishment as he laments that this development has led “theorists” to become “chief corporations of academic capitalism”. As earlier mentioned, Bloom advocates the studying of Great Books because he thinks that they may immunise their readers from the vagrancies of intellectual trends by harmonising their passion with their reason, developing their human natures so that they can judge issues from a critical distance. The assumption that Bloom and Fromm make is that those who would subscribe to “theory” lack this distance, a self-awareness that allows them to think about their intellectual and life choices with care before making them. For Bloom, undergraduates who subscribe to the insights of critical theory are “indoctrinated” and “cannot defend their opinion” (26). Fromm intimates a similar refusal of self-awareness in “literary theory” itself when he claims that the theories themselves “affect an air of violated innocence” regarding their incorporation into corporatized universities. Ellis himself appears similarly aggrieved by his “theorist” colleagues: “These new attitudes and ideas [from “literary theory”] gained ground so quickly that no full-scale analysis and discussion of them took place before they were already widely accepted. . . . They became accepted dogma quite suddenly” (10).

Having faith that their own university education has equipped them to judge the situation objectively, these scholars view the rise of “theory” as belonging to the vicissitudes of academic trends and therefore the capitalistic aspect of the academic market. The project of *Bildung*, a more traditional way of teaching and reading literature, one that would nurture human reason so that it could judge issues objectively would protect academics and students from falling prey to the vagaries of capitalism as manifested in its constant generation (and marketing) of intellectual fashions. Thus, these scholars view a return to older kinds of literary scholarship as an antidote to the crisis of the university.

*Looking Forward: “Literary Theory”, the Neoliberal University and Ambivalence Towards Bildung*

Perhaps the most famous book from a “literary theorist” about the unhappy state of affairs in the academy is Bill Readings’s book *The University in Ruins*, published posthumously in 1996 after his tragic death in a plane crash. Given the limited amount of space in this thesis to discuss the field, I will focus on this seminal text in University Studies to explore the critique of neoliberalism launched by the “theorists” and their problems with the *Bildung* project in its traditional form. Readings’s book provides some useful historical context for the centrality of reading and literature to the university project through a discussion of *Bildung* via his readings of Schiller and Kant. This discussion provides a useful platform for outlining the tensions between the social mission of the university, the cultivation of disinterested reason, capitalism and nationalism. Readings also attempts a solution to the neoliberalisation of the university that does not involve repeating *Bildung* wholesale. Regardless, Readings’s own solution can be viewed as part of an

engagement with *Bildung* in its loosest sense of “self-cultivation” in that it involves a transformative process in thinking about the individual and his/her relation to the community.

In this book, Readings famously launches a scathing attack on “the contemporary university as bureaucratic corporation,” arguing that it is subservient to the watchword “excellence” (21). For him, the notion of excellence exemplifies the concept of the modern university, which is more akin to a large bureaucratic corporation than a national-cultural institution. For Readings, the notion of excellence has “the singular advantage of being non-referential” (22), a “qualifier whose meaning is fixed in relation to something else” (24). Everyone has “his or her own idea about what [excellence] is,” although these disagreements are peripheral: once “excellence has been generally accepted as an organising principle, there is no need to argue about deferring definitions” (Readings 33). And once there is no need to argue, we can agree that “everyone is excellent, in their own way, and everyone has more of a stake in being left alone to be excellent than in intervening in the administrative process” (Readings 33). This situation, Readings suggests has “a clear parallel to the condition of the political subject under contemporary capitalism” (33). The only boundary that excellence has is “the boundary that protects the unrestricted power of the bureaucracy” and “if a particular department’s kind of excellence fails” to toe that line, “then that department can be eliminated without apparent risk to the system” (Readings 33).

Readings sees this focus on excellence as “[marking] the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that *the idea has lost all content*” (39; emphasis added). As a large bureaucratic corporation, with a focus on a non-

referential keyword, “all that the system requires is for the activity to take place, and the empty notion of excellence refers to nothing other than the optimal input/output in matters of information” (Readings 39). Qua Marx, the empty non-referential keyword “excellence” here can be compared to the emptiness of exchange-value, the pure abstraction and unitisation of value that characterises money. As long as a department’s excellence is in service of capital, in whatever way, it will survive. Here Readings identifies that the idea of the University has been lost and posits that “the idea of University has in the past been accorded the kind of referential value that excellence lacks” (44). In his view, “the appeal to excellence occurs when the nation-state ceases to be the elemental unit of capitalism” and “instead of states striving with each other to best exemplify capitalism, capitalism swallows the idea of the nation-state” (44). Readings suggests that the past idea of the university has to do with nation-state capitalism, and that the contemporary university is instead aligned with neoliberalism. In other words, the contemporary university is aligned with Brown’s notion of neoliberalism insofar as it views its performance and goals in terms of metrics; as long as a department, colleague or students can be judged as *measurably* excellent, different standards of excellence can be used without questioning the overall framing of all aspects of the university in economic terms.<sup>23</sup>

Readings’s book also takes issue with the solution of the thinkers in the previous section, suggesting that a return to the traditional *Bildung* project is not

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<sup>23</sup> Readings’s sense of how the concept of “excellence” has negatively impacted universities has been corroborated by other more recent studies, for instance *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (2009) by Michèle Lamont and “Excellence R Us’: University Research and the Fetishisation of Excellence” (2016) by Moore *et al.*.

viable as an immunising mechanism against the neoliberal university. He argues this through a helpful historico-philosophical contextualisation of the *Bildung* project that involves outlining the links between the project of *Bildung* in the modern university, the rise of nationalism and capitalism. Readings divides the history of the university into three stages. First, the old university, second the modern university and thirdly, the contemporary university. He is interested only in the latter two stages of the university. For him, the story of *Bildung* begins in the eighteenth century with Kant, and the influence of the Enlightenment on the idea of the university. This is where the university moves from being a preparatory college for the ministry to becoming an institution for research and learning, in other words, when the university begins to be seen as means by which a large-scale social education project is carried out. Readings argues that the idea of the modern university had its inception in Kantian privileging of reason: “what distinguishes the modern University is a universal unifying principle that is immanent to the University”, namely, the principle of reason (56). He draws on Kant’s *The Conflict of the Faculties* to elucidate the structure of the modern university, explaining that Kant had divided the human faculties into three content-based higher faculties (theology, law, medicine) and a contentless lower faculty (philosophy and the humanities) (56). The higher faculties drew their “authority from an instance that remains an unquestionable authority with them”: traditional key texts in their fields (Readings 56). The lower faculty is contentless in that it does not base its study on authoritative knowledge. Instead, it “legitimizes itself by reason alone, by its own practice” and if it does “recognise an external authority, such as the state, it preserves [its] autonomy in that it does so only by virtue of a free judgement of its



own based on reason” (Readings 56). The lower faculty of philosophy thus drives progress in the higher faculties by using rational inquiry to question tradition, leading to all disciplines having “a universally grounded rationality,” passing “from mere empirical practice to theoretical knowledge by means of self-criticism” (Readings 57).

If the university is, however, completely autonomous and dependent on the principle of reason alone, then it is contradictory to think of it as an institution within society serving a social goal. But this does happen to be the case; for Kant, the mission is social. If the goal of the university is, as Kant says, to “produce technicians [men of affairs] for the state,” then the university’s allegiance to reason cannot be disinterested (that is, solely dependent on the rule of reason alone) because it is part of a state educational apparatus interested in producing men that would contribute to the good of the state (Readings 58). Kant resolves this conflict by producing a “third term” that “[combines] institution and autonomy, while holding pure reason and institutional history apart” (Readings 59). This third term is the “republican subject . . . who is rational in matters of knowledge, republican in matters of power” (Readings 59). Such a subject would govern as if his people were mature and *as if* he were following the rule of reason in a disinterested manner (Readings 59). Analogously, the university “institutionalises reason, but although its authority to impose reason may function heteronomously (by virtue of the superstitious respect accorded to the University as the institution of reason), that authority must only function so as to affirm the principle of the autonomy of the rational subject” (Readings 59). So the university must function *as if* it were not an institution with state authority: an institution entrusted *in good faith* (not through

reason) by the state to be an institution of reason. As the institution of the university operates thus only in a hypothetical sense, its operation in reality means that it will inevitably deviate from its (idealised) *modus operandi*.

The university operating in reality needs concreteness, objects that interest reason and work in the interest of reason. As Readings points out, “what was required was a way to flesh out [the fiction of the university of reason], to allow the University to take on a form that might work out the aporia between reason and institution” (60). Thus, the study of nature became the flesh of the university: “reason is given *organic life* through historical study. Humanity does not achieve the moral state by rejecting nature but by *reinterpreting nature as a historical process*” (Readings 63; emphasis added). Nature was important because the Kantian emphasis on reason also meant its tyranny, at least if applied to the now: regardless of how rational state laws were, humanity in its current state would not be able to agree to abide by them of their own free will, precisely because there was a gap between uneducated man and a state of reason. This gap would result in a harsh state that had citizens only obeying its rules out of fear rather than their reason (Schiller, Letters 29). This reasoning results in the concept of nature becoming important because it was needed on a pragmatic level: to help to provide materials that bridged the gap between the now (uneducated and superstitious, ruled only by “the natural condition”) and the ideal (educated and rational) (Schiller, Letters 29). The study of nature, in the form of tradition, would allow the individual to access reason via empirical means, helping him/her grow as a human being: “what is *rational* in tradition . . . is not only isolated and affirmed but also given *organic life* in that it is preserved rather than simply *imposed upon a void*”

(Readings 64; emphasis added). The process of “hermeneutic reworking is called culture” (Readings 64). Culture “names an identity. It is the *unity* of all knowledges that are the object of study” (Readings 64; emphasis added). It also “names a process of development, of the cultivation of character—*Bildung*” (Readings 64).

The emphasis on reason in what Readings terms the Kantian university also ties in with a fundamental structural change in Western societies. I simplify a complex historical phenomenon for brevity’s sake: broadly speaking, the age of Enlightenment encouraged individual liberty and fraternity (equality between human beings) while moving away from the hierarchical structures of monarchy and state (rigid stratified classes with very little or no social mobility). The social motives of the Kantian model can be traced back to this general sentiment. As human beings were different but equal, with their individualities respected, sharing only the *universal* human trait of reason, so was the University changed to have different and specialised areas of research, all of which were equally respectable, underpinned by reason. In order for different but equal people to co-exist in a *society*, something has to be the binding glue, and this something has to be *concrete*: hence the choice of tradition, which delimits the boundary of each society and which explains why, despite reason being something that (in theory) was accessible to all human beings, the practice of the university and its social ideals became culture-bound. The process of *Bildung* also allows for the *social mobility* of the individual: it was a rite whereby all individuals in society (in theory) could move towards an ideal, a great leveller.

According to Readings, then, the German model of the university has had great influences on the Anglo-American University.<sup>24</sup> The popularity of the German model in America and England in the nineteenth century makes sense if we consider how easily it lent itself to nationalistic projects. It also gives us an understanding into how the purpose of studying literature became entangled with the social mission of the university. The specialisation and scientific methods in the German university model mirrored the rise of the nation-state and lent themselves to nation-state capitalism: the training of specific and specialised skillsets that worked as cogs in a state machine as opposed to the heading of the state by an aristocratic/ religious elite. Specialisation meant that the “old ‘composite structure’ of standard required courses was declared unsatisfactory and replaced ‘by a differentiation of previously existing departments and the introduction of new ones.’ Instead of three courses of study – classical, scientific and modern languages – there [would be] now eight, including English Literature, history, political science, mathematics, and physics, biology, geology, and chemistry” (Graff 67).

The nationalism implicit in the idea of *Bildung* was the uniting factor and the ethical justification for the various disparate units of society to work together: for the greater societal (national) good. This is part of the reason for the rise of English departments in the Anglo-American university. Literature is given special status in the university as a discipline because of these structural changes. It becomes the bearer of culture because the rise of nation-state capitalism and the

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the word “German” here reflects the fact that both Kant and Schiller are currently regarded as thinkers in the German tradition. For the sake of historical accuracy, it should be noted that at the time at which either thinker was writing, Germany as the country that we recognize today did not exist.

corresponding mission to turn a large number of individuals into state subjects through education meant that the university intake was more heterogenous than it used to be. In Gerald Graff's words, more social mobility through university education meant that, in both the U.K. and America, "higher education could no longer take for granted the tacit understanding that polite literature was the natural form of acculturation for gentlemen" (108).

In the specific case of the Anglo-American university, English gained central importance because of a variety of different factors. First, the rise of nationalism meant that from its inception in the late nineteenth century, English Literature departments became important in both the U.K. and America. Graff notes that, in America, the "very decision to divide the new language and literature departments along national lines was an implicit assertion of pride in the 'English speaking race'" (71). The American literature textbook by Brander Matthews that he subsequently quotes is typical of the views at that time: "as literature is a reflection and a reproduction of the life of the peoples speaking the language in which it is written, this literature is likely to be strong and great in proportion as the peoples who speak the language . . . English literature is therefore likely to grow, as it is the record of the life of the English speaking race and as this race is steadily spreading across the globe" (qtd. In Graff 71). In England, there was a parallel nationalistic push for studying English literature. Most famously, this was exemplified by Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), which gives culture the task of building subjects to form an ideal state. As outlined by Collini, Newman's lectures

on the university set out a similar objective.<sup>25</sup> Institutionally, in 1840, F.D. Maurice, who had been recently appointed Professor at King's College London, "introduced the study of set books" (Barry 12). In Maurice's view, the English "middle-class represents the essence of Englishness . . . so middle-class education should be peculiarly English, and therefore should centre on English Literature" (Barry 13). As Peter Barry further explains, "people so educated [in English Literature] would feel that they belonged to England, that they had a country . . . [and even political agitators would] feel [their] nationality to be a reality, in spite of what they say" (13).

The First World War and Second World War, however, catalysed a change in Anglo-American English departments that led to the elision of their nationalistic origins. There was a recoil from Germanity in American universities, leading to "an official mobilization of higher education" that focused on teaching pupils nationalistic values (Graff 129). This valorisation of specifically American values led to a rejection of the technicality and specialisation involved in the German model of the university. As Graff notes, "American Literature studies . . . owed its founding in large degree to the impetus of wartime superpatriotism" (130). Yet this was complex, both in America and Britain. The influence of Germany that had resulted in the flourishing of different disciplines and specialisation in them remained: this was conducive to the structural changes in both countries and the boom of

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<sup>25</sup> To further support this claim, here is a relevant quotation from Newman's work: "[A] university training [involving what Newman calls 'a liberal education'] is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind . . . at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life" (134).

capitalism. As Robert Anderson notes, disciplinary specialisation in Britain became the norm, and technical subjects (for instance, engineering) began to be taught in the universities, shifting focus away from the large-scale socio-political mission of the German-influenced university (111-112).

On the other hand, Britain and America moved away from the alienating effects of technology, partly because of a nationalistic reaction against Germany and partly because of the rise of Anglo-American modernism.<sup>26</sup> In Britain, the clash between the two kinds of social missions of the university (as both a specialised technical training ground for skills and an institution that had *Bildung* as its goal) found its expression in C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* and F.R. Leavis's corresponding reply to Snow. In America, especially "by the end of the thirties", thanks to developments in both Russia and Germany, nationalist "social missions for literature had become compromised" (Graff 150). This led to scholars (a few prominent and influential New Critics) there beginning to change their tune, arguing that "literature had no politics" as opposed to their initial stance that "the politics of literature should be seen as part of its form" (Graff 150). It is very likely that the concatenation of events in both countries resulted in the rise of a liberal humanism in English that was at the same time nationalistic and in denial of its own cultural boundaries: this was always implicit in the tensions of the *Bildung* project but is made explicit if we look at the rhetoric of nationalism *vis a vis* the rhetoric of liberal humanism. In America, on the one hand, there was an aspiration

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<sup>26</sup> See Robert Eaglestone's first chapter in *Ethical Criticism* (1997), which outlines the basic principles of modernist criticism and its aversion to technology. Eaglestone's sense of the thinkers in the previous section is that they support "the modernist critical paradigm against what they name 'theory'" (11). This modernist paradigm, as he notes, has its roots in "the Arnoldian/colonial understanding of literature as offering civilising virtues" (17).

to the apolitical technicality of the sciences. On the other hand, this aspiration had a socio-political value that was in line with liberal humanism (in line with the Enlightenment) and, oddly enough, the appropriation of liberal humanism as a cultural-specific value.<sup>27</sup>

Literature should be, qua F.R. Leavis and influential figures in the universities in the nineteen thirties, that which allowed professors and students to, as Hutchkin puts it, “pursue truth for its own sake”, as an antidote to “the disorder of specialisation, vocationalism and unqualified empiricism” (qtd.in Graff 164-165).<sup>28</sup> The modernist reaction against technology, which resulted in an opposition of “the human” to the “mechanical”, was happily in line with nationalistic sentiments at that time, and it allowed scholars to claim that their culture-specific canons were examples and transmitters of universal human values, allowing them to overlook the nationalistic origins of their departments and even the cultural specificity of their claims. We might recall, via Reading’s reading of Kant and Schiller, that literary tradition examples of nature would allow human beings to develop their own human nature, which was their drives (feelings and desires) balanced out with their capacity for reason.

A fleshing out of Readings’s outline of the philosophical basis for the modern university, therefore, demonstrates that *Bildung* as university education

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<sup>27</sup> This is evident from Bloom’s linking of the nurturance of “the rational and industrious man” to the American Declaration of Independence (26-27). This observation also explains the semantic slippage in this thesis and elsewhere: the notion of a cultural-specific literature has become conflated with “just literature” is why English departments or even American Literature departments are able to speak of their missions as universal, to promote liberal humanism through the study of literature.

<sup>28</sup> See F.R. Leavis, *The Idea of a University* (1943). Leavis’s views echo Robert Maynard Hutchkins’s, which I have quoted here via Graff. Hutchkins became president of University of Chicago in 1929.



works in service of both capitalism and empire, or more accurately, a capitalistic empire (hence Readings's term "nation-state capitalism"). Although *Bildung* involves an education that extends beyond thinking of education as narrowly vocational training, the cultural boundaries of this education and the notion that a nurturance of one's human nature is the basis for learning allows the state to instrumentalise the individual in service of capital. For instance, a university-educated individual now has the basis for learning a completely new skillset because the development of reason is fundamental to content-based learning. There is also an ethical justification for empire and the opening of new markets stemming from the *Bildung* project's being apparently both universal and culturally specific: the notion of colonisation as civilising project that develops the humanity of other peoples.

Having argued this, Readings tries to think a solution that would avoid the contradictions and pitfalls of the *Bildung* project in its traditional form. He thinks that a solution to the problem of the decline of the university and the place of English within it is to think of the university as a "community of dissensus" (19-20). According to him, "the modern community is inherently universalising, since it is based upon the assumption of a shared human capacity for communication. Specific nations merely compete to best incarnate their *essential* humanity" (182; emphasis added). This inherently universalising tendency cannot be delinked from the subject of *Bildung*: the apparently universal human undivided subject constituted of reason that, paradoxically, is exclusionary because it is bounded by a nation's culture. Readings's "community of dissensus", then, tries to avoid this exclusionary tendency by thinking of the university as "a community in which the

possibility of communication is not grounded upon and reinforced by a common cultural identity . . . [a community] made up not of subjects but singularities” (185). Singularities, as defined by Readings, is a term that designates *not subjectivity*, “the locus of an activity of reasoning” shared with other subjects, but rather positions that are completely opaque to one another, such that one cannot take for granted a common identity as grounds for communication and instead is forced to negotiate with the other (115-116). He compares this notion to Agamben’s “‘whatever’ community, where the social bond is characterized . . . not as obligation but as transience, the solidarity of those who have nothing in common but who are aggregated together by the state of things” (186-187). The obligation is to a community thrown together as if by chance, as it were, made out of innumerable different individuals who are “[obligated] to others that [they] finally cannot understand” (188).

There is a good deal of merit to thinking of the University as a community of dissensus. The most obvious advantage of this idea is that it avoids the problems of othering that come with a notion of identity: it avoids a thinking of self versus other and holding that other at a distance, allowing for a fetishization of the other or its reverse, rejection of the other. Hence, it also allows for the avoidance of nationalism and the promulgation of nation-state capitalism, and its successor, neoliberalism, which also relies on the thinking of a subject, albeit one that is “no longer tied to the nation-state [so as to be ready] to move to meet the demands of global capital” (Readings 49). The second advantage of the idea is that it allows for an escape from the logic of accounting. Readings’ emphasis on radical difference as not commensurable between individuals and the social bond as a work-in-progress,

with no clear goals and/or fixed notions that can be pinned down and abstracted into units of value, does not allow for the notion of “excellence” in the corporatized university to function. His notion of the University as a community of dissensus is his attempt to think “an institutional pragmatism that recognises [the threat of the traumatic return of repressed memory] rather than to seek to redeem epistemological uncertainty by recourse to the plenitude of aesthetic sensation (nostalgia) or epistemological mastery (knowledge as progress)” (170-171).

Another example of a solution to the neoliberalism of the current university that involves a transformative process comes from Thomas Docherty’s 2008 book, titled *The English Question*, where he advocates what he calls the cultivation of a “critical humility” as the answer to the crisis of English. He defines this as a receptivity “that can be characterised by “passivity and helplessness” (*Question* 127). This notion of passivity as receptivity echoes Derrida’s words in “The University Without Condition”, where Derrida speaks of “work, travail [signifying] the passivity of a certain affect; it is sometimes the suffering and even the torture of a punishment” (221). Docherty links this notion of critical humility to laughter, which is a form of “cynical reason” (*Question* 113). Docherty believes that laughter “is motivated by something beyond itself and is therefore neither entirely autonomous nor entirely a marker of the autonomous freedom of the individual who laughs . . . laughter is something . . . that possesses us” (*Question* 126). Laughter is something that escapes the confines of language and the self and is also a marker of “a humility that comes from the sense of one’s own total superfluity . . . of speaking or expressing when there is nothing to express, and yet the necessity to express it” (*Question* 132).

According to Docherty, our sense of ourselves as academics in English (and the humanities) is marked by redundancy, and laughter is both a response and an expression of that redundancy: an embodied response to crisis. His notion of critical humility has its roots in many philosophical texts and a reading of British history, particularly the complex politics between Scotland and England. He touches on texts as diverse as Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* and Alan Badiou's *Saint Paul*, Derrida's *Demeure* and Walter Scott's *Waverley*. But what he does with those texts is to pick out salient ideas without necessarily conveying how the viscerality of what he has read leads him to his conclusions. Consider his reading of *Waverley*:

It is here, in the hospitable discovery of the possibility of an intimacy between two who are radically opposed as characters [Edward and Bradwardine], that one finds the alleged 'rationality' of the day . . . a form of 'cynical reason', in that the social intimacy that they establish is grounded in the dogs [a reference to its ancient Greek etymology]. . . . [T]his cynicism, on which the openness of communication-as-possibility rests, remains itself largely inarticulate. . . . [T]he Scottish lads, and with them, Davie Gellatley [the apparent simpleton], become the medium through whom Edward and Bradwardine are able to establish their social being. . . . This cynicism, thus . . . is a reduction of language *either* to the mindless and incoherent barking of dogs *or* to the ostensibly senseless but actually oddly rational songs of Davie; but it is more

important for what it facilitates than for what it is in itself (*Question* 113; emphasis original).

Here Docherty reads the text allegorically, with both Edward and Bradwardine representing people who are completely different from one another, with David representing the inarticulable sociality that binds them (he sings “ostensibly senseless songs” which (*Question* 113), by their nature, resist “the drive towards homogenisation” and hence abstraction and exchange) (*Question* 78).

With this short overview of the history of the university’s mission and the place of literature within it, we can begin to understand better the arguments of the “non-theorists” and the objections of the “theorists”. The lingering question remains of how *exactly Bildung* is linked to aesthetic appreciation and how differences in aesthetic appreciation may have influenced the arguments of either camp. Bloom gives us a clue to the former through his references to the notion of beauty in his book. A notable instance of such a reference is the following:

Lessing, speaking of Greek sculpture, said ‘beautiful men made beautiful statues, and the city had beautiful statues in part to thank for beautiful citizens’. This formula encapsulates the fundamental principle of the *aesthetic education of man*. . . . Education is . . . providing a *natural continuity* between what they feel and what they can and should be” (80; emphasis added).

Bloom echoes Schiller’s letters on aesthetic education (briefly quoted earlier in the discussion on Readings) in suggesting that the appreciation of the beautiful allows

for a bridging between reason and passion, which in turn enables individuals to behave in morally desirable ways.

The notion that aesthetic appreciation fosters *Bildung* is important in *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* as all three novels explore how their protagonists' capacity for aesthetic appreciation allows them some degree of resistance to the norms of their current societies, which have been structured by capitalism. Thus, their conceptions of *Bildung* and its tasks closely parallel the "non-theorists". Yet, through their critique of *Bildung*, they also parallel the "theorists" in thinking about the problems of *Bildung* and proposing alternatives engagement with it. These parallels suggest that an engagement with their critique of *Bildung* could potentially provide meta-contextualization of both scholarly camps. Since much of this critique stems from the operations of irony, we will further clarify each novel's engagement with *Bildung* through a brief consideration of how irony operates in each of them. The only irony that *Stoner* intends for its protagonist is tragic irony, which serves to impress upon the reader the heroism of the protagonist. The reader's awareness that Stoner's devotion to *Bildung* leads to his eventual downfall increases rather than decreases reader sympathy for him: it gives the reader a sense of the enormity of Stoner's sacrifices in service of this vision of education (see footnote 9). In this case, therefore, the distance between the reader and Stoner does not serve a critical function in regards to the *Bildung* project. Rather, the novel restricts us to Stoner's perspective to emphasize his suffering and evokes the sublime in its readers so as to add gravitas to its narrative of its protagonist's life journey and to deflect reader criticism. Yet, precisely because Stoner seems to suffer at the hands of other characters, we can undertake an ironic reading of his

views by fleshing out critiques implicit in their utterances. This move allows us to engage in a critique of *Bildung* even as we empathize with Stoner regarding the importance of *Bildung*.

In the case of *Herzog*, the ironization of the novel's protagonist and the ensuing critique of *Bildung* are more in line with an intuitive understanding of the novel's objectives. *Herzog's* comedy is reliant upon its demonstration of how its protagonist (who has a subjectivity nurtured by his appreciation of beauty) is ruled by his passions despite his advocacy of *Bildung* as the nurturance of reason. In order to provide us comic pleasure at the expense of its protagonist, the novel allows us more insights into the philosophy guiding his beliefs so that we can be amused when it stages scenes where his education results in the very outcomes that he thinks it prevents. Yet, the identification that it encourages with its protagonist results us feeling the pain of the irony directed against him. Lastly, like *Herzog*, *Disgrace* allows us to derive comic pleasure from the ironization of its protagonist: it stages how his appreciation of the sublime results in a subjectivity that hinders him from achieving the goals of *Bildung* even as we empathize with him.

This brief discussion of irony in the novels makes it clear that more theoretical apparatus is needed to sharpen our understanding of the operations in all three novels. Firstly, the unstable irony that allows the reader to critique *Bildung* is particular. It stems from the reader's realization of the harm that the novels' protagonists' do to the very principles that they seek to defend. In other words, their experiences of having undergone *Bildung* harm their objectives, which are themselves a product of *Bildung*. The mechanics involved in this irony can

therefore be described by the medical metaphor of auto-immunity: *Bildung* is a system that seeks to enshrine some principles, but it is a system that ends up harming the very objectives that it sets out to protect. Auto-immunity can therefore be thought of as being at play in the novels, where the concept is defined as a critical mechanism that harms one's aims through one's own actions to achieve these aims. Secondly, it becomes clear there needs to be a theoretical framework that better allows us to accurately and concisely describe the operations of each novel. Lastly, we realize that the sublime is an important mode of aesthetic appreciation that also fosters *Bildung*, but this mode of aesthetic appreciation has been largely elided by thinkers like Bloom and Readings.

My next chapter aims to address these concerns through a discussion of aesthetic education as defined by Gayatri Spivak's book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (2012). Through a reading of the introduction in this book, I will demonstrate that Spivak's use of Derrida's concept of auto-immunity is key to what she thinks of as an aesthetic education, and that auto-immunity can be used to explain the way these novels express a criticality that can be understood as auto-critical irony. In addition to this, Spivak also provides a valuable understanding of how the auto-immunity of *Bildung* operates in Schillerian beauty. Next, I will discuss how the Schillerian sublime may foster *Bildung* to provide some background context for the mode of aesthetic appreciation that is evoked and critiqued in both *Stoner* and *Disgrace*. Lastly, I will embark on a brief discussion of the term focalization as used by Mieke Bal in her book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* so as to better discuss the operations of auto-immunity in each novel.



## Chapter 2

## Auto-immunity and The Generation of Double Binds: Gayatri Spivak's reading of Bateson, Kant and Schiller

As discussed in my previous chapter, *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* allow space for an irony that is auto-critical. This auto-critical aspect is crucial to their operation as meta-campus novels. Irony structures the critique of *Bildung* in all three novels: all three readings of the novels rely on an ironic critical distance that enables them to highlight how *Bildung* nurtures a subjectivity that ends up undermining the very things that it values. While the form and structure of the novels allows for reading of this critique of *Bildung*, it is important to stress that the readers themselves cannot take undertake this critique from a position of detachment as the empathy with these characters allows them to realize both the arguments behind support of *Bildung* and the heavy costs of *Bildung* to an individual.

Putting the two observations together, we can conclude that the logic of auto-immunity is at work in the ironic operations that all three readings focus on, and that the reader's simultaneous identification and distance from the protagonists of the novels results in a dilemma of whether to support the *Bildung* project or not. Yet, all three novels contain aesthetic features beyond the identification with their protagonists; to focus on the reader's identification with the protagonist does not do justice to Eve's and Székely's observations about the campus novel as it does not pay sufficient attention to the affects that may be generated by the aesthetic qualities of the novel.

As all three readings will prove, the logic of auto-immunity operates not only at the level of the protagonist insofar as the protagonist ends up doing damage to the very objectives that they aim to advance, but also at the level of text. This is evident from the fact that the novels themselves often enact multiple layers of irony: they may advance critiques of *Bildung* that they then throw into question in some way, not via the identification with their protagonists, but via other kinds of textual features like the affective qualities of their prose. The reader is therefore asked to come up with, and then constantly undermine conclusions that s/he forms, as s/he continues on his/her journey of reading the text. Through this undermining of his/her own conclusions via the auto-immunity of the text, the reader is able to experience the pain of auto-critical irony. Thus, the meta-campus novels under discussion articulate the relationship, in *aesthetic form*, between auto-criticality and auto-immunity.

This chapter undertakes a reading of Gayatri Spivak's book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (2012), which considers how an aesthetic education can prepare us for living in a globalized world dominated by information technology, in order to provide elaboration on the concept of auto-immunity and the different ways in which this concept plays out in the novels. The book also allows us to think about how the difficulties of the reader, caused by the auto-immunity of the novels, may be conceptualised as the enactment of the reader's education via literature. It must be clarified that Spivak's book relies on its use of Derrida's concept of auto-immunity to frame its argument regarding the purpose of a university education. This concept was first mentioned by Derrida in his book *Spectres of Marx* (1993) and subsequently made frequent appearances in his later

writings.<sup>29</sup> The most succinct explanation of auto-immunity as understood by Derrida is perhaps in the following quotation from Derrida's *Rogues*:

[What] I call the auto-immune consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one's own protections, and in doing so oneself, committing suicide or threatening to do so, but, more seriously still, and through this, in threatening the I or the self, the ego or the autos, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the autos itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself but in compromising the self, the autos – and this ipseity. (45)

There is a lot to unpack in even such a short quotation, but the relevant points for this thesis that can be picked up from it are firstly, the mechanism of auto-immunity and secondly, Derrida's interest in how auto-immunity results in compromising the self.

Regarding the first, the biological metaphor operates as follows: auto-immunity occurs when an immune system harms the very organism it seeks to protect through its reaction to what is dangerous to the organism. Derrida provides a concrete example whereby this can be understood, namely, the way in which democracy operates in a nation-state. In a country where democracy is in operation, to uphold the concept of democracy, it is a right for non-democratic parties to contest an election. And should these parties win, they would set up a system of governance that is harmful to the concept of democracy (*Rogues* 30).

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<sup>29</sup> The notion of auto-immunity would again appear in *The Politics of Friendship* (1994) and become a bigger part of his thought, most notably in later works like "Faith and Knowledge" (1996), *Rogues* (2003) and "The University Without Condition" (2001), first written as a lecture for the Presidential Lecture Series in 1999.

Auto-immunity is thus not possible without the protection mechanism that constitutes the immune reaction. Derrida then further extends the logic of the biological metaphor: an immune system that has gone rogue and harms the organism can be understood as that which no longer serves its protective purpose, and, is therefore, in Derrida's words, a "[destruction of] one's own protections." In other words, auto-immunity can be understood as a protection mechanism that has, within itself, that which might work against its own purpose of protection.

Secondly, the threat that an auto-immune disorder poses to the organism's life is understood as a threat to the self, the subject of *Bildung* (the thinking, rational I). The subject, however, as Giorgio Agamben makes clear, cannot be equated to the sheer fact of its existence as a living being, as evidenced by the distinction that he makes between *bios* and *zoē*, with the former denoting the "qualified life of the citizen" and the latter denoting "bare, anonymous life" (*Homo Sacer* 73). However, Derrida is able to conclude that a threat to life also poses a threat to the I because "the distinction between *bios* and *zoē* . . . is more than tricky and precarious; in no way does it correspond to the strict opposition on which Agamben bases the quasi totality of his argument about sovereignty and the biopolitical in *Homo Sacer*" (Derrida, *Rogues* 24). This idea that the logic of autoimmunity applies to the construction of the subject and not just the biological organism is crucial to understanding Spivak's account of aesthetic education as undermining the very self that the project of *Bildung* was supposed to develop.

### **The Operation of Auto-Immunity in Spivak**

In order to understand how the notion of auto-immunity is treated in this text, I will outline Spivak's argument in the introduction of her book briefly, paying particular emphasis to three areas: her treatment of Bateson, Schiller and Kant. Via Spivak's discussion of Bateson, I will first elucidate what she thinks is the task of an aesthetic education, namely, to be able to live with an awareness of contradictory instructions that one may face in one's life. These contradictory instructions can be understood via Bateson's notion of double binds. The focus here is on the centrality of the aesthetic to the epistemological change that a university education is supposed to effect. Spivak uses Bateson's notion of schizophrenia to describe a situation where an individual does not benefit from whichever choice s/he makes. She suggests that while an aesthetic education may not effect benefits for the individual in terms of the outcomes of his/her choices, it may at least cause the individual to examine the thought process behind the making of the choices.

The first few pages of Spivak's introduction lay out the structure of her book and what she attempts to achieve in her introduction:

The Introduction opens with the double bind: learning to live with contradictory instructions. It traces a Kant-Schiller-Marx-de Man trajectory, where the European proper names are metonyms for epochal changes. Toward the end, the Introduction moves on to a place that *contradicts the virtue of acquiring the skill of playing the double bind: schizophrenia as figure, reterritorialized and recoded.*

The Introduction ends with Gramsci's exhortation: instrumentalize the intellectual, in the interest of producing epistemological change,

rather than only attending upon the ethical, in subaltern and intellectual alike. (*Aesthetic Education* 3; emphasis added)

Spivak clarifies the source of the phrase “double bind” for her work: Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972). The notion of the double bind was, for Bateson, “a way to understand childhood schizophrenia qualitatively” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 4). Bateson and his colleagues define the double bind in an earlier paper in this way: “a situation in which no matter what a person does, he ‘can’t win’”, a situation that characterizes schizophrenia (Bateson et al. 251). By the time Bateson was writing *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, he had become interested more in how the said situation is generated for any given individual than understanding it through logical types.<sup>30</sup>

According to Bateson:

Double bind theory asserts that there is an experiential component in the determination or etiology of schizophrenic symptoms and related behavioural patterns, such as humour, art, poetry, etc. Notably the theory does not distinguish between these subspecies. Within its terms there is nothing to determine whether a given individual shall become a clown, a poet, a schizophrenic, or some combination of these.” (272)

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<sup>30</sup> In their 1956 paper, published in *Behavioural Science*, Bateson and his colleagues try to understand schizophrenia through Bertrand Russell’s theory of logical types. They claim that in “the psychology of real communications . . . the discontinuity between a class and its members . . . is continually and inevitably breached”, and that a pathology occurs when “certain formal patterns of the breaching occur in the communication between mother and child” (Bateson et al. 251). They conclude by asserting that “this pathology at its extreme will have symptoms whose formal characteristics would lead the pathology to be classified as a schizophrenia” (Bateson et al. 251). This paper is reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.

Having made the provocative link between schizophrenic symptoms and the arts, Bateson concludes that he and other researchers “deal not with a single syndrome but with a genus of syndromes, most of which are not conventionally regarded as pathological” (272). The cluster of syndromes is labelled by Bateson as “trans-contextual” (272). It is then that we come to the quotation from Bateson that Spivak uses, that “both those whose life is enriched by trans-contextual gifts and those who are impoverished by trans-contextual confusion are alike in one respect: for them there is always or often a ‘double take’ (272, also qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 4). Bateson then gives examples of the double take, suggesting that for these individuals, experiences like a falling leaf or a friend’s greeting is never “‘just that and nothing more’” (Bateson 272). There is always “extra” meaning attached to such events, a reading of them by the individual: “[Internal] thought may be projected into the contexts of the external world” (Bateson 272). Bateson’s text asserts a context (non-pathological and artistic) in which this reading is “appropriate” or at very least harmless to the subject who performs it. Regardless, the habit of reading and the subsequent conclusions derived or actions performed as a result of that reading may occur in contexts where it is inappropriate, or unwarranted, leading to schizophrenia.

To help us understand the situation, Bateson gives the example of a dolphin who is being trained by a trainer’s whistle (276-277). The dolphin becomes trained to do a trick on hearing the whistle, and she receives food as a reward. On hearing the whistle, she performs the same trick again and again. But the trainer wants her to learn a variety of tricks, and therefore there are occasions when she does not get rewarded with food after performing the first trick she has learnt. This results in

a double bind for the dolphin, who is faced with what Spivak would refer to as contradictory instructions. She receives food when performing a trick, which serves as an instruction of sorts to perform the said trick. Then again, there are situations in which performing the same trick does not bring about the expected reward of food, resulting in an instruction that directly contradicts the first. This is the double bind of schizophrenia, where learned habits of behaviour may be performed in contexts unsuitable for them (hence the term trans-contextual syndrome). The dolphin's problem is solved when she finally comes up with new tricks as an "innovation" to continue gaining her trainer's approval. From this, Bateson concludes that the maladjustment of the dolphin causes her great pain, but if "the pathology can be warded off or resisted, the total experience may promote *creativity*" (emphasis in original).

From this conclusion, Bateson proposes that pathology resulting from trans-contextual confusion may be treated through "play therapy", which places "complementary nurturant frame" around the double binds of the individual (323). Bateson's play therapy involves learning a "hierarchic series" that consists of "message, metamessage, meta-metamessage and so on" (247-248). Play therapy is, for Spivak, "never distant from what we are calling an aesthetic education", and "habitually fails with religion and nationalism" as individuals (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 4). She quotes Bateson's observation that human beings will die to save a flag as an example (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 5). These human beings confuse the flag with the community that they love, conflating the flag with their projections onto it. This happens because they follow learnt *habits* of thought of nationalistic or religious behaviour in some contexts, which they apply to other



contexts “wrongly”; in short, individuals sometimes engage in behaviour that is “inappropriate” in some contexts because they fail to contextualise the feelings and thoughts that lead to such behaviours with a meta-contextual understanding of the operations of nationalism and/or religion (this involves, among other things, thinking about faith and knowledge).

Spivak is very clear about what she thinks a successful aesthetic education *might* achieve: “The aesthetic short-circuits the task of not examining [the premises of habit every time the habit is used], perhaps” (*Aesthetic Education* 6). Spivak’s quote claims that the aesthetic may encourage us to examine habits otherwise left unexamined. This, however, can only be *possible* if we do not “take the literary as substantive source of good thinking alone” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 6). If we do so, according to Spivak, we will fail as the aforementioned individuals have failed, because we will (in the example she gives on the same page) fail to notice that “Wordsworth’s project is deeply class-marked, and that he does not judge habit” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 6). Spivak suggests that the literary *alone* is insufficient for good thinking and will lead to us failing to make such contextualisation regarding writers because she is thinking of beauty as appreciation of “the literary” as conceptualised by Schiller in his letters on aesthetic education. Spivak contrasts Kant’s philosophy with Schiller’s, suggesting that Kant’s philosophy contains instances of auto-immunity while Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education papers over such instances. That is, Kant’s *text* occupies a position of self-awareness about its contradictions generated by its attempt to defend metaphysics and promote a vibrant civil society.

Spivak's reading of Kant suggests that the concept of auto-immunity may be able to effect examination of one's own habits. Auto-immunity is a critical mechanism (an auto-criticality) that comes into operation when one makes a protective gesture in support of any cause. These gestures put their own validity and aims into question through the mechanism of auto-immunity, leading to contradiction. She uses the example of Kant's defence of metaphysics to outline two kinds of auto-immunity in at work in his philosophy: unintentional and intentional. The difference between these two kinds of auto-immunities will aid in clarifying how auto-immunity works in the three novels. I will provide an explanation of how these work by examining her reading of Kant, firstly through a reading of Kant's use of maxims, and the secondly through a gloss of Kant's defence of *a priori* knowledge. The first kind of auto-immunity involves unintended contradictions in a text that lead to the undermining of messages that it sets out to support, while the second kind of auto-immunity involves setting up propositions or structures within a text that lead to an undermining of its messages. We can think of *Stoner* as exhibiting the first kind of auto-immunity, whereas *Herzog* and *Disgrace* enact the second kind of auto-immunity. As will be evident from the readings that follow this chapter, despite all three novels performing the auto-immune function, John Williams intended to structure his book to make his protagonist (a staunch advocate of *Bildung*) seem flawless to the reader, whereas both Saul Bellow and J.M. Coetzee intend for their readers to have a more critical relationship to the *Bildung* that their protagonists embody and promote.

Regarding the first kind of auto-immunity, Spivak gives the example of the place of Kant's concept of maxims in his philosophy. The need for maxims arises

because Kant wishes to differentiate between “subjective grounding propositions [Grundsätze] that are found not from the nature of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a specific possible perfection of the cognition of the object” and “objective principles [of reason] [Principien]”<sup>31</sup> (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 603, also qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 14). Spivak claims that “the former belongs within the outline of philosophizing as truth within what [she] calls an ‘intended mistake’. They are propositions that ground philosophizing. The latter is part of the objective world of pure reason as it is transcendently deduced by the philosopher, without the ability to produce evidence” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 14). The task of philosophizing, as Spivak has noted, always has to involve *Grundsätze*. *Principien*, however, involves the Kantian *noumenal*, which, according to Paul Guyer and Allen Wood in their Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, can be understood as the “things as they are in themselves” that “might be *thought* but not *known*” (10; emphasis in original).

Spivak’s reading of Kant when she is talking about *Grundsätze* suggests the idea of reason being in conflict with itself. She quotes a passage from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, saying that considering “*Grundsätze* constitutive” means that “as *Principien* they can be in conflict, but if one considers them *merely* maxims, then it is not a true conflict . . . [but] merely a different interest of reason

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<sup>31</sup> I am using the same translation and edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* as Spivak. In this edition, Spivak notes that both *Grundsätze* and *Principien* are translated as “principles,” effacing the important difference that Kant makes between them (*Aesthetic Education* 14-15). To preserve the English, translators have done this, choosing instead to add the German as footnote to each use of “principles” in the text. For ease of referring to this distinction, I have chosen to preserve the German distinction highlighted by Spivak in this thesis.

that gives rise to a divorce between ways of thinking”<sup>32</sup> (qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 15; emphasis Spivak’s). Maxims are, according to Kant, are defined as “practical laws, insofar as they are at the same time subjective grounds of actions”<sup>33</sup> (*Critique of Pure Reason* 681). Kant goes on to assert that the apparent conflict stems from what looks like “different interest[s] of reason,” but since “reason has only a single united interest . . . the conflict between its maxims is only a variation and reciprocal limitation of its methods” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 603, also qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 15). By “constitutive”, Kant means part of reason. Different *Grundsätze* may be in conflict with each other. Why would constitutive *Grundsätze* be a problem for Kant? Also, why is Kant set on reason having a single united interest?

Kant is, among other things, trying to explain how “reason may be a source of illusory arguments and metaphysical pseudo-sciences” (Guyer and Wood 8). His assertion that reason has a single united interest becomes important to his philosophical task when we consider the consequences of this assertion. If this is the case, then it follows that any conflict between different *Grundsätze* would be “only a variation and a reciprocal limitation of the methods attempting to be

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<sup>32</sup> To avoid confusion, since Kant insists that reason is not constitutive but regulative, one might want to look at a few examples that he gives on philosophers proceeding via maxims: “If I see insightful men in conflict with one another over the characteristics of human beings . . . some assume particular characters of peoples based on their descent . . . while others . . . fix their minds on the thought that nature has set up no predispositions at all in this matter . . . [these] are [pursuits] of the principle of affinity resting on the interests of reason; for observation and insight into the arrangements of nature could never provide it as something to be asserted objectively” (*Critique of Pure Reason* 604).

<sup>33</sup> John Saunders has a very helpful PhD thesis that discusses Kant’s use of the term “maxim,” titled *Kant and the Unity of Reason*, submitted for a PhD at Cardiff University in 2018. According to Saunders, this definition of maxim given is the first instance where Kant *defines* the term (13-14).

sufficient to this interest” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 603, also qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 15). This explains the errors of thinkers whom Kant calls “sophistical reasoners”: different thinkers “[believe] that [their] judgement[s] come from insight into the object, yet [they] ground it solely on the greater or lesser attachment to . . . principles” that do not “rest on objective grounds, but only on the interest of reason, and that could be better called ‘maxims’ than ‘principles’” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 603). There is “nothing here but the . . . interests of reason” and hence, these unfortunate thinkers are unable to “speak from an insight into the nature of the object” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 604). Kant insists, however, that “these maxims can of course be united, but as long as they are held to be objective insights, they occasion not only conflict but also hinderances that delay the discovery of the truth” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 604).

Kant wants to protect the validity of metaphysics as a field of study that can make a “dualistic *defence* of both modern science and human autonomy” (Guyer and Wood 2; emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> The unity of reason allows for Kant to argue metaphysics (as he practices it) is valuable because it can *explain* contradictions between scholars of natural science; the contradictions are simply a result of the unawareness that these thinkers are “merely” operating from maxims. Reason has

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<sup>34</sup> Kant’s relationship to metaphysics and his defence of it is complex. Elaborating on it in text would disrupt the flow of ideas in the main text. I refer my readers to Guyer and Wood’s introduction, which succinctly summarizes Kant’s concerns: “Kant’s position . . . required him not only to undermine the arguments of traditional metaphysics but also to put in their place a scientific metaphysics of his own, which establishes what can be known *a priori* but also limits it to that which is required for ordinary experience and its extension into natural science. Kant therefore had to find a way to limit the pretensions of the dogmatists while still *defending metaphysics* as a science which is both possible (as was denied by the skeptics) and necessary (as was denied by the indifferentists)” (3; emphasis added).

to be united so that there is the possibility that Kant can posit the possibility of philosophizing “beyond” these thinkers who ground their judgements in “mere” maxims. Without a single united interest of reason, Kant’s philosophical task of diagnosing the errors of other thinkers would not exist, or be made possible: he cannot explain how they have come up with different conclusions. Hence, Spivak suggests that Kant’s assertion of a united reason “can itself be (or not be) read as within the programmed ‘intended mistake’” of *Grundsätze*, and the invention of the maxim a “methodological need” for philosophers (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 15-16). It can be read as an (unacknowledged) subjective proposition that grounds his philosophizing, and the maxim a methodological need that follows from said proposition. Kant asserts that taking maxims as an objective ground from which to philosophize is a mistake, but in order to assert that, he might have to philosophize from maxims himself. This is “an unavoidable double bind” (we cannot take maxims as objective grounds/ my own philosophy might take a maxim as its objective ground), as Spivak notes of the matter (*Aesthetic Education* 16).

Kant himself, of course, does not intend to repeat the mistakes that he had pointed out in other thinkers. One of the ways in which he tries to avoid the mistakes of others is to distinguish the empirical deduction from the transcendental deduction which deduce concepts dependent on experience and *Principien* respectively. Here is the passage from Kant on the distinction between the empirical deduction and the transcendental deduction that Spivak quotes, and that I am re-quoting more fully:

Among the many concepts . . . that constitute the very mixed fabric of human cognition, there are some that are also destined for pure

use *a priori* (completely independently of all experience), and these always require a deduction of their entitlement . . . [Y]et one must know how these concepts can be related to objects that they do not derive from any experience. I therefore call the explanation of the way in which concepts can be related to objects *a priori* their transcendental deduction, and distinguish this from the empirical deduction, which shows how a concept is acquired through experience and reflection on it. . . . To seek an empirical deduction of [these concepts] would be entirely futile work, for what is distinctive in their nature is precisely that they are related to their objects without having borrowed anything from experience for their representation (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 220).

Kant's notion that reason is regulative and not constitutive of human beings creates what Spivak calls the "big" double bind of philosophy: "I must philosophize, man cannot philosophize (understanding cannot access the ideas of pure reason)" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 19). According to Spivak, Kant uses the transcendental deduction to manage this double bind (*Aesthetic Education* 19). The transcendental deduction involves "philosophizing on the analogies of understanding as it deals with the manifold of the senses" to gain "indirect access to pure reason"<sup>35</sup> (Spivak,

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<sup>35</sup> See Guyer and Wood's short and helpful summary of the transcendental deduction in their introduction: "Kant centres his argument on the premise that our experience can be ascribed to a single identical subject, via what he calls 'the transcendental unity of apperception', only if the elements of experience given in intuition are synthetically combined so as to present us with objects that are thought through the categories. The categories are held to apply to objects, therefore, not because these objects make experience possible, but rather because the categories themselves constitute necessary conditions for the representation of all possible objects of experience" (9). Categories are defined, in Kantian terms, as "the pure concepts of understanding" (Guyer and Wood 4).

“Interview” 1022). This allows Kant to avoid working from maxims, and instead proceed from his understanding to access pure reason. However, according to Spivak, “by this reckoning, reason is fractured” (Spivak, “Interview” 1022).

Spivak is fascinated by Kant being a “counterintuitive thinker” who is “almost at the mercy of the counterintuitive power of his thinking” (Spivak, “Interview” 1022). It may be noted here in these two sections of Kant that Spivak deals with is his attempt to avoid conflicts within reason or the fracturing of reason, but almost always suggesting these through his thinking, thinking that was made possible by the proposition that reason has a single united interest. Kant’s philosophy suggests intuitive conclusions that he himself does not allow for, intuitive conclusions that conflict with or put into doubt his stated ones. The sections thus far discussed the concept of auto-immunity within Spivak’s reading of Kant, which has knock-on implications for her final conclusion about the task of an aesthetic education (which I will cover later). First, Kant differentiates between understanding and reason, insisting that the latter is not constitutive but regulative in human beings, thus setting up a chain of logic that leads to the conclusion of empirical deductions not being helpful at all in deducing *Principien*. This is part of Kant’s aim to “begin a limited rehabilitation of the ideas of traditional metaphysics by arguing that the ideas of reason have an important function in the conduct of science if they are understood *regulatively*” (Guyer and Wood 18; emphasis in original). This leads to the possibility of the verification of *a priori* knowledge being impossible, leaving the emphasis on *a posteriori* knowledge, knowledge more closely linked to the physical sciences than metaphysics, already an instance of auto-immunity. That is, Kant’s attempt to clarify and address the problems in



metaphysics harms its own cause by containing within itself the possibility that this may be useless or impossible. More auto-immune possibilities stem from Kant's need to keep the interest of reason unified: the proposition that reason has a single united interest leads to thinking that puts into doubt this proposition. Kant's criticism that others can only work from maxims might require that he, too, might only be able to work from a maxim. In all of these cases, the impulse that leads Kant to make certain philosophical propositions so as to protect philosophy by correcting its errors leads to that which casts these propositions in doubt and causes harm to his philosophical goals. Auto-immunity is only possible with an immune impulse.

Auto-immunity, as I have shown, is in operation with respect to the "big" double bind that Spivak points out, that we must philosophize/ we cannot philosophize. We can understand the "big" double-bind as a result of Kant's impulse to prove that metaphysics could usefully contribute to the natural sciences and the defence of human autonomy. According to Guyer and Wood, "Kant sought . . . to defend its [*a priori* knowledge's] scientific character against sceptics . . . and against proponents of 'common sense' who regard [it] as pedantic and superfluous . . . [comparing] dogmatic metaphysicians to defenders of despotism" (3). There are two salient things to be noted here. First, Kant's philosophy has a social aim: to promote "a high degree of civil freedom . . . [that would be] advantageous to the intellectual freedom of the people" (Kant, *Enlightenment* 10). This aim explains Kant's criticism of his opponents. The "we must philosophize/ we cannot" double bind is linked to Kant's notion of reason being regulative and not constitutive. One

has to wonder why the trouble of proposing (and defending) the notion of *a priori* knowledge, and the answer comes from Kant's criticism of his opponents.

If we follow Kant, then we will believe that insisting on dealing with only things in our experience may lead to dogma. It is a resolution of this double bind, and with this resolution comes focus on only things that can be known *a posteriori*, things that can be known with some degree of *confidence*. The higher the degree of confidence, the easier it is to assert authority that such-and-such must be the case (empirical evidence can be provided). Insisting on only *a posteriori* knowledge, therefore, fosters an *attitude* that is conducive to dogma, which is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a "body of opinion . . . formulated or *laid down authoritatively or assertively*" (emphasis added). Of course, to apply such an attitude to concepts like freedom (for Kant, a concept of reason) lessens the degree of openness and debate about what such concepts are or can be, leading to Kant's other criticisms about his critics defending despotism.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, we can see this double bind as a manifestation of Kant's intellectual cautiousness, an admission of the limitation of his powers as philosopher. This double bind, which involves the philosopher not being able to provide evidence for the transcendental deduction, provides a species of criticality that guards against dogma. That the concepts deduced by the transcendental deduction cannot be supported by evidence means that the philosopher is constantly reminded of the limit of his/her powers: there is always something

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<sup>36</sup> Kant is not disputing the usefulness of *a posteriori* knowledge, or the empirical deduction. Kant's defence of the notion of *a priori* knowledge should not be taken as questioning the use of empirical evidence where it should be used.

outside of his/her ability to prove *conclusively*. This criticality takes an auto-immune *form*, as I have outlined. In the case of this particular double bind, the inability to provide evidence puts into question the utility or even validity of this sort of philosophy. In Spivak's words, "no guarantees, because you can't produce any evidence of its grounds" ("Interview" 1022). The same mechanism is at work regarding other double binds that I have pointed out in Kant, for instance, the one involving not taking maxims to be objective grounds for philosophy/ taking maxims as objective grounds for philosophy. The criticality demonstrated by the auto-immune function might be more properly labelled as *auto-criticality*, in the sense that it involves putting into question the validity of its own propositions.

Auto-criticality via auto-immunity in Kant can take two forms. The first form of auto-criticality is not intended, and manifests as an "unintentional" auto-immune function, the fracture and counter-intuitiveness that so fascinates Spivak. This is demonstrated by the possible conflicts between the *Grundsätze* and Kant's assertion that reason has a single united interest: this auto-immune function in Kant's philosophy is reflected through his "fractured voice, unacknowledged by him, of course" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 17). The thesis demonstrates, via its reading of *Stoner*, that *Stoner* has this unintentional fracturedness of voice that leads to it undermining the *Bildung* project that it attempts to promote. The second form of auto-criticality via auto-immunity is a conscious recognition that one's protective impulse (immune impulse) leads to double binds. This is the auto-immunity of the "big" double bind that Spivak has mentioned (we must philosophize/ we cannot philosophize) and is also in operation in the passages that Spivak quotes regarding the practical function of pure reason (*Aesthetic Education*

17). In these passages, Kant writes about the “as ifs’, not just ‘world’ but ‘self’ as well [that] are clearly shown to be things needed so that both experience and philosophizing can be possible” (Spivak 17). This auto-criticality, a recognition of the philosopher’s limitations and a recognition that the steps taken needed to philosophize might indeed put into doubt the very steps that were posited as necessary.<sup>37</sup> As Spivak notes, “an ‘as if’ is as much error as truth. Your interest makes you decide which word you will use” (*Aesthetic Education* 17). The consciousness of the limitations of such operations characterises this form of auto-criticality, and is “the best of the European Enlightenment, which recognizes the limits of its powers without either theologizing or pathologizing them. Ulysses among the sirens, who tempt with *absolute knowledge*” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 17; emphasis added). As my readings of *Herzog* and *Disgrace* will show, both novels take steps to highlight the limitations and flaws of *Bildung* as promoted by the figures of their protagonists. This leads to them a conscious provision of dilemmas for their readers: in Spivak’s words, “who wins loses” (*Aesthetic Education* 3).

After speaking about Kantian philosophical rigour, Spivak moves on to discuss Schiller’s concept of beauty, which touches on the idea of *Bildung* discussed in the previous chapter. According to Spivak, Schiller’s reading of Kant resolves rather than endures the double binds in the latter’s philosophy, with the consequence of erasing the awareness and subsequent sense of helplessness that

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<sup>37</sup> This reading of auto-immunity in Kant is also the line that Paul de Man takes. De Man notes that Kant had “interrupted, disrupted, disarticulated the project of articulation . . . which he had undertaken and which he found himself by the rigour of his own discourse to break down under the power of his own critical epistemological discourse” (de Man, *Aesthetic* 134).

one experiences in the face of contradictions. The erasure of this sense of contradiction leads to the unitary subject that, as my reading of Readings has shown in the previous chapter, works in *uncritical* support of nation-state capitalism. Spivak militates against this lack of criticality while acknowledging its inevitability in the world we live in today. In her view, Schiller skips Kant's attempt to resolve the “big” double bind of philosophy entirely (the transcendental deduction) (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 17). This is most evident in Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, where Schiller “tried to undo the double bind of mind and body by suggesting the *Spieltrieb*—the ‘play drive’ [is present in] art as a balancing act that will save society” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 19). Schiller's solution to the Kantian double bind has been mentioned briefly in the previous chapter via my brief explication of Readings's outline of how literature came to take centre stage in the mission of the university. Spivak's reading of Schiller adds another dimension to Readings's reading of Schiller.

First, the undoing of the double bind of mind and body in Schiller that Spivak mentions is an undoing of the double bind of having to philosophize while not being able to access reason. The Kantian viability of the application of the categories to *both* empirical and transcendental judgements is read by Schiller as experience being necessary in making transcendental judgements.<sup>38</sup> Although Kantian and Schillerian concepts cannot be neatly mapped onto one another, for

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<sup>38</sup> Schiller elides the Kantian distinction between empirical judgements and transcendental judgements, skipping the transcendental deduction. Schiller ignores Kant's struggles in showing how the categories can indeed be used in transcendental deduction, and also that empirical judgements may only proceed from the use of the understanding through an entirely different mechanism from that of the transcendental deduction.

the purposes of this thesis we can understand Schiller reading the reliance on sensory content to make judgement as “the sense impulse”, that which “proceeds from the physical existence of Man or from his sensuous nature” (Schiller, “Letters” 64). Kantian reason, on the other hand, is understood by Schiller as “the formal impulse”, that which stems from “[Man’s] rational nature, and strives to set him at liberty, to bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestations, and to *maintain his person* throughout every change of circumstance” (Schiller, “Letters” 66; emphasis added).

We may note here that Schiller immediately assumes that “this person” is “an *absolute indivisible unity*” and “can never be at variance with itself, since we are ourselves for all eternity” and hence this impulse “wishes the actual to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and necessary to be actual, in other words, it aims at truth and right” (Schiller, “Letters” 66; emphasis added). The actual, our sensory content of our world (“body”), and the eternal, concepts of reason (“mind”), are here “forced” by Schiller through the concept of the formal impulse to meet, what Kant might call a filling of the transcendental deduction with content, a “transcendental illusion which influences *Grundsätze* whose use is not ever meant for experience” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* 385, also qtd. in Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 19). This philosophical mistake, the transcendental illusion, allows Schiller to make the conclusion that “*laws* for every judgement” can be derived from the “*cases* [that] the first impulse . . . furnishes” (Schiller, “Letters” 66; emphasis added).

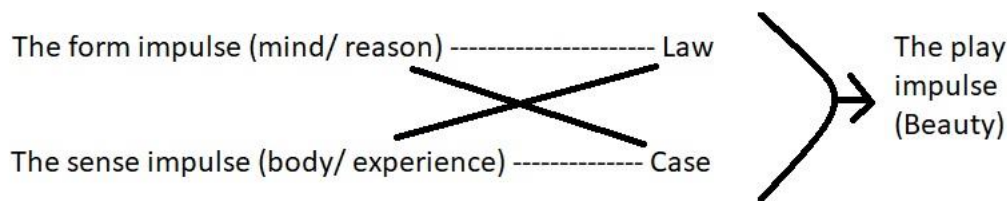
Schiller admits that “the reciprocal relation of both [sense and form] impulses is . . . a problem of the reason”, and attempts to solve this problem by

proposing “a new impulse which, just because the other two *work within it*, would be opposed to either of them taken in isolation” (Schiller, “Letters” 74; emphasis added). The Schillerian undoing of the Kantian double bind is evident in his conceptualisation of this impulse which he calls the “play impulse”, defined as that which “would aim at the extinction of time in time and the reconciliation of becoming with absolute being, of variation with identity” (Schiller, “Letters” 74). The play impulse achieves its aims thus: “The sense impulse wants to be determined, to receive its object; the form impulse wants to determine for itself, to produce its object; so the play impulse will endeavour to receive as it would have itself produced, and to produce as the sense aspires to receive” (Schiller, “Letters” 74). In play therefore, one receives sense impressions (Schillerian “cases”) as concepts of reason (Schillerian “laws”) and concepts of reason as sense impressions.

As the “object of the play impulse can be called . . . Beauty in the widest sense of the term” (Schiller, “Letters” 76), this is achieved via a chiasmatic thinking that runs throughout Schiller’s thinking of the beautiful, first outlined by Spivak’s mentor Paul de Man in his chapter on Schiller’s writings on the sublime (Spivak, “Interview” 1022).<sup>39</sup> The chiasmus created in Schiller’s letters regarding the beautiful can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

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<sup>39</sup> See the chapter “Kant and Schiller” in Paul de Man’s *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, University of Minnesota, 1966. Aside from talking about Schiller’s chiasmatic thinking in her interview, Spivak also talks about the chiasmatic thinking of Schiller in a little more detail on pages 24-25 of her introduction to *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*.



The following paragraph from Schiller makes a useful summary of Schiller's thought process regarding beauty:

We know that Man is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively spirit. *Beauty, therefore, as the consummation of his humanity, can neither be exclusively mere life, as maintained by acute observers who adhered too closely to the evidence of experience . . . nor can it be exclusively mere form, as has been judged by speculative philosophers who strayed too far from experience. . . . [I]t is the common object of both impulses, that is to say of the play impulse.* (Schiller, "Letters" 77; emphasis added)

The gap between understanding and reason, and the gap between mind and body, is resolved through the play impulse, which is the object of beauty. Beauty is the fullest realization of Man's humanity. Ergo, the play impulse is the object of humanity. Schiller's undoing of Kant's double bind assumes that focus on the empirical can lead to knowing not even the system that relates our experience to our rationality (transcendental analytic, of which the transcendental deduction is part) but rather knowing ideas of reason themselves.<sup>40</sup> The resolution of the double bind into a single bind results in a single instruction: examine beautiful art

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<sup>40</sup> Coleridge defiantly (mis)reads Kant in a similar way, as Roy Parks has noted succinctly: "Coleridge substituted an act of will for the thing in itself to render ideas constitutive, annexing to Kant's view of freedom and conscience the intuition of God. This act becomes the prime source of our intuition of the ideas of reality" (339).



objects and beautiful natural objects, and you will realize your humanity to its fullest potential. We therefore have a subject/object relation to the world, where we exist as undivided subjects trying to benefit from the examination of the objects around us.

The result of this misreading of Kant, today, can be felt at a concrete societal level: a narrative of liberal humanism that is exclusive despite its purported inclusivity. After all, the version of the human that Schiller was thinking of may not be as completely ahistorical as his text seems to suggest; inevitably there would have been some influence from his society and his own experiences. Where this focus on beauty and the human is in operation in a reading of Wordsworth, as Spivak has noted, class is elided because the Schillerian single bind does not highlight its own assumptions in any way. It operates on a *habit of thinking* in a certain way about literature from the habit of thinking a certain way about Kant. Being dependent *only* on the literary, where the project of the literary is understood as Schillerian, Spivak warns, may lead to missing out aspects of text(s) that one might think of as crucial to learning and understanding them, and developing a tendency not to examine one's habits.

Despite this, it becomes clear from Spivak's text that she views Schiller's reading of Kant sympathetically. Although she notes that "the philosophical rigour of the unacknowledged, fractured Kantian subject is not to be found [in Schiller]. . . . [O]ur social problem seems to be summed up so accurately by Schiller!" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 20). Despite Schiller having made what she thinks of as a mistake, "it may be adduced that Kant and Schiller show us two ways of living in the double bind" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 20). Schiller, she thinks, "*did not*

*intend* his mistake; he was a Kantian” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 20; emphasis added). Since “the fragile instrument of intention drives us”, it “is on the ground of intended versus unintended mistakes that we can differentiate ourselves from Schiller” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 20). As is clear from my reading of Spivak, she thinks that “Kant’s own text can also be described as an intended mistake, where the intention is the programme of reason and the ‘mistake’ is the only correct procedure open to the philosopher” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 20).

Auto-criticality via auto-immunity, I suggest, is one way in which we can read Spivak as dealing with the problems of habit, first brought up in her reading of Bateson. However, unlike Bateson, she does not propose a series of meta-messages with which to contextualise double binds and ward off what Bateson characterises as trans-contextual confusion. Providing a larger context for double binds was Schiller’s move for resolving Kantian double binds into single ones, as we have seen. As Spivak says, “Schiller’s *Spieltrieb* [the play impulse] has something in common with Bateson’s ‘play’. It protects the subject from double bind as schizophrenia” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 27). This is acceptable and is in fact the only route we can go down, as Spivak’s quotations on Kant have suggested, but only if we exhibit, at some level, the awareness that we have resolved the bind: the awareness being the intention to make a mistake as opposed to the unawareness that one is making a mistake. Auto-immunity constantly puts our own propositions into doubt, and can be understood as the form of auto-criticality.

My previous chapter has laid out, via Readings’s book, how a Schillerian understanding of art can be put into concrete practice to flesh out the aims of a Kantian university. Readings deals briefly and succinctly with what Spivak might

characterise as the necessity of Schiller's mistake and how Schiller resolves the Kantian double bind. To recap, Readings suggests that the university of reason, when put into practice, needs to be fleshed out, and therefore cannot operate via disinterested reason (although, ideally, it ought to). There is the double bind concerning the role of the university that is related to, though not equivalent to, the "big" double bind of "cannot philosophize/ must philosophize": to operate so that it nurtures disinterested reason/ to operate to nurture reason so that it produces technicians for the state. With Schiller's solution, this double bind is, as we have seen via both Readings in my introduction and Spivak in this chapter, resolved into a single bind: the project of *Bildung* that nurtures reason through aesthetic judgement. However, Readings is not interested in intentionality and Spivak is, and this is where her solution lies.

Spivak recognises that to exist in the space of the double bind can be paralyzing as far as taking action is concerned. Even to write philosophy, or theorise any solutions, is a resolution of several double binds, at least, if we follow Spivak's reading of Kant. This is why she extends the "mistake" that Schiller makes not only to Kant but also to thinkers like Derrida and Nietzsche (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 28). Here is the quotation: "Schiller's problem was *not that he was wrong*, but that he *did not run with his version of wrong*, as did Kant, as did Nietzsche, as did Derrida, in different ways" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 28; emphasis added). Spivak's choice of the word "run" can be read in the context of Derrida's writing on auto-immunity in *Rogues*, particularly his comments on Husserl's critique of objectivism: "Husserl names . . . an interior and intimate danger, an immanent danger . . . that philosophy *made itself run*, as if it wrongly

gave itself reason—as if it wrongly considered itself right—to win out over itself, as if what it did were ill-suited to what it has to do, *as if it did itself ill* in winning itself over to winning out over itself, between *the factual infiniteness of its determined figures* and *the idea of its infinite task* (Rogues 126; emphasis added). The recursiveness inherent in Derrida’s quotation is a useful guide to the form of auto-immunity present in all three novels under study: in Derridean terms, their constant undermining of the ideas that are promoted in them in one form of another is a form of running (over) themselves.

The last important layer of Spivak’s answer to the function of an aesthetic education cannot be separated from the ideas that Derrida raises in the quote that I have just given, and fleshes out the political resonances of the concept of auto-immunity as tying into the social function of the university. First, from Spivak’s reading of Kant, auto-immunity can be considered a move (or series of moves) that the regulative function of reason makes in its striving towards knowledge. As I have earlier pointed out, Spivak’s reading of Kant highlights for us two forms that it might come in. For Spivak, Schiller’s voice, unfractured and without the counter-intuitive power of Kant’s, lacks the highlighting of its own auto-immune possibilities.

Next, the abstraction as represented by the internal thought of an individual and the concreteness of events, also mentioned in the quotation from Derrida about Husserl and highlighted by Bateson as a “double take”, is, according to Spivak, “the double bind at the heart of democracy for which an aesthetic education can be an epistemological preparation” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 4). If we think of one of the Derridean definitions of democracy, “a force in the form of a

sovereign authority . . . to give the force of law and thus the power and ipseity of the people” (Derrida, *Rogues* 13), then a democratic government sometimes has to “[decide] in a sovereign fashion to suspend . . . democracy for its own good . . . so as to *immunize* it against a much worse and very likely assault” (Derrida, *Rogues* 33; emphasis added). In concept, at least, democracy is the force in the form of a sovereign authority that gives the force of law to the people. In practice, there are times where this authority has to act as authoritarian, to repress certain parts of the population it is supposed to give power to, to protect its own aims of giving the force of law to the people.<sup>41</sup> If not for this repression, there is a possibility of events like “fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms [coming] into power or [ascending] to power through formally normal and formally democratic processes” (Derrida, *Rogues* 33).<sup>42</sup> In either case, a move for democracy in the abstract necessitates a move against democracy in practice. Using Bateson’s words, both of these situations are situations where a win for democracy also is a loss for it. This is what Derrida calls “the auto-immune *double bind* of the democratic” (*Rogues* 39; emphasis original) and is what Spivak (earlier quoted) refers to as the “double bind at the heart of democracy.” Ergo, Spivak thinks that auto-criticality as auto-immunity, fostered by an aesthetic education, can prepare us for the double bind of democracy, if only precisely because democracy itself contains within it the logic of auto-immunity.

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<sup>41</sup> Derrida gives several instances of this, elaborated on throughout his text. Notable examples are the actions of the Algerian government during the Algerian Civil War and the reaction of the United States to September 11 (*Rogues* 33, 37-38).

<sup>42</sup> Derrida gives an instance (among others) where this could have happened: the 2002 French presidential election in which Jean-Marie Le Pen could have won (*Rogues* 30).

Despite Spivak's approval of auto-criticality as auto-immunity, however, the only *direct* mention of auto-immunity in her introduction comes from a lamentation that it is not possible: "Here now is the last move of my Introduction. I will move to the contradictory swing of the double bind—and say that this best lesson of European philosophy . . . *cannot be remembered today*: that smart work, saving work, comes, when you know its limits, with an auto-immune knowledge, alas" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 25; emphasis added). Spivak's move *against* auto-immunity here is a last swing of the double bind that I will now outline.

The notion of the double bind, the poles that its contradictory instructions represent, can be thought of in Derridean terms as an aporia, that which is "in a certain way irreducible, calling for an endurance . . . an experience other than that consisting in opposing, from both sides of an indivisible line" (Derrida, *Aporias* 14). This is in line with how Paul de Man reads Kant. I quote Spivak on the matter: "De Man reads Kant as a philosopher for whom philosophizing was recognized as menaced by philosophizing to the last instance. He reads Schiller as domesticating Kant's critical incisiveness in order to re-valorise what he thought of as the 'aesthetic' . . . I will suggest that in the end de Man finds a way to point at *persistent domestication as a way to handle the aporetic*" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 24; emphasis added).

Paul de Man highlights the inescapability of Schiller's mistake:

[Before] you . . . hold [Schiller's mistake] against Schiller, or think that it is something we are now far beyond and that we would never in our enlightened days do . . . *don't decide too soon that you are beyond Schiller in any sense. I don't think that any of us can lay this*

*claim*. Whatever writing we do, whatever way we have of talking about art, whatever way we have of teaching, whatever justification we give ourselves for teaching, whatever the standards are and the values by means of which we teach, they are more than ever and profoundly Schillerian (de Man 142; emphasis added).

Following de Man, Spivak thinks that once we enter the realm of the practical, to begin thinking of how to justify an education in the humanities, we are in the realm of Schillerian readings, “which all of us can understand, and in which all of us can participate, precisely to the extent that they are pragmatic, everyday, banal experiences” (de Man 141). When faced with trying to obtain funding for one’s department or project, for instance, one “has” to commit the Schillerian mistake, insofar as one has to resolve any double binds one has into a single bind that moves towards pointing out, unequivocally, the utility and usefulness of one’s project. This banal and practical aspect of the fight to make humanities education important is why Spivak asserts that ultimately, auto-immunity *cannot* be remembered and that domestication of philosophy has to happen.

Spivak’s move against auto-immunity sets up yet another double bind. In brief, there is an ethical imperative to be aware of the difficulty of one’s situation(s): one must intend one’s mistake, that is, set up some sort of system where auto-immunity can be a form of auto-criticality. On the other hand, one cannot linger with the double bind if one wants to engage in practical action. Caught in this particular double bind, Spivak generates many smaller double binds in the process. On the one hand, she is wary of the Schillerian move that Bateson also makes, which is providing a meta-contextual frame around the double bind

that resolves it. This is evident in her summary to her introduction to her 2012 book (earlier quoted) where she says she wants to “[contradict] the virtue of acquiring the skill of playing the double bind” and reterritorialize and recode schizophrenia as figure. To leave the meta-contextual frame out of the picture is to live with schizophrenia, according to Spivak’s reading of Bateson, and this is, at some level a degree of intellectual rigour that she supports.

Despite this, she believes that Batesonian “play therapy,” in the form of a Schillerian aesthetic education, may, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, perform the important job of interrogating our habits of thinking. On the other hand, while trying to contradict the virtue of playing the double bind by upholding schizophrenia as figure, insofar as Spivak insists on “learning to live with contradictory instructions” instead of resolving them into a single bind, she has made a move that is like Bateson’s and Schiller’s insofar as *thinking* schizophrenia as figure is a frame that can be placed around her own double binds as a domesticating gesture.

Spivak’s text thus enacts the double bind of the abstract and concrete through its performance of creating what we might think of auto-immune moves, acts of auto-criticality that highlight the various double binds in her text, while at the same time enacting a Schillerian resolution-of-sorts of these double binds through the very act of theorising. These contradictions in Spivak’s text provide an experience that is both within and without the experience of schizophrenia. Her conclusion is that an aesthetic education, the heart of a university education, lies in the process of managing this experience (among other experiences of double binds). An aesthetic education is preparation for the double bind of abstract and concrete that lies in



manifestations of democracy. My readings are Spivakian insofar as they tease out how all three novels under study force their readers to experience and tolerate double binds; by implication this thesis suggests that these meta-campus novels enact an aesthetic education that supports democracy.

### **The Schillerian Sublime and the *Bildung* Project**

In this section, I will pick up on the elision of the sublime as aesthetic affect in Spivak's text and tease out the consequences of Schillerian sublimity to the *Bildung* project. This discussion is needed because of the importance of the sublime feeling to the *Bildung* that is examined in both *Stoner* and *Disgrace*. Moreover, explication of how the sublime fosters a desired subjectivity will also contribute to better understanding the intersections between the two sub-fields of University Studies with the discussion of *Bildung* in *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* and the operation of auto-immunity not only in the novels, but also in the sub-fields themselves. In the process, I want to focus on how the sublime relates to the notion of *Bildung* as character cultivation via the universities, where the latter can be thought of (via Schiller's Letters and Readings's reading of them) as engaging in an aesthetic education so as to help mankind to nurture the play impulse, which is the object of "inner man at one with himself" (Schiller, "Letters" 33). As earlier mentioned, according to Schiller, if an aesthetic education proves successful, there will be no conflict between its subject and the laws of a moral state: "the State will be simply the interpreter of his [Man's] fine instinct, the clearer expression of his inner legislation" (Schiller, "Letters" 33). Because different states exist in different countries, it becomes clear that the project of *Bildung* must be culture bound

despite its claims to a universal humanity. This tension between the claim to a universal humanity and the cultural specificities involved in this project is key to understanding the unhappiness of the “non-theory” camp.

There is a further complication here, which is that beauty and the sublime are different ideas as understood by both Kant and Schiller. In order to understand this, the next two sub-sections within this section will give a brief outline of the sublime in Kant and then Schiller’s reading of the Kantian sublime. I propose that the Schillerian sublime is key to forming the necessary cognitive-emotional orientation towards the *unequivocal* valorisation of an ahistorical, universal *Bildung* project ostensibly centred on beauty because the Schillerian sublime involves *confidence in one’s self as reasoning being* via the mistake (already mentioned in regard to beauty) that Schiller makes in thinking reason constitutive and not regulative. That is to say, the project of *Bildung* in universities cannot be divorced from Schillerian sublimity; *in fact the project of Bildung may more properly be linked to Schillerian sublimity than to Schillerian beauty*. What I am proposing is that the view of aesthetic education that has formed the history of the modern university (what we might call the *Bildung* project) is so closely linked to Romantic notions of what education should achieve that it cannot be delinked from the kind of experience that reading Romantic texts provide, namely, an experience of the Schillerian sublime.

The reasoning is as follows: the university aims to train subjects for the state. Schillerian beauty as something that gives us access to ideas of reason can only work via the assumption of an undivided subject, as previously shown, but even if we take on board all of Schiller’s assumptions, it gives us little indication as

to how this subject may resist, or be orientated towards, focusing on ideas of reason or valuing the role of reason in day-to-day life. The *ipseity* in the Schillerian sublime serves as immunisation against being shallow, materialistic, ignorant of the “actual” quiddity of humanity (beauty, qua Schiller's definition as highlighted in the previous section), where this immunisation is an argument put forth by the “non-theory” thinkers as the benefits of an aesthetic education. The assertion here, qua Bloom and others, is that there is a *criticality* born out of aesthetic education, resulting in an (undivided) subject who is a reasoning being. This subject is able to resist the pressure of popular trends of thought and behaviour in society because of his/her ability to think independently.

This sense of an aesthetic education, inextricable from the Romanticism of Schiller, is pertinent to all three novels under discussion. In the following chapters of this thesis, I discuss how the protagonists of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* attempt to resist what they think of as the structural pressures of the societies that they live in. Stoner eschews the pragmatic choice of studying agriculture to aid the family's farm, choosing instead to study literature because of his encounter with the sublime. *Herzog's* protagonist sees himself as a rational being who may be able to resolve the legacy of the contradictions of Romanticism, enlightening others about their flaws in the novel, with the lofty end goal of improving the state of the world. *Disgrace's* Lurie, who is a professor of Romanticism, sees himself as a Romantic hero resisting the rationalisation of the university. All three protagonists think of an aesthetic education as a single bind: *Bildung* protects the individual from perpetuating undesirable elements in their society, enabling them to think beyond societal conventions.

### *Kant's Notion of the Sublime*

We could do worse than to look at Kant's definition of the sublime as a starting point. First, we have to examine the mechanism behind the affective quality of the beautiful and the sublime, that is, how both the beautiful and the sublime are connected to the feeling of delight:

The beautiful and the sublime agree on the point of pleasing on their own account. Further they agree in not presupposing either a judgement of the senses or a logically determining judgement, but one of reflection.<sup>43</sup> Consequently the delight is connected with the mere presentation or faculty of presentation, and is thus taken to express the *accord, in a given intuition, of the faculty of presentation, or the imagination, with the faculty of concepts that belong to understanding or reason, in the sense of the former faculty assisting the latter.* (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 75; emphasis in original)

In the case of the beautiful, the delight that one experiences is connected to the *form* of the object that one apprehends:

The beautiful in nature is a question is in the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else

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<sup>43</sup> Kant defines reflective judgement against determining judgement: "Judgement is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle or law) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it is determining. . . . If however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgement is simply reflective" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 15).

by its presence provokes, a representation of its limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.” (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 75)

Therefore, “accordingly the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of *an indeterminate concept of understanding*, the sublime as a presentation of *an indeterminate concept of reason*. Hence the delight is in the former case coupled with the representation of quality, but in this case with that of quantity” (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 75; emphasis added).

Let us follow Kant closely in his outlining of the sublime. He tells us that the feeling of delight in the beautiful is different in kind to the feeling of delight in the sublime:

“[The] beautiful is directly attended with a feeling of furtherance of life, and is thus compatible with charms and a *playful imagination*. On the other hand, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be *no play, but a serious matter in the exercise of the imagination*. Hence charms are also incompatible with it; and, since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternatively repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime . . . merits the name of a *negative pleasure*.” (*Critique of Judgement* 75-76; emphasis added)

The biggest distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, however, is this: that beauty “conveys a *purposiveness in its form* in making the object appear . . .

*already adapted* to our power of judgement. . . . [That which] excites the feeling of the sublime may appear, in point of form, to be *ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation* . . . and yet it is judged as all the more sublime on that account” (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 76; emphasis added).

Kant defines “purposiveness” as follows:

Now the concept of an object, so far as it contains at the same time the ground of the actuality of this object, is called its end, and the agreement of a thing with that constitution of things which is only possible according to ends, is called the purposiveness of its form. . . . In other words, by this concept nature is represented *as if* an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the manifold of its empirical laws. (*Critique of Judgement* 16; emphasis added)

Yet “an object, or state of mind, or even an action may, although its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, be called purposive simply on account of its possibility being only explicable and intelligible for us *by virtue of an assumption on our part of a fundamental causality according to ends*” (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 51; emphasis added). With this in mind, we can understand that form is important for beauty because it allows for the play of imagination and understanding: it is the form of the object (or action, etc) that prompts us to intuit its purposiveness, and yet we may trace this purposiveness in objects with our imagination without our understanding determining its end. Freed from the determining power of the understanding (which attaches concepts to objects), the imagination can provide endless variations upon a theme, so to speak; it is “inspired” but therefore also limited by the form of the (beautiful) object. Thus,

it provides endless fodder for the understanding, which tries to find concepts for these variations. This unending attempt by the imagination and understanding trying to come to an agreement (i.e., the play of the faculties) is what we experience as the beautiful.

That the sublime is evoked by that which cannot be adequately presented by our imagination is key to the Kantian conceptualisation of it. In the sublime, there is no playfulness, no sanguinity and hence no charm. Rather, since the sublime is not bounded by form, imagination cannot (re)present endless variations on the form of the object in an appreciation of its purposiveness (as in the beautiful). Instead, the formlessness of the sublime poses an impossible task for the imagination. We may conclude immediately from this that the aforementioned play between the imagination and the understanding is impossible in the sublime. We also find out why Kant associates the seriousness of the feeling of sublime with “a serious matter in the exercise of the imagination”: there is nothing for the imagination to play with, or more accurately speaking, to play on, and instead there is a genuine struggle for it to try to represent that which it cannot. What, then, does the sublime involve, if not the appreciation of purposiveness, and what is it that the imagination so exercises itself to represent? Two key passages in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* answer this question:

[In] what we are wont to call sublime in nature there is such an absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms of nature, that it is rather in its chaos . . . [its] magnitude and power, that nature chiefly excites the ideas of the sublime. . . . It [the sublime] gives on the whole no indication of

anything purposive in nature itself, but only in the *possible employment of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves* of a purposiveness *quite independent of nature*. For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but *for the sublime one merely in ourselves and in the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature*. (77; emphasis added)

[The aesthetic judgement] in its judging a thing as sublime . . . *refers that faculty to reason to bring out its subjective accord with ideas of reason*. . . . This makes it evident that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging subject, and not in the object of nature that occasions this disposition by the judgement formed of it. Who would apply the term “sublime” even to shapeless mountain masses . . . or such like things? *But in the contemplation of them, without any regard to their form, the mind abandons itself to the imagination and to [reason]*. (86-87; emphasis added)

We can see from these passages that the beautiful involves an appreciation of nature, broadly speaking, and is therefore in need of an external ground (object, action, etc) whereby purposiveness (the manifold of empirical laws) can be intuited and appreciated. In contrast, the sublime stems from, and is concerned with the self. Not with any perception or appreciation of nature’s laws but rather only with the subject’s reaction to nature. For it is “the attitude of [our] minds” that allows us to view nature as sublime; unlike the beautiful, there is no external object (that which, in our empirical reality, has a form to it) to prompt us on the same journey



of delight involving the play of the imagination and the understanding that the appreciation of purposiveness entails. The mind generates the attitude that allows for the experience of the sublime to be possible because it “hearkens . . . to the voice of reason within itself, which for all given magnitudes . . . requires totality, and consequently comprehension in one intuition” (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 85). Thus, reason “gives” imagination an impossible task: to represent the unrepresentable of infinite magnitude.

With this understanding of the sublime, we are close to solving the question that we earlier posed in this section about the linkages between the (Kantian) sublime and Romantic notions of what an aesthetic education can achieve. We may note here that the sublime is only experienced when we *contemplate* formless natural phenomena—what is needed here is a certain *distance* from the object so *that* one can contemplate it—the distance that allows for the relationship between active subject and passive object to occur. We may term this distance “aesthetic distance,” the distance that we need to institute between ourselves and the object of contemplation such that *we are no longer regarding it as part of our daily lived experience*, but rather in a “special category” of objects to be contemplated for our aesthetic pleasure. Kant says this outright when he talks about the dynamical sublime:

One who is in a state of fear can no more play the part of a judge of the sublime of nature than one captivated by inclination and appetite [this is the Kantian definition of interest, as opposed to disinterestedness] can of the beautiful... But, *provided our own position is secure*, [the aspects of destructive nature are] all the

more attractive for [their] fearfulness, and we readily call these objects sublime. (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 91; emphasis added)

I will not go into Kant's segue from apparently thinking the sublime as mathematical to thinking the sublime as dynamic because of the constraints of space. Regarding this matter, I am in agreement with Paul de Man's essay on Kant, collected in *Aesthetic Ideology*, which claims that there is no philosophical accounting for this distinction but rather only a performative linguistic one (79). This being the case, logically speaking the idea of aesthetic distancing that the dynamic sublime involves also applies to the mathematical, and hence something that is required for the sublime in general. It suggests the idea of a *certain space* where we can intuit both our reason (only as regulative principle) and yet also the limits of our imagination, and this accounts for the mix of pleasure and displeasure in the sublime:

The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law. (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 88)

### *Schiller's (Mis)interpretation of Kant's Sublime: A de Manian Reading*

This space, which for Kant is suggested but not labelled, is later colonized by the Romantics as the Romantic Imagination. I use the word "colonized" because

the Romantic Imagination as syncretic power and a space whereby the aesthetic is made possible is not the same as the Kantian faculty of imagination (the power to [re]present perceptual input), although this almost certainly contributes to the Romantics' mistake of psychologizing Kant. The suggested aesthetic space of the Kantian sublime is perhaps the "something in [Kant's] text that allows for such psychologizing," that within the text that perhaps tempted the "pervasive" (mis)readings of Kant that the Romantics conducted (Spivak 19). It is the space where a heaven can be made out of hell, and a hell made out of heaven: indeed, Kant, in a provocative paragraph, suggests that war is sublime, and peace debases the self-interest (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 93). In line with de Man's essay on Kant, I would like to suggest that perhaps this is also the point at which the mistakes that Schiller and Coleridge make become necessary.

As I have said, I am in agreement with Spivak that the mistake that Schiller and other Romantics make regarding Kant is one that any general reader of philosophy *has* to make, and which, at some level, the text tempts one to make. It is the problem of "translating" the theoretical in Kant into concrete practices (or, in general, the gap that exists between a theoretical inquiry and the application of theory in practical terms). This applies not only to the setting up of the university but also to what readers may gain from their reading experience(s). Hence, the question for the Romantics (who were artists) is: what is the "takeaway" for readers who experience the sublime? How does having experienced the sublime develop the reader? Since the Romantics had "a determination to locate reality in experience (Shea 286)," what does the experience of the sublime do for the reader? If we follow Kant to the end, he makes no comment on *what lesson we*

*learn* when we feel reason as regulative power. He is interested in understanding the experience of the sublime—a philosophical question. But the Romantics were interested in what the experience of sublimity could do for the reader, and they made a crude but understandable mistake in drawing a lesson from Kantian philosophy: a mistake that we are all in danger of making, the mistake of translating feeling into abstract and comprehensible concepts.

The sublime experience is one of transcendence (we note a similar displacement in the university project, that the University of Reason is not motivated by reason), and so the experience of the sublime in Romanticism, unfortunately, leads not to accessing reason, but (ironically enough) to a *faith* that one is accessing reason. That this access is regulative and not constitutive is not something that the Romantics pay heed to, as we have seen.<sup>44</sup> What is enough is that for all *practical* purposes (I echo De Man here), one “feels reason” and thus “gets reason” (here is where the mistake of viewing reason as constitutive is made), and so in this attempt to grasp at an *intelligible benefit*, the mistake is made.<sup>45</sup>

The mistake stems from the Romantics grappling with what it means for “us” to experience the limits of “our” imagination and feel “our” reason; they are

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<sup>44</sup> I generalise; it is arguable that some of them (I think of Byron in particular) had an inkling of the problems involved in this sort of thinking. Only consider “Don Juan”: “What a sublime discovery 'twas to make the / Universe universal egotism, / That all's ideal—*all ourselves*: I'll stake the / World (be it what you will) that *that's* no schism” (721). The importance of Byron as Romantic poet recurs in my chapter on *Disgrace*.

<sup>45</sup> Kant *explicitly* says that both the beautiful and the sublime are not concepts, and the Romantics have done him injustice in committing this mistake.

concerned with a practical question and not a philosophical one. Here is Schiller on the sublime:

Sublime we name an object, at whose conceptualization *our sensuous nature feels its limits*, but *our rational nature its superiority, its freedom from limits*; in the face of this we thus derive physically our brevity, which we surmount but morally, i.e. through ideas . . . because the frightful subject matter acts upon our sensuous nature more forcefully than the infinite one, so the gap between the sensuous and the transcendental capability is also felt all the more ardently, so the superiority of Reason and the inner freedom of the heart become all the more prominent. That the entire essence of the sublime is founded upon *the consciousness of this, our rational freedom*, and all delight in the sublime is grounded directly on this consciousness alone. (“Of the Sublime”; emphasis added)

Schiller is speaking of the practical sublime as opposed to the theoretical sublime, which for him replaces the Kantian divide of the dynamical versus the mathematical sublime. As mentioned earlier, this distinction, even in Kant, does not hold philosophically, in that for Kant, what both kinds of sublimes share in common is a failure of representation by the imagination. However, what Schiller’s division between the theoretical and the practical allows him to do is to subscribe to a false dichotomy of mind and body by valorising the practical sublime completely at the expense of the theoretical sublime. Thus, for Schiller, existential threat belongs to the realm of sensuality, whereas the delight in the sublime

belongs to the realm of reason (the mind, which he simplistically equates to the delight in valorising the “reasoning I”). De Man’s complaint is completely correct—that Schiller’s practical sublime (the only sublime that Schiller is really interested in) “bears no relationship whatsoever” to Kantian notions of the sublime, which stem from the conflict of the faculties (de Man 140).

The false dichotomy between mind and body that Schiller sets up assumes that delight in feeling one’s mind does not belong to the realm of the sensuous, despite it being an affective experience. The pain of feeling the limits of the conscious self’s imagination, then, is regulated as that which is beyond the thinking self, “merely” a pain generated from existential threat. Thus, the sublime reminds us of our position as monadic subjects (by implication, whole) by alerting us to the power of the monadic “I” as subject constituted of reason, which resists existential terror through “the ability to maintain reason” in the face of annihilation (de Man 141). This view is shared by Thomas Huhn who reads the Kantian sublime thus: “The pleasure of the sublime is what binds subjectivity to itself; it is the moment when subjectivity ‘feels’ itself, the moment when subjectivity becomes whole and cohesive, coherent and unitary. It is, in short, the moment in and according to which subjectivity is constituted” (274).

The sublime thus becomes something that *we end up providing for ourselves*. Historical circumstances, in this case, a trend towards secularity that began in the Enlightenment, encouraged Schiller’s error of self-aggrandization. F.X. Shea further elaborates on this: “The origin of that ‘awful power,’ in the grip of which one is transported ‘beyond’ experience, remains stubbornly unresolved. The persistent realism of the modern spirit forbids its being easily assigned an other-

worldly origin, as we have seen" (287). If a feeling of transcendence cannot be attributable to religious transport, then it must be attributed to mankind. This is broadly in line with Kant's conclusions, but the slant that Schiller gives to his conclusions is very different. As opposed to the sublime happening because there is a conflict of the faculties, the transcendence involved in the sublime so usually associated with the religious leads to a Romantic valorisation of self: the religious sentiment is simply transferred from deity to the power of the self, since Schiller believes that reason is constitutive (in his view, the "I" who thinks). Faith in this "unbiased, reasonable" self, then, is not simply due to a philosophical conviction that one has truly reached objectivity. It also is due to an affective conviction that is religious in tenor. And so philosophy in Kant mutates into theology in Schiller.

The reaction to "theorists" by Bloom and other "non-theorists" therefore can be understood in the following ways. There is, understandably, an angry gut reaction against what they think of as the relativizing of something universal: the human. After all, broadly speaking, post-structuralism and other "theoretical" movements (such as Marxism and feminism) attempt to historicise and bring to attention what has been left out of the dominant narrative of liberal humanism in literature: the mission is ethico-political, to show that the cultural and gendered boundaries of this narrative gave privilege to the voices of a certain kind of peoples and to tilt the balance back towards equality. It becomes *possible*, then, that the universality of liberal humanism might be a pleasing (often self-serving) illusion that was in line with maintaining the status quo of establishments that were far from disinterested (working only on the basis of reason, to hammer the point home). This, of course, hits them hard: their entire worldview has been shown to

be interested in ways that were completely opposed to the notions of equality, fraternity and progress that they so strongly believed in. The disinterested rational self might be a product of nationalistic interests. Its purported objectivity could be read as non-objective, interested in the most banal ways: working in favour of the self's progress and nation, often at the expense of others, despite its avowals to the contrary, and despite the lofty aims of doing the exact opposite.

### **Auto-Immunity in Both “Theory” and “Non-Theory” Subfields of University**

#### **Studies**

This section attempts to perform some fidelity to the ethics involved in Spivak's theory of appreciation by fleshing out the workings of auto-immunity in both “theory” and “non-theory” thinkers in University Studies to clarify this thesis's position regarding its ethics of reading. It also emphasizes the importance of aesthetic appreciation to thinking the university project by elucidating how the solutions of the “theory” thinkers outlined in Chapter 1 stem from aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, it will provide further clarification of how Spivak's notion of aesthetic education is intimately tied to her support of democracy, and highlight the thesis's awareness of its own auto-immunity (an unavoidable consequence of Spivak's framework) enacted by its own readings of the three novels under discussion. Lastly, as this section fleshes out how the auto-immunity in both camps of thinkers leads to double binds, it performs a mediatory function between the two camps by pointing out that neither school of thought can confidently assert its superiority over the other. This discussion allows the reader to better appreciate



the thesis's secondary aims of mediating differing opinions about each of the novels it discusses.

From the previous section, it becomes clear that the project of *Bildung*, with its links to the Enlightenment project is self-contradictory and flawed; as Spivak says, "the Enlightenment is sick at home" (*Aesthetic Education* 27). The self-contradiction exists, as Spivak has intimated, in the Enlightenment mission, one of the many double binds that she highlights:

We want the public sphere gains and private sphere constraints of the Enlightenment; yet we must also find something relating to 'our own history' to counteract the fact that the Enlightenment came, to colonizer and colonized alike, through colonialism, to support a destructive 'free trade', and that top-down policy breaches of Enlightenment principles are more rule than exception (*Aesthetic Education* 4).

To want the benefits of the Enlightenment without reservations might mean perpetuating the violence involved in colonisation, which after all was pitched (among other things) as a "civilising mission" *a la* Kipling's "The White Man's Burden." On the other hand, Spivak thinks that there were admirable political and philosophical gains in the Enlightenment, and to want these, even with "modifications for locality", may involve "subverting the European Enlightenment critically", implying that "'we', whoever we are, are below the level of the Enlightenment. A double bind, again" (Spivak, AE 4).

As is clear from Spivak's text, *unintentionally* resolving this double bind of the Enlightenment into a single bind screens epistemic violence from one's self. This screening may, in the worst-case scenarios, lead to the screening of structural or political violence from one's self. Despite this, the self as construct existing in any particular society, Bill Readings reminds us, is an integral part of facilitating the workings of both nation-state capitalism and its successor, neoliberalism. The inescapability of this lived reality by both "theorists" and the "non theory" camp and the contextualisation of the writings of the former by the latter in this reality may lead the latter to question or react against the "value relativism" promoted by the questioning of this self and its beliefs or operations in the name of a faith that one can access (objective) reason. At best, the moves that "theorists" like Spivak make may seem unnecessary; at worst, as I have previously mentioned, they may seem hypocritical. This is a "natural" result of the auto-immune function in "theoretical" writings; with the risk of auto-immunity comes the risk of others picking up on this function and viewing it uncharitably.

This particular understanding of the "theorists" stems from a worldview that has little sympathy for the epistemic nature of the task of the "theorists." The end political actions that an auto-critical subject might make may indeed not differ from that of a critical subject. The devil is in the details:

When and as we decide [to take action on a double bind], we know . . . we have broken the double bind into a single bind, as it were, and we also know that change will have to be undertaken soon. . . . Knowing this, the typical emotion that accompanies decisions of the daily grind—is a spectrum of regret to remorse to at least unease,

otherwise self-congratulation followed by denial or bewilderment.

This is different from the *unexamined hope* which animates much globalist and alter-globalist enterprise today, in the United States as in the global elite (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 11; emphasis added).

The difference, Spivak makes clear, is not necessarily in the choices made but in the cognitive-emotional orientation with which choices are made and the emotions following the making of the choice. There is no *guarantee* that being auto-critical leads to better choices; the only difference is perhaps more *sympathy* for those who have resolved double binds in a way different to one's self, and that the constant hope (examined as opposed to unexamined) that in some situations, auto-criticality via auto-immunity, the examination of habits of thought, *may* lead to better outcomes in terms of decisions. Again, this has its risks as well as benefits.

The most obvious risk is the auto-immunity of democracy; one might make one's self sympathetic, or begin to empathise with (and in the end, perhaps support), views that may do harm to one's stated beliefs or political cause, a risk that one takes on if, following Kant, one wants a large degree of civil freedom. The unstated risk of "the other side," that is, of the "non theorists" holding on to faith in themselves as rational subjects, is a closing of dialogue of "other voices" that one disapproves of or does not take into account, again for better or for worse, depending on the specific situation and one's ethico-political views. In the latter situation, a closing of dialogue is auto-immune *only if* one wants to promote democracy in principle; if this is the case, then neither "theorists" nor "non theorists" win. What seems certain is that if we follow Derrida in his reading of

democracy as having an auto-immunity embedded within it, the route of questioning that Spivak takes is in line with the workings of democracy.

At this juncture, I want to point out that the chapters in Spivak's book that follow her introduction are "in praise of learning the double bind—not just learning *about it*" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 1; emphasis added). Her reading suggests that *the aesthetic is a space itself where the double bind can be learnt*, where the domestication that the meta-contextual frame that she provides can be problematised, provisionally, via the experience of reading. In the case of Spivak, the auto-immunity in her reading is intentional and highlighted; in the case of Bill Readings and Thomas Docherty, I suggest that their texts rely on an unstated auto-immunity that has its roots in aesthetic experience. Readings's notion of a "community of dissensus" is his attempt to resolve a double bind presented to him in concrete terms: people in the university come from all over the world with different identities, and notions of selves linked to their experiences as a state subject. Think and work within these categories and expose the university to the predations of neoliberalism, risk supporting a system that one does not support. Try not to think in these terms and one faces the difficulty of working with the other in concrete terms, of how to negotiate with the "I" of the other who is inevitably grounded in some sort of socialisation that cannot be detangled from his/her existence in a globalized world. Readings does not mention the double bind that he faces.

Despite this, his resolution of the double bind into a single bind, via Levinas, is only manageable in practice with the use of one's imagination, one's trained ability to understand rhetoric in texts. First, the theoretical solution of a

“community of dissensus,” discussed in the previous chapter, requires us to become a “community to be understood on the model of dependency rather than emancipation” (Readings 190). How do we do this ethically? By not just respecting the other as an abstract concept, but qua Levinas, to glimpse God in the face of the other. In intellectual terms, this entails a realisation that one cannot know the other, an acceptance that we do not “know in advance what it means to be human” and thus an avoidance of viewing “humanity as an object of cognition” (Readings 189). However, in my view, Levinas’s notion carries the weight that it does precisely because it has the emotional frisson involved in thinking a relation to God.<sup>46</sup>

In practice, to accept intellectually that we cannot know the other without feeling the force of the Levinasian obligation to the other could lead to a situation where one acquires a certain complacency about the otherness of the other, where the model of “dependency rather than emancipation” (Readings 190) might involve supporting to the field-coverage principle that Gerald Graff has isolated as being responsible for the incoherence of the English departmental mission (xiii).<sup>47</sup> That is

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<sup>46</sup> This reading of Levinas is not unique. See Michael Morgan’s essay “Levinas on God and the Trace of the Other” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas* (Oxford University Press, 2019). It is not within the scope of the thesis to provide a sustained discussion of divinity in Levinas’s thought.

<sup>47</sup> See Graff’s definition of this principle and how it allows English departments to avoid committing themselves to any cause: “The new university dealt with this problem [diversity of views about the university’s mission] by evolving a structure of departments whose separation from each other—managed by a new cadre of academic administrators—guaranteed a level of peace and quiet. Here was the emergence of what I call the ‘field-coverage’ model of academic organization. Each department was composed of a set of subfields that were to be ‘covered,’ first by faculty members trained in the newly established system of graduate education, then by students taking courses. As I suggest, the advantage of the field-coverage model ‘was to make the [English] department and the college curriculum virtually self-regulating.’ . . . Thus whenever a threatening innovation arose—positivistic ‘scholars’ who challenged the methods and assumptions of journalistic ‘generalists’; academic ‘critics’ (the New Critics), who challenged both the scholars and the journalistic critics; eventually feminists, post-structuralists, new historicists, queer theorists, and other insurgents who

to say, at risk of pointing out the obvious, if I know nothing about Levinas but think that what Readings says is a good idea, I might move towards recognising the limits of my own scholarship (for instance, in medieval literature, which I know little about) and not look towards being emancipated (a change in subjectivity effected by *Bildung*), in the process supporting a bureaucracy that works by isolating fields from one another while encouraging communication between scholars. As opposed to focusing on the development of my own neutrality and traits that are associated with being a “good” subject, I try to be open to sharing and learning from my students and colleagues, to be dependent on them and for them to be similarly dependent on me. Readings avoids trying to sound “mystical,” claiming that what he is saying is “simple” (Readings 188), but in moving away from the emotions involved in responding to the theological and spiritual resonances of Levinas’s writings, he also loses the radicality of his proposition, as semantic slippage regarding Reading’s use of the word “dependency” might occur, and in fact might be likely to occur with a reader unfamiliar with the force of Levinas’s writings.

Moreover, without the force of Levinas backing Readings’s proposition, Readings’s notion of the community of dissensus becomes open to the institutionalisation he so fears. He prefers dissensus over consensus, he says, because “dissensus cannot be institutionalised” (167). But of course institutionalisation is possible—once abstraction enters the picture, ideas as “units of thought” can be transformed into units of value. At risk of sounding cynical, once

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challenged both the New Critics and the traditional scholars—the newcomers could be absorbed into the department by simply being added to the established array of fields.” (viii-ix)

this happens (once the obligation to the other is stripped of its emotional resonance), there is every chance that universities, if persuaded of Readings's idea, would begin to set out surveys for its staff and students trying to measure and manage "dissensus" or "negotiation" using the same logic that they currently do to measure "excellence" or "student satisfaction." Without this emotional resonance, the infinity of the other can be domesticated: one can simply accept that the other cannot fully be known but try one's best to ensure that one is attempting to be responsible for unknown others, a process that could take place via the technocracy and managerialism that Readings criticises. Also, there is the disheartening idea that members of community of dissensus might very well take on a notion of identity that involves being part of that community. All of this, of course, is not what (in pragmatic terms) Readings was hoping to achieve with his work: things that have some trace of divinity about them are always-already beyond the reach of such practices, and the obligation he speaks of is linked less to sociality (which can be banal in the technocratic sense I mentioned) than to divine law. The weight of the obligation is different, and so is the amount of emphasis that this obligation is given, once we associate the other with divinity instead of mere sociality.

It is arguable that Readings has provided a meta-contextual frame for the double bind that he faces via his theorisation; the confidence and the optimism in the text are reminiscent of the confidence of the Schillerian subject. This is unavoidable, as Spivak keeps saying. Readings has read and appreciated both Levinas and Lyotard, and via them, proposed a solution that questions the very structures that have allowed them to write and publish as scholars and thinkers.

His confidence, and theirs, exists in auto-immune tension with the notion of singularities that he has proposed. Readings's text resembles Kant's (in Spivak's reading of Kant) in that it is striking in its counterintuitive power. It can, however, only be viewed from this perspective through a framing of the feeling of the sublime shaken into a double bind with an auto-immune effect: one realizes one's inability to imagine the other in Levinas, where the affectual freight of realisation of this inability is framed not as an achievement that proves one's self is a thinking subject but a realisation for the reader that the category of the subject that s/he must perform in his/her "daily life" cannot fully contain or is insufficient to address his/her "self" or indeed, the other. Without the engagement with rhetoric and its effects, Readings can be domesticated by a neoliberal bureaucracy in the way that I have outlined. That is surely not his intention; perhaps Readings has taken it for granted that his intended audience has had an aesthetic education. Without the recognition of the auto-immune helplessness in the face of a double bind, there is no hope of enacting the community of dissensus that is his provocative legacy.

As with Readings, the question in this context is how Docherty's notion of critical humility in *The English Question* has been influenced by his background as a scholar of literature. The emphasis is, again, not on the thinking self here, although it lurks in the background whenever one writes or theorises. Rather, there is a solidarity born out of the knowledge that we all have limits to knowing, an affective knowledge given to us by the sublime (both Kantian and Schillerian notions of the sublime "tell" us this). What we share in common is not anything that can be known per se; in fact, we might not share any common knowledge. We are all embodied creatures, however, and this fact of existence can be a basis for



solidarity. Again, this seems to me optimistic in the same way that Readings's work is optimistic. It does not highlight the pressures we face attempting to be ethical, forced as we are by our existence as subjects in a globalized world to have identities within and without the institution(s) that we work in.

Docherty deals with this in his book, admirably ploughing ahead despite this double bind. The following section of his book outlines the stakes. Already a senior scholar at the time of writing the book, he comes up with the following observation:

The relationship of the academic to her or his institution has now changed somewhat from the structures that pertained when I, for one, entered the profession. Twenty years ago, a colleague who expressed sceptical criticism of the work of his or her department did so in the spirit of dialogue and debate. . . . Today . . . we need to be clandestine, for many of us are now in the ridiculous—even dangerous—position where we might fear that anything we say can be taken down and held against us: the official university requires or demands a culture of compliance (*English Question* 139).

My chapter on *Disgrace* will deal with the issue of official compliance with the university mentioned by Docherty. For now, let me restrict myself to noting that the university justifies restrictions to speech and research by claiming to be working for society's benefit, and this rationale is behind what Docherty calls the “dominant ideology of the ‘instrumentalist’ decree” in the contemporary university (*Question* 139). The logic of immunity lies behind the curtailing of the academic's

freedom in the contemporary university: to protect its students and the public against that which is either harmful or useless to the society that the university ostensibly serves. Docherty implies that this immunising move is auto-immune insofar as it harms the cause of research, but his own solution too, has its auto-immune risks in its response to the double bind that he faces. Docherty picks out the feeling of helplessness as a reaction to at least two double binds, one of which is that we are aware that “literature cannot define itself as such,” but “requires us . . . to ‘quicken’ it into becoming literature as such” (*Question 128*). Without the definition of literature “as literature,” or even as a part of “the humanities”, no thinking is made possible to begin to defend “an aesthetic education.” Yet, the double bind involved in having to define literature turns into “the elite that it requires for its (and our) survival,” thus betraying its own ambiguities about its definition(s) and risking the project of an aesthetic education becoming something in line with the exclusivity that a Schillerian aesthetic education implies (Docherty, *Question 128*).

In situations where the politico-ethical stakes are high, for instance research that may question the category of transgender people, it is debatable whether a shared solidarity based on helplessness in the face of one’s limited knowledge is enactable or even desirable. Alluding to Beckett, Docherty points out that this passivity stems from “the sense of one’s own total superfluity, . . . the arbitrariness and absurdity . . . of speaking or expressing when there is nothing to express, and yet the necessity to express it” (*Question 132*). In this situation, one takes one’s own views lightly, which allows one to accept difference more equably. And yet, this screens the *stakes*, often concrete, of huge differences in worldviews and

political outcomes stemming from the worldviews. Once one takes action, political or otherwise, to act in accord with one's ethics, which may involve rejecting the other's, such shared solidarity exists only as a trace, an auto-immune "memory" that one is acting against another being against the sense of all beings being ostensibly equal. Yet again, having this solidarity as background and remaining filial to it may lead to inaction, a paralysis born out of the recognition that we are all equal, and no matter who wins, there is a loser. Whatever the situation, one cannot win, on several levels.

I have outlined how auto-immunity may operate in the Schillerian subject of reason. This operation is at work in both the "theorists" and the "non-theorists." The difference, as Spivak points out, is simply whether one lives with one's auto-immunity or denies it. Spivak is hopeful that an aesthetic education could enact the former:

I would like to propose that the training of the imagination that can teach the subject to play—an aesthetic education—can also teach it to discover . . . the premises of the habit that obliges us to transcendentalize religion and nation. . . . If, however, this is only a 'rearrangement of desire' or the substitution of one habit for another through pedagogical sleight-of-hand, there will be no ability to recover that discovery for a continuity of epistemological effort. We must . . . keep up the work of displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination, attempt to access the epistemic. (*Aesthetic Education* 10).

For Spivak, an aesthetic education is the training of one's imagination. Spivak supports a Schillerian aesthetic education insofar as she thinks that training the imagination to appreciate literature may train our reason. She speaks of beauty, but I would argue that the same is true of Schiller's sublime. Again, the devil is in the details—her "sabotage" of Schiller involves not the Schillerian belief that we get access to our reason in reading literature or become a rational subject; instead it involves a notion that this provisional belief (or subject) will work against itself (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 2). That is, what Spivak calls "engagement with rhetoric" will allow us to "attempt to shake the Schillerian balance into a double bind" by questioning the epistemological frameworks that *allow* us to do this very work (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 25).

In training the imagination to engage with literature, we may use our reason and, for all practical purposes, *believe* we have become creatures of reason, but this training, taken to its logical conclusion, takes on an auto-immune function: it questions its own premises and its own validity, being aware that we are turning the traces of reason into a sign of humanity (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 23). This awareness is active and case-dependent; it cannot be *a habit* of feeling or thought that "deconstructs" in an automatic manner, but always a weighted negotiation that asks questions about itself, including the tendency to make itself a habit. The "lesson" of the double bind, therefore, leads to thought-moves that offer some protection for the subject from an (unreasoned) belief in one's reason, where this protection is self-destructive of the unity of the subject. In this sense, it is itself an auto-immune effect that is necessary for auto-criticality: it is, in Derridean terms, where reason *runs*, where it "does itself ill from winning over to winning out over

itself” and where the united Schillerian subject fractures and faces provisional destruction even as it asserts itself in the act of “domestication” via the thought in reading.

Spivak uses Derridean references to auto-immunity as a defining characteristic of democracy to point out that her notion of an aesthetic education prepares students of the humanities to embrace the *form* of democracy. This is effected not only through her discussion of reading, but also through the performativity of her introduction in its own auto-immune gestures. The more important transformative process that may take place through the appreciation of literature and the other arts happens not through teaching students about concepts, but through the experience of contradiction that readers may face when confronted with contradictory imperatives in the texts that they read. I have highlighted how the tension between the two sub-fields of University Studies can be explained through the auto-immune function. Spivak’s thought allows for a deconstruction of the binary between both camps, suggesting that apparent opposition between the “non-theory” and “theory” fields stems from the auto-immune function only made possible through the operation of the “non-theory” camp’s Schillerian subject of reason. This notion is demonstrated clearly in my reading of *Disgrace*. The auto-critical function that compromises the undivided self, or puts into question its judgement *through reason*, is unwelcome because it removes unreasoned faith in the objective reasoning self. This auto-critical function, linked to auto-immunity, may be viewed, if not within the frame of Derridean aporia, as contradiction or even worse, hypocrisy. Auto-immunity opens these thinkers up to the charge that they are writing as reasoning subjects, and

therefore their self-questioning presupposes a faith that they avowedly question. On the other hand, with regard to the “non-theory” camp, to have unreasoned faith in reason is a betrayal of reason’s own functioning. There is no direct advantage in belonging to either camp, except that an attempt to welcome auto-immunity is in line with (as earlier discussed) the form of democracy.

The brief discussion of auto-immunity in both the “theory” and “non-theory” camps has led to a better outlining of the ethics of reading in Spivak’s notion of an aesthetic education. Thus, it allows for better position of this thesis’s own ethics of reading. By embracing the auto-immunity present in *Stoner’s*, *Herzog’s* and *Disgrace’s* engagement with the *Bildung* project, this thesis attempts to establish, through the elaboration on the double binds that result from each text’s auto-immune operations, that some of the conflicts in the reception of each novel stem from the texts themselves providing hospitable grounds for (democratic) discussion. Thus, my work highlights how contradictions in all three novels open textual space for discussion. Yet, even while this thesis attempts to prove that each novel encourages rather than discourages openness of discussion, this thesis acknowledges the auto-immunity in its readings of the texts: inevitably, the focus on *Bildung* and the theoretical framework of auto-immunity delimit the ways in which it can demonstrate the openness of each novel, already restricting its discussion of the (endless) possibilities of reading.

As my reading of the three novels will show, auto-immunity as a concept is thus useful not only in understanding the novels’ critiques of the *Bildung* project, but also as a means of mediating the debates about each novel and the understanding of both “non-theory” and “theory” scholarly camps in University

Studies via the meta-contextualization of each camp. We can understand “unintended auto-immunity” at work in *Stoner*, whereas both *Herzog* and *Disgrace* can be read as examples of novels that embrace “intended auto-immunity,” with *Disgrace* exhibiting a higher degree of reflexivity regarding what it embraces.

Mieke Bal’s notion of focalization allows us to better understand the how these two kinds of auto-immunity work in the tragedy of *Stoner* and the tragic-comedy of *Herzog* and *Disgrace*. Bal defines focalization as “the relation between who perceives and what is perceived [that] colours the story with subjectivity” (7). All three novels are focalized through their protagonist because their use of free indirect discourse allows us into the minds of each protagonist. Yet, the aims and operations of each text may extend beyond its protagonist’s. We can explain this using Bal’s definition of the “narrator” as “that agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs that constitute the text” (11).<sup>48</sup> Bal’s definition of the narrator of a text enables us to discuss more precisely the operations of each novel outside of their focalization through their protagonists. Of use to this thesis is also Spivak’s notion of “counter-focalization”, which involves the readerly construction of “an alternative narrative [to the focalizer’s thoughts] as a running commentary” that helps us understand the novel (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 323-324).

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<sup>48</sup> Earlier on this thesis referred to Booth’s implied authorial persona to facilitate understanding of Eagleton’s critique of Lodge’s campus novels. Booth’s notion is appropriate given that Eagleton links the positionality of the novels to the middle class subject. Yet, while this concept allows us to better understand the political positionality of Lodge’s novels, the notion of the persona is at odds with the concept of auto-immunity, which is a mechanism. Bal’s definition of “narrator” allows us to better think of the operations of the text without implying or attributing any sort of subjectivity to that which dictates the aesthetic features of the novels.

Thus, it becomes possible to explain intended and unintended auto-immunity in the three novels. As my next chapter will argue, *Stoner's* unintended auto-immunity stems from its maintenance of a tragic tone, which not only stems from the focalization of the novel through its protagonist but the narrator's choice to focus only on the protagonist's suffering as he encounters obstacles in his life. Moreover, the narrator of the novel supports its protagonist by using the sublime to impress upon its readers the importance of *Bildung* and the enormity of his self-sacrifice; thus we are encouraged to feel that the significance of Stoner's struggles and suffering is so immense that it lies beyond our imaginative grasp. This discourages us from closely interrogating his advocacy of the *Bildung* project. In this way, the novel encourages consolation in the form of the pleasure of the sublime in place of critique.

Yet, both this consolation and the provision of obstacles for its protagonist contain unintended auto-immunity. In providing its protagonist with obstacles in the form of uncooperative or unsympathetic characters, the novel provides space for its readers to counter-focalize their perspectives, thus allowing for critiques of its protagonist. Also, by discouraging its readers from engaging in both the objectivity and criticality posited as the result of *Bildung* despite it being a consequence of his ability to appreciate the sublimity of literary texts, the thesis ironically discourages its readers from the goals of the project that it tries so hard to get its readers to support. Yet, this critique of the novel's protagonist's auto-immunity not only replicates Stoner's mistakes insofar as it contains its own auto-immunity: it replicates violence that he enacts on other characters by being as harsh to him as he is to others in the novel. In this way, *Stoner* enacts the double



bind of aesthetic education: its pathos contradicts the critique that it allows us to enact, leaving its readers in the space of a dilemma.

My fourth chapter argues that *Herzog* simultaneously allows us to focalize and counter-focalize its protagonist: this facilitates the operation of an intended auto-immunity. Through free indirect discourse, we are encouraged to focalize through Herzog. This not only impresses upon us the importance of the *Bildung* project, which he attempts to promote via both his academic work and personal life, but also makes us realize the costs of doing the work that he does: this gives the novel a tragic shading. Yet, there are instances where Herzog contradicts himself, and this casts his reliability into doubt, particularly when the narrator provides us with opinions from other characters that allow us to ironize his beliefs. This forms a good deal of the comic relief in the novel. The narration alerts us to the auto-immunity in the politics of *Bildung* by providing us with comic examples of how Herzog's Romanticism leads him to harm the very causes that he is trying so hard to advocate. First, Herzog's subjectivity, formed through *Bildung*, causes him to dismiss the views of those less educated than him even though he thinks that *Bildung* would foster democracy and equality. Next, through Herzog's thoughts, the narration provides us with intertextual references that highlight Herzog's allegiances to Romanticism, suggesting that the objectivity of *Bildung* is not ahistorical and transcultural, but rather inextricable from the philosophy of a culturally and temporally specific artistic movement. Also, by allowing us insights into Herzog's personality, the narration encourages us to realize that *Bildung* inculcated in him via his appreciation of beauty, far from harmonizing his passions with his reason, instead encourages him to act on his passions instead of his

reason. *Bildung* thus contributes to the disconnect between passion and reason that it aims to bridge.

Lastly, at the end of the novel, the narration tells us that Herzog retreats back into the countryside to enjoy nature. This suggests that the contradictions of *Bildung* are unresolvable: through this very action, Herzog gives up working towards the socio-political goals that *Bildung* has encouraged him to advocate for. Despite this counter-focalization of Herzog's beliefs, however, the narration enacts one last defence of the novel's protagonist: the exuberance of its prose encourages active readers to reflect that dismissal of its protagonist's project while enjoying the affective qualities of Bellow's writing re-enacts the auto-immune act that Herzog performs at the end of the novel by giving up on his project. Thus, the narration suggests that complete dismissal of his project would leave one complicit with the inequalities and materialism of his society that he has tried so hard to combat. The narration therefore offers its readers the double bind of an aesthetic education: auto-immune *Bildung* as performed by its protagonist or complicity with the unsavoury aspects of American society that he has tried so hard to resist throughout the novel.

The last reading of a novel in this thesis argues that much of *Disgrace's* power to think through the problems of *Bildung* comes from its prompts for us to counter-focalize its protagonist. Like in *Stoner* and *Herzog*, the focalization of the novel through David Lurie allows us to realize that the *Bildung* he has undergone, fostered by his appreciation of the Schillerian sublime, hinders him from carrying out its own goals. The novel has a tragic tone because we are allowed access into his thoughts and feelings, moreover, the outcomes in the novel are grim: a student

has experienced (at very least) sexual harassment by Lurie, if not rape, Lurie's daughter Lucy herself is raped by three men, and Lurie himself becomes seriously injured by an attack. Yet, much of its comedy comes from the ironization of its protagonist by its narration: Lurie plays an active part in demoralizing himself regarding his teaching, and despite his anger at his daughter's suffering, is unable to understand the distress of his student's father at hearing that she has been sexually harassed by him until very late in the novel. In addition to this, the novel's comedy comes from the narration's ironization of Farodia Rassool on the university committee: the very committee she is on that is a tool for her to effect justice is a symbol of the inequalities of a system that allow for the perpetuation of injustice.

The narration of the novel, however, allows us to experience a feeling of bafflement through Lurie as he continues his journey through the novel. This bafflement, I argue, is valuable as it results from the destruction of the subjectivity that has caused him not only to enact violence on women, but also to be racist and unbending in his negotiations with others. Despite casting Lurie's feeling of stupidity in a positive light, however, the novel suggests that it may lead to support of the status quo because Lurie adapts to norms of rural life. This, when contrasted the narration's portrayal of his daughter's assertiveness in creating a new position for herself in the community after her rape, makes us realize that the novel poses us the dilemma of whether to take on the assertiveness of Schillerian subjectivity, (thus opening ourselves up to the auto-immunity of *Bildung*), or to be complicit with the status quo through Lurie's passivity.

### Chapter 3

#### The Auto-immunity of *Bildung* in John Williams's *Stoner*: Sublimity as Sustaining Social Privilege

*Stoner* is perhaps the campus novel that is most famous for its exaltation of the ideals of a university. The novel has had a resurgence in popular culture in the late 2000s because it thematises the status of the university as a site whereby one can rediscover reasons for scholarly labour beyond the financial exigencies of one's life. The novel tells the tale of a humble literary scholar who professes literature despite the obstacles in his life, mainly in the form of his farming background, a wife whom the novel portrays as neurotic, an apparently unreasonable colleague and fraudulent graduate student. He stoically tolerates his wife's attempts to make his domestic life miserable, teaching and working at his scholarship despite his emotional anguish, and upholds scholarly standards by failing the fraudulent student even though it costs him the goodwill of the eventual chair of the department. The tragedy of the novel is that Stoner's insistence on being true to the ideals of his profession leads to the sacrifice of his personal happiness and arguably to his eventual death. Stoner's determination to do what he considers the right thing in spite of great personal sacrifices impresses upon the reader the importance of his beliefs, and reassures the reader that his vision of the university is valuable.

The restriction of the reader to Stoner's perspective invites the reader to identify with the doomed protagonist, whose fatal flaw appears merely to be that

he believes in the project of aesthetic education more than the university for which he works. Since we are able to identify with Stoner as he undertakes an uncompromising fight for the values of the university, we feel pity for him when his actions result in suffering for himself. Stoner's life appears tragic to us because he remains unrewarded for his valiant fight for his values: we can infer from Eagleton's observation that tragedy involves the destruction of what we find valuable and Aristotle's observation that our "pity is awakened by undeserved misfortune" that a key characteristic of the tragic is the ignominious end of a protagonist who has admirable virtues (73). John Williams's letter to Marie Rodell, which contains a brief outline of the novel, makes the intended message of the novel clear:

To all outward appearances, [Stoner] is a failure; he is not a popular teacher; he is one of the less distinguished members of his department; his personal life is a shambles; his death by cancer at the end of an undistinguished career is meaningless. But the point of the novel will be that *he is a kind of saint*; or, stated otherwise, it is a novel about a man who finds no meaning in the world or in himself, but *who does find meaning and a kind of victory in the honest and dogged pursuit of his profession* (qtd. in Shields 113; emphasis added).

Stoner's tragedy is an affirmation of a life well-lived; a life that insists on the worth of his value system despite it causing him pain. The tragedy of the novel hence comforts scholars who feel that the increasing corporatisation of academia poses

them challenges in regard to their teaching and being able to conduct research in a way that is germane to their scholarly interests.

Elaine Showalter's acerbic take on the recent popularity of the novel sheds light on the reasons behind its popularity: "Rediscovered at a time when the humanities are in decline, academic jobs are scarce and teaching takes a back seat to blogging, the novel's message of humble and heroic service to literature has obvious appeal for sorrowing humanists" ("‘Classic’ Stoner?"). Except for a few scathing newspaper articles like Showalter's, the novel's reappraisals have been overwhelmingly positive, both in newspapers and the precious little scholarship that has been conducted on the novel. Scholars feel an identification with the tragedy of its protagonist, whose education in literature is portrayed as enabling him to resist the encroachment of a metanarrative of economics (*a la* Wendy Brown) onto the university project.<sup>49</sup> Drew Smith's 2013 article in *The Daily Beast*, "Famous for Not Being Famous: Enough about 'Stoner'" highlights just how much positive press attention has been devoted to the novel. Of interest in Smith's observation is this comment:

Are all these people who are 'discovering' *Stoner* actually just falling in love with *an image they have of themselves*? You can almost hear the internal dialogue. This incredible book is about a frustrated

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<sup>49</sup> Examples of these newspaper reviews include Steve Almond's 2014 article in *The New York Times*, "You Should Seriously Read 'Stoner' Right Now" and Tim Kreider's 2013 *New Yorker* article "The Greatest American Novel You've Never Heard Of". There is a paucity of scholarship conducted on the novel—a search for it in the MLA bibliography turns up fewer than fifteen entries. The majority of these praise the novel for its deep insights. Scholarly articles that have a laudatory tone include Mel Livatino's "Revaluation: A Sadness unto the Bone: John Williams's *Stoner*" (2010), Jeff Frank's "Love and Work: A Reading of John Williams's *Stoner*" (2017) and Maureen Clark's "Listen to the Sound of the Quiet American: John Williams's *Stoner*" (2017).

writer and teacher of literature. Why in God's name doesn't everyone know about this astonishing piece of universal fiction?  
(emphasis added)

Smith astutely suggests that the novel puts forward an image of the scholar that resonates with many students of literature. This notion is supported by one of the many panegyric articles on the book, Julian Barnes's *Guardian* article, "Stoner: The Must-Read Novel of 2013," which asserts that many of its readers would identify with the novel's protagonist because of his relationship with literature: "Many will be reminded of their own lectoral epiphanies, of those moments when the magic of literature first made some kind of distant sense, first suggested that this might be the best way of understanding life."

I suggest that a more critical examination of the novel with a focus on the logic of auto-immunity that structures both Williams' defence of the university and Stoner's relationship with literature will elucidate the nature of Stoner's relationship with literature. This will clarify why so many literary scholars identify with him, and also shed some light why a minority of readers (like Showalter) are unhappy with him. It will then be easier to think about the effects of the novel's consolatory function for academics in relation to how they deal with the changes in the academic marketplace due to university corporatisation. This in turn will allow us to analyse the affective relation of "non-theorists" to the project of *Bildung*. By employing the concept of auto-immunity elaborated in the last chapter, I will suggest that the logic of auto-immunity takes place at two levels. First, the text attempts to protect its protagonist from participating in the logic that involves the exploitation of self and others for monetary personal gain—by providing him with a

university education in the humanities and subsequently a tenured position within the university—in fact fosters in him a self-destructive attitude that in turn is also exploitative of self and others for the goal of the personal enjoyment of the sublime feeling as defined by Schiller. More than this, it can be demonstrated that the same sublime feeling through which the text immunises its protagonist against materialistic thinking has within itself a dynamic of gendered exploitation.

Secondly, the tragedy of Stoner's life serves to generate a consolatory experience of the sublime in its readers, thus providing a reaffirmation of the importance of the university project that protects its readers from the structural strain of working in a corporatized university. However, this feeling of consolation only provides an illusion of protection. In discouraging its readers from engaging in criticism of its protagonist and relying on the sublime to emphasize the awareness of the importance of his task, what it actually does is encourage passivity in its readers in the face of the rapid destruction of the idea of a university, ultimately hastening and worsening the destruction of what it attempts to protect.

Both Stoner's attitude in the novel and the consolatory affect that the novel provides for its readers ultimately stem from a narrative of *Bildung* that supports a hierarchical society. This narrative, as I have argued in my first and second chapters, is intimately linked to Schiller's writings on the sublime, which equates the self with intuiting one's reason. By examining Stoner's motivations for becoming a professor, I will demonstrate that aesthetic education in the novel is conceptualised as a project of *Bildung* whereby the nurturing of one's imagination through exposure to the aesthetic alerts one to one's status as a reasoning being. In order to give the tragedy verisimilitude, the novel has to tread a delicate balance



between making other characters realistic by providing us plausible reasons for their behaviour and making its protagonist (in Williams's words) "a kind of saint" by restricting the reader to his perspective.

Hence, the staging of the various failures in its protagonist's life that are meant to evoke pity in us allow for a reading that sees them as episodes within the novel that expose the problems equating the novel's professorial focalizer with the use of reason. *Stoner* maintains its tragic tone through the provision of numerous obstacles to its protagonist's goals and attempting to avoid any problems in its protagonist's perspective. It performs the latter by restricting us to his perspective via free indirect discourse and maintaining a laser-like focus on his suffering, encouraging its readers to pity rather critique him. Thus, the narrator's text (in Bal's terms) aims to protect rather than criticize its protagonist. This chapter discusses three obstacles that Stoner faces which contribute to his unhappiness. The first is Stoner's father's disapproval of his choice to continue his graduate studies in literature at university, the second is Stoner's unhappy marriage and the last is Stoner's altercation with a student whom he views as a fraud. In all three cases, although the utterances of other characters in the novel allow us some insight as to their perspectives, the novel does not give them a chance to articulate the negative impact that Stoner might have had on their lives: the novel's focus is *his reaction to them*. Yet, the utterances that these characters give do provide enough material for the reader to engage in counter-focalization if s/he desires: we can engage in a reading that focuses on using these utterances to flesh out perspectives that highlight the flaws and biases in Stoner's perspective, giving an ironic flavour to the novel's attempts to make its protagonist seem blameless. It is

thus that the novel's attempt to immunise its protagonist from criticism takes on an auto-immune function.

A reading that counter-focalizes Stoner allows us to see the novel as suggesting that Stoner's practice of his own thought takes on an auto-immune status in that he becomes unable to escape solipsism. Although he thinks excessively, an epistemology that requires aesthetic distance between subject and object traps him within his inner world, ultimately uncritically perpetuating unequal relations of power between races, classes, sexes and academic tiers necessary for the perpetuation of the materialism that he is ostensibly resisting. As I will show later in the chapter, Stoner's death scene reaffirms the value of all that he has learnt in the novel, however flawed, through a sense that the lessons learnt in an aesthetic education are ineffable and beyond thought. The sublime feeling that the novel provides cannot be separated from its nostalgic and tragic tone: the university project is unthinkable and irretrievable because it is so firmly fixed to a model of the university and learning that belongs in the past and Stoner's self-sacrificial failure. Nostalgia evokes a pleasurable nostalgic commitment to a mission that, it is implied, is doomed to fail in the face of today's corporatized university.

It follows that the novel, contrary to many interpretations of it, can be read as staging the *limits* of a traditional narrative of *Bildung* as model of aesthetic education. The tension between the pathos of the novel and the plot events needed to enact its tragedy allows for the insertion of ironic distance, which facilitates a critical reading of the *Bildung* project that the novel tries to get the reader to unequivocally support. The novel thus unintentionally allows space for an

auto-critical irony: our identification with its protagonist entails an uncomfortable realisation of the problems of *Bildung* even as we reaffirm it. A fleshing out of the auto-immunity of the novel therefore highlights its potential for auto-criticality. This reading of the novel has implications for the “non-theory” scholarly field concerned with the *Bildung* project insofar as it stages both the dangers and potentiality of the affirmation of Schillerian *Bildung*: as with Stoner’s protagonist, uninterrogated belief in the project as being able to encourage the use of reason through the fostering of one’s ipseity may lead to actions and behaviour that are uncritical. The counter-intuitive reading that my chapter attempts is meant to flesh out the potentiality of *Bildung* for auto-criticality by suggesting that the critique of *Bildung* is a paradoxical and ironic enactment of fidelity to it, particularly in the context of this novel: an ironic reading of Stoner’s life involves the insertion of critical distance and the use of reason, characteristics of the *Bildung* project discouraged by the novel in its campaign to make its reader sympathetic to *Bildung*. Qua Spivak in my previous chapter, the book’s tension between its pathos and its interrogation of *Bildung* may enact a double bind for the reader that s/he has to tolerate.

### **The Schillerian Sublime: Stoner’s Motivation for Professing Literature**

William Stoner, our titular protagonist, is born into a rural farming household in Missouri, in 1891. At the beginning of the novel, we are told via free indirect discourse how Stoner’s childhood home looks to him: “It was a lonely household, of which he was an only child, and it was bound together by the necessity of its toil” (Williams 2). This starts the novel off with a sombre tone: the

repetition of the idea that the household is lonely is echoed by Stoner's status as the only child. The reader's sense of his isolation is enhanced by the assonance in the sentence which increases its gravitas; the "o" sounds slow the rhythm of the sentence down and give the sense of a quiet moan. The novel enhances this sense of Stoner being a character who has a hard life through its image of him as a teenager, a boy whose shoulders "[a]t seventeen were already beginning to stoop beneath the weight of his [farming] occupation" (2). The word "already" here captures our sympathy: the boy's shoulders are bent before they should be. When he is sent to university, Stoner "did his work at the University as he did his work on the farm—thoroughly, conscientiously, with neither pleasure nor distress" (Williams 7). He does not care for his studies at all: "He was aware that he had learned things that he had known before, but this meant to him that he might do as well in his second year as he had done in his first" (Williams 7). Stoner at the beginning of the novel is, therefore, characterised as barely alive, lacking the self-awareness that so many philosophers deem as a uniquely human trait.

What, then, brings Stoner to life? The answer is the sublime affect of literature. Here I will note that Williams sets the reader up for this by explicitly telling the reader that Stoner's vocation is to be a scholar of literature: "It was not until he returned for his second year that William Stoner learned why he had come to college" (8). With this sentence we are made aware that Stoner's previous experience as a student of agriculture played no part in giving his college experience (and his life) meaning. William Stoner's first year experience of getting to know more about "the brownish clods" in his soil chemistry course and the distant awareness that "his growing knowledge of them might be useful when he

returned to his father's farm," is, according to the focalised narration, not the *actual* reason why he came to college at all (Williams 8). We can already see a hierarchy of values being set up here: experiences that do not contribute at all to the inner life of the protagonist are cast as being devoid of existential meaning.

In fact, literature itself is held up to be radically different from other kinds of things that one could ever study at university. Stoner is stung into consciousness by "the required survey of English literature" at his university, which "troubled and disquieted him in a way *nothing had ever done before*" (Williams 8; emphasis added). The unparalleled power of the aesthetic to sting and stimulate a numb mind is evident here. We are also told that Stoner "found he could not handle the survey as he did his other courses" because mere rote memory is not enough to understand literature: "Though he remembered the authors and their works and their dates and their influences, he nearly failed his first examination, and he did little better on his second. He read and reread his literature assignments so frequently that his work in other courses began to suffer; still the words he read were words on pages, and he *could not see the use of what he did*" (Williams 9; emphasis added). Again, the aesthetic is portrayed as extraordinary here: essential to the inner life of human beings who have imagination and soul, it does not yield its secrets to the student who seeks to master it through the grasp of dry facts. More than this, the aesthetic, unlike the facts about soil chemistry, apparently cannot be shoehorned into being utilised in Stoner's society. That which is merely useful to the daily business of eking out a life for one's self is viewed as unimportant. Aesthetic education at university in the book is thus portrayed as immunising one from exploiting one's education for eking out a living. It is not

narrowly vocational in the sense of training one for a job that would facilitate taking one's place as a cog in the well-oiled machine of a functionalist society.

This becomes clear when we examine the pivotal scene that follows the narrator's important declaration of Stoner's vocation. Archer Sloane, Stoner's mentor, is teaching the survey on English literature that Stoner has had so much trouble with. Faced with an insensitive and unappreciative class, the angry scholar directs his arrows of contempt at the hapless Stoner, who is but one of the zombie-like students at this point in the novel. Archer Sloane asks our young protagonist: "Mr. Shakespeare speaks to you across three hundred years, Mr. Stoner; do you hear him?" (Williams 11). The arrow hits home and young Stoner experiences an epiphany. For the first time in the novel, he becomes aware of himself:

William Stoner realized that for several moments he had been holding his breath. He expelled it gently, minutely aware of his clothing moving upon his body as his breath went out of his lungs. . . . Stoner became aware that his fingers were unclenching their hard grip on his desk-top. He turned his hands about under his gaze, marvelling at their brownness, at the intricate way the nails fit into his blunt finger-ends; he thought he could feel the blood flowing invisibly through the tiny veins and arteries, throbbing delicately and precariously from his fingertips through his body. (Williams 11-12)

The power of Shakespeare's sonnet stuns the numbed senses of Stoner into working. There is no space here for the young protagonist to think about how to exploit his education so that he can get more money, or how best to perform his job. Rather, the existential theme that Sonnet Seventy-Three deals with forces

Stoner to face the fact of his own existence. For the first time he becomes aware that he is a living being, made out of flesh-and-blood and who has the freedom to think and feel.

This is, properly speaking, an experience of the sublime, because any mode of being in the world involves a veiling of the bare fact of existence, even if (paradoxically) one is having an experience of intuiting it. As Martin Heidegger points out in his lecture “What is Metaphysics?” when “man secures to himself what is most properly his . . . What should be examined are beings only, and besides that—nothing; beings alone, and further—nothing.” The awkward syntax here, coupled with the use of the notion of “nothing,” in the translation of Heidegger by David Farrell Krell, shows how ill-equipped language is to express what Heidegger calls *Dasein*, the *inarticulable* and *nigh-unthinkable* facticity of human existence that in turn allows for disciplines like science to exist as a human pursuit.<sup>50</sup> Hence when Sloane asks him again what the sonnet means, Stoner cannot articulate that which he intuits: “Stoner’s eyes lifted slowly and reluctantly. ‘It means,’ he said, and with a small movement raised his hands up toward the air . . . ‘It means,’ he said again, and could not finish what he had begun to say” (Williams 12).

The discussion in the previous chapter on Schiller’s notion of the sublime (see Chapter 2, Section 2, Sub-section 1) sheds some light on the nature of Stoner’s

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<sup>50</sup> I am engaging in a simplification of Heidegger’s philosophy prior to the Second World War to aid in understanding Stoner’s experience of Shakespeare. Charles Guignon’s *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (2006) is a helpful companion when trying to gain a basic understanding of how Heidegger’s philosophy changed throughout his career. Of particular interest is the first section of the book, which provides an “account of ‘Dasein’ (human existence) and of the worldhood of the world in *Being and Time*” (Guignon 3). It is not within the scope of the thesis to discuss either *Dasein* comprehensively as a concept or later Heidegger’s association with National Socialism in the 1930s.

epiphany. To recap, for Schiller the sublime feeling arises from the subject feeling the limits of his body, which sensitises him into being aware of the limitlessness of his mind, where the mind is understood as the consciousness of one's existence as a reasoning being. It becomes clear from the novel's description of post-epiphanic Stoner that the sublime experience of literature has sensitised him to the fact of his own consciousness. The novel's description of Stoner's last two undergraduate years is telling: "He became conscious of himself in a way that he had not done before. Sometimes he looked at himself in a mirror . . . and he wondered if he appeared as ludicrous to others as he did to himself" (Williams 13). Stoner becomes self-aware—it is no coincidence that during this period Stoner is described as seeing himself in the mirror. The idea of seeing oneself in the mirror suggests that Stoner's ability to reflect upon himself is dependent on a split consciousness: the self observing itself from a distance. Having othered himself, Stoner is thus able to wonder if others see him as he himself does. Significantly, the image that one sees in the mirror is also virtual. Here we can recall that aesthetic appreciation relies on an appreciation of only the "mere *representation* of the object" regardless of "how indifferent [one] may be to the *existence of the object of this representation*" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* 37; emphasis added). That aesthetic pleasure is dependent upon the representation of objects and not the objects themselves is telling. Briefly, in Kantian terms, purposiveness (in the case of beauty) or enormity/ power (in the case of sublimity) is *perceived* in an object by the subject who experiences aesthetic pleasure. The representation of the object is of paramount importance. This suggests a mode of engagement with the world that is more dependent on one's subjectivity than interaction with actuality.



Indeed, looking at one's self in the mirror is not only a classic metaphor for self-reflection but also one for narcissism.

The novel's focus on Stoner's psychology provides us with evidence to intuit the Schillerian assumptions behind the birth of Stoner's self-awareness. For instance, we are told that Stoner has been friendless his entire life, but it is only during his undergraduate study of literature that "for the first time in his life he [becomes] aware of loneliness" (Williams 14). The feeling of loneliness requires a monistic self being conscious of its own exclusive boundaries that maintain the distinction between subject and object. This is also why Stoner feels that he "was with [the characters in the classics] in a way that he could never be with his fellows who went from class to class . . . [walking] unheeding in a midwestern air" (Williams 15). Stoner feels closer to the fictional characters he reads about than to his classmates because they have become part of his imagination. His classmates, of course, exist as beings who have their own thoughts and lives outside of his imagination, and therefore cannot be co-opted in this solipsistic manner.

That Stoner's literary education has granted him awareness of his own ability to reason and to feel is evident from the character's own reflection on his past self and his family: "Sometimes he thought of himself as he had been a few years before and was astonished by the memory of that strange figure, brown and passive as the earth from which it emerged. He thought of his parents, and they were nearly as strange as the child they had borne; he felt a mixed pity for them and a distant love" (Williams 15). The inclusion of the appositive in the first sentence of the quotation makes it clear that Stoner's description of the strange figure that is his past self is as brown and passive as the earth. The repetition of the

same adjective “strange” to describe his parents suggests that Stoner thinks of his parents as being like his former self: possessing a passivity stemming from lack of subjecthood, like the inanimate earth that they worked on.

Although the novel restricts us to Stoner’s perspective, the scene where Stoner tells his father about his decision to enter graduate school undercuts the sense that his parents are as passive as the earth. Because Williams intends for Stoner to appear saintly, the novel is structured to constantly reinforce our sense that he suffers for his beliefs. Hence, the interaction between Stoner and his parents when he tells them about his decision to enter graduate school is structured by the novel’s need to sustain its protagonist’s alienation from others so as to facilitate a tragic tone. Thus, Williams has to have Stoner’s father provide his son with some sense that the family is disappointed with his decision to commit his life to the study of literature. Notably, the novel focuses on its protagonist’s pain, not his mother’s or father’s: it spends little time elaborating on her unhappiness, only telling us that Stoner perceives her face “twisted *as if* in pain” as she cries, and that he reacts to this development by getting “heavily” to his feet and staring into the darkness (23; emphasis added). Outside of focusing on Stoner’s pain as opposed to his mother’s, the description of his mother behaving “as if” she were in pain insulates both Stoner and the reader from the viscerality of her unhappiness.

Although the novel attempts to downplay the hurt that Stoner causes his parents, in providing opposition to Stoner’s chosen life path in the form of Stoner’s father, it provides the latter character with a voice that undercuts Stoner’s own view of his parents being like his previous self:

Stoner tried to explain to his father what he intended to do, tried to evoke in him his own sense of significance and purpose. . . . “I don’t know,” his father said. His voice was husky and tired. “I didn’t figure it would turn out like this. I thought I was doing the best for you I could, sending you here.” . . . “I know,” Stoner said. . . . “Will you be alright? I could come back for a while this summer and help. I could—” “If you think you ought to stay here and study your books, then that’s what you ought to do. Your ma and me can manage.”

(Williams 22-23)

Since we are restricted to Stoner’s consciousness in the narration, his father’s thoughts are a closed book to us. It is clear, however, that his father is not as passive as Stoner thinks he is, that is, completely subject to the vicissitudes of life without the awareness to respond to changes. We know that it was the father’s decision to send Stoner to university to study agriculture so that productivity on the land could be improved, as is evident from this speech to his son: “Seems like the land gets drier and harder to work every year. . . . County agent says they got new ideas, ways of doing things they teach you at the University. Maybe he’s right. *Sometimes when I’m working the field I get to thinking.* . . . You go on to the University come fall” (Williams 4; emphasis added). Indeed, this ties in with his father’s assertion that he is trying to do the best he can for his child in the earlier quotation. His last words to Stoner on the matter, telling him that he ought to continue with graduate school if that is what he desires, are perhaps made out of bitterness but no less indicative of a thinking subject. Although saddened and disappointed, he recognises that Stoner has prioritised his desire to study literature

above the need to work on the farm, and for this reason, he rejects Stoner's offer (made out of guilt, and not out of any true desire to help) to help out at the farm during the summer holidays.

This observation allows us to better articulate what Stoner's education has taught him. It is arguable that Stoner's aesthetic education has taught him a kind of self-reflection that his father lacks. It is not so much the ability to reason (that his father clearly exhibits) but rather the ability to wonder about one's existential purpose beyond that of eking out a living, to appreciate, among other things, the (re)presentations of life and ideas in works of art. Perhaps this is why Stoner's father intimates that the outcome of Stoner choosing to continue with his studies is not ideal and that that the outcome is not, to him, "the best" for his son. Stoner's father's reply shows understanding of his son's choice to continue his studies, but little empathy or sympathy for his son's decision. What Stoner's father does not possess is the mode of subjectivity that his son gains upon his study of literature, for better or worse. This mode of subjectivity has given Stoner the ability to think upon philosophical matters and to use his reason in a way that apparently involves reflecting upon one's existence and why one chooses to live life, but at the cost of self-absorption.

### **Gender and Epistemology in the Schillerian Sublime: Solipsism as Auto-Immune Mechanism**

One can better understand how self-awareness becomes self-absorption upon the examination of Stoner's initial interactions with his wife, Edith. His very first encounter with her highlights to him the difference between his (masculine)

self and the (feminine) other: “Stoner paused in the doorway, caught by his vision of the young woman. Her long, delicately featured face smiled at those around her, and her slender, almost fragile fingers deftly manipulated urn and cup; looking at her, Stoner was assailed by a consciousness of his own heavy clumsiness” (Williams 47). Edith’s appearance sensitises Stoner to a vision of sexual difference. The physical differences between him and the young girl that he has gazed at force upon him a sense of self-awareness and of his difference from the other.

Moreover, it is the inscrutability of the other that attracts Stoner to Edith:

[Suddenly] he met [Edith’s] eyes; they were large and pale and seemed to shine with a light within themselves (Williams 47).

[It] was [Edith’s] eyes that caught and held him, as they had done the day before. . . . When he looked at them he seemed drawn out of himself, into a mystery that he could not apprehend (Williams 51).

The text repeatedly uses the word “seem” to describe the impact of Edith’s eyes on Stoner’s psyche. This insistence upon how Edith *appears* to Stoner reminds the reader that the descriptions are not the manifest reality of the novel but rather are a description of how Stoner reacts to Edith and the attraction that she holds for him.

Stoner’s self-awareness, as I have outlined, is a result of the masochistic mixture of pleasure and pain involved in the Schillerian sublime. His initial interactions with Edith show how this model of becoming self-aware encourages self-absorption—Edith becomes the mysterious feminine other that Stoner’s imagination fails to apprehend. This relationship dynamic allows for Stoner to

experience the sublime. This becomes evident when Edith delivers a long monologue about her early life to Stoner. Stoner's description of Edith as she is delivering the monologue suggests that her speech is a neurotic outburst, the manifestation of some sort of mental illness on her part: "[Edith's] eyes were fixed straight before her, her face was blank, and her lips moved as if, without understanding, she read from an invisible book. . . . She did not seem to notice [Stoner]; her eyes remained fixed straight ahead" (Williams 53). Stoner's reaction to this disturbing development in their interactions is what he calls love: "When [Edith's monologue] was over, he felt that they were strangers in a way that he had not thought they would be, and he knew that he was in love" (Williams 53). The peculiar phrase "strangers in a way that he had not thought they would be" to describe Stoner's feelings towards his would-be fiancée suggests to us that the attraction she holds for him is the sublime. Stoner cannot *imagine* a frame of reference that explains Edith's behaviour. She makes what Stoner calls "a confession" (Williams 53) to him while they were still acquaintances; there is a disjunct between the intimacy of the content that she discloses to him and the social context in which this disclosure occurred. Stoner's imagination struggles with the representation of this disjunct. Stoner does not manage to articulate exactly what way in which they were strangers. This difficulty he faces in placing Edith and her interaction with him is a relationship between strangers that Stoner "had not thought," and is something that we are told Stoner *feels*. This feeling, however, is understood by Stoner as being in love: "he *knew* that he was in love" (emphasis added). The difficulty imagining his relationship to Edith, a point of tension, is

resolved by Stoner's conclusion that this difficulty was an indication of being in love.

Stoner's conclusion that he is in love with Edith after his failure to imagine his relationship to her is puzzling unless we conclude that he is basing this conclusion on his prior experience with the notion of love. The last mention of the concept "love" before the scene with Edith occurs in Stoner's meeting with Sloane (his mentor) at the end of his undergraduate degree. In this meeting, Stoner tells Sloane that he "can't quite realize . . . that [he'd] be leaving the University at the end of the year" (Williams 18). He decides that he cannot return to farm life, but "the decisiveness of his voice surprised him" and the decision that he has made fills him with "some wonder" (Williams 18). Stoner has trouble realizing that his mode of existence as a student of literature is only temporary and cannot quite imagine why his studies are so important to him. His relationship to his studies is so unclear that the certainty of his decision not to return to agrarian life is a surprise to himself. It is Sloane who provides the noun "love" to name Stoner's relationship to literature: "'It's love, Mr. Stoner,' said Sloane cheerfully. 'You are in love. It's as simple as that'" (Williams 19). In this pivotal scene, Sloane suggests to Stoner that the latter's inability to imagine and articulate how important literature is to him is a sign of "love." The word comes to signify the failure of imagination in the Schillerian sublime: as argued, Stoner experienced this with Shakespeare as an undergraduate in his first year. Thus, the structural parallel drawn between Stoner's difficulty in understanding his relationship to literature and his difficulty with placing Edith in relation to himself after her monologue leads Stoner to conclude that he is indeed in love with her. Since Stoner understands experiencing

the sublime as love, there is no motivation for him to change his dynamic with Edith: in fact, in order for it to be possible for Stoner to continue enjoying the sublime, he needs to constantly re-enact this relationship dynamic of seeing her as a mystery.

This sets the stage for a dynamic between Stoner and Edith where what she means to him and how she relates to him is entirely his own making. His treatment of Edith as an object of aesthetic pleasure ties in with the novel's portrayal of her as not being aware of her own needs and desires: "Edith Elaine Bostwick was probably not aware of what she said to William Stoner that evening [in her monologue], and if she had been she could not have realized its significance" (Williams 53). Stoner, however, "thought he understood" her monologue as "a plea for help" (Williams 53). The narration here highlights Stoner's subjectivity through the word "thought," pointing out that Stoner may not have been accurate in understanding Edith's speech as a "plea for help." Stoner has to exert himself to *think* the mystery of Edith using his reason in this case.<sup>51</sup> Because she remains a mystery to him, he has to constantly engage in a completely subjective construal of Edith's relationship to himself. Despite their subsequent conversations being

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<sup>51</sup> The narration's suggestion that Edith is neurotic – not only through Stoner's perception that her speech is a neurotic outburst but also via its suggestion that Edith was probably unaware of what she said to Stoner (and even if she were aware that she had made that speech to him she lacked the cognitive and emotional faculties to process the significance of her speech) – is in line with Stoner's use of her to experience the sublime. Hélène Cixous's and Catherine Clément's *The Newly Born Woman* suggests that Edith is unimaginable for Stoner because she lies outside of the neat systems that form the symbolic order. This unimaginability is what Stoner construes as love, but it is also what allows for his perception that she is mentally ill: "Societies do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are, if one may say so, between symbolic systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility. Dangerous for them, because those are the people afflicted with what we call madness, anomaly, perversion, or whom we even label, says Mauss, "neurotics, ecstasies, outsiders, carnies, drifters, jugglers and acrobats." (7).



“curiously impersonal,” Stoner felt that “there was a kind of ease between them, and he *imagined* that they had an understanding” (Williams 55-56; emphasis added). Stoner’s relationship with Edith can be compared to his relationship with fictional characters: as earlier mentioned, Stoner feels closer to fictional characters than to his real classmates because the former exists in his imagination. In this context, we can better begin to understand Stoner’s feelings for Edith: she is a stranger not in the way that his classmates are strangers to him, but in the way that characters in the classics are to him—distanced and other yet curiously intimate because of the life that he gives them through his imagination. Because he relates to her in this way, he can completely ignore whatever Edith says in favour of the narrative in his imagination—after his declaration of love, she insists to him “with some hint of animation” that “she had never thought of him that way [romantically], that she had never imagined, that she did not know [anything about romantic love]” (Williams 56). Stoner’s (aesthetic) distance from the actual object of his desire (Edith) means that he is able to ignore any input from Edith that contradicts the relationship construed in his imagination.

The gendered dynamic in Schillerian aesthetics is played out on a literal level in the novel with a (masculine) subject who derives aesthetic pleasure from a (feminine) object. I bring attention to this gendered dynamic because it echoes the gender dynamics of that which Stoner tries so hard to resist: a world where one engages in work and advancement of one’s career only for the purpose of earning money to survive. The notion of an active masculine subject opposed to a passive feminine object is in line with what Helena Lopata calls “gender stratification” in American society, a phenomenon that can be understood as the world being

defined “as containing two spheres, the private sphere of women and the public sphere of men” (176). Although “most historians and sociologists date the development of gender stratification to the combination of capitalism and industrialism,” it is a form of “age-old patriarchy” that has been practiced since “ancient Mesopotamia and Blumberg” (Lopata 176). In social systems where men own property, “a complex imagery of women's personality, defined as ‘true womanhood’ . . . emerged to justify their absence from [the public] sphere” (Lopata 178). According to Lopata, this vision of womanhood defined women “as physically and emotionally weak, passive, submissive, needful of protection, best suited to the private world of the home and small children” (178).

Lopata’s insights about gender stratification in societies help us to understand the similarities between Stoner, his father, and Edith’s father in regard to their attitude towards women. Although Stoner may feel that his farmer father is now alien to him, the gender dynamic that he sets up in his relationship with Edith is very similar to the views of his father on the role of women in society. Stoner’s father is part of a hierarchal system that supports the functioning of a capitalistic society—he works on the land and agents make profits distributing and selling the fruits of his labour. In his worldview, women are needed to make male lives more comfortable: “I’m glad [Stoner’s] getting himself a fine woman. A man *needs* himself a woman, to do for him and give him comfort. Now you be good to William. He ought to have someone who can be good to him” (Williams 65; emphasis added). Unsurprisingly, Edith’s parents, despite being a step above Stoner’s family in class, have a view of marriage that neatly ties into that of Stoner’s father.

Edith's father, Horace Bostwick, spares no effort in advertising Edith's class advantage to Stoner and to impress upon him that his duty would be to provide for his wife: "Edith has had—advantages—you know. A fine home, servants, the best schools. . . . I find myself afraid, with the reduced standard which would be inevitable with your—ah, condition—that. . ." (Williams 60; last ellipsis original). This is but an advertising bluff, however. Edith's parents want to marry their daughter off, and when Bostwick interprets Stoner's reply to his concerns as backing away from marrying Edith, he displays "such an expression of concern, dismay and something like fear that [Stoner] was surprised into silence" (Williams 60). Bostwick then "hastily" makes it clear that Stoner "misunderstands" him as having objections to the marriage and says that his apparent outlining of Edith's discomfort was a "[mere attempt] to lay before [the latter] certain—difficulties—that might arise in the future" (Williams 60). Edith chooses to withdraw during this talk, leaving the decision-making to her parents and Stoner. When her mother calls her back to the room after the talk has concluded, her father tells her that "he and her 'young man' had had a nice talk and that he had his blessing" (Williams 60). Her reaction is telling: "If it's to be done . . . I want it done quickly" (Williams 61). Edith, true to her upbringing, leaves all the decision making to her father and Stoner. It does not even occur to her to oppose the decision. Although the novel gives Edith little space to articulate her unhappiness, this utterance of hers suggests that prospect of marriage is clearly unpleasant to her; unlike delighted fiancées; she simply wants the affair over with as quickly as possible.

Ultimately, this neglect of Edith's feelings comes back to harm Stoner. His marriage is a failure because he has not factored in the way her upbringing has

shaped her—neither has he factored in her feelings regarding having a romantic relationship and getting married. After they move into a house together, Edith insists on obsessively cleaning the house and performing household duties by herself: “When Stoner tried to help her she became stubborn . . . [H]e needed the time for his studies, she said, this was *her* job. Puzzled and helpless, he withdrew his aid” (Williams 75; emphasis original). Sex with her husband, to Edith, is “enduring violation,” and attempts by Stoner to hold a dialogue about the situation are “accepted [by her] as a reflection upon her adequacy and her self, and she became as morosely withdrawn from him as she did when he made love to her” (Williams 75-76). Despite the pain that Edith might have felt upon the failure of her own marriage, the novel chooses, again, to focus on Stoner’s suffering instead of hers: “[W]ithin a month [Stoner] knew that his marriage was a failure; within a year he stopped hoping that it would improve” (Williams 75). Stoner is initially puzzled and then in despair because he does not realize how their relationship dynamic works. Edith does her best to play the dutiful housewife—to the point where she becomes a caricature of one—who does all the domestic labour in the house. In this relationship model, she has to play out her prescribed gender role and so does her husband. Dialogue and negotiation between them about relationship roles do not come into play at all, and the female is responsible for the domestic happiness.

As Lopata has pointed out, patriarchy is certainly not unique to industrialised societies practicing capitalism, but the aforementioned gendered relationship roles definitely play a part in facilitating its functioning. The particular family dynamic of a female homemaker in charge of the domestic sphere while the male worker goes out to labour supports the exploitation of male workers, who are

then freed up from their familial duties to work long hours so as to maximise profits for their employers. At each level of exploitation, the focus is on benefiting one's self, with little consideration for the feelings, welfare or benefit of the other. In other words, the gendered dynamic of power and exploitation that exists between masculine subject and feminine object is echoed at each level of society in a hierarchal system: the subject/ object relations in the family mirror the relations between the managerial and working classes in society. As argued, these relations are reproduced in the structure of the aesthetic pleasure of the sublime.

Stoner is unable to realize that his education in literature reproduces relationships with an unequal power balance because Schillerian *Bildung* itself is ideological: it can perpetuate existing power structures in society precisely by suggesting that it is outside of these structures.<sup>52</sup> In his essay, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," Herbert Marcuse deftly traces how Aristotle ordered different forms of knowledge in "a hierarchy of value whose nadir is functional acquaintance with the necessities of everyday life and whose zenith is philosophical knowledge" (65). This hierarchy assumes "a fundamental break *between the necessary and useful on the one hand and the 'beautiful' on the other*" (Marcuse

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<sup>52</sup> The term "ideology" now is freighted with so many different connotations, definitions and uses that it would be impossible for me to deal with it comprehensively in this thesis, much less with this chapter. The collection *Ideology*, put together and edited by Terry Eagleton, is a selection of seminal texts from prominent thinkers like Marx, Althusser, and Habermas among others that traces the evolution of the word and explores the debates around it. Regarding the sense in which "ideology" is used in this chapter, Eagleton's incisive definition of the word in the introduction to his book will suffice: "[Ideology] is the bourgeois revolution at the level of the mind itself; and its ambition is nothing less than to reconstruct that mind from the ground up, dissecting the ways we receive and combine our sense-data so as to intervene in this process *and deflect it to desirable political ends*" (2; emphasis added). The implication of this definition, as Eagleton notes, is that "to dub an idea 'ideological' is not just to call it false or deceptive, but to claim that it fulfils a particular kind of deceptive or mystifying function within social life as a whole" (6-7).

65; emphasis added). According to Marcuse, “Aristotle did not conceal this state of affairs” (67) where “most men had to spend their lives providing for necessities while a small number devoted themselves to enjoyment and truth” (70). The rise of industrial capitalism, however, resulted in a masking of the relations of production in society that allows for philosophical and aesthetic enjoyment via the concept of what he calls “culture”: “In the bourgeois epoch the theory of the relationship between necessity and beauty, labour and enjoyment, underwent decisive changes. First, the view that concern with the highest values is appropriated as a profession by particular social strata disappears. In its place emerges the thesis of the universality and universal validity of ‘culture’” (Marcuse 69). Raymond Williams provides a helpful gloss on the sense of the word “culture” as used by Marcuse in the context of his essay: it can be understood as “the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (90). Marcuse’s work provides us with a cultural context for Stoner’s experiences and behaviour that echoes Readings’s claims about *Bildung* supporting what he calls nation-state capitalism: although the Schillerian sublime seems to resist the ugliness of unequal power relations in society by evoking a feeling of transcendence from ostensible mundane societal realities, it actually plays a part in perpetuating and sustaining the social relations of power in the reality that it claims to transcend.

Unsurprisingly, the hierarchal nature of social relations affects Stoner’s ability to teach literature and engage in literary scholarship. This can be shown through his interactions with Lomax (a colleague who is a professor of Romantic literature) and his pet student, Walker. The text portrays the university as a

sanctuary from the exigencies of life for people like Stoner, with its heart not in the other disciplines like soil chemistry but in the goals of aesthetic education that allow one to escape or counter the forces of the “outside world.” The “true nature of the university,” according to Stoner’s friend, Dave Masters, is that it is “[an asylum . . . a rest home, for the infirm, the aged, the discontent, and the otherwise incompetent” (Williams 28-29). However, as I will argue, while Stoner is heroized through his defence of the university system against characters like Lomax’s student, the text also provides enough evidence to show that Stoner’s resistance to these characters is dependent upon and perpetuates the unequal power relations such as the subject/object relations between him and his wife.

Plot-wise, we see that Stoner sacrifices his love affair and his career prospects by making an enemy out of Lomax by failing his pet student, Walker, out of an apparent sense of duty to scholarship and teaching. In Walker’s preliminary oral comprehensives for his PhD, he is shown to be “unable to answer a single one of [the simple questions asked of an undergraduate] satisfactorily” (Williams 166). Because of this lack of knowledge, Stoner feels that “for [Walker] to be a teacher would be a—disaster” (Williams 168). Williams has Stoner repeat this view twice: the first time at Walker’s oral comprehensives and the second time when he is discussing Walker’s orals with his friend Gordon Finch (Williams 171). This is true not only because Stoner thinks that Walker knows how to market himself: in Walker’s eyes, Stoner sees “something cold and calculating and watchful” that makes him conclude that Walker’s entire performance is “a bluff” that is a marketing tactic (Williams 146). Stoner sees Walker as “the world” intruding on the asylum of the university (Williams 172). Walker’s connection with Lomax is

uncomfortably reminiscent of the ugly academic politics no one wants to admit when talking about academic publication or the granting of PhDs: the huge advantage that one can have in one's field if one forms the right academic connections.<sup>53</sup> The ugliness of such politics cannot be divorced from an alienation from one's labour—seeking rapid progress in one's career to the point of sacrificing quality in one's duties.

That said, the text makes it difficult to judge whether Walker is truly as incompetent and ill-intentioned as Stoner thinks he is. After all, whatever Walker's flaws are, it is evident that Stoner wants Walker to respect his power in the classroom uncritically and does not put effort into engaging in dialogue with him. The dynamic involved is hierarchal and focused on the teacher's intellectual interests at the expense of the student's. The student is there as object, to reflect and promote the interests and ideas of the teacher. For instance, the altercation that happens between Stoner and Walker during Stoner's graduate seminar does not allow the reader to conclude that Walker's behaviour in the classroom is truly uncalled for. Here is Showalter's version of what happens in the novel:

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<sup>53</sup> The realities of academic life are chronicled in Jorge Cham's popular *PHD Comics* series, where he notes that "there are no grades in grad school (you just have to play well with others)." He refers to the relationship between graduate students, their advisors and the institutions that they work for as resembling a Ponzi scheme in the comic, "Beware the Profzi Scheme." These are burdens that few graduate students or professors would talk about publicly: they are accepted realities that one has to accept if one wants to be a scholar today. But the popularity of the comics attests to the anger, desperation and frustration that all PhD students and academics feel under such structural strain. Karen Kelsky's book, *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide To Turning Your Ph.D into a Job* (2015), provides evidence that interpersonal connections with powerful senior academics is useful for someone who wants to succeed in academia. She lambasts many advisors in the USA who equip their supervisees with domain knowledge and research skills but not what she calls "career-related skills": these include, among other things "cultivating well-known reference letter writers" (15-16).



Walker shows up late for the class and interrupts Stoner's lecture on grammar and rhetoric with annoying questions about the relevance of grammar to great poetry. After a few weeks, Stoner and the other students silence Walker's interventions, but he finally gets his say in a seminar paper that challenges the premises of the course and critiques the paper of a female student whom Stoner particularly admires.

Stoner is outraged. After class, he charges Walker with dodging the assignment, avoiding research and violating seminar decorum. Startled, Walker protests that he "always thought that disagreement was healthy. I assumed that you were big enough to—." Stoner goes ballistic. Accusing Walker of "laziness and dishonesty and ignorance," he threatens to flunk him unless he writes a new paper or hands in the manuscript of his talk to see if "something can be salvaged." ("Classic Stoner'")

There are several points to be made here. First, the relevance of grammar to the aesthetic, or the poetic, is not at all something that critics (or even writers) completely agree on. Walker's challenge is therefore not radical given the history of the subject—it is perfectly legitimate in a classroom where poetry is being discussed. In fact, such a question is almost expected from a Romantic scholar, particularly one who is working on Shelley. Only consider Shelley's notion of poetry, his views of the poet's relation to his work and the relation of readers to poetry: "Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be *'the expression of the imagination'*: and poetry is connate with the origin of man. . . . A poet is a

nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, *who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.*" (Shelley; emphasis added).

One way to understand Shelley's Romantic definition of poetry is to see it as a reaction against the "codified rules of doctrinaire forms of neo-classicism" (Abrams, *Mirror* 123). In Ferdinand Brunetière's words, Romanticism, defined as "the disorder of the imagination—passionate in its incorrectness" ("le désordre de l'Imagination—fougue dans l'incorrection)," is opposed to Classicism, defined as "the regularity of good sense—*perfection in measure*" ("la régularité du bon sens—la perfection dans mesure") (my trans.; qtd. in Phelps 4; emphasis added). According to this view, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and the combination of "long and [deep]" thought are the essence of good poetry (Wordsworth, *Ballads* 98). Grammar is not essential to the quiddity of poetry, and Walker is at least precise when he asks Stoner "What can . . . grammar have to do with poetry? Fundamentally I mean. *Real* poetry" (Williams 138; emphasis original). Stoner's response to Walker is dismissive and shows that he does not want (or is unable) to consider that the differences between their views of poetry stem from different assumptions regarding the aesthetic. In response to Walker's question, Stoner merely tells Walker that the "relationship [between grammar and poetry] will become clearer to [him] as [they] go on, as [they] see the extent to which the poets and dramatists of even the middle and late Renaissance were indebted to the Latin rhetoricians" (Williams 138-139). Stoner claims that the Renaissance dramatists and poets were indebted to their Latin predecessors in response to

Walker's question. But he does not address the central assumption in Walker's question, which is that grammar itself is not central to what constitutes poetry: it is not a question of indebtedness (influence on or reaction against other writers) of a poet to other poets but merely one of whether grammar is an essential part of the aesthetic. Also, Stoner is obviously aware of Ben Jonson's claim that Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek" since he corrects Walker on the reference when the rest of the class laughs at Walker's misattribution of the quote (Williams 139). He does not engage with Walker's intent in bringing up the quotation, which is to challenge Stoner's claim that the Renaissance poets were indebted to their Latin predecessors.

Ironically, the intimacy implied by an epiphanic relationship with literature causes Stoner to confuse reactions to scholarship with the reactions to their authors. Despite Stoner's relationship to literature being Romantic in nature insofar as it is deeply personal, he chooses to engage with literature via a grammar-focused approach more in line with Classicism. The conflation of the two approaches allows for Stoner to believe that his subjective views about literature are objective: in terms of *form*, this repeats the contradiction of *Bildung* as nurturing an objective ahistorical subjectivity that can be traced to an interested politico-economic aim *a la* my reading of Schiller's sublime in the previous chapter (see Chapter 2, Section 2, Sub-section 2). This contradiction plays out in two consecutive moments over two pages in his confrontation with Walker about the latter's presentation.

In his presentation, Walker takes issue with the views promoted in the paper presented by Katherine Driscoll, a graduate student whose work Stoner

admires and whom he later has an affair with. After the presentation, Stoner apologises to Katherine for Walker's behaviour: "I'm sorry he attacked you," he tells her (Williams 148). When Stoner confronts Walker about his presentation, Walker correctly intuits that Stoner may have taken offence. He defends himself by asserting that "intended no offence"; he protests that his remarks "were not intended personally" and that "if feelings have been hurt, [he] shall be most happy to explain to the young lady" that his presentation was not a personal attack (Williams 149). Yet, when Walker offers this defence, Stoner cuts him off and tells him that his problems with Walker have "nothing to do with the young lady, or with [himself], or with anything except [Walker's] performance," completely contradicting what Stoner has said to Katherine (Williams 149). Rightly, when confronted with this assertion from Stoner, Walker says that he "[doesn't] understand at all . . . unless [Stoner's anger] is simply a matter of disagreement" (Williams 149). Certainly, Showalter (earlier quoted) was right about Stoner as he indeed does not consider the possibility that "disagreement is healthy" and instead "goes ballistic": instead of engaging Walker on how to discuss different ideas in a classroom he accuses Walker of "evading the issue" and begins quibbling with Walker over whether Walker's paper (much overdue) was completed at the last minute (Williams 149). Stoner does want to transmit knowledge, but will only consider his job done if the student is an object for furthering his ideas. Unlike Lomax, he does not seem to care for grooming students who may have interesting ideas.

At stake here is the ability to be open to otherness. Lomax is aware that Walker is not the most knowledgeable or the most coherent of graduate students.

We know that Lomax thinks that Walker has “imagination,” “enthusiasm” and “integrity” (Williams 181). But Lomax tells Stoner that although Walker’s work “promises to be brilliant,” “it will not be what some would call . . . *sound*, but it is most *imaginative*” (Williams 140; emphasis in original). We are told that his presentation on his dissertation “[is] lucid, forthright and intelligent . . . at times it was *almost brilliant*” (Williams 158; emphasis added). Both Stoner and Lomax are in agreement regarding the apparent quality of Walker’s project. Walker’s performance regarding his thesis even stuns Stoner, who “could not believe that this was the same man who had taken his [own] seminar” (Williams 158). However, he knows nothing outside of his field of study (Shelley), and it is this that makes Stoner fail him. I would not be so quick to conclude that Walker is “a bullshit artist” (Kreider) “an intellectual charlatan” (Wiegenstein 42) or “a lazy, incompetent fellow for whom Lomax has special fondness” (Westhues). Knowledge does not equal intelligence, and it might just be that Walker is very intelligent but grossly under-informed (or simply over-specialised). Stoner never allows himself to believe that Walker might be truly intelligent but extremely ignorant. This is due to a view of scholarship that is informed by his own practice. Certainly, he sees himself as giving Walker a chance to show that he is informed about his area of study when he questions Walker about Byron’s work. Walker shows himself to be unfamiliar with Byron’s poem, and from Walker’s lack of knowledge, Stoner concludes that he is a fraud who is devoid of all scholarly (and teacherly) potential. He tells Lomax that Walker is unable to answer the simple questions put to him, and yet presents a very good thesis because of Lomax’s aid: “[I]t is natural that you two [Lomax and Walker] should have talked over his thesis subject. So when you questioned him on

his thesis he did very well" (Williams 167; emphasis added). Stoner's statement achieves the appearance of objectivity because he has paused to phrase his words "carefully" (Williams 167). But the implications of Stoner's statement are clear. The crucial conjunction "so" in Stoner's speech creates a logical linkage between the discussions Lomax has with Walker about his thesis and Walker's exceptional insights in his own thesis. The insinuation that Stoner makes is clear: Lomax has either fed Walker all the material for his dissertation or has scripted questions and answers for Walker's oral examinations. Lomax is understandably furious at the implications of Stoner's statement and is angered to the point of shouting (Williams 167).

Stoner's bad faith regarding Walker outside of their personal tiff can be attributed to his notion of what scholarship should involve. When Stoner graduates with his B.A., he sees his scholarly future as "a territory ahead that awaited his exploration" (Williams 24). Here again the subject/ object relationship surfaces in the metaphor used. The active scholar/ subject takes the shape of the explorer, and the passive object of discovery is the body of knowledge. This view of scholarship places emphasis on the mastery of knowledge and not acuity of thought, or the interest of ideas. We can intuit this if we contrast Stoner's description of his own unexceptional but competent PhD with his description of Walker's work in the previous paragraph: "[Stoner] read [his dissertation] through and judged it to be *sound*" (Williams 83; emphasis added). Also, as Stoner's attitude towards Walker reveals his own assumptions about scholarship, we can begin to question whether his relative unimportance as a scholar has more import than merely lending pathos to the tragedy. After all, we are given to know that

Stoner is not an exceptional thinker: “[Stoner’s] expectations for his first book had been both cautious and modest, and they had been appropriate; one reviewer had called it ‘pedestrian’ and another had called it ‘a competent survey’” (Williams 104). This is not surprising in light of what we have just discovered about Stoner’s attitude towards scholarship. He is not open to disagreement, and therefore he prevents his own scholarship from being enriched by scholars who may hold different views from him.

To sustain the pleasure of the sublime, Stoner cannot move away from reproducing hierarchal gendered relationship dynamic that facilitates the current workings of power in the society that he thinks he is taking refuge from. In many of his relationships (students, wife, work), Stoner has to maintain a subject position and others in his life take the position of disempowered object. However, this is disastrous not only for Stoner’s domestic and professional life but for the bigger project of the university as well. If the project of the Kantian university is, as referred to in Chapter 1, to nurture the reason of the citizens of the state so that they would be better able to serve the state and be complicit with laws that are dictated by reason, then Stoner does the project of the university harm by not engaging students whose views differ from his. In fact, the ugly episode with Walker demonstrates clearly the auto-immunity involved in the idea of the university. The aesthetic experience at the heart of the university, the Schillerian sublime, is that which ostensibly nurtures a subject of reason. However, the awareness of one’s self as a reasoning being comes with an epistemological framework that encourages the objectification of others to induce the feeling of

sublime in the subject. This mechanism of othering traps the subject in solipsism, preventing him from wanting (or being able to) interact with others.

The consequences of the Schillerian sublime as Stoner's aesthetic education harm him on a personal level. First, his tiff with Walker causes ruin to his love affair with graduate student Katherine Driscoll, as Lomax manipulates the office politics in the department in such a way as to separate them (Williams 218-219). Secondly, Stoner's career suffers because of Lomax. Although tenure protects him from getting fired, Lomax forces him to teach classes that he dislikes with a terrible schedule for a while (Williams 228) and tries to force him to retire at retirement age against his will (Williams 263-264). Stoner's professional trials would be much worse—but he is fortuitously protected from more serious career problems by his friend Gordon Finch (the dean of the department).

The larger implications of Stoner's views on scholarship and pedagogy are, however, devastating for the university project. Ironically, his teaching style does not encourage his students to use their reason or even to trust their intuitions about literature but rather to obey institutional power or face the consequences, reproducing the very situation that Schiller is trying to prevent through his proposition that the populace undergo an aesthetic education. The university, in this model, becomes a drone mill where students learn to reproduce and continue the current power dynamics in society. This is effected at both an ideological level (students are not allowed to dissent to the views of the powers-that-be) but also at an attitudinal level (students learn that society is hierarchal, and learn how to treat others less privileged than themselves). With this sort of pedagogy in place, the university may indeed teach students (like Stoner) that there is more to life than



the pursuit of money, but it also reproduces unequal power dynamics that enable the exploitation of labour and a lack of care for the less empowered.

Thus, the apparent sanctuary of the university from unpleasant societal forces promotes, in insidious ways, the inequalities of the rat race that it attempts to immunise its students from. The Schillerian sublime as a motivation for scholarship also proves to be harmful to the very project of scholarship if we think of it as the use of reason for the good of society. Being trapped in one's own solipsistic thoughts greatly limits the amount of knowledge one has (of others, among other things) and this subsequently limits the objects that reason can be used on. It also does not allow for a more interactive and fruitful relationship with the knowledge that one deals with as the monadic subject is bounded. Knowledge comes in passively and is collected, becomes part of the landscape that one admires, but one is not changed in any meaningful way, and as a consequence, one's scholarly work remains static. This explains Stoner's mediocrity as a scholar, but also the observations that Rebecca Jopling makes about Stoner's actions in his personal life: "Stoner may experience positive feelings about working with literature, but any insights he may experience from reading and writing about the finest literature the English, Latin, and Greek traditions have produced do not incite, encourage, mandate, or even gently suggest to him that he make adjustments, small or large, to his own personal life".

### **The Schillerian Sublime as Readerly Affect**

The novel offers a commentary on the sublime feeling as aesthetic education not only textually but also meta-textually by evoking the Schillerian

sublime in its readers for tragic effect. This is achieved through various textual methods that involve evoking but not explicitly stating the significance of Stoner's apparently humble life and the struggles that he faces, increasing the gravitas of the text. The first of these methods is the restraint and clarity of the prose which suggest to us the ineffability of the importance of Stoner's life. As Lee Clark Mitchell writes in his insightful article on style in *Stoner*, we begin the novel faced with a terse, "strangely listless obituary," with the "reported life" of the protagonist "reduced to telegraphic prose" (140). These "bleak paragraphs suggest that reticence itself might be a correlative to the life being chronicled, matching Williams's taciturn style with his subject's emotional costiveness" (Mitchell 140). The restraint of Williams's style has a steady rhythm that moves us temporally forward in the novel, interrupted only by Stoner's moments of sublime epiphanies that short-circuit time (Mitchell 144). Near the end of his essay, Mitchell concludes that Williams's plain style "triumphs by making us realize the worth of words used sparingly, of lives lived prudently, and of the fitting accord between verbal restraint and suitably judicious behaviour" (158). This is certainly true for people like Mitchell himself, who, despite his incisive analysis of the novel's prose, ultimately joins the chorus of commendatory voices about the novel's ideological propositions (159). Like Stoner we are made to feel that the novel contains "a sense of wonder and disbelief at [its] own temerity" in its own writing "and the responsibility [it] had assumed" (Williams 104). The restrained quality of the prose enacts a sense of humility and proportion that never quite voices the ambition of its ideological, Schillerian claims about the purpose of the university. The philosophical explanation of Stoner's literary epiphanies via Romantic thought, given here in this

chapter, is missing, and instead looms large as something ungraspable by the imagination, evoking the sublime feeling as a sense of the significance of Stoner's life.

Next, the novel excludes other characters' thoughts while melding our consciousness with Stoner's through free indirect discourse, evoking his sublime experiences in ourselves while excluding (possibly explanatory) perspectives from other characters. For instance, we are told that when he first sees the university, "Stoner had a sudden sense of security and serenity he had never felt before" (Williams 5). This supports the notion of the university as sanctuary. We are brought into Stoner's consciousness here: the elimination of the introductory "he thought" or "he felt" blinds us to Stoner's subjectivity. Moreover, we are not given access to the consciousnesses of other characters. Thus, we empathise with him when he suffers Edith's behaviour, and when he gets into an academic tussle with Lomax and Walker. Since we are put into Stoner's headspace, we are put into the subject position in the earlier mentioned gendered relationship dynamic that is necessary for the feeling of the Schillerian sublime and experience it when Stoner does. For instance, Stoner re-experiences the ineffability of the love for his field of study on reading Katherine Driscoll's book: "It was a passion neither of the mind nor of the flesh; rather it was a force that comprehended them both, *as if* they were but the matter of love, its specific substance. To a woman or to a poem, it said, simply: Look! I am alive" (Williams 259; emphasis added). How this love for scholarship operates is left largely unsaid. We are told that it encompasses both mind and flesh, and that is linked to the *appearance* of the mind and flesh as the substance of this love. We are not told how the former is related to the latter as

the semi-colon suggests a linkage between the two independent clauses but eliminates the need for specifying the exact relationship between them. Also, the highlighting of the latter as appearance enhances the sense of its ineffability. The quotation hammers home the point by repeating that this love is simply the intuition of one's life, echoing and reaffirming Stoner's epiphanic experience upon reading Shakespeare all those years ago in Sloane's undergraduate class.

The same mechanism is at work when Stoner nears the end of his life and contemplates his relationship with Edith: "Almost without regret he looked at [Edith] now. . . . If I had been stronger, he thought; if I had known more; if I could have understood. And finally, mercilessly, he thought: if I had loved her more. As if it were a long distance it had to go, his hand moved . . . and touched her hand" (Williams 282). The novel does not ever make it clear in what way Stoner should have been stronger to improve their relationship, or how this would have helped the situation. Neither does it specify what should have been known or should have been understood, or how more (Schillerian) love would have helped. Again, , as with the previous quotation, the semi-colon here suggests a linkage without specifying what said linkages are. The short phrases present at the end of the previous quotation and at the beginning of this quotation speed up the rhythm of the information delivered to the reader, but the information given is inadequate in helping us fully grasp the realisation that Stoner has. These features in the text stage the gap between the understanding and the imagination and the gap between self and other, dramatized by the perception of the "long distance" that Stoner has to move to touch his wife's hand. We are told that Stoner could have

done better, but we are left with a sense of sublimity born out of the text's suggestion that Stoner's realisations are impossible to imagine or fully intuit.

The distance that allows for the sublime feeling is constantly at play in the novel because we are restricted to Stoner's perspective, and thus we continually experience the sublime feeling as Stoner aestheticizes others in his lives. For example, Stoner is sad when his friend Dave Masters dies, but his reaction is relatively subdued and not characteristic of a person recently bereaved. In Stoner's eyes, Masters becomes a literary figure and his death becomes a symbol for the brutality of war: "[Stoner] wondered at the difference between the two kinds of dying [in peacetime versus a sudden disaster like war], and what the difference meant, and he found growing in him some of that bitterness he had glimpsed . . . in . . . his friend David Masters. . . . When [Stoner] thought of Masters, he thought of him as a Catullus or more gentle and lyrical Juvenal . . . and thought of his death as another exile" (Williams 40). Stoner here does not seem to realize the singularity of Masters as individual and personal friend. Rather, Masters's death is a prompt for Stoner to have yet another one of his inner revelations, this time about death. Tellingly, Stoner then transmutes Masters into literature. Thus, Masters becomes nothing but a narrative constructed by Stoner that provides yet another experience of the sublime for himself: the tragedy of his friend's violent and early death becomes a narrative that allows Stoner to intuit the unimaginable brutality of war.

The novel contains several self-referential gestures towards the aesthetic distance that Stoner puts between himself and others so that he (and by extension the reader) can experience the sublime. Two of these have already been mentioned: Stoner's perception of his distance from Edith and the notion of the

university as a sanctuary that puts distance between its inhabitants and a cruel world. It can be noted that for the notion of the university to remain as sanctuary, it is necessary for the text to keep Stoner within the world of the university, relatively insulated from the catastrophes that befall the world around him. Apart from keeping the character within the institution of the university, the text also has the character actively distance himself from others in the novel. Stoner himself is not broken by the death of his friend in the way that Sloane is by the death of his colleagues, and in fact does not suffer noticeably from the war in any way.

Stoner's non-involvement in both wars and his relative immunity from the impact of the Great Depression highlight the problems with a Schillerian project of *Bildung*. Stoner's privileged position is what allows him to place aesthetic distance between himself and disaster. The security of his tenured job means that he never had to despair even while the Great Depression was devastating so many Americans. Stoner's reaction to people who despise his privilege as "a tenured employee of an institution that somehow could not fail" is merely "a quiet sadness for the common plight" (Williams 227). The specificity of the event of the Second World War, the unprecedentedness of a war involving so many countries and fought with modern technology, is ignored. Unlike his mentor, Stoner insulates himself from the horrors of war by "[withdrawing] a little distance to pity and love, so that he was not caught up in the rushing that he observed" (Williams 227-228). Being insulated from disasters means that Stoner is able to continue to view life

symbolically: the Depression becomes a symbol for the misery of the average wage earner; the war is a symbol of “irrational and dark forces” (Williams 227).<sup>54</sup>

The university as sanctuary, it becomes clear, can only exist in a system where being at university gives one immense existential and financial privilege at the cost of others. For the reader who experiences the sublime with Stoner, the implications are enormous. Through the various mechanisms mentioned in this section, the novel insulates the reader from the world in the same way that it insulates its protagonist from the world, re-creating Stoner’s privileged place in the institution at the level of textual space. In this space, the text re-enacts the very aestheticizing that its protagonist does, turning its protagonist’s life struggles into a symbolic struggle for the university project. Each of Stoner’s trials or thoughts, as we have discovered, always signify something more than themselves. This excess, as I have tried to demonstrate, is always intimated as beyond the reader’s grasp: the mystery of Edith’s eyes, his realisations, etc.

The text’s reliance on the sublime feeling to give significance to its protagonist’s life proves to be pernicious for the university project when we consider its impact on current readers who may have the potential to perform actions that could at very least alleviate the dire state of the current university. As the novel relies on the sublime feeling to give portentousness to Stoner’s struggle against the encroachment of a capitalistic world, it has to provide for its reader the

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<sup>54</sup> Stoner’s feelings about the war are akin to a spectator’s reaction to a literary tragedy (cathartic horror and pity mixed with aesthetic pleasure): “One part of him recoiled in instinctive horror at the daily waste, the inundation of destruction and death that inexorably assaulted the mind and heart” but “yet another part of him was drawn intensely toward that very holocaust from which he recoiled . . . [H]e yearned for involvement, he wished for the taste of death, the bitter joy of destruction, the feel of blood” (Williams 254).

sense that this struggle cannot be imagined. In doing so, it discourages the reader from active engagement with Stoner's vision of the university through the substitution of the pleasure of the sublime for critique or a call to action. The only way in which this can be performed is by staging it in the past. Hence Stoner is firmly placed in a model of the university that no longer exists. He himself is a medievalist, an allusion to the time when the university operated on a monastic model and literally was a cloister. The struggle itself is over. Stoner is dead at the close of the novel, and to his younger colleagues, his name "is merely a sound which evokes *no sense of the past and no identity with which they can associate themselves or their careers*" (Williams 1; emphasis added). His heroic attempts to resist the entry of capitalism into the university have ostensibly failed and the world of the university continues evolving after his death. The kind of fight depicted is something that the current reader of the novel would be unable to imagine, much less enact, simply by virtue of living in a different system. Rather, s/he is encouraged instead to take nostalgic comfort in the sublime pathos that the heroics of yesteryear evoke.

The closing scene of the novel makes clear the stakes of the novel. Stoner has one last experience of the sublime before his passing that again echoes his epiphany with Shakespeare in Sloane's class:

It hardly mattered to him that the book was forgotten and that it served no use. . . . He did not have the illusion that he would find himself there . . . and yet he knew, a small part of him that he could not deny *was* there, and would be there. He opened the book, and as he did so it became not his own. He let his fingers riffle through



the pages and felt a tingling. . . . The tingling came through his fingers and coursed through his flesh and bone; he was minutely aware of it, and he waited until it contained him, until the old excitement that was like terror fixed him where he lay. The sunlight, passing his window, shone upon the page, and he could not see what was written there (Williams 288).

Stoner's book, the direct result of his model of professing literature, is forgotten and useless, mirroring the novel's opening paragraph describing Stoner's largely forgotten and unremarkable life. The "small part" of Stoner that the book contains is indeed the chronicle of his profession of literature, and not the character himself. The book that is not his own refers as much to Stoner's sole scholarly publication as to John Williams's novel itself. An excitement that is like terror is an apt description of the sublime indeed. At the moment of dying, Stoner is transmuted from the realm of the novel's reality into the reality of the novel as a telling of a fictional character's life. This metatextual transfiguration may be the cause of Stoner's sublime experience as much as the intuition of the immense significance of his life's mission as professor. The mechanics behind the operation of sublimity is finally hinted at in the last sentence, where the inability to see what is written is part of the epiphany that constitutes the experience of the sublime.

The transcendence that reading the novel gives a reader is hence dependent on a lack of clarity about what to do with the current situation of the university. Criticality is unimportant, pushed aside in favour of the invisible and the absent: that which is unimaginable and which evokes the Schillerian sublime. This pathos is what we are left with to console ourselves in the face of our current

situation. As I have earlier said, however, this pathos is made possible only in the textual space of the novel that cannot be delinked from the privilege of its protagonist's life. The pathos cannot, therefore, ultimately shield us from the encroachment of neo-liberalism onto the university system. Even worse, it exposes us to the predations of the current system instead of protecting us from it as it encourages us to be passive, to accept aesthetic feeling in the place of investigating the university's current problems or advocating for structural reform.

That said, this very reading is evidence that the novel does indeed allow the reader space to understand the limitations of the Schillerian project of *Bildung* even as its pathos discourages such a reading. This may be read as its final auto-immune act—it contains that which destroys its intended message. This auto-immunity has its affirmative side. *Stoner* serves as a cautionary tale for scholars like Allan Bloom who champion an unexamined faith in the *Bildung* project as the basis of a university education. Commitment to *Bildung* via aesthetic appreciation can lead to inflexibility and dogmatism if one does not investigate the mechanics involved in its nurturance of a critical subjectivity. Yet, dismissal of *Bildung* due to its flaws too easily replicates its failings: if we dismiss Stoner's views as completely unworkable or worthless, we assert the critical mastery that he does over Walker and Edith. We thereby deny him the sympathetic reading that we criticise him for not extending to Walker and Edith. The contradiction between the pathos of the novel, which encourages us to be sympathetic to its protagonist, and the form of the novel, which allows for a critique of its protagonist, constitutes the double bind that its readers have to contend with. The text is structured such that regardless of whether we are critical of Stoner or choose to support him, it is difficult for its

readers to imagine a position that does not replicate his mistakes: there is no winning in this situation.

## Chapter 4

Auto-immunity in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*: The Cynical Readerly Choice between Auto-immune *Bildung* or Profligate Consumption

*Herzog* is Saul Bellow's most famous novel. It tells the story of a professor of Romantic literature who vainly draws on his learning to solve the problems of both modernity and his own personal life. It is therefore a critique of the pretensions of literary (and philosophical) studies to solve practical, non-literary problems. This notion is supported by Bellow's foreword to Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*: "To finish with *Herzog*, I meant the novel to show how little strength 'higher education' could offer a troubled man. In the end he is aware that he has had no education in the conduct of life . . . and he returns, in the language of games, to square one . . . to some primal point of balance" (16). Since its protagonist Moses Herzog is a scholar of Romanticism, "higher education" as defined by the novel is an education that involves *Bildung*, a Romantic notion of what education can do for the individual: one of the key thinkers for Herzog is Hegel (Bellow, *Herzog* 12).

As Allan Wood says in his introduction to Hegel's *The Philosophy of Right*, "*The Philosophy of Right* is founded on an ethical theory that identifies the human good with the self-actualization of the human spirit" (xi). Thus, Hegel's philosophy "[reifies] certain key Romantic self-conceptualisations like 'spirituality,' 'creativity,' 'process,' 'uniqueness,' 'diversity,'" hailed by the Romantics as part of the development of the self that would result in society being changed for the better

(McGann 32). Hegel has been ‘giving [Herzog] a great deal of trouble’ because, his philosophy, like that of other Romantics, does not seem to square with Herzog’s experience of life (Bellow, *Herzog* 12).

Despite his protagonist’s “confusion” being “barbarous,” however, Bellow still ultimately affirms Romantic ideals (Introduction 16). Of Herzog’s confusion, he writes:

[T]here is one point at which, *assisted by his comic sense*, [Herzog] is able to hold fast. In the greatest confusion there is still an open channel to the soul . . . to that part of us which is conscious of a higher consciousness, by means of which we make final judgements and put everything together. The independence of this consciousness, *which has the strength to be immune to the noise of history and the distractions of our immediate surroundings*, is what the life struggle is all about. The soul has *to find and hold ground against hostile forces*, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently annul its very existence (Foreword 16-17; emphasis added).

Bellow asserts that the “comic sense” of his protagonist, the ironic distance that he has from his own foibles, allows him access to a “higher consciousness,” that of “the soul.” We can conclude the following from this assertion: the ironic distance allowing for comedy that enables Herzog to realize the uselessness of his education in dealing with his lived reality is also that which allows him to have access to something beyond the intellect and its struggles that Bellow terms his soul. We can begin to make sense of Bellow’s notion of “the soul” if we consider the end of the

novel, where Herzog decides to give up on the intellectual aspect of his project while enjoying the sensory pleasures of aesthetic appreciation. As I will show later in the chapter, Herzog attempts to prove, both in his intellectual work and his life, that Schillerian *Bildung* via the notion of the beautiful enables a marriage of reason and feeling. Yet, when the intellectual aspect of the *Bildung* project collapses due to its contradictions, he clings onto its sensory aspect. Despite being back to “square one,” Herzog finds peace of sorts through this manoeuvre. “The soul” that Bellow thinks is immune to “the noise of history” is thus this sensory aspect of Schillerian beauty which Bellow affirms in the face of the failure of its philosophical aspect.

The auto-immunity of the novel stems from its insistence that the sensory structure of Schillerian beauty is inextricable from its philosophical underpinnings that shape the worldview implicit in the *Bildung* project. Whether or not one wants to recognize the philosophy behind the appreciation of Schillerian beauty, engaging in the appreciation of beauty already puts to work its humanistic assumptions, generating a dynamic that eventually harms the egalitarianism that its humanism aims to achieve. An indication of the inextricability of the philosophical content of Schillerian beauty from its sensory content is that *Herzog*, like other works of Saul Bellow’s, contains views that would be considered unpopular by radicals. As John Burnside writes in *The Guardian*, Bellow has been under attack from progressives even back in the 1960s: “Bellow was unpopular with the late 60s generation of students, who attacked his work as symptomatic of an old, racist, sexist, elitist sensibility.” This comment suggests that many progressive students in the 1960s felt that Bellow’s work appealed to and voiced the concerns of conservative white

middle-class Americans who were dealing with a transformative cultural change in their national identity linked to the cultural wars in the sixties. As Andrew Hartman notes in his book on the culture wars, 1960s counter-culture, the increased popularity of cultural relativism and the rise of identity politics made many conservative white middle-class Americans aware (for the first time) that their “seemingly *timeless truths*, including truths about America . . . [were] sacred cows [that] were being butchered” (4; emphasis added). The students whom Burnside mentions, and indeed Hartman himself, read Bellow’s work as manifesting this discomfort with a new politics and cultural climate.<sup>55</sup> Despite Bellow’s attempt to defend his protagonist’s final stance, the novel’s insistence of the inextricability between the philosophical and the sensory in the Schillerian appreciation of the beautiful casts his affirmation of his protagonist into doubt. The appreciation of beauty is only possible via a subject/object relationship that dictates an individual’s orientation towards the world around him. The epistemology nurtured by Schillerian beauty already performs the ethics of liberal humanism advocated by the “non-theorists” in Chapter 2, and therefore Herzog’s choice to engage only in the sensory enjoyment of the beautiful does not exempt him from the critique of *Bildung* that the novel conducts.

While this chapter does not have sufficient scope to deal with Bellow’s racial and gender politics as brought up by Burnside and other critics, the

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<sup>55</sup> See Hartman’s characterization of Bellow in the same book in which he comments: “The texture of post-sixties anti-intellectualism was best revealed in neoconservative writings, even in fiction. In the 1969 novel *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*—the neoconservative novel par excellence—Saul Bellow drew a picture of the ‘new class’ type distinct from older anti-intellectual caricatures” (53). Other evidence of Bellow’s fall from favour include the closing down of *The Saul Bellow Journal* after the death of its editor, Gloria Cronin, in 2013. Saul Bellow is one of the authors blacklisted in Rebecca Solnit’s 2015 article for *Lithub*, “80 Books No Woman Should Read”.

relationship of their views to the *Bildung* project are better understood through a reading that focuses on the auto-immunity of *Herzog*. While a reading of the mechanics of auto-immunity in *Stoner* enables us to understand the dangers of an uninterrogated belief in the *Bildung* project, a reading focused on the auto-immunity of *Herzog* allows us to better understand the appeal of Schillerian *Bildung* despite its failings. The novel offers us a choice between the vain struggles of its protagonist or choosing the path that he eventually takes, which is to affirm the sensory pleasure involved in Schillerian aesthetic appreciation while ignoring the epistemological implications of this structure of feeling. The first choice involves accepting a traditional notion of *Bildung* with knowledge of its problems while the second involves ignoring the problems of *Bildung* completely. The choice that the novel offers us forecloses any possibility of a vision of *Bildung* that may involve dealing with its shortcomings. The reader realises that whichever choice s/he makes, s/he would be unable to escape the problems of *Bildung*, and is therefore encouraged to have sympathy for Herzog's struggles. Although this sly move to gain the reader's sympathy is cynical insofar as it is interested in manipulating the reader to accept a traditional notion of *Bildung* through an apparently clear-sighted critique of its pros and cons, the novel's assumption that the problems that come with the subjectivity that *Bildung* nurtures are inescapable is productive for understanding the appeal of *Bildung* in the world that we live in today. The reading that this chapter offers allows us to understand the thought process behind the "non-theory" scholarship that sees the reinstatement of the *Bildung* project as a solution to the crisis of the university.



The honesty of the novel about the problems of the *Bildung* project is perhaps why, unlike *Stoner*, *Herzog* has not enjoyed a major re-evaluation of its status in popular culture.<sup>56</sup> While the auto-immunity in *Stoner's* defence of *Bildung* consists of offering readers who are dissatisfied with the corporatisation of the university consolatory pathos in lieu of a call to action, *Herzog* intentionally highlights the contradictions present in a defence of *Bildung* both through the struggles of its protagonist and its form. The novel demonstrates how the *Bildung* project's attempt to nurture a subjectivity that transcends the shallowness of a society concerned with material goods and possessions promotes an orientation towards the world that enables the very shallowness that it attempts to transcend. This logic of auto-immunity operates on two levels. Firstly, via the comic ironization of its protagonist, the novel critiques its protagonist's attempts to demonstrate via his life and his intellectual work that the *Bildung* project nurtures an ahistorical, rational and objective subjectivity *qua* Schiller. In destabilizing the ahistoricity and objectivity of the *Bildung* project, the novel enacts a critique of its protagonist's epistemological orientation, demonstrating that the aesthetic appreciation of Schillerian beauty buttresses rather than resists the politico-economic conditions of the society that spawned it: it is the sensory expression of an epistemological orientation of a subject that is the result of the rise of nation-state capitalism *qua* Readings. Secondly, Bellow attempts to affirm his protagonist by providing his reader with the exhilarating prose of his novel, which suggests that the alternative

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<sup>56</sup> Of pertinence is Judith Shulevitz's *Atlantic* article, where she notes that "[t]he torrential *inner disputation* that made *Herzog* feel so original when it was published in 1964 makes it uncomfortable to read now . . . Readers get no respite from the howls of humiliation and self-pity he sends up" (emphasis added).

to his protagonist's failed attempt to resist the materialism in his society is to reveal in the exploitation of prose for sensory pleasure. The novel's last auto-immune move is therefore encouraging the reader to support the traditional *Bildung* project despite its critique of the auto-immunity in *Bildung*: the novel tries to protect its protagonist from its own critique of him. The novel is thus a meta-campus novel because it conducts a recursive auto-criticality: it does not only critique the basis of the institution (the university) that allows for its existence, but also attempts to critique this critique.

The narrator's dismantling of its protagonist's beliefs, nurtured by Schillerian *Bildung*, is systematic. First, while Herzog tries desperately to assert that Romanticism can effect a transformation in individuals that encourages them to promote both equality and democracy in their societies, the narration ironizes this view by showing how Herzog's own education in Romanticism puts him on a path that not only fosters an implicit elitism but also causes him to dismiss the views of other characters in his life because of his own beliefs. In the process of ironizing Herzog, the narration demonstrates the auto-immunity inherent in the view of *Bildung* promoted by Bellow's close friend, Allan Bloom (earlier mentioned in the thesis). A faith in reason is auto-immune insofar as it harms the cause and operations of reason by being unreasoned, and the auto-immunity of Herzog's faith in the reason of the *Bildung* subject forms much of the novel's comedy. That is, the narration's ironization of its protagonist's views and behaviour suggests that Herzog's education does not enable him to reject bias and assess ideas objectively. Rather, the narration suggests that his rejection of popular trends of thought and the advice of others is not a result of the application of reason but rather an

allegiance to Romantic values. By highlighting Herzog's allegiance to Romanticism, the narration provides historical and ideological context for its protagonist's views. Thus, the narration undermines the ahistoricity and neutrality of the Schillerian *Bildung* subject. The narration also suggests, through its protagonist, that Herzog's Romantic education does not equip him with the ability to use his reason from a critical distance but rather leaves him vulnerable to the opposite: he is prone to acting on his impulses without using reason. This challenges the Schillerian notion of beauty as the synthesis of reason and feeling by showing that it cannot divorce itself fully from the contradictions in its Kantian inspiration. As elaborated on in Chapter 2, beauty can be understood as the appreciation of purposiveness, which by definition cannot be propositional. Hence, a Romantic education that has as its focus the appreciation of beauty emphasizes the sensory rather than the conceptual, paving the way for a breakdown of the fragile Schillerian marriage of reason and feeling.

We can explain the operation of the novel's structural ironization of its protagonist in the following ways. First, even though we feel for Herzog because we are allowed access to his consciousness via free indirect discourse, the narrator of the novel highlights the blind spots in Herzog's apparent ability to judge others reasonably or to treat them without snobbery by having other characters directly reflect on and rebut his views. Secondly, Herzog's thoughts sometimes contradict themselves, and these self-rebuttals work in tandem with the other elements of the narration to allow the reader to counter-focalize him. For example, early on in the novel, Herzog thinks of himself: "He noted with distaste his own trick of appealing for sympathy. A personality had its own ways. . . . Herzog did not care for

his own personality, and at the moment there was *apparently* nothing he could do about its impulses” (Bellow, *Herzog* 18; emphasis added). This narration simultaneously provides us with both identification with Herzog even while it gives us some ironic distance from himself. While this is evidence that Herzog sometimes has the ability to judge himself objectively, it also encourages the reader to engage in active work to evaluate whether or not Herzog is being fair in any given instance of the novel. In this instance, the word “apparently” highlights that Herzog is aware that he is using the excuse of being helpless against his feelings to avoid a confrontation with his first ex-wife, Daisy. Yet, at other times, the narration suggests that he is indeed helpless against his impulses. This is particularly evident when the narrator highlights the disconnect between Herzog’s thoughts and feelings by carefully tracing how he makes his decisions, particularly with the incident that forms the climax of the novel: Herzog’s plan to murder Madeleine and Gersbach is shown to be a decision with no rational basis.

Lastly, by providing incidents that directly highlight how Herzog’s Romanticism isolates him from his reality, the narration encourages us to consider that his perception of his own self-importance, and indeed his belief that Romanticism may be of use to the world, may be mistaken. Basically, the novel forces its readers into a counter-focalization of its protagonist that involves a visceral realization that Schillerian *Bildung* may foster an attitude that is of little practical use in achieving socio-political goals by having him/her simultaneously feel for Herzog and using structural irony to cast his opinions into doubt. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, despite his best efforts, Herzog fails to resolve the contradictions of Romanticism, and retreats back into a sheltered and

safe solitude where he can instead simply enjoy the sensual pleasures that his education has enabled him to enjoy. This retreat from the world harms the ostensibly progressive social goals of the *Bildung* project that Herzog has tried so hard to defend and promote.

Despite its focus on the auto-immunity of *Bildung*, the novel demonstrates an ambivalent attitude to its protagonist through its treatment of the Reality Instructors (characters who want to educate Herzog in what Bellow calls “the conduct of life”) whom he so dislikes and its highlighting of the overlaps and contrasts between the politics of Romantic feeling in its protagonist and the politics behind the affect in its own aesthetics. Regarding the first, the novel emphasises the high stakes and the nobility of the goals of *Bildung* as resistance to the philistinism of Herzog’s world. Nevertheless, even the novel’s emphasis on the importance of its protagonist’s project is another way in which the narration fleshes out the auto-immunity of the *Bildung* project. Rather than nurture a subject whose reason can protect him from the rat race that involves the materialism that Herzog is fighting against, the subject’s *relationship* to the world needed for the appreciation of beauty and sublimity in fact places him in an orientation that aligns him with an industry that uses the natural world around him for sensory pleasure. As Louise Green aptly notes, “nature has unquestionably become subsumed within the *instrumental* logic of capitalistic production”: its commodification stems from it “holding the promise of a value separate from the vicissitudes of culture and politics” (emphasis added).<sup>57</sup> Thus, even Herzog’s aesthetic appreciation of the

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<sup>57</sup> The thesis does not have the scope to discuss the nature industry in detail, especially since this industry has changed from time of writing of *Herzog* to the time of writing of this thesis. Its logic is

world is but another iteration of how material objects should be valued for the comfort that they may bring us.

The appreciation of beauty, as explicated in my second chapter via Spivak's reading of Schiller, is dependent upon us having a subject/object relationship with the world around us. The subject/object dynamic is also necessary to the operation of the sublime, as my previous chapter on *Stoner* has shown, and is a dynamic that involves using objects in the world for aesthetic pleasure. Herzog gains some measure of peace only when he gives up on the project of trying to insist that the intensity of his appreciation for the world has existential meaning, but hollowed of its philosophical content, Herzog's appreciation of the world's beauty begins to resemble the appreciation of the world that Bellow offers us through the aesthetics of his novel. The joy that is to be had in reading Bellow involves precisely the exploitation of his prose for sensory pleasure. This joy accounts for much of the power and freshness of Bellow's prose, an experience for the reader that is exhilarating regardless of his/her feelings about Bellow's politics. Disturbingly, the exuberance of the prose is an unapologetic fetishization of then-contemporary American life: Bellow's apparent celebration of the quotidian offers the sights and sounds of America as objects of pleasure for the reader.

The contrast between the novel's exuberance and the misery of its protagonist throughout much of the novel provides an apologia of sorts for the *Bildung* project that has been excoriated throughout the novel. The defence that

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an extension of Readings's observations about how the subjectivity of *Bildung* ties into the logic of capitalism. Louise Green's book is one of the many that deals with "the ways in which the relations of power, nature, and history coalesce in capitalist modernity" (Aghoghovwia 184). Other thinkers in this field include George Monbiot, Naomi Klein, Lesley Green and Jason Moore.

the novel offers of its protagonist allows us to understand the appeal of Schillerian *Bildung* for the “non-theorists”: *Bildung* appears to offer an individual an *ethical framework* beyond that of being focused on gaining money and material goods for one’s pleasure even though this resistance is ultimately futile. Yet, although a rational weighing of the two choices encourages the reader to support a traditional notion of *Bildung*, the experience of reading the novel does force the discomfort of the following double bind on its readers. Whatever the contradictions of Romanticism are, it becomes clear that Herzog’s inheritance of the Romantic legacy provides him with an (fatally flawed) resistance to the reduction of an aesthetic education as just another object to exploit for our pleasure. However, if we defend the *Bildung* project and its links to Romanticism, we fail because of *Bildung*’s own auto-immune operations. On the other hand, if we give up on *Bildung* and simply enjoy the pleasures that art brings us, we end up treating art like any other consumer object. Through this double bind, the novel offers its readers a way to negotiate the problems of *Bildung* despite itself: rather than accept the subject/object relationship between ourselves and the artwork assumed by the subjectivity of *Bildung*, appreciation of the art object may instead involve its ability to force us to face splits in our subjectivity via the dilemmas that it poses to us. My reading of the novel thus differs from the laudatory readings of Bellow like Gilbert Porter, Anslem Atkins and Allan Chavkin, and the dismissive readings of Andrew Hartman, Rebecca Solnit and Judith Shulevitz.<sup>58</sup> In my view, the novel remains

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<sup>58</sup> Other examples of laudatory readings include Gilbert Porter’s “‘Weirdly Tranquil’ Vision: The Point of View of Moses Herzog”, Allan Guttman’s “Saul Bellow’s Humane Comedy” and Jeroen Vanheste’s “No Pills, but Letters. Saul Bellow’s Herzog: The Recovery of a Depressed Academic”

important because it teaches us how to live with the contradictions of aesthetic education: we must identify with, support and critique Herzog at the same time.

### **Herzog's Problems: The Failure of Both Objective Reasoning and the Social Goals of Romanticism**

Herzog's struggles in the novel with ideas and other characters centre round his attempts to argue that Romanticism can improve society if one avoids its flaws while enjoying its benefits. As Allan Chavkin says in his study on suffering in Saul Bellow, "Herzog knows that romanticism in its nineteenth-century form is outmoded, and therefore he intends to forge a new romanticism that can accommodate itself to the modern age" ("Problem" 166). This attempt is perhaps clearest in his failed project on Romanticism, a "volume on the social ideas of the Romantics" (Bellow, *Herzog* 11) that he had embarked upon after a successful PhD thesis, "several articles and a book, *Romanticism and Christianity*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 10). This project is supposed to be "a history which really took into account the revolutions and mass convulsions of the twentieth century, accepting, with de Tocqueville, *the universal and durable development of the equality of conditions, the progress of democracy*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 12; emphasis added). According to Herzog, "[t]his study was supposed to have ended with a *new angle* on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by *renewing universal connexions; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self; revising the old Western, Faustian ideology; investigating the social meaning of*

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among others. Another example of a writer (among others) who has dismissed *Herzog* because of Bellow's sexism is Jude Doyle, in her article "The Perils of Reading While Female".



Nothingness” (Bellow, *Herzog* 45; emphasis added). We are told via free indirect discourse, however, that his study does not manage to achieve its desired end. Instead of a coherent and ambitious academic publication, Herzog is left only with “eight hundred pages of chaotic argument which had never found its focus” for his pains (Bellow, *Herzog* 10). According to the novel, Herzog has once been certain of his ideas “on consensus and civility” but “something had gone wrong”—Herzog is just not sure what (Bellow, *Herzog* 12).

The chaos of Herzog’s attempted project is reflected in the form of the novel, which consists of Herzog’s unsent (and at times incomplete) letters to individuals both dead and alive, his fleeting dealings with friends, acquaintances and family, and his journeying from the Berkshires, to New York, then to Martha’s Vineyard, then to Chicago and then back home to the Berkshires again. The aims of his study are supported by his letters; in these letters Herzog attempts, unsuccessfully and tellingly, to combat what he thinks is the anti-Romanticism of the “Wastelanders”: a group of thinkers (mainly existential, proto-existentialist or existentialist-influenced) who have “[lost] sight of the old-fashioned moral characteristics of the Ruskins” (Bellow, *Herzog* 82). Since Herzog himself is unable to piece together what the problems with his study are, it is left to the reader to deduce from the novel why his study fails and the implications of the failure of this study for Herzog himself. However, the narration focuses on a few days in Herzog’s life and the letters that he writes instead of focusing on his failed study. This encourages the reader to read Herzog’s behaviour and thoughts as the result of an aesthetic education in Romanticism. Through this, the novel offers us insights into the contradictions of Romanticism that are a result of its auto-immune function.

Herzog's study mentions that he wants to correct "the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self." Unlike Stoner, Herzog is aware that his Romantic heritage encourages solipsism and a valorisation of one's subjectivity. His study therefore aims to avoid the solipsism inherent in Romantic thought so that one can begin to reach out to others in society, to live life by "renewing universal connexions." Correcting this flaw of Romanticism will allow for the "development of the equality of conditions" because it will allow the Romantic subject to maintain his capacity for deep feeling and for self-examination via reason while encouraging him to place the same weight on the views of others in his life, strengthening his social bonds in the process. However, the narration makes it clear that Herzog cannot have his cake and eat it through the ironization of its protagonist. While reading the novel, the reader begins to come to the realisation that though Herzog has shown himself to be self-aware at times, most of Herzog's energy is spent evaluating himself and the world instead of reacting to the reality around him. Even worse, his constant focus on himself and his allegiances to Romantic values often result in incorrect evaluations of others and of his own situation and a dismissal of views not in line with Romanticism. There are times when he is not self-aware, when he is a slave to his passions, and when he uses whatever powers of reason that he has to justify his passions.

One of the more prominent examples of Herzog being ironized by the text is the example of Madeleine, his second ex-wife. If we are to believe Herzog, he has treated his first wife, Daisy, "miserably" while Madeleine, on the other hand, "had tried to do *him* in" (Bellow, *Herzog* 11; emphasis original). We feel for Herzog because "the divorce was painful"; he was "in love with Madeleine" and he

couldn't bear to leave his little daughter" (Bellow, *Herzog* 13). Yet, while the free indirect discourse encourages us to feel sympathetic towards Herzog, who was seemingly forced to leave a marriage because of his wife's nastiness towards him, the narration immediately provides the reader with evidence that Herzog's opinions of Madeleine might be biased because he is guilty of exactly the things that he accuses her of. First, his complaint that Madeleine is egotistical, pretentious and masochistic is ironized because the narration gives us evidence that brings out the similarities in their behaviours. For instance, when Madeleine breaks the news to Herzog she emphasises her own pain regarding the failure of the marriage: "you also understand what a humiliation it is to me to admit defeat in this marriage. *I've put all I had into it. I'm crushed by this*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 15; emphasis added).

Through free indirect discourse, the narrator has Herzog embellish Madeleine's words with a narrative of his own, in which he implies that she is using this purported declamation of pain for her own self-aggrandisement: "She had prepared the event with a certain theatrical genius of her own. . . . Crushed? She had never looked more glorious" (Bellow, *Herzog* 14-15). It is noteworthy that this is Herzog's interpretation of Madeleine—his own narrative about her motivations and her emotions. We might empathise with Herzog's bitterness about his wife if the narrative did not immediately supply us with an equally dramatic passage demonstrating his masochism and self-centredness: "It had never entered Herzog's mind . . . to stand his ground. He still thought to perhaps that he would win by the appeal of passivity, of personality, win on the ground of being . . . a good man, and Madeleine's particular benefactor. *He had done everything for her—everything!*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 16; emphasis added). Note the close parallels between Herzog and

Madeleine—if Herzog is right, both characters obviously have a martyr complex and a flair for the dramatic. This comparison is undoubtedly comic, and Herzog’s possible projection of his own characteristics on Madeleine brings an element of dramatic irony (no pun intended) to the reader.

Next, via free indirect discourse, Herzog paints a very unflattering scene of Madeleine impressing a fellow scholar, Shapiro. He implies that Shapiro is sexually attracted to the beautiful and intelligent Madeleine: “[Shapiro] couldn’t keep his eyes from the shape of [Madeleine’s] behind in the tight cotton-knit fabric” (Bellow, *Herzog* 76). Shapiro therefore “made a great *production* of learned references” to impress her (Bellow, *Herzog* 76-77; emphasis added). With this, Herzog suggests that firstly, the learned Shapiro is a great name-dropper, someone who, like Valentine Gersbach (whom he associates with Shapiro in his thoughts), “looked so clever that you forgot to inquire whether he was making sense” (Bellow, *Herzog* 79). This devalues his high estimation of Madeleine’s opinions. Herzog also manages to imply that Shapiro’s estimation of Madeleine’s intelligence and opinions are not necessarily that accurate as he is impressed by her beauty and wants to flatter her. In contrast to Shapiro, Herzog is unexcited by Madeleine’s ideas. He complains that he apparently suffers for this: “[I]f Moses did not join in, if he sat there, in her own words, like a clunk, bored, resentful, he proved he didn’t respect her intelligence” (Bellow, *Herzog* 78). Moreover, Madeleine “complained that he never *really* listened to her. He wanted to shine all the time” (Bellow, *Herzog* 78; emphasis added). The reader is given access to Herzog’s rebuttal of this apparently unfair judgement of Madeleine’s, again via free indirect discourse: “that

[what Madeleine thinks] wasn't it. He had heard her lecture on this subject many times, and far into the night. He didn't dare say he was sleepy" (Bellow, *Herzog* 78).

The narration makes it clear, however, that even if Madeleine is unfair, naggy and attention-seeking, again Herzog is proven to be no better, if not worse. Although Herzog claims that he is not disrespectful of Madeleine's opinions, but simply bored of them, the narration in the novel suggests that this claim is untenable. The narration allows us access into Herzog's thoughts, proving that Madeleine's complaints about him wanting to be the centre of attention are justified. After all, the narration provides us with evidence from Herzog himself that throws into doubt his previous assertions about Madeleine's opinions: "I understood that Madeleine's ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. . . . [She] lured me out of the learned world, got in herself, slammed the door, and is still in there, gossiping about me" (Bellow, *Herzog* 82-83; emphasis added). Madeleine is correct that Herzog wanted to shine all the time, and by extension, he views her opinions as threat to his position as respected intellectual. If this is the case, then it is very plausible that he never *really* listened to her, where the word "really" is an indication that Herzog is considering her opinions objectively based on their merits and shortcomings. Again, Herzog is ironized by the novel here: his thoughts inadvertently prove that he is unfair to Madeleine, always believing himself to be the centre of the learned world, giving credence to her accusations.

Understandably, Herzog struggles to understand the self-defeating nature of his own Romanticism. The egotism that Herzog despises is a valorisation of the thinking self, which one gets with the Romantic Imagination. The attention and

emphasis on the self comes at the cost of attention and emphasis on others.

Herzog's portrayal of Madeleine as a witch-like Satanic schemer only highlights his self-absorption. It becomes clear to us that Madeleine may very well have formed an impression of Herzog that has at least some basis in the reality that she experiences, but Herzog himself is unable to see how and why she forms her views of him. That is to say, Herzog assumes things about their motives and analyses their personalities in his role as armchair critic or amateur psychologist without ever having realised Heisenberg's principle: that his own feelings and motives affect his perception of them. Thus, the harmony of reason with passion present in the notion of Schillerian beauty becomes a conflict, or, in Spivakian terms, Schiller's resolving of the double bind of mind and body into a single bind is shaken back by the novel into a double bind. Rather than Herzog's feelings being in accordance with his reason, reason and passion are at odds with one another. Herzog often reaches the wrong conclusions about others because he is too self-absorbed and because his passion interferes with his ability to reason clearly. Also, a belief in the superiority of a Romantic education means that he gives less credence to views that are not in line with Romantic values, regardless of the laudable intent of treating everyone equally.

The climax of the novel's plot, in fact, only happens because of Herzog's misguided conclusions about his former friend Gersbach. The book follows a simple revenge plot: Herzog, the cuckolded husband, seeks revenge against his former best friend (Valentine Gersbach) for betraying his trust, having an affair with his (now former) wife and apparently abusing his child. Herzog's dislike for Gersbach, together with a series of events, pushes him to make the irrational conclusion that

his daughter is being abused by the latter, which causes him to plan to murder both Madeleine and Gersbach. Herzog's disdain of Gersbach and the plan to murder him are perhaps the most damning evidence in the book of the auto-immunity of Herzog's Romantic education. Herzog's prizing of authenticity and individualism, a result of his Romantic education, leads him to disdain his former friend's efforts at intellectualism despite his desire for equality in society. As mentioned in Chapter 1 via my readings of Gerald Graff and Bill Readings, *Bildung* as the goal of the university has an egalitarian impulse insofar as it promises an individual upwards social mobility through education. In this way, it promises to protect the masses from inequality. At the same time, the very existence of a promised mobility through the classes is evidence of a hierarchal society where a university-educated individual is closer to a Schillerian notion of the ideal man. The novel uses Herzog's disdain of Gersbach and his aborted murder plan to demonstrate how *Bildung* leads to the support of hierarchies in society rather than the support of egalitarianism, and also to demonstrate that *Bildung's* contradictions do not allow for passion and reason do not work hand in hand.

After Herzog departs from the Berkshires, he builds us an unsympathetic picture of his former friend as he reminisces about the past in his travels, revealing the causes of his dislike for the man. We are told that Gersbach, who is originally a disc-jockey in Pittsfield, had become somewhat of a public figure since "Herzog himself had introduced him to cultural Chicago" (Bellow, *Herzog* 64). We become aware that Herzog not only sees Gersbach as being ungrateful but also regards him as a hack. Though Gersbach has become a public figure, a "poet" and "a television intellectual" (Bellow, *Herzog* 64), Herzog feels that his former friend's lectures are

“so spirited, so vehement, gross [and] ludicrous” that they are “a parody of the intellectual’s desire for higher meaning, depth, quality” (Bellow, *Herzog* 66).

Indeed, Gersbach proves that he is not dedicated to scholarly precision by getting his Yiddish wrong: “‘You’re a ferimmter mensch.’ Moses, to save his soul, could not let this pass. He said quietly, ‘Berimmter.’” (Bellow, *Herzog* 67). Further on, there is

more evidence of Herzog’s dislike of Gersbach’s pretensions to culture: “He’s a poet in mass communications . . . a ringmaster, popularizer, liaison for the elites.

He grabs up celebrities and brings them before the public. And he makes all sorts of people feel he has exactly what they’ve been looking for” (Bellow, *Herzog* 222).

Herzog thinks that Gersbach is not true in his desire to be an intellectual, a huckster of low-quality art that exploits the masses, and is therefore of course, inferior to himself. This being the case, he is the injured party and Madeleine has inexplicably bad taste: “Did it console [Herzog] that a beautiful woman had dumped him? But she had done it for that loud, flamboyant, ass-clutching brute Gersbach. Nothing to be done about the sexual preferences of women” (Bellow, *Herzog* 108).

Herzog’s dislike of Gersbach ties into his dislike of what he thinks of as intellectual crudity and an uncritical grasping at popular intellectual trends in order to gain social capital. This echoes Allan Bloom’s concerns and the concerns of the “non-theory” camp as explicated in Chapter 1. Significantly, Herzog associates Gersbach’s attempt at intellectualism with the French and Russian revolutions and not philosophy:

Literate people appropriate all the best things they can find in books, and dress themselves in them just as certain crabs are supposed to beautify themselves with seaweed. . . . [When] I think



of Valentine I don't think of philosophy, I think of the books I devoured as a boy, on the French and Russian revolutions. . . . I see mobs breaking into palaces and churches and sacking Versailles, wallowing in dream desserts or pouring wine over their dicks and dressing in purple velvet. (Bellow, *Herzog* 224)

It is no coincidence that Herzog associates Gersbach's attempt to be an intellectual with movements that are pushing for egalitarianism. Herzog's thought shows that he is, at least at some level, aware of the social capital of his education. Despite this, he has little sympathy for people who attempt to grasp at equality through trying to gain the same sort of social capital that he has. The contradictions of *Bildung* lead Herzog to the ironic conclusion that promotion of equality can only be effected through someone like Herzog, who is among the select few who can appreciate the value of the literature that he reads. Unlike Gersbach, Herzog thinks that he would treat the valuable in life appropriately, and not use it for self-aggrandization or ornamentation for the self. He thinks that he would properly appreciate books, rich desserts and wine.

Herzog's egotism and elitism have as their source the contradictions of the *Bildung* project. As earlier mentioned, the narrative of liberal humanism implicit in the *Bildung* project, tied to a narrative of social mobility in society, does implicitly suggest a hierarchal structure, where the educated are superior and more advanced humans than the less-educated. Because an aesthetic education, in Schiller's view, serves as a bridge between the natural character of man (which is ruled by drives and immoral) and the moral character of man (the rule of Man's reason), someone who has had an aesthetic education has "impulses [that] are

sufficiently consonant with his [or her] reason” (Schiller, “Letters” 31). Logically, this also means that sh/e is more in touch with all aspects of his/her humanity than uneducated people who are ruled more by their drives than by their reason. And yet, since human nature is available to all people, it means that the people who have had an aesthetic education can claim to speak for all humans with the assumption that their feelings and thoughts are the same as everyone else's even as they also subscribe to the belief that people who have not had an aesthetic education are inferior.

This perspective not only devalues the views of others who have not experienced the privilege of an aesthetic education but also discourages one from being able to sympathise with other points of view. Herzog is so desperate to give a new life to Romanticism because of its lofty social goals of promoting equality. Because of his belief that only select educated individuals can understand human nature and therefore point the way forward to a better society, Herzog puts himself under immense pressure. The “intellectual work” that he does, he believes, can “change history” and “influence the development of civilisation” (Bellow, *Herzog* 111). Given his beliefs, it is understandable that Herzog thinks that “the progress of civilisation—indeed, the survival of civilisation—depended upon the successes of Moses E. Herzog” (Bellow, *Herzog* 131). The egotism that Herzog is desperately trying to rid Romanticism of is a logical product of its contradictory assumptions. The stakes of the project of *Bildung* and the stakes of reforging a new Romanticism for the modern age become impossibly high, obscuring other views in the process and preventing Herzog from reasoning objectively or forming the social connections that he so claims to value.

In view of this, regardless of the accuracy of her account, the opinion of Gersbach's wife, Phoebe, regarding why he decides to try his hand at intellectualism becomes significant: "You [Herzog] never understood a thing about him [Gersbach]. He fell for you. Adored you. Tried to become an intellectual because he wanted to help you. . . . He read all those books so you'd have somebody to talk to, Moses. Because you needed help, praise, flattery, support, affection" (Bellow, *Herzog* 268). According to Phoebe, Gersbach attempts to become an intellectual out of love for Herzog, not to gain fame for himself. His aims in becoming an intellectual were a lot closer to the ground than Herzog's: instead of aiming to aid the progress of civilisation, he simply wanted to support his friend. Phoebe's words to Herzog are telling: "It's not my fault that you refuse to understand the system other people live by. Your *ideas* get in the way" (Bellow, *Herzog* 269; emphasis added). Phoebe points out, correctly, that Herzog's Romantic ideas, while ostensibly about equality and the progress of society, actually form a world view that is exclusionary of the views of others who simply do not share Romantic concerns. Moreover, because of this, his views about the progress of society are formed in the *abstract*, not close to the ground, only in dialogue with other scholars and thinkers who share the same preoccupations (if not the same solutions). Herzog does not at all occupy an objective position as a rational subject. His opinions about society are a product of his education and his own fixations.

Perhaps the most scathing treatment of Herzog's capacity for disinterested reason comes from the novel's depiction of his plan to murder Gersbach and Madeleine. While building up to this event, the novel makes clear that Herzog is a split subject, not solely a subject of reason or a subject whose reason and feelings

are in harmony with each other. He flies to Chicago to shoot the couple because of his feelings and not any process of reasoning. The decision to kill is prompted not only by his dislike of Gersbach and his resentment and anger at being cuckolded but also by his traumatic experience of visiting a New York courtroom where he watches cases being tried. Watching the trials is a test of Herzog's good faith in humanity. The prostitute who tries to rob a store to maintain his drug addiction is "illusionless, without need for hypocrisy" (Bellow, *Herzog* 236). He candidly admits to the judge that he has needed money and has therefore committed robbery even though the storekeeper "looked so butch" that "[he] knew she might be tough" (Bellow, *Herzog* 236). Herzog realises with horror that the application of reason here works in line with self-aware and unrepentant selfishness: the "alert cheerfulness" of the prostitute describing his motivations and process of thought is "realism," "nastiness in the transcendent position" (Bellow, *Herzog* 236). As Anselm Atkins notes, this encounter of Herzog's alerts him to "evil in himself as well as the accused" (125). Herzog's ideals about humanity are metaphorically poisoned as he realizes how cruel humans can be: while watching the prostitute stand on trial, the novel states that Herzog feels like he has "[swallowed] a mouthful of poison" but realises immediately that "this poison" is not external but "rose from within" (Bellow, *Herzog* 238).

After the third case that he witnesses, which involves a mother's cold-blooded murder of her child, Herzog is in deep distress: "With all his might—*mind and heart*—he tried to obtain something for the murdered child. . . . He pressed himself with intensity, but 'all his might' could get nothing for the buried boy. Herzog *experienced nothing but his own human feelings*, in which he found nothing

of use" (Bellow, *Herzog* 247; emphasis added). Faced with the harshness of human cruelty, Herzog's mind is paralysed. Although the professed goal of his intellectual work is to advance civilisation, he is unable to theorise to obtain "justice and mercy" for the child (Bellow, *Herzog* 247). All he can do is feel the inclination to "pray away the monstrosity of life" (Bellow, *Herzog* 247). This inclination, as Herzog himself cuttingly notes, is useless when trying to obtain some sort of redress for the child. Herzog's cognitive dissonance, a result of the disconnect between his ideals and reality (later pointed out by Phoebe Gersbach) is evident here. Moreover, at this point, it becomes very clear that there is a disjunct between Herzog's mind and his heart.

According to Atkins, "[Herzog's] experience [with the murdered child] and these reflections prompt him to fly straight to Chicago to save his own daughter from the influence of Madeleine and Gersbach" (126). While it is true that Herzog's experience at the courtroom trials push him to travel to Chicago to save his daughter, it is inaccurate to say that there are *reflections* prompting him to do so. Rather, as I have explained, it is his feelings that rule the day. By the end of the courtroom experience, Herzog experiences "nothing but his own human feelings." The novel's description of his decision after his courtroom experience supports this: "New York could not hold him now. He had to go to Chicago to see his daughter, confront Madeleine and Gersbach. *The decision was not reached; it simply arrived*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 248; emphasis added). In the last sentence of this quotation, Bellow's narration strips Herzog of cognitive agency. Consider the structure of the two clauses. The first clause is a passive construction that implies the existence of a human agent, some person who reaches the decision,

presumably via a process of deliberative thinking. The second clause is a stock active construction with the decision itself as the agent—Herzog is not the cause but merely the site of its arrival, the passive receptacle. We are not told about exactly by what mechanism Herzog’s decision arrives, but the narration strongly hints that it is a result of Herzog believing the worst about Madeleine and Gersbach after the destruction of his good faith in humanity rather than stepwise reasoning that he engages in to reach conclusions about the way that they are treating his child. We know that the first mention of Herzog killing Gersbach comes after Herzog reads Portnoy’s letter (Bellow, *Herzog* 107). The letter describes an incident where Herzog’s daughter, June, is left in a locked car by Gersbach (because he does not want the girl to witness an argument between him and her mother). The incident leaves the girl “shaking and weeping” (Bellow, *Herzog* 107). The letter makes Herzog so angry that he inwardly exclaims: “I’ll kill him for that—so help me if I don’t!” (Bellow, *Herzog* 107). We cannot be sure whether or to what extent this exclamation should be read as anything more than an expression of anger than an actual statement of intent, but there is no further mention of Herzog contemplating the option of murder until much later in the text, until after he lands in Chicago and takes his father’s gun from his father’s house to do the deed. Only after the last of the courtroom scenes in New York, where Herzog hears about the murdered boy-child and is left with nothing but his feelings of sadness and despair, does his decision to confront Gersbach openly finally “arrive”, and even at this juncture the reader is not provided with information as to what the form of this confrontation would look like.

Just a few sentences after the portrayal of Herzog as a passive receptacle of the decision to confront Gersbach and Madeleine, the narration confirms that he is wont to act on his feelings rather than according to his reason, and suggests that even at this point, Herzog does not yet know how he would save his daughter. We are provided with Herzog's thoughts, which contradict the idea that he acts based on his reason: "*Characteristically, he was determined to act without clearly knowing what to do, and even recognising that he had no power over his impulses*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 248; emphasis added). In other words, this state of acting based only on impulse is something that Herzog is generally susceptible to; it is one of his defining characteristics. The sentence following the last quote can be reasonably interpreted as a metaphor for the disconnect between Herzog's chains of reasoning and the realities of everyday life: "He hoped that *on the plane, in the clearer atmosphere, he would understand why he was flying*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 248; emphasis added). His disquisitions are only flights of fancy. They require considerable distance from "the ground" to take place.

Herzog's recognition that he had "no power over his impulses" heavily imbricates his thoughts *en route* to Harper Avenue (where Madeleine and Gersbach live) with irony. In this passage, Herzog claims that the decision to murder is based on reason:

It *did not seem illogical* that he should claim the *privilege* of insanity, violence, having been made to carry the rest of it—name-calling and gossip, railroading, pain, even exile in Ludeyville. . . . But they [Gersbach and Madeleine] had done *something else* to Herzog—unpredictable. It's not everyone who gets the opportunity to kill

with a clear conscience. They had opened the way to *justifiable* murder. They *deserved* to die. He had *a right to kill* them. They *would even know why* they were dying; no explanation necessary.

(Bellow, *Herzog* 261-262; emphasis added)

Although earlier on Herzog recognises that he has no power over his feelings, in this paragraph Herzog's attempts at thinking about the incident are shown to be eminently unreasonable despite his assumptions of the contrary. There are multiple layers of irony here. Herzog thinks that Madeleine and Gersbach have treated him very shoddily, causing him to be subjected to "name-calling and gossip, railroading, pain" and "even exile." Given how poorly he thinks he has been treated, it *appears logical* to him that he could claim that the murders are motivated by insanity. This claim of insanity would serve as a defence of his actions in court, thus Herzog's casting of insanity here as a "privilege." Insanity here is not a state that Herzog concludes that he is in; it is simply a convenient state of mind that he can *assert as rightfully the case* given his suffering at the hands of Madeleine and Gersbach. However, according to Herzog, being treated poorly by Madeleine and Gersbach and the resultant apparent insanity is not the real reason that motivates the murder. "Something else" does—Herzog's belief that the couple are abusing his little daughter. In his view, this makes the murder "justifiable." In other words, to him, the murder is morally correct and reasonable. He has earned the "right" to murder the couple. Insanity serves as cover for his real motivations, which, to Herzog, are defensible in the light of reason.

By this point in the novel, the reader already has good reason to doubt whether Herzog indeed has been treated as poorly as he thinks he has. The



premise that he has been very hard done by has already been thrown into doubt, and this, together with the distance implied by the word “seem,” throws into doubt the logicity of Herzog’s conclusion that he can plead insanity based on his suffering. Despite this, the claim of insanity, which Herzog sees as cover for the real motive of the murder, resounds as ironically accurate, as we become aware at this point of just how lacking in reasoning Herzog is. First, Herzog’s decision to murder the couple is impulsive, motivated by experiences that he has had in the New York courtroom that are unconnected to either little Junie (June), Madeleine or Gersbach. Secondly, he assumes that the incident of June being left in the car is a major matter in the lives of Gersbach, Madeleine and June, and that both Gersbach and Madeleine would know that that this incident is sufficient reason to murder them. Herzog assumes that they either know of their own apparent nastiness to the child in this incident or know that he thinks that they have been really nasty to his child, but both assumptions are logically flawed. For the first to be true, they would have had to have cruel intentions towards the child to begin with, and the narration has provided no evidence that they do. For the second to be true, they would somehow have to know Herzog’s thoughts and feelings about the matter of the car without being told.

The intended murder is the climax of the book, but Herzog fails to carry out his mission of revenge when he spies on Gersbach and sees him giving Junie a bath: “As soon as Herzog saw *the actual person giving an actual bath*, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence *turned into theatre*, into something ludicrous” (Bellow, *Herzog* 265; emphasis added). Herzog manages to build a caricaturishly evil picture of Gersbach to justify his intent to murder the

latter. When confronted by the reality of the person, he realizes that this picture is completely made up—as he says, a ludicrous illogical act (despite his initial claims to the contrary) that is more theatrical than anything else. Herzog realizes he has not been applying his reason. Rather, in indulging his passions, he has let his imagination run wild. The attempted transmutation of the messiness of his life into a revenge play fails as the neat roles that he assigns to each of his actors collapse against his observed reality. It becomes evident from Herzog's aborted murder plan that perhaps Madeleine's conclusions about Herzog may not be wrong. With heavy irony, the novel intimates that what Herzog calls her "bunk and paranoia" may be in fact be justified (Bellow, *Herzog* 261).<sup>59</sup> Her fear of him causing harm to her may not be due to "the imperiousness of imaginary powers that once impressed [Herzog]" but rather her powers of reason (Bellow, *Herzog* 261). It is instead Herzog who is paranoid and who has impressive powers of imagination that cause him to be irrational. The comedy is painful: Herzog thinks that he has exercised his reason in concluding that he has a right to murder, and that the insanity plea is a cunning ploy whereby he can bypass the consequences of committing the crime to uphold justice. Yet, this very thinking itself is illogical: the novel provides no reason for Herzog to conclude that he has the right to murder. His thoughts and actions, in fact, can be explained using the insanity that he thinks he is but feigning.

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<sup>59</sup> It is notable that like Stoner, Herzog believes that his ex-wife is paranoid and hysterical. This is perhaps most evident in the scene where he recounts his interactions with Edvig, the psychiatrist in Chicago who ends up treating both him and Madeleine. Even though Edvig tells Herzog that "one paranoid episode [of Madeleine's] doesn't indicate insanity", Herzog protests this claim: "But it's she's who sick, sicker than I am" (Bellow, *Herzog* 62).

I have argued that Herzog's education in Romanticism has made him prone to acting on his feelings instead of his reason. As opposed to protecting Herzog from being completely subjective, the emphasis on feeling in Romanticism turns out a subject that is prone to do exactly what Schillerian *Bildung* claims to protect against. Herzog is nothing if not biased, acting under the sway of his impulses. This can be attributed to beauty being something that one feels, a sensory pleasure; the subject who appreciates beauty therefore is focused on his/her sensory appreciation of reality rather than using his/her reason. For Herzog, this is the most important aspect of life, if not life itself: "The crude oval of the basin was smooth and beautiful in the grey light. [Herzog] touched the almost homogenous whiteness with his fingers and breathed in the water odours and subtle stink rising from the throat of the waste pipe. *Unexpected intrusions of beauty. This is what life is*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 225; emphasis added). Via my reading of the novel, I have also argued that the very shape of the *Bildung* project engenders auto-immunity where its social goals are concerned: for there to be the promise of upward social mobility and hence equality, a social hierarchy has to be present, and with it the prioritising of the views and goals of an educated class.

### **The Ambivalent Space of Herzog: The Pain of Romantic Auto-immunity or the Pleasures of Consumption?**

The social goals of Romanticism are hindered not only by the previously mentioned contradiction within the *Bildung* project but also by the fact that the optimism of the *Bildung* project may encourage its subjects to ignore reality. Yet, this is where the text's last auto-immune gesture takes place: in secret support of

the optimism of its protagonist, it critiques its own critique of *Bildung*. Even as it ironizes Herzog for being irrational, it suggests that his faith in societal progress may be preferable to a cynical acceptance of the ugliness of society. We can intuit this not only from Herzog's dislike of those whom he calls the "Reality Instructors" but also the text's parallels between Herzog's Romantic epistemology and its own aesthetics.

Consider the novel's treatment of Herzog's dislike of those whom he calls "Reality Instructors." At first glance, the novel pokes fun at its protagonist for his idealism and his inability to accept the rational advice of others. The term is used by Herzog to describe characters like Gersbach and Himmelstein whom he sees as trying to tear down his Romantic ideals: "Reality instructors. They want to teach you—to punish you with—the lessons of the Real" (Bellow, *Herzog* 132). Tellingly, Herzog replaces the word "teach" with the word "punish" mid-thought. Lessons in reality are both instruction and punishment for Herzog, who wants desperately to believe that "*reason can make steady progress from disorder to harmony* and that the conquest of chaos need not be begun anew every day" (Bellow, *Herzog* 189; emphasis added). His desire to maintain the optimism of the *Bildung* project makes him reject their advice: "[Simkin] was a Reality Instructor. Many such. I [Herzog] bring them out. . . . It's the *cruelty* that gets me, *not the realism*" (Bellow, *Herzog* 36; emphasis added). Early in the novel, Herzog claims that he does not object to the realism of these Reality Instructors, but their cruelty. At this point, he is able to think of cruelty and realism as separate concepts, one of which he cannot tolerate and the other of which he can. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear to Herzog that an instruction in reality cannot be separated from cruelty. As

Herzog's experiences in the New York courtroom later show, at times reality is cruel. It is this cruelty that Herzog cannot bear: evidence that humans can use reason to achieve selfish goals that may result in harm to others, as in the case of the prostitute who attempts to rob the store. Because Herzog cannot bear to accept any view of the world that contradicts his good faith in humanity's use of reason, any rational advice that the Reality Instructors give him is rejected wholesale even when they give him life advice that is logical, based on reasonable conjectures about others. For instance, Herzog's friend, Sandor Himmelstein, points out to Herzog that the jury would side with Madeline because of her youth and looks. Herzog rejects his well-intentioned if hurtful advice because he does not like to think of himself as "a victim" (Bellow, *Herzog* 88) and also because he thinks of Himmelstein as "a man of the crowd" who "[cuts] everybody down to size" (Bellow, *Herzog* 92).

Herzog's Romanticism, as previously mentioned, involves the simultaneous contradictory stance of thinking of himself as both Everyman and better than those who have not had his education. Consequently, Herzog rejects not only advice that has a cynical view of humanity but also any advice that throws into doubt his goodness and significance as a human being: he refuses to be "cut down to size." For example, Herzog dismisses Gersbach's opinion of Madeleine: Gersbach points out that Madeleine may have just wanted approval from Herzog because she looks up to him, and says that Herzog's egotism got in the way of his relationship with Madeleine (Bellow, *Herzog* 67). Again, before Herzog goes to Gersbach with the intention to murder him, Simkins warns him: "[Take] it easy. This exaggeration is bad for you. You eat yourself alive" (Bellow, *Herzog* 225). Gersbach may or may not

be right, but the plot that the narration provides us with definitely proves Simkins right: Herzog crashes his car shortly after he aborts his plan to murder Gersbach and Madeleine, and is arrested when the police discover his loaded gun in his pocket. Herzog, who wants to believe that reason always makes progress towards harmony, makes a mess out of his own life because he fails to reason.

On further examination, however, there are other Romantic reasons as to why Herzog rejects the Reality Instructors. Herzog's optimism consists in believing that despite everything, Herzog as *Man par excellence* means well, and aims higher than everyone else in the novel, towards an ideal reality that has yet to be reached. This Romantic reaching is why he hates the Reality Instructors: he sees them as adhering to a mode of thought that is in line with "a materialistic mass society hostile to 'glorified' ideals" (Chavkin, "Bellow's Alternative" 326). As Mark Sandy says, Bellow's work from the 1950s onwards is "concerned that contemporary existence was creating a restrictive and rational mode of thinking equivalent of Blake's 'mind-forg'd manacles'" that ""deaden[ed] a Romantic belief in the transforming power of the imagination" (57). Herzog associates the use of reason by the Reality Instructors with the entrapment and subordination of the soul's (natural) impulses to the manacles of pandering to the reality of his contemporary society instead of working towards its improvement.

In the final analysis, the novel demonstrates ambivalence about Herzog's optimism despite its harsh critique of the *Bildung* project. Even as it excoriates its protagonist for his delusions of grandeur and his isolation from his reality, it suggests that Herzog's silliness stems from a noble cause. In fact, it questions, too, whether an acceptance of reality might entail something as unpalatable, if not

more unpalatable, than its protagonist's struggles and contradictions. The following passage, taken from Herzog's letter to Harris Pulver, underlines what is at stake in the novel:

Good and Evil are real. The inspired condition . . . is not reserved for gods, kings, poets, priests, shrines, but belongs to mankind and to all of existence. And therefore—There, Herzog's thoughts, like those machines in the lofts he had heard yesterday in the taxi, stopped by traffic in the garment district, plunged and thundered . . . stitching fabric with inexhaustible energy. . . . He wrote, Reason exists! Reason . . . he then heard the soft dense rumbling of falling masonry, the splintering of wood and glass. And belief based on reason. Without which the disorder of the world will never be controlled by mere organization. (Bellow, *Herzog* 172-173)

Herzog's failed study in the social goals of Romanticism hinge upon everyone in society being able to access "the inspired condition," defined by him as the state in which one is able "to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death in clarity of consciousness"; in other words, a condition in which one can both feel and think deeply as per Schillerian *Bildung* (Bellow, *Herzog* 172). This access puts humanity on the path of good rather than evil—the stakes here according to Herzog are more than personal. The optimistic statement made defiantly by Herzog that this condition belongs to everyone is a statement of faith in the good, not reason, and therefore needs no logical continuation. Herzog's thought process literally stops dead in its tracks at this declaration of faith. Significantly, Herzog is unable to logically connect the inspired

condition and reason: the gap (or Spivakian double bind) between his reason and the feelings of faith that he has is symbolised by a dash. Instead, his thought process undergoes great convulsions, only to jump to the idea that “reason exists.” Even as Herzog thinks this, the narration symbolises the collapse of reason not only through the loss of his coherence via its use of the ellipsis, but also through his hearing of “the rumbling of falling masonry.” His sentences break down into fragments, indicative of his incoherent thought.

While the narration ironizes Herzog as a subject of reason, we become aware that Herzog’s doomed struggle to redeem Romanticism is also a struggle to defend the values of the modern university. This becomes clear in the letter that Herzog writes to Governor Stevenson:

Like many others I thought this country might be ready for its great age in the world and intelligence [could] at last assert itself in public affairs—a little more of Emerson’s *American Scholar*, the intellectuals coming into their own. But the instinct of the people was to reject mentality . . . [preferring] to put its trust in visible goods. . . . So things go on as before with those who think a great deal and effect nothing, and those who think nothing evidently doing it all. (Bellow, *Herzog* 72)

Herzog’s hope that the intellectuals could play an active part in the improvement of society is the ethical rationale behind the *Bildung* project: education of the individual so that the cultivation of his/her powers of reason would benefit society on the whole. Although it is not within the scope of the thesis to examine closely the relationship between the Transcendentalism of Emerson (referenced in the



quotation) and the Romanticism of Schiller, for the purposes of this chapter, Emerson's claim in his speech that "the office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances" echoes the contradictory egalitarianism of the *Bildung* project: although Emerson "[embraces] the common," it is up to the scholar, "Man Thinking," to pioneer society's advance (*American Scholar*). Herzog attempts to argue for the narrative of *Bildung* because he sees it as a corrective to a society obsessed with materialism. The opposition between "mentality" and "trust in visible goods" highlighted by the quote outlines one of the important oppositions in Herzog's thought in regard to what he calls "good" and "evil": the Reality Instructors are bound to this particular reality where material gain is for the highest good, whereas Herzog's Romantic values allow him to cling to some form of resistance against the logic of capitalism, which involves a focus on obtaining material goods for one's existential comfort at the expense of ethico-political concerns. As egotistical as Herzog might be, "[his attempts to prove other scholars wrong with his project] was not simple vanity, but [rather stems from] a sense of responsibility that was the underlying motive" (Bellow, *Herzog* 126). Thus, we can draw a parallel between his motivations and Stoner's.

The stakes are perhaps made most conspicuous at the end of the novel, when Herzog eventually relinquishes any attempt at a defence of an aesthetic education. Without intellectual content, Herzog's sensory pleasures remain only just that. He begins to fit the characterisation of Emerson's "decent, indolent [and] complaisant" scholar who does nothing to combat "public and private avarice," leading to "tragic consequence[s] for the public": "The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself" (Emerson, *American Scholar*). After he

returns to the Berkshires, Herzog is understandably worn out by his intellectual struggles. In his pantry, he looks out of the window, appreciating how the dimming sun make “the hills . . . [begin] to put on a more intense blue colour” and the loud chirping of the birds (Bellow, *Herzog* 247). As he examines himself, he decides to stop trying to make sense of his feelings:

Something produces intensity, a holy feeling. . . . There are those who say this product of hearts is knowledge . . . this intensity, doesn't it mean anything? Is it an idiot joy that makes this animal . . . exclaim something? And he thinks this reaction a sign, a proof, of eternity? But I have no arguments to make about it. . . . I am pretty well satisfied to be, just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy (Bellow, *Herzog* 347).

Herzog correctly figures out that he has been prone to thinking that the strength of his sensory appreciation of the world is proof of transcendental principles: the progress of the world towards democracy through reason and the love of man for others. Having suffered much by the instruction of reality at this point, he concludes that he “couldn't say that, for sure” (Bellow, *Herzog* 347). The relief that Herzog experiences at the end of the novel is linked to him giving up on trying to handle the contradictions of *Bildung*. This relief is by extension, experienced by the reader. Yet, this feeling of relative peace may lead to too quick a conclusion about what Herzog learns from his struggles. Consider Atkins's cheerful and confident conclusion about the novel's end: “Herzog's need to justify and clarify, which sets the novel in motion, has come to an end. . . . No innocent and no defeatist, he survives his defeats while reading their message realistically. . . . Herzog's view of

life thus stands in healthy contrast to both innocent American optimism and imported, chilly, absurdist pessimisms. He is post-crisis man" (128-129). There is no evidence that Herzog's defeats have led him to read "realistically"—rather, he has chosen to stop reading. Unable to construct arguments, he places himself at the mercy of fate. Cocooned in the Berkshires, Herzog simply enjoys nature around him, giving up most of his cognitive and social activity.

These observations give "post-crisis man," Atkins's phrase, an ironic ring. The novel asks whether man post-crisis is indeed so desirable: although Herzog has not lost the ability to enjoy nature, he has ceased to enjoy most of the other things that he once felt were important. Herzog's peace may not be as "healthy" as Atkins says; it comes at the price of his zest for life, and paints for us a potential picture of what giving up on *Bildung* might look like. While it is notable that Herzog now feels more companionship with animals, this increased integration with the natural world comes at the price of societal withdrawal. The price is not merely paid by Herzog, who is "weirdly tranquil" at this point (Bellow, *Herzog* 8). The huge house in the Berkshires (the countryside) is bought using family money: "twenty thousand dollars worth of house," "Papa's [Herzog's father's] hard earned money!" (Bellow, *Herzog* 12). Even though Herzog fails to resolve his problems, the buffer of his family (his rich brothers, Shura and Will Herzog) allows him to retreat to the countryside and let "his mind [remain] open to the external world" to appreciate nature (Bellow, *Herzog* 8). Herzog's tranquillity, earned at a heavy social price, is also one that is sustained by his lack of worry over his existential security. His enjoyment of nature is thus also implicated in an industry that involves the invention, packaging and commodification of nature as a place of restorative

leisure, an industry that rewards characters like Shura Herzog and those lucky enough to be related to him.

We can conclude, therefore, that the novel is telling us that Herzog can enjoy the beauty of nature without the intellectual baggage that comes with the appreciation of beauty only because he can literally afford it, and even then, the novel does not portray this state in an unequivocally desirable light. The parallels between Herzog's final state and the novel's post-modernist aesthetics give us a further insight into the problems of discarding the *Bildung* project completely. The novel makes it clear throughout that the way Herzog relates to people and most of his problems stem from his self-absorption and his tendency to obey his heart blindly. Refusing instruction from reality, he is wrong about many people because he does not relate to them as subject to fellow subject, but rather subject to object, figures around whom narratives can be built based on his feelings about them. This is an orientation that is necessary for both the appreciation of beauty and sublimity in both Kant and Schiller, as my second chapter makes clear. The category of the subject, qua Readings, is necessary for the operation of capitalism. This point becomes indisputable by the end of the novel. Without his suffering, the structure of Herzog's relationship to nature becomes conspicuous: nature *is used by him* to provide himself with sensual pleasure. Although both Herzog and the novel posit that *Bildung* is a means whereby materialism in society can be resisted, the last few moves of the novel expose the auto-immunity in this notion: an aesthetic appreciation already contains within itself the structure of subject/ object needed for consumption. Despite this, the novel's own aesthetics still expresses a secret support for its unhappy protagonist. Without the alienation that Herzog

experiences from beginning to end, the novel suggests that the alternative is unapologetic exploitation of material objects for pleasure. Thus, it enacts for us at a textual level the dichotomies that obsess its protagonist: between “mentality” and “trust in visible goods” and between “good” and “evil.”

Regardless of whether we happen to like its embattled protagonist, it is difficult to deny that what the 1976 Nobel Committee has said about Bellow’s writing holds true in *Herzog*: there is “ample opportunity for descriptions of different societies; they have a rare vigour and stringency, and a swarm of colourful, clearly-defined characters against a background of carefully observed and depicted settings.” Irving Malin’s book of collected essays on Saul Bellow, *Saul Bellow and the Critics* (1967), contains the works of several scholars who agree with the Committee’s sense of the vibrancy of Bellow’s language, for example, Leslie Fiedler, who says of Bellow that “his language . . . always moves under tension, toward or away from a kind of rich, crazy poetry, a juxtaposition of high and low style, elegance and slang. . . . Implicit in the direction of his style is a desire to encompass a world larger, richer, more disorderly and untrammelled than that of any other writer of his generation” (8). In the same book, Richard Chase says that Bellow’s prose makes “formidable music” due to its “dizzy medleys of colloquial and literary words” (27). Marcus Klein notes that Bellow’s novels are “shaped . . . by an energy of total commitment, by an imagination that will confront human needs and greeds as they spill all over themselves and yield to clarity only after heavy labour,” leading to “the excitement that one feels in [Bellow’s work]” (95). Fiedler’s astute observation that there is a desire to encompass a rich world in

Bellow's writing, a totalizing impulse of sorts, explains the rich polyglot language that he uses and the sense of exhilaration noted by both Chase and Klein.

With focus on *Herzog*, I posit that the euphoria of Bellow's prose can be gainfully understood and contrasted with Herzog's misery. The postulation that I advance is this: *Herzog's* prose is exhilarating because the reader is put in a position where s/he can enjoy the affective pleasures of the prose without any of the ideological baggage that makes its protagonist so miserable. The failed but energetic resistance to capitalistic thinking via *Bildung* is contained in the struggles of the novel's protagonist rather than shared with the reader via the enjoyment of the novel's language. This results in contradictory instructions for the reader: supporting the failed protection of *Bildung* from the predations of capitalism or the hysterical joy of giving in to unabashed exploitation of the world for the selfish purpose of giving one's self pleasure.

Herzog's reaction against the Romantic uniqueness of self is a struggle to reconcile the experience and consequence of textual affect with a push for egalitarianism and a rejection of solipsism. But of course, as earlier argued, the notion of the aesthetic as a unique source of inspiration also necessarily means that the self of the artist is unlike that of any "common man." That is one of the beginnings of the divide between high/low culture and the danger of the aesthetic as a route into solipsism. The alienated self is unhappy: there is a certain masochism (as Herzog proves) in believing one's self as privy to insights that the common crowd lacks. In the case of Herzog, despite his best efforts, he is unable to overcome his alienation from society. This loneliness, also noted by Fiedler in his essay (9), is one of the sources of his unhappiness; it can be productively

contextualised by Jameson's views on modernist art as exemplified by Edvard Munch's *The Scream*:

[The] problem of expression is itself closely linked to some conception of the subject as a monad-like container, within which things felt are then expressed by projection outward . . . [This] shows us that expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress. (Jameson 15)<sup>60</sup>

Bellow's aesthetics in *Herzog* achieves, in its own inimitable way, a solution to the problem of alienation, especially with regard to its less-educated readers who may not share Bellow's intellectual concerns. Herzog the character is alienated from the other characters in the novel, but the novel itself manages to appeal to both highbrow and lowbrow readers. While the scholars, critics and those who have had an aesthetic education find fertile ground for their concerns in Herzog's troubles,

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<sup>60</sup> Jameson's notion of modernism is not in line with the standard notion of modernism, as is evident from his examples of Munch and Van Gogh, who made conscious moves away from realism in their art. The standard narrative of Anglo-American modernism, as exemplified by figures like Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, is that it is an attempt to portray a rapidly changing world, transformed by the First World War. This realism-focused interpretation is easily deducible from the essays of these writers, and is, by this time, a view of the movement propagated in a lot of scholarly work, for example, Erich Auerbach's famous book *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946). See also Jameson's own take on the matter in chapter one of his book on post-modernism, where he talks about the institutionalisation of conventional modernism.

the novel also manages to appeal to those who may not recognise its references. The references to Heidegger, Wordsworth, Emerson, Kierkegaard and other thinkers matter to Herzog but are shown to be only so much noise in stopping Herzog from actually listening to the reality around him. In this way, the ironization of Herzog's learnedness negates the importance of the references that its less educated readers may not understand.

The price of this aesthetic populism and an end to alienation, though, is the transformation of content to simulacra, where anything that one experiences, including alienation, is turned into spectacle, available to the reader as fetishistic consumption. In this situation, the subject is free from alienation because the monistic self experiences a split that allows it to aestheticize its own alienation. It is through this mechanism that any intellectual references that might alienate the reader are turned instead into sites of sensation. The gesture that Bellow makes with his aesthetics and which generates the exuberance of the text for the reader stems from the dizziness of mastery. The weight of our problems and of the world cease to matter if we turn everything into a fetish: things lose their distinctiveness and are there only for the self to enjoy as spectacle. This affect of the text is only available through aesthetic distance, and enjoyed, paradoxically, by a coherent self that can luxuriate in the sensory appreciation of its own life-moments broken into discrete fragments.

Such aestheticisation of our own anxieties, however, while providing us with a coping mechanism for our place in a capitalist society, avoids rather than confronts the auto-immunity present in the *Bildung* project. The realisation of the ethical problems of what we can characterise as the novel's post-modern



aesthetics is the most ingenious way in which the novel encourages us to have sympathy for its unfortunate protagonist. By highlighting how the torturedness of its protagonist stems from his desire for social progress and contrasting this misery with the intoxicating experience of its aesthetics, the novel nudges us towards pains of Spivakian-Batesonian schizophrenia. That is to say, we are encouraged to reflect on the price we pay for enjoying the latter and thrown into ambivalence by that reflection. Although Herzog is egotistical and delusional, his attempt to rescue Romanticism from its problems is not motivated by his own pleasure, as earlier discussed, but rather a response to the weight of the world's socio-political problems. The goals of the *Bildung* project, despite their auto-immunity, provide us with sufficiently noble goals: to encourage intellectual responsibility and to use this intellectual responsibility to achieve good in society.

The novel is a demonstration of the compromises that the “non-theorists” accept in seeing the *Bildung* project as the solution to the problems of the contemporary university. It encourages us to have some sympathy for their difficult position: if one has been university-educated, particularly in the humanities, *Bildung* is inescapable. The inescapability of *Bildung* extends to the “theorists” who are interested in solutions to the *Bildung* project. Even Readings’s and Docherty’s solutions to the problems of *Bildung*, in the form of the community of dissensus and critical humility respectively, rely on aesthetic experience that assumes a subjectivity nurtured by *Bildung*. Thinking an escape from *Bildung* is a working out of not only the auto-immune function of *Bildung* (insofar as such escapes involves a rejection of traditional Schillerianism) but also the auto-immunity of these solutions themselves: they evince an implicit reliance on the subjectivity of *Bildung*.

Lurking in the background of this chapter, therefore, is the question of how one should treat the auto-immunity in *Bildung*. The novel's cynicism itself is a demonstration of the auto-immunity of the *Bildung* project: its support of its beleaguered protagonist relies upon the reader's use of reason, but if we extend the same use of reason to the choice that the novel offers us, it informs us that the novel has presented its readers with a false dichotomy, thus encouraging us to think of that which is beyond the world that the novel offers us. I suggest that the awareness of this false dichotomy performs several functions in enacting an aesthetic education for its readers. It reminds us of the difficulty in rejecting *Bildung* or imagining an escape from it. It also makes us question the compromise that we accept when we think of Schillerian *Bildung* as an answer to ethical issues in society.

Relatedly, the novel's support of its protagonist and his difficulties allows its readers to focus on the value of his sentimentality, even as it leads him into trouble: Herzog is not sympathetic because he is an optimistic and cheerful subject of *Bildung*; like Stoner, he is sympathetic because he suffers relatively tragic consequences stemming from his choice to support *Bildung*.<sup>61</sup> The alternative to this suffering, the novel implies, is an ease of being that encourages all that Herzog was trying to resist: ironically we reduplicate this ease if we buy into the novel's

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<sup>61</sup> Herzog has a succession of unhappy marriages and an existential crisis. However, while these cause him much pain, he does not lose his job or economic security. He does not even want for companionship; he moves through a succession of women in his life. The last of these is Ramona whom he is still dating at the end of the novel. His career prospects also remain relatively good: "On the strength of his early successes he never had difficulty in finding jobs or obtaining research grants" (10). His suffering is therefore comparatively less than Stoner's in the previous chapter or David Lurie's in the next chapter.

cynicism without recognising the value of its emotional pain. Even as we recognise that the novel tries to manipulate us into supporting its protagonist's intellectual choices, the experience of reading *Herzog* places us in the uncomfortable space of having to choose between two disagreeable choices: an auto-immune defence of reason and resistance to capitalistic materialism or a complete abandonment to the enjoyments of consumption. Within the world of the novel, there is no comfortable choice that we can make. Thus, our confrontation of these choices can be thought of as what Spivak calls the training of an aesthetic education: an experience in dealing with contradiction that may help us in preparing to further the cause of democracy in our contemporary globalized world.

## Chapter 5

Auto-Immunity in Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Stupidity as an Epistemological Preparation  
for the Contemporary Public Intellectual

*Disgrace* makes it very clear that it has an interest in the subjectivity fostered by an education in literature: the first part of the novel focuses on the unhappiness of its protagonist, a professor of Romantic literature, in having his School (Classics and Modern Languages) closed down because of rationalisation in the university while the second part of the novel explores how his education in Romanticism causes him to struggle with integrating with the rural community. While *Disgrace* shares with *Stoner* and *Herzog* an interest in how *Bildung* affects an individual, the thesis makes a move from 1960s America to 1990s South Africa for two reasons.

First, it allows us to deal directly with a society where neoliberalism has become *de rigueur*. This has resonances for scholarship first for the “theory” thinkers of the thesis, who see neoliberalism the cause of the university’s problems, and also more broadly speaking for other thinkers in University Studies, who, as I have argued, are concerned with the deleterious impacts of neoliberalism on their professing. While *Stoner* and *Herzog* posit that *Bildung* can help their protagonists resist the unattractive aspects of a capitalist society, in 1960s America neoliberalism had not yet become entrenched in university culture. Rather, as Ellen Schrecker says in her book *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s* (2021):

From the mid-1950s through to the early 1970s, colleges and universities were at the centre of American life. Even as many campuses were *wracked by turmoil*, they were also experiencing *what has come to be seen as a golden age— at least for white men*. Faculty positions were considered prestigious, and the academic community as a whole— faculty, students (both graduate and undergraduate), researchers, administrators, and intellectual hangers-on— seemed to be engaged in an exciting collective endeavour to improve their institutions and perhaps even make the world a better place (1; emphasis added).

Schrecker's observation that we retrospectively think of the golden age of the American university as including the 1960s is useful for contextualising the struggles in *Stoner* and *Herzog*. The protagonists in both novels struggle greatly against what they feel are unsavoury forces in their societies; this reflects the situation of American campuses being "wracked by turmoil". Yet, both protagonists do not ever lose the power that their *métier* invests them with or think about possible privileges that their being white may have conferred upon them in a racialized society. The stability of a university career remains available to both protagonists, even though the auto-immunity of *Bildung* causes them to make moves that hinder the progress of their careers. Stoner's tenure and Herzog's abundant job opportunities are testament to the social and economic capital that American universities in the 1960s had. Significantly and presciently, both protagonists lose their fight to promote *Bildung* as educational model. This is framed, in *Stoner*, as a loss against the models of scholarship of Lomax and Walker,

and in *Herzog*, a loss against the tendencies of a society that valued material goods above anything else. As in the “non-theory” camp, this loss is framed as a loss against the unsavoury aspects of capitalism.

By the time Coetzee was writing *Disgrace*, however, the impact of these losses has taken hold. The alliance between more progressive politics and capitalism, arguably a bogeyman in *Herzog* and a reason for its current unpopularity today, has become solidified in the alliance between progressive politics and neoliberalism that Coetzee depicts in Lurie’s confrontation with the university committee in *Disgrace*. Simon During, in his recent article in *The Conversation*, details how “the cultural revolution of the 1960s, which created a suite of liberation movements—civil rights, feminism, anti-colonialism, LGBT rights—also provided room for the neoliberalism to come”. Because “[1960s] radicalism was . . . more about lifestyle and recognition of marginalised identities” than “class struggle or economic justice”, neoliberalism managed to co-opt many of the goals of the 1960s radicals (During “Demoralization”). As During has noted, “In 1968, radical students demanded that their education leave the ivory tower and become “relevant”—a relevance neoliberalism has delivered, *if on unexpected terms*” (During “Demoralization”; emphasis added).

The effectiveness of this alliance is interrogated by *Disgrace* through its portrayal of the university committee. Coetzee is suspicious of the way procedure is seen as able to effect the moral change needed to address the deep-seated morally problematic attitudes. David Attwell has detailed how “South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided the seed from which *Disgrace* germinated” (196; emphasis added). Coetzee had “misgivings about whether

ordinary people were capable of living up to the spirit of moral triumph that was taking hold of the nation”, particularly with the “gap that was opening up between aspiration and reality” (Attwell 197). In order for human rights violators to be granted amnesty by the TRC, a “full disclosure of truth” needed to be made (“TRC”), where “‘full disclosure’ [was restricted only to] events and political affiliations, not of matters of the heart” (Attwell 199; emphasis added). Thus, “social redress [became] a function of power”, where power was concerned with granting amnesty based on metrics (in this case, empirically verifiable facts) (Attwell 199).<sup>62</sup> My reading allows us to examine the limitations that progressive politics experiences when allied with neoliberalism: in the case of the TRC, as with the university committee that examines Lurie, only admission of facts is required for him to be absolved of his wrongdoing; no change on a personal level is required, and this is what angers the feminist on the committee.

Secondly, the move to South Africa enables a direct fleshing out of the racial politics of *Bildung*. My readings of both *Herzog* and *Stoner* suggest that *Bildung* in its traditional form, while an attractive proposition for the goals of the university project, harms the social and intellectual goals that it sets out to achieve. Both readings demonstrate that Schillerian *Bildung* does not nurture a subject of reason but instead instills an epistemology that perpetuates existing social inequalities. These inequalities include not just class inequality, dealt with in both chapters, but

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<sup>62</sup> This chapter, which is focused on *Bildung*, does not have the scope to deal with *Disgrace*'s relationship to the TRC directly. Readings that look at the relationship between *Disgrace* and the TRC in detail include Jane Poyner's "Truth and Reconciliation in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (2008) and Rebecca Saunders's "*Disgrace* in the Time of a Truth Commission" (2006).

also gender inequality, which is directly dealt with in the reading of *Stoner*. In both chapters, however, racial inequalities are not directly dealt with. Nevertheless, the issue remains in the background insofar as the narrative of liberal humanism and progress that *Bildung* assumes may be used to justify colonial violence (see Chapter 2). In fact, despite *Disgrace*'s overt interest in how a university education in Romantic literature has affected its protagonist, it is Coetzee's most controversial book not because of its interest in the university or in literature, but because of its handling of race.

The novel's portrayal of a white woman being raped by three Black men, and her decision not to report this incident to the police, has caused offence particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, where race remains a hyper-sensitive issue. In his article "Disgrace Effects," Peter McDonald outlines the furore that the book has caused since its publication in July 1999. Of particular note are the responses from the African National Congress and of South Africa's then-president Thabo Mbeki, which criticize the novel for being racist. The African National Congress (ANC) made an oral submission regarding *Disgrace* to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) on fifth of April 2000, accusing the novel of perpetuating racist stereotypes about black people (McDonald 323). The submission criticised Coetzee for "[representing] as brutally as he can, the white people's perception of the black man" (qtd. In McDonald 324).

Probably the most famous scholarly response expressing unhappiness with the novel comes from Jake Gerwel. A distinguished professor of literature and the Director-General of the President's Office for Nelson Mandela, he published an article in the Afrikaans weekly *Rapport*:



[praising] Coetzee as a compelling chronicler of 'the dislocation [onbehuisheid] of the white-in-Africa,' but [going] on to express dismay at the novel's portrayal of the 'almost barbaric post-colonial claims of black Africans,' at its representation of 'mixed-race [bruin] characters' as 'whores, seducers, complainers, conceited accusers,' and at its 'exclusion of the possibility of civilized reconciliation.' (qtd. in McDonald 325)

Although many responses to *Disgrace* accused it of racism towards black people, several other responses also were uncomfortable with its treatment of white people. Gerwel's response touches on this aspect lightly in his complaint that the book does not allow for the possibility of civilized reconciliation. His plaint is echoed in part by R. W. Johnson, a fierce critic of the ANC, who views Lucy's decision to give up her land to a relative of the one of the rapists, without struggle or legal recourse, as evidence of the "collective guilt" of white people in South Africa, something that he claims is "nonsense" ("Africa"). This reading is also supported by Dan Roodt, who coined the term "Lucy-syndrome" to describe the voluntary abasement of white people to compensate for their complicity in the apartheid regime (Marais, "Morbid" 32). This pessimistic reading of *Disgrace's* treatment of white people has been echoed more recently in Ian Glenn's 2009 paper, "Gone for Good—Coetzee's *Disgrace*," which argues that Coetzee's "liberal afro-pessimism limits his treatment of key themes in ways which date the novel" (79).

Readings that do not focus on racial allegory tend instead to read the novel as some sort of Bildungsroman, focused on the changes that its protagonist

experiences throughout his journey through the space of the novel. As Mike Marais says, following Jane Taylor's famous *Disgrace* review, scholars have tended to "assume that the *Bildung* which Coetzee's protagonist, David Lurie, undergoes in the course of *Disgrace* involves the successful development of a sympathetic imagination and hence the capacity to empathize with the other" ("Imagination" 75). Yet scholars cannot fully agree on this idea either: prominent readings of the novel like Lucy Valerie Graham's and Melinda Harvey's see Lurie's journey as turning away from traditional Romanticism to embrace a new way of looking at the world.

Coetzee's thoughts in *Doubling the Point* provide some contextualisation for the furore surrounding his novel. They suggest to us that we should be wary of any straight-forward allegorical reading of racial relations in his work. Rather, race in *Disgrace* is dealt with insofar as it is part of the history of South Africa, which Coetzee feels that he cannot directly represent:

History may be . . . a process for representation, but to me it feels more like a force for representation, and in that sense, yes, it is unrepresentable. . . . In Africa the only address one can imagine is a brutally direct one, a sort of pure, unmediated representation; what short-circuits the imagination, what forces one's face into the thing itself, is what I am here calling history. "The only address one can imagine"—an admission of defeat. Therefore, the task becomes imagining this unimaginable, imagining a form of address that permits the play of writing to start taking place." (67-68; emphasis in original)

It is notable that Coetzee's articulation of his writerly problems itself contains instances of auto-immunity that result in a double bind. Not writing at all betrays history insofar as it does not respond to the force for representation. Yet, any writing that attempts to respond to the force for representation harms the unrepresentability of the very force that it is attempting to convey. Thus, even the admission that history is "the only address that one can imagine" is understood as "an admission of defeat." Coetzee then concludes that the way out of this double bind is to imagine "a form of address that permits the play of writing to take place." The play of writing is therefore proposed as a solution-of-sorts to the double bind concerning the unrepresentability of history.

Coetzee's own awareness of his auto-immunity regarding the problem of representing the force that is history suggests to me that a reading of auto-immunity in *Disgrace* is valuable. The focus on race and the university in the novel allow us to understand how the subjectivity nurtured by *Bildung* simultaneously provides some resistance to the neoliberalisation of the university while allowing for the assumption of white superiority. It will also shed some light on the contradictory readings of race and Romanticism generated by the novel. Moreover, the readings in the previous two chapters, while proving that both novels can indeed enact a Spivakian aesthetic education, do not suggest any solutions to the flaws of *Bildung*. Another question therefore lingering in the background of the thesis at this juncture is whether *Bildung* should be dismissed as the goal of the university given its many problems. This chapter picks up on the overt interest that the novel has in examining whether *Bildung* as university education still has any use in contemporary society.

While the narration in *Disgrace* suggests that the kind of subjectivity associated with *Bildung* may be unavoidable in our contemporary world, it also suggests that Romanticism may provide a solution-of-sorts to the *Bildung* that it nurtures by suggesting that *Bildung* contains within it the possibility of self-critique. A reading focused on the auto-immunity of the novel has two main benefits. First, it allows us to explore the ways in which the narration intimates that Schillerian *Bildung* may address its own flaws through auto-critique. Secondly, it enables us to think through the complex treatment that the text gives to Romanticism, thus providing a context-of-sorts for the contesting readings of Romanticism and race in the novel. *Disgrace*, I argue, intentionally fleshes not only the Anglo-European cultural context of the self-destructive auto-immunity of both a traditional Schillerian aesthetic education but also the auto-immunity involved in the later politico-historical critique of the failings of this sort of aesthetic education when conducted in a neoliberal society. The novel's intertextual references enact an intentionally auto-immune defence of Romanticism and hence Schillerian *Bildung*: as this chapter will show, the double binds generated by the auto-immunity of the narration explain not only the apparent disjunction between the views that Marais points out and the views of scholars like Harvey and Graham but also the contradictory views about the novel's stance on race.

Also, the novel's fleshing out of the auto-immunity present in the politico-historical critique of *Bildung* gives us an insight into the difficulties and risks of "theory" scholarship that attempts to think beyond or address the flaws of the *Bildung* project. The debates about the novel's relationship to Romanticism are inextricable from the novel's concern with the university, particularly since, as

Chapter 1 shows, some of the unhappiness with the neoliberalism of the university centres around its neglect of Schillerian *Bildung* and attempted restitutions of the *Bildung* project. Although half the novel takes place outside of the university, Lurie's clash with the university administration is an enactment of the Schillerian subject's clash with a corporatized university, and his subsequent difficulties when he moves to the farm brings up questions of how an intellectual may interact with others outside of the ivory tower to contribute to society. Hence, *Disgrace* investigates the problems of the traditional university project of Schillerian *Bildung*, the problems that may arise when this subject attempts to confront a neoliberal institution and the lingering question of whether scholarly attempts to address the problems of Schillerian *Bildung* manage to contribute to societal progress.

My reading follows Derek Attridge's famous "Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*" insofar as it attempts to think about the novel as being a response to "'the times' in which the characters find themselves living," where "the times" includes the prevalence of neoliberalism: according to Attridge, neoliberalism is a "new mentality" that prizes "organization and efficiency" (165). Like Attridge, I am interested in thinking about whether "literature is especially competent" as a response to contemporary problems, but he and I differ insofar as his emphasis lies more on the significance of the tasks and mode of living that Lurie engages in at the end of the novel than on Lurie's feeling of stupefaction as an indication of the auto-criticality that can happen with *Bildung* (Attridge 174). The chapter is therefore more interested in the affectivity that readers experience through the change in Lurie's subjectivity as a change that

literature (in the form of the novel *Disgrace*) can enact than in what elements in the novel may say about literature.

Thus, this reading continues the interest in narration that the previous two chapters have engaged with and picks up on the readings of the novel's stupefying effect via Philip Dickinson and Sam Durrant while following Bal and Spivak in attempting to pay attention to how the focalization in the narrative affects our impression of the novel. While my reading of the novel agrees with Spivak's statement that "Disgrace is relentless in keeping the focalization confined to David Lurie" insofar as it denies us access to any other character's psychology, it also investigates in further detail why "the reader is provoked [when] Lucy is resolutely denied focalization" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 323). This chapter aims to explore how "Lurie-the-chief-focalizer's inability to 'read' Lucy as patient and agent," which for Spivak is "the rhetorical signal to the active reader to counter-focalize," works together with other elements in the narrative to encourage the novel's readers to "make an alternative narrative as a running commentary" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 323-324).<sup>63</sup>

My reading demonstrates that we are encouraged to engage in an auto-critique of the *Bildung* project because the melding of our consciousness with Lurie's (through free indirect discourse) operates in tandem with the narrative

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<sup>63</sup> Spivak's words here do not actively suggest that the reader's counter-focalization is a construction of Lucy's perspective. Later on, however, she does suggest that the narrative formed by the active reader is an attempt to "counter-focalize the absent Lucy" (*Aesthetic Education* 324). I wish to clarify that my reading, which involves the counter-focalization that she speaks of, does not wish to extend its claims so far. Rather, I take my cue from Spivak's earlier words, which to me seem accurate: we are provoked into constructing an alternative narrative to frame the characters in the novel, but we cannot be sure that our narrative is a counter-focalization of Lucy *per se*.

elements that distance our consciousness from Lurie's, sharpening our sense that his thoughts regarding his own life may be unreliable: the narration makes use of the adverbial phrase "to his mind" and the limited perspective that we glean from the other characters when they engage in dialogue with Lurie to signal to us that we have the capability to critique Lurie even as we empathise with him. The sense that Lurie's consciousness is not ours encourages us to reframe his thoughts and actions. We are provoked by Lucy's incisive yet enigmatic utterances, along with the narration's intertextual references to Wordsworth and Byron, to reconstruct an alternative narrative frame for Lurie's feelings, thoughts and actions via a re-reading of Romantic works. Thus, my reading of auto-immunity suggests that the auto-criticality of the novel cannot happen without the reader's stupefaction: Attridge's elision of this experience of the reader is why, to him, "the sharp insistence that neither . . . the production of art [nor] the affirmation of human responsibility to animals . . . constitutes any kind of answer or way out . . . to the multiple problems of the age that [Disgrace] delineates" (177). Only when we think through how the reader's bafflement (through Lurie) is linked to art and his service to the dogs does the novel provide some insight into how it enacts a displacement of subjectivity that shows how literature is "in the service of the emergence of the critical" (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 333). We can read this as what Coetzee calls the "play of writing": the bafflement that the reader feels and how s/he chooses to process it is an instance of the novel which, in Coetzee's words, is "operating in terms of its own procedures and [issuing] its own conclusions [instead of operating] in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history' (qtd. in Head 24). Of the three meta-campus novels in this

thesis, therefore, *Disgrace* has the strongest “meta” tendencies. It does not only reflect on the purpose of the university (*Stoner* and *Herzog*) or conduct a recursive critique of itself (*Herzog*) but actively encourages us to think of ways in which its own operations may lead us to think beyond the ideas that it brings up.<sup>64</sup>

The first critique that the narration performs of a Schillerian aesthetic education is similar to the one launched by *Herzog* in regard to the socio-political goals of the latter’s protagonist, and involves highlighting how *Bildung* harms the very goals that it aims to achieve. The key difference is that Lurie’s position as an adjunct professor of communications in a rationalised university means that he retains the cognitive structures and feeling that allow for Schillerian aesthetic appreciation without *Herzog*’s faith that it can effect any great social change. Rationalisation, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “the action, fact, or process of applying rational methods of analysis or planning to economic or social organization, esp. in order to achieve maximum profitability or efficiency; spec. the reorganization of a business, industry, etc., so as to reduce or eliminate waste of labour, time, or materials,” and hence we can conclude that the change in Lurie’s university might result from literature being momentarily unprofitable in a neoliberal society. Lurie’s lack of faith that his education is important is a result of the university’s own stance that an aesthetic education is unimportant. Lurie’s stand against a neoliberal university and its pragmatic concerns then becomes personal, setting the stage for his confrontation with the university committee and

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<sup>64</sup> See the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “meta” as prefix. I am referring to the sense number 2 of the word, defined as “with sense ‘beyond, above, at a higher level’.”



hence for the narration to flesh out how an alliance with neoliberalism may render ineffective any attempts to redress the flaws of Schillerian *Bildung*.

In investigating the auto-immunity of *Bildung*, the narration shows that Lurie's education in Romanticism leads him to believe two ideas that hinder him from carrying out the goals of the *Bildung* project: he thinks that aesthetic appreciation cannot be taught, and that one has to maintain an aesthetic distance from reality in order to enjoy the benefits of aesthetic appreciation. These ideas, I will show, are related to the assumptions necessary for the operation of the Schillerian sublime. These assumptions are laid out in Wordsworth's "The Prelude," a poem that has played a major part in constructing Lurie's worldview.<sup>65</sup> Lurie's

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<sup>65</sup> The overlaps between Schiller's philosophy and Wordsworth's philosophy have been noted by Joan Torgeson Knapp, who has written a PhD dissertation titled *Wordsworth's "Prelude": The Growth of a Poet's Mind through Aesthetic and Moral Experience as Defined by Kant and Schiller* (1977). Knapp's dissertation argues that Kant's philosophy explains the sublime aesthetic experiences in "The Prelude" while Schiller's philosophy provides a theory of moral development for the speaker as he grows throughout the poem (6-7). This, she argues, cannot be direct influence: "By his own admission, Wordsworth had never read Kant, and any influence that came through Coleridge could not have occurred before Coleridge read Kant in the spring of 1801. The first manuscripts of "The Prelude" were completed well before that time" (9). But this elision of Schiller's aesthetics from Wordsworth's philosophy of the sublime seems problematic regarding "The Prelude." While scholars like Anne Mellor and Theresa Kelley also link Wordsworth's sublime to the Kantian sublime, they tend to focus on the views that he articulated in his book on the Lake District and in his fragment "The Sublime and the Beautiful," both of which have been written after the first drafts of "The Prelude", Wordsworth's views of the sublime have evolved over his career. Adam Potkay provides a useful outline of the shift in Wordsworth's notions of the sublime: "Earlier, especially in 'The Prelude,' Wordsworth tended to associate the sublime with grand and imposing forms of nature, but later came to associate it, following Kant, with the supersensible reason that transcends the natural world. . . . In 'The Prelude' he recounts the ability of the beautiful and sublime forms of nature to inculcate moral habits; conversely in his Kant-inspired commentary 'The Sublime and the Beautiful' . . . he comes to see 'reason and the moral law' as a necessary precondition to our appreciation of the sublime" (688). Potkay does not mention Schiller, but to my mind Schiller is useful in helping us understand some aspects of sublimity in "The Prelude": the notion of nature inculcating our morality echoes Schiller's "Of the Sublime," part of which has been earlier quoted in Chapter 2, and part of which is quoted later in this chapter. Both Schiller and Wordsworth (at least in "The Prelude") think that the sublime is a feeling whereby nature aims to "help" Man by alerting him to his morality. While Wordsworth does not state explicitly that the grandeur of humanity consists in being conscious of one's reason, my chapter will argue that there is enough evidence from Lurie's behaviour and thoughts that his subjectivity (fostered by Wordsworth's sublime) does not deviate significantly enough from Schiller's to pose problems in understanding Lurie's subjectivity as Schillerian.

views about literature make him an ineffective teacher because he thinks that the appreciation of literature consists of experiencing the sublime; such appreciation is not reliant on nurturing a student's understanding or knowledge and therefore cannot be conveyed via any propositional content that his lessons may contain. Secondly, the very structure of the Schillerian sublime is reliant upon a failure of imagination that allows the subject to intuit himself as a reasoning being. We realize this once we examine Lurie's reading of "The Prelude"; he suggests that the encounter with reality results in disillusionment because any sensory input from reality should serve only to prompt one towards ideas of reason. This serves as an explanation of why he chooses to imagine things about his students rather than to try to reach out to them. There is a considerable amount of humour in Lurie feeling isolated from his students: his alienation from them is a consequence of his having undergone Schillerian *Bildung* via the sublime. Thus, the very aesthetic education that is supposed to transform society into a community of rational subjects prevents Lurie from being unable to educate his students into becoming conscious of their reason. Disturbingly, the narration makes it clear that Lurie applies the same framework of aesthetic appreciation of the sublime to his attempted romances with women: this is how he justifies the violence to which he subjects both Soraya and Melanie. The aesthetic as conceptualised by Schiller therefore leads to behaviour that directly harms its egalitarian goals.

However, although the narration launches a harsh critique of Lurie's Romantic education, we become aware that his education gives him some resistance to the rationalised university. The narration thus suggests that a politico-historical critique of *Bildung alone* cannot provide resistance to the inequalities

that neoliberalism perpetuates. The narration literalises the alliance between the neo-liberal university and progressive politics in the university committee that judges Lurie for his actions: Farodia Rassool, the social sciences lecturer on the university committee, who is focused on having Lurie repent for violence that he imposes on Melanie, is on the same committee as other academics who are interested in the course of action that would make the university look the most marketable. While the university's ostensible aim is protecting those who are relatively disempowered, the reader is reminded through Rassool's failure to extract an admission of moral wrongdoing that the alliance of the moral with the neoliberal harms rather than achieves its aims. The university's goal of making itself look good so that it is attractive to students leads to the committee merely asking for a formal apology from Lurie and not for him to realize his wrongdoing, showing it does not care to inculcate the principles that may prevent recidivism in its employees.

Moreover, through the contrasting fates of Melanie and Soraya (Lurie's hired sex worker), the reader is reminded that the "joining of political correctness and corporate funding" perpetuates rather than addresses inequalities (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 316). A historico-political critique of *Bildung*, if performed within a neoliberal institution, is auto-immune insofar as it relies on neoliberal procedures to effect a change towards progressive attitudes in society: it does not care about personal change in an individual. Moreover, the alliance of progressivism with neoliberalism continues rather than redresses the previously discussed hierarchy implicit in the *Bildung* project: the privileging of an educated elite over the less fortunate and less educated. Thus, the narration manages to

suggest that without some form of aesthetic education, political progressivism in the form of a push for equality can become easily co-opted by neoliberal institutions.

The narration's ultimate defence of Romanticism, however, does not come from a push to re-evaluate Lurie but in encouraging us to re-read the novel's major Romantic intertextual references. This enables us to realize that although Lurie's behaviour and views stem from male Romantics, but the texts written by these writers are valuable because they offer us an undoing of Schillerian *Bildung* via their turn towards the feminine, where the figure of the woman can be understood in Spivak's sense that "'woman' is a *position without identity*" (*Aesthetic Education* 32; emphasis added). This chapter will focus on one of text's major intertextual references: Byron's "Lara." When we first encounter them, the novel's intertextual references to Wordsworth and Byron nudge us towards a critique of Lurie's aesthetic education: despite his professed Romanticism, he instrumentalizes his learning to seduce Melanie. Yet, the novel does not suggest that Romanticism only prompts us towards Lurie's mistakes. Rather, if we read the novel in tandem with "Lara," the novel highlights its own parallels with the poem: like Disgrace's turn away from Lurie towards Lucy, the poem "Lara" turns away from the masculinity of Lara towards the femininity of Kaled. This turn, together with the novel's tentative support of the changes in Lurie as he struggles to adapt to his new life on the farm suggests that Romanticism still holds valuable lessons for its readers, if only because it contains a tendency towards the critique of its own ideals.

The learning that the narration encourages us to do can be thought of as its own covert auto-immune defence of Schillerian *Bildung*: *Bildung* is that which is

valuable because it allows for its own destruction. Although Lurie seems to be the only one who ends up feeling foolish as he attempts to adapt to life outside of the university, we can attribute this feeling to his habit of trying to *read* others around him. This habit leads him not to knowledge or a sharpened use of reason but bafflement: the feeling of stupefaction that Lurie experiences as he comes to terms with his new life can be understood as the destruction of his ego. This can be read as an undoing of Lurie's (and by proxy the reader's) Schillerian *Bildung*: a process that makes him less sure of his status as rational subject, moving him towards unknowing and unthinking.

Despite the novel's suggestion that Lurie only grows as he becomes increasingly open to Lucy, we only realize that we can only make sense of the novel's operations and feel the stupefaction that Lurie feels via the medium of the aesthetic: firstly the experiences of Lurie and secondly through the novel's intertextual references to Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems and Byron's "Lara" that help us to understand the importance of a (feminine) perspective that we cannot access, where the feminine is defined as that beyond the purview of a (patriarchal) system.<sup>66</sup> Lurie's bafflement is valuable insofar as it suggests to us a breakdown of the subjecthood so necessary to the operations of capitalism: the narration

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<sup>66</sup> The thesis moves away from women who are portrayed as hysterical or neurotic (Edith Stoner in *Stoner* and Madeleine Herzog in *Herzog*) towards a recognition that femininity is not accounted for in (Lacan's) symbolic (Cixous 9). The femininity that the narration encourages us to look towards is therefore one that overlaps with queer theory in thinking the feminine as an experience of "radical alterity within a heterosexist world" (Rivkin and Ryan 528). It is not within the scope of the thesis to provide a sustained discussion of the overlaps and differences between queer theory and feminism. Eve Sedgwick, one of the most prominent queer theorists of our time, clearly lays out the relationship of her theories to both what she calls "deconstructive feminism" and "radical feminism" in her book *Between Men* (704).

suggests that despite Lucy's putting into practice her groundedness, perhaps it is Lurie that affectively moves towards being beyond subjectivity via the breakdown of his selfhood. Lurie's experience goes beyond that which is conceptual and hence cannot be subject to the logic of rationalisation.

Yet, despite this, the text's defence of *Bildung* results in a double bind, not for Lurie but for the reader, whose reprieve from Schillerian subjectivity via Lurie is brief because s/he is forced to continue life as subject-in-the-world at the close of the novel. The reader's lesson is thus not quite the same as Lurie's: his experience exists in an aporetic relationship to Schillerian subjectivity in the reader, as a space that serves as a critique-of-sorts of the optimistic confidence of the Schillerian subject. Lurie's journey from university to country may be read as the narration providing a suggestion as to how the intellectual may be useful to the community outside of the university. The reader faces the dilemma of whether to be as passive and unknowing as Lurie at the end of the novel or to whether to continue with the faults of the Schillerian model that he follows at the beginning. The notion that Lurie's bafflement might be preferable to Schillerian self-assertion because it may encourage us to reach out to others and understand them better is itself undercut by the relative assertiveness of Lucy in deciding how to proceed after her rape. From this, *Disgrace* suggests that societal change may not be effected if one is either too inflexible or too passive in regard to pursuing one's goals. The novel enacts epistemological change in its readers by encouraging them to adopt the flexibility of Lucy as a guide on how to act when facing difficult decisions in a neoliberal world. Such flexibility involves what Spivak calls "playing the double bind": in trying to evoke epistemological change in others, one has to may either

choose Lurie's new openness to others or be assertive depending on the specifics of the situation that one is facing (*Aesthetic Education* 3).

### **The Auto-immunity of David Lurie's Schillerian *Bildung***

The protagonist of *Disgrace* is a professor of literature who has lost his position as a professor in the humanities. Although *Disgrace* tells us that David Lurie is not a particularly outstanding scholar, Lurie is not prevented from being a scholar of literature because of any apparent mediocrity in his work (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 4). Rather, he cannot perform his role as an academic in the humanities because his department has been closed down:

Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalisation, adjunct professor of communications. Like all rationalized personnel, he is allowed to offer one special-field course a year, irrespective of enrolment, because that is good for morale. This year he is offering a course in the Romantic poets. For the rest he teaches Communications 101, 'Communications Skills', and Communications 201, 'Advanced Communication Skills.' (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 3; emphasis added)

This passage shows how different conditions in the academy have become in the 1990s. *Herzog* and *Stoner* were published in 1965, but *Disgrace* was published in 1999. In less than forty years, corporatisation has taken over at most universities. The phrase "great rationalisation" points to the changed working conditions of literary scholars and the crisis that aesthetic education is currently facing. As Derek

Attridge says, the “implicit critique here is aimed not at a local issue but at a global phenomenon at the end of the twentieth century; those who work in educational institutions in many parts of the world can tell their own stories of the ‘great rationalisation,’ and of course the syndrome goes well beyond the walls of the academy” (166).

Lurie is allowed to teach a literature module, not because such modules engage students or help them in growing intellectually or personally, but because it is good for Lurie’s morale (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 3). The students, however, when we first meet them, appear not to share Lurie’s enthusiasm for his subject at all. Lurie’s attempts to engage the class with Book 6 of Wordsworth’s “The Prelude” are met twice with silence, which discourages the already beleaguered Lurie, whose response to the silence is to feel that “the very air into which he speaks hangs listless as a sheet” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 21). In this situation, Lurie sees himself as the long-suffering instructor with an esoteric passion that most students would not care for, particularly in a time where aesthetic appreciation seems to be on the decline. There may be some truth to that, but it is also true that Lurie has picked (as he himself has noted) a passage where the speaker of the “The Prelude” has his imagination fail him. This failure of imagination that happens to Wordsworth’s speaker is precisely what Lurie accuses his students of, and this throws an even more ironic light on the fact that the course is supposed to help Lurie’s morale. That is, when not forced into teaching communications, when he is allowed his *métier* as professor of literature, Lurie experiences the same disillusionment as Wordsworth’s speaker when the latter sees the summit of Mont Blanc and grieves that this vision of the mountain, the “soulless image on the eye,” has usurped upon



“the living thought” that he had imagined the mountain to be (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 21).

Lurie experiences this disillusionment because, like the speaker of “The Prelude,” he believes that an encounter with reality destroys one’s ability to experience the feeling of the sublime: Lurie wants to maintain an aesthetic distance between himself and his reality. Yet, the text ironizes Lurie by suggesting that it is this very maintenance of distance that makes Lurie’s pedagogic endeavours unsuccessful. The narration therefore fleshes out the critique of the Schillerian sublime the passage in “The Prelude” that Lurie uses for teaching: it works to show how Lurie’s own beliefs about poetry work to undermine his attempt to inculcate the same belief in the power of poetry in his students, thus undermining the social goals of the *Bildung* project.

The conversation that he has with Melanie about the appreciation of literature is telling: his belief that an appreciation of literature is unteachable stems from his conceptualisation of literary appreciation as Schillerian sublimity. For example, when Melanie tells him that she likes Blake but is not keen on Wordsworth, although maybe the latter would “grow on [her],” Lurie replies that slowly appreciating a poem is not something that he has ever experienced; in his experience “poetry speaks to you either at first sight or not at all. A flash of revelation and a flash of response. Like lightning. Like falling in love” (13). The violence in the similes that Lurie uses, together with the notion that aesthetic appreciation consists of an epiphany, suggests that he is talking about the sublime. Consider the following excerpts from Schiller’s “Of the Sublime”:

To annihilate violence as a concept, however, is called nothing other, than to voluntarily subject oneself to the same. . . . [T]hus has nature *even employed a sensuous means, to teach us, that we are more than merely sensuous; thus did she even know to utilize sensations*, to lead us to the track of this discovery, that we are not in the least subjected slavishly to the violence of the sensations. . . . In the sublime, on the contrary, reason and sensuousness do not harmonize, and precisely in this contradiction between both lies the charm wherewith it seizes our soul. The physical and the moral man are separated here from one another most sharply; for exactly in such objects, where the first only feels its limits, does the other have the experience of its force and *is elevated infinitely precisely through that which presses the other to the ground.* (emphasis added)

Schiller's views on the sublime are echoed by the "boat-stealing" episode in Book 1 of Wordsworth's "The Prelude" where the speaker experiences the sublime. In this episode, the might of nature, symbolised by the large mountain, haunts the child and makes him aware of the difference between "living men" and the "huge and mighty forms" that nature may take:

A huge peak, black and huge,

As if with voluntary power instinct

Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,

And growing still in stature the grim shape

Towered up between me and the stars, and still,

For so it seemed, with purpose of its own

And measured motion like a living thing,

Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,

...

After I had seen that spectacle . . .

o'er my thoughts there hung a darkness

...

huge and mighty forms,

that do not live

like living men. (59)<sup>67</sup>

The awareness that natural objects may take on an immensity that is well beyond the limitations of Man's physical body metaphorically stalks the speaker's consciousness. Yet, the force of the threat that the mountain poses to the child is that which eventually elevates his morality.

Consider the parallels in language between Schiller's description of the sublime and the speaker's analysis of his ability to appreciate the sublime:

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<sup>67</sup> My references to "The Prelude" come from the 1850 version of Wordsworth's text. Margot Beard notes that Lurie uses this version of the poem (75).

Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe!

...

From my first dawn

Of childhood *didst thou intertwine for me*

The passions that build up our human soul . . .

With life and nature, *purifying thus*

*The elements of feeling and thought,*

*And sanctifying by such discipline,*

*Both pain and fear, until we recognize*

*A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.*

(Wordsworth, "The Prelude" 59-61; emphasis added)

The pain and fear that the child undergoes in his experience of the sublime alerts him to the "grandeur" of an ideal humanity, "purified elements of feeling and thought." Leaving aside for the sake of brevity and focus the Catholic resonances of "grace" that this quotation calls up, Wordsworth's poem provides us with insight into Lurie's assumptions. Nature, in Schiller's words, uses sensations, not learning, to teach us the lessons of the sublime. Wordsworth's poem agrees with Schiller's ideas about the sublime by having its speaker imply that the ability to experience the violence of the sublime is not something that is nurtured, but gifted to the speaker by the universe. Wordsworth's speaker positions himself as passive grammatical object in relation to the active Spirit who bestows upon him the

necessary ingredients for experiencing the sublime. Lurie's view of the aesthetic is surely shaped by "The Prelude": "For as long as [Lurie] can remember, the harmonies of 'The Prelude' have echoed within him" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 13). Given this epistemological framework of aesthetic appreciation, it is no wonder that Lurie believes that aesthetic appreciation cannot be nurtured, in direct contradiction to the social goals of the *Bildung* project. I want to emphasise that it is Lurie's perspective that his students think he is making much ado about nothing: "A man looking at a mountain: why does it have to be so complicated, they want to complain? . . . Where is the flash of revelation in this room?" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 21).

Next, the parallel drawn between Lurie's failure of imagination in the classroom and the failure of the speaker's imagination in "The Prelude" suggests yet another auto-immune dimension to the *Bildung* project as effected by the Schillerian sublime. The sublime feeling, as explicated in Chapters 2 and 3, is actually dependent upon the inability of the imagination to represent ideas of reason: Schiller's words (earlier quoted) suggest that it is only when physical man "feels [his] limits" (this includes the limits of his imagination) that moral man "has the experience of [his own] force." Lurie's reading of the poem is telling: he believes that the speaker's "sense-image" of the mountain is necessary, but should be "kept as fleeting as possible, as a means toward stirring or activating the idea that lies buried more deeply in the soil of memory" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 22). Our sensory experiences of the world should, by this logic, be nothing but a means whereby one has some sort of access to the realm of ideas; too much contact with reality spoils one's ability to use our sensory input as that which can signify

something beyond our imagination. Lurie does not want to reach out to his students because, according to this logic, it would hinder his ability to engage in aesthetic appreciation.

It is thus that the reader is able to find humour at Lurie's expense. Firstly, the text ironizes him by suggesting that his very need to remain in the realm of the aesthetic might prevent him from being able to convey aesthetic appreciation to his students because he is unwilling to get to know their views and possibly modify his pedagogical approach to be more successful. Secondly, this habit of disengagement with reality does not actually enable Lurie to feel the sublime, at least where his students are concerned. Rather, even though Lurie chooses not to engage with his students' actual responses to Wordsworth, Lurie's imagination does not fail *per se*, but rather supplies him with a narrative influenced by the reality of the neoliberal university: he imagines that his students do not respond to literature because his work is no longer valued by the university.

The novel suggests that the unpalatable reality of the rationalised university influences Lurie's unfavourable opinion of his students. Consider this commentary of Lurie's on his job as adjunct professor of communications at the university: "He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever. But then, so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform; clerks in a post-religious age" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 4). Lurie is aware that he has never been a good teacher of literature—we may be able to attribute this to his refusal to reach out to his students. More than this, though, Lurie is acutely aware that regardless of teaching

ability, he and his colleagues from Classics and Modern Languages no longer fit into the larger picture of university goals. Hence, we can read Lurie's unsympathetic reaction to his class as a reaction to the rationalisation of the university: because the rationalised university no longer prioritises Schillerian *Bildung* either via beauty or the sublime as its goal, it does not advertise this as the end-goal of its educational programmes and therefore will no longer attract students who have an interest in the aesthetic.

Significantly, Lurie does not have the hope that Herzog displays in regard to the power of Romanticism to transform society. Herzog's hope exists because society still recognises and cares for his talent, evident in his past work: "On the strength of his early successes he never had difficulty in finding jobs and obtaining research grants" (Bellow, *Herzog* 10). Lurie has no hope because neoliberalism (as defined by Wendy Brown earlier in this chapter and thesis) has led to the university deciding that his entire field of study is of no use; neoliberalism is not concerned with changes in one's subjectivity but measurable outcomes. Society itself has stopped believing in the importance of Lurie's work, and hence Lurie has no hope that the aesthetic can effect the larger socio-political goals that Romanticism might once have encouraged him to believe in.

Importantly, Lurie conflates his relationship to literature with his relationship to women: earlier on he compares the appreciation of poetry not only to lightning, but falling in love (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 13). When Lurie thinks that his students display "blank incomprehension" in reaction to his comment about the speaker trying to keep the "sense-image" of Mount Blanc as brief as possible, he resorts to talking about love as a simile for aesthetic appreciation: "Like being in

love,' he says. 'If you were blind you would hardly have fallen in love in the first place. But now, do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddesslike form" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 13). The text suggests that to try to get through to his students, Lurie has to make an effort to see them as they are and not as he imagines them, in the process using "the cold clarity of [his] visual apparatus" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 22). Such seeing involves trying to access reality: in the context of Wordsworth's poem, it means trying to see the mountain as it really is, which, as earlier mentioned, Lurie refuses to do, ironically leading to his disillusionment. As Claire Heaney notes in her insightful essay, "Emotional Intelligence: Literature, Ethics and Affective Cognition in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (2012), blindness is necessary for Lurie to engage in romance with women, and this blindness is an integral part of the structure of his aesthetic appreciation: "That Lurie's conception of love is expressly based upon the upholding of Platonic archetypes, rather than concrete engagement with the concrete particularity of the loved one, suggests a model of behaviour which actively privileges blindness as a legitimate ethical and aesthetic response" (144).

Lurie's choice to remain in the realm of the aesthetic means that he sacrifices the chance of making a genuine connection with his students in order to retain the structure of perception that allows him to experience the sublime. Similarly, this decision to escape from reality allows Lurie to find the relationship between Soraya and him fulfilling for a time, despite the fact that it is clearly one sided: "She knows the facts of his life. . . . She knows many of his opinions. . . . Of her life outside Windsor Mansions Soraya says nothing" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 3).



From such a relationship, Lurie can feel affection for Soraya, and he even imagines that she reciprocates his feelings (as earlier mentioned). He does not realize his selfishness even after the bleak reality of her situation is impressed upon him. Soon after Lurie spots Soraya with her sons, she quits working with him. Despite knowing that he “ought to close [that chapter with Soraya],” he makes a last attempt to contact her by using a detective agency to track her down (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 10). This is, as Soraya notes, an instance of “harassing [her] in [her] own house” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 11).

Lurie’s blindness to the feelings of the other, a result of perceptual apparatus geared towards enabling the possibility of experiencing the Schillerian sublime, is repeated with his courtship of Melanie. Instead of having a sexual relationship based on emotional connection, he tells her that she “ought to” spend the night with him because “she has a duty to share [her beauty]” with the world (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 16). The imperatives here show that Lurie wants to put forth to Melanie the argument that women owe it to him to satisfy his desires. Consent, getting to know the other, and a full engagement with the women whom he pursues is not an option. Indeed, Melanie is not invested in the relationship. Like Soraya, she is in a disempowered position in relation to Lurie. The narration makes Melanie’s passivity clear even through its sentences. Lurie and Melanie have a subject/object relationship, as indicated by the syntax in the following sentences: “He takes her to hout Bay. . . . [H]e tries to put her at ease. . . . [H]’e asks about her other courses. . . . He takes her back to his house. . . . [H]e makes love to her” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 19). Compare this to Soraya’s passivity: when she takes off her makeup because dislikes it; he calls her a “ready learner, compliant, pliant”

(Coetzee, *Disgrace* 5). The text does not spare Lurie. Melanie is said to be “passive throughout” her first sexual encounter with Lurie, and in her second, Lurie notes that she does not resist him but “[averts] herself” completely, “as though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration. . . . So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 25). Melanie does not say anything, but Lurie’s observations show us the ugliness of his actions. Despite his observations, Lurie’s intentional ignorance of reality allows him to gloss over his violence to the girl as he manages to entertain briefly the “intoxicating” thought that Melanie might take up residence with him, causing “whispering” and “a scandal” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 27).

*Disgrace* thus lays bare the auto-immunity of *Bildung*: the structure of feeling that Lurie is supposed to help others achieve and which allows for apparent societal progress is the very thing that prevents him from becoming an effective teacher. Furthermore, as in *Stoner*, *Disgrace* makes it clear that this model of aesthetic appreciation both requires and perpetuates the gendered dynamic of active masculine subject/ passive feminine object, harming the social goals of *Bildung* in the process. This relationship to women allows Lurie to visit violence on the women whom he encounters. As Heaney says, “Lurie’s conception of love is expressly egotistic, privileging the (male) artist’s imaginative experience at the expense of the (objectified female) other. . . . [Coetzee juxtaposes] Lurie’s idealized version of events with an altogether more sordid narrative in a move which explicitly foregrounds the falsifying power of Lurie’s aesthetic discourse” (144-145). The conditions needed for Lurie’s aesthetic appreciation, when viewed in the context of the *Bildung* project and its goals of societal progress towards equality,

indicate the auto-immunity of the *Bildung* project: far from promoting equality in society, the transformative powers of *Bildung* actually perpetuate the existing inequalities in society, especially with respect to gender.

### **The Auto-Immunity of Progressive Politics in the Rationalised University**

In the wake of his painful demotion from full professor of modern languages to adjunct professor of communications, Lurie, unlike Herzog, has no basis to believe that any of his projects, regardless of brilliance, can make a difference to the world. However, as someone who has had an education in Romanticism, he can still provide a private resistance to the rationalisation of the university. Importantly, Lurie's gesture of resistance to rationalisation begins even before his failed attempt to seduce Melanie. As Attridge notes, the novel begins with Lurie priding himself on his "perfectly calculated sexual regimen" (153). This approach to sex certainly is more in line with the principle of rationalisation, which is also adopted by the university for its operations than any Romantic outlook in life. Only when Lurie moves away from his rationalised solution to sex (the hiring of sex workers) does he get into trouble with the university. The university would not have cared if Lurie had continued using a sex worker as an outlet for his sexual needs. Lurie himself would have had no trouble if this had been the case. Lurie's expulsion from the university stems from his desire to have more than a rationalised solution to sex with Soraya, an impossible situation given his arrangements with her. His relationship with Soraya only breaks down because he realizes that she has a family outside of him, that her sex work is merely her job and that he is just another client (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 6). Prior to this realization, "an affection has grown up in [Lurie] for Soraya" that he believes "is reciprocated"

(Coetzee, *Disgrace* 2). This “complacent, even uxorious” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 2) fantasy of faux-domesticity breaks down ultimately because Lurie performs a double-think that cannot be sustained: he wants her only as a sex worker, working on “afternoons only” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 7), and yet also craves intimacy. It is Lurie’s inability to remain content with rationalisation that leads him towards trouble with the university: his “shadow of envy . . . for the husband [Soraya’s husband] he has never seen” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 11).

Very early on in the text, *Disgrace* highlights that the subject-formation involved in Schillerian *Bildung* leads to an inflexible and assertive subject. On the second page of the novel, we are told that “[Lurie’s] temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 2). This fixity or hardness in Lurie has to be kept in mind as we witness his choreographing of himself as an embattled Romantic hero resisting the rationalisation of the university, which becomes evident in his defence against the claim of sexual harassment that is lodged by Melanie. Indeed, his behaviour is against university rules: the complaint lodged against him falls under “article 3.1 of the university’s Code of Conduct,” which “addresses victimization or harassment of students by teachers” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 38-39). The Office of Student Records also accuses Lurie of allowing Melanie to pass her exams and gain credit for classes that she has not attended (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 49). Throughout his trial, Lurie’s concern is the hypocrisy of the committee and its inability to understand the relationship of his desire to his aesthetic education. Thinking in such abstract ideas allows Lurie to “situate himself as libertine defender of desire against the mechanized forces of

conventional society” even as it allows him to ignore the violence that he has visited upon Melanie (Heaney 143). The scene enables the narration to suggest that any critique of the flaws of *Bildung* in a neoliberal institution, though ostensibly more concerned with the rights of the powerless than with Lurie, has its own auto-immunity: it cannot change the minds of subjects to agree to progressive social change and only protects those with enough privilege. This maintenance of the status quo leads to an ultimate perpetuation of existing inequalities as opposed to redressing them. Instead, it is Lurie’s Romantic education which, despite its flaws, manages to provide some resistance to the neoliberal university.

Lurie’s defiant statement to the committee suggests that he is determined to make a statement to the committee about the value of the aesthetic regardless of whether they accept his lesson or not. He refuses to take part in institutional procedure, repeatedly denying the committee the opportunity to “hear both sides of the case” in the name of fairness (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 49). In the same vein, he does not provide the defence that the committee expects when accused, instead coolly accepting the facts of the matter: “I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 49). When asked by Farodia Rassool if he has read Melanie’s charges before admitting guilt, he replies that he accepts the charges because he “[knows] of no reason why Ms. Isaacs should lie” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 49). This claim is true not only because Lurie knows the truth of the situation: he has made the sexual advances to Melanie himself but also, she does not stand to benefit regardless of whether he is found guilty.

Rassool then asks him if it would not be prudent to read Melanie’s statement first, and Lurie replies that “there are more important things in life than

being prudent" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 49). Lurie's language echoes the language that he used in his first attempt to seduce Melanie, where he asks her to do "something reckless" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 16). Imprudence is the end result of passion, which, as I have previously noted, is how Lurie describes his relationship with literature. Lurie also uses passion to explain his pursuit of Melanie in his confession to the committee: "I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 52). In the context of *Disgrace*, passion as a Romantic concern becomes important because of its centrality to Lurie's two literary idols, Wordsworth (as earlier mentioned) and Byron: "Lurie's concern with passion, both his awareness of the waning possibilities of sexual passion or the more aesthetic 'literary passions' that he quizzes Melanie about (13), is a deeply Byronic concern" (*Beard* 62).

Lurie refuses to speak the language of rationalisation and legality in his dealings with the committee, instead working in the mode of self-expression and introspection. This is why the businesswoman in the committee cannot understand him, and neither can Farodia Rassool, the sociology professor who is horrified at his treatment of Melanie (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 50). When Lurie pleads guilty to the charges, Rassool is unhappy because she thinks that his legal plea lacks the specificity of the violence that he has committed: "he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 50). Lurie's lesson in reading works for Rassool after a fashion; despite her united front with other professors who are asking for a plea of guilt,

she seems to realize the inadequacy of university red tape in addressing moral wrongs. As Lurie notes, Rassool's concern is not legal; she wants a confession of sin, not a legal plea (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 51). Rassool's awareness of the disjunct between the admission of facts and the moral realization that comes with realizing the gravity of one's actions leads her to accuse Lurie of "[accepting] the charges only in name" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 50). Unhappy that the legal plea does not "mention the pain [Lurie] has caused" or "the long history of exploitation of which [his actions] are part," Rassool tries to fish for an admission of moral wrongdoing from Lurie because the "wider community is entitled to know what it is specifically that Professor Lurie acknowledges" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 50).

Rassool's awareness of the problems of legality ironizes her alliance with the rest of the committee who are focused on the paperwork of the matter. Unlike other committee members, who merely want from Lurie a willingness to subject himself to due process in the university, Rassool is trying to obtain from Lurie a confession that indicates that he is feeling repentant for his actions. This Lurie initially resists, but later submits to, in a bid to demonstrate that the words that Rassool wants him to say are no real indication of his true feelings: "I have said the words for you [Rassool], now you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. . . . That is beyond the scope of the law. I have had enough. Let us go back to playing it by the book" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 55). Lurie is correct in noting that Rassool's demands are beyond the law, and this casts an ironic light on her demanding of moral justice via institutional procedure.

What is clear here is that Lurie will not allow the university committee to coerce him into moral rectitude or into issuing a public apology that he does not

believe in, participating in a farce to make the university look good. There is no dialogue between Lurie and Rassool because she wants to corner him into feeling and saying the things that she desires. Despite this, Rassool is probably the most likable member in a very unlikable committee. Whatever her failings, she wants Lurie to realize his sins and repent sincerely. The male committee members, however, who try to get Lurie to issue a statement of apology, are much more in line with the goals of the neoliberal university. Like Lurie, they show little care for the violence that Melanie has suffered, instead prioritising their friendship with Lurie and focusing on getting him to apologize so that the university can maintain a good reputation. Aram Hakim, who is Lurie's friend, "intervenes" in Elaine Winter's laying out of Lurie's lying about Melanie's record, asks him to do further reading of the university code and "perhaps get legal advice" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 41). He expresses "sympathy" for Lurie, telling him that these charges "can be hell" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 42). Desmond Swarts tells the committee that the university "ought not to proceed against a colleague in a coldly formalistic way" because most of the committee "are not [Lurie's] enemies" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 51-52). It is on these grounds, the grounds of "male chumminess," that the committee asks for a statement from Lurie "admitting [he] was wrong" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 42). It is made clear that the male members of the committee are more concerned with protecting the university's reputation and not rocking the boat than they are with executing justice.

Significantly, the words of Manas Mathabane, the chair of the university committee, makes it clear to Lurie that he does not care about either Melanie's



suffering or Lurie's morality. The following two quotations are taken from his interactions with Lurie regarding the matter of Melanie:

Ideally [the university committee] would all have preferred to resolve this case out of the glare of the media. . . . It has received a lot of attention, it has acquired overtones that are beyond our control. All eyes are on the university to see how we handle it. That is why I ask whether there is not a form of public statement you could live with and that would allow us to recommend something less than the most severe sanction. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 54)

The criterion [of Lurie's public statement] is not whether you are sincere. That is a matter . . . for your own conscience. The criterion is whether you are prepared to acknowledge your fault in a public manner and take steps to remedy it (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 58).

Lurie is perceptive enough to point out the Mathabane's cynicism: "I am being asked to issue an apology about which I may not be sincere?" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 58). Lurie's resistance to the university committee allows the reader to see that the university committee is more concerned with appearances than Lurie learning from his mistake. Because Lurie is so obstinate, we are shown the university committee's true concerns when they push him for a public apology.

The scene of Lurie's confrontation with the university committee also encourages us to consider the paradoxes of trying to effect social progress through being complicit with neoliberalism. When Rassool mentions the "long history of exploitation of which [Lurie's affair] is part," the text alludes to the situations of the

Sorayas of the world. Whatever Rassool's thoughts would be of Lurie's behaviour we cannot know, but what is clear is that she would not be able to push for Lurie to be punished had he stuck to sex workers. In fact, there is no way she could even know about it unless she had found out by accident or had been told. As Lurie's decision to follow his passions move him from the realm of the exploited sex workers to that of the university, his behaviour illuminates for the reader the inevitable complicity of the rationalised university with the inequalities of a capitalistic society. The university can only protect those within its remit. Thus, it is only concerned with those who have the power to make complaints and who are privileged enough to do so: people like Melanie, who is fortunate enough to be able to make it to university and who has a caring family. It is not just that Rassool fails in her mission to get Lurie to realize that he is morally wrong—the committee that she belongs to, far from redressing the injustices of society, not only fails to—prevent injustice to women on a larger societal scale but is in fact a signifier of the inequalities that allow for the exploitation of an underclass of women. This lends Rassool's mission for justice a comic and heavily ironic flavour: though her alliance with the neoliberal university is not entirely comfortable, the way that she thinks she can effect progressive social change is symbolised by the very thing that maintains the status quos that she so detests.

At this point, I would like to re-examine and rebut Attridge's claims about Lurie's representation as a Romantic hero in the matter of his behaviour towards the disciplinary committee. Attridge writes:

There is little to suggest that at the time he makes it Lurie intends his stand as a principled challenge to the entire establishment in the

name of desire . . . nor that he is consciously and deliberately embarking on a complete reinvention of his way of living. In its emotional resonance it seems more like a matter of pique, irritation, and hurt pride taking him willy-nilly down a road whose destination is obscure. (169)

This description is true of Lurie only if we consider how Lurie looks to us. It is, however, not necessarily true of how Lurie looks to himself. I argue that the text suggests that Lurie thinks that he is indeed making a Romantic stand against a rationalised establishment, but the text's distancing of us from him makes it difficult for us to see his resistance as a principled stance. As earlier mentioned, in the university committee scene, the text makes it clear that Lurie has decided to refuse to cooperate with institutional procedure. Next, although we are not privy to any other character's inner thoughts but Lurie's, Coetzee is careful to put distance between Lurie and the reader, enabling an ironic reading of Lurie's behaviour.

Consider the beginning of the novel: "For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 1; emphasis added). As the narration here highlights Lurie's own thoughts on the issue, we are made aware that the narrator's view of the situation (or indeed our own view) might not very well be Lurie's. The phrase "to his mind" occurs again, barely a few pages after the first, in the passage that I have already quoted but will requote for the purpose of continuity: "He has never been much of a teacher, in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 4). Coetzee's narration

ensures that despite experiencing the immersion that free indirect discourse offers, the reader is made aware of the limitation of Lurie's perspective through the adverbial phrase "to his mind" and the appositive use of commas. Markers of Lurie's subjectivity pepper the text, constantly reminding the reader that the thoughts presented in the novel belong to him alone. Here are a few more examples:

The gossip mill, he thinks, turning day and night, grinding reputations (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 42).

Poor land, poor soil, he thinks (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 64).

He is not, he hopes, a sentimentalist (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 143).

The distancing of the reader from Lurie allows the readers of the novel to realize the failures of Romanticism as practiced by Lurie. In the classroom scene, for example, this distance enables us to discern the auto-immunity conferred upon him by his Romantic education. Given Lurie's position as a Romantic thinker in a neoliberal institution that does not value or care for his views, there is little impetus for him to present his thoughts and arguments in a manifesto *a la* Herzog. As I have argued, the novel provides enough evidence for us to see how deeply the Romantic emphasis on the sublime feeling has affected his actions and behaviour. Lurie's stand against the committee seems confused to Attridge simply because we have a critical distance from the text. This confusion stems from a textual effect: the simultaneous distancing of the reader from Lurie acting in tandem with the restriction of the reader's consciousness to Lurie's. This results in what I would call a doubling of consciousness, where we can feel Lurie's emotions while also feeling

the sharp edge of the text's ironic treatment of him. Hence, we can feel the anti-establishmentarian impulse behind Lurie's dramatic staging of himself as Romantic hero (for instance, in the university committee scene) while being able to retain an ironic distance from his antics that allow us to sense both the delusionality and parochiality of his views. This peculiar mix allows us to confuse our sense of Lurie with Lurie's sense of himself, leading to Attridge making his conclusion that Lurie is acting out of pique. Although Lurie may look melodramatic to us, it is unclear to what extent Lurie's performance is his inner reality.

If, as I have argued, Lurie's Romanticism impels him to resist the procedures of the neo-liberal disciplinary committee, then we can conclude that Lurie's aesthetic education provides him with some degree of resistance to the rationalised university. Although Rassool launches a critique of Lurie's views that dovetails with the critique that the novel itself provides of him, she is unable to provide the same degree of resistance to a system that she intuitively sees as flawed. We can read this as the novel suggesting that the space of the Romantic aesthetic is, despite its problems, a possible way in which one can effect change in society. Moral precepts applied with brute force, whether in the form of protective laws or moral censure from others, do not succeed in reforming individuals who believe that their violence to others is justified. Though Rassool and the rest of the committee differ in their motivations, neither are interested in understanding Lurie's point of view. Rather, both are united by their desire for admission of fault; Rassool because she wants Lurie to repent, and the committee because it would make the university look good. Through this, the novel suggests that while a socio-political critique of *Bildung* can be co-opted by a neoliberal university, there is

literally no space within such an institution to understand Romantic explanations, much less engage with them: this is why there is no effective dialogue between any of the committee members and Lurie. Lurie's inflexibility allows him to resist the committee, but at the same time, this resistance does little to change either his views or theirs because they are equally inflexible.

### **Disgrace's Auto-immune Defence of Romanticism: Feminising the Romantics**

Lurie's resistance to the university committee makes it clear that the very exclusion of the Romantic ideals of education from the neoliberal university might offer a glimmer of hope for an aesthetic education. This glimmer of hope, however, is not realized via Lurie's confrontation with the university committee; the text is unforgiving in its focus on his blindness and violence towards women. Rather, we are encouraged to think any potential resistance that an aesthetic education may offer to neoliberalism outside of Lurie's conventional Romantic readings that focus on the Byronic (male) (anti)hero or the (masculine) Wordsworthian poet of genius. For instance, the text does make it clear that the university as an "emasculated institution" is Lurie's view rather than the narrator's. The genderedness of Lurie's thought becomes significant to the reader, who has already been sensitised to his objectionable behaviour regarding both Soraya and Melanie. Lurie always views events via the frame of phallic power.

This becomes evident in his conversations with Lucy. The other instance of emasculation comes up in the text when Lurie talks to Lucy about why he resisted the offer of counselling at the university. When Lucy dryly asks Lurie if he is "so perfect that [he] can't do with a little counselling," he states that he is against

forced reform of character (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 66). However, there is the truth that he is unable to voice out to Lucy: “[Lurie] was going to add, ‘the truth is, they wanted me castrated,’ but he cannot say the words, not to his daughter” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 66). Although Lurie does not tell Lucy that masculine pride is part of why he resisted the notion of counselling, Lucy’s insightful reply to Lurie suggests that she has intuited that both Lurie and the university committee do not reach any compromise because they are equally involved in a phallogentric fight for dominance: “you [Lurie] stood your ground and they [the university committee] stood theirs” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 66). Lucy’s advice to her father that “it isn’t heroic to be unbending” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 66) applies as much to him as to characters like Rassool.

Through the character of Lucy, the narration suggests that there is hope for Romanticism, but not if we read it with a conventional understanding of the movement that focuses on a notion of Schillerian *Bildung* that fosters an assertive and stable (masculine) subject that accesses the world around him as an object. Rather, Lucy’s name is an allusion to the mysterious Lucy in Wordsworth’s “Lucy” poems, whom the male speaker speaks about but whose thoughts we are not able to access. Structurally, *Disgrace* enacts the same dynamic as the Lucy poems insofar as we can access Lurie’s inner thoughts but not Lucy’s. Yet, *Disgrace* differs from the “Lucy” poems in that it gives us glimpses of her views as she engages in conversation with her father. These glimpses encourage the reader not only to realize the limitedness of Lurie’s perspective but also to think about how the

change in Lurie's views and temperament in the second half of the novel might be related to Lucy's (feminising) influence and perspective.<sup>68</sup>

The turn towards the feminine is not only encouraged by the novel's highlighting of the difference between Lucy's views and Lurie's, or even the Wordsworthian reference to the "Lucy" poems. In addition to Wordsworth, one of the major intertextual references that *Disgrace* makes is to Byron's long poem "Lara." I will elaborate on the narration's auto-immune defence of Romanticism through a reading of "Lara" and demonstrate that the various seemingly contradictory readings regarding the text's stance towards Romanticism can be understood if we think of the novel as prompting us towards an auto-immune reading of Romanticism. In picking up on the auto-immunity of Romanticism, the reader is provided with a paradoxical defence of *Bildung* that is auto-immune: the proposition that *Bildung* can only be more effective if it incorporates a sense of its own destruction.

When we first encounter both Wordsworth and Byron in *Disgrace*, they prompt us towards a critique of Lurie. Despite the novel's suggestion that Lurie's Romantic education provides him with resistance to the neoliberal university, the intertextual references provided by its narration seem to suggest that Lurie has failed to learn a key lesson of Romanticism: the responsibility of the educated intellectual to push society towards equality and to speak for his fellow man. This is the socio-political aspect of the movement that Herzog is so preoccupied with and

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<sup>68</sup> That Lucy is a lesbian highlights that the feminising involved is not essentialist, and rather has overlaps with queering the subject, who does not necessarily be cis-female to be put in a feminine position.



which Lurie seems to show very little interest in. As John Douthwaite writes in his essay on *Disgrace*, despite Lurie's professed Romanticism, he displays a troubling "lack of psychological and emotional involvement" in relation to others (131). Indeed, when speaking of Lurie's classroom scene, Margot Beard notes not only his failure of imagination but also his "shockingly instrumental use of the Wordsworth text to convey 'covert intimacies' to Melanie" (64). In the same vein, earlier on in the text, Lurie has instrumentalised Shakespeare's first sonnet to try to convince Melanie to sleep with him (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 16). Later, during the scene with the university committee, when Lurie hyperbolically casts himself as a "servant of Eros," one does wonder if Lurie uses his Romanticism in a self-serving way, to absolve himself of feeling responsible for his actions.

The novel's intertextual reference to Byron's poem "Lara" in fact, contains lines that directly ironize Lurie's defence that his passion excuses him from being responsible for the violence that he inflicts on others. For the sake of clarity, I will provide a brief summary of Byron's poem. The poem tells the tale of the return of its protagonist, Count Lara, from his time abroad in the East. At the beginning of the poem, we are told that Lara has run away from home in his youth to travel in the East, and returns home with a devoted foreign-born page named Kaled. Although Lara does good on his return, freeing the serfs from their servitude, earning their loyalty, he eventually dies in a fight that is ignited by his skirmish with a knight, Sir Ezzelin, who challenges him for crimes committed abroad. After Lara's death, the poem turns its attention to Kaled, whom we discover is a woman dressed up as a man. Soon after Lara dies, Kaled dies, pining for Lara, and the poem ends by telling us that in death she was able to lie next to her beloved,

although “her tale” remained “untold” (Byron 354). The poem, however, does not only tell the tale of its protagonist, but also provides some commentary on his psychology. In fact, an examination of the poem shows that it contains lines that may be read as a direct criticism of how Lurie presents his motivations for harassing Melanie to the university committee:

But haughty still, and loth himself to blame,  
 He called on Nature’s self to share the shame,  
 And charged all faults upon the fleshy form  
 She gave to clog the soul, and feast the worm;  
 ‘Till he at last confounded good and ill,  
 And half mistook for fate the acts of will. (Byron 326)

This intertextual allusion warns us that Lurie might be using a Romantic narrative of uncontrollable passion to justify his selfish actions. Lurie’s behaviour and his selfish instrumentalization of poetry leads Beard to conclude that Lurie, at least, at the beginning of the novel, “shows no sign of internalising that vital Romantic concept,” the sympathetic imagination (64). For Beard, it is only as Lurie progresses through the novel and “loses himself” that he begins to achieve this imagination (67). While Beard is correct in suggesting that Lurie undergoes a change in the later part of the novel that puts him more in line with Romantic ideals, this change cannot technically be described as a nurturing of the sympathetic imagination. The sympathetic imagination is a central Romantic concept that allows access to objective universal truths, most notably championed by male Romantic greats

Shelley and Coleridge in works like “Defence of Poetry” and “On Poesy or Art” respectively. In the words of M. H. Abrams, “the imagination, of which poetry is the product and the expression, is the mental organ for intuiting ‘those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself’ (130). Thus, “by its sympathetic identification the imagination perceives . . . the fundamental reality and inner working, the peculiar ‘truth’ and nature of its object” (Bate 145). It becomes clear that the sympathetic imagination is a Romantic way of achieving constitutive access to a world of transcendental truths. Through this access, the Romantics attempted to solve the class contradictions of *Bildung*: the privileged and educated can speak for the underprivileged because their aesthetic education has equipped them with insight into the latter’s “essential natures” (Bate 149).

I have elaborated on this philosophical mistake in Chapter 2 via Schiller’s assumption that reason is constitutive. The larger implication of this mistake, however, is that Lurie’s blindness is not simply a betrayal of Romanticism but rather an inevitable result of its operations, as both my readings of the unfortunate Herzog and Lurie show. These realizations about the problems of Romanticism lead scholars like Lucy Valerie Graham to conclude that *Disgrace* launches “a critique of the Romantic/ humanist posturing that obscures, even justifies, forsaking ethical responsibility in the realm of life” (441). Similarly, Melinda Harvey argues that “Coetzee invokes Wordsworth to give an account of the middle-aged, middle-class white male and his world-view,” in the process implicating Wordsworth in Lurie’s disgrace (97).

Beard and Douthwaite argue that Lurie fails to learn from his masters, while Harvey and Graham argue that it is Lurie’s masters who have failed him. At first

glance, views like Beard's and Douthwaite's seem to be in tension with Graham's and Harvey's. However, this is not so if we consider that a key feature of Byronic Romanticism is self-criticism. *Disgrace* invokes Wordsworth and Byron in order to critique their legacy via Lurie, but also so that an active perusal of these writers allow us to read Lurie's evolution in the novel as in line with the ideals of Romanticism. In Claire Heaney's words:

In many ways the novel reads as a faithful enactment of Byronic tradition. Lurie, with his literary passions, his rebellious arrogance, his disrespect for social institutions, self-destructive behaviour and eventual exile is in fact rather apt for a Byronic hero. . . . Coetzee's relation to Romantic tradition in *Disgrace* is thus dialogic rather than simply rejectionist. In the novel, Romanticism operates both as a self-justifying prejudice which motivates Lurie's ethical behaviour, and as a legitimate model for learning to rectify that behaviour (146-147).

Heaney's astute observation goes a long way towards explaining the novel's attitude towards an aesthetic education. However, I argue that Heaney's postulation can be clarified if we think of *Disgrace* as fleshing out the auto-immunity of Romanticism. That is, the novel's narration shows very clearly how the tenets of Romanticism, when followed blindly *a la* Lurie, lead to what we might think of as anti-Romantic outcomes: inequality, an inability to impart one's knowledge to others and a lack of self-awareness regarding the consequences of one's actions in regard to the well-being of others. Yet, Romanticism has within itself the space for auto-critique, and if this space is cultivated, it could,

paradoxically, address the flaws that *Bildung*, as Romantic project of education, inculcates in its subjects.

I propose that *Disgrace's* moves towards defending Romanticism involves encouraging its readers towards a feminine-focused reading of Romanticism that exists in uncomfortable tension with the canonised understanding of Romantic ideas that we have imbibed, mainly from male Romantic writers. Its affirmative reading of Romanticism consists in its suggestion that Romanticism allows space for the undoing of a Schillerian aesthetic education, where this education is framed as the nurturing of the masculine Romantic subject: as I will subsequently argue, reading Byron in tandem with the changes in Lurie and the novel's turn towards Lucy encourages us to look towards an undoing of the subject-formation that Schillerian *Bildung* involves. The logic is auto-immune. That is to say, the novel, through Lurie's evolution and Lucy's presence in his life, provides us with a sense of how to undo Schillerian *Bildung*. Despite this undoing, however, we leave the novel still as subjects in the world, but carrying within ourselves the experience of the destruction of Lurie's own subjectivity. Leaving the novel, we may learn a species of self-critique that Lurie was never able to effect, as well as a sense of openness towards the feminine other of Lucy. This learning experience exists in tension with our fully-formed subjectivities that allows us to extend our capabilities for self-critique and for being respectful to others.

When we read Lurie's journey in tandem with the novel's allusions to Lucy and to "Lara," it becomes clear that the novel is encouraging us to re-evaluate these texts and Lurie's journey with a lens that is focused on the lessons that their female figures give. As Beard notes, as the novel progresses Lurie becomes more

sensitive to his daughter's otherness, and "it is perhaps a measure of Lurie's gradual change that he is becoming more alert to the strangeness of his beloved daughter" (67). The same words used to describe Lucy in Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" can be used to describe Lucy in *Disgrace*: she "lives unknown," dwelling in ways that are "untrodden" to him, "half hidden from the eye" of both Lurie and the reader (Wordsworth, *Selected Poems* 71). This celebration of Lucy's otherness is the point of Wordsworth's Lucy poems; as Beard rightly notes, Lurie becomes less egoistical and more attuned to Lucy's integration with nature, finally re-enacting the speaker's respect for her simplicity (Beard 68-69). In its movement towards Lucy, *Disgrace* also replicates the movement in "Lara." Like "Lara", *Disgrace* begins with a masculine central figure and protagonist who is heavily critiqued and ironized, but ends by looking towards the mysterious feminine Kaled.

"Lara" as a text has a conflicted attitude towards its protagonist that *Disgrace* replicates. On the one hand, Lara is the Romantic champion of the masses, who "[frees] the soil-bound slaves" and promotes the cause of the serfs (Byron 341). Lurie does not fight for equality per se, but is presented as someone who resists the neoliberal university. On the other hand, the poem does not spare Lara, charging him with arrogance (a "secret pride") that "misleads his spirit . . . to crime" (Byron 326). Lurie's pride in his education and his masculinity lead him not only to hurt Melanie and Soraya, but also to refuse any notion of reform. Lara, like Lurie, is the main protagonist of the text that he inhabits, but the poem moves beyond his eventual death to focus on the unheroic and untold truth of Kaled. These close textual correspondences suggest that we might want to read *Disgrace*

via the movement towards the feminine in "Lara": Schillerian *Bildung* cultivates a subject who may still perform ethical actions via masculine valor, but at the same time, is so arrogant and blind to the realities of his own self that this route is unacceptable. Thus, the text takes a turn towards the lessons that we can learn from Kaled: the eschewing of bold heroics, which place one at the centre of a narrative, in favour of patient and unrecognised help because of the love that one bears another. We can also learn from Kaled, who spends much of the poem dressed up as a man, that behaving in a masculine way may be appropriate despite *Disgrace's* harsh critique of Lurie's masculinity.

Lucy is like Kaled insofar as she is interested not in abstract ideas, but simply in living a life with the people whom she cares for. As Spivak says, Lucy's vision of "starting with nothing" after her rape, "in the reproductive situation shorn of the fetishization of property, in the child given up as the body's product," is a vision where the ethical might emerge, if we think of the ethical as that which extends beyond the problems of Schillerian *Bildung* (332). Lucy's "nothing" is gendered, and related to a turn towards the animal, and thus opposed to Lurie's subjectivity, which is not only masculine, but also that of a white man in a system where white men have the power to exploit people of colour. This exploitation of people of colour, particularly women, is possible because the default subjectivity of such systems is white and male. The lives of others therefore only are valued in relation to white masculinity; thus, a hierarchy of privilege is formed with white males at the top and animals at the bottom. Through Lurie's thoughts and actions, the novel aligns the white masculine subject with a world view that places the

needs of one's self above the needs of others (who are hence by definition, feminine, coloured or not human).

Lurie is racist: he uses the slur "kaffir" to refer to Petrus (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 140).<sup>69</sup> When facing difficulties in his relationship with Petrus, he longs for the old days when race relations were even more unequal than present, when one could "have had it out" with Black people "to the extent of losing one's temper and sending [them] packing and hiring someone in [their] place" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 116). Both Melanie and Soraya, whom Lurie inflicts violence on, are women of colour: the former is described by Lurie as "the dark one" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 18) and the latter is "honey-brown," with "long, black hair" and "dark, liquid eyes" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 1). Lastly but no less significantly, we are told that Lurie, prior to his slow and painful change at the farm where he begins to feel for the dogs that he has to euthanize, has "been more or less indifferent to animals" and "disapprove[d] of cruelty" only "in an abstract way" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 143).

Thus, the novel makes it clear that the turn towards the feminine and animal is inextricable from a turn towards the racial other. In order to unpack this, we can first think about how Lucy's reaction to her rape differs from Lurie's reaction to his daughter's trauma. Lucy refuses to leave the farm for Holland despite Lurie putting pressure on her to do so. Lurie thinks Lucy wants to stay and

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<sup>69</sup> The use of the word "kaffir" is particularly offensive and loaded in South Africa, where it is derogatory slang for black people. The election slogan for the Afrikaners' National Party, which gained power in 1948 and which was responsible for the policy of apartheid, was "Die kaffer op sy plek; die koelies uit die land—The kaffir [nigger] in his place; the coolies [Indians] out of the country" (Aikman 81). Today, the use of the word in South Africa is considered *crimen injuria*, and is thus legally actionable. See also Gabeba Baderoon's essay on dogs in *Disgrace*, cited later in this chapter, where she talks about the origins of the word "kaffir" and its racist implications.



not report the rape incident to the police because of her racial guilt. He points this out at least twice. First, at Petrus's party, he tells Lucy, "You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 133). Next, after the police return the wrong car to Lurie, Lucy has her last conversation with her father over the incident of the rape, where Lurie urges her to leave the farm, he tells her: "You are on the brink of a dangerous error. You wish to humble yourself before history. But the road you are following is the wrong one" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160). Lucy's reply to her father is that although "the road [she] is following may be the wrong one, if [she] leaves the farm now she will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of [her] life" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 161). In this way, the novel, through Lucy, encourages us to construct a narrative that her father is incapable of. Lucy sees leaving the farm as defeat, whereas Lurie sees staying at the farm as "[stripping her] of all honour" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160).

Spivak has noted this by pointing out that Lurie sees Lucy's giving up of her farm as leaving her with nothing, where this "nothing" is intertextual with Kafka's *The Trial* and alludes to "the end of civil society . . . where only shame is guaranteed continuity" (*Aesthetic Education* 322). Lurie's view that Lucy is staying out of racial guilt echoes the views of Dan Roodt, R. W. Johnson and Ian Glenn, all of whom are mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The novel itself rebuts this view through Lucy's words. The complicity of Black people with rape and avariciousness that some critics accuse the novel of, however, ironically mimics Lurie's conflation of Petrus with Lucy's rapists. These critics, the novel suggests, refuse to recognize the singularity of black individuals by conflating them with the

three rapists in the novel who happen to be black.<sup>70</sup> This inattention is also, the novel suggests, Lurie's mistake:

One way or another, it was [Petrus] who brought those men in the first place. . . . Petrus is not an innocent party, Petrus is *with* them [the rapists]. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 133; emphasis in original)

Petrus is not an old-style kaffir, much less a good old chap. Petrus, in my opinion, is itching for Lucy to pull out. If you want proof, look no further than at what happened to Lucy and me. It may not have been Petrus's brainchild, but he certainly turned a blind eye, he certainly didn't warn us, he certainly took care not to be in the vicinity. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 140).

Lurie's opinion of Petrus is contrasted with Bev's and Lucy's. Lucy directly rebuts Lurie by claiming that the incident "is not Petrus's fault" and cautioning him against calling the police on Petrus when he sees the youngest rapist at Petrus's party, reminding him that Petrus is "not some hired labourer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 133). Lucy reminds her father (who, as earlier noted, is nostalgic for apartheid racial relations) that they no longer live in times where he has all the power over black men, and that he has to at least "hear Petrus's side of the story" and "be sure of his facts" if

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<sup>70</sup> Attridge notes the novel's "dedication to a singularity that exceeds systems and computations: the singularity of every living and dead being, the singularity of the truly inventive work of art. (And this is connected to the collapse of his sexual routine when he tries to individualize "Soraya" and to his resistance to the committee whose task it is to reduce a singular erotic experience to a classifiable category.)" (188).

he wants to call the police (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 133). Bev tells Lurie that Lucy will “be alright” once “Petrus has taken her under his wing,” that he “slaved to get the market garden going for Lucy” and that he is a “good chap” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 140). All that we know of Petrus’s relationship with the rapists is that the youngest of the rapists, whose name is Pollux, is “a brother of Petrus’s wife”; Lucy does not know “whether that means [that he is] a real brother [of hers] but Petrus has obligations towards [Pollux], family obligations” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 200). This information tells us nothing about Petrus’s involvement, if any, with the incident of Lucy’s rape and the attack on Lurie.

However, the novel’s intertextual references thus far allow us to construct a narrative that explains both Lucy’s and Petrus’s choices. Kaled is not committed to Lara because of any notions of justice; her attachment is personal. Ironically, although Lurie immediately sees that violence has been inflicted on his daughter, he is unable to realize that he has inflicted violence on Melanie and apologize for it until late in the novel (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 171-173). Even after that realization, he still stalks Melanie by going to one of the plays that she acts in, and hires a prostitute to satisfy his desires (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 190-195). His sensitivity to Lucy’s pain is personal; understandably Petrus sees his commitment to Pollux as mirroring Lurie’s protectiveness of Lucy: “You [Lurie] come to look after your child. I also look after my child. . . . He is a child. He is my family, my people” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 201). Lucy’s speech to Lurie after Petrus proposes marriage to her gives us an idea of why she thinks leaving South Africa for Holland would be a defeat:

[T]ake a moment to consider my situation objectively. Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have a father, but he is far

away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for patronage? . . . Practically speaking, there is only Petrus left. Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me. And at least I know Petrus. I have no illusions about him (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 204).

We are told, via Lurie's conversation with Bev, that Lucy's mother is Dutch, and that Lucy has lived in Holland with her mother after the divorce, but chosen to return to South Africa (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 161). While it might be true, as Lurie claims, that his daughter has returned to South Africa because of her dislike of her stepfather, it is also true that she has chosen to return to South Africa because she has chosen him and "a certain surround, a certain horizon" over the environment in Holland (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 161).

For reasons that are not made clear to the reader, Lucy really enjoys South African farm life: early on in the novel Lurie tells us that Lucy has "fallen in love" with the smallholding in Grahamstown and "he helped her to buy it" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 60). Choosing to leave her home is something that Lucy does not desire; she would be leaving the farm not because she no longer likes farm life or prefers some other kind of life to the life that she has on the farm. Leaving the farm would mean that the trauma of the rape has forced her out of a lifestyle and environment that she really enjoys. Thus, leaving would be a "defeat" in Lucy's words. Yet, Lucy is aware that the life she has chosen comes with dangers, and Lurie cannot protect her from them. Marriage to Petrus may not be something that she truly desires, but it is a pragmatic choice that will allow her to continue the life that she enjoys.

Lucy's choice, also, as I have earlier postulated, is something that places her beyond Schillerian *Bildung* insofar as she moves outside of what Agamben calls *bios* towards *zoē*, and therefore moves towards being outside of the system of exchange in a neoliberal society (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Lurie's despair at starting with "nothing," "like a dog", is inextricable from capitalism and its phallic grasping after power in the form of money and property (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 205). By contrast, Lucy's choice to give Petrus her farm and her baby is a re-reading and re-evaluation of Lurie's fear and hatred of castration, where the "nothing" that is the metaphorical hole of the vagina is the very space for a radical beginning outside of an existing capitalistic patriarchy. Lucy's "nothing" is therefore a more profound and complete resistance to neoliberalism than Lurie's (masculine) Romanticism; qua Readings in my first chapter, Lurie's initial mode of subjectivity is necessary for the operation of capitalism despite his resistance to the neoliberal university.

Yet, Lurie does undergo a change that aligns him more with Lucy and dogs as the novel progresses. Lucy's "nothing" also extends to the disintegration of Lurie's subjectivity as the novel draws to a close: Lurie moves closer to *zoē* as he learns to care for dogs and realize the otherness of Lucy's perspective. In contradiction to Beard's claim, I have argued that Lurie does not learn to sympathise with the other; however, I am in agreement with her that he is brought closer to Lucy as he moves towards being bewildered by her otherness. Several scholars have noticed that the turn towards Lucy that Lurie experiences is a turn towards the animal insofar as he only begins to reconcile himself to his daughter's perspective once he begins helping Bev care for the dogs in her shelter.

For instance, Tim Herron observes that “something does happen to David, something is kindled in him and that change has something to do with his increasing engagement with animals. Precisely what it is that happens to him is difficult to articulate” (474). In trying to articulate what Lurie’s change involves, Herron posits that “the first flickerings of sympathy” are ignited in Lurie as he cares for the animals; later he argues that “in being close to animals, in looking after them (even when they are dead), in learning from them, and in dwelling amongst them, David’s capacity for sympathy is broadened to a remarkable degree” (471, 480). While I am uncomfortable with Herron’s use of the word “sympathy” as descriptor, with its significant echoes in the concept of “the sympathetic imagination,” I agree with Herron in noting that Lurie moves from disapproving of cruelty in an abstract way to an embodied experience of feeling pain in euthanizing the dogs that he cares for. This move away from what Herron calls an “abandon[ment] of all that had hitherto sustained [Lurie] as a white, liberal, libidinous academic” (Herron 471) marks the change in Lurie that moves him beyond Schillerian Bildung, and thus the novel can, as Marianne DeKoven argues, be read as “part of a burgeoning popular, literary, and academic set of discourses locating the possibility of hope or of the persistence of the humane in this woman-animal allegiance over the seemingly terminally destructive power of global capital, of which neoliberal neocolonialism is a key element” (DeKoven 847). The narration suggests this through Lurie’s increasing integration with the farming community near its end, a community that does not operate by the rules and laws of the state with its involvement in the global flow of capital. Significantly, as Lurie becomes less of a city man, he gains new appreciation for rural life, when he admits that

throughout his life “he has never had much of an eye for rural life, despite all his reading in Wordsworth,” and asks himself whether it is too late to “educate the eye” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 218).

I posit that the hope of the novel can be located in Lurie’s changing attitude towards the dogs that he takes care of, which marks a change in Lurie’s subjectivity. He does not gain Romantic sympathy, in fact, the narration is careful to suggest that he goes wrong when he does use his imagination to try and access the experiences of others. Two notable instances are his imaginings regarding Melanie and Lucy. In the first, early on in the novel, Lurie “[tries] to imagine what has happened” to make Melanie lodge a complaint against him (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 39). Immediately, Lurie infantilizes Melanie, stripping her of agency: he imagines that she is “too innocent” to have decided to lodge a complaint; he thinks that her father, “the little man in the ill-fitting suit, must be behind it, he and cousin Pauline, the plain one, the duenna” must have “talked her into it, worn her down, then in the end marched her to the administration offices” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 39). There is no evidence in the narration to support Lurie’s view; however, there is some evidence in the narration to suggest that Melanie is not completely devoid of agency: she has taken the initiative to complain to her boyfriend about Lurie’s behaviour (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 30) and he tells Lurie, later on in the novel when he stalks her at her play, that “Melanie would spit in your eye if she sees you” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 194).

Imagination fails Lurie again when he attempts to understand Lucy’s experience of rape by imagining her experience, in the important scene where they have their last argument about her refusal to leave South Africa: “Lucy was

frightened, frightened near to death. Her voice choked, she could not breathe, her limbs went numb. This is not happening, she said to herself. . . . While the men, for their part, drank up her fear, revelled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160). After this episode, Lurie asserts that contrary to Bev Shaw’s and Lucy’s assertions that he “doesn’t understand” because he “[wasn’t] there,” he does understand Lucy’s situation if he takes the male perspective: “he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 160).<sup>71</sup> The question is answered for us when he encourages Lucy to leave after this attempted reconstruction of her experience, and she tells him that she sees leaving as a defeat. The sympathetic imagination, the concept that the Romantics used to attempt to resolve the social contradictions of the *Bildung* project, does not allow access to the transcendental truths of others because it is bounded first and foremost by masculinity. Sympathetic imagination fails because it assumes that white masculine subjectivity is shared by others who do not inhabit that subject position (see Chapter 2, Section 1 and Section 2, Subsection 2).

*Disgrace* contrasts the sympathetic imagination with a feeling of stupefaction that Lurie increases experiences as the novel draws to a close. As Lurie

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Marais reads this scene as Lurie eventually managing to sympathise with Lucy (“Imagination” 77). This sympathy, as I have argued, is problematic: sympathy leads Lurie astray, and leads him to misunderstand Lucy rather than begin to approach her perspective. See Coetzee’s essay on *Clarissa* in *Stranger Shores*, where he claims that “to interpret rape or to interpret a woman’s interpretation of rape in itself carries overtones of violation, as it shows that “we are still under the sway of the sentimental notion of womanhood that Richardson did so much to establish—the notion of the woman’s body as special, compounded of the animal and the angelic in ways beyond a man’s comprehending” (*Stranger Shores* 37-38).



participates in killing dogs, and his focus is not imagining the experience of the animal, but the beginnings of feeling for the animals that he kills:

He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy's kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake. *He does not understand what is happening to him* (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142; emphasis added).

Lurie feels more for the dogs that he puts down as he kills more of them; killing does not induce numbness in him. He feels pain upon inflicting death upon them, but “tries not to sentimentalize the animals he kills” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 143). In words of the narrator, he does not understand his change in himself. While I am in agreement with DeKoven that Lurie “identifies with the dogs” towards the end of the novel, I stress that this identification takes place at the level of embodiment insofar as both Lurie and the dogs inhabit bodies that possess “a common vulnerability to death and their capacity to feel pain,” (DeKoven 886) and Lurie becomes emotionally overwhelmed by the implications of this identification, to the point where he ceases to understand what is happening to himself (Schildgen 325). Lurie has moved away from “disapproving of cruelty in an abstract way” (earlier quoted) to feeling baffled at his own emotions. This mental confusion is a far cry from the access to transcendental truths promised by the sympathetic imagination.

The affective difference between Lurie's lack of understanding and the sympathetic imagination is concisely summed up by Philip Dickinson in his 2013 essay on *Disgrace*:

Coetzee's work in general, and this novel in particular, bring the language of sympathy into bewildering contact with moments of inappropriable affect . . . the other of feeling—confusion, disorientation, emotional excess, anaesthesia, stupidity. Sympathetic discourse ultimately wants to protect feeling from the incalculability of affect but cannot guard against such contamination. Coetzee's fiction, on the other hand, posits this contamination as the irreducible condition of ethical relation, if not as the very experience of the ethical. (2)

Dickinson points out that if we want to read *Disgrace* as an affirmation of Romanticism, then we cannot talk about what he has learnt without taking into account the predominant emotion that Lurie feels as the novel progress: the feeling of stupidity and incomprehension that involves being thrown into a world that one is ill-equipped for. Lurie's learning journey, then, is marked not by epiphanies or insights into truth, but stupidity and the loss of one's self:

If [Lurie] came [to Lucy's farm] for anything, it was to gather himself, gather his forces. Here he is losing himself day by day. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 121)

He saves the honour of corpses because there is no one stupid enough to do it. That is what he is becoming: stupid, daft, wrongheaded (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 146).

If we pay attention to this feeling of stupidity and loss of self that Lurie experiences, then it becomes clear that Lurie does not receive a schooling in the sympathetic imagination (defined earlier), as Beard and other critics have asserted. Instead of gaining access to the essential truths of the rural community, Lurie experiences increasing bafflement as he tries to integrate into his new life. As Dickinson notes, it is difficult to “know what to do with the stupefying aura of the ethical that accompanies Lurie’s decision [in the closing scene of the novel where Lurie decides to euthanize a dog that he has formed a bond with]” (17). In this scene, Lurie does not offer us insights into why he is doing what he is doing, or what he has learnt, simply telling Bev: “I am giving him up” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 220). This sentence is the sentence that ends the novel. It is difficult to say that we can see Lurie learning a sense of responsibility for the other, becoming less selfish, because Lurie’s decision to euthanize the dog “at once assumes and abdicates a responsibility for the other, seeming enigmatically to recede from the grasp of ethical thought” (Dickinson 17).

What seems to be true is that Lurie becomes less self-absorbed by becoming less of a self. His ego, in every sense of the word, is reduced, and he slowly moves towards a more existential mode of living, without any viable interpretative framework to understand the things or people around him. Lurie thus slowly tries to learn to unlearn, by moving away from abstractions as much as he can. He moves towards becoming Lucy’s “nothing.” This is why his opera

eventually evolves to be “the kind of work a sleepwalker might write” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 214). Lurie moves away from being a Romantic artist to someone whose art is only produced unconsciously, incidentally, through monotonous physical action. Samuel Durrant’s essay on *Elizabeth Costello* and the sympathetic imagination perhaps outlines the journey that Lurie takes most clearly: “It is only in his stupefying work with animals that [Lurie] avoids imaginative projection and enacts a singularly unimaginative sympathy” (130). So, in place of the “sympathetic imagination, in which the self attempts to mentally inhabit the position of the other, Coetzee’s fiction works to other the self” (Durrant 130).

As we read both Dickinson and Durrant meta-textually, it becomes clear that what Lurie learns is not exactly what they have learnt. Lurie learns not to abstract, to move away from thought into action, to become stupid. As Durrant points out, “what Lurie literalizes, we, of course, experience as fiction” (130). We feel him becoming stupid, but do we ourselves become stupid as we read the novel? It would be dishonest to say so. After all, the conclusions of the scholars cited, including Dickinson and Durrant themselves, are intellectually sophisticated. Not admitting the lessons that a text teaches allows the confusion between Lurie’s consciousness and ours to be perpetuated. We feel what Lurie feels, to some unspecified degree, but what we read as his lessons are more likely our own. Dickinson struggles with trying to interpret the stupefaction that Lurie experiences. It is correct that, in Dickinson’s words, a reader is at a loss if s/he tries to know what to do with this feeling of stupidity. However, my argument thus far suggests that to think towards a conceptual understanding of this stupefaction is perhaps impossible, if it is indeed the “nothing” that Lucy suggests. We can see our impulse

to interpret and understand even this stupefaction as a tendency to think in abstractions: it is the Schillerian subject resisting the breakdown of itself. I suggest that we cannot know what to do with this feeling, in fact, this feeling is valuable precisely because it resists our tendency to know, to read and interpret. This notion ties in with Durrant's postulation that Coetzee's fiction works to other the self, but I would add that the othering of the self is enacted not through an attempt to inhabit the other but through the breakdown of the self. We can read this as the novel's enactment of a Spivakian double bind: after reading the novel, we are left with two experiences that may be described as aporetic. We retain the breakdown of self that we experience via Lurie, and this exists in tension with the Schillerian subject that still remains intact in spite of this experience.

Lurie's journey from university to farm, and his subsequent movement towards being open to rural life, seems to imply that we may be better off not engaging with the aesthetic at all. In this sense *Disgrace* is meta in a way that *Stoner* and *Herzog* are not: as an aesthetic object it makes gestures towards moving us to consider that which it implies is not within its purview. Are we then to read the novel to take away the lesson that literature is not worth reading, that it causes more problems than it is worth? This is a question that Durrant wrestles with, when he asks whether we should respond to the novel by following Lucy's example: giving up our rights and privileges (131). It is also a question that might have passed Attridge's mind although he does not take into account the feeling of bafflement in his reading of *Disgrace*—in his preface to *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, he mentions that "the pleasure" in reading Coetzee is often "mixed with a feeling of dismay," and that his work on Coetzee has always been

accompanied by “a sense of bafflement” (x). It is possible to conclude that the novel’s lesson directs us away from the pursuit of studying literature, but this in turn would be a turning-away from the fact that we have learnt this lesson via a novel and through the active perusal of a novel’s intertextual references. Moreover, paradoxically, our ability to look towards Lucy as a figure of progress involves a move of abstraction that is part of reading. To look towards Lucy and even to be baffled by her (via Lurie) involves an awareness that both Lurie and Lucy are characters in a novel, where Lurie is representative of the (masculine) subject formed of Schillerian Bildung and Lucy is representative of a (feminine) “adaptable” character who lives “closer to the ground” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 210).

This push towards an allegorical reading is built into the novel: the novel drops us clues via the dialogue that the characters engage in. For instance, the narration provides a meta-commentary of the novel via Lucy’s speech to Lurie: “You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. . . . I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 198). In the first part of her speech, Lucy describes the structure of *Disgrace*; she indeed does not make an appearance until Lurie leaves the university. Indeed, as per her speech, the novel pushes us (and its protagonist) towards the realization of Lucy’s importance. Next, that Lucy gives equal importance to both her life and Lurie’s life contains an encapsulation of the double bind that the novel presents us with: the masculine Schillerian subject exists in tension with the feminine other. Lucy’s calm assertiveness can be gainfully

contrasted with Lurie's increasing uncertainty and bafflement. While the text does not give us insights as to Lucy's inner feelings, this contrast suggests that the breakdown of subjectivity that Lurie experiences, and the subsequent double bind that we experience through him, is only available to someone who has experienced a Schillerian aesthetic education.

This idea is supported by the fact that only a familiarity with the significance of the *symbol* of the dog in South African culture allows us to understand the full significance of Lurie's identification with dogs. If we read the novel allegorically, Lurie's emotional connection to dogs, acquired during the course of the novel, marks a change in not only his subject-position but also his attitudes toward race. In her brilliant article "Animal Likenesses: Dogs and the Boundary of the Human in South Africa" (2017), Gabeba Baderoon points out that "canines [came] to be framed by invective" because of "the meanings given to dogs during colonial settlement, and particularly to one dog, *Africanis*, known by the imprecation 'kaffir dog'" (346). Baderoon provides a concise summary of how the *Africanis* came to occupy a place in racist discourse:

The *Africanis* is one of three indigenous Southern African breeds, along with the *boer hond* and the ridgeback. . . . During the nineteenth century, the three dogs were integrated into a racialized South African imaginary that divided them into 'white' and 'Black' breeds. The *boer hond* and ridgeback became known as 'white' dogs valued for their loyalty and genetic purity and were seen as distinct from 'mongrel Kaffir dogs'. . . . The *Africanis* acquired its pejorative associations partly because its owners *did not control its breeding*, a

particularity which led Europeans to view the dogs as ‘feral’.

Consequently, the ‘mongrel’ *Africanis* dogs became associated with a discourse of degeneracy and *wildness*, while the ‘white’ indigenous breeds became beloved national symbols through novels (346-347; emphasis added).

It is therefore significant that the dogs Lurie comes to care for are mongrel dogs; the dogs at Bev’s shelters are “not Lucy’s well-groomed thoroughbreds but a *mob* of scrawny *mongrels* filling two pens to bursting point, *barking, yapping, whining, leaping with excitement*” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 84; emphasis added). Lurie’s thoughts about the dogs he cares for not only echo Thomas Hardy’s character Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, who kills himself and murders his siblings because he senses the stress that caring for the children places on his parents, but also the uncontrolled breeding resulting in unruly offspring that society cannot presently accommodate: “The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: because we are too menny” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 146). Read allegorically, the novel implies that the “old” Lurie is dead, and that the changed Lurie cares for the racial other, and thinks of himself as being related to them. This push to read race allegorically works in tension with the attention to singularity that the novel encourages, leading us to yet another double bind: as earlier discussed, an allegorical reading of the novel’s treatment of race might lead to the false equivalences that enable Lurie’s racism, and yet, if we eschew such reading completely, we cannot fully appreciate the change in Lurie. The auto-immunity of the novel leaves us with little firm ground on which to stand: this is Coetzee’s “play of writing.”



The fact that the novel opens itself up to *more* fullness of meaning as we flesh out its references is an indication of its self-awareness as its status as aesthetic object. Although it gestures at its own limitations and encourages us to go beyond them, it seems acutely aware that even a reading of this gesture is made possible through understanding how our feelings upon reading the novel tie into what Lucy might disparagingly call “abstractions” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 112). Therefore, I propose that the novel’s apparent turn away from the aesthetic is rather an attempt to protect us from the worst legacies of Schillerian *Bildung*: solipsism and egotism. The confidence in our critical abilities and the push to take action in the face of that which appears unethical to us is inbuilt into the very notion of subjectivity, particularly the subject who lives in a neoliberal world, regardless of whether s/he chooses to engage in aesthetic appreciation or not. Lucy has pointed out that the committee and Lurie are equally unbending. Rassool’s confrontation with Lurie, in fact, aligns her not with the feminine but rather with the masculine subjectivity of *Bildung*: she attempts to use her “rapier-phallus” to draw out the confession that she desires from him (Coetzee, *Doubling* 66). Lucy herself is decisive in the face of the trauma of her rape, doing what is needful for herself to survive.

Lurie’s particular sensitivity to aesthetic appreciation, while it exposes him to the problems that the Schillerian sublime involves, also allows him to experience the bafflement that he does at the end of the novel. After all, his bafflement stems from (among other things) a failure to read his new life and to read Lucy: bafflement is a result of his habit of reading. For example, after the attack on Lucy and him, we are told that Lurie loses himself because he is drawn into the

monotony of day-to-day life (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 121-122). He only feels this way, however, because he wants to maintain the fiction of a coherent and indivisible self, a “gathering of forces” that will allow him to plan his next (presumably Byronic) move (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 122). Also, when Lurie asks Lucy if her decision to stay and give Petrus her farm is motivated by the notion that “[she] can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present” she tells him that he is “misreading [her]” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 112). Although Lucy claims that she “[doesn’t] act in terms of abstractions” and that “until [Lurie makes] an effort to see that, [she] can’t help him,” it would be inaccurate to conclude that she works without any abstractions at all (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 112). The literality of Lucy’s attempt to “start at ground level,” “like a dog,” has phenomenological resonances (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 205). Hence, Lucy herself does not escape the problem of abstraction insofar as her attempt shares with phenomenology a conceptual attempt to focus on human experience rather than transcendental truths. Even though Lucy, unlike Husserl and company, effects this via changes to her material conditions rather than through intense thought, to truly be “like a dog” would involve the breakdown of subjectivity that Lurie experiences: a movement away from human thought. It therefore can be concluded that *Disgrace* does conduct a defence of Schillerian *Bildung*, but only through the suggestion that it provides us with the training to undo itself.

Although Spivak focuses on counter-focalizing Lucy and hence does not focus on Lurie’s stupefaction, I propose that Lurie’s move from university to farm and the text’s support of his stupefaction, as opposed to being read as the implication that we should leave the university system completely, can instead be

read as an enactment of Spivak's exhortation to "instrumentalize the intellectual" and what such instrumentalization may entail (3). *Disgrace* sends its intellectual out of the university system into the rural community, but he literally cannot begin to contribute to the community until he learns that his ways are not superior to theirs. Lurie's sense of superiority, gained via the contradictions of the *Bildung* project, has to be destroyed before he can communicate and work with others outside of the university. As Spivak says, "there is no possibility of the emergency of the ethical when the . . . subject's sense of superiority is rock solid" (329). Moreover, Lurie's bafflement, which makes him uncertain of himself, is a softening of his hard temperament that happens to mirror the displacement of the masculine by the feminine in Spivak's introduction: affectively, Lurie moves towards Lucy's literal position in the novel as property-less female.

When fed back into the double bind that we are forced to live with in the aftermath of having read the novel, our experience of the disintegration of subjectivity via Lurie allows us to become more effective not only in the realm of using our knowledge for what we think of as positive societal changes but also in regard to scholarship. Emma Williams, in her 2019 article on *Disgrace*, suggests that Lurie's bafflement upon his encounter with the other is "intimately tied to education insofar as this implies the reaching for ways of thinking and understanding that expand, extend and deepen the more I approach them" (637). Williams terms this change in Lurie as one that opens him up towards being humble, a word that with "its religious resonances, has connotations beyond modesty—a term that suggests something more like understating or downplaying one's abilities. Humility suggests rather being in relation to that in the face of which

I am as nothing” (637). Williams’s conclusion echoes Docherty’s notion of “critical humility,” mentioned in Chapter 1 of the thesis, which emphasises helplessness. To linger with this might mean inaction, integration with the community *a la* Lurie. For the reader who is engaged in any situation where the ethical stakes seem high and require (phallic) self-assertion, however, it serves as a reminder that flexibility has its place in fighting for one’s cause and to respect others as equals regardless of difference.

As my chapter has argued, *Disgrace* posits that Lurie’s feminisation, in terms of its disintegration of (masculine) Schillerian subjecthood, provides a structural resistance to neoliberalisation that his Romanticism does not. From this, we may conclude that Lurie’s term, “emasculatation,” applied disparagingly to the contemporary university, may not be a wholly negative thing. While it is true that the rationalised university is emasculated in the sense that it increasingly lacks the ability to effect an epistemological change in its subjects as signified by Schillerian *Bildung* and that its humanities scholars are therefore emasculated in this sense by proxy, the novel offers us the notion that this emasculatation may still allow scholars to effect the positive changes in their students and in their societies. Emasculatation may encourage us, as many of the books in University Studies prove, to interrogate the workings of the institution critically in a way that may not have been done if academics did not feel powerless (see Chapter 1, Section 2). This interrogation may lead to teaching strategies and solutions to the crisis of the university that have an increased awareness of the problems of the traditional university project, and which addresses them with a finely tuned sense of the dangers involved in each solution as detailed in Chapter 2.

Through doing this, the novel offers us a way to negotiate the auto-immunity present in the “theory” scholars who attempt to address the flaws of the Bildung project, but whose attempts still result in auto-immunity and double binds because they contain within them the assertiveness and confidence of the Schillerian subject (see Chapter 2, Section 3). We can conclude that dogmatic adherence to their proposed solutions would re-enact the unbendingness of Rassool and Lurie. That the novel ascribes Schillerian unbendingness to both Rassool and Lurie shows that it is aware of the auto-immunity present not only in Bildung, but in individuals who may attempt to critique Bildung. Ironically enough, auto-immunity hinders both Lurie’s efforts to teach literature and Rassool’s efforts to reform Lurie because they lack auto-criticality: they are not aware of the possible problems and difficulties that come with their own choices and temperaments. Paradoxically, a welcoming of auto-immunity in the form of constant auto-criticality may have made a difference in the choices that both parties make when trying to effect their goals.

The key is in living with contradictions, to have the adaptability of Lucy as meta-contextual framework, not the hard temperament that Lurie initially starts out with. We can take our cue from the figure of Kaled, who appears masculine and hard, but is secretly feminine and flexible.<sup>72</sup> Exhibiting hardness when fighting for a cause is perhaps inevitable and necessary, and this explains much of the

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<sup>72</sup> The play in Kaled’s gender presentation is alluded to when Petrus suggests to Lurie that Lucy’s model of femininity is outside the strict heteronormativity of a patriarchal system: “[A] boy is better. Except your daughter. *Your daughter is different. Your daughter is as good as a boy. Almost!*” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 130; emphasis added).

assertiveness with which scholars in University Studies diagnose the ills which plague the institution and propose solutions (see Chapter 1, Section 2). Yet, to effect change, sometimes Lurie's passivity and stupidity is needed, insofar as it allows us to be open to seeing the view of the other whom we might not understand or agree with. While *Disgrace* astutely suggests that we cannot completely escape abstraction, even with Lucy's attempt to be pragmatic and grounded, through both Rassool and Lurie, it also suggests that operating completely via abstract principles without the embodied relating to others that Lurie begins to enact towards the end of the novel hinders one's socio-political goals.

The logical extension of the novel's suggestions is that we should think through situations on a case-by-case basis, considering what route to take depending on the specifics of the change that we want to achieve. Its narration behoves us to consider carefully the risks inherent in any decision we make, including the risk of having an abstract and inflexible ethical framework that dictates our actions. This is particularly useful for the intellectual who may venture outside of the ivory tower to attempt to effect change in society: first, it offers the reminder that s/he is not inherently superior to other less-educated (and often less financially privileged) peoples, and secondly, it puts the onus on the academically trained to think about how to put across his/her ideas in forms that may be accessible and relatable to others. *Disgrace* therefore offers us a tentative roadmap of how to think the benefits of an aesthetic education and how to live in what Spivak calls "an era of globalization." Its narration's insistence on the coincidence of thought and affect provides an answer to what an aesthetic education might

be—not only the inevitable abstraction that comes with the act of reading, but also an embodied experience that impacts our conceptual conclusions. Reading literature requires an effort of interpretation that leads to an openness of meaning that reflects the flexibility that *Disgrace* promotes: the debates around all three novels discussed in the thesis are evidence of this.

I propose that the flexibility that *Disgrace* suggests that we adopt may be termed pragmatism. Literature provides a training ground for this insofar as it forces us to deal with contradictions. We can consider this play training in the sense that Spivak proposes: we learn to play double binds in reading, which trains us for making difficult choices in our lives (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Meta-campus novels like *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* not only engage in auto-critique, but also train their readers for that which might be beyond the purview of the aesthetic: day-to-day dilemmas that they might face in their lives. The pragmatism of *Disgrace* thus escapes the nostalgia of *Stoner* and the hysterical despair of *Herzog*. With no certainty of success, *Disgrace* suggests that the change in society that we want may be possible if we recognize the value of auto-critique while making sure that auto-critique itself does not become a mechanical habit: we have to constantly interrogate this value out of a fidelity to auto-critique. It is thus that we can “work for the remote possibility of the precarious production of an infrastructure that can in turn produce a Lucy or her focalizer, figuring forth an equality that takes disgrace in its stride” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 334).

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion: Summary and Discussion of Limitations

This thesis's readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* have offered a rebuttal of the idea in the scholarly literature of campus novels that the genre's critique of the university is simplistic while redressing the overwhelming trend of judging books in the genre according to whether they are realistic enactments of university life. I have argued that the three campus novels under study treat of the university project in a serious and sustained manner through both their form and content, where the university project is defined as the *Bildung* project. As my discussion of the novels shows, *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* not only offer us ample material for thinking through the pros and cons of *Bildung* but also enact an aesthetic education for their readers by providing a space for them to deal with contradictions. Thirdly, I have shown that feeding the critique of *Bildung* in all three novels back into the strands of *Bildung*-focused strands of scholarship within the field of University Studies gives us some insights as to the motivations and the possible risks and benefits of the latter. Lastly, the readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* form an arc that begins with the investigation of the problems of *Bildung* and ends with a suggestion of how to deal with them.

A brief summary of my findings in each chapter will clarify this thesis's other achievements to the reader. My introductory chapter has a brief literature review of both the scholarly fields of campus novels and University Studies. In my review of the former, I have identified in the scholarship an unhappiness with the lack of realism due to the predominance of satire in the genre, leading to a tendency to dismiss the genre's critique of the university as being overly simplistic. This, I have



argued, stems from a desire of scholars to see books within the genre undertake a serious critique of the university. The over-emphasis on realism in the genre has been addressed by a few newer studies that, by focusing on the aesthetic aspects of campus novels, remind readers that the novels are aesthetic objects, and therefore have may have aims beyond the portrayal of reality. This thesis, through its readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace*, has filled a gap in the scholarship of campus novels by taking on board both the desire to see the university and its aims taken seriously and the desire to pay close attention to the aesthetic features of novels within the genre. I have suggested the category of “meta-campus novels” to describe the operations of these texts. The name of this category indicates that the irony in these texts serves an auto-critical function via the genres of tragedy and comedy. To sharpen the focus on what kind of critique of the university the novels being examined are interested in, I have picked out two salient strands within the scholarship that are concerned with *Bildung* as the aim of the university, where *Bildung* can be understood as a life-changing development of an individual’s subjectivity via thinkers like Schiller and Kant. *Bildung*, I have shown, is posited by these thinkers as a force for societal good via nurturance of an individual’s reason.

The first scholarly strand, which I have called the “non-theory” strand, believes that the contemporary university’s problems can be solved if the university reimplements *Bildung* as its goals. The second scholarly strand, which I have called the “theory” strand, attempts to address what it sees as the problems of traditional *Bildung*, providing a different view of learning-as-transformation in the process. The chapter proposes that the insights gleaned from reading *Stoner*,

*Herzog* and *Disgrace* provide not only a valuable critique of the traditional *Bildung* project but also provide a meta-contextualization of the two scholarly camps.

In Chapter 1, therefore, I have contributed to scholarship not only by identifying a fertile area for research within the field of campus novels that my readings fill, but also narrowed down the kind of university education that the three campus novels I have examined are interested in via my discussion of some scholarship in University Studies. The thesis therefore not only provides readings of campus novels that fill a gap within the scholarship in the field of campus novels, but also suggests that readings of campus novels may benefit from an engagement with the field of University Studies, laying the groundwork for scholarship involving more of such intersections in the two areas.

My second chapter draws ideas from Gayatri Spivak's book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (2012), in order to achieve three objectives. Firstly, I flesh out the importance of the notion of auto-immunity and the double bind to her readings of Kant and Schiller so as to further sharpen the notion of auto-criticality via ironization in the readings of *Stoner*, *Herzog* and *Disgrace* in this thesis: auto-immunity, defined as a critical mechanism that harms one's aims through one's own actions to achieve these aims, comes into effect whenever one tries to enshrine any set of principles, and double binds can be defined as the contradictory instructions that result from the auto-immune mechanism. Secondly, I provide an elaboration of how Spivak's project of aesthetic education involves a nurturance of the ability to recognise the auto-immunity in one's own gestures, and to be able to live with the contradictions that are a result of this auto-immunity. Thirdly, I pick up on Spivak's elision of the notion of the sublime in her

discussion of aesthetic education, suggesting that *Bildung* may not only be nurtured by Schillerian beauty but also by the Schillerian sublime. Lastly, I use the notion of auto-immunity to think about the risks and benefits of the approach to *Bildung* in the “non-theory” and “theory” scholarly camps, in the process outlining the thesis’s ethics of reading by mediating between the two camps of scholarship and reflecting on the thesis’s own auto-immunity.

The chapter’s contributions include the following. It provides a gloss of Spivak’s writing and a fleshing out of her intertextual references to clarify how auto-immunity is central as a concept to Spivak’s notion of aesthetic education as living with contradictions. It also picks up on Spivak’s elision of the sublime as aesthetic affect, highlighting the importance of the sublime in the construction of an objective subject. Lastly, it provides a mediation between the “theory” and “non-theory” camp and reflects upon its own work, in the process providing some clarity as to the mechanics of the ethics of reading in a deconstructive framework.

My third chapter, which conducts a counter-intuitive reading of *Stoner*, provides a sustained scholarly critical examination of how the novel elicits the support of its readers for its protagonist and his vision of the university project, and shows how this support for the protagonist’s views ironically ends up harming his goal of protecting the institution of the university. I demonstrate that Stoner’s education at the university can be thought of stemming from *Bildung* via Schiller’s sublime, which is the nurturance of an individual’s self-awareness that he is a reasoning being. This mode of being for which the university is a sanctuary, the novel suggests, involves a subjectivity protects one from an instrumental view of the world. Yet, the tragedy of Stoner’s life is of his own making because it is

inextricable from his subjectivity, which perpetuates the inequalities in his society that compel its members to focus on the monetary: Stoner's blind spots cause other characters to react to him in a hostile manner, causing him great unhappiness. In demonstrating this, I flesh out how the text's enactment of the sublime not only through the reader's identification with the experience of its protagonist but also through the novel's pellucid prose stands in tension with the narratives suggested by the details it provides to other characters in order to facilitate its own verisimilitude: this tension forms the contradiction that the reader of the novel has to live with. In addition to this, I suggest that *Stoner* demonstrates the dangers in having an unexamined faith in the *Bildung* project that some "non-theorists" have.

The contributions of this chapter include the following. Firstly, it addresses a gap in the scholarship and reception of the novel by providing a counterweight to the overwhelming positive re-evaluations of the novel. Next, it provides an explanation of the mechanics of the novel, explaining why and how the novel has been received so positively, and makes sense of the novel's popularity *vis a vis* the few informal critiques of it. Thus, the chapter also provides an explanation for *how* the novel allows for contesting readings of itself.

In my fourth chapter, I conduct a reading of *Herzog* that fleshes out its critique of Schillerian *Bildung* via the notion of Schillerian beauty, while also demonstrating how it covertly elicits the support of its readers for the Schillerian *Bildung* despite its harsh critique of it. I demonstrate how the novel shows that *Herzog's* education via *Bildung* causes him to be ruled by his passions and not his reason, and also to demonstrate an elitist attitude. Much of the comedy of the

novel stems from the ironic fact that Herzog himself is evidence that *Bildung* nurtures a subjectivity that directly contradicts its own objectives. Yet, although the novel systematically shows how *Bildung* collapses under the weight of its own contradictions, it suggests to the reader that *Bildung* at least provides some resistance to what Herzog thinks of as the shallow materialism of his society. By contrast, enjoying the sensory aspect of aesthetic appreciation without taking on its ethical goals (as Bellow's prose encourages us to do, and as Herzog does in the Berkshires) unapologetically facilitates the epistemology behind the materialism that Herzog tries to desperately resist and elides the material basis for Herzog's enjoyment of nature. The novel appeals to our reason to encourage us to support its protagonist's doomed task: in this way it demonstrates the appeal that *Bildung* has for the "non-theory" scholarly camp. Despite this, however, the novel still provides a dilemma for its readers in the form of placing its readers in the position of having to choose between the unpalatable choice of a failed *Bildung* or unabashed complicity in supporting materialism.

The chapter's contributions are the following. Firstly, it provides a mediation between some contemporary dismissals of *Herzog* due to its conservative politics and readers who unequivocally support its protagonist's mission by recognizing the novel's conservatism while demonstrating its importance as an aesthetic object that still teaches us to live with contradiction. Secondly, a comparison facilitated by a comparison of *Herzog* to *Stoner* suggests that *Bildung*, as a popular evocation of university project (*Stoner*), is palatable to thinkers when its flaws are screened from them. *Herzog* is being punished for its relative honesty about the difficulties of *Bildung*.

My last chapter demonstrates how *Disgrace's* critique of the *Bildung* project involves providing a solution-of-sorts to the problems of the *Bildung* project through a revisioning of Romanticism via its intertextual references and an emphasis on a feeling of stupefaction. I show that, like *Stoner* and *Herzog*, *Disgrace* can be read as conducting a critique of its protagonist David Lurie by showing how *Bildung* via Schillerian sublime prevents him from carrying out its goals. Yet, the novel cautions us against dismissing Romanticism completely simply because of the problems with *Bildung*: despite Lurie's many flaws, he still provides more resistance to the neoliberalisation of the university than the progressive character Farodia Rassool, whose symbolic alliance with the university's neoliberal committee causes her to fail in getting Lurie to realize the violence that he has enacted on his student Melanie.

By fleshing out the novel's intertextual references to Wordsworth and Byron, I suggest that the novel proposes that the flexibility and groundedness of Lurie's daughter, Lucy, is preferable to the initial assertiveness and solipsism of Lurie. I trace the change in Lurie's subjectivity as he becomes feminised insofar as he loses his Schillerian assertiveness that allows him to provide narratives for the people around him: this takes the form of bafflement that opens him up to being receptive towards the otherness of the characters whom he is surrounded by, but also makes him passive. The novel therefore forces its reader to face the double bind of whether to continue with Schillerian self-assurance or the new uncertainty of Lurie. With Lucy's flexibility as a meta-contextual framework, the novel suggests that we can adapt either position on a case-by-case basis, depending on our situation and needs.

Chapter 5 offers several contributions. Firstly, it mediates between several conflicting readings of *Disgrace* through a careful investigation of the novel's operations: it provides explanations for how the novel elicits conflicting readings of its treatment of Romanticism and race. Next, it demonstrates that an aesthetic education is still valuable because of the negotiation between thought and feeling that reading literature involves: it not only enacts bafflement for its readers but suggests to its readers that this bafflement may not be wholly negative, providing a welcome alternative perspective for readers who may be encouraged by the structural conditions of their societies to value the phallogocentricity of Schillerian ipseity.

All in all, the thesis has paid close attention not only to the content of the novels but also the ways in which their aesthetic features feed back into their thematics, thus adding to the small but growing number of voices that are calling for readings that pay attention to the status of the campus novel as aesthetic objects. By exploring the intersection between campus novels and University Studies, it sets a precedent for future readings of campus novels that involve intersections with other scholarly fields. It also demonstrates that engagements with the aesthetics of campus novels themselves are very fruitful in regard to thinking about them as spaces where readers can reflect on the university, laying the groundwork for future work in that direction. In addition to this, the meta-contextualization of the two scholarly camps enabled by the critique of *Bildung* that the novels undertake are an indication of the contribution that reading literature makes to arguments about the university: by forcing a visceral engagement with the difficulties, attractions and drawbacks in proposing solutions

to the neoliberalisation of the university, reading impresses upon us the depth of thought and feeling in the scholarship undertaken by both camps regardless of whether we agree with them. This thesis thus supports what Kathleen Fitzpatrick calls “generosity in academic life,” where this generosity involves “the possibility of a shared vocabulary which creates the conditions under which we might conduct a conversation between complex and often contentious ideas, in the hope that we might come to some kind of understanding” (47).

I would like to end by briefly discussing a few possible criticisms of this thesis and addressing them. Firstly, the thesis is limited by its scope, and therefore is unable to devote itself to a sustained outlining of the complex relationship between the model of the German university, the English university and the American university. Moreover, the term “Anglo-American university,” which the thesis uses, conflates differences between English, Scottish, Irish and American universities. Thus, it can be argued, for instance, that the operations and goals of the American university and the South African university are not as intimately linked to *Bildung* as the thesis might suggest, and using *Bildung* to understand the struggles of the protagonists in the three novels is a move that does not adequately take into account their cultural specificities. This is the logical extension of the rebuttal that David Shumway conducts of Bill Readings’s outline of the history of the university: “While the German university was a model for the emergence of the American university in the last quarter of the 19th century, Americans were more interested in the actual practice of German universities than they were in the theories behind them” (1-2).



However, the use of this term allows the thesis to highlight the importance of *Bildung* to the Anglo-American sphere, which is borne out not only by its readings of the novels but also its use of both British and American thinkers in Chapter 2. In particular, the reading of *Herzog* demonstrates that it is difficult to take on the practice of something without imbibing in some way the philosophy behind it. The introduction to Cathy Davidson's *The New Education* provides further evidence that *Bildung* lingers as an important university mission in America:

You are moving from control by others to *self-control*, from ideas shaped by others to your own ideas, from received opinions to your own ability to determine where you are going next, to *discern*, *evaluate*, *make judgments*, and then to *act*. . . . In America, we call it college. I have witnessed this *transformation* over my long career as a college professor. (1-2; emphasis added)

It should be added that the thesis's reading of *Disgrace* highlights the novel's negotiations with *Bildung* as colonial inheritance: Lurie is not only shaped by his education in British Romanticism but is also a white character living in a multi-racial city, and the novel ironizes his assumption that the cultural specificity of his subjectivity applies to other characters. The reading of the novel therefore already deals with the problems and double binds involved in thinking of the effects of coloniality on South African universities.

Another possible objection to this thesis involves the criticism that the theoretical nature of this thesis may be replicating the abstractions that it denounces via its critique of David Lurie. The criticism can be extended to Spivak's work, insofar as her answer to dealing with the inequalities of globalization

involves epistemological change via sustained engagement with literature and its ideas. Ironically, it can be argued that neither Spivak's work or this thesis provide outlines of concrete practices that can be implemented at universities that may address the problems stemming from its neoliberalisation and its complicity with the global flow of capital despite their best efforts. Spivak's notion of the double bind can be used to answer this objection. While the outlining and thinking of practices that address the problems of the contemporary university in what Jeffery Williams might call Critical University Studies (see Chapter 1) has a groundedness that both Spivak's work and this thesis lack, the thinking of these practices should not be viewed as opposed to the abstractions that philosophy, literature or any of the humanities may pose.<sup>73</sup> Rather, as the reading of *Disgrace* makes clear, the groundedness itself is effected by an epistemological framework that the novel encourages us to adopt; in this way the aporia between *theoria* (the epistemology behind what this thesis calls "pragmatism" in its last chapter) and *praxis* (thinking and acting so as to achieve one's goals) is a double bind that we learn to play.

The welcoming of differing opinions that the thesis extends to the scholarship on the novels that it studies is thus extended to the work that lies beyond its purview, highlighting the democratic ethos of this thesis. Its form highlights a major double bind that it plays with in service of democracy. The readings begin with a character who leaves the farm for university and end with a character who leaves the university for the farm. This circular structure

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<sup>73</sup> On a related note, Fitzpatrick's book contains a sensitive and helpful discussion of a concrete series of steps we can take that may move us closer to enacting Readings's community of dissensus in the first chapter of her book.

demonstrates the double bind of using university education to “parse the desires (not the needs) of collective examples of subalternity” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 34). As Simon During says, Spivak’s notion of “an aesthetic education successfully transmits critique only where it also forms a channel for upward social mobility, and in that way it solidifies a system based on unfreedom just by eliciting critical and imaginative freedom,” and in behoving others to look to the desires of the oppressed, it encourages them to follow a system of ethics that is intimately tied up with the goals of *Bildung* (“Postcolonial” 500). Yet, an awareness of this, as *Disgrace* shows us, is precisely what will enable us to attend to the less privileged in society, and perhaps it is also what will enable us to work towards a society where the prosthesis of the *Bildung* project is no longer necessary.

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