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Bildung as Cult: Education through Secret Societies in German Literature

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Bildung as Cult

Education through Secret Societies in German Literature

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Languages and Literature

Of Bard College

By

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedicated to Professor Franz Kempf, who guided me through the writing of this paper
Thanks to the other members of the Bard literature department who helped me, Professor Mutter,
Professor Voronina, Professor Libbon, and many others, and also to my family, my best friend
Charley, Bard College, and the Rudolf Steiner school for giving me this idea as well as likely
every idea I've ever had.

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As a child I counted the Waldorf school I attended as a second mother of sorts. Eventually I would hear many criticisms about the school from former students and from friends I told stories about the school to. Cult was a word that arose every now and then, especially surrounding the German thinker and philosopher, Rudolf Steiner, who was also the school systems founder. In a way I think this connection of the word cult with my childhood has caused me to see the idea of cults in a cozy, quaint sort of light. However, this viewing of cult did not conform with the cults I read about in news stories and Wikipedia articles. It did however apply to many of the cults I would encounter in German literature, as literature is always a space for ideas that crumble in reality to flourish in text. Utopias don't stand a chance in the real world, but when cradled by literature they have the potential to last for an eternity of pages, unless the author wills it otherwise. I think the same is true for cults, within these works of literature I have found a continuation of a feeling of comforting strangeness that I held close to me for years at Waldorf school. This paper is not largely about Waldorf schools, but Waldorf school and Steiner certainly spurred me to write this paper. Steiner was to initially play a larger part in this paper, yet I ended up not tackling his ideas in quite as much depth as planned, I realized that even if I operate off a modified and positive version of the term it may still seem tactless to spend too much time calling Waldorf schools a cult, seeing as I very much enjoyed my years at Waldorf school and would not want to risk sounding critical of it. I figured this introductory section could set down both a personal connection between myself and German literature and provide a vision of grounded real-world practicality for some of the ideas to come. Perhaps, further on in my paper, the reader can look back at the fragments of writing about Steiner in this introductory piece and imagine him as trying to create a real-world home for the figures from German literature that he took a liking to, which I personally see his schools as some attempt at doing.

Within the works of German literature that I am writing about there is a predilection surrounding both the ideas of education and the mystic. Education is likened to a mystic journey, both internally and externally, in the style of antiquity, think Homer, yet mixed with more modern sensibilities on the oncoming of malaise and complexity. Education has in many ways been tamed and can be used in the wrong hands to potentially nullify a mind. This may sound like anti-conformist, conspiracy theory babble, and of course much modern education is quite good, but some literary works give examples of people failing to find the lessons they require in their daily lives. These disillusioned figures must turn to the occult, turning on their prior sensibilities and courting the stranger side of the world, to root up lessons that can revitalize their lives and put them back onto the path of their quests, giving them further motivation to not finish their education per se but accept its eternal nature and keep pursuing it all the same. The occult is often presented as malevolent, syndicates with vicious miniature hierarchies, painted by failed idealism, more modern examples would be Charles Manson and David Koresh. Even further back however, the idea of the cult is one of, at least publicly perceived, power and danger, the cult of Mithras comes to mind. However, German literature heavily features partially cult-like groups, certainly as bearers of offbeat wisdom, but they do not present any threat to individual lives though they can vastly change an initiate's perception of the world or their own lives. Cult is a nebulous term which can make it easy to throw around but perhaps at the risk of diluting its meaning and the power behind it. It means many things to different people, from generally describing a passionate group, as in those devoted to an underappreciated film, it can also describe blood thirsty brainwashed zealots, or be a reverent group in worship of a god or concept. According to the Oxford English Dictionary¹ cult can be defined as "1-A system of

¹ Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'Cult'.

religious veneration and devotion towards a particular figure or object”, or “1.1-A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister”. I think that both these definitions specifically tie into my more personal understanding of cults that I will demonstrate within this paper. I am focusing on groups that do seem strange or sinister to others within the text and the reader themselves, that then veer away from being sinister and as a result show how others, or the reader, are almost biased or even bland for having seen danger where there was truth and beauty. I want to focus on cults as being mistakenly defined as inherently fearful groups, it is the perception of onlookers that deems them such more than any actual activity within them, well at least in these German literary works. To be fair many of the groups I look at are based upon the Freemasons, a group that denies its accusations of cult, but perhaps these accusations do make them line up with the above definition of cult. They are a truth-seeking organization that is seen as strange by many onlookers, so is that all it takes to be a cult? I think much of our modern fear of cult stems from some fear of leadership, an unwillingness to give oneself up to a greater cause than oneself, or to worship. However, though cults can easily brainwash followers they also have the potential to do the opposite and create a more sincere and intimate relationship with the object that is worshipped, channeling reverence through only a few middlemen as opposed to an entire system of bureaucracy, an unending hierarchy standing between a person and their god or beliefs. In some of the works I explore cults are designed so as to bypass traditional education or governments that do not provide true knowledge. Some of these cults are very mystic, practicing magic, operating secretly, and arousing fear from those who do not understand them or are deliberately made to despise them outsider propaganda. Other cults I will focus on will bear some mystic markers but also seem

larger spread and more bureaucratic than traditional cults, perhaps showing that they will one day transform into a government of their own, possibly losing cult status.

Cults are often associated with the supernatural or uncanny, in real life these are often seen as a symptom of their delusional piety, but in some works this magic is real and aimed at distributing knowledge while dispelling the darker magic of ignorance. However, magic is not the most important aspects of these groups, I believe that even without their spells these literary cults would still be determined to reshape society into something closer to a classroom than a jail cell. I think that such works may, indirectly or not, ask why we are repelled from the idea of cults? Is it simply due to a history of them turning malevolent, or is it some modern inability to handle the ability of others to fathom beliefs beyond our own? In our pursuit of all out freedom do we forget that some exercise their freedom by entangling it with those of others and seeking out a higher form of liberty even if it means sacrificing some portion of their individuality. There exists a bravery in giving over our loyalty to another, loyalty is often seen as a word associated with dogs and sidekicks but to some it is still a grand value. Embracing a worthy leader can be a highly transformative experience and one capable of changing the world.

Waldorf schools on some level bear these idyllic cult sentiments but also defy them, teaching a mix of individuality and community, Steiner's conception of a classroom lines up with some of the cults to follow in this paper but clash with others. The nature of Waldorf school is difficult to describe but in Bruce Uhrmacher's article, "Chapter 5: An Environment for Developing Souls: The Ideas of Rudolf Steiner"² he lays out the ways in which Waldorf schools create a space between literature, the spirit world, and a physical architecture. He describes a

² - *Chapter 5: An Environment for Developing Souls: The Ideas of Rudolf Steiner* by P. Bruce Uhrmacher. *Counterpoints*, Vol. 263, *Pedagogy of Place: Seeing Space as Cultural Education*, (2004), pp-97-120.

group of Waldorf teachers going about their morning rituals, which prepare them for dealing with children, as Steiner believed that to interact with children one had to be in a specific mindset, a spiritual playfulness of sorts. He writes, “At 8:00 Am., about six Waldorf teachers in Sunnyville, California attend ‘Morning Verse.’ They meet in the lounge, a small room in the back of one of the buildings filled with an old couch, a large stuffed chair, a coffeemaker, a small refrigerator, and two walls of books” (98). It seems a simple enough setup, but the Morning Verse is a bit unconventional, outside of a religious school context. Waldorf schools tread the line of being religious, it is more a generalized view of holiness though, attributed more to nature and beauty than any one figure (though Steiner himself did put quite a lot of weight in his belief in Christ). Almost a Unitarian Universalist view of life and the world.

He writes about the architecture of the building, “To Understand Steiner’s ideas about the environment, we will employ an appropriately far-reaching Steinerian definition of ‘environment’ which covers the general idea of ‘surroundings.’ This definition will allow us to examine not only Steiner’s notions as they relate to Waldorf schools but also his relevant architectural and cosmological ideas” (97). These ideas of environment and cosmic architecture are heady and academic, showing that Steiner’s systems for schooling are both complex but heartfelt. This is something to Waldorf that’s fascinating, at once it is an effortless immersive experience to children, easy to accept as reality, but it can also be analyzed intellectually by adults, like a hard to parse text. Uhrmacher makes it seem as if Steiner had the ability to transmute language and literary ideas into physical space, and one that is accessible to children at that. His ideas are academically sound without being too complicated to convert into a simple lesson and a comforting room, this does have an inkling of the occult to it as well. A mystic, or

dare I say cult, leader must have some power to mix reality and fantasy, difficult ideas with simple activities.

Being a children's teacher is already a position that puts one in an almost cult-leader like station. For all their defiance children are susceptible, the words of the teacher will instruct them not only about their day but the rest of their lives. Harsh or kind words will echo forever, the kindergarten or elementary school teacher helps their students excavate or chisel their personality out of the infinity of interwoven material that is childhood. Is doing such an act inherently one of destroying magic? To help a child discover themselves cuts them off from the possibility of them being everything but is also an essential act. Steiner is surely the sort to be aware of this and seeks to make this distinguishing of the self-more mystic in its own right than mundane.

Uhrmacher writes, "Steiner continued to refine his ideas on the cosmic environment when he encountered Theosophy and later as he developed his own 'theosophy' called Anthroposophy.

His writings changed from a philosophical discourse to a mystical one, but the ideas were consistent" (100). Anthroposophy is a very strange and cult like belief system urging the

follower to use the mind to access the spirit. The reader is shown that Steiner's ideas veer towards the spiritual realm but that they still maintain a logic, not to say that I believe in them.

Steiner is interested in the places where the everyday intersect with the unknown, which would be the points he would be required to chart out to create an unconventional but useful system for schooling children. Steiner sought out education that was heroic and fantastic as well as capable of connecting children to themselves and the world around them.

The Waldorf space mimics the spaces presented by German literature, from personal experience firstly I can say that there is a certain warmth permeating throughout the building of the Waldorf school I attended, the Rudolf Steiner school in New York City. The interior of the

building offered a pocket of comfort and order within the fast paced, iron domain of Manhattan. Almost in the style of some decadent Roman emperor's palaces which would feature vast constructed lakes, the Steiner school would occasionally, such as on holidays, hold forest scenes adeptly crafted from felt and wool. This never struck me as a vain attempt to usurp nature but a happy sort of imitation, a tribute of sorts. Such art exhibitions were technically impressive but always felt humble, and I never much thought about the time it must have taken the teachers to make them, as it was so possible to imagine them naturally springing out of the ground. In another Uhrmacher article, "Uncommon Schooling: A Historical Look at Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy, and Waldorf Education"³, he writes, "Rudolf Steiner's educational system was to alleviate social ills, and it incorporated many of the reforms mentioned above. The Waldorf school was child-centered and designed to foster the total personality without a one-sided emphasis on the intellect" (392). It seems unconventional to create an education that does not prioritize the intellect, sure morality is prized by all systems of education I would imagine, but more likely is seen as something budding from the intellect.

Steiner saw a separation between the soul, the intellect, and the body, and he sought out a holistic way of developing all of them in a child. The building itself and the activities and lessons within mirror these ideas, with intellect being set aside in the early years, being more passively raised, while more focus is put into communication between the students and their teachers. Kindergarten days were strictly scheduled but relaxed overall, after a morning sketching session we would be assigned a role for the day that usually consisted of playing in different areas or

³ -*Uncommon Schooling: A Historical Look at Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophy, and Waldorf Education* by P. Bruce Uhrmacher. *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No.4, (Winter 1995), pp- 381-406.

using different toys, with the exception of cooking and cleaning which were dreaded but not all that bad in actuality. The lack of choice in one's playtime, rather than feeling restrictive, added a sense of duty to something as simple as playing with blocks or puppets. That was your vocation and talent for the next few hours.

The idea of the Bildungsroman is one of cultivation, the formation of one's character through their education. Education is likened to an almost heroic journey, especially that of the classical, Hellenic sort. One can only partake in their own Odyssey by consuming the travels of countless others in their studies, if they do so their coming of age will be charged with extra significance and take on the marble hue of classical adventure. Education is something that many people experience and even the most complacent of children and young adults will presumably rail against it at some point. However, works in the genre of Bildungsroman posit that education is mistaken as an enforcer of day-to-day dreariness when really it utilizes the day to day to deliver something far more transcendent. A good system of education is only using everydayness as its messenger, managing to pack an hour of class with an era of history, unraveling great works of art in the span of a lesson or two. *The Magic Flute*⁴ (premiered in Vienna on the 30th of September, 1791) is a good starting point to show how these ideas of the occult and education are important within German writing. This work introduces the cult as a educational squadron in a compact and powerful manner. Tamino is the ideal candidate for induction into the court of the sorcerer Sarastro and serves as a naïve hero who learns greatly about himself from his time with Sarastro. Within this work there is also an emphasis on the conflict between secular and non-

⁴ -*The Magic Flute* libretto by Emmanuel Schikaneder, and music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Premiered in Vienna on the 30th of September, 1791. Pescadero Opera Society.

secular aspects within a cult, for Sarastro's brotherhood uses Egyptian myth as imagery but appear more devoted to freedom than any Gods. Schikaneder also addresses romance, music, and politics in a fascinating manner.

Chapter One-*The Magic Flute* and Warring Cults

In Mozart and Emmanuel Schikaneder's *The Magic Flute* there is much to further these ideas of clandestine education turning out to be more benevolent than the powers that hound it down and attempt to destroy it, that is the Queen of the Night. Sarastro hides in the shadow but is really the one worshipping the light, summoning holy fires and the like, perhaps it is his very disconnect from the world of light that makes him hanker for it? In the end he brings about brilliant sunshine and banishes the Queen to the world of dark that she stands for, putting her in her rightful place. This text focuses on both education as a means of journeying, Tamino faces many trials and tribulations and crosses much physical and emotional distance to find both love and knowledge, which are presented as pretty much one and the same. Love is seen as the ultimate principle of humanism, the best package for wisdom to be conveyed in, even if it is an emotion most prized among impetuous youths, and a great act of defiance amongst many forces that set out to quench it. In the beginning of the libretto Tamino is attacked by a massive serpent, "O help me, protect me, my powers forsake/me!/The treacherous serpent will soon overtake me" (1). The snake harkens back to the original biblical tale of knowledge and sin, that of Adam and Eve. However, in this case woman comes to the rescue as opposed to giving into the serpent as Eve supposedly did, the three ladies fighting off the snake after Tamino has fainted. I think this diversion from Biblical legend shows that the fruit of knowledge is no longer sin but is in itself a new Eden. Sin has transformed into ignorance and oppression and paradise is no longer one place but the ongoing path to enlightenment. It's also interesting to me that Tamino does not heroically fight off the snake as one would expect in a story but succumbs to its terror. Does this show that he is not yet knowledgeable enough to be brave? If courage comes from wisdom at all

that is. Or does it establish him as the scholarly sort, more versed in the mind than in battle. Perhaps the lesson is that Tamino must learn to turn his mental prowess to become educated in an active, physical sense as well. True knowledge will not render one effete but will make them capable.

Later on, in *The Magic Flute* Tamino comes into contact with Papageno and this meeting establishes the rule of the land, after Tamino inquires as to the land's ruler and asks if he can meet her, Papageno says with a start, "See her? See the star-flaming Queen?/What mortal can boast of ever having/seen her? (To himself:) The way he stares at me! Pretty soon I shall begin to be afraid of him... (2). This dialogue establishes the wonder that surrounds the Queen, cult-like in its own right. She is treated less as a human ruler and more as a goddess, mortals being unable to look upon her according to Papageno, who is somewhat prone to exaggeration in all fairness. This does not exactly imply her amoral nature but certainly shows an imbalance between her station and those of her subjects.

This dialogue, spurred by Tamino's questioning, also shows how little Tamino knows of the country he has just arrived in, in fact the reader should realize that they do not know of Tamino's origins, aside from the fact that he is a Prince. In a way this story begins in media res with Tamino fleeing the great snake, he has probably been traveling across the rocky terrain for some time but from where he has come, we do not know. It seems curious that so little is given to this pivotal character in terms of backstory, he is set adrift from any history he may have, perhaps this symbolizes the lack of knowledge in his life. He has begun a physical journey in search of an interior one, that will provide him with character through education. In other senses too Tamino is a blank slate, this may be taken as a fault of the narrative or a means of making him easier for the reader to fill with their own intentions, but it is also possible that his emptiness

leaves room for the lessons he will later receive from Sarastro and the other elements of his trials. Being a Prince is certainly a winsome attribute to have but aside from this we know little of Tamino. The scenery of the area also allows for a certain blankness to set in, it is described as a, “Rough, rocky landscape” (1). Arid places first off are a classical adventuring environment, amidst the space of the desert there is much space to roam and think, and potentially perish. But could the makeup of this new land also hint at a need for flora and fauna, aside from the snake that is? The desert is often associated with age, being ancient and balding in terms of vegetation, but could it also bear the mark of youthful ignorance? Maybe the very land is in need of education alongside Tamino?

This ignorance makes Tamino the perfect opportunity for Sarastro, as well as the Queen. He is a blank slate capable of being filled with all sorts of information, The Queen wants him to marry her daughter, who he does in fact love, but to the reader it feels as if marrying her due to the Queen’s wishes would be a stale and legalistic way to encounter young love. Even if someone does love another marrying them in the name of some political alliance, Tamino being a prince and Pamina a princess, would be to sacrifice passion in the name of a bureaucratic cause. The Queen is established to be a harsh ruler fairly quickly, her three ladies punishing the spritely Papageno for simply talking about her and taking credit for saving Tamino. The First Lady says, “I expect you would like to know why our/sovereign lady is punishing you so strangely today?” (3). The words of the lady are cold and made especially sinister by the implication that Papageno has been punished many times before, but that this punishment is especially strange. A golden lock is placed over his mouth preventing him from speaking, which is half displayed as comical, forcibly shutting up a loud and loquacious character is definitely a

trope, but it's always pretty uncomfortable to think about. The lock being golden feels especially imperial and sadistically decadent.

Though the Queen is still being largely treated as noble in this first act the seeds of her as a villain are being planted. Instead of urging one to speak their mind, as Sarastro surely would, she closes mouths. Tamino is shown a portrait of Pamina by the ladies and gushes over it after this the Second Lady informs him of the Queen's ever-present eyes and ears, "The Queen of the Night, our sovereign, has/heard every word you have said. "If this young/man," she said, "is as bold and valiant as he is/ tender, then my daughter Pamina is saved!" (4). Here the reader wonders how Tamino has been overheard, magic presumably. I also find it interesting that if she is so aware and omnipresent that she could find Tamino brave, as he previously passed out before the serpent. Wouldn't this answer the question of his bravery? Maybe she figures that he was more so exhausted by his travels and the desert climate?

When Tamino meets the Queen, it is made even apparent that she wants him to save and marry her daughter, who she claims Sarastro 'the demon' has stolen away, and does indeed desire him to be loving, but still I maintain that it is a more formal version of the emotion than what Sarastro would encourage. The Queen does seem rattled and makes a compelling argument for Sarastro's evil, though I do have to admit that her full title "Queen of the Night" makes her sound a bit ominous as well. The mountains also part to allow entry into her throne room, a biblical act but also a potential show of her full capabilities for destructive magic. After leaving the room Tamino is staggered momentarily but then turns back to the issue of Papageno's confinement. Fortunately, the Ladies announce that he has been pardoned by the Queen and he is freed from the lock. He seems to be sorry for his lies, but probably only out of fear of another brutal reprimanding. The Three Ladies in unison, quite cult-like actually, say, "For if all liars

received/a lock like this on their mouths,/instead of hatred, calumny, and black gall,/love and brotherhood would flourish.” (5). This obsession with truth, though at first venerable seeming, has a very authoritarian sort of undertone, forcing love and fraternity through imprisonment has never been very effective. In a way the reader can see that the Queen is a cult leader of her own but having a government to back it up makes it seem more legitimate.

Tamino is then granted the golden flute, unlike the confining lock it creates sound instead of preventing it, yet both being gilded seems a notable similarity. The virtues of the flute are extolled by the Ladies, and then they demand that Papageno accompany the prince on his journey. The flute also symbolizes the role of the arts, specifically music, in Bildungsroman. One cannot become fully cultivated without consuming and creating art, at least according to the logic of the libretto. Of course, it's ultimately for Papageno's good that he tags along, but he is initially afraid, and it is odd that he is told he will be the Prince's servant. Being a sidekick is already a little demeaning, and that's before terms like servant come into it. Papageno puts up a fuss stating, “The Prince can go to the devil!/My life is dear to me./In the end, I'll swear,/he'll steal away from me like a thief” (6). Though presented as an act of cowardice there is something brave to Papageno's wrathful proclamation and the simple pride of admitting that he values his own life is admirable. It's also worth thinking about his belief that even honorable characters like the Prince will ultimately betray him and sneak off like a thief. Papageno is fairly cynical as far as comic relief characters go. However, he is given an instrument of his own and decides to stick around and tackle his fate. The travelers head off and the scene cuts to Pamina in Sarastro's palace.

This scene furthers the idea of Sarastro being villainous and shadowy, as Pamina does seem to be a prisoner and in discomfort. She is also being intimidated by Monostatos and it

becomes clear that Sarastro has slaves and is not entirely in favor of freedom or fully morally upright. Though overall the work still displays him as a force of good, these moments do show some ambiguity of his character, however. The reader wonders who is more despotic between the Queen and Sarastro. I do think that we are ultimately meant to see Sarastro's brotherhood as benevolent, but especially in these early stages we are shown its dark side and made to question it. It is perhaps odd that we later have to throw away some of these unsettling moments and embrace its moral goodness but in terms of historically rooted conflicts in literature, this work being influenced by the French revolution, it makes sense that both sides have their failings but that one is more earnestly fighting for love and fellowship. Eventually Papageno arrives and ends up talking with Monostatos from the window, having a conversation that seems to momentarily bring them closer and address racial issues in the period, an important moment of education for Papageno, who for a second seems to relate to Monostatos who is black. Papageno says, "Am I not a fool to have been frightened?/There are certainly black birds in the world, so/why not black men as well?" (7). This is a seemingly insightful observation on the part of Papageno, who is usually quite clueless. Even if he puts it into the simplistic terms of bird colors it still feels meaningful as birds are his chief way of understanding the world. Yet, Papageno then rather abruptly sets his attention on Pamina and tells her his intention to rescue her with the Prince. Pamina promises the lonely Papageno that a fated lover is on the way for him. Love is a major educating and developmental force for Tamino, Papageno, and Pamina in the libretto, and shown as something that Sarastro brings about by creating such intense circumstances, as Pamina says, "Everywhere I shall/be at your side./I myself shall lead you;/ love guides me." (23). Pamina who had initially been powerless in this story has now found herself guided by love and capable of leading Tamino. In this way Sarastro's nefarious actions are somewhat excused, as love itself can

be potentially destructive but is still seen as a force of necessity and light, “Two hearts burning with love/can never be divided by human weakness” (23). The imagery of burning at once shows love as a symbol of destruction and light. Saying that human weakness cannot overcome love is ominous but beautiful phrasing, it is not saying that love necessarily makes humans strong but that it protects against their innate weakness.

Love is an abstract yet classical means of attaining enlightenment, though calling love ‘educational’ may at first seem reductive of its powers to some, as it is practically as imperative as air or water to many romantics, this downplays the importance of education, which could be likened to sustenance for many. There may not be a classroom environment for love, though it could surely blossom in a classroom, but it certainly contains a myriad of lessons as well as transformative powers, according to many of its gentler critics at least. Schikaneder presents love through the relationship between Tamino and Pamina who have an instantaneous bond, Tamino falling for her as soon as he sees her portrait and Pamina being thrilled to hear the world love at all when Papageno informs her of Tamino’s affections. Papageno, the foolish comic relief character, seems to also embody a desire for love but at first is held back from his goal by his unworthiness. At a later moment in the libretto, he is unable to restrain himself from talking to her when instructed otherwise and almost gives her up for lost, eventually he becomes enlightened by his desire and ends up with Papagena, fulfilling his education through love.

The mystic is of course in the hands of the cult in this text and is yet another means of education. Sarastro and his brotherhood inculcate Tamino in an arcane manner. Though presented by the empress as malignant sorcerer, Sarastro and his priests are really but scholars of the unknown, wishing to teach Tamino of himself and the world around him. They navigate a network of mysterious portals and live-in reclusion, but are willing to test Tamino and his

friends, making them pass through capacious spaces of flame and water. It becomes clear that Sarastro is only intimidating due to the vastness of his knowledge, not in its wickedness. The empress is the truly corrupt one and Sarastro exiles her to a sunless land, creating a paradisaal scene on Earth. Sarastro's esoteric teachings combine with the love Tamino feels and turn him into a wiser being. Schikaneder creates a concoction of different lessons for his protagonist, instead of guiding him in too many contradictory directions, as one would expect, they fuse into one path for Tamino. *The Magic Flute* seems to say that the teachings of the strange side of existence, Sarastro's brotherhood, can go along with the flushed, hearth of the world, love.

Once Tamino and Papageno have arrived at Sarastro's palace *The Magic Flute* starts to fully exalt both the merits of humanity and those of religion in interesting moments such as the following, "Do here the mighty gods abide?/These arches and portals, mysterious/dwelling,/Of reason and labor, and arts are foretelling;/Where man is achieving and idleness banned" (9). Here the architecture of Sarastro's temple is described, namely the arches and doorways that adorn it, and the ideals of his organization are laid down. It is a place for human achievement where laziness will not stand. While Sarastro and his followers revere the Egyptian gods (Isis and Osiris being the chiefly worshipped pair, I will return to address them later on) and inhabit structures made to honor their supposed existence, the gods feel as if a thin veneer for worship of the human potential. First off they exist to make the whole setting of the opera seem exotic, both for the sake of excitement and as it would be too controversial to set such an anti-monarch work in Europe at the time, but there also seems to be other reasons for this choice. Egyptian gods unlike monotheistic gods seem somehow as if less overriding, devotion must be split between several beings, though of course henotheism can exist within polytheistic societies, somehow creating less of a sense of man being ruled over by one King-like figure. First Tamino converses with an

unknown speaker in the hulking temple, he accuses Sarastro of tyranny and the Speaker asks, “Is there any proof for what you say?” (9). The reader starts to become aware of both Sarastro’s influence and his possible goodness, especially since the Speaker tempers Tamino’s passionate and ignorant hatred of Sarastro with calmness and some semblance of sympathy. The Speaker, when asked about Pamina’s confinement, says “Yes, young man! What you say is true.” (9) but refrains from answering any more questions on the matter. The conversation with the anonymous speaker, is almost like a confessional booth conversation, or an ancient Greek dialogue. It shows Tamino questioning himself by speaking to the disembodied voice, his thought and words are given clarity when not limited by the anxiety of talking to a physical form, though talking to a formless voice may create an anxiety of its own. Following this exchange Sarastro himself enters the scene, though only after the main party comes into conflict with Monostatos and fears for their freedom and safety once more, the stage directions read, “*Sarastro, in a triumphal carriage drawn by six/lions, makes his entrance with his retinue*” (11). Sarastro physically enters the libretto with a procession to rival the Queen’s first appearance and ostentatious acts of mountain-shifting power. It also asserts him as a more eastern seeming sort of ruler, pharaoh-like in imagery. Sarastro’s might and style is equal in pompous display to the Queen’s, the two do have their similarities.

The followers of Sarastro chiefly worship Isis and Osiris, and perhaps other Egyptian deities, Osiris being the God of the underworld and Isis the Goddess of fertility and the wife of Osiris. Sarastro says, “O Isis and Osiris, bestow/the spirit of wisdom on this young couple!/You who guide the wanderers’ steps,/strengthen them with patience in danger.” (13). Here Sarastro is calling upon his patron gods to educate the couple, making the gods out to be teachers of sorts more than paternal overlords. The call for Tamino and Papageno to be patient in danger is quite

interesting, usually one imagines that quick thinking is needed to address danger but here he urges them to take on danger with calm deliberation. As said above it seems that these two gods are figureheads for more abstract principles of life and death, and in a sense humanity itself, that the acolytes just use to concentrate the bulk of their passion and thought. The two divinities being married also seems telling as the cult appreciates the idea of love between two beings and in this case, they worship the ultimate marriage, that between life and death. The gods have been harvested for their ideals; Sarastro's version of worshipping is for the sake of his own development rather than those of the gods. In a sense Sarastro is invoking, praying to, himself. It sounds prideful but it is still a prayer for humble things, knowledge and strength and nothing more. Sure, knowledge is power, and Sarastro has plenty of that, but asking to be a scholar rather than a king still shows some signs of humility. Sarastro's role as scholar and teacher is demonstrated by lines such as the following, "Tamino, the son of a king, has/journeyed to the north gate of our temple. He/wishes to tear off his veil of night and look into/the sanctuary of great light" (12). The veil imagery, like the golden lock, represents repression of knowledge and expression. Calling it the veil of night strengthens this imagery, this idea of being stranded in the dark. Sarastro's willingness to embrace newcomers and help them see the light may make him seem power hungry but could also be said to empower these acolytes. Maybe it's most fitting to call him a scholar king?

The perils of Paganism to more organized churches have always been the absence of political and economic figures between a human being and their God. Instead of Prometheus putting fire into the hands of the common man he gives it to a leader who filters it through a bureaucratic, sterilizing system that only allows the worshipper a small percent of its light. Someone like Sarastro is the only buffer between the divine and its followers and he is interested

in giving unfettered, educating power to his followers. Yes, in the wrong hands this one person can become incredibly destructive but someone like Sarastro only seeks to instruct his followers in the mystic arts and the mortal arts of thinking for oneself and finding emotional gratification, love in Tamino's case. The Queen of the Night has certainly become aware of these Pagan dangers and becomes incensed rambling about her anger at Sarastro and her daughter who she urges to kill the enigmatic sorcerer or be disowned, "My heart is seething with hellish vengeance,/death and despair are blazing around me!/Unless Sarastro feels the pangs of death/at your hands,/you are no longer my daughter" (17). If there were any doubts about her being the greater evil the reader will likely put them aside here. Not only does she want her rival dead, but she instructs her daughter to do so with the threat of abandonment. Not long ago the Queen and her followers were proclaiming the virtues of universal family, but obviously her vision of family is militaristic and comes with many catches.

Sarastro, in the following scene, states, "Within these sacred portals/vengeance is unknown,/and if man has fallen, love guides him to his duty./Then, with a friend's hand, he walks,/glad and joyful, into a better land." (17). These are similar values to what the Queen has claimed to believe in but seem more sincere from Sarastro, and also declare vengeance a great vice, while the Queen is of course in favor of such actions. Great trials and changes await, goblets of wine erupt from the ground, love sways Pamina from her potential act of vengeance on her mother's behalf, the lovers brace themselves against the wrath of nature, as mentioned before fire plays a particularly large role in this inculcation, "*Tamino and Pamina turn towards the mountain which is pouring out fire. They walk through crackling fire and bowling wind. Tamino plays his flute. As soon as they come out of the fire, they embrace*" (24). The talk of 'sacred portals', apparently doorways and not literal magic portals as I had initially thought, and

trial by fire solidifies the feeling that this is a cult style initiation. However, in this case the cult will not bring about harm but good, or at the least more good than the Queen's reign. After these tests a chorus announces the triumph of the party. After some reveling Sarastro brings about the light and the Queen's regime is banished by the victory of love and knowledge, all brought upon by Sarastro's brotherhood and its teachings.

Humanism and enlightenment thinking provide an education of revolt, shaking off the inherited, stale God and becoming one's own personal Christ-figure. Sarastro is not really a danger to those who come to him with an open mind, he only banished the Queen of the Night and her followers, as they had long ago sought to exert ignorant power over others and themselves. Sarastro would presumably have a government of teachers and students; a kingdom would be a vast classroom. In the opera education is presented through the lens of humanism and the cult is a concentrated form of humanism, with some contradictions and tenebrous elements of course. Schikaneder was in fact writing both as a result of the French revolution and due to the popularity of clubs like the Freemasons. I think that this work offers a nuanced look at the cult mentality. Showing its potential for evil and destruction, but also offering an idealized version of a cult as a pedagogic enterprise that plays into life's preexisting journey, accelerating what a wandering prince like Tamino would learn during their travels. The cult is a strategy for tackling larger, more evil forces with a small unit, but of course can fall into corruption and small-scale absolutism at any moment. I do think that to some extent Schikaneder warns of this but by and large he shows a utopian version of such a brotherhood, which is an instrument to make education a dynamic and righteously dangerous force against those like the Queen of the Night. In chapter two Goethe's ideas of cult as less of a temple of semi-secular worshippers and more of a bureaucratic power of its own further stretches the definition of cult but in a way that I believe

expands the term rather than diluting it. There is no one quite like Sarastro to bestow his magical lessons but there is an emphasis on one young man's journey and education that is aided by a watchful cult like presence, that eventually teaches him how to abandon the superfluous aspects of his persona to become more himself as well as to integrate into society.

Chapter Two-*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and Cult as an Alternative to Art

In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*⁵ the character of Wilhelm is a bright and precocious boy, especially in the field of puppeteering and theater. He is most quickly drawn into the act of puppeteering, perhaps suggesting a desire for a sense of control, ruling over miniature versions of beings and pulling the quite literal strings of their fate. However, the puppets control Wilhelm as well, drawing him towards the theater as a whole, within the first pages of the novel Wilhelm's mother is regretting the gift of the puppets as they've led to her son spending excessive time in the company of thespians. "How often have I been reproached for giving you that wretched puppet theater for Christmas twelve years ago. It gave you that taste for the theater!" (373). Here we see the mother lament this act, showing that his family would rather Wilhelm do something practical than pursue the arts, an age-old dynamic between parents and their children. Wilhelm, in distress, responds, "Don't blame the puppet theater, don't regret that token of your love and care for me. Those were my first happy moments in the new and empty house" (373). Wilhelm goes on to describe his introduction to the puppets, which he steeped in a mysticism showing that maybe cult already has a birthplace early on in the text. The puppet show he obsessed over as a young boy was the story of David and Goliath. After his reaction to the puppet show he was gifted the puppets to keep. This also goes to establish Wilhelm's emotion and sentimentality, unsurprising for a work of German romanticism, but still important to note.

⁵ -*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Goethe. *The Essential Goethe* translated by Matthew Bell, Princeton University Press, 2016.

However, after the puppets comes love, which in a sense reverses the notion of control, as Wilhelm must learn to give mastery of his life up to the heightened state of emotion. Goethe writes,

If, as is often said, first love is the best that any heart can experience early or late, our hero must be considered thrice blest for being able to enjoy these supreme moments in full measure. Few of us are so favored, for in our early years our feelings often take us through a hard school and, after a few paltry indulgences, we must forgo our highest wishes and learn forever to do without what we once dreamed of as utter bliss” (374)

Wilhelm is presented as a young man of divine providence, the years of his youth aligning with the chance for love. He does not have to find romance after being weary of the world and himself, he is introduced to it while already at the peak of himself. Where many use love in an attempt to redeem a failed life Wilhelm is lucky enough to combine it with a fresh and opportunity riddled one, like some holy sort of chemistry experiment, or maybe more aptly, when addressing the mystic, alchemy.

His lover is even a peer from the world of theater, closely interlinking his different desires, Goethe writes, “She had first appeared in the flattering light of a theatrical performance, and his own passion for the stage was closely connected with his first love for a woman.” (374). His love does not seem as if it has to contend with his theatrical streak though as noted above does slightly reverse his sense of control. He feels improved, his life made more sensical and engaging by his tryst with Mariane. However, he does mention that he stops attending the theater as routinely, perhaps finding that same electrifying glow within his own life and not needing to watch it or perform it on a stage. While musing on his love Wilhelm describes the love lives of all those in the theater company, “It was not long before natural instincts began to stir in boys and girls, and the company divided up into little love affairs plays within plays” (385). Even if some of his engagement with attending the theater has diminished, he feels that the structure of his romance makes up for it. Wilhelm also goes on to describe his fears of sacrificing love and

art to make money in the world of commerce. He describes a humorous but passionate poem he wrote in which commerce is a trivial old maid and the Muse of Tragedy almost a Valkyrie. One particularly striking line in his description reads, “The old woman talked like one who had to pick up and save every pin, and the other as though she were distributing kingdoms” (385). This line perfectly displays the goliath (felt a fitting word choice considering Wilhelm’s favorite story) role that art plays to Wilhelm. It is not merely a beautiful distraction but a conquering force for him, something that can give him his kingdom or strip him of the little one that he has. It’s a relatable sentiment, to the point where it may feel cliché if not described with such absolute spiritual urgency and through the interesting metaphor of the two women who manifest the rival forces of commerce and artistic freedom. It feels that the path for cult or another sort of strange society is already being paved, as a primary purpose of such things is to offer a member a job of sorts, reflecting the mundane need for purpose, but veiled under the aesthetics of ritual and secrecy, not to suggest that these are merely superficial elements.

Wilhelm and Mariane experience some doubts as to the loftiness of their love and joys, the as of yet unnamed narrator of the text implies that she does not always listen to his ideas in full and also shows her moods as capricious, her swinging from ecstasy to great despair. The reader gleans the idea that things could go south and that they are more consumed with love itself than each other, who are reduced to mere portals to the realm of pleasure. When Mariane descends from the heights of her love she finds her true station in life to be lowly and uninspiring, Wilhelm however seems a bit closer to true happiness as his dreams of theater and the call of his education grow ever stronger. He fantasizes about constructing a new sort of theater as a whole and it seems has greater plans for the structure of his life, these lines of thought seem to hint at the looming presence of the Society of the Tower, which watches over

and guides Wilhelm's life even while he is fully unaware of them. Wilhelm has been throwing himself into his studies, taking a keen interest in critics but not finishing much of his readings, preferring to play the role of the dilettante and take in little snippets of knowledge from a wide range of sources. Wilhelm says, "It is not the business of a pupil to finish a thing. He should try his hand at everything" (388). An attitude I sort of admire but am trying to defy while writing this paper! Wilhelm embodies a certain type of scholar it seems, filled to the brim with passion for learning but not necessarily persistence. His love of study seems to mirror his love of Mariane all consuming, joyful, yet somehow lacking. This early romance and talk of studying seem to set the stage for these two factors throughout the story, saying that love and knowledge will be important parts of Wilhelm's life and progression as a human, as well as things that the occult can take into consideration for drawing him into their web, though it is not yet revealed if this is a web with a dangerous spider in it. Wilhelm is a relatable character in many ways, even in his slight dilettantism there is a nobility. He has worthy ideas of how to cure the human spirit of its ailments. While his friend Werner speaks of profiting off people's follies, comparing the business of puppeteering to the Venetians getting rich off the crusades, Wilhelm seeks to rid people of their follies, "I would think it a nobler pleasure to cure people of their follies" (388). In this short line of dialogue there's a lot of insight into Wilhelm's character. We see that he wishes to help people, but he also openly admits to this act as a pleasure in its own right. Wilhelm is willing to aid others but has no qualms with reaping the pleasures in the act.

Werner and Wilhelm go on to discuss commerce, Wilhelm's arch nemesis, and Werner exults the mind of a businessman, "The mind of a true businessman is more wide-ranging than that of all other men-has to be so. What an overview we gain by the orderly fashion in which we conduct business. It permits us to survey the whole without being confused by the parts" (388).

Werner does make a compelling argument for embracing the hag of commerce. The reader can already imagine Wilhelm seething internally but trying to stay courteous and host an amicable debate. The call of the occult can again be seen here, Wilhelm wanting to shed trivial interactions and masked emotions in exchange for unveiled passion. He does not want to debate if the ultimate romantic core of art and god exists but to be absorbed and devoured by them. Wilhelm presumably sees Werner as a spokesperson for the world of commerce, an especially well-spoken if maybe garrulous one, but a symbol of the brutally quotidian monetary realm that pursues Wilhelm unrelentingly. The reader can sense a breaking point on the horizon, Wilhelm having to choose between art and love or the real-world, travel will soon be Wilhelm's way to pursue love even after it has lost the form of Marianne for him. All this talk of interests in finance and the possibly mentally liberating aspect of pursuing materialism lines up nicely with the current obsession with stocks, GME that is, that has interested many newcomers to economics, such as me.

Goethe writes,

Werner, who had sharpened his own mind by his contract with Wilhelm, had come to think of his trade and business activities in terms of spiritual elevation, and always believed that he did so with greater justification than his otherwise sensible and respected friend who placed such high value, indeed the whole weight of his soul, on what seemed to Werner the most unreal thing in the world" (389)

This line of thinking begs the question of whether the soul is at all compatible with the world of finance and luxury. If Werner feels his soul soar as a result of his interest in capital gain does it not soar? Perhaps Wilhelm has a more limited view of the soul in seeing it restrained to more abstract and easily romanticized forms. Wilhelm would surely say that Werner has mistaken some pleasure-seeking part of himself, the shadow of his soul, as the soul itself. Believing that each advance in the outer world is a step forwards in the inner one, when really the inner world, according to thinkers like Wilhelm, can sometimes surge forwards the most as

the outer world recedes. This is an occult line of thinking, as often entering a cult can cause a retraction of the outer world, limiting its scope to a specific site or temple yet promising a greater romping ground for one's soul. Though of course many cults are sybaritic and criticized for being a place in which to acquire cheap and lowly highs.

Wilhelm's father is also in on the world of commerce, "Wilhelm's father had, on the death of his own father, sold a valuable collection of paintings, drawings, etchings and antiques, had remodeled and refurnished his house from the ground up, all in the newest taste" (390). Wilhelm's father defies the nature of his son by literally sacrificing art for commerce. He gives valuable artworks and antiques in exchange for money. Of course, this should be understandable as it is for the higher purpose of familial security and love but knowing Wilhelm well enough at this point the reader can see that such an act will be reproachable to him. It is also ironic that Wilhelm wishes to be an actor, probably meaning that if successful he too will be sacrificing art for money in a sense. Unless he plans to keep his theater in a solitary chamber, he will be entertaining paying customers. Wilhelm's father does seem to have the best in mind for his son, wishing him to travel so as to gain material collections but also qualities that he himself had lacked. Despite all this talk of the father's money it is implied that his family is only slightly wealthy, but not enough to make Wilhelm a viable long-term option for Mariane, urging her to look towards other male suitors despite the despair she feels over the possible loss of Wilhelm. Mariane has already begun to mourn Wilhelm, who has recently proposed to her and shown interest in making a family. Mariane also suspects that she is pregnant and has become miserable due to her situation. Her maid Barbara soothes her sweetly at first but then starts to compel her to potentially juggle Wilhelm and a richer lover, saying that she will be doing no wrong if she keeps the two from ever meeting and that she could even convince another man that Wilhelm's

child is his own. Mariane wishes Barbara, or anyone at all, to perform her actions for her, specifically to make these difficult choices for her, again bringing about the motif of puppeteering and maybe even cult-like control over life. Love may control her but it also does not give her step through step instructions to traverse its own murkiness, she will need a greater or more direct force to get her through the tough calls to come. Barbara suggests that Wilhelm's upcoming travels will be a good time to meet a richer man, Norberg, setting herself at the helm of Mariane's life. Love in this work is more arduous, as it takes several partners before Wilhelm finally reaches an acceptable form of it, than in *The Magic Flute* in which it is presented as more instantaneously healing and beneficial. This is not to say that love is presented as less important or passion inducing in Goethe but that he advises slightly more caution in matters of the heart.

Barbara is not only a servant of Mariane but one of commerce and the everyday, Goethe writes, "The old women did her best in her own sober prose to bring Mariane from her flights of poetry down to everyday reality, using the tricks of bird catchers, who imitate on a tin whistle the song of those they wish to catch in their nets" (393). First off, I feel as if this ties in nicely with Papageno from the earlier section of my paper, but also it does a good job of juxtaposing Wilhelm's love in all its horrific instability with Barbara and the world of comfort and imprisonment. Mariane is inflicted with poetry and it takes prose to cure her, but this will inadvertently bring her down from her flight. This passage implies that to save someone like Mariane trickery must be employed, is it better to let her suffer at the hand of love and poetry or nullify her life?

Meanwhile Wilhelm has taken an interest in another pair of lovers, his own case of amour fou has perhaps made him overconfident in the world of romance. When he hears of the plight of two lovers on the run, escaping the lives forced on them by their parents, he knows he must seek

them out to aid them as well as presumably bolster his own romantic feelings through them. He learns of them from their family and from a group of soldiers smoking pipes upon a field. This is the first real instance of adventure we see Wilhelm embark upon and feels like a large developmental step for him, even if the reader knows that his love deteriorates back home as Marianne worries about the economic factors of her relationships, slowly giving herself away to commerce's clutch. Wilhelm encounters the star-crossed pair at court, where they are being questioned for their flight and accused of theft and other heinous deeds. He finds himself impressed by the girl who composes herself elegantly before the audience and speaks to her passion and innocence, clarifying that the aspersions as to her and the boy thieving are only rumors. The boy is also an actor, or was, further stirring Wilhelm as he sees a kindred spirit in him. The two make an excellent case for themselves before the court and Wilhelm rejoices as it seems they will be allowed a life of love and art, setting an example for the possibilities ahead of Wilhelm. However, after the ordeal seems over Wilhelm tells the man, Melina, his admiration of his career as an act and is struck and disappointed when told that he no longer wishes to pursue his craft and in fact looks down upon the art form, saying,

It is experience, not impatience, that makes me decide as I have. Is there any livelihood in the whole world more meager, insecure and tedious? One might just as well be a beggar in the street, What one has to put up with from the jealousy of colleagues, the favoritism of managers, and the fickleness of the public! You have to be really thick-skinned, like a bear on a chain, beaten with a stick in the company of dogs and apes, to dance to the bagpipes before children and riff-raff" (399).

A major motif of Wilhelm's companions so far has been an ability to speak fluidly and fervently but in describing beliefs that directly contradict Wilhelm's own infatuation with the world. Melina is quite well spoken in his scorn of both acting, the public, and possibly idealists like Wilhelm. Before the portion of the rant above he had also implied that Wilhelm only praises acting as he has never truly performed, quite a hostile assumption to make to a new and

agreeable friend. To see his art form, which he sees as an escape from the draining desires of the people as nothing but another way to be captured by them and forced to provide them amusement is surely a stark blow against Wilhelm's whole idea of the world. His education, to address one of my major subjects, is being made up of brutal takedowns of his goals and innermost dreams. Being challenged can be quite demoralizing and the opposite of educational to some, but to others it can be invigorating and cause further drive in the direction being critiqued. The reader can look back upon Tamino being faced with potential death, walking through chambers of fire all in pursuit of education and membership within Sarastro's group.

This encounter which strikes and disturbs Wilhelm is foreshadowing for figures who will later arrive to discourage him from the actor's life. As his life becomes more and more theatrical it seems to urge him to become more grounded and less seduced by the stage. Wherever Wilhelm travels he is met by the theater, when he has become acquainted with the Society of the Tower, he is told by Jarno, "It seems,' he said, 'that you are predestined to encounter actors and theater everywhere you go. We are in the midst of a drama that is not precisely amusing'" (634). Jarno acknowledges that Wilhelm is bound to the theatrical but also urges him to see that the drama of life is not always pure entertainment or even art. In moments like these the members of the Society have an in-depth understanding of Wilhelm and his wants and needs, they understand the conflict at his core between the world of art and that of commerce and where being an actor fits into this balance.

This understanding of Wilhelm is later shown in more detail when Wilhelm is given the records of his full life. Wilhelm learns that every detail of himself and especially his education has been recorded by this organization. The reader would expect him to be horrified, instead he merely contemplates how difficult it is to read a text that confronts one with themselves. The idea

of cult as horror seems as if hung before the reader as a possibility but is then quickly dissipated and replaced with the idea of cult as knowledge and perhaps love. Wilhelm reading the story of himself is a brief section compared to many others in the book, instead of being an extremely revelatory sequence it is treated almost casually. A calm overtakes Wilhelm and the reader, a joy as well. From this section the reader understands that Goethe treats the idea of cult sympathetically, discarding the initial panic any reader might have when they realize that Wilhelm has almost been supernaturally stalked throughout his life. A strange sense of peace settles over the moment as Wilhelm accepts the course of his life. One can see that his internal crises are coming to an end as he realizes that the Society of the Tower can be the perfect way to enter the real world without necessarily having to be a servant of commerce, while also gaining a slight respect for commerce. Already the theater has been reduced in its grandeur by the ex-actor early on in the work and the presence of Mignon who isn't the biggest fan of actors herself. In short theater is now less of a form of magic to Wilhelm but just another shackle, dangerous as it is one posing as a liberator. As Irvin Stock writes in his article "A View of Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship"⁶, "This ennobling ideal out of Italy is not only above the vulgarities of the theatre and above the realm of practical activity; she is also 'above' the world of Judeo-Christian morality on which the family and society in the West are founded..." (96). Mignon is being referred to here, she seems to see herself as above many things, an educational step being cynicism. She is also a Pagan of sorts, reminiscent of Sarastro worshipping Isis and Osiris, Gods who would be seen as Pagan in monotheistic eyes. Though in some ways she is right to be cynical, in the case of the theatre, she seems a bit exaggeratedly jaded, though this jaded outlook towards material things only comes as a result of her love of ideas and more abstract beliefs.

⁶ *A View of Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by Irvin Stock. PMLA, Vol. 72, No. 1, (March, 1957), pp. 84-103.

Wilhelm's love of the theater seems educational but is in a way a form of obscene cynicism, as the theater is glorified for being what the world is not, in his eyes that is. Instead of living life and learning from it he is replicating it, perhaps it's a trite comparison but it's reminiscent of Plato's cave. Instead of seeking truth he has become obsessed with its shadow and learned to play along with it. The society and its agents want to guide him away from this inability to see beauty in the material world and let even commerce seem a kindly and insightful visitor upon his life. Embracing the likes of Werner, who has noted before is quite intelligent even if seemingly unglamorous, is important for Wilhelm's progression as a thinker.

I found the poem on Italy and by extension Mignon to be a striking moment in this text, showing a hankering for the antique ways of the Mediterranean and at once a spite and sense of mystery for Europe. Even though it seems unrelated the cult sensibility shines through in this short poem both in the lines hungering for ancient civilizations and in the sections on the bleaker but equally mysterious history of Europe. Goethe writes, "Know you the land where lemon blossoms blow,/And through dark leaves the golden oranges glow,/A gentle breeze wafts from an azure sky" (454). Here we are clearly greeted with Mediterranean scenery, a longing for Antiquity and its world of classical art and beauty is portrayed without being mentioned outright. The use of "Know" to start off the poem and the following two stanzas is interesting, creating the sense that not all readers would be aware of these lands. Making them seem more foreign and fantastical, and giving a sensation of being whisked off to these locales by a narrator acting as a tour guide. The poem is calm, describing relaxing sounding features, trees, blue skies, gentle breezes, while also maintaining a building sense of emotional urgency. Especially during the bleak winter days during which I'm reading this work I feel the pull of the Grecian or Roman world and its many enlightening pleasures. In myth and history these worlds are often shown as

finely balanced between philosophical and hedonistic. One like Wilhelm who enjoys love and seemingly attention but also art and more cerebral activities could find a place that serves both such needs. In more modern times it can be difficult to fulfill both needs at once, many people having to choose one or the other, so the appeal of a place that caters to both grows ever stronger. The poem is not exactly historical and instead seeks to show off the myth of these ancient areas, feeling as intangible and light as the sky and winds described within it, using its imagery to forge its own atmosphere in a brilliant and pleasing manner.

The latter lines of the poem turn to grimmer scenery, perhaps describing the darkness of Northern Europe though it seems as if left a bit ambiguous. Now instead of breezy surroundings and brightness we have feudal, monstrous environments. The reader can picture Grendel stalking and loping across such lands. The third stanza reads, “Know you the mountain and its cloudy trails?/The mule picks out its path through misty veils,/The dragon’s ancient brood haunts caverns here” (454). Still the reader is asked if they know of this place but it is presented as far less idyllic. It is at once gray and murky in an everyday seeming sense but also mythological in a stark, Medieval way. Not the dragon itself but its offspring are like ghosts inhabiting caves and mountains. The strong image of the dragon is at first given to us but then distanced from it twice over, as its the dragon’s descendants and perhaps only some spiritual remainder of them, going off the word ‘haunts’. The evil and avarice of the dragon still lingers long after its horrific majesty has disappeared from the world. The fairytale monstrosities that once plagued the Earth are deceased, but their corpse crushes the world with its dead weight. This is assuming that dragons are evil, as they usually are in Medieval stories, yet maybe this one is an exception? Could the ghost of the dragon be the Society of the Tower in some way? A people who have the blood of fables in them but have adapted to live in their present reality while also maintaining the

grandeur of the fire breathing forefathers. Maybe the Society of the Tower represents a people who have learned to long for past ages and foreign lands but in a controlled sense, using it to their creative benefit without letting it override their lives. I found this poem very striking and full of great imagery that seems abstract but also ties back to the core themes of the novel.

Goethe advocates for a love of arts in a utilitarian seeming way, as the character of Jarno says in response to Abbe,

But I cannot be so hard on those poor devils, those human beings you speak of. It is true that many of them are reminded of their own wretched deficiencies when they are in the presence of great works of art and of nature, that they take their conscience and morality with them to the opera...and their comprehension necessarily diminished the grandeur and splendor of what comes to them from outside, so that they may be able to relate it somehow to their own paltry selves. (727)

Here the reader again sees the emphasis of art not as a means of assuaging a consciousness in crisis but as independent from the human struggle, something that must be viewed objectively without the onlooker trying to mix themselves into it. Personally, I don't agree with this philosophy, but I think it's a thought-provoking idea. As Hellmut Ammerlahn writes in his article "Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre': An Apprenticeship toward the Mastery of Exactly What?"⁷, "...Wilhelm moves towards mastering his creative imagination by replacing the theater, the stage where nature and art, truth and illusions are mixed, with the Society of the Tower" (107). The idea of the society as beyond art is reiterated here, I also find it interesting that creative imagination is detached from the act of art. We imagine that art is always the end product of creativity, yet this need not always be the case. The Tower Society is a place to save our creativity from the need to be used on vanity projects instead reallocating this

⁷ Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre': An Apprenticeship toward the Mastery of Exactly What? by Hellmut Ammerlahn. *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 30, No. 2 (1997), pp-99-119.

precious internal resource towards our actual life, whatever that may be, not the illusory stage which mixes life and illusion.

Ammerlahn goes on to say,

Since I am interested in the philosophical ramifications of the Society, I want to go beyond its humanitarian, economic and political concerns which have received widespread critical attention...Why does the Tower Society, secret and elitist and aristocratic as it appears, specifically select Wilhelm, a mere denizen of the bourgeois <middle class> for its tutelage and guidance?...How can he, who exclusively plays the roles of princes on the stage and is associated with a sick but recuperating prince, assume in the end a pivotal, a princely role within the Tower Society? (111)

Though Ammerlahn is trying to present this as separate from economics and politics plays into them all the same. Another view of the Tower Society is shown here, that of a machine that converts a bourgeois man into a monarch of sorts. Throughout the novel we see Wilhelm as a figure representative of class, his ornate and comfortable childhood and ability to pursue acting hints at money, but not enough money to ascend to the level of Marianne. Again, the puppet strings, that represent love and other tethers to society, come back to haunt Wilhelm. Perhaps cults are in part an organization that transforms the social class of its members, in the real world one may play a middle class nobody but within the bounds of cult they become an aristocrat or a knight errant, or even a king. Wilhelm being married to Nathalie further presses this idea; he is now of noble blood if only within the Society. The Tower seeks to make Wilhelm less of an actor, the text and Ammerlahn have proven this idea, yet they also seem as if they attempt to make his life more of a play, living out art instead of creating it in a controlled format. He stops acting on the stage and follows more practical forms of creativity as his tenure in the Tower is its own theater of sorts. At once Wilhelm discovers sincerity, learning to set down his affected adversity to commerce and his dramatic nature, while also taking on a new masquerade. Having seen his life written out for him by the Tower Society seems to show him that he is made up of documents, paperwork, grounding him as a being of commerce. The actor is an important part of

cults within German literature, cults dissociate acting from the stage and instead use it to paint over the entire lives of those who they envelop. In darker real-world cults one can imagine that many stray, histrionic souls wander into the arms of the cult to take on a life where they feel themselves playing a more meaningful part. Many feel that they are always acting out a boring, drama-less life in a dissociative sort of way so turning to cult can apply this feeling of ghostly theatricality to a role worth playing. This is a generalization, people drift into strange situations for all manner of reasons, but it does feel that the unwell are extra drawn to groups like cults, in real life at least. After being enrolled in a benevolent, fictional cult, the Tower, Wilhelm realizes he is ultimately an actor learning to perform as a fully fleshed out human being as opposed to a character. Cults in the space of German literature are a vestibule leading from the absurd, free floating life to a transcendent form of normalcy. This seems a good point to step away from Wilhelm and look at another work which emphasizes both class identity and the theater, Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*⁸.

⁸ -*Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse. Translated by Basil Creighton. Picador. 1927.

Chapter Three- *Steppenwolf* and Cult as Identity Loss

In Steppenwolf Harry Haller is presented as a man with an internal cult of sorts, he finds his inner life cut in twain by his natural human desires and his bestial instincts. It is almost possible to state that Haller holds two cults within his heart, that of the idolatry for an average life he cannot fully attain and the overwhelming urges of the animalistic are warring organizations. In a sense both of these sides of him are concerning to the people who circulate around him, they are upset by the mundane side of him which they see in themselves and then shocked by the wolf that lashes out from time to time. Like any cult figure Haller has a magnetic savagery but also a sympathetic side, despite their clashing he seems to know how to utilize these sides in tandem to attain superficial needs, yet he cannot create a treaty that would lead to his ultimate goal of inner harmony. Though worship of the wolf seems more shocking to the reader, as many try to hunt down and slaughter their rampaging spirit animal, yet his reverence for the life of an ordinary person is sometimes more startling. It is amusing to imagine mad ceremonies, rites performed by barbaric cultists all at the altar of bourgeois society. This is one fraction of Haller's troubled soul. Haller does not know that his life is hurtling towards the theater, which is its own cult and the place that is capable of welding together the two fragments of his being. The theater here is more important in cult like ritual than the theater in Goethe as it is not something that must be set aside but an essential portal used for entering an occult state. Before his brush with cult Haller's encounters with others are filled with melancholy longing, he dreads meetings with figures like the old professor. Though he may be an interesting person he still finds him incapable of understanding the forces that propel and tear apart Haller's soul. Hesse writes,

While my two selves were thus locked in conflict, the professor was almost forgotten; and when the oppressiveness of his presence came suddenly back to me, I made haste to be relieved of it. I looked after him for a long while as he disappeared into the distance along the leafless avenue with the good-natured and slightly comic gait of an ingenious idealist. Within me, the battle raged furiously. (76)

Haller seems to view the professor's idealism as somehow oppressive, perhaps seeing it as a self-inflicted way of splitting oneself into two selves and thus resenting it due to his own split being involuntary. Idealism strains against the boundaries of one's everyday self, the self that compromises and abandons principles, and seeks out something higher. While others desperately seek out internal battle Haller has it thrust upon him and only wishes for a cease fire. Haller might also disdain the professor for being too tame, too much a fixture of the bourgeois world that Haller both wishes for and pushes away from. The professor is of course a figure of education a possible provider of Bildungsroman, yet Haller is of a more advanced age than Wilhelm or Tamino and feels that his ability to learn from someone who shares his age is limited. Haller hopes for a new stage of education, a lesson that he knows that he most likely cannot find within the bounds of ordinary society, that despite his knowledge this particular professor does not hold what he needs to repair and complete himself. Cult will once again leap in to provide this otherwise unattainable enlightenment and give physical space to Haller's internal cults. Theater will also be prominently featured as the cult is a theater of its own, the Magic Theater which is proclaimed to be for Madmen only.

Later on, Haller dines with the professor and his wife but finds it an unpleasant experience as he is confronted with yet another aspect of his splintered off self, his public persona of journalism. The professor presents an article by Haller, thinking it is by an author who coincidentally shares his friend's name, he goes on to vituperatively slander the content of the article which is written as a diatribe against the Kaiser, Hesse writes, "There was a man for you!

The editor had given him his deserts and put him in the pillory, However, when the professor saw that I was not interested, we passed to other topics, and the possibility that this horrid fellow might be sitting in front of them did not even remotely occur to either of them” (80). Haller seems to find some grim amusement in being lampooned unknowingly by the professor, perhaps seeing it as a way to exist outside of himself momentarily. This instance also shows Haller’s adversity to authority, the Kaiser’s in this case, further setting him up as a person who rejects systems of government but also most likely craves them deep within himself. As in *The Magic Flute* the government is shown as oppressive or more just laughably ineffectual in this work, at least according to Haller, opening up the possibility of the cult as a form of art that pushes back against the government while also providing a sense of membership. The Magic Theater is more abstractly anti-government, not seeking to destroy it like Sarastro did, but its tutelage of laughter still bears an implication of being able to chortle at the power mongers that people like Haller despises and not taking them too seriously. This theater is distinct from the cults in the other works within this paper and harder to strictly define as a cult, though it is of course bathed in secrecy and seems to dwell within the supernatural or bizarre. Haller may not become as initiated within it as Wilhelm does the Tower Society but from his dalliance with it his life is inextricably changed.

This dinner ends in disaster with Haller being enraged by a picture of Goethe in the couple’s home. He sees the art piece as presenting the writer pompously, as Haller says, “‘Let us hope,’ said I, ‘that Goethe did not really look like this. This conceited air of nobility the great man ogling the distinguished company, and beneath the manly exterior what a world of charming sentimentality!’” (81). Haller seems to adore Goethe but views this image of him as posh and obnoxiously aristocratic, emasculating the writer by making him look too artificially ‘pretty’.

Despite Haller's admiration of Goethe, the clash makes the reader aware of the differences in mentalities between Goethe and Hesse and how this will affect their differing opinions on secret societies and the world at large. I believe Goethe would disapprove of Haller's contempt for the picture of himself. Goethe and Hesse envision different yet also similar forms of theater, though theaters are exclusive in today's view perhaps in the era of the novel they were more public, and seemingly the only qualification needed for the Mad Theater is madness which is affordable by all. Meanwhile the Tower Society is more class-based though it operates at a junction between middle class and aristocratic. The Professor's wife is hurt and takes her egress and the professor scolds Haller mildly and warns him against being so outspoken in his opinions. This interaction shows an immaturity of Haller's, sure we all love to read about those whose opinions are too grand to be kept silent, but in reality, Haller has been unnecessarily cruel and obviously displays some self-centered traits. There is much room for education within his mind though he rejects such educational figures as the professor, choosing to see them as only objects of a stale and beaten down society. Haller apologizes saying, "I sincerely beg your wife's pardon and your own. Tell her, please, that I am schizomaniac" (82). It is funny to see the Steppenwolf acknowledge his own crippling duality to make the apology, though the reader knows this to be a sincere thing for him to reveal the professor probably sees it as a ridiculous excuse. The professor accepts the apology graciously however and notes how he has enjoyed Haller's company in the past. One small detail of note is that the professor mentions Haller's interest in Mithras, the Roman god who accumulated a cult of his own in ancient times. Haller may have some academic interest in the occult, yet the reader can sense that he wishes to live more mystically as well, mysticism perhaps being another way of finding harmony between one's inner animal and humanity. For now, however the Steppenwolf has achieved victory within

Haller, even if he lashed out in an argument about literary subjects he did so in an animalistic way and without exhibiting restraint. Hesse writes,

The wolf in me howled in gleeful triumph, and a dramatic struggle between my two selves followed. For it was at once clear to me that this disagreeable evening had much more significance for me than for the indignant professor. For him, it was a disillusionment and a petty outrage. For me, it was a final failure and flight...a complete triumph for the Steppenwolf (83).

Haller seems to be tipping towards the realm of the wolf, it feels as if deciding on one aspect of his personality to lean into would perhaps be a way of attaining some semblance of peace, and far easier than pursuing true internal harmony. Haller reels out into the street with these thoughts on his mind, as he wanders all about, he begins to contemplate suicide, seemingly specifically enamored with death by razor. He narrates the battle between his cowardice and despair and eventually his fear of death seems to win out, it is uncertain whether this fear comes from his animalistic or human nature. He retreats to a bar and encounters a woman who seems attracted to his intense ways and words, she forwardly tells him that she wants to nurture and control him. Hesse writes,

'You're not difficult. I wouldn't mind betting it's a long while since you have had to obey any one.'/'You'd win that bet. How did you know it?'/ 'Nothing in that. Obeying is like eating and drinking. There's nothing like it if you've been without it too long. Isn't it so, you're glad to do as I tell you?'/ 'Very glad. You know everything' (86-87).

This interaction cuts right to the core of Haller's dilemma, his desire to defy the powers around him but also his need to be directed through life so as to avoid hurting himself. Haller seeks out control while running from the idea of a master, this all seems part of the lead up to the Theater and its teaching of laughter. Comedy is at once a way to shrug off one's reigns and subvert power while also being granted a path, the path that leads to the funniest sights. Haller

tells this woman about his dispute with the Professor and Hesse writes, “If you had sense, you would laugh at the artist and the professor—laugh and be done with it” (91). The woman’s words cut to not only Haller’s core but to the conclusion of the book. It’s daring for Hesse to include the primary thesis of his work at this point in the book but helps to hammer in the emphasis on laughter. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his work *Rabelais and His World*⁹, writes of laughter’s on and off relationship with religion. He uses the word ‘cult’ broadly in these lines, yet it still feels to bear some significance when held against Hesse. Bakhtin writes, “At the same time certain religious cults inherited from antiquity were influenced by the East and in some cases local pagan rites, especially by the rites of fertility. Rudiments of gaiety and laughter are present in these forms.” (74). Bakhtin knows that while laughter may be dangerous to organized religion that it is also holy in its own rite and can offer up a religious experience of its own. Laughter is seen as a form of growth by Bakhtin, a pagan force of life reminiscent of Osiris’s presence as a fertility deity in *The Magic Flute*. This sentiment is shared by Hesse, while Goethe’s cult is more serious the cult that Hesse introduces in his novel is one of lighthearted revelry, illustrating how Hesse became so popular in the 1960’s counterculture in the US, which was arguably a cult of its own.

To move back to Haller and his chance encounter for now, the woman, who has not yet divulged her name, leaves Haller to go dance. He protests but she instructs him to sit and sleep and he does so. While nodding off in the bar he dreams of Goethe and a scorpion which clambers about on Haller. This is a mystic, occult dream if I’ve ever heard of one. Goethe seems to have become a patron saint of Harry’s, he may represent cult itself, or more likely duality. Goethe’s

⁹ *Rabelais and His World* by Mikhail Bakhtin. Iswolsky, Helene. Indiana University Press. 1984.

fascination with polarities reflects the split running through Haller. In a way the picture of Goethe, though distasteful to the Steppenwolf, represents some part of Goethe's ideology. Goethe was himself drawn to the lifestyle of aristocrats and found himself living luxuriously in the royal court, perhaps the professor's picture shows Goethe as Goethe himself wanted to be, ostentatious in an appealing manner. Though this is mainly conjecture, Haller does seem torn between two different forms of Goethe in the same way that he seems torn between two sides of himself. The Goethe of Haller's dreams confronts Harry in an almost aggressive way, he accuses him and his entire generation of not appreciating the old masters and their art enough. Harry admits to this saying, "'You are quite right,' said I, chilled by his ministerial glance. 'We young people have, indeed, very little appreciation of you. You are too pompous for us, Excellency, too vain and pompous, and not outright enough. That is, no doubt, at the bottom of it—not outright enough'" (94). This passage is interesting as Haller is middle-aged and a large part of his character seems based upon his age, bildungsroman, as unending a process as it is, seems to have abandoned him here. Yet out-ranked and out-aged by Goethe Haller is grouped in with the young again, even though he is being mildly insulted by Goethe he seems to find some joy in being made to feel young and condescended to, it says that there is still a chance for him to find teachers and continue his education, in the world of the dreams and occult as opposed to the world of conventional classrooms, which would surely reject someone of his age. Haller expresses his desire to kneel to Goethe, who in the dream has a slightly imperial presence and wears a badge, maybe Goethe represents the new and commanding woman, or perhaps even the Kaiser, an idealized hybrid of artist and politician. Like *The Magic Flute* this work is politically aware even if subtly so, I believe that another large aspect of Haller's psyche is his aversion to modern political figures. I believe that the Kaiser previously mentioned in the novel is Wilhelm

II, the final Kaiser who strengthened the German navy and turned the country into major a colonial power but was also seen by some as inflammatory in his public speeches and as a war monger who helped bring on WWI, though I am no expert on the topic. I see Haller as the sort who longs to be a patriot but finds it harder and harder to do so with the advent of modernity, so turning to Goethe as his own emperor is a way of honoring Germany's enlightened past while defying its modern politics.

The scorpion in this dream sequence is also noteworthy, Haller believes it to be heraldic and deadly but in a non-threatening way somehow, he likens it to women and the original sin. The strangeness and comfort derived from this dream by Haller points towards the occult, showing how space is already being made in his mind for the introduction of the Mad Theater. After the dream Haller retreats to his room and awaits his next meeting with the girl more eagerly than he has anything in quite some time. Upon his first formal date with the girl Haller guesses her name successfully, saying he thinks she resembles a Herman in her boyishness and then trying the name 'Hermine' which just so happens to be correct. Hermine and he chat for a while before she undergoes a strange transformation, not exactly in a supernatural way, into a sinister and powerful seeming being, something between an occult figure or a dream being like Haller's subconscious Goethe, or a politician full of dreadful might and will. Hesse writes, "And now a dark cloud of seriousness spread over her face. It was indeed like a magic mirror to me. Of a sudden her face bespoke seriousness and tragedy and it looked as fathomless as the hollow eyes of a mask" (108). Hesse enjoys writing descriptions of people transforming in ambiguously spiritual ways, he creates a sensation of the sublime in not fully letting on whether the onlooker experiences terror or delight at these sights. In this moment, the occult is reaching Haller through the form of one woman, though later it will appear as theater, it is currently making itself known

in Hermine. The description of Hermine's face as a mask is especially striking, as it subverts the emptiness of an unworn mask's eye holes and deems their eyes 'fathomless'. In this sense there is a depth of sort given to an emptiness that seems significant. Hermine then barks more and more orders and Haller seems to submissively enjoy pledging his allegiance to her, Hermine states that she is aware that he likes but does not yet love her and she says she will make him love her eventually. Her most shocking and final command for him is that he should kill her when she asks. Haller is stunned by this request of course but does not all that vocally reject it. The two then go back to more standard conversation though they still cover large and important subjects such as war and nationalism.

This sequence seems very political, as mentioned before Haller dislikes the state of his nation but still wishes for fervent worship of something. Since he has no abstract patriotism or religion, he projects these feelings upon the flesh-and-blood woman he has encountered. He is a jingoist not for Germany but for Hermine. The two also talk about the war and predict the war to come. Hesse wrote *Steppenwolf* in 1927 so these lines are prescient though I figure that many German citizens knew that the inter-war period would be brief from the economic conditions and political tensions of the Weimar era. Interestingly the word 'Holocaust' even makes an appearance, Hesse writes, "But nobody wants to. Nobody wants to avoid the next war, nobody wants to spare himself and his children the next holocaust if this be the cost" (117). This word choice reveals a dark history on the horizon and I'm unsure if it's an intentional choice by a translator from after World War II or just pure coincidence. Haller can tell that a larger more malevolent cult following is developing, and not the mis-understood and truth-seeking type described in this paper, I do not wish to delve too far into this era of history as it is very large and of course somber, but it feels worth mentioning in the political context of *Steppenwolf*. Hermine

will go on to introduce Haller to Pablo, a man whom he despises for a handsome vapidness which he projects onto him. Pablo does not seem an important figure, he especially does not seem thoughtful enough to be a mad man or the cult leader of the Magic Theater. He seems like a standard hedonistic effete man, possibly reminiscent of Haller's hatred for the Goethe portrait, and though Haller joins in on his indulgence, dancing and listening to rowdier music, he holds contempt for him and hardly suspects him of containing any mystic nature or knowledge of the Steppenwolf. Pablo also is implied to be foreign and it seems as if Haller sees this as another mark of his representing the new age in a negative way. Subtly I think this work chronicles Haller coming to terms with the world beyond Germany and more diverse groups of people. In one scene where Haller encounters Pablo Hesse writes,

Corridors and stairs were filled to overflowing with masks and dancing and music and laughter and tumult. Oppressed in heart I stole through the throng, from the Negro orchestra to the peasant band, from the large and brilliantly lighted principal room into the passages and on to the stairs, to bars, buffets and champagne parlors. The walls were mostly hung with wild and cheerful paintings by the latest artists. All the world was there, artists, journalists, professors, business men, and of course every adherent of pleasure in the town. In one of the orchestras sat Pablo, blowing with enthusiasm in his curved mouthpiece. As soon as he saw me he sang out a greeting... A corridor in the basement had been staged as hell by the artists and there a band of devils played furiously. (162-3)

This scene will be coincidentally mirrored by Kafka later on in the paper, even down to the use of the term 'negro' and the musical representation of Hell. But within this sequence in *Steppenwolf* the reader can see how Haller associates newness, diversity, and raucous art and music with Hell. Though in this phase of the novel Haller is becoming more open to pleasures he still seems disturbed by seeing the cosmopolitan gathering devoting itself to hedonism. In part Haller's journey is one of overcoming a spiritual stiffness, while most bildungsroman heroes become older Haller must learn to be younger over the course of his journey. Goethe is in a sense Haller's current cult leader but this submission to the past is soon to crumble as Haller lets

himself be ruled at first by Hermine, who is younger than him, and then by Pablo who will turn out to also control Hermine. There is even a note of homosexual tension between the two, Hermine and Maria serving as a go-between for the older and younger man and Haller's passionate, frustrated disdain for him that later turns into submission. Through the introduction of Pablo as a cult leader of great knowledge and prowess Hesse seemingly wants to emphasize the fact that we cannot be sure of who truly understands our nature, those we deem most disconnected from our life and philosophy may actually live by the same values as us or even contribute to the forging of those very values.

Haller has been living freely, in a world of strange new music and his affection for Hermine, however he still feels the pull of his fractured self and its desire for one-ness. After a night of heavy dancing Pablo guides him and Hermine to the Magic Theater, posters for this place have been scattered throughout the city and the book and reveals that it belongs to him. At this point Haller seems to appreciate Pablo's musical talents but still doesn't respect him much and worries about his relations with Hermine. However soon Haller's world will be shaken and both parts of their nature will be greeted with an array of mirrors powerful enough to reflect both halves of Harry. The night has already been full of mad revelry and hints at the theater, but the true carnival is just beginning, Hesse writes,

With a smile Pablo led. He opened a door and drew a curtain aside, and we found ourselves in the horseshoe shaped corridor of a theater, and exactly in the middle. On either side, the curving passage led past a large number, indeed and incredible number, of narrow doors into the boxes. 'This,' explained Pablo, 'is our theater, and a jolly one it is. I hope you'll find lots to laugh at.' (176)

The reader is drawn back to Sarastro's temple from *The Magic Flute* with its many doors, or portals, and its overall scope. Pablo seems a poor imitator of Sarastro however, with a far less obvious motive, the whole cult in fact exists for more ambiguous reasons. Does it also seek to

undermine the authority of war mongers and other undesirable politicians? Or does it only want to encourage the education of men like Haller, who have thus far been unclaimed or abandoned by Bildungsroman. Perhaps these two acts are one and the same. Haller believes that Bildungsroman cannot apply to him, the professor and him clashing is a good example of this, he thinks that he is educated enough and that further attempts would plunge him into the institution of humanity that contrasts the wolf. Sure, his love for Hermine has been an education, especially in hedonistic pleasures, but he still remains his unsatisfied self at his core. The Magic theater however promises to wipe Haller's slate clean, a de-education of sorts, through learning to laugh he will learn to forget himself and get another chance. Pablo says,

'This is the prison where you lie. And if you were to enter the theater as you are, you would see everything through the eyes of Harry and the old spectacles of the Steppenwolf. You are therefore requested to lay these spectacles aside and to be so kind as to leave your highly esteemed personality here in the cloakroom where you will find it again when you wish.' (176)

The Steppenwolf, which seems to lie deep within Harry, is here likened to a cloak. Harry is mistaking an outfit for a soul, his spectacles for his eyes. The reader can understand how this novel gained such popularity in the 1960's US, with its talk of psychedelic ego destroying experiences, and learning to laugh in the face of political oblivion. Harry is an unlikely champion of hippy values, values which I have likened to the cult and occult in this paper before. Though this cult is not so magically skilled as Sarastro's or as bureaucratic and far reaching as the Tower Society it bears similarities to both. Like the Tower Society it has a basis in theater, both teach the initiate that their lives are a form of theater and tell them not to take certain things as seriously as they once had, acting itself in Goethe's work and one's personality in Hesse's. Also, like the Tower Society, this theater has a deep understanding of Haller's life, the treatise of the Steppenwolf being brought up and various rooms within the theater pertaining to Haller's life. In the style of Sarastro's trials, Haller begins to stumble through the various areas of the theater,

encountering reflections of himself and doors labeled with inscriptions such as the following, “Mutabor/Transformation Into Any Animal Or Plant/You Please...Delightful Suicide/You Laugh Yourself To Bits...Downfall Of The West/Moderate Prices. Never Surpassed” (190).

These inscriptions refer to either Eastern seeming philosophies or to Haller’s life, the references to suicide mirroring his own self-destructive urges and the political commentary seemingly showing his disdain for modern, Bourgeois politics.

Strange figures lie within the Theater, reminiscent of the nameless speakers in *The Magic Flute*, “I found myself in a quiet twilit room where a man with something like a large chessboard in front of him sat in Eastern fashion on the floor...’Are you Pablo?’ I asked. ‘I am not anybody’” (191). The two go on to discuss the Steppenwolf and the pursuit of taming it, Haller being shown reflected versions of himself, doubles that plunge him into agony, he even speaks with a vision of Mozart but all in all his voyage fills him with panic and make him think of the Magic Theater as a nightmare of sorts. Eventually Haller flies into a panic and tries to murder Hermine who he finds lying with Pablo, partially due to her prior orders, in doing so he exits the illusion of the theater and seemingly fails its test. Pablo later finds him and informs him of his disappointment but teaches him only with the harshness of a teacher whose pupil has failed an exam. Pablo may be much younger than Haller, but he has become his educator, or de-educator, within the occult classroom. Hermine is reduced to a hallucinatory spell, a piece in a game, of Pablo’s, showing that perhaps he does have magical powers to rival Sarastro’s, “He took Hermine who at once shrank in his fingers to the dimensions of a toy figure and put her in the very same waistcoat pocket from which he had taken the cigarette” (217). Haller seems unphased by this, surprisingly. As he sees that the woman he may have loved, who he valued for her dominating spirit, is in fact controlled by Pablo. She even resides in the same pocket from which

he takes his cigarettes, a pocket dedicated to everyday pleasures as opposed to anything very important. Sometimes women in these cult related works are powerful figures, like Hermine seems to be at first and how Pamina is for moments during *The Magic Flute*, but at other moments their power is taken, as Hermine's is by Pablo here. Despite this surprising moment Haller is more concerned with his failure in the theater, he thinks to himself, "One day I would be a better hand at the game. One day I would learn how to laugh. Pablo was waiting for me, and Mozart too" (218). Haller may not know how to laugh at himself yet, but he knows this is now his goal, to acquire laughter through the occult. All classrooms before this one had instructed him on being himself and now, he has found a classroom that can offer him a Bildungsroman of self-disintegration, which is what he really desires. Though the theater arrives late within the novel and abruptly proves itself to be cult-like, it is full of arcane knowledge and magics, it is easy to fear, it is seemingly led by the deceptively naïve Pablo, and it teaches Haller a valuable lesson that defies the teachings of the outside world. Haller has found love, political fealty, and knowledge all wrapped up in one package through the emergence of cult in this novel. He is given these attributes but is more importantly shown how to live without them. The Magic Theater's lesson is one of living off only laughter, and thus finding ways not only to shake off the oppressive control of the world but of one's own being. Harry has found a nondestructive and magically powered alternative to suicide through the Magic Theater.

Next Kafka will demonstrate another example of cult-like groups offering a troubled hero an escape route from his own life. Kafka portrays the cult as a means of getting lost in a romantic, communal way, an appealing offer for one who has been previously lost in a grimy, alienating way.

Chapter Four-*Amerika* and Cult as an Act of Vanishing

Kafka's portrayal of cult in *Amerika*¹⁰ is also oriented around theater. The Theater of Oklahoma is in a fragment at the end of the book. Karl has already been exiled from Germany, had his misadventures involving his suitcase about the ship to the new world, and gone through a chaotic whirlwind of employment and alienation within America. Kafka's lack of firsthand knowledge of the US has created a dream version of the nation, one built upon unfettered imagination and idealism, both of the land's grandeur and its potential for new breeds of isolating modernity. America's full expanse is best portrayed in this short fragment hidden away after the abrupt ending of the main narrative we find Karl wondering about a sign for the theater and musing on the multitude of posters in the fledgling nation. Kafka writes, "There were so many posters, no one believed in posters anymore. And this poster was even more implausible than such posters tend to be. Above all, it had one great flaw; there was nothing about wages." (267). This excess of posters leading to a lack of belief in posters at once mitigates from the purpose of posters and implies that an importance they once held and have lost. I would not generally see posters as something to be believed in, but this phrasing makes it clear that the people of Kafka's United States once held faith in posters and most likely the jobs and lives they advertised. However, Karl sees the lack of wages on the otherwise promising poster as a flaw, he figures the job pays a negligible sum due to this omission. The lack of wages on the sign reinforces its cult status, the organization offers a role but not necessarily pay, it is a job beyond money and the world of men entwined with money. The call of the Theater of Oklahoma mirrors

¹⁰ -*Amerika* by Franz Kafka. Translated by Mark Harman, 2008. Schocken Books.

the call of westward expansion in the early days of the country, especially notion of young men going westward to evade the ills of the city and come to resemble the virtuous, rugged nature of the country. Perhaps Karl sees a similar ideal in the Theater, plus the call of the mystic even if the occult has not fully revealed itself to him yet. Karl thinks that the work will be without shame, in contrast to the odd and restrictive jobs he had done earlier in the story. In the cult he sees the possibility of a new life, the new country has not offered him this quite enough so he hopes that within this society his prayers will finally be answered.

Karl arrives at the meeting ground to a triumphantly chaotic sight, a sight mainly compromised of noise,

It was a confused clamor, the trumpets were not in tune...In front of the entrance to the racetrack was a long, low platform on which hundreds of women, dressed as angels in white robes with large wings on their backs, blew long trumpets that shone like gold. But they were not directly on the platform; each stood on her own pedestal, which however was not visible, for it was completely covered by the angels' long billowing robes. Since the pedestals were very high, a good two meters tall, the figures of these women looked gigantic, though this impression of great size was somewhat marred by their small heads; even their loose hair was too short and looked almost ridiculous, as it hung down between their large wings and down along their sides. (268-9).

This undoubtedly makes quite the first impression on Karl, who must feel as if he has ascended to some ramshackle, out-of-tune version of Heaven. While most cults in these works have not directly played into Judeo-Christian imagery but the Theater of Oklahoma certainly does, as is later revealed other musicians emulate the devil in their outfits. This imagery and the mention of other cult members sometimes dressing as demons echoes Hesse's scene in which an orchestra is dressed in satanic garb as well. The idea of cult and modernity, despite its ancient roots, are brought to mind and shown parodying the significance of Heaven and Hell that traditionally religious people venerate or fear. Cults are both eternally ancient and eternally young, always striking fear into the minds of those who have a weary disposition and are

paranoid of youths. After this sight Karl looks for the admission office and runs into his friend Fanny along the way. It seems that the cult often serves as a nexus between protagonist and their allies from earlier in the text. In all the works examined in this paper the cult usually surfaces near the end of the book, serving as a plot device of sorts to wrap up the story. Various characters are brought into contact, their mysteries explained through mysticism, and the main character finds their purpose. If the Locus amoenus appearing midway through classical journey narratives and offering physical respite, the cult comes in at the end and provides a mental respite of sorts, and instead of rest they are given stimulation. It is implied that the cult is less transient, that its teachings at the least will eternally regenerate in the mind of the pupil.

Karl is lucky however and has found both paradisaical physical land and also the possibility of mental rejuvenation. Though the cult motives of the theater are left somewhat murky, it does seem to be an actual traveling theater, symbolizing a way of connecting to the new world of America. This America is one of the sword, as the statue of liberty seen in the start of the novel holds a blade in place of its usual torch, yet perhaps there is a nobility in this too. I wonder if the theater plays into this most openly conquest-hungry idea of America or if they are an entirely peaceful group. Karl seems put off by the angelic troupe greeting the newcomers and suggest to Fanny that whoever leads the theater should tone down the display to bring in more members. Maybe Karl is not as attuned to the cult theatrics as a Haller or Wilhelm? It's interesting to think of Karl somehow flunking out of the cult rather than being initiated or inculcated by it, though I suppose Haller fails the initial test, but it is suggested that Haller could train and try again.

Karl also takes on the name of 'Negro' when asked by the organization if he would like to re-name himself. This, like the relationship between Papageno and Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*, may express some attempt at solidarity between outsiders. Does Karl come to worship the

state of being an outsider within the span of this work, crystallizing this ideal in this final fragment of the text? It's quite a modern idea, in some ways, to revel in being a stranger to the world yet Karl seems to be doing just this in the choosing of his name. Though the term 'Negro' is pejorative now and is used with some possible contempt in *Steppenwolf* it seems to be used in a sympathetic way by Kafka and Karl. As stated by the Oxford English Dictionary¹¹, "The word Negro was adopted from Spanish and Portuguese and first recorded from the mid 16th century. It remained the standard term throughout the 17-19th centuries and was used by such prominent black American campaigners as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington in the early 20th century." Kafka seems to be using the term to acknowledge the role of black Americans in the country's history and showing how Karl feels some kinship with them and their plight. The aforementioned figures of W.E.B Dubois and Booker T. Washington used the term proudly as a symbol of their identity and place within the country. Though Kafka using it to describe a white character may seem insensitive now, it seems as if Kafka means for Karl to take pride in this connection to black culture and to view himself as a group of outsiders larger than himself and even the Nature Theater.

Though he is also attempting to relate to other alienated beings in the choosing of this name. The alternate title of this book is *The Man Who Disappeared* which implies that the whole story has been a leadup to Karl fading out of the eyes of the world, perhaps disappearing in a startling, literal sort of way or in a more transcendent way. The novel starts with Karl leaving home, so he has already vanished in the eyes of his family, though they seemingly wanted him

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'Negro'.

gone. Now he must perhaps disappear to himself and to the reader. Everyone has heard of someone running off with the circus, and the nature theater seems to resemble a circus in many ways. Perhaps in opposition to cults that give the initiate a better grip on their life this cult pry's the neophyte away from their life? The last pages of this fragment seem to imply that Karl is going further into the heart of the land, merging with its nature in a sense. Though this is positive it also shows a disintegration of self, reinforced by the idea of Karl losing some essential German identity and being adopted by the cult of America. Karl's vision of the presidential theater box, which comes to him as he looks at a photo of it, appears as if a holy hallucination of some new breed of God, yet styled almost as if a decadently European king or Kaiser more so than an American politician, Kafka writes,

It showed the box reserved for the President of the United States. At first glance one might easily have believed that it was not simply a box but the actual stage, so forcefully did the balustrade sweep out into open space. The entire balustrade was gilded. Hanging side by side between its small pillars, which looked as though they had been cut out with the finest scissors, were medallions of former presidents, one of whom had a remarkably straight nose, thick curved lips, and eyes that looked straight down from beneath his arched brows. Rays of light streamed from around the box, from all sides and also from above; the section of the box in the foreground was bathed in a white yet soft light, whereas its deeper recesses, behind red velvet draped in folds of varying shades all along the perimeter of the box and held in check by cords, seemed like a dark red shimmering void. So grandiose did everything look that one could scarcely imagine people in this box. (284-5)

This passage is interesting for many reasons. First off it is probably the most flowery part of this fragment besides the last page, showing that the man-made presidential box is almost as much a fixture of nature as is the landscape seen out of the (man-made) train. However, this box goes beyond nature and turns to magic, being compared to a void in a description of size reminiscent of the Nature Theater's overall expansiveness but going beyond it even. It also plays into the idea of theater that the cult does but also blurs the concepts of actor and audience. Karl stating how the box could be mistaken as the stage at once demonstrates its size but also seems

philosophically rich and resonant in terms of American politics and the all-encompassing showmanship behind them. Every loyal American citizen wishes to both languidly zone out and watch the show while also harboring dreams of being one of its most active actors. Perhaps Kafka predicted this part of the nascent American psyche? It is also noteworthy that it is not noted whether a president is actually depicted in this picture of the box, all the reader knows is that medallions of former presidents hang around the box, pictures within pictures. One of these presidents is striking with Karl due to his sharp features, I thought it might be Abraham Lincoln going off the description and the tragic connection between the man and the theater box. This is purely conjecture on my part, however. Though it is a photo it is as if Karl has imagined greater depths to it, and there seems some magical link between the Theater of Oklahoma and the United States and its Presidents. The void, like a black hole, is seen as something that could be disappeared into, however it is a void of light bringing to mind the painted ceiling of the Duomo in Florence or a similar painting, a shimmering, spiraling upwards expanding void. This theme of vanishing into the void is reiterated at the end of the fragment. Kafka writes,

Only then did Karl come to understand the vastness of America...On the first day they passed through a tall mountain range. The sharp angles of the bluish-black masses of rock went right up to the train; they leaned out the window and searched in vain for the peaks; dark narrow jagged valleys opened up, and with their fingers they traced the direction in which the valleys opened up, and with their fingers they traced the direction in which the valleys disappeared (288)

The themes of size and vanishing are brought up again in this passage, the sense of becoming lost among the nature of America as opposed to the machinery of it is presented. Many reject urban isolation but beg for country isolation, or vice versa though this feels slightly less common. The sensation of the valleys and the world as a whole opening up consume Karl and the rest of the cult is conjured up by Kafka in this sequence. This theater troupe is looking to act out some elaborate vanishing act with the help of nature, believing this to be some means of fully

embracing American values. Kafka seems to posit that one is only a full citizen of a nation when they learn how to disappear within it, in this case Karl needs a cult-like group to teach him how to fully embrace the art of vanishing. Karl's citizenship is his disappearance, and the test delivered to him by the cult. As in *Steppenwolf* Karl is reborn through disappearance, it may seem startling to see his personality set aside and his old life turned into a discarded garment, but for Karl and Haller it has seemed to be a welcome process. However, the reader must wonder if a more sinister side of cult is being revealed here after all? Has Karl been brainwashed into seeing his kidnapping as baptism and resurrection? Many dangerous real-life cults take in strays like Karl, who have been pushed out of their homes, and convince them they are finding their purpose as they rob them of their personality. Karl may very well be entering a servitude to another, personality that feeds of his own abandoned psyche as it does off those of other misguided initiates. However, in keeping with the cults I have explored so far, I would like to give the Nature Theater the benefit of the doubt.

Yes, there is something of a tedious bureaucracy to it, with Karl running about filing paperwork to become 'employed' there yet there does not seem to be any truly ominous tone to the place. This isn't Manson's Spahn Ranch, it's more of a circus than that. Cults like this operate in a spot between integration, offering newcomers to a country or stage of their life a place to enter. Karl is an immigrant in America and very lost before entering the Nature Theater, however the cult also works by assimilating him, absorbing him and making him into part of an amorphous mass, potentially wiping out individuality or blending all members into one individual, capable of keeping nothing secret, an oceanic but also terrifying sense of community created in the process. Karl may disappear into his fellow cult members as well as disappearing into the landscape itself. This could be seen as pure teaching, everything learned but the

individual's ability to serve as a unique receptacle of knowledge being erased. However, there isn't the emphasis on education that Goethe and other writers have used their cults to represent yet like in Haller's case the education seems to be held in the promise of a fresh start. We do not exactly know what lessons Karl will learn but we know that he will travel, which is of course the best way to embody Bildungsroman. Like Haller's education through cult Karl will be paradoxically educated by devolving. Presumably what is left of him will be the most receptive parts, even if they are then assimilated. Education in these works is not always seen as the refining of one's ego but the strengthening on one's connection to others. Notably there is water imagery present in this final note of the fragment, "...broad mountain rivers swept forward in great waves over the craggy base, pushing along thousands of small foamy waves, plunging under the bridge over which the train passed, and coming so close that the breath of their chill made one's face quiver" (288). Water is at once a force of rebirth and of vanishing, it can easily make someone disappear without a trace yet in this passage it seems to be less threatening, the wind chilled by the waves make Karl aware of his face and seem to contrast the friendly disagreements that were prior described within the train car. Karl is losing interest in himself and finding religious awe in nature. The same awe that he found in the presidents is now found in the waves, comparing a nation's leader to that nation's landscapes seems to be a sign that someone has become a native of sorts, the history and nature of the land has started to merge and become one. It's hard to say whether the cult is the ultimate form of progression or regression, the cults entered by Haller and Karl certainly lean towards the latter. They offer a return to simplicity and possibly even nonexistence. It seems menacing but to these figures such dissolution is what is required.

At the end of the day cults are always open to outsiders like Haller or Karl and this act of acceptance is strongly alluring, this power can be abused or used as a way to educate such otherwise untamable figures. Though for Karl the cult seems to bring him to the verge of a void, as demonstrated by the presidential theater box and the train ride through the mountains, but after all voids are known to devour light and it seems that within those voids Karl will find the lights denied to him by the rest of the world.

-Conclusion

Cult haunts and offers hope to these four or so figures from German literature. As unconventional a means of learning it seems it is highly effective, whether teaching initiates to fight an evil Queen, learn varied skills, rearrange their priorities, how to laugh, or how to vanish. What seems menacing at first turns out to be a magician king. The real world has, as it often does, taken the concept of cult and corrupted it, made it a place that is quite antithetical to education and generally only serves to produce pleasure or pain. However, in German literature cult has become a beacon of all that is weirdly awe inspiring in the world. These are the ideas that thinkers like Steiner did their best to translate into real world spaces but are also ideas that are only truly capable of thriving within books. Cult is a way of meshing the classical idea of journey with the more modern ideas of education. Cult is at once an incentive for adventure but also a place to rest, a place for finishing one's development speedily and dramatically. Even if you lose yourself within these literary organizations you know that the absence of your self will be filled with grand ideals and hidden knowledge, a worthy replacement for an ego. Hesse's *Steppenwolf* was quite popular in the US during the 1960's and it's easy to see how hippies and other bohemians could value his message of laughing self-annihilation. However, I think the idea of cults goes far beyond any 60's crash pad and stretches back to the roots of time. It's easy to imagine the first religions, even Christianity, starting out as odd and passionate sects, startling to their neighbors. Though of course the promise of cult is often lost in real life it can be nurtured on the page, like some bizarre plant that feeds off ink as opposed to water. What fails in real life always finds a place in literature, literature is like a hospital or a testing ground for ideas that cannot exist outside its bounds. German authors like those in this paper have a special understanding of cults and their potential for education, they saw the potential of cults to be the

receptacle for a sort of knowledge that is not easily bestowed through any other medium. To write about cults is almost a form of ekphrasis, capturing a strikingly powerful art form through the tried and true but equally brilliant art of literature.

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