

AN EXPLORATION OF PROTOFACIST TENDENCIES IN ROBERT MUSIL'S  
*DIE VERWIRRUNGEN DES ZÖGLINGS TÖRLESS*

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## Abstract

When Robert Musil saw his book, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, published, he could not have seen the coming of fascist dictatorships. Despite this, two of Musil's characters display characteristics that are hauntingly similar to characteristics common in the fascist Nazi movement in Germany and Austria, as well as protofascist groups such as the German Freikorps. By examining the characters of Beineberg and Reiting as well as their world in *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* through the lens of thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Klaus Theweleit, one can find many similarities between Musil's characters and the fascists of the coming years. Although Beineberg and Reiting cannot take Adorno's F-scale, which measures the authoritarian personality of individuals, there are many instances in which these characters' actions and the F-scale overlap. One also discovers striking similarities between the tendencies of Musil's characters and the fascistic tendencies of the Freikorps and other groups described in Klaus Theweleit's book, *Male Fantasies*.

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## **Chapter 1 - An Exploration of Protofascistic Tendencies in Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless***

When Robert Musil saw his book, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, published in 1906, he could not have had foreseen the coming fascist regimes that played such a role in shaping the 20th century. At the time of the book's publication, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was still intact, Germany had been a unified country for merely 35 years, Japan had defeated Russia only one year prior in the Russo-Japanese war, and the First World War was still 8 years away. The world that Robert Musil knew was not yet one influenced by fascist regimes. Instead Musil's world was shaped in the world of the conservative and bureaucratic Austro-Hungarian Empire, which would later crumble in the aftermath of the First World War. During this time, "Austrian ideology offered sustenance to a hierarchical social order, but it also emphasized reason, empiricism, and a high moral tone of service" (Luft 8). Within these political and social actualities, lay indications of a developing totalitarian mindset.

Despite Musil's inability to predict the future, and despite the lack of fascist movements at the time of its publishing, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, held two figures, Reiting and Beineberg, who embody certain characteristics that would later be referred to as fascistic. It would be irresponsible to name Beineberg and Reiting fascists, as they would predate fascism by many years, however, their philosophies and actions are relevant to the discussion of trends that predate fascism, but which are carried over, or indeed requisite for the creation of the fascist movements of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.

In *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, the characters of Beineberg and Reiting are students at a military academy named the *Konvikt zu W.* During their time at the academy, Beineberg and Reiting physically, sexually, and emotionally abuse a weaker third boy, Basini. Through the abuse they lay upon Basini, and through their conversations with the title character, Törless, the reader comes to recognize Beineberg and Reiting as sadistic, misogynistic, authoritarian, and violent individuals. These characteristics are prevalent not only among the students in the story, but also in protofascistic movements and groups that would appear later in the 20th century. These characteristics are also made clear not only through Basini's abuse, but also through their interactions with the local prostitute, Božena. Despite a predisposition toward sadism, misogyny, authoritarianism, and violence, Beineberg and Reiting's urges and actions are engendered by the *Konvikt zu W.*, which in fact plays a part as a breeding ground for these sorts of protofascistic individuals.

*The Authoritarian Personality* by Theodor Adorno and *Male Fantasies* by Klaus Theweleit attempt to better understand fascist and authoritarian trends in individuals in groups. In both of these works, a certain sense of what it means to be a fascist is established, along with certain tendencies, which include, but are not limited to an emphasis on physicality, the authoritative control of others, a misogynistic mentality, and a positive reception to violence. These tendencies are a few of the commonalities between the characters and environments described in Musil's text and the fascist movements prevalent in the first half of the 20th century. The descriptions of fascists in Adorno and Theweleit's works

cannot be matched one to one with the figures of Reiting and Beineberg, as at there were no fascist movements at the time of *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless'* publication. In these two characters, there are, however, traits that overlap with the traits of certain fascist and protofascist groups such as the German Freikorps, who existed after the First World War, many of whom would later take positions of power in the Nazi movement. The story of protofascism apparent in Törless does not begin with these two totalitarian students, however. Instead one must first examine the environment in which these students operate.

The environment in which Musil's novel is set is centered around the *Konvikt zu W.*, which is a military academy somewhere in the eastern parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. This academy is not only of importance in understanding Reiting and Beineberg's dark and violent tendencies, as this academy and the town that supports it, in fact support these two characters' tendencies, but also as breeding grounds for a totalitarian mentality that would later be crucial in the development of fascist movements. On several occasions, the community in which these students operate, turns a blind eye to the abuse Beineberg and Reiting perpetrate on a weaker third student, Basini. Through the book, these two individuals along with the main figure, Törless, disguise the fact that they have veritably turned Basini into a slave, on whom Beineberg and Reiting heap abuses in order to achieve their own ends. During the time that Basini is mistreated, there is no sign from the administrators or faculty of the institute that they have even an inkling of what is happening in front of them. In fact, the structure of the school itself in addition to the administrators' reaction to

Reiting and Beineberg's abuse of Basini implies that such incidents are occur from time to time at the institute, and that it is possible that the administrators themselves took part in such activities. In the end, the mistreatment of Basini is revealed to adults in charge of the facility, and Basini is ejected from the institute while Reiting and Beineberg are allowed to continue their education.

The town in which the students' academy lies is described as quite barren, agrarian, and far removed from where the Törless family resides. The institute is also ironically to be found in this distant town in order to shelter the *Konvikt's* students from the corrupting influence of larger cities (Musil 8). Törless himself battles with remoteness of the *Konvikt zu W.*, and as such suffers from a sense of homesickness that is abetted by his seeming distance from the students around him. In the time after his arrival at the institute, the only solace Törless can find from his homesickness lies in writing letters home to his parents, until he begins a friendship with the effeminate Fürst H.. As is the case in some friendships, there came a break in the friendship, and Fürst H. left the institute, which left Törless bored once more. When he seeks relief in the institute's library, he is sorely disappointed. What he finds is described by Musil:

Denn dort waren in der Büchersammlung wohl die Klassiker enthalten, aber diese galten als langweilig, und sonst fanden sich nur sentimentale Novellenbände und witzlose Militärhumoresken (Musil 16).

The library was not, however, where Törless would likely find the other students at the institute. Their interests were quite different than those of Törless as Musil further describes:

In seinen Kameraden war es die Freude am Sport, das Animalische, welches sie eines solchen gar nicht bedürfen ließ, so wie am Gymnasium das Spiel mit der Literatur dafür sorgt (Musil 17).

The emphasis of this school did not lay in what the students could find in the library, but rather what the students could find out on the playing field. What the students would have even been able to find in the library would include Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, perhaps a few Modern authors, as well as Roman tragedies. Whether by intention or accident, the community formed at the institute valued physicality over intellect.

The institute that is described in *Törless* is not one that is entirely created in fantasy. As a youth, Robert Musil himself spent time in such the institutes in Eisenstadt south of Vienna, and at Mährisch-Weisskirchen, which he described as "das Arschloch des Teufels" (Brodsky 88). The time he spent at these military academies played a leading part in his development of the *Konvikt zu W*, and it is for this reason that a brief examination of Musil's personal past is beneficial in understanding the environment, which he describes in *Törless*. Although Musil's novel is a work of fiction, the *Konvikt zu W*. and Beineberg and Reiting are based

in Musil's own personal experience (Brodsky 89). His first school in Eisenstadt was a lonely experience for him, and was a source for Musil to reflect on in developing the young Törless' homesickness at the beginning of the novel. Soon afterwards he transferred to Märsch-Weisskirchen, which played an important role in his development of the *Konvikt zu W.* (Luft 29).

The time that Robert Musil spent at the military institute may not have affected him as much or in the same way as some other authors such as Rainer Maria Rilke, who have written about similar experiences in such institutes, but it left a mark on him all the same. Out of this experience, Musil carried forward a sense of the "semi-savage living conditions and the atmosphere of embryonic dictatorship," which is evident in his book (Brodsky 89). This understanding of Robert Musil's time at Märisch-Weisskirchen is further supported in David S. Luft's monograph, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942*. In his book, Luft describes military academies such as the one Musil attended as being culturally inferior to the Gymnasia of the time, but such institutes allowed students to be "educated with the social, political, and military elite of the empire" (Luft 30). Luft then moves further to explain that these institutions were not "strongholds of bourgeois values and sexual restraint," and that "prostitution, homosexuality, and sadism did their part to educate the young officers" (Luft 30). Although Musil spent but three years at Märisch-Weisskirchen, the themes of prostitution, homosexuality, and sadism left an impact on him. The story that he writes about Törless coming into his own, and beginning to understand the world is driven by Törless' inability to fully grasp Beineberg and Reiting's sadistic abuse

of Basini, as well as how he should react to his awakening sexuality, particularly in an all-male institute.

The role that prostitution plays in this novel becomes apparent in the boys' interactions with one of the local prostitutes, Božena. As young boys in an all male-academy, the students have few places to turn in order to learn of the fairer sex, so prostitutes are often where the students turn in order to fulfill their desire for release. As a prostitute, Božena was one of the outlets for several of the boys at the institute. Among her clients included not only Törless and his friend Beineberg, but the meek Basini as well. Božena is described as character who has become quite ugly, but who still carries a certain charm, and who some time ago had left her home town to while away her time smoking cigarettes and reading cheap novels in between visits from the local men (Musil 39). One night Törless and Beineberg visit Božena together, and the interaction between the three gives the reader a certain understanding of each of them. As the two boys approach where Božena practiced her craft, a man leaves where the boys are soon to enter with a clamor of curses. Törless' visit to Božena, was something for which the boy could hardly wait. The visit was initially described as becoming his "einzigsten und geheimen Freude," but by the middle of his visit, Törless could not decide if he should either protect himself from Božena, or if he should flee from her (Musil 40).

The animosity that is displayed between Božena and her client continues on with Beineberg and Törless as the substitutes for her previous clients. During their visit, Božena pays little attention to Törless, and continuously mocks

Beineberg. She had, in previous visits, learned his identity, and parts of his personal history. Through her knowledge of him, she heckles Beineberg with stories of his mother and his aunt and uncle. Despite these abuses, the boys stay in the company of the prostitute, and eventually learn of Basini's visits to Božena. She explains to the students that during one of his visits, Basini had explained, "alle Weiber seien nichts anders wert," which Beineberg then grins at (Musil 48). During this interaction the sort of misogynistic mentality prevalent at the *Konvikt* begins to take on a clearer shape, which is only further developed once Božena discusses Basini's mother with him. Once Božena had confronted Basini about whether or not his visit would shame his mother, he became flustered and explained:

Mutter?... Mutter? Was ist das? Das existiert jetzt nicht. Das habe ich zu Hause gelassen, bevor ich zu dir ging (Musil 48).

Basini's response to pressure from Božena is interesting in that he leaves any thought of his mother far away from anything to do with Božena. Also instead of referring to his mother as the feminine *sie*, he refers to her as the gender neutral *das*. Neither party really takes the other seriously during the visit and the boys leave with a generally negative picture of women.

This visit sets up a rather interesting dichotomy of women in the mind of Törless. The question of how he should understand women is then further

confused, as the other woman in his life is in fact his mother. In his mind he understands Božena as some kind of a pariah, who is disgraced and unclean:

Wäre Božena rein und schön gewesen und hätte er damals lieben können, so hätte er sie vielleicht gebissen, ihr und sich die Wollust bis zum Schmerz gesteigert. Denn die erste Leidenschaft des erwachsenden Menschen ist nicht Liebe zu der einen, sondern Haß gegen allen... Und sie selbst ist eine Flucht, auf der das Zuzweisein nur eine verdoppelte Einsamkeit bedeutet (Musil 41).

On the other hand, Törless' mother is the exact opposite of Božena in many aspects. For him, his mother was something pure and a person to which he wrote almost everyday in order to assuage his homesickness. Not only did Törless' mother protect him from the homesickness he felt in the beginning, but it was she who escorted him home once it was decided that he was leaving the academy. Even unto the end of the narrative, she comforted Törless on the train back home (Musil 199-200). The roles each of these women play in the life of Törless relate to themes that are discussed in Klaus Theweleit's book, *Male Fantasies*.

According to Theweleit, women play on of 2 major roles: the Nurse and the Rifle-woman. The nurse personifies what can be good in women, namely a "heroic mother figure" who is "clearly above any suspicion of whoring" (Theweleit 91). These women are noble, beautiful, and chaste. Opposite the chaste, white

nurses stand the castrating rifle-women. These women are anathema to not only the white nurse, but also to men everywhere, as they are the castrators and implied whores (Theweleit 72). These two roles are filled in *Törless* by Božena as the castrator, and the mother as the heroic nurse. As Božena mocks and belittles Beineberg during their visit to her, their power in the situation is damaged, and they are removed from control of the situation. In the patriarchal community in which Beineberg and *Törless* operate, this is an affront. Not only is Božena a castrator in their interactions, but as a prostitute she has lost her chastity and is an active participant in weakening the students physically. *Törless'* mother on the other hand is for *Törless* a protection from the drudgery of everyday life at the institute. She is a distant symbol of goodness, who not only protects her son, but allows him some sense of joy:

Er schrieb Briefe nach Hause, beinahe täglich, und er lebte nur in diesen Briefen; alles andere, was er tat, schien ihm nur ein schattenhaftes, bedeutungsloses Geschehen zu sein, gleichgültige Stationen die Studenziffern eines Uhrblattes (Musil 9).

Within the patriarchal all-male *Konvikt*, in which the students lived, there could be little contact with women, and thus there is little room for their understanding of women broadened.

Despite their relatively short roles in the novel, compared to the students of the *Konvikt*, the women in *Törless* play important roles. The emphasis once

again is on the males of the story, and their interactions with one another. With the exception of Božena, the other women in the novel are also referred to by titles such as mother, or aunt rather than by name. This bears a resemblance to a theme that Theweleit discusses through his monograph. In studying the Freikorps, Theweleit found that many of the women to which these members of the Freikorps refer are left nameless, and are mentioned within a context that often refers to these women as a means to an end rather than an end in and of themselves. One specific example lies in a piece written by Freikorps member, and future commandant of the Auschwitz death camp, Rudolf Höss. In this paragraph, Höss never refers to his future wife by name; he only refers to her as either his future wife, or as the woman. In this piece he describes their first meeting in the Artamans, where she had traveled with her brother, and goes on to explain that even though he felt connected to her, he “kept the things that moved [him] most deeply to himself, never revealing them to her” (Theweleit 8). Theweleit takes particular note of the fact that Höss goes out of his way to mention that she traveled to the Artamans with her brother, thus ensuring that this sister who travels with her brother, rather than some other man, is in fact chaste. Also, much like Törless’ mother, this woman is in fact simultaneously his home and at home, being far removed from where any action is taking place (Theweleit 9). Although this is not a direct indication of how Reiting and Beineberg think or write, this observation lends itself to a better understanding of the society in which the two must operate, and unlike Törless, these two are more firmly embedded in the social norms and expectations of the time.

The effects of the all-male community at the *Konvikt* on the students educated there does not end with an insufficient understanding of women. It in fact praises and reinforces the hegemonic role of men in society, which in turn lends itself to the distrust of effeminacy as a whole. Törless' first friendship at the academy with Fürst H. holds some examples of this. Fürst H. was a boy from an old influential family in the empire, who was not entirely taken seriously by his peers for his effeminate ways. In *Törless*, how Fürst H. is received by his peers is described:

Alle anderen fanden seine sanften Augen fad und affektiert; die Art und Weise, wie er im Stehen die eine Hüfte herausdrückte und beim Sprechen langsam mit den Fingern spielte, verlachten sie als weibisch (Musil 12).

This made the prince unpopular with his peers, and perhaps in part because of this, the young man eventually moved away from the *Konvikt*. The prince is not the only character in the book who is understood as effeminate in nature. Later, during Beineberg and Törless' visit to Božena, she describes Basini to them:

[Basini] ist sehr komisch. Und nobel; er trinkt nur Wein. Aber dumm ist er. Es kostet ihm eine Menge Geld, und er tut nichts, als mir erzählen. Er renommiert mit den Liebschaften, die er zu hause haben will; was er nur davon hat? Ich sehe ja doch, dass er zum

erstmals in seinem Leben bei einem Frauenzimmer ist (Musil 47-48).

Basini is characterized as a generally weak individual through out the book, and is at one point described as “sehr schwächlich gebaut, hatte weiche, träge Bewegungen und weibische Gesichtszüge” (Musil 70). A little further on Basini’s reason visit to Božena at all is explained simply as “um den Mann zu spielen” (Musil 71). This observation implies that gender at the *Konvikt* is not always clearly defined, in that Basini, as a male, still has many characteristics, which are normally attributed to women. As Basini is understood by the other students to be effeminate, he is treated at times as if he were a woman.

The abuses that are heaped upon Basini are often sexual in nature, where he plays the female role in the sex act, and he is detested for his weakness. Reiting, Beineberg, and in some cases Törless in contrast take on the male role in the sex acts, and with the exception of Törless are generally perceived as masculine figures. During the course of the narrative, Törless often refers to the bodies of Reiting and Beineberg as being of masculine type. At one point, Törless contemplates Beineberg’s figure by noting his “stahlschlanken Beine homerischer Wettkämpfer,” his “ruhigen Schlankheit,” and that he resembled the “Darstellungen des Martyriums” (Musil 27). As with the stress that is put upon a masculine physical form at the institute, as previously mentioned, the emphasis on sports, which is are traditionally masculine endeavors, brings itself to the foreground in the description of the *Konvikt*. This glorification of the masculine

form exists as an opposite to the female form, which is often the literal embodiment of the vilified female gender.

This emphasis on youth and masculinity is not found at this institute alone, but are also traits that would later help define fascist movements in general. Many of the traits which are common to fascist movements can also be identified within the community at the *Konvikt zu W.*, but first one must have a working understanding of what fascism really is. Fascism can be a difficult concept to comprehend due to the vagueness of the term, but this difficulty has not deterred many individuals pursuing a better understanding of fascism. It is not possible to define fascism in a mere few adjectives that the most notable fascist movements embodied, namely Italy's National Fascist Party under Benito Mussolini or Germany's National Socialist Party under Adolf Hitler. These movements can be described as dictatorial, xenophobic, violent, and nationalistic, but these adjectives do not do justice to the philosophies of these movements (Payne 2). The ways in which fascism may be described are as varied as the fascist movements that have existed, just as the philosophies of fascist movements vary based on the time, place, and requirements of the system. Vague as fascism may be, George L. Mosse explains that, "the fascists themselves described their political thought as an 'attitude' rather than a system," and that, "it was, in fact, a theology which provided the framework for national worship" (Mosse 9). Within these fascistic systems emotions held terrible sway, which could mobilize the masses to a nationalistic frenzy in such a way that rational thought did not seem to enter the equation. Much like in the *Konvikt zu W.* the written word did not

hold nearly as much sway as action in fascist movements, and thus a formal ideology of fascist movements can be difficult to pin down.

One author who has attempted to create working list of definition of fascism is Stanley Payne, in his monograph, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*. According to Payne, there are several points which require identification, namely "(a) the fascist negations, (b) common points of ideology and goals, and (c) special common features of style and organization" (Payne 6). Under each of these three categories lie several finer points defining their role in the development of fascist ideology. Although one cannot directly apply every single subcategory to the community at the institute, several comparisons can yet be made. The fascist negations as well as the common points of ideology and goals are not completely comparable to *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, due to the fact that the scope of the novel is not broad enough to gain a national perspective on these topics. The way in which Payne lays sections (a) and (b) out, requires a national scope that is not available through *Törless*. Payne's section (c), however, allows for a greater level of access, because stylistic and organizational points lend themselves to be observed on a smaller scale.

The style and organization of fascist movements contain 6 main points according to Payne. These categories include an emphasis on the structure of meetings, attempted mass mobilization, a positive evaluation of violence, extreme stress on masculinity and male dominance, exaltation of the youth, and a specific tendency toward an authoritarian style of command (Payne 7). Unlike the previous two categories, several of these subcategories are available for

discussion of the protofascist tendencies apparent at the *Konvikt zu W.*. Perhaps the most obvious of the subcategories in relation to the institute is the willingness to use violence. Throughout the narrative, violence comes makes itself relevant over and over again. Much of the story is driven in fact by the violence that Reiting and Beineberg perpetrate on Basini. Even more damning, however, is the response the faculty has once they are made privy to the events that unfolded under their noses. For his relatively light crime of theft, Basini is ejected from the academy dishonorably, while the more severely criminal Reiting and Beineberg are allowed to stay with little punishment. The punishments handed down obviously favors these characters who control the situation with Basini, and by allowing the two abusers to stay on at the institute, the faculty in fact gives them a silent nod of approval.

Much like with violence, there is a sense of extreme stress on masculinity. Through the book, that which is considered masculine wins out over that which is feminine. From the mockery of Fürst H. to the abuse of the weak Basini, masculinity wins. Despite his role as the male in sex acts against Basini, even Törless leaves the academy after the revelation of Basini's crime. As a character, Törless did not personify masculinity in the way that Reiting and Beineberg did, and was in fact "ein junger Mann von sehr feinem und empfindsamem Geiste" (Musil 158). In much the same fashion, emphasis in the novel was placed upon the youth rather than on the adults who were to be the leaders of the institute. Outside of boring lectures, which the students attended, and meeting at the end of the novel between the faculty and Törless, adults were

seldom found. Much of the time, the students were left to their own devices, which is especially apparent in that Reiting, Beineberg, and Törless were able to abuse Basini seemingly at will, and that Beineberg and Törless would be able to move about at night in order to visit the prostitute, Božena. Except for the far removed parents, there were no true role models for the boys to attach themselves to.

Beineberg and Reiting in particular embody the protofascistic tendencies that are prevalent in the *Konvikt zu W.* In the vacuum left by the near absence of authority figures at the institute, it is individuals such as Beineberg and Reiting, who step in to take on the mantle of authority themselves. Both Beineberg and Reiting are sons of Military officers, and both are at the *Konvikt* in order to prepare themselves for careers as military officers as well. As officers in the Austro-Hungarian Empire's military, they will be expected to be authority figures in leading other men, and must thus somehow prepare themselves for this eventuality during their time at the institute. What the boys at the academy learn is not limited to what the institute's teachers teach in the classroom, and the two boys grasp at what they imagine to be an opportunity to practice for their future, namely the enslavement and torture of the submissive Basini.

Both of the boys find worth for their future in the abuse of Basini, but the worth that Beineberg and Reiting find, however, diverges when it comes to what role Basini plays in their preparations. For Beineberg, torturing Basini is a way to purify himself, and to somehow become more than what he is. On the other

hand, Reiting abuses Basini to practice controlling other people in preparation for his time as an officer.

In attempting to understand the character of Reiting, it becomes clear that he has a predisposition to think and act in terms of authoritative power dynamics, in which he takes on the role of leader. Those who are under him seem to be of negligible importance, are not recognized as people, but rather as tools for him to advance his own agenda. Reiting shows a controlling predisposition, and a tendency toward violence.

In the novel, Reiting begins the abuse of Basini after he discovers that Basini was, in fact, a thief, who had been stealing from the other students. Upon this revelation, the three boys, Beineberg, Reiting, and Törless meet in order to determine how they should deal with Basini. During their conversation, Törless explains his view of how Basini should be handled:

Und einen Solchen bestraft man - überall, in der ganzen Welt. Er muss angezeigt, aus dem Institute entfernt werden! Mag er sich draussen bessern, zu uns passt er nicht mehr (Musil 65)!

In response, Reiting tells Törless that he does not believe it would be so terrible, “wenn wir Basini noch länger unter uns behielten” (Musil 66). If Basini’s case were to be brought before the administrators of the facility, he would surely be thrown out of the *Konvikt*, and would become persona non grata in the greater

community. Reiting then goes further to briefly describe the opportunity he sees in their control of Basini:

Basini ist in unserer Hand, wir können mit ihm machen, was wir wollen, meinetwegen kannst du ihn zweimal täglich anspucken... Du musst die Idee fallen lassen, dass zwischen uns un Basini irgendeine andere Zusammengehörigkeit bestehe, dass uns seine Gemeinheit Vergnügen bereitet" (Musil 67).

In Törless' continued protests against Basini's virtual enslavement, Reiting finds only weakness:

Was steckt dir im Kopfe? So eine Art Idealismus, meine ich. Heilige Begeisterung für das Institut oder für die Gerechtigkeit. Du hast keine Ahnung, wie fad und musterhaft das klingt (Musil 67).

In his conversation with Törless, Reiting shows a disregard for rules of the institute. Instead of going through the proper channels, Reiting takes on the role of an authority figure, not only to dispense justice of his own, but additionally in order to practice for his future as a leader.

One of Reiting's greatest joys is described as being, "Menschen gegeneinander zu hetzen," and when he is asked about it, Reiting explains: "Ich übe mich dabei" (Musil 55). In the torture of Basini, Reiting finds yet another

platform from which he can practice his authoritative might. Reiting's desire to control Basini is explained by Beineberg:

Auch Reiting wird nicht von der Sache lassen, denn auch für ihn hat es einen besonderen Wert, einen Menschen ganz in seiner Hand zu haben und sich üben können, ihn wie ein Werkzeug zu behandeln (Musil 80).

During his explanation of Reiting, Beineberg goes further to remind Törless of Reiting's admiration for Napoleon and explain that Reiting would dissect Basini, "um zu erfahren, worauf man sich bei solchen Unternehmungen gefaßt zu machen hat" (Musil 83). In observations such as these, one begins to get a clearer image of what it is that Reiting believes, and who Reiting is.

Beineberg on the other hand is less interested in the question of punishment, but rather in perfecting himself. For Beineberg, torturing Basini is not only a way to purify himself, but also, simply put, an enjoyment. When Törless looks for a response from Beineberg in regards to how Törless, Reiting, and Beineberg should deal with Basini, Beineberg simply grins and replies:

Meinetwegen könnt ihr machen, was ihr wollt; mir ist es nicht um das Geld zu tun und um die Gerechtigkeit auch nicht. In Indien würde man ihm einen gespizten Bambus durch den Darm treiben; das wäre wenigstens ein Vergnügen (Musil 67).

Beineberg's father, as a young man, was a dragoon in India under the English, and during his time in India, he was influenced by the "geheimnisvollen, bizarren Dämmern des esoterischen Buddhismus" (Musil 24). Through the influence of his father, much of what Beineberg believes to be true in the world revolves around his understanding of Indian philosophy. The form of this philosophy, however, appears to be fragmented and confused, as Törless is often left even more confused by the other boy's explanations than he was at the beginning of their conversations. It is through his philosophy then, that Beineberg is able to rationalize his sadistic tendencies, and not only gain pleasure from the experience, but also help himself gain what he believes to be a higher spiritual level.

Beineberg believes that there are two types of people in the world, people like Basini, who "bedeuten nichts - eine leere, zufällige Form," and:

Die wahren Menschen... welche in sich selbst eindringen können, kosmische Menschen, welche imstande sind, sich bis zu ihrem zusammenhange mit dem grossen Weltprozesse versenken (Musil 83).

For Beineberg, enslaving Basini has nothing to do with punishing him for his crimes, instead Basini was an opportunity for Beineberg to learn:

Alle grausamen Dinge, die dabei geschehen, haben nur den Zweck die elenden nach aussen gerichteten Begierden abzutöten, welche, ob sie nun Eitelkeit oder Hunger, Freude oder Mitleid seien, nur von dem Feuer abziehen, das jeder in sich zu erwecken vermag (Musil 83).

By burning away what he sees as physical limitations and weaknesses, Beineberg hopes to enter a "höheres Reich der Seelen" (Musil 84). Much like Reiting, Beineberg views people like Basini as tools to be used in furthering his own agenda, namely the development of his soul.

Beineberg's philosophy implies that using individuals such as Basini in order to reach a higher spiritual level is a perfectly acceptable course of action, but the same use of "wahren Menschen" would be unacceptable. Although Beineberg does not expressly name any other figures in the book as members of this latter standing, Beineberg himself explains that he is "an zwei Fäden geknüpft" (Musil 83). Beineberg does not understand people like Basini to truly be people, but instead impostors, who merely take up space and are available to be used by individuals such as Beineberg. Although his philosophy does not match that of the later Nazis, the dichotomy of people he develops can be compared to the Nazis' view of other races or ethnic groups as less human than themselves.

Like many of his peers at the institute, the character Beineberg is specifically not interested in the academic side of the institute. His interests lay not in the philosophical texts or works of nonfiction that he could find in the

school's library, but rather in Indian philosophies, which shape his worldview.

Törless describes Beinebergs relationship to books as:

Mit dem Lesen war es übringens bei ihm ganz eigen. Er war Reiteroffizier und liebte durchaus nicht die Bücher im allgemeinen. Romane und Philosophie verachtete er gleichermaßen. Wenn er las, wollte er nicht über Meinungen und Streitfragen nachdenken, sondern schon beim Aufschlagen der Bücher wie durch eine heimliche Pforte in die Mitte auserlesner Erkenntnisse treten (Musil 24).

In reading the works of contemporary authors, or of the great authors deemed necessary for the academy's library, Beineberg finds little interest. The works of a different sort, however, catch his attention, specifically books of "indischen Philosophie," and "Schlüsselwerke wie die alchemistischen und Zauberbücher des Mittelalters" (Musil 24-25). These texts, however, are described as texts, which to him "nicht bloß bücher zu sein schienen" (Musil 24). Beineberg glorification of magical and mythical texts such as these demonstrates an affinity for the supernatural and unexplainable, just as his particular form of Indian philosophy displays his affinity for sadistic violence.

In analyzing the characteristics of Reiting and Beineberg in *Törless*, the reader can easily recognize that these characters are predisposed to be violent and authoritative. These predispositions relate, at least in part, to one of

Theodor Adorno's attempts to identify personalities that trend toward antidemocratic thought in his book, *The Authoritarian Personality*. This attempt takes the form of a questionnaire called the Fascism (F) Scale, in which individuals answer questions that are intended to rank the individuals in 9 different categories. The questions that determine the categories, in which each of the individuals who took the questionnaire are scored, are intended to measure certain internal personality constructs rather than expressed external indicators. This presents a problem in that Reiting and Beineberg both are but literary figures, and obviously cannot take part in a study including the F-scale. In explaining the F-scale, however, Adorno gives indications of characteristics that those, who score highly on the F-scale could possibly exhibit. It is these characteristics that beg a comparison, and not the actual questionnaire itself. There can be no one-to-one correlation between the characteristics displayed by Beineberg and Reiting, and the characteristics described in *The Authoritarian Personality*, as there is neither a psychological workup of either of these figures nor a complete history of their actions. As was afore mentioned, expressly naming Reiting and Beineberg fascists would be irresponsible and patently untrue, but there are, nevertheless, similarities between what can be seen of Beineberg and Reiting and variables in the F-scale.

As one might imagine, the F-scale concerns itself to a notable extent with violence, authoritarianism, and hostility. Each of the nine variables, which Adorno uses in his attempt to identify individuals with a predisposition toward antidemocratic thought, discusses a distinct set of trends in an individual. Both

Beineberg and Reiting display characteristics that resemble those discussed in the F-scale, but these characteristics relate more closely with different variables. The characteristics displayed by Reiting in Törless include a preoccupation with authority in his control over others, violent trends in his abuse of Basini, and an affinity for powerful historical figures in his admiration for Napoleon. These characteristics relate then most clearly to the variables of “power and ‘toughness,’” “authoritarian aggression,” and “destructiveness and cynicism” (Adorno 228).

First, Adorno explains power and ‘toughness’ characteristics as “preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader follower dimension; identification with power figures; ... exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness” (Adorno 256). Second, authoritarian aggression is described as a “tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values” (Adorno 228). Finally, Adorno describes destructiveness and cynicism as a “generalized hostility, [and] vilification of the human” (Adorno 249). As a character, Reiting is very much aware of the power dynamics around him. He wants nothing more than to control others, which would put him in the role of a leader. This is made clear through his enjoyment in setting people against one another and in his rejection of the set rules in order to enslave Basini. Through it all, Reiting’s aggression and desire for control does not waver.

Beineberg’s sadism is in line with that of Reiting’s, but his belief in the mystical works of his Indian philosophers, as well as his tendency to define

people in but two categories, “leere Menschen und wahre Menschen,” places him close to the variable superstition and stereotypy, which Adorno defines as, “the belief in mystical determinants of the individual’s fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories,” (Adorno 228). Adorno further discusses superstition and stereotypy as being related to the ethnocentric thought so prevalent in fascist movements, as well as that:

It appears likely that superstition and stereotypy embrace, over and above the mere lack of intelligence in the ordinary sense, certain dispositions in thinking which are closely akin to prejudice, even though they might not hamper intelligent performance in the extraceptive sphere (Adorno 236).

In the case of Beineberg, it is difficult to measure his intelligence, but it is apparent, as was afore mentioned, that Beineberg holds no love for books. Beineberg’s way of thinking, which is shaped by his adopted Indian philosophy, does appear to be closely related to prejudice, as he sees people unlike him as mere creatures, and not truly human.

As Beineberg concerns himself more with tending to his internal spiritual nature, than his external control of others, he is not as concerned with assuming roles of authority as Reiting. This is not to say that Beineberg is altogether unconcerned with control. Beineberg sees the “leere Menschen” as opportunities

for him to practice veritably burning away his humanity, and in order to use individuals like Basini to these ends, he must first control them.

In conclusion, Beineberg and Reiting, much like the fascists of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, are sadistic, aggressive, authoritative, and misogynistic. In abusing Basini, these two students hope to prepare themselves for lives as leaders within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These boys are not, however, alone. The *Konvikt zu W.* is a school full of boys like Basini, Törless, Beineberg, and Reiting, many of whom indeed might be abusing other students of their own. In this institute adult oversight appears minimal, and the boys, in many cases, could do exactly as they please, and in doing so take on roles of authority for themselves. As characters, Beineberg and Reiting are but two examples of the kind of men who would later take up the banner of fascism in Europe, and the *Konvikt zu W.* is a breeding ground for individuals such as Beineberg and Reiting.

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