Anna-Marie Stephanie Felber
20313954

Expressions and Functions of Disgust: The City, the Self and a Solution in Art – A Comparative Analysis of Jean Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* and Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*

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Expressions and Functions of Disgust: The City, the Self and a Solution in Art – A Comparative Analysis of Jean Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* and Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*

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Modernist culture has engaged with the uncertainty and disillusionment of the interwar years in various ways. Among the explosion of modernist culture and its ensuing ambiguities and discontents, Herman Hesse's Steppenwolf and Sartre's La Nausée stand out for exploring the psychological and philosophical consequences of a disillusioned and changed world through disgust. A comparative close reading of relevant scenes of the two novels will be used to identify how disgust is expressed, in particular its associations, its objects and consequences. This dissertation analyses the relationship between disgust and the city, the bourgeoise and the self. It explores the role of art in relation to disgust, particularly the ambiguity of music as a reflection of the protagonists' stance towards society, its effects and the potential to function as an antidote. It will be argued that although there is a partial congruence of disgust in La Nausée and Steppenwolf in terms of the connection to the city, the bourgeoise, the self and its antidote in art, the more profound qualities and implications of disgust diverge in significant ways, and thus also its function. Haller's disgust focuses heavily on mental and internal struggles, which functions as a way to express his rejection of modern life and society. His mental and societal (self-) disgust, an expression for his alienation, boredom, conflicting, and contradicting personalities, are closely interconnected and become almost pathological. The nausea Roquentin experiences, on the other hand, focuses on the existential quality of external objects, in particular their contingency, and the consequences this has for his self and his worldview. Disgust expressed through, among other things, alienation, death, and sexuality offer a comprehensible way to express this contingency and Roquentin's experience of existence. It will be argued that the encounter and engagement with music triggers an open-ended yet long-term antidote to disgust in both novels. This dissertation is an addition to the existing literature on disgust, outlining how disgust despite or perhaps because of its multiplicity offers a comprehensible way to express the consequences of a modern and changing world.

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1. Introduction

The years after the First World War produced an array of art and literature, an 'explosion of modernist culture in an exciting variety of movements and styles' (Jarausch 2016, 200). Marked by the experience of the war, modernisation, and political upheavals, the interwar years in central Europe can be described as a 'climate of uncertainty and disillusionment' (Bond 2016, 2). Among the explosion of modernist culture and its ensuing ambiguities and discontents, Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and Sartre's *La Nausée* stand out for exploring the psychological and philosophical consequences of a disillusioned and changed world. Wood, for example, sees in *La Nausée* 'a logical exploration of a world without meaning' (Wood 2000, 215). Moreover, in Haller's fractured personality in *Steppenwolf*, Bond diagnoses 'a more wide-reaching contemporary malaise', a breakdown of trust in the traditionally held views of reality (Bond 2016, 4).

The growth of the middle class and the decline of old elites altered society's structure. Divisions in the self and society emerged (Bond 2016, 7). Parallelly, bourgeois values of cleanliness, self-discipline and hard work remained dominant (Jarausch 2016, 184). Intellectuals, writers and artists were frustrated with those values and with the persistent hierarchical structures and conventional styles that came with them (Jarausch 2016, 184). As Jarausch puts it, the First World War 'deepened the sense of dissonance, hastened the rejection of received rules, and radicalised the attack on bourgeois (im-)morality' (Jarausch 2016, 184). At the same time, anti-modernist backlash and cultural pessimism emerged among a number of philosophers and writers (Jarausch 2016, 200). Indeed, bourgeois society, its rules and behaviours, are critiqued in *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf*.

Those tendencies and attitudes have been expressed in various ways. One of those, a feeling but also metaphor for this historical climate, is disgust. Using a comparative lens, this dissertation aims to explore the function of disgust in Sartre's *La Nausée* and Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, regarding the protagonists' development and their relationship with the world. It will be argued that it is the main way to relate to and express a changed world and its consequences for the protagonists, namely that disgust becomes the lens through which the characters perceive the bourgeois world, the city and themselves. The dissertation will look at the underlying causes and issues of their disgust. Expressed through images of death,

particularly through a visceral, bodily and organic language, it not only leads to exclusion but is also a trigger for reflection and change in overcoming disgust.

Comparing the two novels is fruitful because of varying degrees, their form, occurring themes, and the Zeitgeist but most illuminating is the comparison by the theme of disgust which allows for a deeper understanding of the philosophical and psychological issues at stake. Furthermore, it offers the possibility to explore the variance and difference of responses and consequences of a disillusioned and uncertain world through the same emotion. Similarities in form, other themes and the Zeitgeist build the foundation on which a comparison of the theme of disgust is possible and worthwhile. Concerning the form, most prominently, both texts are (fictional) diaries that become novels. With a foreword by a supposed editor in both cases, this not only leads to similar narrators but also raises questions of narrative reliability. Yet, the first-person narrator makes the plot, in particular, the experience of disgust arguably subjective and direct and allows for a comparison. Most importantly, perhaps is the fact that both novels function as a medium for philosophical contemplation (Swales 2013; Rolls and Rechniewski 2005, 2-3). Theories of the novel also allow for another parallel. Lukács argues that the novel is the expression of transcendental homelessness, meaning that the totality of life or a pre-determined meaning is no longer given in the world, but it is still sought after (Lukács [1920] 2015). The novel is then the medium that tries to reveal and create this totality (33). Indeed, his theory seems to reflect the struggle the characters in both novels face. Themes of otherness, (literal) homelessness and personal crisis due to precisely that loss of totality and meaning are evident in both. This is partly expressed through mental sickness: Sartre's original title, for example, was *Melancholia* (Rolls and Rechniewski 2005, 14), and Hesse speaks of a sickness of the soul which befalls Haller (Hesse 2012, 22). It is the struggle to seek or create meaning that is the underlying mechanism in both novels. It will be argued here that this is decisively expressed through disgust.

Lastly, a connection to (disenchanted) Romanticism has been drawn for *Steppenwolf* and *La Nausée*, respectively. Rolls and Rechniewski propose that the distaste for ordinary life, the sense of monstrous otherness and the self-absorption in Sartre's novel are tropes of nineteenth century Romantic and post-Romantic literature (Rolls and Rechniewski 2005, 15). Similarly, the connection between Hesse and German Romanticism has been discussed extensively (for example, Mileck 1983). For *Steppenwolf* in particular, Mileck argues that 'Haller's excoriation of the bourgeois and exaltation of the Immortals of the spirit and the

Magic Theatre, and his espousal of humour are pure Romantic manner and sentiment' (Mileck 1983, 182). Another layer can be added by traces of the Romantic engagement with disgust, in particular, its use to describe a historical situation and the tentative connection drawn to psychology, as well as to '"false" life and "sick" freedom' in both novels (Menninghaus 2003, 124-133).

As stated above, disgust is at the centre of the hypothesis, which argues that disgust is the main way to relate and express a changed world and the consequences for the self; therefore, disgust as a theoretical and philosophical concept and key terms connected to it, such as nausea and cleanliness/purity, will be defined. These definitions do not aspire to completeness; instead, a definition of the terms relevant and valuable for the two novels will be given. In order to do so, their historical development will be traced not only to illustrate the complexity and transformation of disgust but also to situate the use of disgust in the two novels and select appropriate theories to apply to the two texts.

Disgust has been a philosophical and theoretical concern since the seventeenth century. Menninghaus sees the origin of a theoretical concern for disgust in Schlegel, Lessing, Herder and Mendelsohn (Menninghaus 2003, 25-37). It was primarily an aesthetic concern used to differentiate between the aesthetic and un-aesthetic. Most interestingly, however, it marks an upper and lower limit, suggesting that over-satisfaction can also lead to disgust. Kant added a new theoretical layer. The connection he drew between disgust, ennui, and happiness is vital for this comparison. Kant limits the aesthetic function of disgust, arguing that in the portrayal of the disgusting, 'the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself' (Kant 1987, 180). For Kant, disgust is a way to civilise, a 'mechanism to repulse that which is amoral, unfree, and disharmonious' (Menninghaus 2003, 116). Furthermore, Kant connects disgust and ennui. He argues that self-disgust stems from a 'satiety with emptiness and meaningless repetition' (Menninghaus 2003, 119) and from the mind's emptiness of 'sensations toward which it incessantly strives' (Kant 2006, 43). He calls this boredom. Menninghaus also argues that disgust 'offer[s] both possible solutions and intensifications of […] evil' (Menninghaus 2003, 120). The aesthetic function of disgust is picked up again by Romanticism, where it becomes part of an 'aesthetic of shock' (Menninghaus 2003, 124).

Vital for the new perception of disgust in the nineteenth century is Nietzsche. In his work, disgust is not directed towards nourishment as it was in Kant but towards life itself

(Menninghaus 2003, 148). Nietzsche's critique is directed at the moral function of disgust, especially in Christian morality, which he perceives as life-denying. Disgust is no longer a mechanism for life-preservation but a '"will to decline", at the very least a sign of the most profound affliction, fatigue, sullenness, exhaustion, impoverishment of life' (Nietzsche 2019, 9). Central is, therefore, the question of how to re-learn disgust or rather how under nihilist conditions 'disgust at life that lurks everywhere [can] be reconfigured into a "yes"-saying of a new type' (Menninghaus 2003, 148). Especially relevant for this dissertation is the connection Nietzsche draws between cognition and disgust, with the latter understood as a necessary pre-condition and catalyser of the former (Nietzsche 2017, 31-32).

As briefly outlined above, disgust as an emotion has several layers and implications and has been defined and used differently by philosophers, theorists, artists and writers. However, a few core assumptions are more or less strongly inherent in practically all theories of disgust. The first is a connection to the body and its senses. Miller speaks of disgust as an embodied feeling (Miller 1997, 7). The French term *la nausée* derives from the Latin nausea meaning seasickness or desire to vomit (Gran Larousse de la langue française 1975). In its etymology, the it is already linked to the body and its senses, more so perhaps than the German term *Ekel* whose origin is not definitively clear. It emerged in the sixteenth century, possibly from the Middle German verb *ekeln*, signifying abhorrence and violent aversion (EWD 1993). Strongly apparent in the etymology of *Ekel*, there is almost always an element of repugnance, aversion or repulsion connected to disgust more generally. This characteristic, especially exclusion as the consequence of disgust, is relevant for the two novels. Some have seen it as a 'protective line between the self and a threat' (Haidt 1997, 127). Here a connection to the historical circumstances can be drawn, with meaninglessness being the greatest threat to the self in the west (Haidt 1997, 126). Connected to this is an aspect of transitivity or contamination. This allows disgust to become a connection between objects and subjects (Rossi 2017; Dowland 2016). Thirdly, disgust is not only a biological phenomenon connected to ingestion but also a moral, societal, and aesthetic phenomenon. Several researchers have pointed out an ideational concern that distinguishes disgust from bodily phenomena such as nausea or vertigo (Haidt 1997; Knapp 2003; Kelly 2011). It is indeed the dimension of disgust exceeding while keeping a tie to the bodily level that is central in relation to *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf.* As a 'human cognition-embodied schemata [it can be] applied metaphorically to other domains' (Haidt 1997, 123). Knapp, however, questions the strong connection many

have drawn between morality and disgust, especially the idea of some things being universally and normatively disgusting (Knapp 2003). Instead, he argues for a descriptive and individualised approach to disgust (Knapp 2003). Kolnai also questions a fixed object of moral disgust. In his view, moral disgust is directed towards 'inconsistency and irresponsibility; […] illusion and self-deception' (Kolnai 1998, 598).

As the various functions of disgust heavily focus on and have consequences for the self, a link between identity and disgust has been drawn. Korsmeyer, for example, argues that '[d]isgust occupies a liminal site where individual identity is in the process of dissolution' (Korsmeyer 2008, 373). The consequences of disgust on identity will become particularly relevant in the second section of this dissertation, which will analyse disgust and the self. As an emotion, it can become a way of insight and 'add plausibility, and even enhance the effect of the truth at which realism aims' (Rossi 2017, 278; Korsmeyer 2008). Overall, it is an ambiguous emotion. From its original function to reject to expressing both the aesthetic and the un-aesthetic to possessing a transformative power, there is both attraction and aversion inherent in disgust (Korsmeyer 2008; Rossi 2017).

Lastly, there is a strong connection between disgust and uncleanliness. Dowland, for example, defines disgust as 'the way in which our bodies physically react to the abstractions of culture, what is encoded as "clean" or "dirty", appropriate or inappropriate' (Dowland 2016, 68). Therefore, uncleanliness has a double meaning in connection with disgust. On the one hand, uncleanliness can express a lack of physical cleanliness, but it can also imply a lack of moral cleanliness: impurity and immorality. Cleanliness and hygiene, Haidt argues, are culture-specific and are linked to animality (Haidt 1997). Concealing or overcoming draws a boundary between animals and humans and influences how one is perceived and treated (Haidt 1997, 112-113). Miller questions this connection, arguing that it is often not animals themselves that disgust but their characteristics such as sliminess or 'slitheriness' (Miller 1997, 49). He sees the human mind and soul as the generator for disgust, not the animal (Miller 1997, 50).

Additionally, disgust, Miller maintains, is closely linked to hierarchy; the lowly and inferior cause disgust, and disgusting is what transgresses borders and escapes classification (Miller 1997, 43-44). Referencing Mary Douglas's work on pollution and purity, Miller argues that 'dangerous and contaminating are those things which don't fit within the ordering structures. The anomalous thus becomes polluting' (Miller 1997, 43). Similarly, Chudo

disagrees with the connection between animality and disgust, arguing that it is not animality and materiality that disgust but the 'failure of form to govern materiality' (Chudo 2013, 166). Cleanliness has been identified by Speltini and Passini as a social and psychological issue (Speltini and Passini 2014). They argue that '[i]n every culture, the idea of cleanliness/dirtiness, purity/impurity is inevitably linked to a categorisation ordering events, objects, and people and which is functional to the maintenance of that cultural, political, or social system' (Speltini and Passini 2014, 210). Although uncleanliness is not a central aspect in the two novels, animality and disgust's hierarchical function are particularly relevant for *Steppenwolf* but also *La Nausée.*

The above-outlined theories, definitions, and angles, will be used to investigate the function of disgust in *Steppenwolf* and *La Nausée* in several steps, arguing that disgust is the main way to relate and express a changed world and the consequences for the self. The central part of the dissertation will analyse key scenes in terms of the characters' experience of disgust grouped according to its development and the object of disgust. In particular, the sections will look at disgust and the city, the self and lastly, overcoming of disgust through art. Referring to relevant theory, this study will analyse how disgust is expressed in the novels, its role and consequences for the plot. Lastly, the findings of the different groupings will be collected and synthesised to re-assess the original hypothesis.

2.1. The City

'The aftermath of the war also turned the utopia of a liberating urban life into a dystopia of the threatening, exploitative megalopolis' (Jarausch 2016, 191). This change in perception of the city as a concept first occurred in the 1920s and 1930s and had already arrived fully at the time of the writing of the two novels. In both, cities are the geographical and social space in which the two stories take place. Especially noteworthy is the relationship between the city, the bourgeois, and disgust. This relationship and the effects of disgust - for which the foundation in this newly perceived urbanity is strong - will be discussed in this chapter.

2.1.1. The City as the Space of Disgust

In *Steppenwolf* and *La Nausée*, the city is both the space and the object of disgust expressed through death and sexuality. However, the reason and cause of the disgust towards the city

varies for the protagonists. Haller's disgust towards the city is rooted in society and the city's character, which at times becomes almost a moral rejection. Roquentin's disgust is not caused by the city itself, apparent by the naturalistic imagery used to express it, but rather by his changed perspective on the world and the realisation of the contingency of existence. The city reflects this; its inherent characteristics are, however, not the object of disgust.

In S*teppenwolf*, death not only triggers disgust but also expresses it regarding the city. This is most apparent in his search for the entrance of the magical theatre, where Haller encounters a funeral procession and decides to join it. Following and watching the mourners triggers and intensifies his disgust:

> Life had a dreadful bitter taste. I felt the nausea that had been mounting for a long time reach its peak, felt myself cast out by life thrown on the scrap heap. I walked through the grey city in a rage. Everything seemed to me to have an odour of damp earth and burial about it […]. Nothing felt the least bit attractive; everything had the smell of stale second-hand goods, of stale, lukewarm contentment. It was all old, faded, grey listless, worn out (Hesse 2012, 80).

The whole city transforms for him into a burial site, grey and smelling like damp earth. Disgust is, therefore, not only experienced on an abstract level but also felt sensually in the body through smell. This sensation of the city is associated with adjectives describing death and decay, such as 'old, faded, grey listless, worn out' (Hesse 2012, 80). Those words do not only concern the funeral of the stranger but are also a judgement of culture and city life. Indeed, he later concludes that civilisation 'would soon be laid to rest there too, so terminally sick had it become. Our whole cultural world was a cemetery' (83). Thus, the image of the burial confers a loss of value in a 'sick' society. Indeed, this correlates with Bond's argument that the years after the First World War were coined by a 'climate of uncertainty and disillusionment' (Bond 2016, 2). It appears that Haller's disgust of the city, expressed through the image of death and burial, is a consequence of this disillusionment. His disgust is a verbalisation of the recognition that the world has changed, and in Haller's opinion, not for the better.

There is a strong personal component in his disgust. It is not only the city that is old and worn-out, but Haller also feels like his life is 'thrown on the scrap heap'. This is emphasised especially in contrast to his old self, which he describes as an 'inspired youth […] and ardent idealist' (Hesse 2012, 80). His self-perception is therefore clearly linked to his perception of

culture. Following Marquis argument that one's psychological experience 'cannot be separated from the social-symbolic processes […] in which we are embedded and from which we emerge' (Marquis 2002, 145), the sickness of culture echoes his own sickness, his depression.

The stranger's funeral has become an expression of a meaningless and valueless world he rejects. Without direction, he no longer knows where to go. Instead, he 'walked through the grey city in a rage' (Hesse 2012, 80). However, Haller cannot escape the funeral images in which he now sees the future of himself and culture. Haller's disgust is accompanied by rage and contempt for a society and world he perceives as shallow and worthless. The city as the environment and perhaps a symbol for this society reflects his attitude towards them. His disgust, therefore, does not stem from the dead body and death itself but from a (perceived) metaphorical death of society and his ideal world.

Death and the city are likewise closely connected with disgust in *La Nausée*. However, Roquentin encounters death only indirectly and imaginatively. While visiting a café, the absence of the innkeeper and a woman's comment causes him to consider, imagine and fear the innkeeper's death in explicit detail: 'if he is dead it must be from a stroke. He will be an aubergine colour, with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. His beard in the air; his neck purple under the curling hairs' (Sartre 2000, 88). Moreover: 'The body is there, above my head. I would turn the switch: I would touch the warm skin to see. – I can't stand it any longer, I get up' (89). The description of death appears almost emotionless and detached. It is presented as a factuality focused on the bodily qualities of the dead body, like the colour and the warmth of the skin and its position. It appears, however, that it is not the potential dead body that causes disgust, although its description seems to adhere to what is frequently perceived as disgusting. Instead, it is its potentiality, its possibility, which causes Roquentin's flight through the city.

Indeed, it becomes clear that it is not death itself but rather the fog which makes the thought of death possible ('It was just the sort of idea you get in foggy weather') that causes his flight and nausea (Sartre 2000, 88). It appears that disgust or rather a change invades the places he perceived as safe and mundane.

> The fog had invaded the room: not a real fog, which had gone a long time before, but the other fog, the one the streets were still full of, which was

> coming out of the walls and pavements. A sort of unsubstantiality of things (Sartre 2000, 91-92).

The change concerns the objects which served 'to fix the limits of probability' (92), in other words, his perception of the world. With the fog, 'their very existence was being called in question […]. Nothing looked real; I felt surrounded by cardboard scenery which could suddenly be removed' (92). Without a fixed probability, 'anything, anything could happen' (93), including death. Therefore, death appears as a consequence of the change Roquentin experiences. A change that follows, to a certain extent, a loss of control and fixed meaning. In other words, it is not death but the contingency of existence that invades fog-like the whole city and frightens Roquentin. At this point in the novel, however, he does not yet understand it. Roquentin does not know how to express his experience, and the uncanny quality of fog, as well as the unsettling characteristics of death, which is often nauseating and meaningless, offers a comprehensible way to express it.

Despite the parallels surrounding death and disgust in the two novels, they differ in several aspects. Firstly, the emotions accompanying disgust are different. Whereas Haller's disgust is paired with anger and contempt, disgust in Roquentin induces fear and panic. This has an impact on the effect and interpretation of disgust by the characters. Fear causes a desire to remove oneself from its source and disinterest in its features and qualities (Kolnai 1998, 585). In contrast, hatred and contempt focus on the qualities and features of its object and aims at its destruction (Kolnai 1998, 590). As will be discussed below, Haller seems to be unable to separate himself from what he perceives as disgusting while simultaneously aiming to destroy it within himself.

Secondly, the objects of disgust are not congruent. Even though death and meaninglessness are elements of their disgust, there is an inward direction of Haller's disgust that is absent in Roquentin's nausea. His disgust stems from the outside and the loss of probability of the objects around him. It is phenomenologically determined, as it will become apparent to him and the reader in the course of the novel. The reaction to death in the novels reflects the different character of disgust in the two novels. Haller's disgust is centred on himself and a perceived decline of culture. He can clearly identify its meaning and direction. Roquentin's disgust and fright appear not to be caused by death itself but rather by the possibility of it. Death as part of and associated with disgust and its vocabulary becomes an expression for a contingency Roquentin has not yet understood.

The second pillar in the relation between disgust and the city is sexuality. Sexual imagery reflects Haller's ambivalent relationship with the bourgeois and its moral codes, particularly his ambivalent attitude towards an open and free sexuality, which borders on disgust. On the one hand, he is disgusted by society and the part of himself, which he classifies as bourgeoise. A break of rules of propriety and enjoyment of sexuality with Maria, then, seems to allow him to escape and rebel against bourgeoise society (Hesse 2012, 148-150). In this light he perceives Maria as a 'flower' with 'serene youthfulness' (148). On the other hand, he cannot separate himself fully from bourgeoise values. Maria and her lifestyle still represent something repelling. Hence Haller describes her life as 'strangely degenerate' (149). Here a link to the city can be drawn as he transfers his judgement of Maria to parts of the city. Thus he considers '[t]he world of dance halls and nightclubs, cinemas, bars and hotel tea rooms' as 'somewhat common, taboo, and beneath my dignity' (150). Therefore, sexuality, as a loosening of rules and part of his Dionysian abandonment, which Hesse associated with the city (Freedman 1979, 278), remain a part of Haller's disdain and indirectly disgust. In sum, his disgust comes from an inner conflict. His split position towards non-bourgeoise life directly mirrors his self-perception, split into 'civilised human and instinctual wolf' (Bond 2016, 4). The critique of Maria and dancehalls is then not only a societal critique but indirectly also a critique of the parts of himself he calls Steppenwolf. Haller still thinks in binaries and fixed categories and is unable to let go of the hierarchy he imposed on the world and himself. Therefore, it could be argued that it is not the sexual encounter or parts of the city itself that are related to Haller's disgust, but rather the connection to his self and world perception. Miller, for example, argues that inorganic substances are only rarely perceived or used to express disgust (Miller 1997, 38). Indeed, cities in themselves, their buildings, streets, shops should, according to this understanding, not be perceived as something repelling and nauseating. However, Menninghaus argues that moral associations with the city, such as moral decay, be it of the upper or lower classes, can lead to disgust (Menninghaus 2003, 127; 134). Indeed, this seems to be applicable here.

The argument of the improbability of the inorganic being disgusting is directly reflected in *La Nausée*: 'you rarely come across anything but minerals, the least frightening of all existence' (Sartre 2000, 186). Contradictory to this assertation at the end of the novel is Roquentin's first encounter with disgust in the form of a pebble (2). However, Roquentin

draws on organic and sexual imagery to relate nausea. This is evident, in his vision of the city invaded by change or, in other words, nausea.

> […] and somebody who has gone to sleep in his comfortable bed, in his quiet, warm bedroom, will wake up naked on a bluish patch of earth, in a forest of rustling pricks, rising all red and white towards the sky like the chimneys of Jouxtebouville, with big testicles halfway out of the ground, hairy and bulbous, like onions. And birds will flutter around these pricks and peck at them with their beaks and make them bleed. Sperm will flow slowly, gently, from these wounds, sperm mingled with blood, warm and vitreous with little bubbles (Sartre 2000, 190).

The experience of existence is expressed through alienation, violence, and sexuality. Someone is torn from his safe and comfortable everyday life into an alienated and sexualised nature; thus, trees are turned into pricks and are attacked by birds making sperm mingle with blood. The description of the change is in stark contrast to the previous description of bourgeoise life as calm and coined by routine. Indeed, the sexual imagery is one of shock in perhaps going against the bourgeoise notion of sexual reservation. It could be argued that disgust as an aesthetic of shock is here introduced by referring to a vocabulary laden with organic imagery like ‘sperm flowing slowly’ and ‘blood, warm and vitreous’. As it is precisely the organic, the living and paradoxically the dead: ‘what disgusts […] is the capacity for life, and not just because life implies its correlative death and decay’ (Miller 1997, 40). The person referenced here is suddenly exposed to nature they no longer recognise. Naked, they are stripped off their previous assumptions and confronted with the absurdness of existence. It is, therefore, not a moral judgement associated with sexuality that elicits disgust in both the reader and the citizens of Bouville; instead, the disgust is an expression of an understanding of the contingency of existence. In Roquentin’s words, it is the realisation that there is not ‘a single reason for living left’ (Sartre 2000, 187).

Disgust, sexuality, and the city are connected in *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf*. However, the connotations, effect and function vary. Haller’s disgust in this area reflects his struggle with himself and bourgeoise society. It illustrates a failing coming to terms with the multiplicity of the self. Roquentin, on the other hand, appears removed from disgust and sexuality. It is here not directed towards himself but towards others. Disgust in the form of sexual and

organic images seems to function as a tool to express the experience of the contingency and absurdity of existence.

2.1.2 The Bourgeois as the Object of Disgust

As already implied in the discussion about the city, death and sexuality, the bourgeois itself becomes an object of disgust in both novels.

Haller's disgust of the bourgeoise is based on a loss of values and consequentially connected to a perceived ingenuity and shallowness of their behaviour and transforms into self-disgust for not achieving disentanglement. Haller makes this clear from the beginning of the novel:

> For me, religion, fatherland, family and state, having been devalued, were no longer matters of concern. I was sickened by the pompous antics of those involved in academic life, the professions and the arts. My opinions, my tastes, my whole way of thinking […], were now so degenerate and decadent that people found them suspect. (Hesse 2012, 73-74).

Haller rejects traditional bourgeois values such as religion, fatherland and family. Being without meaning and importance, the behaviour of the bourgeoise along those virtues appear to him now as shallow and ingenuine. Likewise, the work of academics and artists in the light of bourgeoise values seem pretentious and disgusting to him. His judgment stems not only from an objective examination of society but also from his personal history of crisis and is therefore closely interwoven with his self and psychological struggles. It follows the continuous cycle of losing part of his identity and a 'collapse of one of [his] ideals' (Hesse 2012, 73). In his becoming, traumatic as it may be, his perceived difference from and disappointment in society seem to trigger this harsh individual criticism. However, he does not exclude himself from this criticism. Alienated from society and its values, he describes his behaviour through the eyes of others as 'degenerate and decadent'. It could be argued that this loss of values forms a basis for his self-disgust as there are parts of his life and him that could be described as bourgeoise.

Haller's disdain for society re-emerges during the burial scene, which illustrates that his disgust is a moral judgment. Thus, he describes a procession of mourners as 'vultures […] going about their business. Attempting to invest their activities with a semblance of solemnity

and grief, they overdid things to the point where, through sheer theatricality, awkwardness and insincerity, they ended up being comic' (Hesse 2012, 78). This implies a hidden disgust towards the scene as well as a moral judgment reinforcing the previously outlined ingenuity based on the recognition that bourgeoise values have lost their significance. Kolnai argues that it is precisely this 'inconsistency and irresponsibility; […] softness, and sentimentalism; above all, what the Germans call Verlogenheit: that is, a character organically wedded to a mental life diffusely steeped in lying, dissembling, illusion and self-deception' (Kolnai 1998, 589) that causes moral disgust. Indeed, Haller repeatedly voices his disdain for bourgeois society directly. Culture is to him like an 'emetic', and politics is full of 'crass foul play' (Hesse 2012, 28-29). Moral disgust is here expressed through images of uncleanliness and the body and is accompanied by hatred. The connection between the two has been identified as loathing and aversion by Miller and Kolnai, respectively (Miller 1997, 25; Kolnai 1998, 590). However, hate presupposes 'an experience of being personally and adversely affected by the existential presence' (Kolnai 1998, 592). This furthers the argument that his personal experience causes his aversion and is not necessarily a general, objective evaluation.

Moral disgust, defined as illusion and self-deception (Kolnai 1998, 589), it could be argued, is also inherent in Roquentin's judgement of society. This becomes apparent in his observation of the Sunday crowd: 'on Sunday, at this hour, you can see a wonderful show at Bouville' (Sartre 2000, 49). What follows is the history and detailed description of this spectacle. Roquentin does not participate but remains detached from other people. The description of the shallow conversations, consisting primarily of greetings, has almost a satirical quality:

> On the opposite pavement, a gentleman who is holding his wife by the arm has just whispered a few words in her ear and has started smiling. She promptly and carefully wipes all expression from her cream-coloured face and takes a few steps blindly. These signs are unmistakable: they are going to greet somebody (Sartre 2000, 54).

Although this does not lead to disgust directly, disdain towards the bourgeoise shines clearly through his observations. Roquentin contrasts the 'fashionable and distinguished people' (Sartre 2000, 51) with the previous inhabitants of the street, who were driven back after the construction of a new church. Indeed, Roquentin preferred the only remnant of the previous,

presumably working-class environment, a dirty, 100-year-old insecticide shop which had a 'cynical, obstinate look, it insolently recalled the rights of vermin' next to the most expensive church in France, a 'monstrous edifice' (51). His concluding observation of the Sunday spectacle furthers the impression of disdain and implicitly disgust, 'I think I have had enough, I have seen enough of these pink skulls, of these thin, distinguished insipid faces' (54).

During Roquentin's visit to the museum of Bouville, the hypocrisy and inauthenticity of the bourgeois become even more apparent in his changed perspective of their portraits, particularly Parrotin's portrait. Roquentin describes Parrotin as possessing 'white and flabby cheeks' and his body as 'without any defence, bloated, slavering, vaguely obscene' (Sartre 2000, 107). Thus, the portrait depicts a fleshy, disintegrating, almost decomposing body, detached from the person and their appearance. This conflicts with the image Parrotin wanted to project both during his lifetime and in his portrait. It could be argued that the disintegrating, almost grotesque portrayal of a member of the bourgeoise is a critique of their need for good appearance, thus hiding the truth of what Sartre would later call bad faith (Goldthorpe, 1984, 35). This was already hinted at in his observations of the Sunday spectacle but is here more explicitly expressed. He is repulsed by these 'pompous civilians [imagining] that their lives have meaning, and […] that these paintings solemnise and preserve their imperishable achievements' (Wood 2000, 220). Indeed, his reaction differs vastly from the reaction of the other museum visitors impressed by and believing what they see. This grotesque imagery is later replaced by laughter and derision, culminating in Roquentin calling the founding fathers of Bouville 'bastards' (Sartre 2000, 112-13).

Roquentin's disgust towards the inauthenticity of the bourgeoise culminates in his final observation of Bouville. When he describes the people as satisfied in their town ('[t]hey aren't afraid, they feel at home'), it is in stark contrast to the horrendous vision he has of the town (Sartre 2000, 189). In his view, the townspeople only see a semblance of the world and deceive themselves into a calm life by believing 'that the world obeys fixed, unchangeable laws', making them peaceable, morose, 'idiots' (189). After his brutal, nauseating vision of the town's invasion by nature, he denounces bourgeois values, asking, '[w]hat have you done with your science? What have you done with your humanism? Where is your dignity as a thinking reed?' (190).

Disgust towards the bourgeoise is related to illusion, self-deception, and a loss of meaning and values in both novels. However, whereas Haller's disgust is highly personal,

connected with rage and arguably grief for a decaying culture and his self, Roquentin's position towards the bourgeoisie is accompanied by derision. Furthermore, the loss of meaning is not based on a devaluation and discontinuation of meanings but instead on the recognition that there is no inherent meaning in life.

2.1.3. Exclusion or Inclusion: The Consequences of Disgust

Finally, the question arises whether feelings of disgust lead to an exclusion from the society and space they live in or whether it is pure rhetoric; in other words, whether the two characters remain part of what they want to reject. Here the core function of disgust comes into play. Biologically speaking, disgust has been shown to function as a safety mechanism, warning from contamination and leading to a rejection of an object perceived as dangerously, harmfully or inferiorly (Haidt 1997, 127-128). However, the answer to this question is not straightforward; in fact, it is one of the central conflicts in both novels: feeling or being excluded while being simultaneously still intermingled with the society they criticise. The exclusion will be outlined following the development of the character's relationship with other characters, along with the development of their feelings of disgust and their perceived separateness or otherness.

The title of the novel *Steppenwolf* and Harry Haller's alter ego powerfully evoke an image of loneliness and an outsider. Moreover, very introspective, the novel does not have a wide range of characters, and in Haller's relationship to the other characters, he often feels like a 'foreign body' (Hesse 2012, 111). The characters can be divided into two sets: members of bourgeois society, his landlady, her nephew (the editor), his professor friend, and the non-bourgeois part of society represented by Hermione, Maria and Pablo. From the beginning, it is Haller's belonging and simultaneously not belonging to both groups and society as a whole that causes his suffering and disgust. This ambivalence is both self-perception and perception of others.

The editor's preface offers insight into what members of the bourgeoisie think of Haller. The editor not only attributes Haller animal characteristics ('sniffing the surrounding air, his nose nervously twitching' (Hesse 2012, 4)) but is also repulsed by his 'by no means orderly and sensible life' (7). The disgust on the bourgeois side towards him is a moral judgement, his lifestyle being incompatible with their rules. This fits into Miller's assessment that disgust can have a political significance as marking otherness and solidifying hierarchies

(Miller 1997, 9). At the same time, however, the Tract describes Haller's life through participation in city life and holding bourgeois values as 'thoroughly bourgeois' (Hesse 2012, 55). Indeed, the description of his stance towards music, art and literature, revealing an almost arrogant entitlement, place him firmly in bourgeois society (Hesse 2012, 40; 83; 88). This impression is furthered through the appreciation he voices for the cleanliness of his landlady's house and his admiration of acacias, a symbol for bourgeois life. His belonging to the bourgeoise is therefore ambiguous and he seems to be caught in-between. On the one hand, he seeks out the bourgeoise. Therefore, it could be argued that his disgust towards bourgeoise society includes a component of masochism, as he, again and again, seeks out that which causes his disgust. On the other hand, his disgust towards the bourgeoise severs all connections and friendliness, forcefully expressed by his reaction to a Goethe painting which interrupts a dinner party and affronts his host:

> For him it was a disappointment, a minor irritation, bur for me it was the hour of ultimate failure when I turned and ran. It was my farewell to the world of bourgeois respectability, morality and academic scholarship, a total triumph for Steppenwolf (Hesse 2012, 89).

His disgust leads here to his exclusion, causing his flight through the city and his decision to commit suicide. However, it is more his feelings of exclusion and his feelings of superiority that determines his behaviour and perceived exclusion than actual disgust. Disgust appears as a trigger and expression of his inability to connect and understand his contemporaries.

The second group of characters help him overcome, at least temporarily, his disgust. This might appear paradoxical, as Maria and Hermione's work as prostitutes places them in an area that might be considered morally inferior and, traditionally speaking, disgusting by the rest of society. Therefore, his discovered openness towards sexuality and the meetings with Maria might further his exclusion from bourgeois society. In that way, disgust has its desired effect: it leads to his encounter with Hermione, who is not part of respectable society. Passively following Hermione's orders and putting a distance between the object of disgust, bourgeoise society, his feelings of disgust lessen. However, he still does not feel like he belongs to their group. This becomes clear during the masquerade ball, where this life suddenly appears to him as stupid and forced (Hesse 2012, 177). Although he temporarily re-connects

with Hermione, the magic theatre, promising salvation for Haller, fails. Confronting him again with the things he is disgusted by, such as his split personality, feelings of disgust return, culminating in the scene in which he sees Hermione and Pablo having sex, visibly transgressing a moral boundary. He kills her and ultimately fails to reach 'happiness'. Forcefully separated from Hermione and the non-bourgeois part of society, he is excluded from the theatre and shunned by a jury (Hesse 2012, 235). Bond argues that Haller 'is still betrayed by his over-attachment to his bourgeois self into symbolically killing Hermione (and thus rejecting that part of his personality represented by her), leading to his expulsion' (Bond 2016, 15).

Roquentin similarly is both part and not part of the society and city through which he experiences disgust. Although he is physically and spiritually separated from the town and its people at the end of the novel ('How far away from them I feel, up on this hill. It seems to me that I belong to another species'), he concedes: 'I shall be walking in those streets […] - an hour from now I shall be one of them' (Sartre 2000, 188). Flynn argues that this parallels Nietzsche's 'loneliness of the individual who raises above the herd' (Flynn 2014, 141). He is part of city life and unable to leave the urban space. Undeniably, Roquentin is middle class, pursuing intellectual work without the need to work (Sartre 2000, 206). Described as 'l'homme seul' (Flynn 2014, 146), Roquentin's exclusion or rather his experience of solitude as it is more of a passive sense of difference and almost self-chosen separation rather than an active exclusion seems to precede his experience of nausea: 'I never speak to anybody, I receive nothing, I give nothing. The Autodidact doesn't count' (Sartre 2000, 8). However, the two existing relationships he has, seem to break down, after which, Goldthorpe argues, he experiences 'the nature of consciousness' (Goldthorpe 1984, 5).

This break is twofold. Anny, who is connected to his past, presents an opportunity to re-establish a meaningful relationship. He contemplates breaking his (mental) isolation and telling her about his experiences, which he indeed does after suspecting she had undergone a similar change. Disappointed by the lack of honest communication and the failed attempt to re-connect, his perception changes and he states while looking at Anny's face, '[a]ll of a sudden it becomes pale and drawn. An old woman's face, absolutely horrible' (Sartre 2000, 184). This changed perspective of Anny reflects his disillusionment about the potentiality of a meaningful relationship alleviating his nausea. Indeed, Kerr argues that 'grotesque images revealed in the concrete details of the everyday, remind us of our embodiment in the world' (Kerr 2010, 76). The grotesque description of Anny's body places her existence in the realm of

objects and thus functions as a reminder of the contingency of existence. As this is at the root of Roquentin's nausea, their encounter, therefore, fails to alleviate his disgust.

The break of social relations between the Autodidact and Roquentin begins during the lunch scene and culminates in the disgrace of the Autodidact (Sartre 2000, 197-201). After rejecting humanism and the Autodidact's love for all people, a 'feeling of violent disgust' overcomes Roquentin (146). It is directly connected to exclusion—the line between food, ingestion and the metaphysical blurs. Nausea and, crucially, the phenomenological experience of being is expressed through the senses of taste and touch. It is both the cheese, people and nausea – 'this blinding revelation' (146) – that triggers his urge to vomit. After this realisation and a violent fantasy of stabbing the Autodidact in the eye, he appears further excluded, with people staring and being frightened of him: 'they are looking at my back with surprise and disgust: they thought I was like them' (148). The disgust appears now at least partly reversed. Like Haller, he is associated with animality (a crab), denying part of his humanity. However, Roquentin feels disconnected from others through his experience of phenomenological disgust and not because of his moral or intellectual disgust towards them (191).

Exclusion from the bourgeoise society in La Nausée is not based on different values as in *Steppenwolf* but rather on a different level of understanding. He appears like an animal to society because his Being is reduced to existence without a pre-given meaning. Likewise, nausea concerning the bourgeoise is not triggered by society itself but rather is a consequence of the phenomenological experience of Being. Nevertheless, Roquentin's nausea contributes to his exclusion from society by revealing society's 'bad faith' and hampering his ability and willingness to connect to others.

2.2 The Self

This chapter will analyse the relationship between disgust and the self. Although the protagonist's disgust is different in character, existentialist and personal, it has implications for their identities and leads to change. Haller's disgust is personal and triggered by social and human relations as analysed in the previous chapter, including and stemming from his self. Roquentin's nausea, on the other hand, is more connected to the world and its objects, which his self is a part of. However, in both novels, it is not an isolated sensation or emotion but related to boredom and melancholia. This chapter will look at self-disgust as an expression of crisis, and the influence disgust has on identity. It will analyse self-disgust and its

consequences in terms of acceptance, integration or rejection. It will be argued that it offers an opportunity for change and knowledge. Firstly, the connection between disgust and crisis will be analysed. It then will be demonstrated that disgust is not only directed towards the external but also against the self, exemplified by mirror images. Thirdly, the consequences of self-disgust and its acceptance will be discussed, namely contemplation of suicide, as well as the dissolution and fragmentation of identity. In order to illuminate Roquentin's dissolution of the self, it will be argued that it is part of his phenomenological realisation. Haller's fragmentation, on the other, hand will be analysed using Nietzsche's theory of the Dionysian, in particular, his reading of Schopenhauer in terms of the dissolution of the principiium individuationis.

2.2.1 Disgust as an Expression of Crisis

Nausea and disgust emerge in connection with a crisis experienced by Roquentin and Haller. A crisis is here understood as a state in which change is imminent, in other words, a turning point.

At the beginning of his notebooks, Haller leads a 'perfectly tolerable, resonable' life in contrast to periods of pain, depression and anxiety he experienced in the past (Hesse 2012, 27):

> And in the thick, lukewarm air of this contented boredom, this highly commendable painlessness, both of them – the bored, dozing half-and-half god and the slightly greying half-and-half human being singing the muted psalm – will look just as alike as twins. (Hesse 2012, 28)

However, Haller cannot bear this contentment: 'after a short spell, finding it insufferably detestable and sickening I have to seek refuge in other climes […] if necessary opting for the path of pain' (Hesse 2012, 29). His crisis is not only connected to disgust but also to boredom as Haller's life becomes steeped in 'thick, lukewarm air' without change and newness. Boredom, like disgust, is experienced internally but is nevertheless related to 'the experience of the world' (Mansikka 2008, 257). His boredom is thus not only a commentary on middle-class life but also an expression for a struggling self. Even though Haller's actions may seem enjoyable and time is filled, an emptiness forms inside him. His 'half-and-half' days are not filled with meaning and offer nothing of interest to him, which results in boredom (Mansikka 2008, 260; Svendsen 2005, 30). His disgust then stems from a 'satiety with emptiness and

meaningless repetition' and 'from the mind's emptiness of any sensation toward which it continually strives, and hence from boredom' (Menninghaus 2003, 119). In fact, after the collapse of his ideals and the subsequent crisis, he cannot find meaning in life. Such profound boredom 'makes everything of equally great and equally little worth' (Heidegger 1995, 137). Both the world and himself are steeped in this boredom and are therefore paradoxically of great and little worth. This will become apparent in his contemplation of suicide.

Haller's crisis causes him to seek out pleasures and, if necessary, pain to interrupt this meaningless repetition through new stimuli. This could be interpreted as a flight into his wolfish side, into the animal. Indeed, a connection between animality and profound boredom has been drawn, likening boredom to the captivity of an animal (Santner 2006, 11). It is the ordered human life that does not manage to fulfil him. Disgust, then, does not only repel, as it might ordinarily, but also causes him to distance himself from this 'human' life. It also works as a counterforce to the experience of boredom, hence as a new stimulus prompting change. However, disgust 'offer[s] both possible solutions and intensifications of the evil' (Menninghaus 2003, 120). In fact, this tension between solution and intensification runs through the novel and culminates in the Magic Theatre.

Such tension can likewise be observed in *La Nausée.* Crisis as an expression of change and the experience and communication thereof are central to *La Nausée*. Indeed, it appears as the motivation for Roquentin's writing:

> To neglect no nuances or little details, even if they seem unimportant, and above all to classify them. I must say how I see this table, the street, people, my packet of tobacco, since these are the things which have changed. I must fix the exact extent and nature of this change (Sartre 2000, 1)

This change concerns his perception of the objects surrounding him. Therefore, it concerns both the exterior world, whose changed qualities he observes and himself as part of the world of objects. Although Roquentin abandons the idea that this was caused by insanity, it influences his interiority nevertheless. It is not an active change, like in *Steppenwolf*, in which Haller's crisis leads him to seek change as an antidote to boredom; instead, it is passive in character, something happens to him. At least at the beginning of the novel, he does not seek it out. Roquentin appears relieved when it temporarily subsides: 'I think I am cured' (Sartre

2000, 3). However, the sensation returns, and he sees in it 'indications of a fresh upheaval in my life' (7), indeed a crisis. Re-assessing the prior experiences, he comes to a realisation:

> Now I see; I remember better what I felt the other day on the sea-shore when I was holding that pebble. It was a sort of sweet disgust […]. And it came from the pebble, I'm sure of that, it passed from the pebble into my hands. Yes, that's exaclty it: a sort of Nausea in the hands. (Sartre 2000, 13)

Giving a name to his experience (nausea), the image of disgust is henceforth used to express and illustrate the perceived changes. The aspect of contamination and transitivity often attributed to disgust (Rossi 2017; Dowland 2016) is here of importance. Originating in the pebble, nausea passes, via touch, onto him. Therefore, the quality inherent in the pebble causing nausea can be transferred onto him. In Gibbs' words, the pebble represents 'the initiation of his development of existential perspective' and introduces the tension between facticity and transcendence, 'a meeting of the in-itself and the for-itself' (Gibbs 2011 70). This not yet fully consciously realised phenomenological revelation of the world is here experienced bodily as nausea. Therefore, his fear of this revelation changing the perception of himself likewise is not expressed in abstract terms, but through the objects' ability to touch, in other words through a corporeal sensation, 'I am afraid of entering in contact with them, just as if they were living animals' (Sartre 2000, 13). However, it is not the quality of the touch that elicits disgust but rather the fact that objects no longer adhere to his idea of them. They transgressed the boundary marking them as 'thing' and become just like living animals to him. Even though the change and nausea experienced by Roquentin concern primarily his perception of the world, and ultimately himself, the continued engagement with nausea and the subsequent phenomenological experience of the world have consequences for his life, for example, the abandonment of his history project, his planned move to Paris.

Although disgust is related to crisis and interwoven with change in both novels, the quality of it varies substantially. Whereas disgust prompts a change in *Steppenwolf*, the change itself is not primarily experienced as such. In *La Nausée*, on the other hand, it is the change that is experienced as disgust. It only indirectly leads to changes in Roquentin's life. Furthermore, the crisis of disgust experienced by Haller is heavily focused on mental and internal struggles. In contrast, Roquentin's crisis of disgust is more focused on the quality of

external objects and the consequences this has for his self. This difference will become more nuanced with the analysis of self-disgust.

2.2.2 Self-Disgust

Disgust as an expression of crisis leads to self-disgust. This is perhaps most clearly expressed through mirror images. Mirrors function as a tool of (self-) reflection and insight. They transform subjects into objects (Esselborn-Krumbiegel 2002, 1). Depicting a disintegrating or fractured self both elicit disgust. However, disgust in *La Nausée* is directed towards the body, which appears to become separated from the self, an entity of its own. In *Steppenwolf*, the disgust is directed towards an embodied self or multiple selves.

The Tract of the Steppenwolf first mentions the mirror as an object of self-confrontation '[a]nd though he knows the mirror he so desperately needs to look into exists, the thought of looking into it fills him with mortal dread' (Hesse 2012, 60). However, its theoretical character prevents it from transforming Haller's life. Only an active engagement and confrontation with the self through the mirror can lead to transformation (Esselborn-Krumbiegel 2002, 7). Indeed, coming to terms with his perceived split-personality is part of the crisis he experiences, the resolution of which is central in the novel. In the Magic Theatre, the mirrors reflect not only Haller's body but also his personalities:

> It was of me myself, Harry Haller, and inside Harry was Steppenwolf, a timid handsome, apparently stray wolf […], the image of the wolf was flowing through Harry just as a river, churning and clouding its waters. The two were locked in painful combat, eating away at one another, each longing to assert a fully formed identity, but in vain. (Hesse 2012, 190)

The (magic) mirror reflects Haller's internal conflict: the entanglement of his two personalities, constantly at odds with each other. It also hints at the futile desire for a unity of the self, 'a fully formed identity'. It visualises what he already knows and confirms his beliefs. The importance of perception and how it can be distorted, even in Haller's imagination, becomes apparent when Pablo asks Haller to 'divest yourself of your dear personality, leaving it here at the cloakroom' (Hesse 2012, 191).

Although he had temporarily repressed his disgust by seeking pleasure with Hermoine and Maria, destroyed his Steppenwolf self through laughter, it returns in *The Taming of*

Steppenwolf in the Magic Theatre (Hesse 2012, 212-215). It shows his split personality, wolf and man now as two separate, fully-formed entities in a fairground booth. Firstly, the man dominates the wolf as an animal-tamer resembling Haller in a 'malicious and truly repulsive' manner (212). Witnessing this ambiguous spectacle is both disgusting and thrilling, horrific and enjoyable for Haller. It is the man, his distorted mirror, and the unnatural behaviour of the wolf that cause those ambivalent emotions. However, the disgust seems to be mostly directed at the man. It is not the animal that is savage and repulsive to him; the wolf is described as noble, handsome, but the behaviour of man. This only intensifies through the change of roles in the second part of the scene, in which the wolf controls the man:

> Seizing on the screaming little creatures with his fingers an teeth, he tore scraps of skin and flesh from them, grinning as he ate them alive, and closing his eyes in drunken ecstasy as, beside himself, he quaffed their warm blood (Hesse 2012, 214).

Unnatural, like the behaviour of the wolf before who had refused to kill the lamb and rabbit, eating chocolate instead, human Haller abandons all rules of civilisation in favour of violence and blind obedience to the wolf. The lamb and rabbit as unprepared, raw food, which has not undergone a process of socialisation, represents nature rather than culture (Lévi-Strauss 1986). Chocolate, on the other hand, as a product of culture, perhaps even decadence, turns the tamed wolf into a part of society. This obedience conflicts with the wild, untamed but noble character of his wolf part. It could therefore be argued that there is an animalisation of human Haller and a humanisation of the wolf. That Haller is indeed both the wolf and the man, therefore witnessing both parts of himself, becomes apparent when he tastes both blood and chocolate, 'the one just as nasty as the other' (Hesse 2012, 214). In this scene, Haller realises that he is no better than the government or generals he despises. His ideas are 'every bit as appalling, as savage and evil, as coarse and stupid as theirs' (215). It is evident that his self-disgust is a moral judgement of his personality and society. Being neither one nor the other, he is disgusted by the behaviour of his two parts. It becomes evident that the repression of either one of his parts in favour of the other part of his personality does not provide a solution to his self-disgust. Implicitly it indicates that perhaps only a co-existence of his parts according to their nature could alleviate his self-disgust. Indeed, Swales argues that in Haller's experiences, there are 'Jungian aspirations towards wholeness, towards a re-integration of

the multi-facted personality' (Swales 2009, 179). However, re-visualised like this, it is this representation of his human and wolf selves that leads him to destroy his mirror image later on.

Seeing oneself in the mirror as a way of understanding in relation to disgust features in *La Nausée* as well. However, whereas Haller disgust is expressed directly targeting his personality, it is the description of the reflection of Roquentin's face that indirectly evokes disgust:

> I can see an insipid flesh blossoming and palpitating with abandon. The eyes in particular, seen at such close quarters, are horrible. They are glassy, soft, blind, and re-rimmed; anyone would think they were fish-scales […]. The eyes, the nose, the mouth disappear: nothing human is left […]. And in spite of everything, this lunar world is familiar to me. I can't say that I recognise the details. But the whole thing gives me an impression of something seen before which numbs me: I slip into sleep. (Sartre 2000, 21)

The perceiving self of Roquentin's 'I see' does not appear to correspond with his reflection. The lack of first-person pronouns exemplifies the missing self-recognition. The subjective self and the body are separated and alienated. The body becomes an external object perceived through nausea (Kamber 1983, 1280). It disintegrates under his gaze into its parts: eyes, nose, mouth. The separate components lose their human quality (e.g. the eyes turn into fish scales) until 'nothing human is left'. Although here, like in *Steppenwolf* disgust, the self and animals are closely related, their function varies. The loss of humanity in *Steppenwolf* has to do with violence and the abandonment of civilisation. It is expressed through Haller's behaviour and has consequences for his personality. The animal characteristics Roquentin sees in his reflection, on the other hand, express alienation from the body by reducing it into separate parts that partly lose their biological function. The softness and disintegration of Roquentin's body seem both uncanny and disgusting; indeed, Miller argues that the two emotions are interrelated (Miller 1997, 6). The perception of his face erases the difference between different forms of existence, thus reflecting a loss of meaning and absolutes. His face is no longer recognisable as human but now possesses animal and inorganic characteristics. His body, it could be argued, is placed on the same plane of existence as animals, nature, in other words, objects.

His familiarity with the image in the mirror is not caused by self-recognition but by this contingency, which he witnesses everywhere around him and now sees in his own reflection. In Goldthorpe words, the 'oblique, non-reflective consciousness of the body pour-moi gives way to awareness of the body as an independent en-soi' (Goldthorpe 1984, 10). His body, like the objects around him, becomes contingent. This is, however, not the result of a primarily logical exploration but experienced through the body and sensations. However, the body is not primarily perceived through sight, but rather by feelings, by 'a dull, organic sensation' (Sartre 2000, 21). This presents another disparity between the two novels. Sight is the primary tool through which Haller perceives himself and his personality in the Magic Theatre. In *La Nausée,* however, affectivity seems to superimpose sight.

Roquentin, too, tries to escape his reflection and the realisation of his body being an 'independent en-soi' (Goldthorpe 1984, 10), like the objects around him, through violence:

> A sharp, abrupt sensation would release me. I slap my left hand against my cheek, I pull the skin; I grimace at myself. An entire half of my face gives way, the left half of the mouth twists and swells, uncovering a tooth, the eye socket opens on a white globe, on pink bleeding flesh. That isn't what I was looking for: nothing strong, nothing new; soft, vague familiar stuff! (Sartre 2000, 21)

However, Roquentin's attempt remains unsuccessful and only intensifies the previous sensation. The grotesque imagery further reveals his body as Being. The repeated contrast between soft and strong, often associated with the organic and inorganic, and the disgusting (Miller 1997), reaffirms the dissolution of fixed meanings. The mirror, which, according to Doherty, offers a possibility of constituting objective reality as a substitute for the gaze of another, does not bring him 'the stability of quasi-objective reality' (Doherty 1977, 56). However, the reflection upon this changed perspective is limited and does not arrive at a conclusion apart from the following: 'yes, you might say nature without mankind' (Sartre 2000, 22).

Mirrors, or rather the knowledge they reveal, are not only horrifying for Haller (Hesse 2012, 60) but also for Roquentin: '[a] little more and I would have fallen into the mirror trap' (Sartre 2000, 37). However, in the end, facing (self-) disgust and appears inevitable. It returns intensified, without a mirror:

> My hand turns over, spreads itself out on its belly, and now it is showing me its back. A silvery, somehwat shiny back – you might think it was a fish, if it weren't for the red hairs near the knuckles […]. It is me, those two animals moving about the end of my arms. My hand scratches one of its paws with the nail of another paw; I can feel its weight on the table which isn't me. (Sartre 2000, 118)

Like in the mirror, Roquentin no longer recognises his body as himself. He appears to lose control over his body, and it seems to become its own entity. Nevertheless, he still experiences his body: 'I can feel its weight'. It is this bodily sensation that becomes unbearable yet inescapable. Similarly to what takes place in *Steppenwolf*, parts of the protagonist are visualised by an animal comparison. Here, however, the animal imagery alludes to the fact that his body exists just like an animal would. The fear he felt at the beginning of the novel while holding the pebble that the changed perspective of objects might affect his self-perception as well seems to have come true.

To recapitulate, the relationship between self-disgust and crisis varies in the two novels. Whereas self-disgust revealed through mirrors reinforces the crisis and prohibits a resolution in *Steppenwolf*, it is a logical consequence of the changes Roquentin experiences and anticipates a resolution. This disparity is rooted in the different natures of disgust in the novels. Haller's self-disgust is an expression of psychological struggles and is closely related to self-disdain. Roquentin's nausea, on the other hand, is multilayered, complex and not (just) an expression of mental struggles. It is primarily an expression, rhetoric for the superfluity, absurdity and contingency of existence. Hence, disgust functions as a way to express Roquentin's phenomenological realisation.

2.2.3 Consequences of Self-Disgust

The profound experience of (self-) disgust does not remain without consequences. Contemplation of suicide and fragmentation and dissolution of the self ensue. A contemplation of suicide takes place when the sensation of disgust becomes unbearable for both characters.

After the dinner party at the professor's house, Haller's experience of not belonging, bourgeois society and his split personality lead his crisis to a climax:

> Was there any point in saddling myself with even more days like this […]? No! And so I was going to put an end to the farce that night […]. And since, as it seemed, I was now unable to stand loneliness either, since even my own company had become unspeakably abhorrent, indeed nauseating to me; since I was flailing around, close to choking in the airless sphere of my private hell, what possible way out was there for me? There was none. (Hesse 2012, 90)

His days are coined by repetition, and Haller appears thus oversaturated with his own life and identity. Meaningless and empty repetition of days present, according to Menninghaus, a form of ennui, a special case of satiatory disgust (Menninghaus 2003, 119). In combination with his exclusion from society, a connection to depression, in the form of despair and boredom, can be drawn (Miller 1997, 30). Disgust is thus an expression of those emotions. The intensity of disgust grows here to a point where its object becomes indiscernible, which in turn leads to self-loathing (Miller 1997, 31). Haller's self-disgust grows to a point where he sees no other way out but suicide. Scared of death, however, he flees through the city. Although his life is at that moment insufferable, without any meaning, something inside him wishes to go on living. His life appears paradoxically of great and little worth to him. His flight through the city leads him to Hermione and to an alternative way out of his crisis and solution to disgust.

Roquentin's contemplation of suicide is less emotional and appears as a detached contemplation:

> And I – weak, obscene, digesting, tossing about dismal thoughts – I too was superfluous. Fortunately I didn't feel this, above all I didn't understand it, but I was uneasy because I was afraid of feeling it […] I dreamed vaguely of killing myself, to destroy at least one these superfluous existences. But my death itself would have been superfluous. (Sartre 2000, 153-54)

Reflections on his own death are, however, likewise connected to the self. A heightened awareness of his body ('weak, obscene, digesting') as an object, as Being, following his recognition of existence as superfluous, including his own, is the trigger for suicide. His existence, too, is superfluous, meaning that there is no longer a given reason or purpose for

his life. These two scenes further illustrate the differences in their crisis. Although their nausea or disgust causes a similar reaction, the manner, object and function are vastly different. A conflicting split personality, an over-saturation with his life and society causes Haller's depression. Rooted in his perception of himself and society, it is, in fact, a highly individual and personal crisis. In contrast, Roquentin's contemplations are not rooted in personal problems but rather in a universal realisation about existence, namely the 'unintelligibilty of being-in-itself' which he is a part of (Gutting 2001, 137). Later characterised as 'Absurdity' (Sartre 2000, 154), it has consequences for his identity, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

For both characters, however, death is not an antidote for their experience of disgust. For Roquentin, death, like life, is without meaning; it, too, is superfluous. It appears, therefore, that it is not the experience of nausea itself that becomes unbearable but the absurdity of existence to which death would not provide a solution. Haller, at least a part of him, sees in death a way out of his nausea and pain. His contemplation of suicide is an expression of his mental struggle, a symptom of his depression. However, fear of death stops Haller from going through with his plan (Hesse 2012, 91). A part of him still hopes for a meaningful life. This highlights that Haller's disgust is rooted in his self, whereas Roquentin's nausea is a universal phenomenological experience and an absolute loss of meaning that his death could not alleviate. The loss of meaning Haller experiences appears, on the other hand, temporary. There is still a possibility of finding an alternative meaning.

The second consequence of nausea, or rather its (temporary) acceptance, is the dissolution and fragmentation of identity. To understand the fragmentation of Haller's self and its consequences, the Nietzschean concepts of the Dionysian and Apolline prove relevant. In a temporary acceptance, or rather repression of his dual personality, and the disgust and despair connected with it, Haller's personality splits into many selves. This is not caused by understanding or integration but rather by laughter and abandonment of seriousness. It appears, therefore, that his obsession with himself and insistence on seriousness causes his suffering rather than a profound realisation. It could be argued then that what is at stake is a psychological issue rather than a philosophical one, as in *La Nausée.* Abandoning his old selves this way, his dual personality dissolves, and he observes a new version of himself in the mirror.

> However, scarcely had I time to recognise him when he disintegrated, a second figure detaching itself from him, then a third, a tenth and a twentieth

> until the whole gigantic mirror was full of nothing but Harrys or fragments of Harrys, innumerable Harrys […]. Yet all of them were me, and they were only glimpsed and recognised in a flash before vanishing again. (Hesse 2012, 194)

In the mirror, a dissolution of what Nietzsche's reading of Schopenhauer calls the principium individuationis takes place in favour of multiple selves (Nietzsche 2019, 17). The mirror visually reveals what Nietsche calls the Dionysian (17). This is already anticipated through his intoxication during the masquerade ball. His mirages offer a solution to his suffering by allowing him to live out all his repressed fantasies, e.g., hunting and killing, successfully re-living his romantic past and, according to Jones, showing the 'future possibilities of […] existence' (Jones 1988, 110).

In the end, however, the solution the mirrors provide is not successful. In the last mirror, Haller sees himself again, but this time 'ashen now, showing no trace of all those games I'd been playing. I looked terribly pale, exhausted by all the vices I'd indulged in, but at least I was a human being' (223). It shows him his old selves, the immutability of his character and at the same time, the inescapability of his fate, causing Haller to spit at himself and to destroy the mirror, kicking himself to pieces (Esselborn-Krumbiegel 2002, 8). In short, he holds onto the fictional unity of the self. The dissolution of his principium individuationis through the multiplication and fracturing of his self and the disgust he feels towards his own personality lead to a certain kind of knowledge or cognition, namely the realisation and partly acceptance of his contradicting personalities that is the actualisation of the theory of multiple selves first introduced in the tract. This follows Nietzsche's argument that the Dionysiac experience, part of which is the dissolution of the principium individuationis, allows a look 'into the true essence of things' (Nietzsche 2019, 40). Furthermore, Nietzsche sees disgust as one of the preconditions or catalysts for knowledge (Nietzsche 2017, 31-32). However, it remains impossible for Haller to accept and put this recognition into practice; instead, he returns to his previous stance (Esselborn-Krumbiegel 2002, 9).

Haller can ultimately not accept his personalities and, in turn, his disgust. Roquentin, on the other hand, comes to accept and even identify with it: '[t]he Nausea hasn't left me and I don't believe it will leave me for a quite a while; but I am no longer putting up with it, it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is me' (Sartre 2000, 151). It is perhaps this acceptance that allows him to leave Bouville and abandon his history of Rollebon. After his decision to move

to Paris, Roquentin experiences a dissolution of his self which leads to the logical conclusion of his prior understanding of nausea:

> A pale little memory of myself wavers in my consciousness. Antoine Roquentin […]. And suddenly the I pales, pales and finally goes out. Lucid, motionless, empty, the consciousness is situated between the walls; it perpetuates itself. Nobody inhabits it any more. A little while ago somebody still said me, said my consciousness. Who? (Sartre 2000, 202-3)

There is no longer an 'I' with memories and a fixed identity, only consciousness itself and its surroundings. Roquentin discovers himself, indeed, 'on the road, in the town, in the crowd, as a thing among things' (Sartre 2010, 46). First-person pronouns are omitted: 'the consciousness exists like a tree […]. It dozes, it feels bored' (Sartre 2000, 203). The text even quotes his voice 'detached from the referent' (Goldthorpe 1984, 44): 'And there is consciousness of a muffeled voice which says: "The Autodidact is wandering through the town."' (Sartre 2000, 203). Roquentin goes beyond and outside himself. According to Sartre, this leads to knowledge, and in the process, consciousness is purified (Sartre 2010, 42). In fact, the vocabulary of nausea is no longer used, and the 'foul-smelling mind' (45) is emptied. Haller, on the other hand, did not accept his disgust after the fragmentation of his self. The emotion returns and with it the vocabulary of repulsion and disgust, which is part of his psychological suffering. The dissolution of identity in *La Nausée* reflects the loss of meaning already visualised in the mirror scene. Roquentin, however, does not try to escape it. He has accepted nausea with all its consequences.

This is in sharp contrast to Steppenwolf. It could be argued that Haller's fragmentation presents a multiplication of possible meanings and identities. Acting out these possibilities offers Haller the possibility to accept himself and his 'true' identity. In *La Nausée*, however, the subject is eventually eclipsed 'by an apparently pure discourse which […] seeks to convey the apparently immediate, impersonal presence of consciousness to its intentional objects' (Goldthorpe 1984, 44). This 'fugitive and anonymous neutrality' (44) contrasts with the focused subjectivity in *Steppenwolf*. However, this dissolution is only temporary, 'and the I surges into the consciousness, it is I, Antoine Roquentin' (Sartre 2000, 204). The self is not permanently dissolved; rather, it is part of and constituted by consciousness. The self then 'exists only as an object of consciousness, that is part of the world, like any other thing'

(Gutting 2001, 136). Therefore, it might be argued that the dissolution of his self allows for a deeper understanding of the self as an unfixed object. Unlike Haller's fragmented personality, however, his consciousness is unified. The return of his self, however, does not imply regression or failure. On the contrary, it builds the basis for his discovery of consolation in art, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.3 Music

This chapter will look at the role of art, particularly music, in relation to disgust. Both protagonists struggle with disgust and their related emotions. As discussed so far, overcoming or living with it is central to the plot of both novels. Although Roquentin has accepted nausea as part of himself, it is not enough to counteract and live with the sensation. Through its characteristics which differ from other objects, music, or rather creative work, offers a way to create something meaningful, non-contingent, and to cleanse oneself 'of the sin of existing' (Sartre 2000, 211). This realisation follows an engagement with music which focuses on the behaviour and use of music by listeners as well as the creation of music, in which an ambiguity emerges. Indeed, the role of music, in particular jazz, has been part of the scholarly work dealing with *La Nausée* (Carroll 2006; Knapp 1986; van den Hoven 2000).

The ambiguous role of music in *Steppenwolf* mirrors Haller's own struggle with his role in society and his personality. His deep-seated conflict becomes almost unbearable and finding a way out through death or a change of lifestyle becomes vital in the novel. While reflecting his inner conflict, music simultaneously offers an antidote. Therefore, music is, paradoxically, both a trigger and a (temporary) solution to disgust for Haller. Additionally, music is not only a thematic element, but it also influences the formal elements and structure of *Steppenwolf*, which have been analysed by critics, in particular in relation to the sonata form (Ziolkowski in Schneider 2009). Indeed, music has been acknowledged as a significant influence on Hesse's work (Schneider 2009, Below 2012).

Finally, it will be argued that both novels engage with music as a counterforce to disgust in terms of its characteristics. Although ambiguous in character, music offers, or at least contributes to, a solution to disgust.

2.3.1 The Ambiguity of Music

The perception and reaction to music in *Steppenwolf* and *La Nausée* are not univocal. Indeed, an ambiguity and hierarchy of music can be observed in both novels. This, it will be argued, re-affirms the above-outlined attitude towards society and the self, expressed through disgust.

In *Steppenwolf,* music is divided into classical music and jazz. Haller's perception of the two types of music varies, and he sees a clear hierarchy. Classical music is represented by Bach, Mozart, Händel and Haydn. Schneider argues that as the perfect genius, Mozart represents the 'quintessential expressions of cheerful serenity that triumphs over the world, the best remedy for suicidal moods' (Schneider 2009, 388). Indeed, Haller associates classical music with the divine, his ideal self. For him, it is the 'music of the mind and soul' (Hesse 2012, 143).

Jazz, on the other hand, often remains unnamed, except for the Valencia and Yearning (Hesse 2012, 143). An expression for Haller's lack of appreciation for it, it reflects his perception that jazz is 'the cheap variety that only lasts a day' (Hesse 2012, 144). In contrast to classical music, which speaks to the mind and soul, jazz is music for the senses – in other words, the body. Pablo describes the impact of jazz thus: 'regardless of whether it's a good or bad dance tune, it's going to bring joy to people by putting a spring in their step and getting into their bloodstream' (143). Introduced by Hermione and embodied by Pablo (Schneider 2009, 388), it is not only a complement to classical music but also coincides with his abandon of rules in the intoxication of the ballrooms, his love affair with Maria and drinking. In other words, it coincides with the Nietzschean concept of the Dionysian, whereas classical music, it could be argued, is presented as Apollinian. Jazz, therefore, offers a temporary solution to his disgust, which Tebben, however, sees as a 'failed numbing' (Tebben 1999, 26).

Furthermore, it reflects his current existence. Indeed, for Haller, 'American dance tunes represented a disturbing, indeed destructive, intrusion into my refined musical world' (138). It could be argued that the inclusion of jazz into his life mirrors the intrusion of the Dionysian on the Apollinian. Moreover, this fits the argument that jazz represents Haller's wolfish side, led by affective, bodily instincts. More broadly, his rejection of jazz can be seen as a rejection of certain 'aspects of the personality (sensuality, abandonment, lack of discipline)' (Weiner 1993, 105). In contrast, he sees his ideal (human) self in classical music. Conflicting with Pablo and his attitude towards music, classical music mirrors the seriousness

through which Haller approaches life and his yearning for an ideal (united) self. Simultaneously, however, his rejection of jazz in favour of 'divine' classical music re-affirms his position in bourgeois society, where jazz was considered antithetical to German cultural traditions (Weiner 1993, 124).

Additionally, Haller experiences disgust and repulsion when faced with a music transmission in the magical theatre:

> And in fact, to my indescribable astonishment and horror, what the satanic metal horn of a loudspeaker now immediately spewed out was just that mixture of bronchial slime and chewed-up rubber which owners of gramophones and wireless subscribers have agreed to call music. Yet, just as a thick crust of dirt can conceal an exquisite old-master painting, behind all the murky slime and crackling noise, you could indeed recognize the noble structure of this divine music […]. "My God", I cried in disgust. "What do you think you're doing Mozart?" (Hesse 2012, 231)

Like his rejection of jazz, his disgust here is connected to modernity. It is founded on the distortion of what he perceives as 'real' music through modern technology. However, it is not the piece itself that causes disgust. Haller can still make out its divine nature underneath the interfering noise, which is described in terms of contamination and sickness, hinting at the 'great sickness of our times' (Hesse 2012, 23), which the editor identified at the beginning of the novel. His seriousness and commitment to classical music, therefore, build the basis for his disgust. Technology and the demands of modern society seem to interfere with his standards of music and, indirectly, life, not only in the form of jazz but also in the form of transmission. Jazz, as well as technology, Weiner argues, represents a modern, technological society, and for some, a physical, moral and social decay (Weiner 1993, 119). Haller's dismissal of modern technology then appears as a rejection of society. Indeed, his disgust seems to mirror more his stance towards society and less his psychopathological self-disgust, as discussed earlier. His ambiguous attitude towards music seems to reflect both his conflicted relationship with society, modernity, and himself.

Roquentin's stance towards music differs from Haller's. It could be argued that the ambiguity of music is reversed in *La Nausée*. His contempt towards music, like Haller's disgust, is not directed solely towards music but rather at the expectations and narrative surrounding 'beautiful' music:

> To think that there are idiots who derive consolation from the fine arts. Like my Aunt Bigeoise: "Chopin's Preludes were such a help to me when your poor uncle died." And the concert halls are full to overflowing with humiliated, injured people who close their eyes and try to turn their pale faces into receiving aerials. They imagine that the sounds they receive flow into them, sweet and nourishing, and that their sufferings become music, like those of young Werther; they think that beauty is compassionate towards them. The mugs. (Sartre 2000, 207)

This statement is primarily a judgement of people, 'idiots' and 'mugs'. It reflects his prior assertation that the majority of people trapped in sentimentality cannot grasp the truth of their existence. Roquentin, on the other hand, comes to understand its nature through his experience of nausea. The deception they willingly take upon themselves could be described as what Sartre would later call 'bad faith'. Roquentin's rejection of classical music is connected to the aspect of beauty. Sartre argues elsewhere that the real is never beautiful; it is only applicable to the imaginary, which leads to a 'negation of the world in its essential structure' (Sartre 1972, 225). The perception of music as beauty does not allow contemplation of the real and existence. It places the fine arts in the realm of the imaginary. Thus, music as solely beauty without further thought cannot relate to the experience of existence, in other words, nausea. Indeed, beauty appears to be the opposite of existence and the world, which he describes in terms of the disgusting.

Roquentin here negates the fine arts the power of consolation and the possibility to alleviate the suffering of its listeners. There appears to be no way out of suffering unless one actively engages with it. Believing otherwise makes one an 'idiot'. A parallel could be drawn between the critique of the lack of engagement with music, already visible in his perception of art during Roquentin's visit of the portrait gallery, and the vision of the intrusion of existence onto the citizen's life (Sartre 2000, 189-190). Following Carroll's argument that music in *La Nausée* 'espouses Sartre's opposition between high and vernacular art, and the relation of this to his class-consciousness' (Carroll 2006, 398), it could be argued that his rejection of classical music is related to his critique of bourgeois society.

Roquentin's experience of jazz differs from Haller's. Jazz is represented by *Some of These Days*. Most prominently sung by Sophie Tucker, a Jewish New Yorker and composed by a 'Canadian of African descent, Shelton Brooks (1886-1975), who had based the tune on a

blues by Frank Williams called "Some o' Dese Days" (1905)' it was published in 1910 (Carroll 2006, 399; van den Hoven 2000, 1). Jazz is associated with joy and happiness: 'There is another happiness: outside, there's that band of steel, the narrow duration of the music' (Sartre 2000, 26). At first glance, this might appear hypocritical in the light of his condemnation of the reaction to Chopin's prelude. However, his joy is only temporary. Furthermore, it is not passively listening to the music but rather reflecting upon its character and qualities, which leads to consolation. Indeed, listening passively is one of the points of critique Roquentin raises in connection with the Chopin listeners. '[R]ather than confronting their woes, [they] leave them metaphorically with the concierge in the concert hall foyer. Thus emptied, the abstract beauty of a Chopin prelude fills temporarily the void left by their sufferings' (Carroll 2006, 403). In contrast, the jazz tune evokes suffering:

> A conceited little suffering has just been born, an exemplary suffering. Four notes on the saxophone. They come and go, they seem to say: 'You must do like us, suffer in strict time.' Well, yes! Of course, I'd be glad to suffer that way, in strict time, without any complacency, without any self-pity, with an arid purity. (Sartre 2000, 208)

Roquentin, instead of letting the sounds flow into him like the Chopin listeners, interprets and understands the music. For him, it is a call, a manual to suffering. Rather than a cure, it appears to reinforce suffering.

Although reversed, a parallel can be drawn between the ambiguity of music in *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf*. Both novels reflect in their ambiguity towards music the stances of Haller and Roquentin towards society. However, whereas Haller's opinion is closely related to his (split) self and his standards for himself and society, Roquentin's rejection of classical music is based on the behaviour of its listeners, their lack of engagement and understanding of the music. Ultimately, the different perceptions on music can be traced back to the different uses, triggers and sources of disgust. Nonetheless, music is connected to disgust in both novels, offering a temporary relief in the form of escape in *Steppenwolf* and happiness in *La Nausée.*

2.3.2 The Mechanism and Effect of Music

The effect and workings of music in *Steppenwolf* are twofold. Especially important is the association of classical music and its composers with Immortals and their laughter, which is

initially in conflict with Haller's above-outlined attitude towards classical music. In other words, classical music is related to the rejection of seriousness, the embrace of suffering, and self-transformation (Hesse 2012, 66). Those characteristics represent the state Haller should be aiming at. Jazz, on the other hand, is closely associated with Haller's abandon of bourgeois ideals and embrace of an instinct-led life. Indeed, his life changes following his encounter with Hermione. Here, music is associated with the bodily and the senses, in contrast to the intellectual engagement induced by classical music, which Haller terms 'music of the spirit and mind' (143).

> It had been during a concert in which a magnificent piece of early music was being played. Suddenly, between two bars of a passage played piano by the woodwind, the door to eternity had opened up for me again. I had flown through heavens, seen God at work […]. The experience had not lasted long, perhaps a quarter of an hour, but it recurred […] passing through my life like a golden trace of the divine, but it was almost always deeply buried under layers of filth and dust (Hesse 2012, 32).

Here, classical music is firstly associated with eternity, the divine and, implicitly, immortality. The music transcends Haller's everyday life and offers a possibility of understanding and, it could be argued, a way for Haller to transcend himself. The description of music here is in stark contrast to the vocabulary of the disgusting with which he describes society and himself—here represented by 'layers of filth and dust'. Hidden beneath the uncleanliness of his life, classical music has the potential to guide Haller to the divine. However, society and his life which he describes as 'contented, so extremely bourgeois, so extremely shallow' (Hesse 2012, 32) makes it impossible for him to follow the divine traces of music. There is, therefore, a clear link between the disgust he experiences and music. Although it could offer a solution to his suffering, it is only temporary and buried under the disgusting as Haller has not yet understood music and the concept of immortality.

Indeed, it could be argued that his behaviour and reaction during the concert mirrors the one Roquentin criticizes. A misconception of music that the tract later calls out.

> If Harry worships his favourites among the Immortals, for example Mozart, it is because he is still seeing him through bourgeois eyes, tending to explain

> the composer's consummate art, just as a schoolmaster would, in terms of highly specialized talent (Hesse 2012, 66),

while ignoring what truly makes Mozart an immortal: 'Mozart's commitment, his willingness to suffer, his indifference to all bourgeois ideals, and his ability to endure […] extreme isolation' (66). As in *La Nausée*, it is not an abandonment of suffering that leads to consolation (in this case, immortality) but rather the willingness to embrace it.

Later, the connection between music, immortality and laughter turns concrete:

> On reflection, what occurred to me were passages from Mozart's Cassations and Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, and it seemed to me that this music was permeated with the same cool, bright, starry radiance and the same vibrant, ethereal clarity. Yes, that was it. This music was rather like time frozen to become space, and it was suffused with a never-ending, superhuman serenity, a laughter that was eternal and divine. (Hesse 2012, 167).

The vocabulary used to describe the music, and its effect contrasts with the vocabulary used prior, to express Haller's disgust, such as 'thick, lukewarm air of this contentment' (28) and 'everything seemed to me to have an odour of damp earth and burial' (80). Music, on the other hand, is described as 'cool, bright' and possesses an 'ethereal clarity'. As an expression of the Immortals, music is, therefore, the opposite of Haller's life and the goal he is aiming towards. He has now understood the laughter of the Immortals as that which remains 'when an authentic human being has lived through humankind's sufferings' (167). The focus on laughter and humour mirrors Menninghaus' argument that laughter is the counterpart to disgust (Menninghaus 2003, 10). The music, then, represents at once the tool and aim of Haller's development: the acceptance of suffering, the abandonment of seriousness and the embrace of an 'authentic' life, which implies the acceptance and acting out of all parts of his personality. Indeed, the change of perspective, from seriousness to humour, reflects, according to Weiner, the parts of himself he previously repressed (Weiner 1993, 106). This is even more pronounced in his engagement with jazz: 'it wasn't serious or deep enough for you, but now you've realized that there is no need to take it seriously at all' (Hesse 2012, 138). His acceptance of jazz then is not only a rejection of seriousness but also a (temporary) acceptance of his wolf characteristics.

It is, however, not music alone that functions as a long-term solution to his disgust but rather the metaphorical engagement with it. The reconciliation of the two types of music, or rather the dissolution of the dualisms Haller imposes on the world and himself, is vital in finding a solution to his disgust. This is implied in the end when Mozart turns into Pablo. Music, therefore, reflects Haller's development and changing attitudes towards himself and society.

Music functions as a tool for understanding and consolation in *La Nausée* as well. An aspect of timelessness, which is expressed in *Steppenwolf* through the association with immortality, can be found in *La Nausée* likewise. Here, music is outside of time 'the narrow duration of the music, which crosses our time through and through, and rejects it and tears it with its dry little points, here's another time' (Sartre 2000, 26). Indeed, jazz 'points to a different time beyond the everyday' (Deranty 2019). However, whereas the connection to another time in *Steppenwolf* is associated with eternity and transcendence of death, the emphasis in *La Nausée* is on the non-existence of music and internal death. '[M]elodies alone can proudly carry their own death within them like an internal necessity, only they don't exist' (Sartre 2000, 159). This contrasts with Roquentin's perception of objects, including himself. 'Tired and old, they went on existing, unwillingly and ungraciously, simply because they were too weak to die, because death could come to them only from the outside' (159). There is a necessity in music (26) that is absent in everything else. Objects do not seem to possess the autonomy music does. In other words, 'no one can affect its totality' (Caroll 2006, 400). Existence is bound to the present, and 'Roquentin exists in a space/time continuum that has no beginning or end, no past or future. It simply is; and things simply occur, inexplicably' (Knapp 1986, 51). In contrast, music transcends presence, possesses an autonomy the rest of existence lacks and thereby appears as the opposite to disgust, thus offering an antidote to its experience.

Similarly to *Steppenwolf*, the vocabulary of music further reveals its opposition to disgust. Whereas existence is characterised with the vocabulary of the disgusting, for example, 'glassy, soft, blind' and 'soft, vague familiar stuff' (Sartre 2000, 21), music is described as hard, solid and bright. It possesses a 'metallic transparency' (27) and keeps its 'pure and rigid lines' (153). Existence expressed and experienced through nausea, as the 'ambiguity and formlessness of things' contrasts with what Ruppert calls the 'aesthetic form of the tune' (Ruppert 1977, 21). The song, described hard and bright, provides an antidote to the organic softness of nausea as it is precisely this 'soft, vague familiar stuff' Roquentin is struggling with.

Indeed, this deviation from Roquentin's perception of the world, including himself in terms of time and quality of Being, changes him and his surroundings. He is 'transformed by the music as object' through what Knapp calls a '*sensuous relatedness* with the outer world' (Knapp 1986, 50).

> I am in the music […]. My glass of beer has shrunk, it huddles up on the table: it looks dense and indispensable. I want to pick it up and weigh it, I stretch out my hand … Good Lord! It's that which has changed the most of all, it's my gestures. That movement unfolded like a majestic theme (Sartre 2000, 27).

Some of These Days seems to reverse his prior observation of time and everything in it: 'everything you plunge into it goes soft and slack' (25). Instead, Knapp argues, Roquentin now views 'himself as a composite of structured and single entities, alive inside and outside of time, within and beyond the object of consciousness' (Knapp 1986, 50), further re-affirming the possibility of music as an antidote.

At the end of the novel, Roquentin, having understood and accepted his nausea, listens one last time to *Some of These Days*. In his active engagement with the song, his prior observations culminate:

> It does not exist. It is even irritating in its non-existence; if I were to get up, if I were to snatch that record from the turn-table which is holding it and if I were to break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. It is beyond – always beyond something, beyond a voice, beyond a violin note. Through layers and layers of existence, it unveils itself, slim and firm, and when you try to seize it, you meet nothing but existents, you run up against existents devoid of meaning […]. It does not exist since it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which is superfluous in relation to it (Sartre 2000, 208-209).

The song has both a physical form, the record, the voice and sound, and a non-physical form, the melody itself, which is 'beyond the physical realm' and in the imagination (Caroll 2006, 400). Music, therefore, reconciles 'the two states of be-ing' (Gibbs 2011, 65). Indeed, the physical existent is not the 'real' song. The physical form does not possess any meaning. As the melody is without physical qualities and does not exist in the way objects do, music cannot be superfluous. It is, therefore, the only object which is not contingent. This challenges

Roquentin's perception of existence and offers a chance to overcome contingency, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Although both novels use music as a vehicle for a solution and counterpart of disgust, its mechanisms and effects diverge. There is a strong focus on change, humour, and the abandonment of seriousness in *Steppenwolf*'s engagement with music. A distinct relation to the self and its development can be drawn, which is absent in *La Nausée*. There, the focus is more on the quality of music. It is non-existential and contrasts with the contingency of objects. Therefore, it can have a permanent effect on Roquentin at the conclusion of the novel.

2.3.3 The Consequences of Music: Art as a Solution?

The music itself only offers a temporary solution to disgust for Haller and Roquentin. However, it will be argued that the encounter and engagement with music triggers an open-ended yet long-term antidote to disgust. Through the engagement with music, Roquentin finds a retrospective solution in creative writing to justify his existence and accept himself. Although writing as a therapeutic means contributes partly to Haller's overcoming of disgust, it is his continuous engagement with music that is critical to his redemption.

After realising music's non-contingency, non-physicality, and permanence, Roquentin contemplates the creation of the tune and his relationship to it. When *Some of These Days* starts playing for a second time, Roquentin mentally leaves the time and space he is living in, thinking about the creation and composer of the song. 'I try to think about him through the melody, through the white acid sounds of the saxophone. He made that. He had troubles, everything wasn't working out for him as it should have' (Sartre 2000, 211). Several points are important to note here. Firstly, his contemplation and interest were directly caused by the song. Secondly, there is a strong focus on creation, specifically the creator and composer. Carroll argues that the situation of the alienated composter mirrors Roquentin's, even though Sartre here confuses the composer and the singer (Carroll 2006, 399). However, he still concludes that the song saved the singer and the composer (Sartre 2000, 211). Through the composition of *Some of These Days*, they are not only remembered, but they also made something that is not superfluous. Thus, 'they have cleansed themselves of the sin of existing' (211). The necessity the song possesses is then the result of human creation and replaces the contingency of existence (Gibbs 2011, 64-65).

It is this realisation which gives Roquentin new hope. ‘So you can justify your existence? Just a little?’ (Sartre 2000, 212). Therefore, he contemplates the creation of a book:

> But not a history book: history talks about what has existed – an existent can never justify the existence of another existent […]. Another kind of book. I don’t quite know which kind - but you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, something which didn’t exist, which is above existence. The sort of story, for example, which could never happen, an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence (Sartre 2000, 212).

Justifying and re-investing existence with meaning can only be achieved by creating something new, outside the possibilities of existence and therefore above it. Through the status of non-existence, the creation would become like music, ‘beautiful and hard as steel’, escaping the softness and ambiguity of existence. Van den Hoven sees here a contradiction arguing that it ‘will at once be ‘hard as steel’ and evoke Gautier’s ideal and, at the same time, it will not be a mere existent but participate in pure being that is not of this world’ (van den Hoven 2000, 2). Like music, one would have to engage with it: ‘you would have to guess, behind the printed words’ (Sartre 2000, 212). Likewise, Roquentin’s creation would have the same effect on people as music. It would ‘make them ashamed’ (212). Therefore, it seems, any creation has the possibility of leading to the same realisation as Roquentin’s. By engaging with the song, he realises that ‘existence is, because meaningless, an opportunity for human agency’ (Gibbs 2011, 64). Additionally, his novel would be a memento and appreciation of his life as ‘something precious and almost legendary’ (Sartre 2000, 212). Indeed, there are debates whether *La Nausée* is, in fact, the novel Roquentin envisioned (Raoul 1983, 709; Reed, McLure 1987, 346-47). The diary would then be a fictional framework for his creation. However, his solution or antidote to disgust is not immediate. Writing will only be effective in retrospect and ‘wouldn’t prevent me from existing or from feeling that I exist’ (Sartre 2000, 212). Only the past offers Roquentin the possibility of succeeding in accepting himself. Only after the completion of his novel would it invest his life with meaning.

In *Steppenwolf* writing is implied as a solution to disgust by the editor of the notebooks.

> It makes no difference how much or how little they are based on real life, these notebooks are an attempt to overcome the great sickness of our times,

> not by evading or glossing over the issue, but by seeking to make the sickness itself the object portrayed (Hesse 2012, 23).

Like Roquentin's writing project, for which he abandons a grounding in reality by discarding his history of Rollebon in favour of a novel, reality in Haller's writing is irrelevant. However, whereas Roquentin's project focuses on the creation of something meaningful, writing functions here therapeutically. The overcoming of the sickness of the time can only be achieved by engaging with it. It could be argued that this mirrors Roquentin's demand to engage with music. Moreover, and directly related to disgust, the editor's statement follows Menninghaus' assertation that for a self-overcoming, one has to open oneself up to the repellent (Menninghaus 2003, 167). However, Haller's motivation for writing, as well as its success, remains unclear. It does not appear to be the consequence of the experience of disgust and an understanding of its character. Therefore, it is doubtful whether his notebooks are a conscious decision to counteract his disgust. Following this line of argument, the editor's comment is arguably based on hindsight, formulated only after having read Haller's words and thus constitutes a way to explain and perhaps justify its contents to the (bourgeois) reader.

However, it is the continuous engagement with music that provides an implicit solution to disgust. As outlined above, music reflects his development, the rejection of seriousness and dualisms, as well as the acceptance of his other side. However, this is only superficial and temporary. When Haller shatters the mirror and kills Hermione, his (self-) disgust returns. He is punished for abusing the Magic Theatre by sullying it 'with the stains of reality' (Hesse 2012, 237). His sentence is 'to listen to life's damned radio music, to respect the spirit that lies behind it while laughing at all the dross it contains' (236-237). Metaphorically expressed through music, he has to witness and endure the time and struggles he is living in by learning not to take life too seriously. His overcoming of disgust is, however, not yet complete. Like Roquentin's hope to accept himself retrospectively, Haller's antidote lies in a different time as well:

> Oh, now I understood everything, understood Pablo, understood Mozart, whose terrible laughter I could hear somewhere or other behind me […]. I was willing to start playing again, to sample its torments once more, to shudder at the nonsense it entailed, again to journey through my personal hell, a journey I would often repeat. One day I would play the game of many

> figures better. One day I would learn to laugh. Pablo was waiting for me. Mozart was waiting for me (Hesse 2012, 237-38).

His understanding and acceptance of his multiple selves and abandonment of seriousness is not only expressed through the image of life as a game but is also reflected through his attitude towards music. He has understood both Pablo (in other words, jazz, its corporality and freedom) and Mozart (classical music, immortality and laughter). The ambiguity of music seems to be resolved or at least accepted if only Haller continues to play the game of life accompanied by 'life's damned radio music' (Hesse 2012, 236).

As the source of disgust varies between *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf*, the particulars of any solution or antidote must differ as well. For Haller, both classical music and jazz, particularly his changed perspective on them, reflect and aid his attempt to reject dualisms and the unity of personhood by providing a playful, humorous and ambiguous alternative. However, it does not lead him to pursue a creative solution to his disgust. In *La Nausée*, on the other hand, music as a tool for reflection offers a counterpart to the contingency of existence. It inspires Roquentin to start a creative project (a novel) to justify his existence.

3. Conclusion

Disgust is intricately interwoven into the plot structure of *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf.* As a conveyor of a deep-seated change or issue, it functions to relay and express Roquentin's and Haller's experience of the world and themselves. In particular, Haller's disgust focuses heavily on mental and internal struggles, which functions as a way to express his rejection of modern life and society. His mental and societal (self-) disgust are closely interconnected and become almost pathological. The nausea Roquentin experiences, on the other hand, focuses on the existential quality of external objects and the consequences this has, including for his self. It follows a changed perspective of Being and functions, in other words, as the conveyor of a phenomenological realisation. The comparison of the two novels highlights the complex and multi-faceted character of disgust. There is a partial congruence of disgust in *La Nausée* and *Steppenwolf* in terms of the connection to the city, the self and its antidote in art. However, this correspondence is largely superficial and doubtless related to the period in which the novels were conceived. Indeed, the deeper qualities and implications of disgust diverge significantly, and thus also its function.

In both novels, the city is the space of disgust. Confronted by death and sexuality, an urban disgust arises. However, the concrete object of disgust relating to the city varies between Bouville and the unnamed city in *Steppenwolf*. Whereas Haller's disgust is aimed at the city as a symbol for society, its rules, and values that he feels are decaying, Roquentin's urban nausea is results from a phenomenological experience of all objects, including the city. It is less a social critique as is much more obviously the case in Haller's disgust, although there are elements of Roquentin's disgust that suggest a critique of the bourgeoisie in terms of inauthenticity and self-delusion.

Consequently, the protagonists' disgust leads to a partial exclusion from society. Despite Haller's repulsion, he appears to seek out bourgeois society, which rejects him for his otherness. Simultaneously, his attitude towards non-bourgeois society is split, and he fails to integrate, making him an outsider. Despite the different quality of disgust, which is phenomenological rather than personal, disgust has a similar effect on Roquentin concerning his stance in society. His experience of nausea separates him from society, however not entirely, as loose ties remain, and he continues to be part of urban society.

Even though a personal component is less pronounced in *La Nausée*, the self is nevertheless an object of disgust. Mirrors aid self-confrontation in both novels. However, whereas Haller's self-disgust appears psychopathological, is grounded in his split personality, and has fixed binaries as the root cause, Roquentin self-disgust stems from the realisation that he too is contingent and his body an object like any other, in other words, from a dissolution of fixed meanings. This loss of meaning is not based on a devaluation and discontinuation of meanings as is the case for Haller but instead on the recognition that there is no inherent meaning in life. The consequence of self-disgust is two-fold.

On the one hand, it leads to a contemplation of suicide, which both characters reject as a solution. On the other hand, it leads to fragmentation or dissolution of the self. This poses a possibility of self-knowledge to Haller, which, however, fails as he holds onto the fixed unity of the self. Roquentin, on the other hand, accepts his nausea. This leads to a dissolution of his self into pure consciousness. Nevertheless, this is only temporary, and his self returns.

As acceptance of disgust has failed or is insufficient to solve the crisis, another antidote is required in the form of art, in particular music. It is represented in the form of jazz and classical music. Roquentin's and Haller's attitude to music is ambiguous, rejecting one kind while praising the other. Haller initially rejects jazz as an expression of modern society and a

disruption of his life. Roquentin, on the other hand, perceives classical music, especially the behaviour of its listeners, as repelling. For him, it is jazz that functions as the counterpart to disgust as the music's characteristics, its necessity and quality are the opposite of the contingency of existence which is at the root of Roquentin's disgust. Therefore, it provides him with the possibility to give his life purpose. In *Steppenwolf,* the music reflects Haller's struggles with himself and society and offers, therefore, both antidote and intensification of his disgust. Haller's engagement with music has a strong focus on change, humour, and the abandonment of seriousness. A distinct relation to the self and its development can be drawn, which is absent from *La Nausée*. There, the focus is more on the quality of music. Through the engagement with music, Roquentin finds consolation and a retrospective solution in creative writing to justify his existence and accept himself. Although writing as a therapeutic means contributes partly to Haller's overcoming of disgust, it is his engagement with music that is critical to his redemption. For Haller, both classical music and jazz, particularly his changed perspective on them, reflect and aid his attempt to reject dualisms and the unity of personhood by providing a playful, humorous, and ambiguous alternative.

In its versatile character, disgust adds another dimension to (modernist) writing expressing the Zeitgeist and contemporary philosophical and psychological issues. It might be interesting to explore if disgust is a prevalent theme in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in connection with boredom which is only marginally discussed in this dissertation. Furthermore, analysing changes in the portrayal and use of disgust in literature could be fruitful, especially to determine whether it can function as a general expression of change and be adapted to different historical situations.

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