Learning through Living and Suffering: 
The Role of Music in Paula Huston’s *Daughters of Song* 
And a Didactic Approach to the Topic

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Eingereicht bei: Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Gudrun M. Grabher
Eingereicht von: Sven Salchner

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Introduction

Generally speaking, the themes of learning through living and learning through suffering have been represented in American literature in various ways throughout literary history. So has been the subject of adolescents becoming mature, as the process of protagonists growing up and becoming young adults – a path usually accompanied by crucial formative occurrences leading to the acquisition of life experience – is outlined in many fictional works. Usually, these adolescents have to cope with certain rather “negative” happenings which make them struggle hard on their journey to the adult world. However, these happenings lead to the fact that these characters gain life experience.

From a philosophical point of view, the benefits of gaining life experience for learning were highlighted, for instance, by philosopher, essayist, lecturer and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, a main representative of the American Transcendentalist Movement. In his 1837 speech “The American Scholar” Emerson announced that all wisdom and knowledge was to be derived from the authentic self; a self that must learn by living (cf. Grabher 2002: 127). Moreover, Greek philosophers such as Aeschylus pointed out that suffering is a required process for learning, as pain finally leads to wisdom (qtd. in Huston 149).

Paula Huston’s 1995 debut novel Daughters of Song¹ is a characteristic example of an American piece of literature in which the protagonist, a young piano student named Sylvia, experiences learning through living and subsequently through suffering. At the end of this Bildungsroman Sylvia excels in performing a difficult task as a result of her learning process, during which the protagonist experiences how cruel life can be and how it feels to suffer badly: She manages to give an outstanding performance of Ludwig van Beethoven’s

¹ Paula Huston, Daughters of Song (New York: Random House, 1995), hereafter referred to as “DS” with appropriate page numbers in parentheses
Opus 111, a sonata which has made her struggle hard, at a recital\(^2\). Sylvia’s personal victory is caused by the wise lessons she has learned through living and through suffering.

The aim of this thesis is to depict that life experience, which is frequently linked to suffering, is often more essential than any other factors (such as the acquisition of knowledge conveyed by books, for instance) if one wants to manage a challenging task. The experiences made by the fictional character Sylvia will be taken as an example in this thesis in order to illustrate that Emerson’s statement, “Only so much do I know, as I have lived” (1837: 48), which – although it is never explicitly mentioned in Daughters of Song – can be read as the novel’s epigraph (cf. Schwarz 58), is indeed true. I will show that from Book to Book\(^3\) Sylvia’s process of suffering is accelerated, and that this process – combined with the acquisition of life experience – is exactly what the protagonist needs in order to succeed. Thus, in order to outline the role of life experience for learning processes and to illustrate the benefits of suffering, a detailed analysis of Sylvia’s developmental process will be given. The focus will be on the symbolic role of music in the novel as a reflection of the protagonist’s character.

This thesis is divided into three parts. Part One deals with the main characteristics of American Transcendentalists’ attitudes and beliefs – with a focus on Ralph Waldo Emerson’s credo. In addition, an overview of various psychological, philosophical and religious approaches to the benefits of suffering for gaining wisdom is given, which is followed by an introduction to Noel Burch’s Conscious Competence Learning Model (which applies to the protagonist’s learning process). Part Two begins with an analysis of Opus 111, the sonata which plays an essential role in Daughters of Song. After two subchapters dealing with the characters of Sylvia and of her German piano teacher, Cornelius Toft, an analysis

\(^2\) In general, music plays a highly symbolic role in this novel (a fact which will be outlined in this thesis).

\(^3\) The novel is divided into five Books.
of the protagonist’s development in the course of the novel’s plot follows in chronological order. Background information on Frédéric Chopin’s musical style and on the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s is included in this analysis, which is required, as in *Daughters of Song*, the composer’s oeuvre – respectively the philosopher’s theories – function as key motifs. Part Three deals with a didactic approach to the topic of learning through living and suffering, respectively with suggestions as to how to deal with the topic in an Austrian ESL⁴ class.

⁴ English as a second language
Part I: Learning through Living and Learning through Suffering: A Theoretical Approach

1.1 Learning through Living: The American Mind

1.1.1 A Brief Introduction to the Origins and Basic Principles of American Transcendentalism

American Transcendentalism, which developed in the 1830s, is a phenomenon hard to define as a unified or consistent movement or theory of thinking, as it embraces political, sociological, literary, and even utopian conceptions and, in addition to this, blurs all distinctions between theology and philosophy (cf. Grabher 2004: 15). In a less technical sense, the term “transcendentalism” refers to those things in life which transcend the material with the spiritual (cf. Staebler 39). Concerning the theological aspect, the term “Transcendentalism” can be misleading to those who have knowledge in this field, as Edward Wagenknecht argues:

In the Christian religion, God is both transcendent and immanent. Insofar as he manifests himself in the world, through nature and human consciousness and the normal process of human life, He is immanent. But if God were wholly immanent, He would be swallowed up in the world that He has made; we should all be obliged to become pantheists, and sooner or later we should find ourselves worshipping a cyclone. The Christian God, therefore, is transcendent as well as immanent; He is in the world and outside of it at the same time. God in His Heaven (with whatever accent one chooses to read that word) is a transcendent God. (7)

The movement’s main exponents, such as Henry David Thoreau, George Ripley, Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson were centered around Concord, Massachusetts, which was Emerson’s home (cf. Brockhaus 327). In terms of literary history, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short stories and novels, Herman Melville’s novel Moby Dick and his short stories, Walt Whitman’s poetry in Leaves of Grass and Henry David Thoreau’s Walden are influenced by the Transcendentalists besides Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophical writings (cf. Klarer 67).
In general, American Transcendentalism was a meeting place of old and new disciplines and spiritual conceptions (cf. Grabher 2004: 19). While some critics see the Transcendentalists’ main concern in a philosophical reorientation towards the fundamental issues of the essence of man’s existence and destiny, others argue that the Transcendentalists’ main center of interest is their striving for a new attitude towards nature (cf. 16). In Transcendentalism, nature provides the key to philosophical understanding, so one must not be satisfied with natural phenomena, but rather transcend them in order to gain a philosophically holistic vision of the world from this new perspective (cf. Klarer 66f.).

Transcendentalism was influenced by Romantic enthusiasm and reached its peak around 1840 (cf. Schinz 52). The movement adopted its name as well as some basic notions – although modified to a large extent – from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Besides Kant, the philosophies of Plato, Plotin and Far Eastern ones were harbored and accommodated by the American Transcendentalists. Philosopher, lecturer and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the main exponents, exploited the etymological meaning of the word transcendental: going beyond, which comes close to the meaning of Kant’s transzendent (cf. Grabher 2004: 15). The concepts of the transcendental and of the transcendent are strictly kept separate: The former term denotes the subjective conditions of all experience, consisting in the recognition of such truism as logical, arithmetical, and geometrical theorems, which are the clearest, most indisputable, and most unequivocal notions we have, while the latter term refers to something which lies beyond the ken of all possible knowledge within the nebulous domain in which we can as well affirm as deny the possibility of assumptions. Due to the fact that in the English language “transcendental” is a synonym of “transcendent,” the difference made by Kant has been slurred over by many of his expositors (cf. Carus 92).
Kant denied, for instance, John Locke’s assumption that the baby’s mind was a *tabula rasa* at birth, without independent knowledge. On the contrary, Kant was convinced that the mind possessed – in its own rights – certain a priori forms and that Divine Reality was directly accessible through conscience or the categorical imperative. Other German philosophers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, representatives of the German Idealism movement, extended these ideas in a way that made German philosophy an important influence upon the Transcendentalists, establishing or re-establishing the intellectual respectability of an intuitive approach to moral and spiritual knowledge (cf. Wagenknecht 8).

However, it is wrong to assume that American Transcendentalism was the product of influences from outside. George Hochfeld, for instance, argues that foreign influences would have been meaningless if they had not responded to a prior need stemming from an immediate cultural and intellectual predicament, as a radically new world was taking shape around the Transcendentalists, requiring a new vision of man for its comprehension and its fulfillment. In its essence, Transcendentalism was an attempt to complete in the world of thought what the American revolution had begun in the world of action, creating a new literature – the literature of democracy (cf. Hochfeld qtd. in Grabher 2004: 36f.). Thus, the term “Transcendentalism” refers to the German branch of philosophy and its influence on the one hand, and – due to its etymological meaning – suggests a going beyond, marking this movement as decidedly “American” on the other hand, as the American Transcendentalists were looking for the Americanness of the American mind (cf. Graber 2004: 18f.). Therefore, the Transcendentalists’ aim was definitely not to introduce German philosophy in the United States, respectively “copying” it and imposing it on the New World’s citizens, as they were much too independent-minded for doing so (cf. Wagenknecht 5).

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5 The principles of the German Idealism movement – in the context of their relevance for the plot of *Daughters of Song* – are outlined in a more detailed way in Chapter 2.4.2.
8). One even has to highlight that although Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman, who were claimed as particularly representing the influence of German thought in the United States, and whose spirit did by no means betray traces of German philosophy, actually repudiated German thought explicitly (cf. Schinz 52). The American Transcendentalists were convinced of the self-evident truth of the Declaration of Independence that all men were equal. The movement was often referred to as “the Newness,” as its exponents propagated novelty in thought and innovation in behavior. Emerson, for instance, constantly hymned the advent of the new and encouraged the citizens to think in new terms and act in new forms (cf. Staebler 40). In general, American philosophy was, like the American character, an amalgam of inheritance and experience, and even though the inheritance is more obvious, the experience is of higher interest. Hence, although based on Kant and other philosophers’ theories, the American accent is obvious. Of course, such philosophy had to emancipate itself from its Old World rhetoric, conform to the realities of American experience and reconcile itself to the idiosyncrasies of the American character (cf. Commager 26f.). Henry Steele Commager argues:

The American had found felicity in the New World, and his philosophy had to justify a genial view of Providence and Nature, a romantic concept of Man, and a sanguine interpretation of history. He had exercised freedom, and his philosophy had to permit nonconformity and exalt democracy. He had cultivated individualism, and his philosophy had to serve utilitarian purposes. He was successful, and it had to leave room for free will and secular rewards. He was unsophisticated, and it had to avoid subtleties. (27)

Commager states furthermore that even in its American metamorphosis, philosophy was more than a mere transcript of experience or reflection of character, but an active instrument, a stimulus and a provocation as well as a rationalization and a rule, fortifying the Americans for the experience they were to embrace, justifying their effort and their hazards, giving meaning to their history and guaranteeing their destiny (cf. 27).

Transcendentalists believed that each individual becomes the best he or she can become when remaining self-reliant and independent. Emerson, for instance, was convinced
that society and its institutions, such as organized religion and political parties, corrupted the purity of the individual, and believed that each individual remained purer and truer to himself when communicating directly with God (respectively with the “Oversoul” or “Nature,” terms he used synonymously) (cf. Andrews 114).

1.1.2 Ralph Waldo Emerson’ Credo

Generally speaking, Emerson did not at any time feel confined to a particular system or thought, as in fact at least all of the Transcendentalists were pronounced individualists (cf. Wagenknecht 7). Emerson’s conviction that every human being has a direct, immediate access to an understanding of the world of all beings as well as of God threw a bridge across the spheres of philosophy and theology (cf. Grabher 2004: 16), and he cultivated solitude, isolation, independence and self-reliance (cf. 18), constantly striving for a “democratization of the intellect” (Holzwarth 313). Emerson encouraged American poets, for instance, to speak truly of themselves and their culture, stating that each individual could learn from nature and that each poet should express his individual emotions and feelings in poetry. For Emerson, poetry had to be as free, peremptory and clear as its subject and creator, who should be a “liberated self,” and it had to be original and organic rather than imitative (cf. Gray 118).

In order to comprehend the significance of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s mind for the American Transcendentalist movement it is essential to regard the circumstances under which his essays were written, respectively his speeches were delivered. Thus, the intellectual and cultural zeitgeist of Emerson’s time as an essayist and lecturer shall be outlined briefly: During Emerson’s active creative period (in the 1830s and 1840s) the United States was only few generations removed from the establishment of its nationhood. Hence, it was still a raw and crude country, which – despite having achieved political
independence – had not yet achieved intellectual and cultural independence. Authors such as Washington Irving or Nathaniel Hawthorne, repelled by the immature state of their native land⁶, could only be inspired by the Old World. Due to the fact that carpenters, engineers, inventors were – in addition to teachers and lawmakers – in constant demand, there was hardly any place for artists shaping fiction or poetry. (cf. Staebler 95). Warren Staebler states that during this period, “For him who would create, no inspiration could come” (95). However, Ralph Waldo Emerson unequivocally believed in a national American literature to emerge soon, and constantly strived for getting rid of Old World influences, convinced that getting inspiration exclusively from the “shadowy grandeurs of the past,” as Washington Irving referred to creative European minds, was an attitude which had to be changed in order to achieve a creative and – most importantly – individual American style. Emerson’s address on “The American Scholar” is a first public statement on the theme (cf. 95).

Before analyzing parts of Emerson’s oeuvre, namely “The American Scholar” and “Self-Reliance,” I would like to make the remark that in these texts, the author frequently uses the word “man,” respectively its plural “men” when referring to citizens. Although Emerson’s contributions as well as his points of view still have relevance in contemporary American society, his works are regarded as historical texts arising during the period in question in the following subchapters. Thus, I will stick to the term “man” and its plural “men” used by Emerson when analyzing various extracts. Nevertheless, when I apply these theories to the attitudes of American citizens, these words refer – needless to highlight – to citizens of both sexes equally.

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⁶ The United States was still in the building state and the qualities it asked for among its citizenry were practical, not imaginative.
1.1.2.1 Emerson’s “The American Scholar” and Some of Its Core Messages

“The American Scholar,” one of the many appeals for a national literature as well as for native intellectual leadership, was referred to as the “intellectual Declaration of Independence” by author Oliver Wendell Holmes. Emerson read this attempt to implement the “newness” before the so-called Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard College in 1837. This speech was considered highly innovative and pioneering, as the author’s insistence that the first resource of the scholar was not books, but nature, was remarkable. When using the term “nature,” Emerson primarily referred to each individual’s own “nature,” respectively each man’s unique personality. In other words, by outlining a program for “natural” rather than “cultivated” genius, he liberated the scholar from the tutelage of the past, respectively from the roots of the Old World’s mind. By doing so, Emerson transformed the “scholar” into an independent intellectual, as intellect could be achieved by the intellectualization of every individual’s life. According to Emerson’s conviction, everybody could become an intellectual by simply intellectualizing one’s personal “nature.” Emerson was convinced that one could easily become what he referred to as “Man Thinking” without obstacles (cf. Edel et al. 323f.). Hence, Emerson’s “scholar” is not a scholar in the traditional sense of the word, respectively a book-learned man, a restorer of texts, an emendator, a cataloguer or commentator, but a peculiar genius. The American Scholar is in fact a synonym for the American Man – Everyman in the United States who is capable of thought and able to read. Emerson was convinced that a country would only be original if his citizens were original, too (cf. Staebler 101). Therefore, even though one should find Man Thinking with books (“The theory of books is noble” [Emerson 1837: 44]), he criticized the fact that one found the “bookworm” (which is – in the context Emerson puts it – not a positively connoted term) too often (cf. Staebler 95f.):

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as
making a sort of Third Estate\textsuperscript{7} with the world and the soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. (Emerson 1837: 44)

One can conclude that according to the doctrine, books – respectively the “knowledge” they contain – are only useful when they function as a source of inspiration, and by stating this, Emerson criticized the fact that the ideas they contained were frequently just copied, without being critically reflected upon or transformed, leading to the fact that nothing new and innovative was created.

Furthermore, the philosopher criticized the fact that young men growing up in libraries and therefore accepting the views of Cicero, John Locke or Francis Bacon started wrong, as they subsequently set out from accepted dogmas instead of discovering their own sight of principles. Emerson highlighted that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when writing their books, and that therefore they were thinkers rather than Men Thinking (cf. 45). Emerson propagated that no book should ever grow out of anything but the individual writer’s own intense reading of life. In this context, he also stated: “Books are for the scholar’s idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings” (46). Hence, Emerson’s “scholar” is an acute and compassionate student of life, not of the printed word, observing and sounding the present, rather guiding men into the future instead of burying himself in the past (cf. Staebler 96). Emerson did not only warn that if one only acquired knowledge exclusively from books, one’s mind would only consist of preconceived concepts by “thinkers” from the past. He also was convinced that contemporary writers of creative texts might be under the influence

\textsuperscript{7} Emerson referred to the Third Estate (the third social level, or the “common” people) in monarchial France (cf. Spiller 45).
of authors from the Old World from a stylistic point of view, stating that “English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years” (Emerson 1837: 46). Again, he criticizes that they have been imitating the Shakespearean style rather than producing something innovative which comes from the individual writer’s inner self.

Most importantly, in order to liberate one’s mind from preconceived concepts (delivered by books, for instance), Emerson highlighted the benefits of life experience by stating that “Only so much do I know, as I have lived” (48). He explained that there was no better metaphorical “dictionary” than life (cf. 49) in the following context:

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town; in the insight into trades and manufacturers; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get titles and cœpstones for the masonry of to-day [sic!]. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made. (49)

Emerson outlined that according to his conviction, character was higher than intellect, adding the statement, “Thinking is the function, living is the functionary” (50). This attitude of celebrating one’s own living was a pioneering attitude.

One can therefore conclude that according to Emerson, the American Scholar was – most importantly – rightly a student of nature, besides being a rightly reader of books who was to cherish his office as a benefactor of mankind, whose scope had to be broad and whose procedure had to be serene, trying constantly to see things under the aspect of eternity, and avoiding to be swayed by popular commotion (cf. Staebler 97). Emerson also stated that every young man – whether a college graduate or not – had the impression of being only a part of no importance of the “mass,” the “herd,” and he demanded that the younger generation was not to be suffered longer to destroy itself in alienation from society, emphasizing the value of the individual person and its growing. Society, according to
Emerson, would be whole and strong if it freely pursued their work and their domestic interests (cf. 99). He also stated that in order to reform society and to restore the world, it was necessary to redeem only the soul (cf. 101).

Emerson concluded his speech with the words, “A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men” (59). According to Emerson, Man Thinking should make his decisions with the assurance that the sounding of his own private mind and heart was at the same time the penetration of the Universal mind (cf. Staebler 98).

1.1.2.2 Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Credo: “Self-Reliance”

1.1.2.2.1 A General Comment on the Essay

“Self-Reliance,” the doctrine Ralph Waldo Emerson has been associated with most frequently, as it carries the clarion accents of his affirmation in the most striking way, was published in his collection of Essays in 1841, four years after the delivery of “The American Scholar.” It is considered a personal manifesto in which the author is especially self-revelatory (cf. Edel et al. 338f.). Generally speaking, “self-reliance” – according to Emerson – is a kind of human virtue closely related to thinking in its vigilance against conformity (cf. Holzwarth 315). Thus, the ethics of a moral kind of individualism founded on self-trust is the essay’s core topic. Emerson expresses his conviction that – although being fully aware of the fact that one might be whipped by the world for nonconformity – in order to be great, one has to take the risk to be misunderstood, stating:

Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. (1841: 344)
Hence, Emerson encourages American citizens to act according to their personal convictions, without caring what other people’s opinion on one’s behavior or attitude might be. According to the essay, a man should continue in his calling, getting his work done without being deterred by adventitious social duties (cf. Edel et al. 339).

1.1.2.2 An Analysis of Its Key Elements

In the first paragraphs of “Self-Reliance,” Emerson encourages people to speak their latest conviction, which shall then be the universal sense, before picking up his conviction already foreshadowed in “The American Scholar” in detail:

Familiar as the voice of the mind as to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of a genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated mystery. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow [sic!] a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another. (339f.)

One can, again, conclude that Emerson warns against the negative effects books can have if one loses his own creativity and inspiration by imitating or copying former thinkers’ minds and rejecting one’s own thoughts due to a loss of creativity by doing so. Furthermore, the author criticizes the fact that many people do not dare to follow the direction of their own personal thoughts, impressions, reflections and perspectives due to a lack of self-confidence, as many people may think that one’s own mind is worthless and may therefore – in other words – not trust themselves.

“Trust thyself” (340) is indeed another key message Emerson intends to transmit, stating that great men have always trusted themselves and confided in their genius in a childlike way (cf. 340). “Childlike,” however, is not connoted with naïveté in Emerson’s
context, as young boys are still independent and irresponsible, never cumbering themselves about consequences (cf. 341). However, as soon as they grow up and become men, and subsequently become part of society, they start acting according to rules of conformity, with self-reliance being the aversion (cf. 341). In addition to this, Emerson declares a “simple mind” as a positive requirement in order to become an independent and individual thinker: “Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, – means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour” (348).

Generally speaking, in “Self-Reliance,” Emerson constantly encourages citizens to trust their own thoughts:

Insist on yourself, never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life’s cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession. That which each can do best, none but this Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited is. Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely the part he could not borrow. Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare. (355).

In other words, Emerson, again, propagates life as a teacher and – as obvious in this extract – highlights that genius cannot be achieved or transmitted through masters or teachers imposing their attitudes, styles or beliefs on their students. By stating this, he implicitly outlines restrictions occurring when one simply sticks to concepts preconceived by others, whose thoughts and whose knowledge is maybe only assumed to be “better” than one’s own creative potential. Genius can therefore only be acquired from the inner self and can neither be transmitted by a scholar, teacher, master nor by any other external source.

It should not remain unmentioned that the message transmitted in “Self-Reliance”, respectively Emerson’s credo, was not always regarded positively: Many writers, including Herman Melville, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, D.H. Lawrence or George
Santayana, attributed his hope to simple prejudice or blindness to reality (cf. Holzwarth 315). However, Emerson’s thoughts have had a sustainable impact on the American mind.

Emerson – in his oeuvre – does not go into specific detail with regard to what we exactly learn by living – and how it feels (cf. Grabher 2002: 127). Other philosophers and thinkers do so; a fact which will be analyzed in the following sub-chapter.

1.2 Learning through Suffering: An Overview of Positive Approaches to Suffering

1.2.1 Definitions of Suffering

Before focusing on the benefits of suffering for individual learning processes it is necessary to define the term briefly. In the Merriam Webster Dictionary, for instance, suffering is defined as “physical, mental or emotional pain that is caused by injury, illness, loss, etc.” (merriam-webster.com), while in the Cambridge Dictionary, the fact that animals have the ability to suffer, too, is outlined, as in this dictionary suffering is defined as “physical or mental pain that a person or animal is feeling” (dictionary.cambridge.org) (which is irrelevant in the context of the topic, but which should – nevertheless – not remain unmentioned when the term is defined). One can find very similar definitions (concerning the meaning of the term) in various other dictionaries.

Interestingly, the Encyclopedia of Philosophy does not have an entry for suffering (cf. Spelman 5), although various philosophers dedicated their oeuvre to its benefits. From a psychological point of view, psychotherapist Polly Young-Eisendrath refers to suffering as the discontent, the negativity or dissatisfaction that we often feel, sometimes in relation to pain or loss but also in response to ordinary hassles in life […]. Suffering is the negative commentary and grumbling – the background noise that accompanies many of us in everyday life. (27)
In general, suffering is hard to grasp, and even harder to encounter directly, as we are often unconscious of how we are “creating” it and why it arises (cf. 51). However, we often forget that suffering is an essential part of the human condition and one of the engines of human development, as the unavoidable mysteries of pain and suffering can give rise to hidden resources of compassion and creativity (cf. 7).

Many theories of development and spirituality draw some kind of distinction between “useful suffering” (leading to development) and “useless suffering” (leading to the repetition of suffering). In this chapter the focus will be on suffering related to emotional pain and on the “useful” side of suffering, respectively on the positive aspects it can have for human beings from a sustainable point of view.

1.2.2 A Spiritual Approach: An Overview of the Role of Suffering in Buddhism

In Buddhism, an ancient tradition of distinguishing between pain and suffering exists (cf. Young-Eisendrath 10). This religion, which has been exploring this distinction for more than twenty-five hundred years, offers – perhaps – the most developed account of human suffering, as its founder, the Buddha – respectively Prince Siddhartha (as he was called before he became enlightened) (cf. 11), took the alleviation of suffering as his central mission. The Buddha’s teachings contained – and still contain – psychological insight into and practical wisdom about the transformation of difficulty into development (cf. 10): In India, which had a strong caste system during Buddha’s life, he observed that – regardless of one’s rank in life or one’s spiritual attainments – everyone in the world is subject to illness, pain, loss and death. In other words, he realized that suffering can affect every human being, no matter if he or she belongs to a privileged social class or not. Philosopher Elizabeth V. Spelman, for instance, refers to this fact as the “ubiquity of suffering” (1). Due to its ubiquity, finding a cure against suffering became Prince Siddhartha’s main aim (cf. Young-Eisendrath
After a few years, he attained a profound recognition of the nature of human life. One central idea of his enlightenment is contained in the Sanskrit word *dukkha*, a term used by the Buddha in order to describe the fundamental condition of human life, usually translated into English as “suffering,” literally meaning a wheel not running on its axle or a bone that has slipped out of its socket (cf. 12). When this term is understood well, painful experiences awaken us to new meaning and purpose. The first major tenet of Buddhism is that “life is suffering,” as incompleteness, dissatisfaction, and confusion are to be expected in human life. Most importantly, these factors can be alleviated and transformed. For some people, the awareness of life’s incompleteness comes from adversity in childhood, for others from illness or loss or betrayal, for instance, in their later living years (cf. 13). In other words, *dukkha* is nothing but the “state” of all living beings, as suffering – in all its aspects – is identified with existence, which is considered positive when one regards its didactic impact (cf. Urbaniak 1).

When people from Western cultures are confronted with the previously mentioned truth of Buddhism translated as “life is suffering,” they tend to miss its wisdom and reject it as depressing, without realizing that Buddhism simply asks us to focus on our own reactions and perspectives, the ways we create distress rather than responding simply to what’s going on, and alerts us to pay attention to the ways in which we normally react to the world around us, so that we can free ourselves from our constant evaluations and negativity (cf. Young-Eisendrath 27f.). According to Buddhism, the only way to alleviate suffering is to dissolve our wishes for control and our self-protectiveness as well as the separateness we feel from others (cf. 15). Thus, even when afflicted with bodily pain, Buddhists endure suffering patiently, with equanimity, as *dukkha* is nothing but an external object of contemplation (cf. Bodhi 21). Buddhism teaches that much of our suffering is the direct consequence of our own beliefs and attitudes carried over into our perceptions and actions (cf. 14).
1.2.3 An Introduction to Philosophical and Psychological Approaches to the Benefits of Suffering

Greek dramatist and philosopher Aeschylus outlines in a concrete way how we can learn from living (cf. Grabher 2002: 127). For him it is, above all, through suffering that we gain the kind of knowledge helping us to gain a better understanding of both ourselves and the world around us, making us grow and take a step forward on the path of our lives (cf. 127f.). Aeschylus, the founder of ancient Greek tragedy, presented his heroes and heroines as humans who, in their existential freedom, were fighting an inevitable fate, manifesting itself as the unfathomable divine power to which even the gods must resign (cf. Meyer’s, qtd. in Grabher 2002: 133). The so-called Erinyes frequently intervene in human affairs, causing struggle and hardship and suffering, but for the purpose of creating a pattern that can turn out as meaningful (cf. Grabher 2002: 133). In Agamemnon, Aeschylus writes:

He who learns must suffer.
And even in our deep sleep, pain that cannot
forget falls drop by drop upon the
heart, and in our own despair, against
our will, comes wisdom to us by the
awful grace of God. (qtd. in DS 149)

Aeschylus outlines the correlation between learning and suffering. According to Aeschylus, suffering is obviously an inevitable part of learning processes, usually resulting in wisdom. Gudrun M. Grabher states that suffering adds a new dimension to what we refer to as “understanding” and “knowing” (cf. 2002: 128), giving the following example:

We may “know” the philosopher Nietzsche and understand his thoughts in an intellectual way. But through living and suffering we may eventually grasp the “deep” side of it that is in touch with true life. Understanding is both intellectual and emotional, theoretical and empirical, analytical and holistic. (128)

Plato did not treat “grief,” “suffering,” “pain” and “unhappiness” as synonyms (cf. Spelman 17), as he was well aware of the fact that the term is much more complex. In addition, the previously stated fact that via Buddhism we are taught that much of our suffering is the direct consequence of our own beliefs and attitudes carried over into our
perceptions and actions, is exactly what C.G. Jung or Sigmund Freund, for instance, discovered in their early investigations of the unconscious. Thus, there is a parallel between psychology, Jung’s (and Freud’s) theories, and Buddhism: Both Freud and Jung founded their therapies on the premise that facing and remembering what has been most traumatic or painful in a conscious way is the beginning of a healthy mental state, according to the assumption that when we try to avoid or deny what troubles us, we are generally in for more trouble (cf. Young-Eisendrath 8).

C.G. Jung stated: “If anybody achieves at least endurance of misery, he has already accomplished an almost superhuman task” (27). This indicates that Jung realized how difficult and challenging dealing with suffering can be. However, Jung also referred to neurotic suffering as a bogus replacement for real suffering, separating the repetitive ruminations, worries, self-doubts and anxious habits of the neurotic from suffering, and pointed out that it is actually an essential part of life. Thus, although suffering is usually considered something negative, one should not forget the benefits it can bring (cf. 9).

Furthermore, a Chinese sage says:

The vicissitudes of life are but the means to shape your character. If you suffer adversity and react in the proper way, in the long run you will be benefited as fully as though you had good fortune. Cooperate with Destiny to strengthen your character by whatever experience life has to offer. (qtd. in Young-Eisendrath 6)

One can conclude from this paragraph that suffering adversity – respectively negative life experience – can shape a human being’s character in a positive way, which is – on a long-term basis – something valuable. According to this extract, learning how to cooperate with destiny – respectively negative life experience – can strengthen people’s characters.

Psychologist Ralph Hefferline points out the general attitude of contemporary civilized human beings to living and suffering, stating that modern man lives in a state of low-grade vitality, and though generally he does not suffer deeply, he also knows little of
true creative living (cf. Perls et al. 360). However, psychologist Fritz S. Perls outlines that emotional suffering is not only an integral part of the human condition, but also a means of preventing the isolation of the problem, in order that – when working through the conflict – the self may grow. Thus, the sooner one is willing to relax when struggling against the destructive conflict and to endure the pain and confusion, the sooner the suffering will be over (cf. 230). Hence, the only real freedom from suffering can be found when one accepts it, and if one tries to realize how it connects us to ourselves through meaning and to others through compassion. One can only find relief when being able to transform one’s own fears and anxiety into interest and curiosity, and by doing so, accessing the knowledge and compassion that give life a purpose (cf. Young-Eisendrath 189).

Generally speaking, suffering is crucial, as human beings learn sympathy and empathy, understanding of and feeling with fellow human beings by suffering (cf. Grabher 2002: 128). Young-Eisendrath states that the gifts of suffering are insight, compassion and renewal. According to the psychotherapist, suffering is an essential part of the human condition, as the unavoidable mysteries of pain and suffering can give rise to hidden resources of compassion and creativity, because we do not know our courage until we reach our limits (cf. 2). Compassion is a tremendous gift, as the knowledge gained from suffering with others widens our horizon, and suffering awakens us to our own reactions and to our potential to be compassionate (cf. 48), which is, of course, a positive transfer. Becoming compassionate goes hand in hand with the skill of being empathetic, respectively with the capacity of spotting other human beings’ emotions and feelings. When having experienced what it means to suffer, one may get a better understanding of other people’s emotional states and become more sensitive when interacting with other people, as human beings learn sympathy and feeling with fellow human beings, and by doing so, become sensitive towards the traces that life and suffering have left on our lives (cf. Grabher 2002: 128). Thus, suffering may lead to a higher emotional intelligence.
One can conclude that – from a sustainable point of view – suffering is related to a lot of benefits on a long-term basis, even though they may not be obvious at first sight, respectively *during* the suffering process. Although we are not immune to suffering, and have to live with it without surrendering, the best thing is to endure it without resistance, constantly being attentive to the lessons it may teach us about ourselves and to the positive effects it may have on our character. As soon as we have the ability to cross the bridge from self-protectiveness to compassion and knowledge, we have achieved a state in which we realize the benefits of suffering for our lives (cf. Young-Eisendrath 194).

### 1.3 Noel Burch’s *Conscious Competence Learning Model*

Generally speaking, learning processes usually happen step by step and consist of various stages. According to the so-called *Conscious Competence Learning Model*, attributed to American psychologist Abraham Maslow (who used to refer to this model frequently), but actually developed by Noel Burch in the 1970’s, there are actually four stages learning processes consist of: Firstly, there is the stage of unconscious incompetence, in which the learner, unable to fulfil a certain task, is not yet aware of his deficit. Secondly, the stage of conscious incompetence follows, during which the learner recognizes his or her deficit. At this stage, making mistakes can be an integral part in order to achieve progress. Thirdly, the learner achieves the stage of conscious competence: The individual understands what he or she has lacked so far, which is a crucial step towards improvement. Although the learner may manage the task in question at this stage quite well, active concentration is required when he performs it, as there is still a lack of routine. Finally, learners achieve the stage of unconscious competence, in which – after a lot of practice, respectively experience – the task becomes sort of absorbed and “natural” for the learner. At this final stage, the learner usually does not have to think attentively when performing the task in question, as it has become part of the individual’s nature (cf. Dyckhoff et al.: 19f.).
In the following section, the fact that these stages totally apply to the protagonist’s individual learning process of Paula Huston’s *Daughters of Song* will be outlined in a detailed way.
Part II:  *Daughters of Song* by Paula Huston

2.1 Paula Huston’s Debut Novel

Paula Huston’s well-received debut novel, published in 1995, is one example of a piece of literature dealing with the themes of learning through living and learning through suffering, as the protagonist’s character and mind develop in the course of the plot due to certain mainly negative experiences that widen her horizon. The aesthetic medium of learning presented in the novel is music (cf. Grabher 2002: 128). More specifically, the protagonist, Sylvia, a young piano student at a Baltimore conservatory, learns how to give an appropriate, outstanding performance of a certain piece of classical music, namely Ludwig van Beethoven’s final sonata for piano, *Sonata No 32, Opus 111*. She does not only do so by studying and practicing hard, but – as already stated – mainly by gaining life experience, respectively by realizing what it actually means to grow up and becoming mature and – most importantly – by experiencing how it feels to suffer. Sylvia struggles with understanding her own life and understanding the oeuvre of Beethoven’s final living years throughout the course of the plot. Therefore, the novel illustrates the piano student’s learning process on several levels: Sylvia realizes the limits of knowledge conveyed by books (which obviously corresponds to the principles of American Transcendentalism), but nevertheless, she also begins to regard them as some kind of eye-opener (cf. Grabher 2002: 128), in Emerson’s words, as a source of inspiration (cf. 1837: 44). She does not only spend long hours practicing, but also reading many books on the composer and even looking at Beethoven portraits painted during the period in question (cf. Grabher 2002: 129). However, most importantly, in this *Bildungsroman* the reader accompanies the protagonist on her journey through various occurrences happening within the period of a school year, leading to the fact that at the end she is able to manage the difficult and challenging task: She excels at a final recital by interpreting the piece of classical music in question in a brilliant way.
One can argue that the events happening in the protagonist’s life in the course of the school year and the process of experiencing suffering for the first time in her life are the crucial factors that are helpful for Sylvia, as she gets the experience she needs in order to perform the piece for piano in a convincing, authentic and excellent way, which is due to the fact that there are parallels between her emotional state and the composer’s life circumstances during the time the sonata was written.

Paula Huston constantly gives insights into the characters’ thoughts, feelings, emotions and reflections. The motif of music in general and its highly symbolic meaning are omnipresent throughout the novel. Thus, the readers do not only get an insight into the characters’ thoughts, but also get introduced to the world of classical and romantic music, as many descriptive passages deal with reflections on specific pieces by various composers, such as Frederic Chopin and – most importantly – Ludwig van Beethoven.

However, one has to point out that the author herself is not an expert in the field of music. Even though her passion and love for classical music can be felt throughout the novel, Paula Huston has in fact a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and a Master’s Degree in English and American literature. Huston, born in 1952, began writing and publishing short stories in her twenties. In 1995, she published her first novel, Daughters of Song. Her reconversion to Christianity at the age of around 40 led to the fact that since then she has been writing mainly nonfictional texts dealing with topics related to spirituality and the Christian faith. Apart from Daughters of Song, Paula Huston has only published one more novel, named A Land without Sin (2013), so far. Daughters of Song, however, remains her fictional masterpiece (cf. paulahuston.com).

The main characters in Daughters of Song are a few students centered around an old German piano teacher named Cornelius Toft, a former successful pianist and a highly authoritarian character. What all of the students presented in the novel have in common is
the aim and the desire to get Mr. Toft’s approval (cf. Grabher 2002: 128). Most importantly, there is, of course, Sylvia, the protagonist, who turns 20 years old in the course of the novel’s plot. Sylvia, separated from her loving and caring parents for the first time in her life, is a young and innocent dreamer at the beginning of the novel who admires music from the romantic period, such as preludes by Frederic Chopin or other romantic pieces for piano by Robert Schuman, for instance. Other characters are Peter, Sylvia’s best friend, who is a little bit older than her and whose real passion — although he is a student of classical piano — is the world of jazz music, and David, an Israeli violin student, who is a virtuoso and a show-off who enjoys impressing other people, but who turns out to be an immature, superficial and egoistic personality who does not seem to care about other people’s emotions. Furthermore, there is Marushka, the protagonist’s roommate, a very ambitious violin player from Kiev, whose aggravating but loyal companionship is highly appreciated by Sylvia (cf. paulahuston.com). In addition to the students, there are a few other characters that play an essential role in the novel: Firstly, there is Moon Ja Koh, one of Cornelius Toft’s former students and now a highly admired world-renowned pianist, who is a role model for Toft’s students, especially for Sylvia (cf. Grabher 2002: 128), and whose personality is also somehow a reflection of Sylvia’s inner self. Secondly, there is Katerina Haupt, another piano teacher, who has German origins too and also seems to “fear” Cornelius Toft — at least to a certain extent. Miss Haupt, who has never had a family and children, even seems to be a mother-substitute for her students (cf. 133). Finally, readers also get introduced to Bellyman and his companion, Tee, two poor, homeless drifters prowling around the conservatory campus.

As already outlined, the main plot of Daughters of Song deals with Sylvia struggling with interpreting Ludwig van Beethoven’s Opus 111, a sonata she has to play at a recital in April, beside various other pieces of classical and romantic music she admires on the one hand, but which are partially challenging and “finger-bending” (DS 20) on the other hand.
too. However, Beethoven’s *Opus 111* remains the most difficult task for Sylvia. The sonata, which is very difficult to perform due to its jagged rhythms, shrill dissonances and sharp contrasts (cf. Hoffmann-Erbrecht 2), was not chosen by the protagonist on her own for her repertoire; in fact, it is Mr. Toft who wants her to perform this piece at the recital. The young student does not understand her teacher’s selection of this piece of music, stating that “he’s the one who’s making [her] play it [. . .]. And he’s never even told [her] why, and besides that he isn’t helping [her] a bit” (DS 34). In fact, she even thinks that he wants her to fail at the recital; an assumption that turns out as wrong in the final chapters – until very shortly before the novel’s climax. Although Sylvia claims to love this sonata (at least when listening to recordings – especially Cornelius Toft’s recording) she does not appreciate her teacher’s demand of having to perform it at all (until the end of the novel), as she is simply not capable of understanding the composer’s emotions and thoughts he had in mind while composing *Piano Sonata 32*, wondering why Mr. Toft “expects [her] to handle a monster like this” (DS 94). In addition to this, she has to cope with the way Mr. Toft tries to achieve an improvement of her performance, which is a challenge for Sylvia, as she totally respects her teacher on the one hand, but fears his commanding, authoritarian personality entirely on the other hand. Furthermore, she is not yet able to understand his approach of teaching and she fails to recognize which lesson he wants to teach her by quoting German philosopher Hegel on a regular basis and explaining Hegel’s philosophical approach. Mr. Toft does not seem to be very supportive, as he hardly ever comments on Sylvia’s way of performing the Beethoven sonata, and if he does, he only seems to criticize her and even seems to be disgusted by Sylvia’s way of playing (cf. Grabher 2002: 129). Even though she suffers badly from these circumstances, she is highly ambitious and constantly tries to strive for perfection in order to fulfil this difficult task. It takes her some time until she realizes that Mr. Toft’s disapproval of her efforts to play *Opus 111* seems somehow related to her inability to grow up, both as an artist and a human being (cf. paulahuston.com). However, in the course of the plot, Sylvia
goes through all the negative experiences which are formative for her personal development from an innocent adolescent to a young adult woman: For instance, she is confronted with crime and violence for the first time in her life when a robber threatens her and hurts her roommate Marushka physically (cf. DS 69), and she witnesses a homeless man dying, which is a crucial moment of recognition for Sylvia (cf. DS 126). In addition, she loses her virginity to her fellow student David soon after this shocking experience (cf. DS 144) and gets pregnant (cf. DS 258), which leads to a subsequent confrontation with ignorance, egoism and neglect when it turns out that David is not interested in a future with Sylvia (cf. DS 167). Therefore, she also experiences what it means to be lovesick for the first time in her life, realizing that neither her parents nor anybody else can help her, except herself. In general, Sylvia learns that in the deepest existential terms every human being is alone and dependent on her/himself (cf. Grabher 2002: 128) and that suffering and grief can affect everyone, including herself, no matter whether one has a privileged social background (like Sylvia) or not (a thought which is based on Buddha’s previously outlined observations that nobody is immune to suffering [cf. Young-Eisendrath 11]). All these circumstances and the life experience that goes along with these events actually make Sylvia strong and lead to her personal victory.

In order to understand the symbolic meaning of Beethoven’s final piano sonata within the novel and to comprehend why interpreting this particular sonata is such a challenge for the novel’s protagonist, it is not only essential to focus on this piece of classical music, on its characteristics, on the circumstances under which it was composed and on its role within the plot of the novel, but also to analyze Sylvia’s character traits and her personality, which – in the first part of the novel – is in stark contrast to the emotions Beethoven put in his final piano sonata. Therefore, the following two chapters will deal with
an analysis of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata 32* as well as with a detailed character analysis of the protagonist.

### 2.2 An Analysis of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata 32, Opus 111*

As already mentioned, *Opus 111* is the composer’s final sonata for piano. Joachim Kaiser, in his book *Beethoven’s 32 Piano Sonatas and their Interpreters*, lists various audio recordings by various pianists\(^8\). The pianists’ average age is 59 years\(^9\). One can conclude that usually, *Piano Sonata 32* is not performed by very young artists in Sylvia’s age and that pianists have usually already gone through a certain process of maturing when performing – respectively recording – this piece of classical music. Considering the circumstances under which the sonata was written, it is no wonder why younger pianists (like the novel’s protagonist) struggle with performing it in a suitable way.

#### 2.2.1 Ludwig van Beethoven’s Life Circumstances during the Period the Sonata was Written

The composition and its musical style are considered a representation of the composer’s thoughts and feelings during the process of composing, as he was struggling with fate (cf. Hiemke 398) and facing his own death. *Piano Sonata 32* was composed between 1821 and 1822 (cf. Hoffmann-Erbrecht 2), when the composer repeatedly suffered from diarrhea, dehydration, prostration, anorexia and abdominal colic. Due to the abdominal colic phases, Beethoven increased his alcohol intake in order to kill the pain, which

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\(^9\) with Benedetti-Michelangeli being the youngest performer at the age of 42 and Wilhelm Backhaus being the oldest at the age of 85
subsequently led to further afflictions (cf. Kubba et al. 168). In 1821, he had a prolonged attack of jaundice, abdominal pain and vomiting. In addition to this, he was suffering desperately from his deafness (cf. 168). There were even rumors about suicide attempts during this time (cf. Swafford 460). Assisted by German philosopher, sociologist, music theorist and composer Theodor Adorno, author Thomas Mann dedicated a chapter of his novel *Doctor Faustus* to Beethoven’s *Opus 111*, in which fictional character Wendell Kretzschmar gives an enthusiastic speech on the sonata, including documented facts about the circumstances – respectively about the composer’s situation and condition during the time it was written. Mann – respectively Kretzschmar – states that in the year 1820 “[Beethoven’s] hearing, attacked by a resistless ailment, was in progressive decay, and it had become clear that he could no longer conduct his own works” (75). Furthermore, the composer “was quite written out, his productive powers exhausted, himself incapable of larger enterprise, and busting himself like the old Haydn with writing down Scottish songs” (75).

One can conclude that Beethoven’s late life was characterized by suffering, and that the composer was well-aware of the fact that one had to fight against this feeling in order to make one’s life worth living. Argentinian pianist Daniel Barenboim stated: “One could paraphrase much of the [late] work of Beethoven by saying that suffering is inevitable, but the courage to fight it renders life worth living. It is not by chance that the Funeral March is not the last movement of the Eroica Symphony, but the second, so that suffering does not have the last word” (2015: 20). One can understand how much the genius Beethoven, whose life had always been dedicated to his passion of music, must have suffered – especially due to having lost the ability to hear.

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10 Although *Doctor Faustus* is a fictional piece of literature, there is evidence in this passage, as it is based on Adorno’s analysis.
2.2.2 A Brief Formal Analysis of Beethoven’s Final Sonata for Piano from a Stylistic Point of View and a Descriptive Approach

Untypically for a piano sonata, *Opus 111*, which is – in general – characterized by dissonance (cf. Grabher 2002: 130), does not consist of three movements, but only of two movements, which show “their contrast on all possible levels” (Matthews 5) due to an “extreme polarity between tension and release” (Hoffmann-Erbrecht 2). However, they also show some parallels both in structure and from a melodic point of view on the other hand\(^\text{11}\) (cf. Kim 19). Italian Pianist Maurizio Pollini, for instance, describes the two movements as “the embodiment of two diametrically opposite principles: the powerful tension of the first movement gives place to the lofty meditation of the Arietta with variations” (5). In the first variation, Beethoven plays around with the theme in a decorative manner, while the final variation is characterized by shadowy, syncopated bass chords as well as by figurations very high up in the treble (cf. Hoffmann-Erbrecht 3). Alfred Brendel described the first movement, the *Allegro*, as “stormy and passionate” (cf. n.p.), whilst stating that its second movement, the *Adagio*, which “stretches the piano’s capabilities to the limit by its use of the strongly contrasted bass and treble registers” (Hoffmann-Erbrecht 3), is “physically very challenging” (cf. Brendel n.p.). Brendel also commented on the sonata in general, without making a distinction between the two movements, stating that “What is to be experienced here is distilled experience. Perhaps nowhere else in piano literature does mystical experience feel so close at hand” (n.p.).

Concerning the differences between the two movements, musicologist, pianist and scholar Jürgen Uhde states that the first and the second movement of *Opus 111* are both parts of two different spheres: The first movement is regarded as the “will,” being achieved through struggling, while the second one might represent the “grace,” for which the struggle is of no relevance any more (cf. 1044).

\(^{11}\) a fact which has a symbolic meaning in *Daughters of Song*, which will be outlined in Chapter 2.5.3.2
Richard Wagner commented on *Piano Sonata 32* in a similar way, referring to the sonata as “heavenly,” regarding the first movement as the expression of “the will in its pain and its heroic desire, while the second movement is the expression of the mollified will of how a human being wants it to be after having become reasonable and mature” (cf. Kaiser 1994: 610).

According to music professor William Drabkin, in the opening melodic gesture of the first movement “Beethoven was to exploit a […] relationship, underscored verbally with ‘Muss es sein? – Es muss sein!’ [‘Must it be? – It must be!’]” (3), while pianist and musicologist Denis Matthews states about the second movement that it “show[s] the pains [Beethoven] took over the shaping of the […] theme” (6).

Thomas Mann, in *Doctor Faustus*, dedicated another descriptive passage to the second movement:

The theme of this movement goes through a hundred vicissitudes, a hundred worlds of rhythmic contrasts, at lengths outgrows itself, and is finally lost in giddy heights that one might call other-worldly or abstract. And in just that very way Beethoven’s art had overgrown itself, risen out of the habitable regions of tradition, even before the startled gaze of human eye, into spheres of the entirely and utterly and nothing-but personal – an ego painfully isolated in the absolute, isolated too from sense by the loss of his hearing; lonely prince of a realm of spirits, from whom now only a chilling breath issued to terrify his most willing contemporaries, standing as they did aghast these communications of which only at moments, only by exception, they could understand anything at all. (76)

In this excerpt, the author describes the mood of the second movement in an outstanding way, commenting on the “outstanding giddy heights,” on the feeling of being “painfully isolated in the absolute” and on the composer’s emotions when he is facing the loss of his hearing. Furthermore, Mann describes the second movement as a musical rendering of an uncanny form of alienation (cf. Hermand 122).

In addition, Maurizio Pollini describes *Opus 111* as follows:

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*12* a term which will be focused on in Chapter 2.4.3
The Maestoso introduction opens […] with its individual characteristics of sudden changes of dynamics, dotted rhythm, trills and appoggiaturas all in its very first bars. The mystery of a few pianissimo bars and the uncanny sudden sforzato strokes are matched by the tonal uncertainty and ambiguity of the opening […]. Equally directed towards creating a sense of uncertainty is the rumbling thrill low in the bass register at the end of this introduction […]. (4f.)

One can conclude that Beethoven’s final sonata for piano is obviously regarded as somehow unusual, mysterious, and uncanny with a certain mood of uncertainty, which are characteristic traits that also apply to the composer’s emotions, feelings and reflections at the time he composed Opus 111.

It has to be pointed out as well that musicologists agree on the fact that a perfect performance of this Beethoven sonata is simply not possible and can never be entirely achieved by any pianist. Joachim Kaiser, for instance, states that no single pianist is capable of playing it in an entirely perfect way (1968: 78).

In order to understand the highly symbolic meaning of this particular sonata within Daughters of Song, and why performing this sonata authentically seems somehow impossible to Sylvia, the protagonist’s character shall be analyzed in detail as well.

2.3 An Innocent Dreamer Lacking Experience: An Analysis of the Character Sylvia

2.3.1 Sylvia’s Character Traits as Presented at the Beginning of the Novel

In general, Sylvia is described as a “thin and shy” girl who is “still very young, and […] cries too much” (cf. DS 8) on the one hand, but also as an attractive person with “amazing hair” (DS 198) and with a “passionate engagement with the music” (DS 7) on the other hand. From the beginning of the first chapter of Daughters of Song onwards, the reader is introduced to the protagonist as a very young, inexperienced, innocent adolescent at the end of her teenage years. Obviously, she is a dreamer who enjoys observing nature,
landscapes and the area around her in general. The novel begins with the protagonist standing at the practice room window, looking outside:

Below her, Baltimore is spread out under a brilliant blue sky. Clouds of a dense silver purity and whitened scud across it toward the harbor, toward the cold winter water of the bay. [...] Out in the harbor, beyond where she can see, great ships creak against their ropes, nosing out patterns in the water. Floating trash, wheeling seagulls, crabcakes at the Lexington Market. (3f.)

It is evident that when the protagonist is standing at the window, looking outside, she is dreaming, floating away with her thoughts, observing little details of what she sees – which is a habit visible in various passages of the novel, reflecting her languorous inner self. In addition, we learn from the beginning onwards that Sylvia was “a serious child with music in her head” with “no playmates”, but “a trio of intense adults – her mother Anne, her father Ross, her Teacher Miss Selkirk,” who were “devoted solely to the care and feeding of her talent” (DS 4f.). Throughout her childhood and adolescent years, the protagonist has always been a good student, capable and efficient; she has always done always done her homework in a neat and diligent way. She has made her parents proud – but it is beginning to seem that the older she gets, the less she knows and the more often she is destined to fail. (DS 21)

Like many adolescents who leave their parents’ home after they have graduated from school, she subconsciously realizes that she has to become independent and has to learn how to cope with the difficulties of adult life, becoming aware of the fact that life can be challenging and that the times of easiness are over for almost every human being living in a civilized world one day.

Evidently, she had a very protected childhood due to the care of her supporting and loving parents, and she had never been confronted with any kind of serious troubles or worries throughout her childhood and teenage years. This is implied in passages like the following:
In all her years of childhood, she can never remember deliberately going out into a storm. At home, storms meant hot chocolate with whipped cream on top. Storms meant Ross piling on logs in the big stone fireplace, Anne in the kitchen stirring soup, muffins in the oven. Storms meant heat and light and both parents temporarily united against the fury outside. (DS 16f.)

In this extract one can read between the lines that the “storm” is a metaphor for all kinds of dangerous, uncomfortable situations that Sylvia never had to face throughout her life. One should also mention that at this stage of the plot, Sylvia has never had a boyfriend nor any kind of sexual experience, so she is also literally “innocent.” Due to the fact that she has never been in love before, she has also never experienced the negative sides love can have, for instance how it feels to be left and to suffer from lovesickness, which can be, of course, painful.

The fact that Sylvia had a very protected childhood with none of the typical problematic issues most teenagers usually have to struggle with and that she still has a strong connection to her caring family during her time at the conservatory is also obvious, as she feels, for instance, “a deep stab of homesickness, a condition that plagued her for months when she came to Baltimore” (DS 17). This is another sign of non-independence from her parents. Just like many students at the beginning of their time at the university, Sylvia still feels strongly connected to her home town and frequently thinks of her beloved people there.

On the one hand, she misses her parents and the comfort of being under their protection. However, she also seems to have the impression of being under a certain kind of supervision by her father, who, in spite of his physical absence, sets her under pressure with his high expectations. Although he seems to be a loving man who means well for Sylvia, he acts in an authoritative way. Hence, the protagonist sometimes feels being overprotected; a feeling which she cannot get rid of. Sylvia’s dorm room, for instance, is referred to as a place where at any moment the telephone could ring, with her father on the other end. How’s everything with my favorite girl? How’s the recital program coming along? And, unspoken: What does Mr. Toft really think of you? Is there something I should know? (DS 19).
Obviously, Sylvia already starts to get the impression that her father’s constant telephone calls are somehow annoying, regarding them as a sort of burden rather than appreciating them.

2.3.2 Sylvia’s Upbringing: A Psychological Approach

One can state that there is a correlation between the fact that throughout her childhood and teenage years Sylvia never experienced suffering or failure and the way her father used to act, as her father must have evinced an authoritarian style when raising and educating his daughter. The word authoritarian is frequently connotated in a negative way in our society, as many people confuse and associate it with adjectives such as “strict” or even “ferocious.” I have previously used the word “authoritarian” referring to Cornelius Toft’s character. Psychologist Laurence Steinberg, however, defines “authoritarian” parents as “warm and involved, but firm and consistent in upbringing in establishing and enforcing guidelines, limits, and developmentally appropriate expectations” (7). All these attributes apply to Sylvia’s father as we as readers get to know him in a few passages that indicate how involved, but firm and consistent in upbringing he was. Steinberg states that for many years developmental psychologists have been aware of the fact that school children who are raised by authoritarian parents fare better than their peers who are raised in other types of households on basically every indicator of psychological health studied. For instance, adolescents from authoritarian homes achieve more in school, report less depression and anxiety, score higher on measures of self-reliance and self-esteem, and are less likely to engage in antisocial behavior (cf. 8). It is therefore no wonder that Sylvia had always been a child who used to have just good grades and who “has made her parents proud” (DS 21) throughout her childhood and adolescent years. Thus, Sylvia fulfils the cliché of a “good girl” coming from a “good home” – respectively from a high social class – who never had to worry about anything. However, as already stated, she sometimes seems to feel like being
put under pressure, as such a kind of upbringing is also associated with high expectations from her parents which she has presumably always fulfilled, but which seems impossible to her for the first time, as she is now not only expected to please her father, who is far away, but who – besides Mr. Toft – is the person “who determine[s] what she thinks of herself” (DS 33), but also Mr. Toft, which is a big challenge for her.

In addition to this, it should not remain unmentioned that that a difficult childhood (which Sylvia, of course, did not have) can actually help children to develop coping strategies which – from a sustainable point of view – can be helpful when they are experiencing periods of struggle, fate and suffering as adults. Although various psychoanalysts, from Sigmund Freud to Erik Erikson, and later from John Bowlby to Daniel Stern, have stressed the crucial importance of happy, secure attachments in childhood, others, such as psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, did research on the advantages adversities can bring in childhood, as children who have a difficult childhood usually encounter the necessary failures and losses and adversities that adulthood brings. As a consequence, they develop strategies in order to survive and keep going, and by doing so, they acquire competences which can be helpful in adult life, as they learn how to cope with grief (cf. Young-Eisendrath 20f.). Psychotherapist Polly Young-Eisendrath, for instance, states:

I see now how I’ve benefited from a difficult childhood and how I was blessed with enough support to transform its residues into knowledge and connection with others. I doubt that I could have chosen a more interesting life than the one I have if early privileges had been heaped on my plate or if I had been able to look ahead through a crystal ball […]. Without the adversities of my childhood, how could I have awakened my curiosity about the purpose of human suffering at such an early time in my own life? This awakening led me to prepare for a career that teaches me to face the difficulties of life without despair […]. What we seem to be learning is the transformation of adversity into purpose, of difficulty into development. (1f.)

As Sylvia’s childhood was a happy one, she did not have the opportunity to experience “useful suffering” (9) and to develop useful strategies to cope with difficult and challenging situations subsequently. It is now up to the protagonist to develop these
strategies in order to transform adversity into purpose, respectively difficulty into development (cf. 2).

Sylvia’s personality is also reflected in her favorite music: Most importantly, she loves to perform certain pieces by Frédéric Chopin; a fact, which has a symbolic meaning, too.

2.3.3 The Characteristics of Frédéric Chopin’s Oeuvre and Its Connection to Sylvia’s Character Traits at the Beginning of the Novel

In contrast to performing Beethoven, Sylvia “loves Chopin as much as she loves her parents, as much as she has loved anybody in her life – more” (DS 14) and “she knows every nocturne, every prelude, most of the waltzes” (DS 14). In the following passage, in which Sylvia plays Chopin’s *Raindrop Prélude*, her attitude towards the composer’s music is obvious:

She runs her fingers over the top of Peter’s piano – what an old friend it has become – and then seats herself at the bench. She can hardly play Chopin without melting into the beauty; she turns warm, then cool, then warm in waves; she is lifted out of herself. She does not think when she plays Chopin; she has never needed to, once the piece was learned. He is as natural as sleep or breath, her old friend who never knew what it was like to be alone, to be frail and weak, to be shy and dominated by others. (DS 14)

Obviously, playing Chopin seems in a certain sense “natural” to Sylvia, as she does not even have to think when playing one of his preludes (cf. DS 14). “[Sylvia’s] strength as a performer, in spite of how thin and shy she is, has always been her passionate engagement with the music; she can be an exciting pianist when her confidence is high” (8). Of course, her confidence is high when she is playing Chopin, as his music is “familiar” to her.

Various music theorists agree on the fact that “Chopin was the most purely and profoundly pianistic composer who has ever lived” (Siepmann 5). For Chopin, music was

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13 I use the term “natural” in reference to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s previously outlined meaning of the word when referring to Sylvia’s “nature” – respectively to her unique personality.
the expression of a thought, of a feeling or an observation, and playing the piano was therefore a kind of practice the composer applied in order to express these thoughts and words through sound (cf. Wüst 182). Compared to Ludwig van Beethoven’s oeuvre, which tends to be very rational and stormy, Frédéric Chopin’s works are generally playful, descriptive, melancholic, somehow depressing, and the expression of pure beauty. Thus, Chopin’s music reflects the protagonist’s inner self at the beginning of the novel in a certain way, as all of these attributes apply to her. Like Chopin, who used to observe little details, such as raindrops falling, in his compositions, Sylvia – as previously stated – likes observing nature and her surrounding, and by doing so, focusing on little details. She does not only observe nature, but she also studies people, their body language, little gestures and their behavior. For instance, she watches her best friend Peter closely shortly before playing the Raindrop Prélude:

From her place on the floor, she watches Peter as he smokes; she is fascinated, as always, by the way he regards the cigarette so carefully before he lifts it to his lips, the way he inhales with his eyes closed, the way he sighs, smiling to himself, as though never in his life has he experienced greater pleasure. (DS 10)

Frédéric Chopin had a similar attitude, which is reflected in his Préludes. The Préludes are considered a series of brief mood pictures that in various instances are over in less than a minute, sometimes reflecting the inspiration the composer found, at times of sunshine and health, from the laughter of children at his window, for instance (cf. Mayhew 6f.). They are regarded as a huge variety of forms of expression, which are all-time due to their richness in timbre, and as poetry for the piano, with each single Prélude carrying the characteristics of a unique world of sentiments and emotions (cf. Lotz 103). As previously outlined, the observation of nature is, in addition, one of the key elements of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s approach to learning, as he encourages individuals to know themselves and to study nature (cf. Grabher 2002: 127). Furthermore, French composer Claude Debussy was quoted referring to Chopin’s Nocturnes, of which Sylvia knows every single one (cf. DS 14)
as “conversations between the piano and oneself” (cf. Howat 2). When Sylvia plays Chopin, it is indeed a conversation between her and her beloved instrument.

One can conclude that – in contrast to Beethoven’s pieces for Piano – Sylvia does basically not have to learn how to play a piece by Chopin in an emotional, brilliant, authentic way. Chopin’s music is therefore a symbol reflecting her character. In other words, the composer’s oeuvre does not make her struggle, as it is a pure reflection of her feelings, even though she may not be consciously aware of this fact. Maybe Sylvia’s character traits are exactly the factors that are necessary in order to perform Chopin’s oeuvre brilliantly. Gregor Willmes states that – referring to Martha Argerich’s recording of Chopin’s Piano Sonata 2 (which Sylvia played for her high school recital [cf. DS 14]) – “this is not the work of an analytical and intellectual performer but of a pianist who approaches the music on an instinctive level and who can conjure up a whole range of moods on the basis of a whole range of tone” (6). This indicates that in order to play Chopin with the right emotions, the performer must have an instinctive, natural approach to the music, while approaching the composer’s oeuvre in an analytical and intellectual way would not have the same effect for the listener. Due to her character traits, Sylvia is therefore a perfect interpreter of Chopin’s pieces for piano. Hence, she cannot be a good Beethoven performer as well – at least not at the beginning of Daughters of Song – as all these characteristics do not correspond with Beethoven’s (late) oeuvre. In contrast to Chopin’s compositions, Beethoven’s final pieces of music, according to Theodor W. Adorno,

[...] are apt to lack sweetness, fending off with prickly tartness those interested in merely sampling them. They lack all the harmony which the classicist aesthetic is accustomed to demand from the work of art, showing more traces of history than of growth. The accepted explanation is that they are products of a subjectivity or, still better, of a “personality” ruthlessly proclaiming itself, which breaks through the roundness of form for the sake of expression, exchanging harmony for the dissonance of its sorrow and spurning sensuous charm under the dictates of the imperiously emancipated mind. The late work is thereby relegated to the margins of art and brought closer to documentation. Accordingly, references to Beethoven’s biography and fate are seldom absent from discussions of his last works. (123)
This description of works from Beethoven’s final period suggests the musical maturity of the composer’s late oeuvre as well as its characteristics, which are totally opposed to Chopin’s style.

In addition, Chopin is usually regarded as one of the composers who were least influenced by Beethoven, and critics have tended to mythologize these two composers in opposing ways: Beethoven has frequently been presented as a heroic figure larger than life, while Chopin has been regarded as having too fine character traits for this cruel world (cf. Petty 281). One should also mention that Chopin – in his living years – did not appreciate performing pieces of music by Beethoven himself, as Beethoven’s oeuvre did not suit him. Chopin only performed pieces by Beethoven when being urged to do so. (cf. Baur 393) When one considers the fact that there are parallels between Chopin and Sylvia concerning their personality and their character, it is no wonder that performing a Beethoven sonata is not according to Sylvia’s “nature.”

Furthermore, there also seem to be parallels between Chopin’s physical appearance as well as his character traits and Sylvia, as we as readers get to know her. According to biographer Hans Werner Wüst, the composer was a small man of slight build with beautiful hair, who made the impression of being a shy and reluctant person on the one hand, but a very charismatic and fascinating personality with good manners on the other hand (cf. 71). Paula Huston refers to Sylvia’s “amazing hair” (DS 198) in various passages, and the author creates – in general – an image of Sylvia as a well-educated and charismatic person with good manners, too.

In addition, anecdotes about Chopin’s role as a piano teacher are documented: The composer wanted his students to capture the spirit of the music they were playing and constantly encouraged them to put their soul into the music, which was one of the most frequent instructions he used to give his students, constantly highlighting that there was no
such thing as “music without ulterior motives” (cf. Wüst 182). Most importantly, the right feeling stood over discipline for Chopin. One of his other dogmas was, “If you know how to feel in a veritable way, you can trust your inner voice.” The composer encouraged his students to have other interests beside playing the piano and even disallowed them to practice more than three hours a day, as he thought that if students only learned to play the piano by practicing in a disciplined way, they might lose the habit of putting the right feeling in a certain piece of music (cf. 183).

One can conclude that the performers’ individuality, their emotions, and their feelings played an essential role in Frédéric Chopin’s didactic approach, and that Sylvia would have – most likely – appreciated Chopin not only as a composer, but as a teacher as well.

Sylvia’s piano teacher, Cornelius Toft, has a slightly different approach to teaching and to dealing with his students, which will be presented in the following chapter.

2.4 The German Piano Teacher Cornelius Toft and His Credo

Cornelius Toft is an example of a fictional music teacher with German origins in an American novel: A man in his eighties, much venerated though feared by his students, who does not only know his music but displays profound knowledge of theories of philosophy, such as Hegel’s, as well (cf. Grabher 2004: 23). In the course of the plot of Daughters of Song it becomes obvious that the composer alone is not the artist, as a piece of music can only be performed in a brilliant way when both the composer’s and the performer’s emotions mingle and when their feelings are united during the performance. However, even though Cornelius Toft may basically agree with the fact that the composer’s emotions have to be identical with the performer’s emotions in order to perform a certain piece authentically, he
does not seem to regard the performer’s individuality as essential and does not value the performers’ personalities, as they are – according to him – not really relevant in the course of history, as he states, for instance, that “we are all worthless, we musicians” (DS 165) and that “only the music itself” (DS 165) is of importance (which will be elaborated on in detail in the following sub-chapter). Letting go of the ego is, of course, an attitude not much treasured by an American such as Sylvia, as Americans have – as already outlined – a history of celebrating the self (cf. Grabher 2002: 135).

At the beginning of the novel, Sylvia totally lacks understanding for her piano teacher, his didactic attitude and his dogma, related to the philosophy of Hegel. Although Cornelius Toft only contributes partially to the fact that Sylvia has “learned something” (DS 349) by the end of the school year, his principles and the message he wants to transmit to the young piano student have indeed an impact on her to a certain extent.

Generally speaking, we get to know Cornelius Toft as a very strict teacher, who used to be a well-known, successful, outstanding pianist a few decades ago, but who is now – at the age of 84 years – an old, grumpy man who still has the “muscular forearms of a pianist” (DS 35) on the one hand, but who also shows signs of ageing on the other hand. Paula Huston introduces the reader to Toft in Chapter Four. In the opening lines of this chapter, one gets a very clear image of the teacher’s appearance and of the impression he makes at first sight:

Cornelius Toft stands in the hallway, smoking; he does not do it the way Peter does – gracefully and with pleasure – but pecks angrily at the end of his cigarette. Smoke puffs from his narrow nostrils; he is eighty-four years old but has not given up either his cigarettes or, worse yet, his cigars. Sylvia, waiting fearfully inside the practice room for her lessons, can see him just outside the door.

He has been talking to someone. Now the door bursts open, making her jump, and he strides into the room, trailing smoke. “Tell him he’s a fool,” he barks over his shoulder. “Tell him I said so.” (DS 32)

Immediately, one has an image of an old man in mind who seems to be sort of frustrated and choleric, presumably stubborn (as he does not want to give up his smoking
habits, although it is indicated between the lines that this harms the old man’s health), and obviously quite unfriendly as well as highly authoritarian. Sylvia does not feel comfortable in his presence, fearing his powerful personality, as “Whenever she is in his presence, all of Peter’s lessons about courage evaporate” (DS 33), wondering how he can “do this to [her] – [making her] into nothing just by walking into a room” (DS 33). Obviously, she highly respects him and is even afraid of him.

In this context, one should mention that Sylvia also states seeing parallels between Mr. Toft and her father, as her father has the same kind of power over her, though in a different way (cf. DS 33). What Mr. Toft and her father seem to have in common is the fact that “together, they determine what she thinks of herself” (DS 33), and Sylvia does not appreciate the fact that “it’s not [her] deciding how good [she is], or even if [she is] good – it’s them […], her father’s tense and handsome face, her teacher’s glowering looks” (cf. DS 33). At one point – in a lesson, just after having finished a piece by Robert Schuman – Sylvia even sees “her father’s face instead of Toft’s, her father on fire in a burning halo of sunlight” (DS 114) when glancing at him. However, the difference is that Sylvia loves her father, but seems to be disgusted by her piano teacher in contrast, as she dreams of his “querulous nasty voice with the power to freeze her cold” (DS 34) and describes, for instance, his eyes as “dark and round,” which he can make “hard as marbles when he holds a stare” (DS 35). In general, the protagonist feels disliked, intimidated, scorned and neglected by her teacher (cf. Grabher 2002: 134). Furthermore, Sylvia mentions her piano teacher’s “military bearing” (DS 35), which does not make him appear as a sympathetic character. In addition, Sylvia also seems to be obliged to cope with Cornelius Toft and his attitude, as she is certainly put under pressure by her father, who seems to appreciate Mr. Toft much, referring to Toft as “an institution” and as “the best that money can buy” (cf. DS 34). If Sylvia disappointed her piano teacher, she would for sure disappoint her father as well, who – with the intention of just wanting the best of his beloved daughter – pays the fees for the conservatory.
We as readers get the impression that Mr. Toft does not seem to appreciate Sylvia much. By addressing her with questions such as “And what’s in the news from the clouds?” (DS 33) at the beginning of a lesson, it becomes obvious that he sees her as a dreamer, as somehow inferior and not as mature enough to play a Beethoven sonata, for instance, appropriately. One gets the impression that he has difficulties in taking her seriously when treating her in such an apparently deprecatory way.

However, at the end of the novel it turns out that Cornelius does highly appreciate Sylvia, referring to her as “the most exasperating student [he has] ever had” (DS 317) when talking to Moon Ja Koh, even stating to see in her the same possibilities he once saw in the now very successful pianist (which Sylvia is not aware of, as she misinterprets his way of treating her until the end of the novel).

The focus will now be put on Mr. Toft’s teaching principles and on his dogma, which is based on the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

2.4.1 The Role of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel as a Teacher, his Didactic Principles and their Parallels to Cornelius Toft’s Way of Teaching

As already stated, Cornelius Toft is not only an expert in music, but he also displays profound knowledge of theories of art and philosophy, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s, for instance (cf. Grabher 2004: 23), and he constantly tries to impose these theories on Sylvia. Not only does he display knowledge about Hegel; in fact, this philosopher’s principles are his conviction and his dogma.

Toft mentions Hegel for the first time in Chapter Four, asking Sylvia whether she is familiar with Hegel (cf. DS 36). Although having heard the name before, Sylvia is not, which is commented by her teacher with the words: “Of course you aren’t. You are too young. And, of course, an American …” (DS 37), which even sounds like an accusation: By stating this,
Toft does not only show that he regards Sylvia as an inferior human being lacking knowledge, but also expresses his disagreement with the American attitude of celebrating the individual self in an implicit way. In this context, Toft also insists: “You must steel yourself to a discipline of thoroughness. In Germany we call it Gründlichkeit, what I am talking about” (DS 37). However, at this moment, he does not go into detail and does not yet explain Hegel’s approach to Sylvia, to whom Gründlichkeit is literally a foreign word.

In order to get a better understanding of Toft’s teaching attitude, who has assimilated Hegel’s principles, the role of Hegel as a teacher will now be outlined. For Hegel, education had to be fundamentally aimed at what is called Bildung (cf. Pinkard 2000: 269). Hegel himself was a teacher and headmaster at a Nuremberg Gymnasium (a high school). There, Hegel used to combine an interesting mixture of traditional as well as what can be considered progressive ideas (cf. Tubbs 184). However, discouraging dueling, fighting, smoking and political activity (cf. 184), he expected his students to be very disciplined, without exuberance, free of any debauchment and without engagement in anything that could deprave the mind. In his school address of 1810, Hegel stated that of those who attended his school he expected quiet behavior, continuous attention as well as respect and obedience to the teachers. Hegel even introduced military drill into classes, arguing that this would help students to learn quickly and to have the presence of mind required to carry out a command on the spot without previously reflecting on it. One of the philosopher’s role models when dealing with teaching matters was Pythagoras, who demanded from pupils to remain silent for the first four years of their studies. Hegel’s students were expected to keep silent for the first four years of their studies, keeping their own thoughts quiet until they had gone through the “whole,” and Hegel heavily criticized too early participation in the distractions and

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14 The term “education” is difficult to translate in English in a veritable way, as the accurate meaning might get lost; it actually refers to education in terms of knowledge – more specifically knowledge from books. Therefore, Hegel had a totally different approach from Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance.
pleasures of grown-up people (cf. Mackenzie 42). From a contemporary point of view, this insight to Hegel’s teaching principles gives us the impression of an authoritarian teacher; a strict personality who did not encourage his pupils to think for themselves or to express their own, individual thoughts. Nevertheless, Hegel encouraged wide reading and used to take personal interest in his students’ reading material (cf. Tubbs 184). This indicates that he basically made his students into what Ralph Waldo Emerson would refer to as “bookworms,” which is the opposite of individual and creative minds, respectively “Men Thinking.” Thus, Hegel obviously had a very strict approach to teaching and learning, which can be regarded as influential on Cornelius Toft’s approach on the one hand (and which, of course, differs from American Transcendentalist principles entirely). When one regards the philosopher’s 1810 speech in question in detail, this fact surfaces even more. For instance, he stated that the previously mentioned military drill was the most efficient measure against the dullness and distractibility of the students’ minds. Furthermore, Hegel outlined that if students really wanted to make progress and become diligent and independent, individual study outside the framework of school (Privatfleiß – “private effort”) was of equal importance as being present in class (cf. Hegel 1986: 330f.). Of course, when highlighting the significance of what he referred to as Privatfleiß, he subtly appealed to the students’ discipline. In other words, Hegel unfolded the idea of discipline by highlighting the relation of regulated class and private work in their effects on the order and general tone of the school (cf. Mackenzie 41). Of course, this is a parallel between Hegel and the fictional character of Toft, who also expects his students to practice hard and in a disciplined way. In addition, Hegel wrote in a letter to German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, for instance, that “the unfortunate urge to educate the individual in thinking for himself and being self-productive has cast a shadow over truth” (Hegel 1984: 279).

At one point, Cornelius Toft explains Hegel’s approach to Sylvia:
“Hegel,” he says finally, reluctantly, “believed that the individual as individual is of no importance – the only thing that matters about any of us is our place in the broad sweep of history. Which, of course, is heresy here in America, where everyone is a small god, so I do not expect you to accept this. (DS 226f.)

Obviously, in Hegel’s approach to teaching, the individual is of no importance at all. The fact that Cornelius Toft totally agrees with Hegel’s attitude becomes obvious in an already mentioned situation when he talks to a group of his students:

“The important thing,” he says, “is that it all goes on. That we do not take ourselves so very seriously, do you see what I am saying? Because you and you and you” – he points to each of them, his finger wavering in the air – “are nothing in the face of history.” (DS 155)

When critically commenting on the fact that in America everyone is a “small god,” Cornelius Toft again expresses – without directly saying so – his disagreement with American Transcendentalist principles. Of course, two totally different cultures clash when Toft tries to impose principles of German philosophy on Sylvia, who is characterized by the American way of thinking and feeling.

Considering the role of individualism, American psychotherapist Polly Young-Eisendrath states:

Western societies have a strong tendency to see the self as stable, separate, independent and private. Emphasizing the self as essential and unique, rather than as changing and shared, ours is a society of individualism. Our cultural focus is on individual rights and private lives. Seeing ourselves as “captains” of our little body-ships, we believe that we should make decisions and choices with our own private welfare at first place – a sort of self-promoting philosophy, as though taking care of someone else would take something away from the self.

(116)

One can assume that when using the term “Western societies,” the author actually refers – amongst others – to US citizens, whose inner self is characterized by American Transcendentalist principles, and whose cultural focus is on individuality and privacy. Accepting that the individual self does not play an essential role in the face of history is – for sure – hard and an incomprehensible attitude for an American girl like the protagonist.
In order to understand Toft’s attitude, an overview on Hegel’s philosophy is required as well.

### 2.4.2 A General Remark on German Idealism and the Philosophy of Hegel

The root of Hegel’s philosophical approach is German Idealism (cf. Ludwig 18). Hegel is, in fact, considered the last representative of this movement (cf. Emundts and Horstmann 9). From an etymological point of view, the word “idealism” originally derives from the Greek words *idein* (= to see) and *eidos* (= image). Plato believed that the physical world as we perceive it is a distorted manifestation of ideas or forms, and he emphasized the value of ideas and their status as the governing principles that structure the multiplicity of appearances. According to Plato, we really now something only when we know its idea (cf. Altman 2). From the age of enlightenment onwards, philosophical approaches were based on reason and on experience, and reflections by philosophers were mainly based on “cause and effect”-explanations. However, the aim of the idealists was still to conserve traditional, occidental values of truth, morality and religion. German Idealism begins with Immanuel Kant’s philosophical approach and ends with Hegel’s advancement (cf. Ludwig 18f.).

Kant, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, represented the branch of Critical Idealism, based on Transcendental Idealism. Transcendental Idealism, based on Plato’s approach, is the doctrine that all appearances are – all together – to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given as themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves (cf. Stang n.p.). When reflecting on reality and knowledge, Kant realized that the approach had its limits due to insuperable barriers, and within these barriers, one could only observe the reality that one had spiritually created beforehand. In other words, objectivity is created by subjectivity (cf. Ludwig 20).
Hence, due to its limits, Hegel was not satisfied with Kant’s and Schelling’s philosophy, as a consistent theory of reality could not be conceptualized. Therefore, he created the concept of “Absolute Idealism” by refining Kant’s and Schelling’s basic approaches. According to Hegel, in a consistent theory of reality all types of reality must be explained systematically, based on one single principle or fact. For Hegel, parts of reality are not only solar systems, physical bodies and living creatures such as human beings, animals and plants, but also psychic phenomena, societal organizational structures and their products, such as arts or cultural achievements – like, for instance, religions and philosophy. Explaining all these phenomena based on one single principle in a systematic way is, for Hegel, the core task of philosophy, as only with such a theory belief can be “replaced” by knowledge. Hegel refers to this kind of knowledge as “reason” (cf. Emundts and Horstmann 9f.). In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel states:

Consciousness observes; i.e. Reason wants to find and to have itself as existent object, as an object that is actually and sensuously present. The consciousness that observes in this way means, and indeed says, that it wants to learn, not about itself but, on the contrary, about the essence of things *qua* things. That this consciousness means and says this, is implied in the fact that it *is* Reason. If I knew that Reason is equally the essence of things and of consciousness itself, and that it is only in consciousness that Reason can be present in its own proper shape, it would go down into the depths of its own being, and seek Reason there rather than in things. If it did find it there, it would be directed to the actual world outside again, in order to behold therein Reason’s sensuous expression, but at the same time to take it essentially as Notion. Reason, as it *immediately* comes before us at the certainty of consciousness that it is all reality, takes its reality in the sense of the *immediacy of being*, and similarly, the Unity of the “I” with this objective being in the sense of an *immediate unity*, in which it has not yet divided and reunited the moments of being and the “I,” or which has not yet discerned them. Reason, therefore, is an observational activity, approaches things in the belief that it truly apprehends them as sensuous things opposite to the “I”; but what it actually does, contradicts this belief, for it apprehends them *intellectually*, it transforms their sensuous being into *Notions*; i.e. into just that kind of being which is at the same time “I,” hence transforms thought into the form of being, or being into the form of thought; it maintains, in fact, that it is only as Notions that things have truth. Consciousness, in this observational activity, comes to know what *things* are; but we come to know what *consciousness itself* is. The outcome of its movement will be that what consciousness is in *itself* will become *explicit* for it. (146f.)

Reason, according to Hegel, is not subjective, but is the “whole,” the entirety of all realities. Thus, Hegel highlights the correlation between reason and reality, as exclusively reason is real and only reality is reasonable. In other words, knowledge about reality is only
possible if it is based on reason, as otherwise one would not have access to knowledge, and only what is “real” can be known. (cf. Emundts and Horstmann. 9f.) This means that Hegel constantly strived for a look beyond subjectivity (cf. Ludwig 22) with the aim of getting objective knowledge and awareness.

2.4.3 A Theoretical Approach to Cornelius Toft’s Credo: Hegel’s Absolute and an Analysis of Its Impact on Sylvia

In order to comprehend the role of Hegel’s philosophy in the novel, one should look at the following passage; a statement by Cornelius Toft soon after having mentioned Hegel for the first time:

“It is not that you are not talented.” He sighs loudly, a disgusted sigh through his nose, and turns back toward the window. “You simply do not think.”

She doesn’t think? What does he mean?

“You seem to feel that this should be easy, that having a little fire in your hands is enough. Do you see?”

Fire in her hands? She can feel the skin jumping near her mouth; she is embarrassed beyond words. What if her father heard this?

“You need the ice, too, young woman. The hard cold intellect. Do you know what I am saying to you?” (DS 37)

In this context, it is obvious that Sylvia is not really capable of understanding which didactic message Cornelius Toft wants to transmit, as she wonders what he actually means. However, the student realizes that knowledge about Hegel and his approaches might be helpful, as this might provide the metaphorical “ice” she is lacking in order to complement the abundance of fire in her playing, even though she is not able to understand the message of her piano teacher’s cryptic allusions at this stage (cf. Grabher 2002: 129). One can argue that the metaphorical “fire” is Sylvia’s passion deriving from her inner self, from her individual personality and – later – from life experience. At the beginning of Daughters of Song, Sylvia can play Chopin with “fire.” At the end of the novel, she has the “fire” to play the Beethoven sonata in question in a brilliant way. However, in order to achieve her goal,
the “fire” is not enough. Sylvia also needs the “ice”, the “hard cold intellect” – the knowledge. Both the “fire” and the “ice” make up what Hegel refers to as the “Absolute.”

Much later in the novel, Toft explains the philosopher’s credo to Sylvia (cf. Grabher 2002: 134):

“Hegel,” Toft is saying, “put all his faith in something he called the Absolute. And he believed, further, that this Absolute may at times be apprehended through beauty – do you understand what I am saying?”

[…] “So that something like Opus 111, if it is performed perfectly, without contamination by the individual ego – of course –, this is quite impossible, but one is to always strive for it – becomes, as it were, a moment in the mind of the Absolute.” (DS 227f.)

Cornelius Toft then asks Sylvia to take the score of *Opus 111* in order to look at it:

“Now, read it. Read it the way Beethoven did, with no ears to hear it played. Listen to the music in its purest form, before you have distorted it with your moods, your temperamental nature. This is what you are after – to play it the way it was first conceived by the Absolute Mind.”

[…] “Objectivity,” he says over his shoulder. “That is your watchword, Sylvia.” (DS 228)

In this paragraph, Toft mentions the “Absolute Mind.” Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, refers to “Absolute Knowledge” as a coincidence of certainty and truth and states that it involves a reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness, that it exhibits a coincidence of certainty with truth, and that it finally entails a transformation of Substance into Subject (cf. De Nys 2008: 556). When defining self-consciousness, Hegel actually adopts Immanuel Kant’s terms. Philosopher Terry Pinkard states that self-consciousness consists in knowing oneself in terms of knowing where one, as an individual, stands in social space, as a set of potentially universal norms and that – according to Hegel – being self-conscious is to know one’s commitments and – within that knowledge of one’s commitments – knows how to move around in that social space. Such knowledge involves avowing and undertaking commitments that are universal, but also involves awareness of who one is as an individual. Thus, one should know among other things one’s own quirks, one’s settled
dispositions, one’s talents, one’s defects, and one should have awareness for things like which temptations one can easily resist and which present more difficulty and are best avoided. In addition, one should be able to reason out what is appropriate, required and obligatory in light of that kind of self-knowledge. Therefore, self-consciousness is a unity of the “universal” and the “individual” (cf. Pinkard 2013: 69).

According to Hegel, the Absolute is Being. It manifests itself in the material world of nature inadequately, as the Absolute is primarily Spirit, or Thought that thinks itself. For Hegel there are three ways of apprehending the Absolute, which are through art, religion and philosophy (cf. Grabher 2002: 135). Stephen Houlgate states that in contrast to religion, philosophy – according to Hegel – understands its object to be both fully objective and fully united with consciousness, and in becoming philosophical, consciousness finally turns into pure self-recognition in absolute knowing (cf. 100). In addition, philosophy recognizes an even deeper identity of Being and Consciousness:

Philosophy understands that being becomes self-conscious in human beings, but also that it is absolute being and so encompasses more than mere human life and consciousness. It recognizes, however, that such being – even as nature, prior to becoming self-conscious – is identical in structure to human self-consciousness. (100)

When Sylvia begins to comprehend what Cornelius Tofts wants to teach her, she realizes that she must avoid interferences with her ego, and she understands that her teacher’s message is basically the same as Peter’s, who has constantly been trying to give the advice to Sylvia of letting “it” go (cf. DS 313) and to let loose. With “it,” Peter refers to her ego and her struggle with Beethoven’s Opus 111 as well as to the fact that she is permanently pondering about the dilemma of her pregnancy and all her thinking, respectively to her questioning in general. Of course, the attitude of “letting go” (the ego), which is transmitted by Toft, is not much treasured by Americans and stands in contrast to the principles of American Transcendentalism, encouraging people to celebrate the self. Consequently,
Sylvia has to struggle with a dilemma of perspective, as the question is whether to see the individual self as the center of one’s universe or whether to set it in the context of the whole of Being (cf. Grabher 2002: 135).

In addition, as Beethoven’s *Opus 111* is – as already outlined – a paradox in itself, reflecting the paradoxes of life, and due to the fact that the two movements of this sonata are contradicting, those pianists who can play the one movement cannot play the other in an appropriate, authentic way. Thus, one can assume that Sylvia, when managing a brilliant performance of *Piano Sonata* 32, dissolves those paradoxes in the Absolute – at least for the moment (cf. 138).

### 2.4.4 Cornelius Toft, Ludwig van Beethoven and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: A “Triangular Relationship”

In addition to the correlation between Cornelius Toft’s didactic approach and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s way of teaching his students, it should not remain unmentioned that there is as well a correlation between Ludwig van Beethoven’s music and Hegel’s philosophy, as stated by Theodor W. Adorno in his *Philosophy of Music* (cf. Federhofer 128). It is therefore no wonder that Cornelius Toft wants Sylvia to concern herself with Hegel’s principles and to understand the philosopher’s credo and subsequently to understand Beethoven’s music. Therefore, the parallels between Hegel’s principles and Beethoven’s oeuvre shall be pointed out briefly.

Theodor W. Adorno had constantly been trying to verify the convergence of Beethoven’s music with Hegel’s philosophy, stating that Beethoven’s music is the image of the process of how the world is regarded by grand philosophy – not actually referring to the image of the world, but its interpretation. Therefore, music has the same effect from an aesthetic point of view as philosophy has due to interpretation through terminological logic. When referring to philosophy and to grand philosophers in this context, Adorno primarily
thinks of Hegel, stating that Beethoven’s oeuvre does the same from an aesthetic point of view as Hegel’s philosophy does (cf. 128). Furthermore, in his essay on Hegel, “Skoteinos oder Wie zu lesen sei” (“Skoteinos or How to read”), Adorno conceived the relationship between Hegel and Beethoven more in terms of an analogy, stating:

Music of the Beethovenian type in which, ideally, the recapitulation, that is the recollection of complexes set out earlier, is intended as the outcome of the development and therefore of the dialectic — such as music has a character analogous [to the dynamic of Hegel’s thought], but one which transcends mere analogy. Even highly organized music must be listened to multidimensionally, both forwards and backwards at the same time. This is demanded by the principle of its organization in time: time can be articulated only through differences between the known and the not yet known, the existent and the new; a regressive consciousness is a condition of progression itself. One must know a whole movement, be retrospectively aware at each moment of what has gone before. The individual passages are to be understood as consequences; the meaning of divergent repetition must be realized, the recurrent perceived not merely as an architectonic correspondence but as something that has come about through a compelling necessity. It may be helpful to an understanding of this analogy, which seems to relate to Hegel’s innermost thought, to appreciate that the conception of totality as an identity mediated within itself by non-identity translates a formal law of art to the sphere of philosophy. This translation is itself philosophically motivated. (203)

According to Adorno, Beethoven’s music interprets the state of the world due to its dialectic formal law. Therefore, the composer’s oeuvre corresponds exactly to Hegel’s philosophy. Subsequently, Hegel’s philosophy has a significant relevance for the interpretation of Beethoven’s music retrospectively (cf. Federhofer 128). Cornelius Toft is well aware of the fact that in order to perform a piece by Beethoven brilliantly, knowledge about Hegel’s principles is essentially helpful.

Sylvia asks herself how Beethoven may have acted as a teacher, as this may be helpful for her in order to understand Cornelius Toft’s intention as well as Beethoven’s oeuvre itself: “How did the irritable Beethoven teach? Like Toft?” (DS 22) Indeed, there are also – at least to a certain extent – parallels between Cornelius Toft’s teaching principles and the way Ludwig van Beethoven used to teach his pupils. This is why we can describe the constellation consisting of Beethoven, Hegel and Toft as a triangular relationship: The parallels between Beethoven’s music and Hegel’s philosophy, as pointed out by Adorno, are
obvious, and Toft has assimilated both the principles of Hegel and those of Beethoven. Even though we do not know much about Beethoven as a teacher (he did not dedicate much time to teaching), the way he used to teach, for instance, gifted wonder child and later composer Carl Czerny, well-known for his etudes, has been documented. Even though Czerny was already a good piano player when he played for Beethoven for the first time, Beethoven focused only on technical matters during the initial phase of piano lessons for Czerny. At first, Beethoven would not let him play anything but scales and taught him a completely different hand attitude. When Czerny was playing, his hands seemed to “hover” over the piano keyboard, which was not appreciated by Beethoven. It was not until Beethoven was satisfied with his pupil’s hand attitude that he started to dedicate the lessons to the music itself and its interpretation (cf. Caeyers 246). One realizes immediately that Beethoven’s attitude towards teaching, which totally differs from Chopin’s previously outlined didactic principles, is similar to Toft’s style of teaching. Discipline was crucial for Beethoven, who did not encourage his students to be creative and unfocused dreamers when playing the piano. Instead, he wanted them to know how to play in a technically perfect way and to think before putting the focus on the emotions that have to go in different pieces of music. In fact, this is exactly what Cornelius Toft refers to as Gründichkeit – the discipline of thoroughness (cf. DS 63). Toft also wants his students to “think” before they start trying to put the right emotions in a certain piece of music and seems to dislike immature dreamers and dreamy attitudes. His previously mentioned derogatory attitude towards dreamers is obvious in various moments, for instance when asking Sylvia, “And what is in the news from the clouds?” (DS 33), and by doing so, expressing what the protagonist interprets as disgust towards her character and her whole attitude. In addition, one can argue that – due to his attitude – Toft embodies dissonance more than anything else (cf. Grabher 2002: 131), which is another parallel to Beethoven; respectively to the composer’s final piano sonata – “an enigmatic piece of music, characterized by dissonance more than anything else” (130).
However, Sylvia’s most important “teacher” is not Cornelius Toft, but life. Various happenings and occurrences that have nothing to do with her teacher’s dogma contribute to the developing process of Sylvia’s mind in the course of the novel’s plot. These events will be analyzed in chronological order in the following chapter.

2.5 A Chronological Analysis of Sylvia’s Developmental Process

2.5.1 Sylvia’s Learning Process

It is obvious that Sylvia turns from a happy girl to a young woman full of wisdom and life experience in the course of the plot. From Book to Book15 Sylvia’s life gets more and more challenging. As her life path constantly gets stonier. However, the protagonist also becomes more and more self-confident, independent, life-experienced and mature. Although Sylvia is “already” nineteen years old at the beginning of Daughters of Song, she is not yet as experienced as her peers at the same age and not as mature as one would expect a nineteen-year-old girl or woman to be. In fact, she is what one would refer to as a “late bloomer” Nevertheless, even though the protagonist may not be as experienced or developed as other nineteen-year-olds at the beginning, her personal process of navigating through all the typical struggles adolescents have to face happens quite fast, namely in only a few months from the beginning of the school year to April (the month the recital takes place): Sylvia sort of “catches up” with the life experience she lacks in quite a short time and becomes a mature young woman.

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15 As previously stated, Daughters of Song is divided into five Books.
2.5.2 Sylvia in Book One: An Ineffective Attempt to Understand Beethoven’s *Opus 111*

2.5.2.1 A General Comment on Sylvia at this Stage

In the first chapter, the reader gets introduced to the protagonist’s attitude towards the Beethoven sonata in question:

She loves it but cannot possibly play it; she falters, in the fourth variation, over the syncopated disintegrations of the melodic line; she cannot handle the meter shifts between the first and second and third variations; she can’t even play the repeat of the first eight-bar phrase correctly – she blunders through the delicate bass line like an elephant. (DS 6)

Obviously, Sylvia has already achieved the stage of conscious incompetence (presumably after the phase of unconscious incompetence) according to Burch’s previously outlined model (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.). Sylvia highly appreciates Beethoven’s final piano sonata, although she does not seem capable of performing it. She constantly listens to the brilliant recording of this piano sonata by Cornelius Toft, but feels helpless and paralyzed, and the fact that Mr. Toft does not seem to be impressed at all by her way of playing it frustrates her even more:

Beethoven’s last sonata: What in the world is she doing playing late Beethoven? Neither Miss Selkirk nor Mr. Binder would have ever allowed it – she is much too young – but Cornelius Toft … well, in spite of the fact that he gets visibly enraged whenever he hears her play it, he continues to insist that she performs it for her April recital. He must be hoping she will fail – why else would he be torturing her this way? He wants her to fail so he can finally drop her. (DS 7)

Helplessly and desperately, she tries to find an answer to her questions by talking to her close friend Peter about the sonata, stating: “I don’t understand it. […] Why [Beethoven] wrote it. What it means” (DS 12). Actually, the only thing Peter tells her is: “What I know about it isn’t going to help. It’s what *you* know about 111 that’s important” (DS 13). Peter’s answer, which seems superficial and featureless, is neither helpful nor useful for the
protagonist at this moment, and Sylvia does not become aware of the fact how true and valuable Peter’s reaction to her question is until the final part of the novel.

Generally speaking, there is evidence that – from a psychological point of view – the protagonist’s self-doubts and underestimation at this stage are not untypical for a girl of her age. Due to the fact that there are various pertinent studies on this subject, the gender-related aspect should not remain unmentioned: According to many studies, girls, throughout childhood and adolescence, tend to underestimates their achievements and believe that their success is the result of hard work and luck instead of ability (while for boys, who tend to overestimate their performances in everything – from athletics to scholastics –, believing that their success is due to ability and intelligence, the opposite is the case). In addition, we know that boys receive different treatment from teachers – from elementary school through college – as they receive more criticism and praise and are given more instruction than girls. Girls, however, learn that they should be quiet and polite, and defer to authorities. This is why girls may lose self-confidence and sometimes tend to carry this attitude with them when they enter the adult world (cf. Young-Eisendrath 94f.). When considering these results, it is no wonder that Sylvia acts the way she does, as she is totally obedient to her piano teacher’s authority and does not believe in her own success.

The assumption that she can succeed only by working hard and by studying leads to the fact that at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist tries to get a better understanding by attempting to approach the sonata from a theoretical point of view.

2.5.2.2 The Symbolic Role of Ferdinand Waldmüller’s Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven

As Sylvia does not really know what she could do to improve her understanding for Beethoven’s Opus 111, she goes to the library in order to look at portraits of Beethoven, with the aim of trying to get a certain kind of authentic feeling for the composer’s emotions.
while composing the sonata in question. After “looking at portraits of Beethoven all morning, hoping to see something in his face that will help her with his music” (DS 21), she turns to one specific piece of art, namely Ferdinand Waldmüller’s 1823 portrait of the composer:

She likes this one best so far; he looks … not exactly kindly, but not cruel either. Tired, somewhat irritable, with a touch of sadness around the eyes and mouth. His grey hair does not bristle around his head, and in so many of the pictures; his hairline actually recedes. He is fifty-two, hopelessly deaf by now, but still he seems to be listening intently. It seems to her that he has other business on his mind that is more important than sitting still for a painter; he may get up at any moment and leave the room. What is he listening to? She wonders. Could it be Opus 111? (DS 21f.)

Indeed, Sylvia checks her notes instantly, just after having looked at the Waldmüller painting, learning that this portrait was indeed painted only one year after Beethoven had composed Piano Sonata 32 (cf. DS 22). In the painting, Beethoven seems to be represented as a sad-looking, somehow frustrated person full of inner grief and impatience, struggling with problems due to suffering from severe deafness, who focuses on “other business” and is therefore unable to sit still for the artist Waldmüller for being portrayed, which is no wonder, as it is – as already outlined – widely known how challenging life was for the composer in his final living years and how dejected he felt during this period (cf. Swafford 608). Elmar Wörgull states that during the final period of Beethoven’s life, respectively at the time he composed Opus 111 (when he was portrayed by Waldmüller) he was frustrated, as he could not dedicate himself to his artistic work (cf. 143), adding that the expression on the composer’s face can be described as “poison and biliary,” which is the translation of the German proverb Gift und Galle, suiting well the way Beethoven’s mood and feelings are reflected in the portrait (cf. Frimmel qtd. in Worgull 143). Furthermore, Worgull states that Waldmüller’s intention was not to tickle Beethoven’s vanity, but simply wanted to draw a realistic representation of the composer’s inner and outer self (cf. Worgull 145).
Sylvia, in the library, is not yet capable of understanding what Beethoven was struggling with during this time, as she still lacks life experience entirely. Still staring at the portrait, she ponders on whether it is a lack of knowledge, a lack of feeling or a lack of attention that makes her struggle when performing Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata 32* (cf. DS 23). It is not until the end of the novel that the protagonist finds an answer to this question. If Sylvia expects to find a harmony expressed in Beethoven’s music that she – due to her young age – has not found, felt or experienced yet at this state, she is mistaken. In fact, she realizes much later that the music reveals the irreconcilable discrepancies of a human lifetime (cf. Grabher 2002: 130).

In this context, Paula Huston destroys the illusion that the young can easily learn from the old by juxtaposing the young protagonist with a diseased Beethoven who is about to approach death, as the opposite seems to be the case. Adorno, for instance, suggests that the late, mature works of artists sometimes reflect a recognition of the enigmatic character of life, tainted forever by sorrow and suffering (cf. 130).

### 2.5.2.3 The Significance of Sylvia’s first Encounter with Tee and Bellyman, the Alley Men

In a distinctive passage in Book One it becomes obvious how young, shy and innocent Sylvia is at this stage: The protagonist and her friend Marushka encounter Bellyman and Tee, two alley men, for the first time in front of Katerina Haupt’s house:

> “Those men are both drunk,” Marushka whispers hotly. “They are disgusting. David is very brave with them, don’t you think?”

Peter says into Sylvia’s ear, “Be ready if he pulls a knife” [...] Try as she might, she cannot read these homeless men; to her, they are all equally terrifying, trolls out of her childhood fairy-tale books. (DS 56)

One can argue that the two homeless men represent fate and the dark side of life. The passage indicates that Sylvia had never been confronted with the dark side of life before, as
the two poor men evoke a feeling of uncanniness in her. The fact that she even associates their appearance with “trolls out of her childhood […] books” (DS 56) implies how unexperienced she is. Nor does she realize that these men are actually not “dangerous” at all and that she does not have to fear them. Sylvia is simply not familiar with people from the alley and is therefore not able to realize how poor these men are, as she has never had to endure poverty, loneliness, isolation or rejection by society throughout her life so far. In other words, a lack of empathy (as a result of lacking life experience) is obvious.

However, in general, Sylvia only has two serious problems in Book One, namely her inability to understand Beethoven’s *Opus 111* and her piano teacher’s attitude. It is not until some occurrences happening in Book Two that her process of learning through living starts.

### 2.5.3 Sylvia in Book Two: First Steps towards Learning through Living

In Book Two, Sylvia is confronted with some negative and slightly traumatizing happenings for the first time in her life, undergoing experiences that mark the shift from childhood to adulthood.

#### 2.5.3.1 Sylvia’s First Traumatic Experience: A Robbery on the Street

The first negative experience Sylvia is confronted with happens when she and her friend Marushka hurry to the train station in order to catch a train to a competition in Philadelphia in which Marushka will take part: The two students are attacked by a young criminal man whose intention is to rob them. When Marushka has the courage to refuse handing over her violin to him, the robber chokes her until she cannot breathe any more, before crushing his foot in the center of the violin’s amber wood and, by doing so, destroying the instrument. Marushka tries to defend herself, which leads to the fact that the criminal slams her back against a brick wall, and she subsequently falls to the ground and loses
consciousness. When Sylvia gets down on her knees next to her friend, the robber leaves. After the incident, the two girls do not talk about the attack at all (cf. DS 69f.). A few days after the incident, Marushka decides to fly to Kiev to visit her parents for an indefinite period of time (cf. DS 79).

Although this was a traumatizing experience, Sylvia hesitates to call her parents immediately in order to tell them about the incident; In fact, she dials her parents’ number five days after the incident. On the one hand, she still longs for her parents’ protective care, stating that when she is having nightmares related to the traumatic incident, “all she can hold safely in her mind is the house on the lake, the big stone fireplace stuffed with blazing logs, her mother’s warm freckled arms around her” (DS 76), and she desperately wants to see her father, longing “for his strength, his will, the sound of him striding down the hall in her lonely apartment” (DS 77). But on the other hand, she realizes – for the first time in her life – that she has to solve this trauma alone and that she has to learn how to cope with negative experiences herself. When her father offers to come to Baltimore, she refuses: “No, Dad, […] Don’t come. It’s okay. I’d rather … deal with this on my own” (DS 77). This passage is crucial, as one can consider it to be Sylvia’s first step towards adulthood and independence. After the telephone call, Sylvia also reflects about the answer she has just given to her father, thinking that he must be hurt, as he is not used to being dismissed by his daughter (cf. DS 78). In addition, she learns something else in this context: “What’s even more astonishing […] is that he listened. I told him to let me be and he did” (DS 79). Rejecting her father’s offer to come to Baltimore has been a subtle, but remarkable first twisting point not only for Sylvia, but also for her father, who seems to have realized at this very moment that his daughter is not a little girl anymore and does not need constant care, protection and supervision.
Furthermore, Sylvia realizes after this incident on a meta-level how hazardous fate can be and how fast things can change from one second to another in life: “[…] all because of taking one street instead of another – a simple choice, not even thought about, three steps this way instead of that, and suddenly there he is, holding her by the arm” (DS 79), and she remarks, “how random it all seems, how vicious and unfair” (DS 79). Until the incident, Sylvia’s life has always sort of passed in an orderly manner. Now she realizes that the path through life can change its direction from one second to another, and that there is nobody who can protect her from such a shift of direction. This is a recognition she learns through living – respectively through having experienced such a negative situation.

Soon after this incident, Sylvia turns twenty years old (cf. DS 81). One can consider her 20th birthday as a symbol which marks her shift to adulthood, as – at the age of twenty – the protagonist is not a teenager by definition any more. This symbol should not remain unmentioned: Sylvia “feels very strongly the sensation of being caught between childhood and something else” (DS 82). Sylvia is right when assuming that her journey towards adult life has just begun.

In fact, the incidence with the criminal young man has other consequences as well: When pondering about Opus 111 soon after the encounter with this criminal young man a few days after her 20th birthday, she realizes that concerning the “movement that usually frightens her […] something had been different” (DS 93), but first she is unable to tell what it is. However, when playing it again and again, she gets angry, thinking about being left alone with her problems, as she is far away from her home, her parents and her friend Marushka, “all alone in Baltimore, a city filled with evil men” (DS 94). When feeling her frustration, sensing her inner struggles and her loneliness, she suddenly falls into a kind of trance, as she suddenly can see Beethoven moving around in his studio. She senses that the composer’s ears are ringing violently and painfully in a constant and cruel way, and that he
is therefore caught in a state of profound and permanent suffering (cf. DS 95). In this crucial moment, she slowly “realizes a new and startling truth: Opus 111 is becoming part of her” (DS 96). Sylvia becomes consciously aware of the fact that a sort of “transfer” is taking place: Due to her pessimistic thoughts and reflections, she starts heading towards putting the right emotions and feelings into the Beethoven sonata, as she starts to sense how the composer must have felt and what the composer must have had in mind when composing *Opus 111* – at least subtly. In addition, the protagonist notices how her performance of the piano sonata can improve: “She will have to play it and think about and breathe it until she never has to think about it again – until she can play it in her sleep” (DS 96). As I have outlined, playing Chopin’s oeuvre has always seemed sort of “natural” to Sylvia, as she simply understands this composer’s works, while Beethoven’s oeuvre has been incomprehensible, uncanny and unfamiliar to the protagonist so far. She realizes that when Beethoven’s piano sonata will be as “familiar” to her as Chopin’s oeuvre in a way that she does not have to think when playing it (which Noel Burch refers to as “unconscious competence” [cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19]), she will be able to perform it suitably.

Furthermore, she becomes aware of the fact that she has to practice and play it over and over again until she will achieve this state. This indicates that she subconsciously recognizes the importance of what Toft refers to as “discipline.” On the one hand, Sylvia is – for the first time – pessimistic when pondering about how her life is developing at the moment, but on the other hand, it is the first time she shows signs of optimism concerning the Beethoven sonata, as she even tells her fellow student Jan: “Today, I finally made some progress, though” (DS 102).

Sylvia, at this stage, does not only start to understand Beethoven’s emotions, but also starts to become more grown-up and more self-confident, which is obvious in her subsequent piano lesson with Cornelius Toft: Usually, when playing for her teacher, Sylvia is terribly
nervous – especially when he stares at her in a skeptical or depreciatory way. That day, however, when she hears the “frustrated old man’s whine in his voice” (DS 114), something is different: Instead of “shaking with terror” (DS 114) she just asks him gently whether he wants her to go on with ‘Fabel’ (a composer) or not (cf. DS 114). She finds this “utterly strange” (DS 114) and asks herself what has happened (cf. DS 114). Obviously, she is about to lose her fear of Toft little by little.

2.5.3.2 A Next Step towards Adulthood: Sylvia’s First Kiss and a Subsequent Realization

Although Paula Huston mentions Sylvia’s first kiss only rather casually in one single sub-clause in a sort of “flashback” (“[…] and the fact that her fellow-student Jan has finally kissed her [sweetly, warmly, in the dark] – and she liked it.” [120]), I am convinced of the fact that this little occurrence also affects Sylvia’s mind – at least slightly. Usually, people remember the moment and the situation of their first kiss throughout their lives, as the first kiss can be regarded as a subtle key turning point from childhood to adolescence, respectively from childhood to adulthood. Psychologist Richard Alapack states that kissing has a personal significance, transcending the subject’s role as a sexual performer (cf. 48). Thus, one can definitely argue that the first kiss is a crucial occurrence in Sylvia’s life.

Soon after her first kiss, when pondering about her incapability of playing Beethoven’s final sonata for piano in the bathroom, Sylvia has a moment of recognition in which a certain revelation is another little step towards an increase in quality and authenticity of her performance of the piano sonata. Her thoughts and reflections when sitting beside the

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16 Jan is another main character in the novel: a warm-hearted, caring and sensitive young man with Czech origin (and therefore the opposite of the character David) as well as a practicing Catholic who falls in love with Sylvia and who wins her heart in the end. Due to the fact that he does obviously not contribute to the protagonist’s suffering process (as his presence is highly appreciated by Sylvia), the role of this sympathetic character will not be outlined, as the focus is a different one in this thesis. However, it should not remain unmentioned that in the course of the plot Sylvia learns to trust Jan and to finally accept his caring attitude and his love.
bathtub encourage her to go to the conservatory late in the evening in order to give playing

Opus 111 a try:

She sits down at the piano, hardly daring to breathe. Will it come back, that revelation she had beside the bathtub? She closed her eyes, waiting, and after a while, her fingers make their way to the keys and she listens, as hard as she’s ever listened, to what the music is saying. Yes, she thinks, oh yes. She plays the eight measures over and over, and it seems to her that somehow they have become a key, though she has not yet unlocked the entire mystery.

Over and over … and then, suddenly, she’s ready to do the whole thing, to see how it works this time, and she begins the first clamorous movement, the movement she’s always thought unnecessarily loud and well, ugly. So much chaos and passion to get through before the beautiful serenity of the second movement thrills – perhaps that’s what’s been wrong all along. She’s been rejecting the first movement, subconsciously racing to get to the second, and then the second sounds thin and brittle instead of how it should sound – rich and unearthly and full of piece and joy. She feels flooded with some kind of new knowledge, some insight about the music that might evaporate if she’s unable to put it into sound now, and she leans over the keyboard, playing from her wrists and forearms, concentrating with all her intellect. (DS 121f.)

Obviously, the protagonist realizes that the piano sonata only makes sense in its perfection and entity as a “whole.” As long as the sonata’s first movement is rejected and neglected by her, playing the second movement as it should be performed will not be possible. Although the two movements are – as previously stated – highly contrasting, they share some musical ideas (cf. Kim 19). One can argue that the two movements are symbols for Sylvia’s contemporary life situation, as she is in the middle of a journey from a girl to a woman. The first movement can be regarded as a symbol for childhood, while the second movement might be a symbol for adulthood: As already stated, Alfred Brendel described the first movement as “stormy and passionate” (n.p.) whilst stating that the second movement was “physically very challenging” (2). These attributes both correspond to the concepts of childhood versus adulthood. In addition, Ji Hyun Kim points out that C major, the mode of movement one, is the key to indicating triumph, joyfulness and happiness (cf. Kim 23), which are attributes that can be applied as well in order to describe typical emotions during childhood, as childhood years are usually more untroubled than adolescent or adult years. Additionally, Kim argues that both movements are interlinked, as the second movement
begins in the same key (C major) as the first one ends, after a challenging coda (cf. 23). The mental voyage from childhood (first movement) over a challenging period of adolescence (coda) to adulthood (second movement) is fluent as well, and both life periods are in a certain sense interlinked with each other. When realizing that playing the second movement is not possible until having gone through the first movement until its very end without rejecting it, Sylvia subconsciously realizes as well that without having made all the crucial experiences of adolescent life in their whole entity, she will not be able to manage the challenging tasks of adult life. Thus, the protagonist realizes that she has to live in order to make progress. At this stage, she has not yet undergone the whole journey from girl to woman, and is therefore not yet prepared for performing Opus 111. However, according to Burch’s model, the awareness she gains at this stage is her first step towards the phase of conscious competence (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.).

2.5.3.3 Witnessing Death for the First Time

Soon after this recognition, she and her fellow student David, a handsome but superficial and egoistic womanizer, witness the death of Bellyman, one of the homeless men who is prowling in front of Katerina Haupt’s house, late at night (cf. Grabher 2002: 131f.). Sylvia, who has never even been to a funeral prior to this occurrence and for sure has never seen anybody die (cf. DS 126), is emotionally overchallenged by the situation. This being the first time for the protagonist to be confronted with death (cf. Grabher 2002: 132), it is a further step for Sylvia in order to get a better understanding for Beethoven, who had death in mind in the final period of his life. While Bellyman is passing away, Sylvia is “wondering what he can possibly be thinking, what can be going through his mind – if he knows he is dying, and if he is sad” (DS 131). Furthermore, Sylvia states, “I felt him leave” (DS 133) just after the poor and sick alley man has died in her arms, which implies that Sylvia does
not only observe the drifter’s death as an eyewitness, but also gets a sensation of how it feels to die.

It should not remain unmentioned that from this moment onwards, Bellyman’s friend Tee constantly follows Sylvia and watches her, as he thinks that the protagonist might need protection if she is ever in danger.

In the context of Sylvia’s first experience with death, I would like to take up the fact that although Chopin’s music differs from Beethoven’s oeuvre entirely, there are some (few) parallels between Chopin’s and Beethoven’s music, as Chopin was indeed influenced by some of Beethoven’s compositions: One of the few pieces for piano by Chopin which show influences by pieces by Beethoven is Chopin’s Piano Sonata 2 in B flat minor. Interestingly, there are parallels between this sonata by Chopin and Beethoven’s Piano Sonata 32: Chopin begins the sonata with a conspicuous reference to the opening of Opus 111, as both sonatas start with an unaccompanied diminished-seventh leap in octaves, resolving it as a leading-tone diminished seventh to the dominant (cf. Petty 1999: 289). Strikingly, the second movement of Chopin’s Piano Sonata 2, the Scherzo, is the so-called Funeral March. Using a funeral march as part of a sonata, which is unusual, is also one of the few ideas Chopin adopted from Beethoven. Wayne C. Petty, in his essay “Chopin and the Ghost of Beethoven” states that generally speaking, “We may read the Funeral March as a second allusion to Beethoven” (Petty 1999: 289). Hence, Chopin had death in his mind when composing his Funeral March. Regarded in the context of Sylvia’s developing process, who had always understood Chopin, but who had not yet been able to comprehend the characteristics of Beethoven’s late compositions, it is indeed remarkable that Chopin, the symbol for Sylvia’s dreamy character at the beginning of Daughters of Song, also must have thought about death during some of the few moments in his life when playing pieces by Beethoven or when being influenced by Beethoven’s style when composing. Hence, when he set the emotions of death
into music, it was one of the rare occasions on which Chopin – as a composer as well as a performer – must have understood Beethoven’s oeuvre, as he alluded to it in his own works. The fact that when writing a sonata including a funeral march Chopin alluded just to Opus 111 is noteworthy, as Sylvia’s understanding for this sonata improves as well after she has witnessed a man dying. From this moment onwards, Sylvia’s and Beethoven’s minds sort of seem to mingle step by step.

2.5.3.4 Sylvia’s First Sexual Experience and Its Correlation to Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy

Immediately after Sylvia and David have witnessed Bellyman’s death, David walks the protagonist home, and she makes another essential step towards adulthood: The handsome fellow student seduces Sylvia, leading to the protagonist’s first sexual intercourse, which is – of course – an important key event in every human being’s life and a symbolic kind of turning point, marking the metaphorical entrance to the adult world. Even though making love with David has consequences (which are depicted in Book Three), and despite the fact that we as readers learn in the novel’s subsequent chapters that Sylvia was only one of many girls for David, it is – at this moment – a highly positive and beautiful experience for the young piano student, as “she has never felt anything so beautiful, so pure, and she is astounded; she never thought it would be this way” (DS 144) and as she experiences the love act as “so beautiful, so full of love” (DS 144). While she is making love with David, her father comes to her mind – at least for a short moment. Although she thinks that her father may not appreciate the fact that his daughter is losing her virginity, she immediately rejects the thought, convinced that what she is doing cannot be wrong, as the intercourse is something purely beautiful (cf. DS 144). On the one hand, Sylvia still has the impression of being permanently supervised by her caring, but authoritative father, but on the other hand, the fact that she decides for herself intuitively to let it happen and rejects the thought of her
father immediately implies that she starts to think independently, respectively self-reliantly, when acting in the way *she* wants to, without caring about her father’s attitude. In addition to this Sylvia compares making love to music: “So *this* is how it is [...]. Like music” (DS 145). The protagonist compares the beauty and the passion of sexual intercourse to the most essential thing in her life and to her biggest passion (music). When encountering love, she takes another step towards the understanding of music (cf. Grabher 2002: 132). The relationship between music and death is based on Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy. Generally speaking, music played an essential role in the philosopher’s life: Music ethnologist André Schaeffner, for instance, notes that there is no other philosopher who frequented musicians as often as Nietzsche used to do (cf. Liébert 2004: 1). Nietzsche, in his *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, refers to music as a means of understanding death without dying, as – unlike other arts – music has the listener emotionally participate in the sense of unity and wholeness. Music provides insight into the essence of the universe, which leads to a kind of understanding that cannot be acquired through studying books. In the context of Nietzsche’s philosophy, music offers us a presentiment of death in a positive sense, as music enables us to let go of our clinging to a temporally limited existence. Sylvia intuitively has the same association (cf. Grabher 2002: 132). Furthermore, although being overwhelmed by the positive feeling, Sylvia also experiences physical pain while David is inside her. When watching his face, she has the impression that he looks like Bellyman in his final agony (cf. DS 145): “He is calling after something disappearing on the horizon; he calls out desperately; she can hear the utter loneliness in his voice” (DS 145), and Sylvia thinks, “No more dying, no more dying” (DS 145). The fact that Sylvia makes love soon after witnessing death – and experiences for the first time what love actually is – indicates that love and death are closely related to each other, foreshadowing the suffering the protagonist has to cope with in the following chapters (cf. Grabher 2002: 132): From the moment of Sylvia’s first sexual experience onwards, the novel’s mood shifts, as this event
marks the beginning of the protagonist’s process of learning through suffering, as she finds herself on the stony path (cf. DS 132) related to the challenges of the adult world. Now her stony path of being confronted with the challenges and negative experiences of adulthood begins.

When becoming sexually active, Sylvia literally loses her innocence and finally leaves childhood behind. Young-Eisendrath outlines that the transformation from teenager to adult also changes our way of thinking. As we develop into adulthood, we gain the capacity to thinking abstractly about our experiences as well as the ability to trace casual lines from our thoughts, feelings, and intentions to our actions, and from our actions to their consequences. Therefore, we can look back at childhood and see that “magical thinking” – the belief that we directly influence other people or the physical environment through our wishes and fantasies – is erroneous (cf. DS 141). The protagonist is about to learn how to think in a more rational way, which is depicted in the following books.

### 2.5.4 Sylvia in Book Three: Learning through Suffering, Part One

In Book Three, Sylvia has to struggle with the cruelness of adult life. This fact is foreshadowed, as Paula Huston introduces Book Three with the already outlined quote by Aeschylus in order to introduce the misery the protagonist is about to experience:

He who learns must suffer.
And even in our deep sleep, pain that cannot
forget falls drop by drop upon the
heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by
the awful grace of god. (qtd. in DS 149)

### 2.5.4.1 Peter Quitting Toft’s Class

After the previously analyzed monologue by Cornelius Toft, in which he explains to his students that we “are nothing in the face of history” (DS 155), Peter decides to drop the
piano teacher’s class. At this moment, the protagonist is not capable of understanding Peter’s decision, as he had always seemed to get along with Toft. Toft expresses his astonishment as well, telling Peter that he (Peter) has great potential with Beethoven and stating that he (Toft) is shocked about Peter’s decision (cf. DS 157). Sylvia wants Peter to change his mind, as she is convinced that Toft actually wants her to leave (cf. DS 158). Peter encourages Sylvia not to quit. When she argues that he tried to get her to quit before (cf. DS 158), he tells her: “Yeah. [...] You can quit anytime you want. Just don’t do it for him” (DS 158). Of course, this statement by Peter stands in stark contrast to Toft’s attitude concerning the “unimportance” of individual people in the course of history. By encouraging Sylvia to decide for herself, not letting other people have an influence on her individual decisions, he subconsciously propagates American Transcendentalist principles, as he wants her to think individually and independently, doing whatever she considers right, without thinking about other people’s reaction to it (and by doing so, taking the risk of being misunderstood).

On the one hand, Sylvia profits from Peter’s wise statement, but on the other hand, the fact that Peter drops out of Toft’s class on a voluntary basis leads to the fact that from this moment onwards, Sylvia basically has to deal with her troubles all by herself, in solitude. Along with Marushka, Peter is the second of her very close friends leaving Baltimore. Sylvia had always been “so used to bringing Peter her life, laying it out on the table before him, waiting obediently for him to solve her problems” (DS 162), but now she has to cope with her life herself without having the opportunity of getting Peter’s advice on a regular basis any more.

The circumstance of Peter leaving Baltimore and therefore not being as present any more in Sylvia’s life as she was used to also makes Sylvia ponder about her parents’ role. She realizes that “even though she loves them and misses them, their phone calls –
particularly her father’s – leave her drained. She finds that in spite of their loving encouragement, she is on the defensive much of the time” (DS 166).

One of the last wise phrases Peter states when talking to Sylvia is: “What’s more important – Toft’s little comfort zone or Beethoven? You’re coming along with 111 – you’re getting there. Nothing else matters” (DS 159). Peter is right, as the following events actually lead to the fact that Sylvia is getting closer to her aim.

2.5.4.2 Lovesickness and Its Impact on Sylvia

Soon after her first sexual experience, Sylvia learns what it means to be lovesick for the first time: She asks herself why David doesn’t call her after the night they spent together (cf. DS 167). The terrible feeling of lovesickness makes her feel paralyzed and unable to focus on anything but the thought of David (cf. DS 167). The feeling of lovesickness is, of course, not something unusual among adolescents, as this kind of suffering is part of the development process of most young people. Everybody who has ever experienced the miserable and cruel feeling of lovesickness can – for sure – perfectly understand Sylvia’s feelings and emotions in this state, in which she either thinks of David constantly or is not able to think about anything at all. This shall be approached from a theoretical point of view:

Psychologist Ina Grau, for instance, made a study on lovesickness among people at the average age of 21.9 years, with the following result: Among the 163 people questioned, only nine per cent were not familiar with the feeling of lovesickness at all (cf. 90). According to the survey, the following symptoms of people affected are the most frequent ones: feelings of discomfiture, helplessness, loneliness and listlessness, suffering from depression, feeling like being paralyzed, and struggling to manage everyday life (cf. 91). In addition, the gender-related aspect should not remain unmentioned: Grau states that men and women experience lovesickness in a different way, as women scored higher when being asked from which
symptoms they suffered after a separation from a partner or the loss of a beloved person. Obviously, women tend to suffer harder from lovesickness than men, as they experience depression, anger and self-doubts (cf. 95) (which – in my opinion – one cannot generalize, but which can be regarded as a fact based on the study). According to Grau, women have more difficulties finding coping strategies in order to handle the feeling of lovesickness than men (cf. 95). Therefore, it is not astonishing that Sylvia feels the way she does. Needless to say, the terrible feeling has various impacts on the protagonist, as she is emotionally hurt.

One can imagine how hard it is for Sylvia to cope with the fact that David does not seem to be interested in contacting her or seeing her again. However, Sylvia interestingly also shows slight signs of getting stronger soon, being capable of handling her situation in a quite mature way, as she soon does not specifically think of David anymore on the one hand, but reflects on other negative feelings on a general basis on the other hand:

Instead, she ponders over a time, already long gone, when she stumbled upon perfect beauty and then somehow lost it. What she feels is not a specific grief or longing, but something much more overwhelming and pervasive; she wakens each day to the knowledge that she is undergoing a certain kind of death, a bright, galloping decay of the self. Why? she wonders. Surely not everyone goes through this. And what will be left of me when this is over? (DS 178)

Sylvia subconsciously experiences her transformation from a girl to a woman, sensing what Sigmund Freud would refer to as the child ego (cf. Solomon 16) “passing away” by literally experiencing the “galloping decay of the self” (DS 178). Sylvia realizes another change of her personality, too:

She never cries these days [...]. She does not know what has happened to her – why, after all these years, she should have lost her tendency to weep at the slightest provocation – but she chooses to look upon this development, at least, as a sign of maturity. (DS 179)

The fact that she does not tend to cry anymore, developing a kind of “cold intellect” (which are Toft’s words [DS 37]) implies as well that the emotional times of childhood and teenage years are over and that she begins to behave like an adult woman. She even becomes
partially aware of this fact, as she refers to this development as a sign of maturity (cf. DS 179). Sylvia finally becomes consciously aware of what has happened to her personality, realizing “that little Sylvia is no longer running behind her, that she has vanished for good, and that she herself never even noticed when it happened” (DS 189). At this stage, Sylvia seems to have the impression that her child ego is like a former alter ego; a totally different person from the past that does not “live” any more after having undergone a fluent transition which happened without the protagonist’s conscious awareness. Although she has a lot of pessimist thoughts in her mind, she even appreciates the fact that “little Sylvia” has “vanished for good” (DS 189). Sylvia has finally arrived in the adult world. As already outlined, Young-Eisendrath states that it is best to endure suffering without resistance (cf. 194). As Sylvia does not cry, she is on the right path concerning the way of dealing with grief.

Of course, the fact that Sylvia suffers so badly has an impact on her attitude towards the Beethoven sonata, as she “has forgotten almost everything she had once figured out about Opus 111. She has stopped reading books about Beethoven” (DS 178). Toft, having “completely lost patience with her” (DS 178), tells her that although she is a talented girl, she does not know how to think (cf. DS 185). Sylvia realizes that she has not had a rational thought in her head for days (cf. DS 185) except “grief or sickness of whatever it is you call that kind of suffering” (DS 185). Even though Sylvia does not make any progress at all and is convinced that – given this situation – she will never be able to perform Opus 111, she does not yet realize that experiencing the feelings and emotions of suffering is exactly what she needs in order to reach her aim. For the moment, however, Sylvia’s progress concerning Opus 111 stagnates.

Apart from Beethoven’s Piano Sonata 32, Sylvia also seems to lose her flair for other pieces for piano written by different composers she has always enjoyed playing so far: One
night, when she sits down at the piano in order to play Ravel’s *Sonatine*, she realizes that she has become “deaf to the loveliness” (DS 183) of this piece, referring to it as “an exercise, nothing more” (DS 183). Sylvia is – for the first time – frightened by what is happening to her, as she is afraid that she may lose music, worrying what will be left if she loses it, as music has always been there and has been the rock on which her life is built (cf. DS 183). She feels so paralyzed that she has the impression that even music has lost its power (cf. DS 183). The fact that even music – Sylvia’s biggest passion – does not cheer her up implies how badly she suffers and how strong the feeling of paralysis has taken control over her. I would like to mention that musicologists agree on the fact that Ravel’s *Sonatine* is similar to his *Piano Concerto in G major* from a stylistic point of view, which Ravel referred to as “lighthearted and brilliant” (cf. Griffiths 1). It is not astonishing that Sylvia does not have the right feeling for such a piece by Ravel, as the adjectives “lighthearted” and “brilliant” do not correspond to her contemporary emotional state at all, resulting in the fact that interpreting the *Sonatine* is not the protagonist’s “nature” at this stage.

Astonishingly, when Sylvia – without thinking – begins playing one of Chopin’s *Nocturnes*, it does not fail her for some reason (cf. DS 184):

> Her fingers sing; she feels herself beginning to calm, to soften; for a moment her eyes, so stubbornly dry during these past weeks, actually fill. She thinks of her old friend Chopin dying young. She thinks of herself, a child prodigy under the careful tutelage of Miss Selkirk and her parents, and of how, until the night with David, she has always been under someone else’s direction. […] He was only seventeen when he wrote this, she thinks. Three years younger than I am, and he already knew. (DS 184)

To a certain extent, Sylvia manages to put her soul into a piece by Chopin and manages to play it passionately and in a lovely way. Even though Sylvia’s emotional state is about to change at this state, she still refers to Chopin as “her old friend.” Interestingly, the composer’s young death comes to her mind, implying that the concept of dying at a young age – which can again be regarded as a metaphor of leaving behind her child-ego that is figuratively “dying” – is still in the protagonist’s mind. Furthermore, one should point out
that even though Chopin’s music is usually dreamy and playful, it can be argued that the characteristics of the genre of nocturnes (“night-piece”), which was invented by Irish composer John Field (cf. Howat 1), suit Sylvia’s mood well at this state. In the sleeve notes of Elizabeth Joy Roe’s recording of Field’s complete Nocturnes, the pianist states that

The night was a keen source of fascination for the Romantics. Before the advent of electricity, nightfall liberated human behavior from the shield of decorum required by day. The darkness allowed secrets and truths to emerge, intimacy and passion to bloom, and facades to fall away. Not to mention the dreams, hallucinations, nightmares and visions – ideal fodder for the Romantic artist – arising upon the descent of wakefulness into sleep. Thus the nocturnal has accrued a whole host of mythic associations, often diametrically opposed (and all the more intriguing): moonbeams and shadows, fear and abandon; the sensual and mystical, erotic and sacred. (Roe 5)

One may argue that Sylvia is in a stage in which the metaphorical “dawn” – in reference to her emotional state – begins. Having already experienced “intimacy and passion” (DS 5), the time of secrets has just begun for the protagonist, as she does not talk to anyone about the night with David – neither to Peter, nor to her parents – for instance. As Roe states, nighttime is the time of nightmares, of shadows, fear and abandon (cf. Roe 2016: 5). Sylvia knows the uncanny feeling of abandonment very well, and she can therefore put the right emotions in a nocturne authentically.

However, after having played the Chopin nocturne, she realizes that she has been working too long and too hard on her recital program, having burned herself up in the daily grind (cf. DS 184), deciding that “tonight is for Chopin” (DS 184). When deciding to put Ravel aside and playing Chopin instead, she subconsciously sticks to Peter’s advice, namely doing what she wants to do, making independent decisions. At this moment, Sylvia acts according to the principles of American Transcendentalism – in a self-reliant way. One can conclude that she has learned how to act according to her own will and as an independently thinking person.
2.5.4.3 The Impact of Cornelius Toft’s Credo on Sylvia

Soon after the night in which Sylvia decides to play Chopin, she experiences a kind of cultural clash during a rehearsal with Toft two weeks before the recital on the one hand, but also begins to understand her piano teacher’s credo – at least to a little extent, which leads to a paradigm shift in her mind. After having listened to Sylvia playing Opus 111, Toft asks her if there is something she intends to do before playing the sonata in front of the audience in order to improve her style. The protagonist does not know what to say, as she cannot tell her teacher that she is preoccupied, that her mind is full of grief, and that she has other troubles in mind than the recital (cf. DS 220f.). However, her piano teacher reacts with a sort of implicit advice when sharing his thoughts about her:

I heard something in your playing when you first auditioned for me that I have not heard since. Do you know what it was? […] When I first heard you play, I did not hear a girl who occupied herself with young men or love […] I heard a pianist, do you know what I am saying? […] This is the truth: I heard a pianist who was willing to efface herself for the sake of music. Somebody neither male nor female, do you see? Someone who was – how shall I put this? – too innocent to give in to the demands of the ego. (DS 221)

Firstly, the fact that Cornelius Toft criticizes Sylvia for occupying herself with young men or love again implies the parallels between Toft and her over-protective father, who – presumably – would not appreciate the fact that Sylvia has become sexually active if he knew.

Secondly, Sylvia realizes what he saw in her, namely pure innocence, an innocent young person, neither male or female (cf. DS 221). However, Toft continues to criticize his student, remarking that she does not think when playing the sonata, and adds that she has been given the privilege of playing one of the most profound sonatas ever written, but instead of thinking, she tries to feel her way through it, putting the emotions of her little moods and her fits of pique into her performance of the piece (cf. DS 223). The teacher even states that she is not worthy of coming close to this work, as men much greater than Sylvia have spent life times with it (cf. DS 223), before he makes “a gesture with his hand, almost obscene in
its disgust” (DS 223) and turns away from her. He adds that giving the sonata to her was a mistake (cf. DS 223).

Immediately afterwards, when Toft tells her that he is exhausted and has to leave, another step concerning the protagonist’s personal development becomes obvious: For the first time, she dares to answer back by saying “no,” asking him directly why he really did give her Opus 111, as this sonata is usually not played by people in her age (cf. 223). Obviously, the courage to demand from her teacher what she thinks he owes her, namely his knowledge, awakens in her (cf. Grabher 2002: 134). Toft’s answer to this question is essential:

Some people think Opus 111 is impossible, did you know that? […] I mean, there are people who think that no pianist can play both movements. If he can play the first, he is bound to fail at the second, or vice versa. […] I wanted to see what you could do with the arietta, in particular. It was an idea I had […]. Of course you are looking now at one of the more complex movements one could ever play. Yet, here – do you see it? He brings back the opening figures of the theme – yes? – and then we have a brief exchange here, hardly noticeable, between tonic and dominant. And thus, amazingly, we end in utter simplicity. […] Simplicity, Sylvia. Utter innocence. And this is his last sonata, the summation of all he had learned during his twenty-six years of writing them. […] That movement […] can only be played by a master or a child. (DS 224)

I have already pointed out why the two movements of Opus 111 are so highly contradicting that hardly any pianist is able to perform both movements in an authentic way, as the sonata is a paradox in itself, reflecting the paroxes of life (cf. Grabher 2002: 138). In order to understand what Toft refers to when explaining the simplicity of the second movement, the Arietta, to Sylvia, Maurizio Pollini’s analysis of this piece is helpful, as Pollini focuses on the significance of the variations and on the movement’s simplicity:

One could ponder endlessly on the elemental simplicity of the theme of the Arietta in op. 111, which is summed up in his heading “Adagio molto semplice e cantabile.” Using as his starting point material of self-evidently symmetrical construction, and whose melodic and harmonic structure is also “normal,” Beethoven builds a lofty edifice with visionary poetic mastery, which becomes evident as the music takes on increasing stature and grandeur, until its ecstatic conclusion with the long trills of the last variation. Each of the first three variations is in two sections, which repeat marks after each section; they thus follow superficially the pattern of traditional variations, even though their musical content is of a totally different order. Then, from the fourth variation onwards, this link with convention is
severed. From the formal viewpoint very different interpretations have been placed on the structure of this last section; it is important to emphasize how the theme, split up and fragmented in the fourth variation, returns in the concluding section (heralded by the long trills), now once again completely recognizable as in an atmosphere of pure catharsis. The trill, which has taken on ever-increasing significance in Beethoven’s piano works, here appears towards the end of the movement like the final consequence of the preceding development. (5f.)

In addition, the term “simplicity” is used frequently when Beethoven’s music in general is referred to. Anne-Louise Coldicott, for instance, stated that “simplicity can be seen in all aspects of [the] music, including form, tonality, harmony, melody and thematic development, as well as in the treatment of instruments” (72). Leonard Bernstein commented on Beethoven’s oeuvre in the following way:

Simplicity, simplicity itself made manifest. In all the realm of arts you will never find a simplicity to match Beethoven’s. It is a simplicity that shines all the more purely for the intricacy of human feeling that envelops it. For Beethoven, like the greatest of the prophets and teachers, knew how to pluck from the air the essential, the elementally true, and develop from it a complex superstructure that embraces all human experiences. (3)

When one regards these descriptions, the meaning behind Toft’s statement in which he explains the sonata’s simplicity to Sylvia is obvious. Furthermore, Toft now finally explains to Sylvia who Hegel is and outlines what Hegel refers to as the “Absolute,” stating that the Absolute may at times be apprehended through beauty, arguing

that something like Opus 111, if it is performed perfectly, without contamination by the individual ego – of course, this is quite impossible, but one is to always strive for it – becomes, as it were, a moment in the mind of the Absolute. (DS 227f.)

This is the first time Sylvia actually understands which lesson Cornelius Toft wants to teach her. For an American like Sylvia, who seems to have sort of incorporated the principles of American Transcendentalism, it is of course difficult to play a piece of music without the previously quoted contamination of the individual ego (cf. DS 227f.). However, she is capable of understanding her teacher’s message – and she even gives him a weak smile – when he finally gives her the advice of listening to the music in its purest form, before she
distorts it with her moods and her temperamental nature (cf. DS 228), adding: “This is what you’re after – to play it the way it was first conceived by the Absolute Mind” (DS 228) and – as previously quoted – “Objectivity, [...] That is your watchword, Sylvia” (DS 228).

Needless to say, Sylvia learns a lot due to her teacher’s wise words. However, at this stage, she does not know yet whether she will be able to realize what she is about to grasp from a theoretical point of view, as she wonders whether putting purity and innocence into the sonata is actually possible or not. But in this moment Sylvia’s learning process through suffering is not at its peak yet, and she is not yet aware of what life will teach her in the course of the following two weeks.

2.5.5 Sylvia in Book Four: Learning through Suffering, Part Two

2.5.5.1 Sylvia’s Attitude towards Opus 111 at the Beginning of Book Four

Generally speaking, not much changes at the beginning of Book Four concerning any progress related to Opus 111. Sylvia still has her teacher’s words in mind, unable to shake them out of her head. She ponders on what she had missed in all her practice, when reading her books about Beethoven, and she is unaware of what important key had eluded her (cf. DS 244). Even though she keeps the words “innocence” and “purity” in her mind, her fingers are sore, her hands are unresponsive and she thinks that her body knows more than herself (cf. DS 245). However, when closing her eyes, she can hear the sonata’s “simple ending, [...] clean and final” (DS 247), which implies that she is about to become consciously aware of the second movement’s simplicity, and that she starts to realize what has been bothering her about Piano Sonata 32: something she had written down; a quotation from one of Beethoven’s letters which had struck her then as important, even though – back then – she
had not connected it directly to the sonata (cf. DS 247). Although she is unable to recall what the note’s content was at this moment, she becomes aware of it shortly before the recital.

2.5.5.2 A Lesson for Life due to Suffering: Empathy

As previously stated, empathy, sympathy and understanding for other human beings – respectively the ability to spot negative emotions among fellow human beings because of having experienced these feelings oneself – are some of the benefits of suffering (cf. Young-Eisendrath 2). One day, when Sylvia surprises Moon Ja Koh at an odd hour at the conservatory, who is playing the piano for herself without realizing that the protagonist is standing in the door, Sylvia observes how tired, exhausted and sick the glamorous pianist looks (cf. Grabher 2002: 134):

But when the music ends, Miss Koh bows her head and sits for a long time smoothing her cheeks with one hand as though she is crying. Sylvia is caught, not wanting to be seen, yet not able to leave. What is wrong? What if Miss Koh is ill or in pain? Should she go get help?

And then Miss Koh rises and Sylvia is shocked at how thin she looks, how old. There are lines in her face; her hair is limp, her blouse rumpled, her skirt askew. She looks both terrified and helpless, and Sylvia moves first toward the door – may I help, Miss Koh? is there anything I can do? (DS 251)

Obviously, Sylvia has become sensitive to the needs of other people, being able to read (negative) emotions in people’s facial expressions and in their body language, which is a totally new experience for her. Thus, Sylvia already profits from the benefits of suffering, as a positive transfer of the lessons suffering can teach us for life takes place, which is another crucial step in the protagonist’s developing process. Daniel Patrick Foley, in his essay “Eleven Interpretations of Personal Suffering,” states: “I am convinced that I will grow into a better person through […] suffering in my life, for some good can be drawn out of evil, no matter what amount or type of suffering is involved” (325). Sylvia has already drawn “good” out of “evil” by becoming empathic.
2.5.5.3 The Consequence of the Night with Peter: Pregnancy and its Impact on Sylvia

The fact that Sylvia may be pregnant is already sort of foreshadowed in Book Three in various passages: Moon Ja Koh hears “the faint and ghostly cry of a distant baby” (DS 216). In addition, Sylvia asks herself – out of context –, “Oh my God, what if I’m pregnant” (DS 207) when feeling nauseated, and soon afterwards, she feels “ravenously hungry” (DS 208), which is – of course – another potential sign of pregnancy. Subsequently, she “struggles to hold her feet, holding her stomach, [and] sees [an] empty cookie package” (DS 217), which indicates that she feels somehow sick and very hungry, which are other factors indicating that she might be pregnant. The evidence that she is indeed pregnant is presented immediately afterwards (in Book Four): Sylvia wakes up, feeling that she is about to vomit immediately after her awakening, struggling to her feet, holding her stomach, seeing an empty cookie package beside her (cf. DS 217). Nausea – especially morning sickness – is – in combination of ravenous appetite – a typical symptom indicating potential pregnancy\(^7\). Thus, we as readers immediately suppose that the protagonist might expect a baby. Soon afterwards, Sylvia, who has not been to a gynecologist for a few years, decides consulting one. She chooses a female doctor called Margaret, a friend of Katerina Haupt, who turns out to be a very sensitive, sympathetic and empathetic person, which is – of course – important for Sylvia’s personal comfort. The gynecologist does indeed confirm that Sylvia is pregnant (cf. DS 258). Sylvia feels paralyzed and out of her mind, like in a trance, when being confronted with this news. Of course, having a baby was not her intention at all – especially not from a reckless, egoistic and superficial young and immature man like David, who does not seem to be a person with the ability of taking any responsibility: It turns out that he is still together with his girlfriend (cf. DS 169) and that the night with Sylvia was just an

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\(^7\) Gynecologist Denys Fairweather, for instance, states that nausea and vomiting in the first trimester of pregnancy is accepted as a common occurrence among pregnant women and is regarded as one of the discomforts accompanying approximately one half of all pregnancies. The mild symptoms being taken in many instances as almost diagnostic of pregnancy, which generally disappear by the end of the first trimester, are frequently referred to as “morning sickness” (cf. 135).
adventure for him. Sylvia spontaneously asks the doctor if she (the doctor) could do an abortion if she (Sylvia) decided to have one. Margaret nods, telling her that an abortion is a simple procedure at this stage. For Sylvia, there is no way to tell her parents about the pregnancy, and for the first time in her life she has to struggle with being really helpless with no shoulder to lean on (cf. Grabher 2002: 133).

Soon after having consulted the gynecologist and having been told that she is pregnant, she has to play *Opus 111* for Toft in a lesson. Of course, she is unable to focus on the sonata, as she ponders over and over on whether she should have an abortion or not, constantly thinking about how much she has to suffer, all alone, without any support by David or by her family. Toft tries to explain to her how she should play the sonata by applying a theoretical approach, but she is unable to listen to him. However, having nothing in mind but the word “abortion,” this thought has an impact on her performance. In fact, she suddenly realizes how astonishingly well she manages to perform *Piano Sonata 32* without consciously thinking about the piece:

Abortion. Is this truly what she will do? She begins to play without thought, her hands in charge of the music. Beethoven fills the studio. Inside, she is shaking. Abortion, abortion. [...] She plays and plays, and Toft stands somewhere off to the side, like Napoleon, with his hand in his shirt. She cannot remember a thing he said about the allegro, not a thing he punctuated with his stabbing finger. But the music is coming from somewhere anyway – all the hours of practice, she thinks. [...] She feels the music swelling and listens, suddenly amazed. What is happening without her? What are her fingers and Beethoven doing on their own? This phrase, always her nemesis, and this one here … she glides through them, as close to perfection as she ever hoped to get. And not only this, but it is suddenly achingly beautiful, the movement she has always thought so ugly.

So this is being a musician, she thinks; this is it. Playing the best you’ve ever played when everything is falling to pieces around you. Her heart rises; she is light and empty and filled with a surging power. What a thing to know – you can live through almost anything this way.

By the time she gets to the epilogue of the arietta, she is transported; she has never in her life played like this; she listens in happy shock to the last chords leaving the air. And when behind her Toft says grudgingly, “Not quite as bad this time,” she laughs out loud. I know, she wants to yelp. Isn’t it wonderful? (DS 266)
Thus, as soon as Sylvia herself suffers under the circumstances of the way her life has developed, and struggles with her own fate, she is in the right mood for giving a great performance of the sonata, as she subconsciously manages to find the appropriate way of playing it convincingly. At the beginning of the novel, she was not capable of understanding how the composer felt while being portrayed by Waldmüller, for instance, as he had – as previously quoted – “other things in mind than sitting still for a painter” (DS 22). Now, when “everything is falling to pieces around [her]” (DS 266), Sylvia realizes consciously that she is about to share the same fate with Beethoven, as she herself has “other businesses” in mind – respectively her own worries and reflections about life and death when thinking about an abortion. Therefore, she gets a deeper understanding of the emotions Beethoven put in his final sonata. Opus 111 has now become as authentic and as familiar – and even beautiful – to her as Chopin has always been throughout her life. The fact that Sylvia has the feeling of being all alone and having to deal with her troubles exclusively on her own is something she shares with Beethoven: In his final living years, the composer wrote, for instance, a letter to one of his oldest friends, Stephan von Breuning, in which he stated: “Hence I am living – alone – alone! alone” (Swafford 589). Sylvia has learned how to perform the sonata due to her life experience and through suffering and grief. Sylvia has now finally arrived entirely in the stage of conscious competence (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.).

2.5.5.4 A New Feeling of Self Confidence, Independence and Strength

Sylvia becomes much more self-confident in the course of Book Four, learning how to handle her grief and how to stand strong, which is described in a passage about the protagonist’s first encounter with David after having spent a night together. Soon before meeting him on the campus, she realizes that it is actually not directly the baby that has made her worry so much, but David and his behavior, respectively his manner of treating her and the way he has haunted her and messed up her life (cf. DS 280). She realizes: “I’m not even
the same person; he’s killed the best part of me, the part that could love people without being afraid” (DS 280). Generally speaking, losing confidence and the ability to love people without being afraid (or skeptical) is not only a negative development. Of course, being confronted with persons with a “bad” character can be a shock for a young person who grew up in a warmhearted surrounding full of innocence, but one can also state that Sylvia – at this stage – is not a naïve young girl any more, but a young woman who has learned how to think critically\(^{18}\), without trusting anybody – which is an important lesson in every grown-up person’s life. When David approaches Sylvia, trying to have small talk, she acts in a cold, distanced and refusing way, even daring to say, “I think I hate you, David” (DS 282). When David leaves, the protagonist only thinks that he will never know anything about the baby, as she concludes that it is not his baby, but hers, stating, “whatever I do, I do on my own” (DS 283). Thus, Sylvia decides to get the baby and to take care of it on her own. She has learned to make independent decisions and to act as an individual – and therefore acts according to American Transcendentalist principles again: The protagonist has finally realized that she has to do things her own way, without needing the support of others. In addition to this, Sylvia experiences the feeling of anger for the first time in her life when pondering about David’s behavior and his attitude towards her, asking herself, “How can somebody be like that? How can someone touch you all over in tenderness and then throw you away as though you never existed? This is the worst, she thinks – the absolute worst” (DS 290). Hence, her emotions due to lovesickness have now changed from sadness and grief to hate, probably leading to the sort of strength and confidence required in order to play \textit{Opus 111} in an authentic way. Sylvia, at this stage, does not only hate David, but also Toft, her father and Tee, the alley man, who has been following the protagonist since his friend \footnote{18 As previously outlined, Young-Eisendrath states that the transformation from teenager to adult also changes our way of thinking (cf. 141). Sylvia has finally arrived in this stage.}
Bellyman’s death with the aim of taking care of her, and she asks herself what is happening to her (cf. DS 291).

Soon later, Sylvia plays some Chopin Nocturnes, “an exercise that usually calms her, but not tonight” (DS 291). This phrase transmits a symbolic meaning: At least for the moment, Chopin’s music does not correspond at all to her current emotional state, as – for the moment – playing Chopin does not seem “natural” to her.

2.5.6 Sylvia in Book Five: A Brilliant Performance of Opus 111

Book Five – the shortest Book of Daughters of Song – only consists of a description of the day the recital takes place. Immediately before her performance of Piano Concerto No 32, Sylvia becomes consciously aware of what has been bothering her throughout her struggle with the sonata.

2.5.6.1 The Protagonist’s Realization Prior to the Recital

Before going on the stage, the protagonist finds the note she has been thinking about in the course of the last few weeks. It refers to a letter Beethoven wrote to one of his patrons, Hungarian countess Anna Marie Erdödy, a celebrated beauty who used to give the composer a patient and sympathetic ear and who he referred to as his Beichtvater (his father confessor) (cf. Swafford 478). When reading her note, a quote from the letter in which the composer mentions Opus 111 as his hymn to wisdom gained through sorrow (cf. DS 336), Sylvia realizes consciously what she has been lacking throughout her struggle with the sonata:

Man cannot avoid suffering; and in this respect his strength must stand the test … he must endure without complaining and feel his worthlessness and then again achieve his perfection. (DS 336)
Biography writer Jan Swafford analyzes this letter in his Beethoven biography in the following way: Beethoven had the intention to explain to countess Erdödy that endurance is the road to exaltation and that without suffering there is no struggle and without struggle there is no victory (cf. Swafford 671). In other words, Beethoven explains his personal interpretation of the benefits of suffering. Sylvia has made the same experience as Beethoven by having realized that there is no struggle without suffering, and during her performance of *Opus 111* in front of the audience, she is about to realize how true the statement that struggle can actually lead to victory actually is. The fact that Sylvia finally realizes that suffering is a necessary process for learning through living, which cannot be avoided, results in a brilliant and outstanding performance of Beethoven’s *Opus 111*. This achievement is nothing but a metaphorical victory; a victory only possible due to Sylvia’s experiences and due to the lessons she has learned because of suffering – and living. The quotation, “Only so much do I know, as I have lived” by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1837: 45) entirely applies to the protagonist’s insight immediately before her final appearance on the stage.

### 2.5.6.2 The Novel’s Climax: The Recital

Nearly all the characters one gets introduced to when one reads *Daughters of Song* are present in the audience when Sylvia performs *Opus 111*: There is, of course, Toft, and there are her parents, Colette, Peter, Jan, David with his girlfriend, and even Moon Ja Koh, who usually dreads going to students’ recital, but who has been persuaded by Toft to make an exception, as he convinced her that Sylvia’s performance will be extraordinary and outstanding (cf. Grabher 2002: 136). After performing the other pieces, which she used to enjoy playing, but which do not work out very well (e.g. “The Scarlatti sonatas are terrible – jerky, wooden, unfeeling. Sylvia is flushed with shame when they are finally over” [DS 336]), the protagonist begins performing *Opus 111*. Interestingly, for the first time in the novel, the omniscient narrator does not give the reader a detailed insight into the
protagonist’s mind during the time Sylvia is playing the sonata: Paula Huston does not dedicate a single line to Sylvia’s feelings while she is playing Opus 111. We only learn that Sylvia tries to concentrate, “but her mind keeps slipping away” (DS 341) (which reminds us as readers of the moment when she played the sonata for Toft while having the word “abortion” in mind). Then, we learn that “With a long sigh, fixing her concentration on the petals above her, she begins to play a deaf musician’s last sonata” (DS 314), before Paula Huston focusses on describing the actions and emotions of people sitting in the audience who know Sylvia personally instead: Cornelius Toft is nervously drumming his fingers (cf. Grabher 2002: 136), Moon Ja, sitting beside him, feels sort of out of place before hearing Sylvia’s brilliant version of the sonata, Katerina Haupt observes that Sylvia is moving differently at the piano, with her eyes closed – like in a trance – but realizes that the chords are “tense and powerful” and – when she is glancing at Moon Ja Koh, she sees that the famous pianist is “caught in the spell” as well (cf. DS 341f.). Moon Ja Koh’s thoughts are obviously close to what Sylvia may have in mind while playing, which is no wonder, as Moon Ja is – as previously stated – a sort of reflection of Sylvia’s character:

Here’s a wonderful passage. She drops her head and closes her eyes, listening, thinking of the man, deaf, with all the music in his head. Silent choirs, frozen symphonies, sonatas worked out in mute solitude – what kept him going? What great vision? (DS 343)

The fact that Paula Huston does not give insight into Sylvia’s mind as she is performing the sonata is, for sure, on purpose: Sylvia’s mind is slipping away, which implies that she does not think of anything while playing the sonata in front of the audience, being in a totally different universe while giving her tremendous performance, as Opus 111 has become totally “familiar” to her due to her own emotions and feelings and her experience. At the beginning of the novel the protagonist “does not think when she plays Chopin; she has never needed to […]. He is as natural to her as sleep or breath” (DS 14). After having suffered and consequently having learned her lesson through living, playing Beethoven is
finally just as “natural” to her as playing Chopin was at the beginning. At this stage, she has finally arrived in the stage of unconscious competence according to Burch’s learning model (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.).

2.5.6.3 After the Recital: A Subtle Compliment by Toft

When the recital is over, various people approach the protagonist to express their appreciation. Finally, Toft comes into the room. When he turns to the protagonist, he starts with negative criticism, telling her that her performances of the other pieces were weak and very passive (cf. DS 347f.). Sylvia is neither shocked nor embarrassed, as she is totally aware of the fact that these pieces did not work out well herself. But she experiences salvation when Toft adds: “Opus 111, […] Yes. You have learned something this year, have you not?” (DS 349). Although these words are not overwhelmingly “nice,” this is the first time Toft pays Sylvia a compliment. Subsequently, for the first time in her life, Sylvia does not fear her teacher, suddenly realizing how small he looks beside Katerina Haupt (cf. DS 349), “a wizened little man who has to draw in his chin to stand up straight” (DS 349). The protagonist finally sees Cornelius Toft as a human being and not as an authoritative “superman” anymore. Subsequently, without thinking, she kisses Toft on the cheek and simply says “thank you.” Although she states that she does not really know why she kissed him on the cheek, it felt “like the right thing to do” (cf. DS 349).

I would like to remark that Tee, the alley man, leaves Baltimore in a bus soon after Sylvia’s recital, heading for Chicago. This little detail has symbolic significance: Sylvia, now a grown-up and mature young woman, has managed the difficult task that has made her struggle throughout the novel’s plot. Hence, she does not need any kind of protection, supervision or care anymore.
In general, Sylvia has profited from the benefits of learning through living and suffering in the course of the plot into the full extent. After having reached her aim, she seems mature and – most importantly – more self-confident, satisfied and optimistic.
Conclusion

Fictional character Sylvia is an example of a human being who becomes aware of the importance of life experience and of the benefits of suffering for individual learning processes. Her learning process is illustrated on several levels (cf. Grabher 2002: 128): In the course of the novel’s plot, the protagonist does not only learn how to perform Beethoven’s *Opus 111* authentically (which can be regarded as a symbol on the surface), but also learns how to cope with challenging situations on her own by learning through living and suffering, which leads to the fact that she achieves maturity in the end.

At the beginning of the novel, Sylvia is an inexperienced young woman, incapable of understanding the sonata in question and the emotions required in order to perform it in an authentic way, and she lacks the knowledge that is required to perform *Opus 111*, as she totally lacks life experience and never had to endure suffering prior to the various occurrences presented in the novel. The young piano student’s character changes step by step and her transformation is obvious: We accompany the protagonist on her journey from an innocent girl to a young, independent and – most importantly – self-reliant woman, as the omniscient narrator gives us constant insight into her mind in various stages, describing Sylvia’s way from a world full of innocence to the challenging world of adulthood.

In the first chapters, Sylvia is presented as a shy and immature human being, acting in a totally helpless way when trying to play *Piano Sonata 32* suitably, as she is still in the stage of conscious incompetence according to Burch’s model (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.). At this stage, she is unable to detect what the composer had in mind and does not have the experience – respectively the empathy – required in order to play the sonata.

The chain of formative events changing Sylvia’s mind begins when she and Marushka become victims of a robbery. From this moment onwards, her process of becoming mature and independent begins step by step: Her mind develops when being...
confronted with death for the first time and when subsequently experiencing her first sexual intercourse. Afterwards, her process of learning through suffering is accelerated: She experiences how it feels to suffer from lovesickness, and she furthermore has to cope with the fact of being pregnant from an egocentric, superficial and vicious young man on her own.

However, all these negative and traumatizing occurrences strengthen her character and make her enter the stage of conscious competence (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19f.), finally leading to success concerning her challenge. Generally speaking, the more she suffers, the more she understands the sonata. In other words, the worse her life becomes, the better her performance of *Opus 111* gets. In a metaphorical way, Paula Huston – without explicitly expressing it – outlines that suffering (and life experience) is required in order to learn how to manage a difficult task, how to cope with adulthood in general and to arrive in the stage of unconscious competence (cf. Dyckhoff et al. 19). When excelling at the recital, Sylvia becomes consciously aware of the “fruits of sorrow”\(^{19}\): The protagonist profits from the benefits of suffering (insight, compassion and renewal [cf. Young-Eisendrath 2]). At this stage the protagonist also finds an answer to the question she asked herself at the beginning of the novel, whether it was a lack of knowledge, of feeling or attention (cf. DS 23) that caused her incapability to perform *Opus 111*, by realizing that her failure was caused by lacking the combination of all three components. In order to comprehend the role of “knowledge” in this context, the meaning of this term in the context of American Transcendentalism should be pointed out. As literary critic Tony Tanner explains:

> There is knowing and knowing. The knowledge which is a mere accumulation of data will tend to support the *tabula rasa* theories of the psychological sensationalists and make man the sport of matter. But the knowledge which seems to deliver itself as unharassed intuition, which seems to be the result of a generous impressionability and an out-reaching sense of spiritual qualities shared by perceiver and perceived, this knowledge will justify the Transcendentalists in their assertions. (Tanner qtd. in Grabher 2004: 55)

\(^{19}\) which is the title of a book by Elizabeth V. Spelman
In addition, as Emerson puts it, “Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary” (1837: 50). Through living – and suffering – Sylvia achieves the sense of self-reliance that characterizes an adult human being (cf. Grabher 2002: 128). The statement, “Only so much do I know as I have lived” (Emerson 1837: 48) totally applies to her recognition before the novel’s climax, as she realizes that there is no better dictionary than life (which is, of course, another statement based on Emerson’s philosophy [49]).

In fact, Sylvia realizes that the combination of all circumstances and of everything she has learned – mainly through suffering and living – have contributed to her success; respectively to her victory. In addition, Toft’s mainly theoretical contributions and his influence on her have played a certain role for her personal development as well – at least to a certain extent. The protagonist’s main teacher is life, with all the challenges that go along with it and her struggle during her process of suffering. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s philosophical approach to learning (her piano teacher’s credo) versus Ralph Waldo Emerson’s American Transcendentalist point of view and the awareness that only the combination of both approaches – respectively the “whole” – are the crucial factors for her personal development and for the fact that she excels at the recital, in spite of the fact that a perfect interpretation of the sonata is usually not possible due to its paradoxes, as the two movements are strikingly contradicting (cf. Kaiser 1968: 78). At least during the rehearsal, when performing the sonata, Sylvia dissolves the sonata’s paradoxes in the Absolute (cf. Grabher 2002: 138). Thus, Sylvia’s life experience, combined with the “discipline” her piano teacher has tried to impose on her and her individual suffering process, make up the “whole,” leading – in combination with the protagonist’s reflections on life, death and music – to her success.
Part III: How to Deal with Paula Huston’s *Daughters of Song* in an ESL class

3.1 Preliminary Remarks

I would like to remark beforehand that there are various arguments pro dealing with *Daughters of Song* in an Austrian secondary school class: Firstly, the novel’s plot contains the typical struggles teenagers have to face, such as the first love, the first subsequent lovesickness, teenage pregnancy or becoming independent from one’s parents. Thus, the novel may raise the students’ interest, as they may be facing the same kinds of troubles. Jennifer Hill states that literary texts should be appropriate to the age, interests and goals of the students (cf. 15), which are factors that basically apply to the novel in question. Secondly, as the novel’s style and the vocabulary range applied by the author are not complex, it can be read on a B2 level according to the CEFR\(^{20}\), which is the level required for the Austrian standardized *Matura*\(^{21}\) in English.

From a more general point of view, Ronald Carter and Michael N. Long outline that there are three learning objectives when one works with fictional literature in ESL classes: the cultural model (which means that literary texts enable students to understand cultures and ideologies differing from their own in time and space), the language model (meaning that students get in touch with creative uses of the language) and the personal growth model (as – according to Carter and Long – literature helps students to grow as individuals as well as in their relationships with the people around them) (cf. Carter et al. 2f.). When dealing with *Daughters of Song*, all of these three objectives are covered: Apart from the language model, which is, of course, covered, students will get a deeper understanding for the American mind and for the attitude of celebrating the individual self from a cultural point of

\(^{20}\) the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; the Council of Europe’s scheme to set comparable international language standards in order to recognize and describe the achievements and qualifications of language learners at different levels (cf. Scrivener 398)

\(^{21}\) the high school graduation exam in Austria
view. In addition, the background information on various composers and philosophers transmitted by the novel will widen the students’ cultural horizon as well. Furthermore, the themes covered in the novel, related to the benefits of life experience and suffering, will indeed make the students grow as individuals as well as in their relationships with the people around them, due to acquiring skills such as empathy, for instance.

However, I would like to remark that due to the fact that classical music and its symbolic role are omnipresent throughout the novel, students who are not particularly interested in classical music may not enjoy reading the novel. Ray Williams, in his essay “Top Ten Principles for Teaching Reading,” for instance, states: “in the absence of interesting texts, very little is possible” (42), and in general, interest should be – needless to outline – a key criterion in selecting texts for learners (cf. Hedge 206). Hence, the following lesson plans are designed – respectively recommended – for secondary schools with a focus on musical education (for instance for so-called Musik-Oberstufengymnasien; secondary schools with a main emphasis on music), as one can assume that students attending such a school are usually not only passionate about music, but also have profound knowledge of classical music and its composers.

It should also not remain unmentioned that one has to consider that dealing with suffering is, in general, a sensitive issue, as students may have experienced suffering themselves. Therefore, one has to introduce this topic in a careful way. On the other hand, the message transmitted in the novel may help students to get a more optimistic attitude to negative experiences when they have to deal with a traumatic situation on their own, as it may raise their awareness of the positive long-term effects of hard times of struggling and grief.

In the following section I will present seven lesson plans (including all four skills: reading, listening, speaking, writing, in the most balanced way possible) dedicated to Paula
Huston’s debut novel. Students will not only become familiar with the novel’s content and with the subject of learning through living and suffering, but they will also have the opportunity to improve their language skills, respectively to practice a wide range of test formats applied to the standardized Matura, as I have designed some texts modified to content-integrated exercises according to the required standards and test formats for the Matura (Appendices). The Austrian National Curriculum for English recommends that grammar and lexis exercises should be content-integrated (cf. srdp.at). Thus, in these activities, content as well as useful practice for the Matura are combined.

3.2 First Lesson

3.2.1 The Lesson Plan: Getting Familiar with Sylvia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>- The students become actively aware of how having to fulfil an apparently unfulfillable task feels and will therefore be able to understand what is going on in the protagonist’s mind (=&gt; empathy). - widening of the students’ range of vocabulary (adjectives)</td>
<td>Pre-reading activity: The students are asked to think of any challenging task they had to fulfil at some point in their lives (e.g. giving a presentation in front of a class which they were nervous about, taking part in a competition, etc.). They are asked to get together in groups of two and share their experience – and the coping strategies they developed – with their partner.</td>
<td>speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>same aims</td>
<td>The students’ experiences are shared in plenary.</td>
<td>speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>stepping from a personal, individual level concerning the students’ personal experiences to a more general level in order to become aware of the fact how challenging teenage and adolescent life can be</td>
<td>Brainstorming activity: The students are asked to name problems teenagers and young adolescents frequently have to cope with in general and are invited to share their thoughts with the whole class. The teacher collects these ideas on a mind map on the blackboard.</td>
<td>speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students become familiar with the protagonist’s mind and personality at the beginning of the novel. The copies of Daughters of Song are handed out to all students. The students read Chapter One silently.

The teacher asks the question what we as readers learn about Sylvia in the first chapter. The answers the students come up with are shared in plenary.

Announcement of the homework: The students are asked to read Book One.

### 3.2.2 Explanatory Comments

The first lesson starts with pre-reading activities (before the copies of the novel are handed out to the students) in order to introduce the topic, as in general, prior knowledge activation requires pre-reading activities (cf. Haque 3), and as pre-reading activities are an important tool for readers’ better comprehension of a literary text. According to Immanuel Kant, new information, concepts or ideas can have meaning when an individual can relate the new information to something he/she already knows (cf. 7).

When doing the subsequent brainstorming activity, the students become aware of the relevance of the novel’s contents for them. Robin Roberson defines “relevance” as “the perception that something is interesting and worth knowing” (cf. n.p.). When the students think of typical problems they have to cope with, they will relate to Sylvia. Furthermore, Gerlese S. Akerlind states that teachers can raise students’ interests by involving students in active learning activities and by using real-world examples which are relevant for the students (cf. 368).
### 3.3 Second Lesson

#### 3.3.1 The Lesson Plan: Ludwig van Beethoven’s Emotional State and Cornelius Toft’s Way of Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>- checking whether the students have done their homework or not. - revising the contents of Book One.</td>
<td>The students are asked to summarize the content of Book One in plenary (each student is invited to say one sentence about the plot in chronological order).</td>
<td></td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>gaining a deeper understanding for the music mentioned in the novel and for Sylvia’s attitude towards it.</td>
<td>listening to Chopin’s <em>Raindrop Prelude</em> and the beginning of the first movement of Beethoven’s <em>Opus 111</em>. The students are asked to write down adjectives that come to their mind while listening, characterizing the different pieces’ musical style.</td>
<td>CD recording of both pieces</td>
<td>writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>- same aims - widening the students’ range of vocabulary (adjectives)</td>
<td>The students are asked to share their impressions – respectively their adjectives – with their partner before sharing them in plenary. The teacher writes down the adjectives the students come up with on the blackboard.</td>
<td></td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>widening the students’ range of vocabulary (adjectives)</td>
<td>Ferdinand Waldmüller’s portrait is projected on the canvas via an overhead projector or a beamer in order to show it to the students. The students are invited to comment on the composer’s facial expression and to interpret his appearance on the portrait in general.</td>
<td>- Appendix 1 - overhead projector or beamer</td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 min.</td>
<td>- getting familiar with Beethoven’s emotions in his final living years - practicing the test format <em>Word Formation</em></td>
<td>The students are given a text about Beethoven’s emotional state in his final living years. The text is adapted to a <em>Word Formation</em> exercise. Students are asked to do this exercise, which will be subsequently corrected with the teacher.</td>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 min.</td>
<td>analyzing Toft’s character traits and finding out why Sylvia fears his authoritative style that much</td>
<td>The students are asked to get together in groups of three or four with the task of skimming and scanning Book One with the aim of finding (and marking) passages in which one learns something about the piano teacher and Sylvia’s attitude towards him.</td>
<td></td>
<td>reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 min.</td>
<td>Announcement of the homework: The students are asked to read Book Two.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.2 Explanatory Comments

I think it is essential to be familiar with the characteristics of Chopin’s oeuvre in general and with Beethoven’s *Opus 111* when one analyzes the novel. When one reads *Daughters of Song* it is only natural to have the desire to listen to a recording of *Opus 111* if one is not familiar with it. Therefore, I included the second activity in the lesson plan, in which the teacher plays a recording of the sonata as well as of Chopin’s *Raindrop Prelude* to the students. The students’ task is to listen to the recordings and to write down adjectives characterizing both pieces’ musical styles (which are totally different) that come to their mind while they are listening. In addition, I recommend letting the students hypothesize what the composers may have had in mind when composing these pieces (without telling them the title *Raindrop Prelude* in advance). Jim Scrivener refers to such an activity as “music for ‘imagining’” (177), which means that “students close their eyes and visualize images from their own imagination” (177). Afterwards, the students are asked to share their impressions – respectively their adjectives – with their partner (briefly) before they are shared in plenary.

In addition, taking a look at the Beethoven portrait by Ferdinand Waldmüller mentioned in Book One may be interesting and revealing too in order to understand Sylvia’s lack of understanding its expression as well as for deciphering how the composer may have felt when being portrayed. Claude Howard states that pictures give a sense impression of the literary sensation to the eye, as psychological experiments have proved that impressions received through the eye are for most persons – especially for pupils, for whom the visual images are the most permanent – far stronger than impressions received through any other sense avenue, and that oral and verbal impressions should be deepened and strengthened by using pictures whenever possible when one teaches literature (cf. 540). Therefore, as one can read in the lesson plan, the portrait in question (Appendix 1) should be projected on the canvas in the classroom via a beamer in order to show it to the students. The students are
invited to comment on the composer’s facial expression. In this activity, they are asked the same question the protagonist raises to herself while looking at it in the library (namely what was going on in the composer’s mind while being portrayed) (cf. DS 21f.). As some background information on Beethoven is required, a short text (Appendix 2) about the composer’s emotional state during this period will be handed out afterwards. The text, which is a modified extract from this thesis, is adapted to a so-called Word Formation exercise, which is one of the test formats applied at the standardized Matura (cf. srdp.at) in the so-called Language in Use section. I would like to remark that although the use of modified texts is criticized from a didactic point of view by various scholars (due to the lack of authenticity), there are arguments why adapting texts is required in order to achieve certain didactic goals. H.G. Widdowson, for instance, outlines that “pedagogic presentation of language […] necessarily involves methodological contrivance which isolates features from their natural surroundings” (218).

After this activity, students are asked to get together in groups of three or four (see lesson plan), with the task of scanning Book One with the aim of finding (and marking) passages in which we learn something about Cornelius Toft and Sylvia’s attitude towards him. Eddie Williams defines scanning as going through a text very quickly in order to find a particular point of information (cf. 100). Due to the fact that the students have already read Book One, this activity should not be too time-consuming. As stated in the lesson plan, the aim is to analyze Toft’s character traits and to find out why Sylvia fears his authoritative style that much. In general, the consideration of characters of a novel as “real” people helps students to reach a deeper understanding of the motives of the characters, and in addition, students learn, for instance, to analyze subtle nuances of speech that may reveal certain character traits about the persons in question (cf. Hill 75).
### 3.4 Third Lesson

#### 3.4.1 The Lesson Plan: The Role of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>improving the students’ skills concerning the analysis of fictional characters</td>
<td>The results of the activity at the end of the previous lesson are presented.</td>
<td></td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10 min.        | - gaining relevant background knowledge for the topic  
- practicing another content-integrated test format for the graduation exam | The teacher hands out a text (Appendix 3) about German Idealism and Hegel, modified to a Banked Gap Filling exercise.  
The students are asked to read the text and do the exercise. | Appendix 3 | reading |
| 10 min.        | gaining relevant background knowledge | The results are checked together with the teacher.  
The teacher gives some background information on Hegel in general | | listening |
| 10 min.        | - giving the students relevant background knowledge for the topic  
- practicing another content-integrated test format for their graduation exam. | Another text (Appendix 4) is given to the students, dealing with Hegel’s teaching principles (Hegel’s role as a teacher), adapted to a True/False exercise.  
Students read the text and do the exercise. | Appendix 4 | reading |
| 5 min.         | The aim is, again, to learn what kind of person Sylvia is at the beginning of the novel, as the fact that she fears the alley men indicates how shy and naive the protagonist is at this stage. | The students are asked to open their copies of the novel on page 56 in order to re-read the passage about Sylvia’s first encounter with the alley men.  
They are invited to get together in groups of two and to discuss Sylvia’s attitude towards these two men briefly. | | reading, speaking |
| 5 min.         | same aims | The groups’ conclusions are shared in plenary. | | speaking |

#### 3.4.2 Explanatory Comments

As one can read in the lesson plan, the students present the results of the activity at the end of the previous lesson at the beginning of this lesson. Thus, each group reads out one
specific, essential passage which the group members consider essential when one intends to
learn about Cornelius Toft’ character. Together with the teacher, the class subsequently
summarizes which kind of person Toft is, with the aim of improving the students’ skills
concerning the analysis of fictional characters. When doing this activity, the students will
for sure mention the question Toft raises on page 36, “Are you familiar with Hegel?” (DS
36), which creates the link to the subsequent activity, in which teacher asks the students
whether they are familiar with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (or not) before he/she hands
out a text (Appendix 3) on German Idealism, modified to a so-called Banked Gap Filling
exercise (cf. srdp.at): Some words in the text are missing, which are to be found isolated and
jumbled above the text. The students’ task is to fill in the correct words from the box. I would
like to make the remark that understanding the basic principles of Hegel’s philosophy is for
sure challenging for teenagers. This is why the content of this activity remains on a
superficial level so that the content can be understood by the students. In addition, some
background information – respectively some input given by the teacher – will be required
afterwards. If the teacher does not have the required knowledge about Hegel’s approach, I
recommend the book G.W.F. Hegel. Eine Einführung by Dina Emundts and Rolf-Peter
Horstmann.22

3.5 Fourth Lesson

3.5.1 The Lesson Plan: A Chain of Formative Events for Sylvia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>revision of the contents of Book Two</td>
<td>The teacher asks the students which mind-changing events occur in Book Two. The students’ answers are written on the blackboard.</td>
<td>speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 Dina Emundts and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, G.W.F. Hegel. Eine Einführung (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002)
| 10 min. | The results the students come up with are crucial when one deals with the protagonist’s learning process through living. | The students are asked to get together in groups of four, trying to find out what the consequences of these events are (by skimming and scanning various passages of the novel). | reading |
| 15 min. | same aims | A discussion on these specific extracts of the novel follows in plenary. The passage on pages 121f. (beginning with “She sits down at the piano, …”) should be read out and analyzed in detail. | speaking |
| 5 min. | improving the students’ interpreting skills | The teacher asks the students how one can interpret Sylvia’s recognition that the second movement does not work out because she has always rejected the first one. The students’ task is to interpret this passage’s content. | speaking |
| 10 min. | - practicing the test format required for the standardized Matura - getting familiar with the approach of interpreting this extract outlined on the handout. | The teacher hands out a text dealing with one possible interpretation of this extract (Appendix 5), modified to another Word Formation exercise. The students are asked to do the exercise and to state their opinion on this way of interpreting the passage in plenary. Appendix 5 | reading |
| 4 min. | The students have the opportunity to predict how the plot goes on in a creative way. | Foreshadowing activity: The teacher asks the students how they think the novel’s plot continues. | speaking |
| 1 min. | Announcement of the homework: The students are asked to read Book Three. | | reading |

### 3.5.2 Explanatory Comments

In this lesson, certain extracts of the novel, which deal with events that change Sylvia’s mind, are discussed in plenary. When the impact of these occurrences on Sylvia’s attitude towards the sonata is being discussed, the passage beginning with “She sits down at the piano” on page 121, ending with the words “concentrating with all her intellect” on page 122, which is as well analyzed in this thesis\(^{23}\), should be analyzed in detail (as stated in the

\(^{23}\) in Chapter 2.5.3.2
Of course, it may be interesting how the students interpret this passage, and if they have creative ideas concerning the meaning of Sylvia’s (metaphorical) thoughts.

The last five minutes of the lesson are reserved for a foreshadowing activity (see lesson plan). The students have the opportunity to predict how the plot goes on in a creative way. In the NACCCE\textsuperscript{24} report \textit{All our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education}, for instance, the importance of teaching for creativity, which takes place when forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people’s own creative thinking and behavior are introduced (qtd. in Saebo et al. 210), is highlighted. Thus, I included this activity in order to encourage the students to think creatively.

3.6 Fifth Lesson

3.6.1 The Lesson Plan: American Transcendentalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>improving the students’ skills of interpreting literary passages</td>
<td>Students are asked to open their copies of the novel on page 149. They are asked how one can interpret the quotation by Aeschylus.</td>
<td></td>
<td>speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min.</td>
<td>introducing American Transcendentalism</td>
<td>The teacher shows a scene from \textit{Dead Poets Society} (DVD: 52min49sec – 42min41sec) to the class, in which the protagonist tries to impose American Transcendentalist principles on his students.</td>
<td>DVD of \textit{Dead Poets Society} (Touchstone Pictures)</td>
<td>listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>- practicing relevant test formats - gaining background knowledge on the philosophical movement of American Transcendentalism.</td>
<td>The teacher hands out Text 1 and Text 2 from Appendix 6. The students are asked to read the texts and to fill in the gaps.</td>
<td>Texts 1 and 2 of Appendix 6</td>
<td>reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>same aims</td>
<td>The exercises are checked in plenary, and the teacher subsequently comments on their contents by outlining the basic principles of American Transcendentalism and by</td>
<td></td>
<td>listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{24} National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education
19 min. | practicing relevant test formats  
- getting familiar with the contents of “The American Scholar” and “Self-Reliance” | The teacher hands out Text 3 and Text 4 of Appendix 6.  
Students are asked to get together in groups of two. Student “A” gets a copy of Text 3, Student “B” gets a copy of Text 4. The students do the reading comprehension exercise of “their” text alone. Afterwards, student “A” informs student “B” about the contents of Text 3, and vice versa.  
Afterwards, the results are checked in plenary. | Texts 3 and 4 of Appendix 6 | reading, speaking

1 min. | Announcement of the homework: Students are asked to read Book Four. | | reading

3.6.2 Explanatory Comments

In this lesson, the teacher introduces the basic principles of American Transcendentalism by showing a specific scene of the 1989 movie *Dead Poets Society*. From a general point of view, one of the main arguments pro using video clips in an ESL class is that students watch while listening, and by doing so, they get to see language in use, which allows them to see a range of paralinguistic behavior, such as intonation matching facial expression or which gestures accompany certain phrases (cf. Harmer 308). The scene in question shows the protagonist, John Keating (played by Robbin Williams), meeting his class in the school’s courtyard, asking four students to walk around the courtyard together. After they subconsciously start walking in step, and the other boys start clapping in the marching boys’ pace, Keating explains that this experiment demonstrates how difficult it is to listen to our own voice or maintain our own beliefs when other people are present (cf. Kleinbaum 87).

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25 *Dead Poets Society*, DVD (Burbank: Touchstone Pictures, 2002), from 52:49 minutes to 42:41 minutes
After the students have watched the scene, the teacher hands out Text 1 and Text 2 from Appendix 6. These texts deal with the origins and basic principles of American Transcendentalism, respectively with Ralph Waldo Emerson’s conviction, and they are adapted to Gap Filling exercises. In order to comprehend Ralph Waldo Emerson’s conviction, a closer look at two of his most essential texts, “The American Scholar” and “Self-Reliance,” follows. Their contents as well as some background information have been summarized and adapted to reading comprehension exercises with the so-called Short Answer test format being applied (Appendix 6, Texts 3 and 4). Text 3 deals with “The American Scholar,” while Text 4 deals with “Self-Reliance.” I would like to remark that even though the texts’ contents may be challenging for students, they learn that understanding every single word is not required in order to understand the core message transmitted by a text, and that a word-by-word approach should not be applied when one deals with a text in a foreign language (cf. Scrivener 184).

### 3.7 Sixth Lesson

#### 3.7.1 The Lesson Plan: Learning through Suffering and its Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5 min.         | - improving the students’ listening skills  
- introducing the topic (the contents of Book Four) | The teacher plays the song “I will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor to the class after having handed out a sheet with the lyrics (Appendix 7) with gaps to be filled in while the students are listening.  
The students’ task is to find out to which occurrence described in Book Three the song’s lyrics has parallels. | CD recording of Gloria Gaynor’s “I will survive” (album Love Tracks, Polydor) | listening |
| 10 min.        | - revising the plot of Book Four  
- discussing the protagonist’s stony path she has to tread due to suffering. | The students are asked to get together in groups of three to discuss the contents of Book Four, with a focus on the protagonist’s learning process: More specifically, the students are asked to find passages in which a gaining of knowledge for Sylvia is obvious. | | speaking, reading |
| 4 min.         | same aims | The groups’ results are shared in plenary. | | speaking |
| 1 min.         | The students become aware of | Announcement of the homework: | | writing |
Sylvia’s inner struggles by being empathic with her due to writing the inner monologue. improving the creative writing skills

Imagine you are Sylvia (for the male students: Imagine you are a young male piano student who has just been left by his girlfriend and who suffers from lovesickness). Write an inner monologue in which you describe your fears concerning the recital, as due to the fact that you have so many other troubles at the moment you have no idea how your way of performing Piano Sonata 32 could improve.

| 10 min. | - revising the plot of Book Four - discussing the protagonist’s stony path she has to tread due to suffering. | Together with the teacher, three specific passages of the novel are analyzed in detail (see explanatory comments). | reading, speaking |
| 10 min. | - practicing another test format - gaining background knowledge on the positive aspects of suffering processes | The teacher hands out Appendix 8, which is a text about the benefits of suffering, adapted to a Multiple Matching exercise, which is another test format required at the standardized Matura. The students are asked to read the text and do the matching task. | Appendix 8 reading |
| 9 min. | same aims | The exercise is checked in plenary. A discussion on the benefits of suffering together with the teacher follows. | speaking |
| 1 min. | Announcement of the homework: The students are asked to read Book Five. | | reading |

### 3.7.2 Explanatory Comments

This lesson starts with a listening activity: The song “I Will Survive” by Gloria Gaynor is played to the class. The students get a sheet with the lyrics with gaps to be filled in while they are listening (Jim Scrivener refers to gap-filling activities as the “classic” way of introducing songs in class [cf. 339]). In this song, the singer – respectively the lyrical I – tells her former partner that she will “survive” without him, as she has learned to be strong and independent and that she can perfectly live on her own without his presence. The students’ task is to find out which occurrence described in Book Three the song’s lyrics has parallels to. Obviously, it is Sylvia’s way of dealing with David during their encounter,

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letting him know in a very direct and self-confident way that she does not need his presence in order to live her life happily (cf. DS 283).

As stated in the lesson plan, the aim of the homework (see lesson plan) is that students become aware of Sylvia’s inner struggles and are empathic with her when writing about her emotions. One can assume that female students will focus on Sylvia’s pregnancy and on the fact that she does not know whether she should have an abortion or not. Male students will presumably lack empathy for such a situation, and it would not be authentic if male students wrote an inner monologue dealing with pregnancy and abortion. This is why I created a slightly different task for the male students. Thus, male students do not have to write about emotions related to pregnancy and abortion. Clarence Ray Bussinger states that producing texts coming from the students’ inner feelings and ideas gives the students self-confidence, allowing them to mature as writers. When producing creative texts, students explore personal reflection and creative endeavor (cf. 1).

The three specific passages which are analyzed later in this lesson are: a) Sylvia’s encounter with Moon Ja Koh at an odd hour at the conservatory (cf. DS 251), in which the protagonist realizes that she has become an empathic person, b) The impact of her pregnancy and her thoughts about abortion when she is playing Opus 111 for Toft (cf. DS 266), in which she becomes aware of the fact that as soon as she experiences suffering and grief on her own, her way of performing the sonata improves, and c) The previously outlined passage in which the protagonist encounters David, telling him that she hates him (DS 283), in which the protagonist realizes how strong and independent she has become – at least to a certain extent.
3.8 Seventh Lesson

3.8.1 The Lesson Plan: The Lesson(s) Sylvia has learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (approx.)</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Required material</th>
<th>Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5 min.         | - being empathic with the protagonist  
                 - The students can learn from listening to peers reading out a well-written text. | Two student volunteers read out their homework (the inner monologue). |  | listening |
| 5 min.         | improving the students’ skills of interpreting literary texts | The teacher writes the following questions on the blackboard:  
1. How does Paula Huston – respectively the omniscient narrator – describe Sylvia’s performance (from a stylistic point of view)? What might be the author’s intention for choosing this style of narration?  
2. Would you consider Cornelius Toft’s reaction to Sylvia’s performance as a compliment? Why/Why not?  
3. Which wise lesson(s) has Sylvia learned? | Appendix 9 | reading, speaking |
| 10 min.        | | The questions are discussed in plenary. |  | speaking |
| 5 min.         | a revision of Sylvia’s chronological process of learning through living and suffering. | General revision:  
Students form groups of three. Each group gets 14 copied extracts from the novel (Appendix 9) cut out and stuck on 14 shuffled cards.  
The students are asked to put the cards in chronological order. | Appendix 9 | reading |
| 5 min.         | same aims | The chronological order is checked in plenary.  
The teacher asks the students after each passage what the effect of the described situation or incident on Sylvia’s mind is – or was. |  | speaking |
| 15 min.        | improving the students’ skills of interpreting literary texts | The novel’s Epilogue is read in class. Either one student reads it out, or the students read it on their own.  
The teacher asks the question whether the epilogue leaves the readers in a satisfied state or not – respectively whether one would consider the epilogue a “happy ending” or not. |  | reading, speaking |
3.8.2 Explanatory Comments

At the beginning of the final lesson on this topic, the teacher picks two student volunteers who are willing to read out the inner monologue they had written at home (as stated in the lesson plan). The aim is to get an authentic impression of Sylvia’s feelings before focusing on the contents of Book Five. In addition, good students may like to read out their written texts, and weaker students can learn from listening to peers who read out a well-written text. I would like to remark in this context that Penny Ur states that most people feel pride in their work (referring to creative texts) and want it to be read (cf. Ur 169).

As one can read in the lesson plan, the teacher writes three questions on the blackboard (the questions written in italics in the table above). The students are asked to think of answers to these questions on their own before (possible) answers are shared in plenary. Letting the students think about possible answers alone (not in groups) is done on purpose, as the students’ individual thoughts and their individual interpretations are of interest. Due to the fact that there are no real “right” or “wrong” answers to these open questions, there is – of course – room for discussion. Thus, this is a creative activity with the aim of improving the students’ skills of interpreting a literary text by reading it creatively (in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words) (cf. 1837: 47). Before the students share their answers, the teacher could remind them that they should think of Emerson’s conviction that everybody can be a “scholar” and encourage them to be self-reliant when sharing their answers (maybe students are not used to interpreting literary texts without considering secondary sources written by scholars, so this activity is an opportunity for the students, whose interpretations may be creative, to express their individual thoughts on some of the passages of Book Five).
Appendices

Appendix 1

Ferdinand Waldmüller’s Beethoven Portrait

Appendix 2

Word Formation Exercise

Fill in the gaps with a suitable word. The first item, (0), has been done as an example for you.

**BEETHOVEN’S FINAL LIVING YEARS AND OPUS 111**

*Opus 111* is Ludwig van Beethoven’s final sonata for piano. The (0) ______composition______ (COMPOSE) and its musical style is considered a (1) ______________ (REPRESENT) of Beethoven’s inner thoughts and feelings during the process of composing. During this time, the composer was (2) ______________ (STRUGGLE) with fate and facing his own death.28 Piano Sonata 32 was (3) ______________ (COMPOSE) between 1821 and 1822, while Beethoven, at the age of 52 years, was already working on his final symphony29. From 1812 onwards, the composer repeatedly (4) ______________ (SUFFER) from dehydration, anorexia and other severe illnesses. Beethoven (5) ______________ (INCREASE) his alcohol intake in order to kill the pain. Biography (6) ______________ (WRITE), such as Jan Swafford, do not neglect the fact that Ludwig van Beethoven’s drinking habits were (7) ______________ (WORRY), which subsequently led to further afflictions.30 In 1821, when already working on the piano sonata in question, he suffered from terrible pain and vomiting. In addition to this, he was suffering (8) ______________ (DESPERATE) from his (9) ______________ (DEAF).31 There were even rumors about suicide attempts during this time.32 Thus, one can conclude that Beethoven’s late life was (10) ______________ (CHARACTERIZE) by suffering, which is reflected in his final compositions.

**Key:** (1) representation, (2) struggling, (3) composed, (4) suffered, (5) increased, (6) writers, (7) worrisome, (8) desperately, (9) deafness, (10) characterized

28 cf. Hiemke 398
29 cf. Hoffmann-Erbrecht 2f.
30 cf. Swafford 608
31 cf. Kubba et al. 168
32 cf. Swafford 460
Banked Gap Filling Exercise

Fill in the correct words from the words in bold above the text. There is one word too much. The first item, (0), has been done as an example for you.

**AN INTRODUCTION TO GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL’S PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>role</th>
<th>values</th>
<th>root</th>
<th>reason</th>
<th>representative</th>
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</table>

The (0) **root** of Hegel’s philosophical approach is German Idealism\(^{33}\). Hegel is, in fact, considered the last (1) **representative** of this movement. The word “idealism” originally derives from the Greek words *idein* (= to see) and *eidos* (= image). Idealists intended to conserve traditional, occidental (2) **values** of truth, moral and religion. German Idealism, beginning with Immanuel Kant’s philosophical approach and ending with Hegel’s points of view – is based on this principle.\(^{34}\)

Hegel created the concept of “Absolute Idealism.” According to Hegel, a consistent theory of reality is a theory explaining all (3) **types** of reality systematically, based on one single principle or fact. For Hegel, parts of reality are not only solar systems, physical bodies and living creatures such as plants, animals and human beings, but also psychic (4) **phenomena**, societal organizational structures and their products, such as arts, cultural achievements – like, for instance, religions and philosophy. Explaining all these phenomena based on one single principle in a systematic way is, for Hegel, the main (5) **task** of philosophy, as only with such a theory belief can be “replaced” by knowledge. Hegel refers to this kind of knowledge as “reason.”\(^{35}\)

**Key:** (1) representative, (2) values, (3) types, (4) phenomena, (5) task

\(^{33}\) cf. Ludwig 18
\(^{34}\) cf. 18
\(^{35}\) cf. Emundts et al. 10
Reading Comprehension Exercise

HEGEL’S ROLE AS A TEACHER

At the beginning of the 19th century, Hegel was a teacher and headmaster at a Nuremberg Gymnasium. Educational issues played a significant role in the development of Hegel’s philosophy and his teaching during the time he spent in Nuremberg. In general, he used to combine an interesting mixture of traditional and progressive ideas. He discouraged dueling, fighting, smoking and political activity and one can state that he expected his students to be very disciplined, without exuberance and without engagement in anything that could deprave the mind, such as politics. In his school address of 1810, Hegel stated that for those who attended his school he expected quiet behavior, continuous attention as well as respect and obedience to the teachers. Hegel even introduced military drill into classes, arguing that this would help students to learn quickly. Commands had to be carried out on the spot without reflecting on them previously. One of the philosopher’s role models when dealing with teaching matters was Pythagoras, who demanded that pupils should keep silent for the first four years of their studies. Hegel’s students were expected to keep silent for the first four years of their studies, keeping their own thoughts quiet. Furthermore, Hegel encouraged wide reading and used to take a personal interest in his students’ reading material. The philosopher stated that the previously mentioned military drill had the effect of being the most efficient measure against the dullness and distractibility of the students’ minds. In addition to this, he thought that if students really wanted to make progress, being diligent and independent, individual study outside the framework of school was of equal importance as being present in class.36

36 cf. Tubbs 181
## Answer Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, educational issues had only little impact on Hegel’s philosophical approaches</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational issues played a ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the one hand, Hegel was a conservative teacher, but on the other hand, he was also open to new didactic methods.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>In general, he used ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political activity among students was highly appreciated by Hegel.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Hegel even introduced military ...</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>One of the philosopher’s ...</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>Furthermore, Hegel encouraged wide ...</td>
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<td>According to Hegel, studying independently was more important than attending classes.</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>In addition to this ...</td>
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## Key

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Appendix 5

Word Formation Exercise

Fill in the gaps with a suitable word. The first item, (0), has been done as an example for you.

**AN INTERPRETATION OF SYLVIA’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS *OPUS 111***

In this passage, the protagonist realizes that as long as the sonata’s first movement is *rejected* (REJECT) and neglected by her, playing the second movement as it should be (1) **_________** (PERFORM) will not be possible. For the first time, the protagonist starts to understand Cornelius Toft’s attitude and his dogma, Hegel’s philosophy, (2) **_________** (SLIGHT), and it becomes at least a little bit more obvious to Sylvia what Hegel refers to as the “absolute.” Although the two movements are highly (3) **_________** (CONTRAST), the fact that there are certain parallels between the movements both in structure and from a (4) **_________** (MELODY) point of view support this way of (5) **_________** (INTERPRET) the passage above. Both movements share some (6) **_________** (MUSIC) ideas, which implies that an (7) **_________** (INTERPRET) of the sonata only makes sense when both movements are being (8) **_________** (PLAY). In addition to this, one can argue that the two movements stand for Sylvia’s life – and for her contemporary situation, being in the middle of a journey from a girl to a woman. The first movement can be regarded as a symbol for (9) **_________** (CHILD), while the second movement might be a symbol for adulthood. At this stage, Sylvia is still an innocent adolescent who aims at becoming an adult woman, striving towards (10) **_________** (MATURE), which is not possible as long as she still acts like a young girl due to (11) **_________** (LACK) life experience. Pianist Alfred Brendel described the first movement as “stormy and (12) **_________** (PASSION),” whilst stating that the second movement was “physically very challenging.”³⁷ These (13) **_________** (ATTRIBUTE) both correspond to the concepts of childhood versus adulthood. In addition to this, Ji Hyun Kim, in her *Study of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Opus 111*, points out that C major, the mode of movement one, is the key to indicate triumph, (14) **_________** (JOYFUL) and happiness³⁸, which are attributes that can as well be used in order to describe typical (15) **_________** (EMOTIONAL) during childhood, as childhood years are usually more (16) **_________** (TROUBLE) than adolescent or adult years. Additionally, Kim argues that both movements are interlinked, as the second movement begins in the same key (C major) as the first one ends, after a (17) **_________** (CHALLENGE) coda³⁹. The mental voyage from childhood (first movement) over a period of adolescence (coda) to adulthood (second movement) is fluent as well, and both life periods are in a certain sense interlinked with each other. When (18) **_________** (REALIZE) that playing the second movement is not possible until having gone through the first movement until its very end without rejecting it, Sylvia (19) **_________** (SUBCONSCIOUS) realizes as well that without having made all the crucial experiences of adolescent life in their *whole* entity, she will not be (20) **_________** (ABILITY) to manage the challenging tasks of adult life.

Key: (1) performed, (2) slightly, (3) contrasting, (4) melodic, (5) interpreting, (6) musical, (7) interpreting, (8) played, (9) childhood, (10) maturity, (11) lacking, (12) passionate, (13) attributes, (14) joyfulness, (15) emotions, (16) untroubled, (17) challenging, (18) realizing, (19) subconsciously, (20) ability

³⁸ cf. Kim 23
³⁹ cf. 23
Open Gap Filling Exercise

Fill in the gaps with a suitable preposition. The first item, (0), has been done as an example for you.

**TEXT 1**

THE ORIGINS AND BASIC PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

American Transcendentalism, which developed in the 1830s, is a phenomenon hard to define (0) as a unified or consistent movement or theory of thinking, as it embraces political, sociological, literary, and even utopian conceptions. It was a meeting place (1) of old and new disciplines and spiritual conceptions.\(^{40}\)

The movement adopted its name as well as some basic notions – although modified to a large extent – from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Besides Kant, the philosophies of Plato, Plotin and Far Eastern ones were harbored and accommodated (3) by the American Transcendentalists.\(^{41}\)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the main exponents, exploited the etymological meaning of the word transcendental: going beyond, which comes close (4) to the meaning of Kant’s transzendent. Other German philosophers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, representatives (5) of the German Idealism movement, extended Kant’s ideas in a way that made German philosophy an important influence upon the transcendentalists.\(^{42}\)

However, it is wrong to assume that American Transcendentalism was the product of influences from outside. The Transcendentalist’s aim was definitely not to introduce German philosophy (6) in the United States, respectively “copying” it and imposing it (7) on the New World’s citizens, as they were much too independent-minded for doing so.\(^{43}\) One even has to highlight that although Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman, who were claimed as particularly representing the influence of German thought (8) in the United States, and whose spirit did by no means betray traces of German philosophy, actually had explicitly repudiated German thought. American Transcendentalism was often referred (9) to as “the Newness,” as its exponents propagated novelty in thought and innovation in behavior. American philosophy was, like the American character, an amalgam (10) of inheritance and experience, and even though the inheritance is more obvious, the experience is more interesting.\(^{44}\) Although based (11) on Kant and other philosophers’ theories, the American accent is obvious. Of course, such philosophy had to emancipate itself (12) from its Old-World rhetoric.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short stories, Herman Melville’s novel *Moby Dick*, Walt Whitman’s poetry *Leaves of Grass* and Henry David Thoreau’s novel *Walden* are among the central literary texts of this movement besides Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophical writings\(^{45}\).

**Key:** (1) of, (2) from, (3) by, (4) to, (5) of, (6) in, (7) on, (8) in, (9) to, (10) of, (11) on, (12) from, (13) in

\(^{40}\) cf. Grabher 2004: 15
\(^{41}\) cf. 15
\(^{42}\) cf. Wagenknecht 8
\(^{43}\) cf. Hochfeld qtd. in Grabher 2004: 36f.
\(^{44}\) cf. Schinz 52
\(^{45}\) cf. Klarer 67
Banked Gap Filling Exercise

Fill in the correct words from the words in bold above in the text. There is one word too much. The first item, (0), has been done as an example for you.

TEXT 2

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

poets access country novels establishment period nature literature attitude representatives authors independence inspiration engineers

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882, was one of the main (0) ______ representatives ______ of the American Transcendentalist Movement. Emerson’s was convinced that every human being had a direct, immediate (1) ___________ to an understanding of the world of all beings as well as of God.46 He cultivated solitude, isolation, (2) _______________ and self-reliance47, constantly striving for a “democratization of the intellect.” Emerson encouraged American (3) _______________, for instance, to speak truly of themselves and their culture, stating that each individual can learn from (4) _______________ and that each poet should express his individual emotions and feelings in poetry, and that poetry had to be original and organic rather than imitative48.

During Emerson’s active creative (5) ________________, the United States were only few generations removed from its (6) ________________ as a nation. It was still a raw and crude (7) ______________, which – although it had already achieved political independence – had not yet achieved intellectual and cultural independence. American (8) _______________ of this period, such as Washington Irving or Nathaniel Hawthorne, could only be inspired by the Old World (Europe). Due to the fact that carpenters, (9) _______________, and inventors were in constant demand in America, there was hardly any place for artists shaping fiction or poetry. However, Ralph Waldo Emerson believed in a national American (10) _______________ emerging soon, and constantly strived for getting rid of Old World influences, being convinced that getting (11) _______________ exclusively by European authors was an (12) _______________ which had to be changed in order to achieve a creative and uniquely American style.49

Key: (1) access, (2) independence, (3) poets, (4) nature, (5) period, (6) establishment, (7) country, (8) authors, (9) engineers, (10) literature, (11) inspiration, (12) attitude

46 cf. Grabher 2004: 16
47 cf. 18
48 cf. Gray 118
49 cf. Staebler 95
EMERSON’S “THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR”

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s speech “The American Scholar,” one of the many appeals for a national literature as well as for native intellectual leadership, was referred to as “intellectual Declaration of Independence.” Emerson delivered this speech before the so-called Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard College in 1837. This speech was considered highly innovative and pioneering; O.W. Holmes, for instance, wrote about it that “No listener ever forgot that address.” What made this speech so remarkable was the author’s insistence that the first resource of the scholar was not books, but nature. When using the term “nature,” Emerson referred to each individual’s unique personality. According to Emerson, everybody could become a “scholar,” as intellect could be achieved by the intellectualization of every individual’s life. Emerson’s “scholar” is not a scholar in the traditional sense of the word, respectively a book-learned man, but a peculiar genius. Hence, The American Scholar is in fact a synonym for the American Man – Everyman in the United States who is able to read. Emerson was convinced that a country would only be original if his citizens were original, too.

Emerson criticized the fact that most “intellectuals” were “bookworms” (a term which is connoted negatively for Emerson): He thought that young men grow up in libraries and therefore accept the views of Cicero, John Locke or Francis Bacon start wrong, as they subsequently set out from accepted dogmas instead of discovering their own sight of principles. Emerson highlighted that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when writing their books. Emerson propagated that no book should ever grow out of anything but the individual writer’s own intense reading of life. He was also convinced that contemporary writers of creative texts might be under the influence of authors from the Old World from a stylistic point of view, stating that “English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years”. Again, he criticizes that that they have been imitating the Shakespearean style rather than producing something innovative which comes from the individual writer’s inner self.

Most importantly, in order to liberate one’s mind from preconceived concepts (delivered by books, for instance), Emerson highlighted the benefits of life experience concerning knowledge and wisdom acquired by living, stating that “Only so much do I know, as I have lived”. He explained that there is basically speaking no better metaphorical “dictionary” than life.

Emerson also warned that every young man – no matter whether he was college graduate or not – felt himself to be nothing; an anonymity among millions of the “mass,” the “herd,” and he emphasized on the value of the individual person and its growing.

One can therefore conclude that according to Emerson’s principles, The American Scholar was – most importantly – rightly a student of nature, who had individual and independent thoughts in mind.
### Answer Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 0: How did people refer to Emerson’s speech “The American Scholar?”</td>
<td><em>intellectual Declaration of Independence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 1: When did Emerson deliver this speech?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: According to Emerson, what should be the primary source for scholars?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: What does Emerson mean by “nature?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: Who could become an “American Scholar?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><em>Life</em></td>
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</table>
EMERSON’S “SELF RELIANCE”

“Self-Reliance,” the doctrine Ralph Waldo Emerson has been associated with most frequently, was published in his Essays collection in 1841, four years after the delivery of “The American Scholar.”

It is considered as a personal manifesto in which the author was especially self-revelatory. Generally speaking, “self-reliance” – according to Emerson – is a kind of human virtue closely related to thinking against conformity. Thus, the essay’s core topic is individualism founded on self-trust. Emerson expressed his conviction that in order to be great, one has to take the risk to be misunderstood in order to be great, stating:

Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

Hence, Emerson encouraged American citizens to act according to their personal convictions, without caring what other people’s opinion on one’s behavior or attitude might be. According to the essay, a man should continue in his calling, getting his work done without being deterred by adventitious social duties.

“Trust thyself” is one of the key messages transmitted in this speech. Emerson stated that great men have always trusted themselves and confided themselves in a childlike way. “Childlike,” however, is not connoted with naïveté in Emerson’s context, as a young boy is still independent and irresponsible. However, as soon as people grow up and become men, and subsequently become part of society, they start acting according to rules of conformity. Emerson declares a “simple mind” as a positive requirement in order to become an independent and individual thinker.

Generally speaking, in “Self-Reliance,” Emerson constantly encourages citizens to trust in their own thoughts in the essay: “Insist on yourself, never imitate. […] Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely the part he could not borrow. Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare.”

In other words, just like in “The American Scholar,” Emerson propagates life as a main teacher and, as it is obvious in this extract, highlights that genius cannot be achieved or transmitted through masters or teachers or on their attitudes, styles or beliefs which they want to impose.

57 cf. Edel et al. 328f.
58 Emerson 1841: 344
59 cf. Emerson 1841: 340
60 cf. 355
**Answer Sheet**

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<td>What does Emerson mean by “Self-Reliance?”</td>
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<td>Question 2:</td>
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<tr>
<td>According to the essay, which risk does one have to take in order to</td>
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<tr>
<td>be great?</td>
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<td>Question 3:</td>
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<td>Question 4:</td>
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<tr>
<td>According to Emerson, when do people usually start to stick to rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>of conformity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is required if somebody wants to become an independent,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>individual thinker?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should citizens always avoid in order to be great?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to the essay, which risk does one have to take in order to</td>
<td><em>to be misunderstood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be great?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is one of the key messages Emerson intends to transmit?</td>
<td><em>“Trust thyself”</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to Emerson, when do people usually start to stick to rules</td>
<td><em>when they grow up</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of conformity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is required if somebody wants to become an independent,</td>
<td><em>a simple mind</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual thinker?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should citizens always avoid in order to be great?</td>
<td><em>imitating</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is one of the most important “teachers” according to Emerson?</td>
<td><em>life</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 7

Listening comprehension

Listen to the song and fill in the gaps! The first gap (0) has been filled out for you as an example.

“I WILL SURVIVE” by GLORIA GAYNOR

At first I was afraid, I was (0) __________ petrified __________
Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side
But then I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong
And I grew (1) ______________________
And I learned how to get along

And so you're back from outer space
I just walked in to find you here with that sad look upon your face
I should have changed that stupid (2) ____________________________
I should have made you leave your key
If I had known for just one second you'd be back to (3)_________________________ me

Go on now, go, walk out the door
Just turn around now
'Cause you're not welcome anymore
Weren't you the one who tried to (4) ____________________________ me with goodbye?
Did you think I'd (5) ____________________________?
Did you think I'd lay down and die?

Oh no not I, I will survive
Oh, as long as I know how to love, I know I'll (6) ____________________________ alive
I've got all my life to live
And I've got all my love to give
And I'll survive, I will survive
Hey, hey

It took all the (7) ____________________________ I had not to fall apart
Kept trying hard to (8) ____________________________ the pieces of my broken heart
And I spent oh so many nights just feeling sorry for myself
I used to cry, but now I hold my head up high

And you see me, somebody new
I'm not that (9) ____________________________ up little person still in love with you
And so you felt like (10) ____________________________ in and just expect me to be free
But now I'm saving all my loving for someone who's loving me

Go on now, go walk out the door
…..

Key: (1) strong, (2) lock, (3) bother, (4) hurt, (5) crumble, (6) stay, (7) strength, (8) mend, (9) chained-up,
(10) dropping

61 Gaynor 2002
### Appendix 8

#### Reading Comprehension Exercise: Multiple Matching

Read the text and match the beginnings of the sentences on the next page (1-8) with the appropriate endings (A-J). There is one sentence ending too much. The first one, (0), has been done as an example for you.

#### THE BENEFITS OF SUFFERING

Before focusing on the benefits of suffering for individual learning processes it is required to define the term briefly. In the Merriam Webster Dictionary suffering is defined as “physical, mental or emotional pain that is caused by injury, illness, loss, etc.” Generally speaking, suffering is hard to grasp, and even harder to encounter directly, as we are often unconscious of how we are “creating” it and why it arises. However, we often forget that suffering is an essential part of the human condition and one of the engines of human development.

#### A spiritual Approach: The Role of Suffering in Buddhism

Buddhism offers – perhaps – the most developed account of human suffering, as its founder, the Buddha – respectively Prince Siddhartha (as he was called before he became enlightened) – took the alleviation of suffering as his central mission. In India, which had a strong caste system during Buddha’s living years, he observed that – regardless of one’s rank in life or one’s spiritual attainments – everyone in the world is subject to illness, pain, loss and death. In other words, he realized that suffering can affect every human being, no matter if he or she belongs to a privileged social class or not. This is why finding a cure of suffering became Prince Siddhartha’s main aim. Buddha came to the conclusion that the only way to alleviate suffering is to dissolve our wishes for control and our self-protectiveness as well as the separateness we feel from others. Buddhism teaches that much of our suffering is the direct consequence of our own beliefs and attitudes carried over into our perceptions and actions.

#### An Introduction to philosophical and psychological Approaches related to the Benefits of Suffering

According to Greek dramatist and philosopher Aeschylus, for instance, it is through suffering that we gain the kind of knowledge that helps us come to a better understanding of both ourselves and the world around us, making us grow and taking a step forward on the path of our lives. Aeschylus, the founder of ancient Greek tragedy, presented his heroes and heroines as humans who, in their existential freedom, were fighting an inevitable fate. (cf. Meyer’s). In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus writes:

He who learns must suffer.
And even in our deep sleep, pain that cannot
forget falls drop by drop upon the
heart, and in our own despair, against
our will, comes wisdom to us by the
awful grace of God.

Plato, for example, did not treat “grief,” “suffering,” “pain” and “unhappiness” as synonyms, as the term is much more complex. In addition to this, the previously stated fact that via Buddhism we are taught that much of our suffering is the direct consequence of our own beliefs and attitudes carried over into our

62 cf. Young-Eisendrath 51
63 cf. 7
64 cf. 11
65 cf. 11
66 cf. 15
67 cf. 14
69 cf. Meyer’s
70 qtd. in DS 149
71 cf. Spelman 17
perceptions and actions, is exactly what C.G. Jung or Sigmund Freud, for instance, discovered. Both Freud and Jung founded their therapies on the premise that facing and remembering what has been most traumatic or painful is the beginning of a healthy mental state.  

Psychologist Polly Young-Eisendrath states that the gifts of suffering are insight, compassion and renewal. According to the psychotherapist, suffering is an essential part of the human condition, as the unavoidable mysteries of pain and suffering can give rise to hidden resources of compassion and creativity. A highly positive effect is that compassion, the knowledge that comes from suffering with others, is a tremendous gift, as it comes from deeply and truthfully recognizing one’s own suffering in awakening us to our own reactions and to our potential to be compassionate.

The skill of being empathetic, respectively the capacity to spot other human beings’ emotions and feelings, goes hand in hand with becoming compassionate. When having experienced what it means to suffer, one may get a better understanding for other people’s emotional states and becomes more sensitive when interacting with other people, as human beings learn sympathy and feeling with fellow human beings through suffering, and by doing so, become sensitive towards the traces that life and suffering have left on our lives. Thus, suffering may lead to a higher emotional intelligence, which is, of course, a positive effect, too.

One can conclude that – from a sustainable point of view – suffering is related to a lot of benefits on a long-term basis, even though they may not be obvious on first sight, respectively during the suffering process. Although we are not immune to suffering, and have to live with it with no surrender, the best thing is to endure it without resistance, constantly being attentive to the lessons this negative feeling might teach us about ourselves and to the positive effects it might have on our character.

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**Answer Sheet**

(0) One can define suffering as …..
(1) People are often not aware of the fact that …..
(2) Buddha observed that …..
(3) According to Buddhism, suffering is the …..
(4) Aeschylus states that through suffering we gain …..
(5) There are parallels between C.G. Jung’s and Sigmund Freud’s approach and …..
(6) According to Polly Young-Eisendrath, the benefits of suffering are …..
(7) One of the skills one can learn from suffering is …..
(8) The best thing one can do when suffering is …..

_____ (A) …..being empathic.
_____ (B) …..the Buddhist approach.
_____ (C) …..enduring it.
_____ (D) …..physical, mental or emotional pain.
_____ (E) …..everyone can be affected by suffering.
_____ (F) …..spiritual approach.
_____ (G) …..suffering is essential for the development of human beings.
_____ (H) …..knowledge and wisdom.
_____ (I) …..result of our own beliefs and attitudes carried over into our perceptions and actions.
_____ (J) …..insight, passion and renewal.


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72 cf. Young-Eisendrath 8
73 cf. 2
74 cf. 48
75 cf. Grabher 2002: 128
76 cf. Young-Eisendrath 194
Appendix 9

Extracts from the Novel

She likes this one best so far; he looks … not exactly kindly, but not cruel either. Tired, somewhat irritable, with a touch of sadness around the eyes and mouth. His grey hair does not bristle around his head, and in so many of the pictures; his hairline actually recedes. He is fifty-two, hopelessly deaf by now, but still he seems to be listening intently. It seems to her that he has other businesses on his mind that is more important than sitting still for a painter; he may get up at any moment and leave the room. What is he listening to? She wonders. Could it be Opus 111?

\[77\] DS 21f.

“Those men are both drunk,” Marushka whispers hotly. “They are disgusting. David is very brave with them, don’t you think?” Peter says into Sylvia’s ear, “Be ready if he pulls a knife” […] Try as she might, she cannot read these homeless men; to her, they are all equally terrifying, trolls out of her childhood fairy-tale books.

\[78\] DS 56

At first he looks like somebody waiting for a bus. At first she is not even afraid – she is hurrying so fast, after all, and it is hard to see – but then, as they are moving around him, he reaches out almost casually and takes her by the upper arm (three more steps and she would have been out of his grasp) and says, “Over there,” motioning with his head toward a nearby alley.

\[79\] DS 68

So much chaos and passion to get through before the beautiful serenity of the second movement thrills – perhaps that’s what’s been wrong all along. She’s been rejecting the first movement, subconsciously racing to get to the second, and then the second sounds thin and brittle instead of how it should sound – rich and unearthly and full of peace and joy.

\[80\] DS 122

And then, when she doesn’t think she can stand it another second, there are suddenly huge lights in the alley and people and voices and the clattering of equipment, and she is being shoved aside so that men in uniforms can take over. But, she wants to tell them, astonished, he’s already gone. I felt him leave.

\[81\] DS 133

So this is how it is, she thinks. Like music. And then David is suspended above her – she opens her eyes and sees him, dark against the dim light – and he is holding himself with one hand, stroking her, up and down, back and forth, in the warm place between her legs; something tells her to rise up to meet him, and she does, arching her back.

\[82\] DS 145

She looks down at her hands. Her fingers lie quiet and miserable on the rounded caps of her knees. She has not even been able to practice since David left the apartment; she sits at the piano in the drafty practice room, her hands resting on the cold keys, and thinking about him. Sometimes, however, even the thought of David is gone, and then her mind, so recently bursting with Beethoven and Toft, goes perfectly blank – there is nothing within her at all. She is so miserable she has not been able to eat. Her stomach aches quietly; she lies awake in bed at night.

\[83\] DS 167
“Sylvia,” he says. “I heard something in your playing when you first auditioned for me that I have not heard since. Do you know what it was? […] When I first heard you play, I did not hear a girl who occupied herself with young men or love […] is in your mind these days. I heard a pianist, do you know what I am saying? […] This is the truth: I heard a pianist who was willing to efface herself for the sake of music. Somebody neither male or female, do you see? Someone who was – how shall I put this? – too innocent to give in to the demands of the ego.”

And then Miss Koh rises and Sylvia is shocked at how thin she looks, how old. There are lines in her face; her hair is limp, her blouse rumpled, her skirt askew. She looks both terrified and helpless, and Sylvia moves first toward the door – may I help, Miss Koh? is there anything I can do?

Sylvia pulls on her clothes in slow motion, pondering the now-official fact of her pregnancy. Her arms and legs feel heavy, as though she is moving underwater. Congratulations, you are going to have a baby. A baby. A baby. Her ears are ringing, her knees feel weak. She has to touch the wall several times for balance as she walks down the hallway.

Abortion. Is this truly what she will do? She begins to play without thought, her hands in charge of the music. Beethoven fills the studio. Inside, she is shaking. Abortion, abortion. […] She plays and plays, and Toft stands somewhere off to the side, like Napoleon, with his hand in his shirt. She cannot remember a thing he said about the allegro, not a thing he punctuated with his stabbing finger. But the music is coming from somewhere anyway – all the hours of practice, she thinks. […] She feels the music swelling and listens, suddenly amazed. What is happening without her? What are her fingers and Beethoven doing on their own? This phrase, always her nemesis, and this one here … she glides through them, as close to perfection as she ever hoped to get. And not only this, but it is suddenly achingly beautiful, the movement she has always thought so ugly.

“I think I hate you, David.” Her voice breaks when she says this; she is shocked by her hissing vehemence, as he is too. He drops her hair, takes a step backwards, looks down the sidewalk. He will walk away any moment; she can see him making the decision.

She’d memorize the passage, and now she thinks it through one last time: Man cannot avoid suffering; and in this respect his strength must stand the test … he must endure without complaining and feel his worthlessness and then again achieve his perfection.

“The Scarlatti sonatas were an embarrassment. And the Sonatine was very weak, very passive. But you already know that […] The Fantasiestücke, however, was quite competent, especially “In der Nacht.” He coughs, turning his head, then clears his throat several times. She waits. “Opus 111,” he says. “Yes. You have learned something this year, have you not?”

84 DS 221
85 DS 251
86 DS 259
87 DS 266
88 DS 282
89 DS 336
90 DS 348f.
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18. April 2018
Datum

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