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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v12i2.6>

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Pregledni rad

Review Article

Primljeno 2. veljače 2025.

Received: 2 February 2025

Prihvaćeno 25. rujna 2025.

Accepted: 25 September 2025

NAVIGATING ACADEMIC CRISES: INSIGHTS FROM LITERARY NARRATIVES

Abstract

This paper explores how crises within the academic world are portrayed in three influential British and American novels: Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, John Williams's *Stoner*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. It offers a comparative reading that situates these works within the tradition of the academic (or campus) novel and examines how they reveal shifting notions of personal, professional, and moral crisis in higher education. Drawing on literary theory and sociological understandings of "crisis," the paper examines how these narratives articulate crises of identity, purpose, and ethics through their protagonists. *Lucky Jim* uses comic satire to expose the absurdity of mid-century British academic conformity, *Stoner* reframes academic life as a quiet tragedy of unrealized personal purpose, and *The Secret History* pushes the genre toward psychological and moral decay, depicting how intellectual elitism can lead to moral collapse. By comparing these novels, the paper argues that the campus novel genre has evolved from social satire to psychological thriller while keeping its critical lens on the conflicts between individual identity and institutional norms. These novels continue to function as powerful cultural critiques of university life.

Keywords: academic novels, identity crisis, institutional critique, satire

1. Introduction

Academic novels, sometimes called campus or university novels, form a literary subgenre that critically examines the cultural, social, and institutional dimensions of higher education. Rather than serving as mere entertainment, these narratives expose the tension between individual identity and academic structures, showing how personal, professional, and moral crises emerge within university settings. This paper focuses on Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, John Williams's *Stoner*, and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* as examples that illustrate how identity, purpose, and morality are tested within academic life.

The sense of crisis is intensified by the contradictions at the heart of university: an institution that promises knowledge and community but often breeds alienation, moral compromise, or disillusionment. By analysing these three novels, this paper demonstrates that the defining feature of the academic novel is its portrayal of crisis—exposing how higher education produces tensions between personal integrity, and institutional conformity.

2. What is an Academic Novel?

Scholars such as Jadranka Zlomislić, Sarah Hanaa Haji Ahmad Ghazali, John Kramer, Merritt Moseley, and David Lodge define the academic novel—or campus novel—as a literary subgenre that critically engages with the cultural, social, and institutional dynamics of university life. Zlomislić observes that the academic novel shows how higher education acts as a “driving force for the cultural, social and economic development of a nation” (1). Her study highlights how post-World War II expansion shaped modern universities, and, by extension, the fictional worlds depicting them (74).

Ghazali expands this by emphasising the global reach of the academic novel, noting how crises in academic settings appear in narratives beyond the Anglo-American context, including Arab countries and Indonesia (9). Kramer's distinction between student-centred and staff-centred narratives and Moseley's further refinement separating undergraduate novels from professor-focused fiction demonstrate the genre's internal diversity (Kramer 9; Moseley 7). Lodge provides one of the most cited definitions, describing the campus novel as dealing “with the lives of university professors and junior teachers [...] and to a lesser extent with their students” (2), thus capturing how the personal and professional dimensions intersect.

As Dmytro Ihorovych Drozdovskyi shows in his historical revision, the campus novel should be read not only as comic or satirical but as social and psychological fiction that reveals the contradictions of academic life. By setting the university's idealised image as a "paradise of learning" against everyday realities like status anxiety, pretension, and hypocrisy, these novels highlight the tension between social classes and competing values. Supporting figures such as porters or local townspeople often serve as foils who question the moral authority of professors and students, exposing the fragile basis of academic prestige. This clash between the values of humanities and the rise of scientific and empirical thinking dramatizes crisis not just as a personal struggle but as a deeper conflict between culture and power (80).

Sally Dalton-Brown notes how the campus novel has evolved from light satire to darker narratives preoccupied with irrelevance, precarious work, and moral failures (108, 118). Despite this, the genre still suggests that literature and learning can transform lives—even as the modern university becomes a site of exclusion and privilege.

3. Crises in Academic Novels

The academic novel frequently presents the university as a site where societal pressures are intensified and personalised. These narratives expose the erosion of ideals like the pursuit of truth, or social mobility, showing how they have become strained in contemporary contexts. As Michael Schapira explains, the concept of crisis itself historically carries multiple dimensions—legal, theological, and medical—all implying decisive judgement or turning points (340). He argues that in modern contexts the crisis of the university should not be seen as a single event but as a recurring condition shaped by shifts in the relationship between the university, the state, the economy, and culture. As these constellations change, the university's legitimacy is repeatedly questioned, generating stories of bureaucratic inertia, moral ambiguity, or commodification. Historical examples like LaDale C. Winling's study of the University of Chicago show how universities navigated urban crises and segregation while reinforcing inequality to protect their elite status (86). Díaz Villarreal and Pardo Cortés show how American campus novels from the mid-20th century onward reveal the university as a microcosm of Cold War paranoia (*Pnin* by Vladimir Nabokov), 1960s upheavals (*Changing Places* by David Lodge), postmodern consumerism (*White Noise* by Don DeLillo), or moral panics around identity politics (*The Human* 441

Stain by Phillip Roth) (24–25). Ahmad Zidan adds that Malcolm Bradbury’s University trilogy shows how new academics struggle with power and abuse, while Peter Wilson points to fraud as a symptom of an increasingly competitive and precarious environment (35–36). Jeffrey Williams shows that 1950s protagonists like Jim Dixon in *Lucky Jim* embody the crisis of career and identity within rigid institutions, while Lodge’s works continue this critique into the late 20th century. These novels remind us that the crises portrayed in *Lucky Jim*, *Stoner*, and *The Secret History* are both personal and institutional, revealing how the tensions of academic life persist as narrative reflections on identity, power, and moral responsibility.

3.1. Crisis of identity and Purpose in Academic Novels

Academic novels often explore identity crises that arise not just from personal struggles, but from the pressures and expectations built into academic life itself. As Alimova Kamola Mirshahidovna points out, these novels show how history and society shape both what stories are told and how they are told. Common themes include the search for identity and how schools and universities influence who people become (Mirshahidovna 444). In *Lucky Jim*, *Stoner*, and *The Secret History*, the main characters all face identity crises that are deeply influenced by the academic world around them. In these novels, the university is not just a setting—it is a place full of competing ideas, social divisions, and personal desires.

In Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim*, the main character, Jim Dixon, struggles with his identity because of the clash between his working-class roots and the elite culture of the university. He dislikes the pretentiousness of academic life and feels out of place. He desperately wants to escape this place, his job, his social obligations. This desire is captured in a moment of internal conflict: “More than ever it was the moment to dart into the street and fail to return. But economic necessity and the call of pity were a strong combination; topped up by fear, as both were, they were invincible” (Amis 26). However, three forces—money, guilt, and fear are so strong that they override his desire to escape. Dixon does not want to become the kind of academic the university expects him to be. His drunken lecture, which is both funny and freeing, is his way of rejecting the fake traditions of academia and choosing to be true to himself.

Dixon’s crisis is also shown through his interactions with others. Professor
442 Welch, who loves outdated music and pointless academic events, represents

everything Dixon finds meaningless. He even suited words to a piano rondo tune formerly played by Welch, which he named the Welch tune and sang it to himself in the Common Room: “You ignorant clod, you stupid old sod, you havoring slaving get...” (Amis 87). He tries to act polite, but inside he mocks these traditions, showing the gap between who he is and who he is supposed to be.

Bertrand, Welch’s snobbish son, is another symbol of the academic world Dixon rejects. Bertrand tries to seem cultured but lacks real intelligence or empathy. Dixon’s anger toward him builds up until he finally lashes out: “Bertrand’s a bore, he’s like his dad, the only thing that interests him is him. On any issue you care to mention he can’t do otherwise than ignore your side of things, just can’t do otherwise, see?” (Amis 143). These moments push Dixon to question whether he belongs in the university at all.

Dixon’s relationship with Margaret Peel adds another layer to his crisis. Margaret is emotionally fragile and disappointed by her own academic life. She becomes both a support and a source of stress for Dixon. He feels stuck in their relationship, just as he feels stuck in his job, and this reflects his larger struggle to find a true sense of self.

Throughout the novel, Dixon becomes more aware that staying in academia means living a lie. Leaving the university is not just quitting a job—it is a way for him to reclaim his real identity, his way of rejecting a false identity shaped by class expectations, academic traditions, and social pressure. His chaotic lecture is not just funny; it is a moment of personal freedom and a clear break from the academic role he never truly accepted. As Zlomislić explains, academic novels often use humour to highlight the absurdities of university life, and the identity struggles it creates (2).

In *Stoner* by John Williams, William Stoner’s identity crisis is quieter and more internal. He enters the university hoping for intellectual fulfilment, but over time, he becomes isolated and disappointed as his career stalls. Unlike Dixon, Stoner doesn’t rebel outwardly. Instead, he quietly resists the university’s failure to live up to its ideals. His deep love for literature and teaching becomes the core of who he is, even as he’s pushed to the margins. As Lorraine Zhenping Yang explains, Stoner’s story shows how the university can actually limit personal growth instead of encouraging it (4). Marco Bevolo adds that Stoner’s quiet endurance reflects a strong ethical commitment—he stays true to his values even if it means being overlooked (1).

Stoner's personal life also reflects his growing isolation. His marriage to Edith is emotionally distant and painful, cutting him off from any real support. His friendship with Gordon Finch fades as Finch sides with the university powers that exclude Stoner. These broken relationships mirror his loneliness within the academic world and deepen his identity crisis.

One key moment is when Stoner refuses to pass a student, Charles Walker, despite pressure from a powerful colleague. This small act shows his refusal to compromise his values. It is not about rebellion—it is about staying true to himself. Near the end of the novel, Stoner reflects on his life: "Dispassionately, reasonably, he contemplated the failure that his life must appear to be" (John Williams 274). This moment shows that he accepts his solitude as the cost of living with integrity.

In *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, Richard Papen's identity crisis is shaped by his desire to escape his working-class background and become part of an elite academic group: "I envied them, and found them attractive; moreover, this strange quality, far from being natural, gave every indication of having been intensely cultivated" (Tartt 32-33). But as he becomes more involved with the group, he also becomes part of their moral decline. The novel's dark, Gothic tone shows how the closed world of Hampden College encourages both intellectual beauty and ethical decay. When Richard says, "This is the only story I will ever be able to tell" (Tartt 6), it shows how deeply his identity has been shaped—and trapped—by this experience.

Richard's admiration for the group, especially Henry Winter, leads him to ignore their growing moral corruption. After Bunny's murder, Richard reflects, "A month or two before, I would have been appalled at the idea of any murder at all. But that Sunday afternoon, as I actually stood watching one, it seemed the easiest thing in the world. How quickly he fell; how soon it was over" (Tartt 272). This shows how far he is gone in losing his sense of self, a chilling moment of moral disintegration and his psychological transformation.

Julian Morrow, their mentor, makes things worse by promoting beauty and intellect without any moral guidance. When Julian disappears, it symbolizes the collapse of the ideals Richard had relied on to reshape himself. In the end, Richard realizes that his transformation has left him emotionally and morally empty: "Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw'... exist outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does" (Tartt 10).

Across all three novels, identity crises are not just personal—they are shaped by the structure of academic life. The university, which is supposed to help people grow, often does the opposite. Whether it is Dixon’s comic rebellion, Stoner’s quiet endurance, or Richard’s tragic entrapment, these stories show how academic institutions can distort, limit, or even destroy personal identity.

3.2. Crisis of Professional and Institutional Disillusionment

Academic novels often show universities not as places of learning and inspiration, but as environments full of professional frustration and confusing bureaucracy. In these novels, staying true to one’s intellectual values often gives way to fitting in and looking out for oneself. In *Lucky Jim*, *Stoner*, and *The Secret History*, the main characters face more than just personal setbacks—they run into deep, structural problems that reveal how flawed the academic system can be. These novels explore how the way universities are set up can lead to disappointment, as they tend to value rank, tradition, and power more than real learning and scholarship.

In Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim*, the humour and criticism focus on the strange and outdated ways of British universities after World War II. The university where Jim Dixon works does not really support learning—it acts more like a system that keeps itself going by sticking to old customs. Dixon’s problems come from being in a place that rewards people for following rules and flattering others, not for being smart or original. As Arpita Sawhney points out, Amis’s novel questions the usual idea of professors as noble thinkers, instead showing a university full of fake intellectuals who care more about looking smart than actually being smart (208). Professor Welch is a perfect example of this: although he’s supposed to be a scholar, he’s more interested in hosting social events and singing madrigals. His academic image is just for show. Amis makes fun of Welch’s shallow character, describing him as someone who cares a lot about being called “professor” but doesn’t have the knowledge to deserve the title: “no other professor in Great Britain, he thought, set such store by being called Professor” (1).

Welch’s fake academic image also includes how he uses others for his own benefit. He takes advantage of Dixon by making him attend weekend music parties and do research, pretending it is part of mentoring. This shows the university as a place where people are used, not supported (Sawhney 209). Bertrand Welch, Professor Welch’s son, also represents how the university values appearances over real talent. He moves up in the university not because of his academ-

ic work, but because of his social skills and upper-class background. Dixon's future depends on pleasing people like the Welches, showing that the university supports old social systems instead of rewarding real achievement. Sibel Erbayraktar connects this problem to capitalism, saying that the university in *Lucky Jim* copies the structure of the market and silences anyone who disagrees (1271).

Dixon's final moment of disillusionment happens during his famous lecture, where he gives a sarcastic and drunken talk. While it might seem like a personal failure, it is actually his way of rejecting a system that expects him to follow empty traditions. His leaving the university is a way to free himself from a place that doesn't allow real intellectual honesty. As Ayça Vurmaya explains, Amis "ridicules and thereby satirizes the monolithic aspects of society through the parody of the phoney life of the academe" (174).

John Williams's *Stoner* gives a quieter but just as powerful picture of how universities can fail. Unlike Dixon, Stoner does not fight back openly. Instead, he spends his life being pushed aside. His love for literature and teaching—things that should make him successful—actually hurt him in a university where politics and bureaucracy are more important. Joakim Wrethed says that Stoner's real struggle isn't with one person like Hollis Lomax, but with a whole system that no longer values what he believes in (151). The university's failure to support honesty and dedication turns it into a machine that cares more about control and efficiency than learning.

Yang calls *Stoner* a "meta-campus novel," meaning it reflects on the idea of the university itself. The book shows how the university has moved away from its original goal of personal and intellectual growth and become focused on management and rules (4). Stoner's refusal to pass an unqualified student, Charles Walker, is a quiet act of protest, but it leads to him being stuck in his career and isolated. His decision to stay at the university, even though it does not value him, shows how deeply disappointed he is. As Frits Gävertsson explains, Stoner's life is about trying to live by the ideal of thoughtful academic work, but in a corrupt system—this ideal ends up hurting him. His loyalty to literature and deep thinking connects to the ancient idea of self-realization, but in a university that values paperwork over wisdom, these values push him to the margins (41).

Maureen Clark's interpretation of *Stoner* sees his quiet endurance not as weakness, but as a conscious and meaningful form of resistance. She describes
446 Stoner as existing in a "melancholic heroic space," where his silence and steady

dedication challenge the American cultural ideal that heroes must be bold and outspoken (6). By choosing quiet integrity over loud rebellion, Stoner makes a political statement in a university that rewards ambition and self-interest. His conflict with Lomax shows how broken the system has become: Lomax's unfair control over exams and favouritism toward Walker reveal a university where fairness and merit have been replaced by power games. Clark points out that “the rules of war and the rules of power prove to be the same” in the university, and this realization deepens Stoner's disappointment (19).

Stoner's background also shapes his resistance. Coming from a rural family, he inherits a kind of quiet strength— “the blood knowledge of his inheritance” (John Williams 226)—that helps him survive being pushed aside without giving up his values. Clark links this to a larger criticism of American exceptionalism, suggesting that Stoner's low status in the university reflects the country's broader failure to live up to its ideals of fairness and equality (8). His quiet resistance, then, is not just about the university—it also questions the cultural myths that shape American identity.

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* takes this criticism of institutions even further, showing how they can lead to moral collapse. Hampden College, which seems like a place for elite education, turns out to be a closed-off world that encourages arrogance and a lack of ethics. The school's exclusivity, especially in Julian Morrow's Greek class, creates an environment where dangerous elitism can grow. Morrow's teaching style—focusing on beauty and style instead of right and wrong—leaves a gap where students like Henry Winter can justify murder as just an idea. Henry's cold explanation of Bunny's death as “a redistribution of matter” (Tartt 129) shows the kind of moral emptiness that Hampden's academic culture allows.

Dalton-Brown says that Hampden College acts like a “crucible of human excellence,” but this image hides the corruption behind its love of beauty and knowledge (5). The failure of the institution becomes even clearer when Julian Morrow refuses to take responsibility. When his detached teaching leads to real violence, he simply disappears, leaving his students to deal with the consequences. His exit shows that the university does not offer moral guidance—it actually avoids it. Hampden is not a place of enlightenment, but one where ethical responsibility is ignored.

Richard Papen's slow acceptance of this academic world shows how institutions can lead people to lose their moral compass. His strong desire to be a part of Hampden's elite group makes him ignore more and more troubling behaviour, until he becomes involved in murder himself. The university's focus on beauty without ethics turns learning into something dangerous. As Qazi Hasan Yasir explains, Tartt's novel fits into the "campus gothic" genre, where the university's isolation makes hidden psychological and moral problems even worse (3).

In *Lucky Jim*, *Stoner*, and *The Secret History*, the university is not shown as a place of learning, but as an institution trapped in bureaucracy, elitism, and moral failure. Dixon's rebellion, Stoner's quiet endurance, and Richard's moral downfall each show different ways people respond to a system that goes against both intellectual and ethical values. These academic novels reveal a deep crisis in the university: it promises freedom of thought but instead delivers pressure to conform, exclusion, and disappointment. These novels show that the problems in universities are not just background details—they are central to the characters' experiences. Whether through humour, quiet strength, or dark tragedy, these novels show how the university often betrays the very ideals it claims to support. As Matek and Poljak Rehlicki argue, academic novels like these reveal "the impossibility of academic integrity" in institutions that care more about tradition, status, and market values than about real learning (57). This criticism—spanning British satire, American quiet resistance, and Postmodern Gothic—shows why the academic novel remains such a powerful way to explore the contradictions of higher education.

3.3. Crisis of Morality

The failure of academic institutions reaches its most extreme form in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. This novel shifts the focus of the academic novel away from just professional disappointment and instead explores a deep moral and ethical crisis. It shows how elite universities can lead not only to personal or career disillusionment, but also to a complete breakdown of values and meaning.

Unlike *Lucky Jim* and *Stoner*, which show the university as a place full of red tape and ethical compromises, *The Secret History* presents Hampden College as a school whose problems go beyond just bad management or social elitism. Its biggest flaw is its lack of moral direction and its obsession with beauty and style over substance. As Ana Rita Catalão Guedes explains, Tartt's novel fits into both

cay, violence, and privilege into a story where “the campus itself becomes a stage for moral and psychological breakdown” (22). Hampden College looks like a peaceful place for learning, but beneath its beautiful buildings lies something rotten—an idealized world that has been corrupted from the inside.

At the heart of this corruption is Julian Morrow, the mysterious professor whose selective teaching creates a kind of academic elite at Hampden. Julian’s focus on beauty and classical ideals is intellectually appealing, but he ignores the need for moral guidance. His way of teaching lets students separate deep thinking from ethical responsibility. As Catalão Guedes points out, Julian’s failure to stand by them, shows the futility of university teaching (40). This leads students like Henry Winter to see violence as just another intellectual idea (Catalão Guedes 58-59).

Henry’s cold explanation of murder as “a redistribution of matter” (Tartt 129) shows how empty their moral world has become. By putting intellectual ideas above ethical thinking, Hampden College turns learning into something dangerous. The school does not just fail to stop this collapse—it actually helps cause it. It becomes a place where “knowledge itself becomes toxic, a tool for rationalizing cruelty” (Catalão Guedes 30). This supports the opinion of Ljubica Matek and Jasna Poljak Rehlicki of the “irrelevance of the humanities, the humanist way of thinking, and humanist preoccupations” (57).

Richard Papen’s journey shows how the university’s structure encourages moral failure through quiet acceptance. At first, he wants to leave behind his working-class background and join the Hampden elite. But this desire makes him ignore the growing moral problems around him. Catalão Guedes explains that Richard’s wish to fit in is both a personal issue and a criticism of the institution itself. His climb up the social ladder reflects how the university turns knowledge and status into something to be bought and sold (Catalão Guedes 29). Just as Hampden hides its elitism behind a love of learning, Richard hides his guilt behind a desire to belong to something beautiful.

The setting of the novel also supports this theme of hidden decay. Catalão Guedes (24) notes that Hampden’s beautiful buildings remind readers of a return to a perfect, classical world—an “Arcadia”—but this quickly turns into a dark, Gothic space. This change symbolizes how classical ideals fall apart in the modern university. Hampden’s physical isolation makes the group’s mental and moral breakdown even worse. Yasir calls this kind of story the “unsafe cam-

pus,” where schools don’t protect students from darkness but instead make it worse (3). In this way, *The Secret History* goes beyond the professional problems shown in *Lucky Jim* or *Stoner* and instead shows the university as a Gothic place that can lead to total personal and moral collapse.

One of the clearest signs of the university’s failure comes when Julian disappears after the murder is revealed. Instead of facing the results of his teaching, he leaves Hampden College and abandons his students to deal with the guilt and destruction on their own. As Stacey Litzler explains, this shows “the university’s abdication of moral responsibility” (14). Hampden is revealed not as a place that helps or protects students, but as a place that contributes to their downfall.

In the end, Tartt’s novel shows the university not just as a flawed system like in *Lucky Jim*, or a failed dream like in *Stoner*, but as a dangerous place where the lack of moral guidance turns learning into something harmful. Henry Winter’s chilling line, “Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it” (Tartt 43), sums up the novel’s main message: when schools value beauty and intellect without also teaching ethics, education can become destructive instead of enlightening.

Finally, while Amis and Williams criticise the university for being slow and for losing its values, Tartt shows how it can completely fall apart. Her novel reveals how elite schools can create not just disappointed workers, but people who are morally empty and capable of justifying terrible actions. Together, these novels show that the problems in universities are not just about careers or ideas—they are deeply moral. Whether through comedy, tragedy, or Gothic horror, these stories show that the university’s failure is a serious and far-reaching problem.

4. Conclusion

The university novel often tells its story within a setting of crisis—not just using the university as a background but showing crisis as a built-in part of academic life. In *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley Amis uses humour to criticize the British university after World War II, showing it as a place full of pointless rules and fake scholarship. Jim Dixon’s rebellious attitude reveals how silly and outdated many university traditions have become. In contrast, John Williams’s *Stoner* gives us a sadder picture: although the university is shown as a place of quiet dedication and personal meaning, it still fails to protect its most loyal members from being

pushed aside and left feeling alone. Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* takes this crisis even further, showing the university as a closed-off world obsessed with beauty and ideas, but completely disconnected from morality. In this world, the love of classical ideals does not lead to wisdom—it leads to murder. Even though these novels are very different in style and tone, they all show the university as an institution stuck between old ideals and modern disappointment. As Schapira explains, today's universities are shaped by changing relationships between government, money, and culture (344). These novels reflect the problems that happen when traditional academic values no longer match the needs of a market-driven society. So, the crisis is not just about how universities are run—it is also about what they mean, and whether they can still help people grow intellectually and morally.

Kenneth N. Corvo warns that “without academic freedom, the university is nothing more than a tool for power and propaganda” (“The American University in Crisis”). This shows that the problems in academic fiction are not just made-up—they reflect real concerns. From the silly problems in *Lucky Jim* to the quiet sadness in *Stoner* and the moral collapse in *The Secret History*, these novels have long predicted the decline of the university's mission. They show how bureaucracy, political fights, and the turning of knowledge into a product have all weakened the university's purpose. When we read these novels alongside real-world studies of higher education, we see how the campus novel continues to highlight a deep contradiction at the heart of academia: the promise of truth and freedom is constantly threatened by the very systems that are supposed to protect them. In this way, the crises shown in fiction are powerful cultural warnings, reminding us why it is so important to protect the independence of knowledge.

This warning becomes even more serious when we look at the moral collapse in *The Secret History*. While *Lucky Jim* and *Stoner* focus on career disappointment and the university's failure to support personal growth, Tartt's novel shows the worst-case scenario: a complete breakdown of ethical responsibility. Julian Morrow abandons his students, Richard Papen becomes a part of the problem, and Henry Winter embraces a cold, heartless view of the world. All of this happens in a university where beauty and ideas are no longer connected to any sense of right and wrong. Tartt shows that the university's crisis is not just about bad management or lost ideals—it's also about ethics. Hampden College, with its beautiful buildings and classical charm, becomes a dark and twisted place

where knowledge itself is poisoned. This is the final stage of the problems that Amis mocks and Williams quietly resists: the moment when universities not only fail to live up to their ideals but actually destroy them.

Together, these novels show that the university's crisis is complex. It affects identity, careers, institutions, and morality—all at once. Jim Dixon's frustration, William Stoner's quiet suffering, and Richard Papen's moral downfall each show a different part of the university's decline—from a place of learning to a place of personal and ethical failure. These novels suggest that the university is not just failing by accident—its very structure keeps repeating the same problems.

This analysis confirms that the campus novel is a powerful way to explore today's worries about knowledge, authority, and ethics. Through their criticism of red tape, social privilege, and moral indifference, *Lucky Jim*, *Stoner*, and *The Secret History* reveal the deep problems in modern universities. Whether through humour, sadness, or dark mystery, these books show that the university's crisis is not just a one-time event—it is an ongoing condition, shaped by and shaping the world around it.

In the end, these novels do not just ask us to criticise universities—they ask us to rethink what they are for. If universities want to return to being places of real learning and moral growth, they must fix not only their systems but also their values. The academic novel, by showing these failures, acts as both a warning and a call to action. By reading these novels, we are reminded that protecting truth, integrity, and ethical thinking is more important than ever—both in literature and in real life. But if the university continues down this path, can it still be trusted to shape the minds and values of future generations?

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NAVIGATION AKADEMISCHER KRISEN: EINBLICKE AUS LITERARISCHEN NARRATIVEN

Zusammenfassung

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Dieser Beitrag untersucht, wie Krisen in der akademischen Welt in drei einflussreichen britischen und amerikanischen Romanen dargestellt werden: *Lucky Jim* von Kingsley Amis, *Stoner* von John Williams und *The Secret History* von Donna Tartt. Er bietet eine vergleichende Lektüre, die diese Werke innerhalb der Tradition des akademischen (oder Campus-)Romans verortet und analysiert, wie sie veränderte Vorstellungen von persönlichen, beruflichen und moralischen Krisen im Hochschulwesen offenlegen. Unter Rückgriff auf literaturtheoretische und soziologische Konzepte von „Krise“ wird untersucht, wie diese Erzählungen Krisen der Identität, des Lebenssinns und der Ethik anhand ihrer Protagonisten sichtbar machen. *Lucky Jim* nutzt komische Satire, um die Absurdität des akademischen Konformismus im Großbritannien der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts bloßzustellen, *Stoner* rahmt das akademische Leben als stille Tragödie eines unerfüllten persönlichen Lebenssinns, und *The Secret History* führt das Genre in Richtung psychologischen und moralischen Verfalls, indem es zeigt, wie intellektueller Elitismus zu moralischem Zusammenbruch führen kann. Durch den Vergleich dieser Romane wird argumentiert, dass sich das Genre des Campusromans von der sozialen Satire zum psychologischen Thriller entwickelt hat, wobei der kritische Blick auf den Konflikt zwischen individueller Identität und institutionellen Normen erhalten bleibt. Diese Romane fungieren weiterhin als kraftvolle kulturelle Kritik des Universitätslebens.

Schlüsselwörter: akademische Romane, Identitätskrise, Institutionskritik, Satire

KROZ AKADEMSKE KRIZE: UVIDI IZ KNJIŽEVNIH NARATIVA

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Ovaj rad istražuje kako su krize unutar akademskog svijeta prikazane u trima utjecajnim britanskim i američkim romanima: Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, John Williams's *Stoner* i Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*. Nudi komparativno čitanje koje smješta ova djela u tradiciju akademskog (ili kampus) romana te ispituje kako otkrivaju promjenjive predodžbe o osobnoj, profesionalnoj i moralnoj krizi u visokom obrazovanju. Polazeći od književne teorije i socioloških shvaćanja pojma „krize“, rad analizira kako ovi narativi kroz svoje protagoniste artikuliraju krize identiteta, svrhe i etike. *Lucky Jim* koristi komičnu satiru kako bi razotkrio apsurdnost britanske akademske konformnosti sredinom stoljeća; *Stoner* pretvara akademski život u tihu tragediju neostvarene osobne svrhe; dok *The Secret History* pomiče žanr prema psihološkom i moralnom raspadu, prikazujući kako intelektualni elitizam može dovesti do moralnog sloma. Usporedbom tih romana, rad tvrdi da se žanr akademskog romana razvio od društvene satire prema psihološkom trileru, zadržavajući pritom kritičku usmjerenost na sukob između individualnog identiteta i institucionalnih normi. Ti romani i dalje funkcioniraju kao snažne kulturne kritike sveučilišnog života.

Ključne riječi: akademski roman, kriza identiteta, institucionalna kritika, satira