

Book Chapter: Cambridge University in *Wittgenstein Jr.* (2014)

Dr. Walker Zupp

No affiliation

My book, *Wittgenstein Fiction: Portrayals of Ludwig Wittgenstein in Contemporary Western Novels*, will be published by Iff Books on 25 February 2025. The chapter, “Cambridge University in *Wittgenstein Jr.* (2014)”, argues that Lars Iyer’s novel, *Wittgenstein Jr.*, demonstrates how Wittgenstein Fiction can be a genre which uses minimalist forms to create satires of contemporary universities and research institutions. Lars Iyer is Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University and his career has shifted from that of a Maurice Blanchot scholar to that of an author of novels defined by the overlap between philosophy and literary fiction. Iyer’s novel suggests that contemporary universities can only be saved by Augustinian individuals who adhere to a Christian history whose fundamental truths are not necessarily basic propositions. Within this reading are expositions of Arthur Schopenhauer’s views on Christianity (and the place of animals in the world) and comparisons between Augustine’s *Confessions*, Pre-Socratic methodology, and the empirical Wittgenstein’s life and work. The empirical Wittgenstein’s “blind spots” included politics and the psychology of animals. Therefore Iyer’s use of animalistic metaphors throughout his novel - and his separation of the animalistic world of Cambridge educators from his Augustinian Wittgenstein character - creates a novel that presents both an original Wittgensteinian character *and* offers some insights into the empirical Wittgenstein. These themes are also linked to Iyer’s portrayal of Wittgenstein’s romantic life at Cambridge University and the differences between the empirical Wittgenstein’s rocky relationships with his students and the “intellectual hostage group” witnessed in *Wittgenstein Jr.* Following on from this the lack of female characters in *Wittgenstein Jr.* is telling: the empirical Wittgenstein’s strange relationship with women, such as Moscow University’s Sophia Janovskya and Elizabeth Anscombe, offers a complexity which Iyer’s character lacks. There are no female characters in *Wittgenstein Jr.* through which his Wittgenstein character *can be shown to be prejudiced*. In sum, Iyer’s critique of the contemporary university is linked to his insights into the empirical Wittgenstein’s cultural background and context—and the way in which Iyer uses fiction to deliver these critiques and insights shows how the genre of Wittgenstein Fiction can be a useful tool for understanding the life and work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.