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**Towards a Politics of Failure: John Williams' *Stoner* (1965) and *Butcher's Crossing* (1960)**

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**Abstract:** The recent rediscovery of the American novelist and academic John Williams (1922-1994) has seen an explosion of popular interest around two novels in particular: *Stoner* (1965) and *Butcher's Crossing* (1960). This article argues that, in these two works in particular, Williams establishes a distinct pedagogical position – a politics of failure – that proves philosophically pertinent to our contemporary condition. Both *Stoner* and *Butcher's Crossing* mark a powerful intervention in modern American fiction, shifting traditional notions of frontier heroism and post-war American triumphalism towards the experience and endurance of individual hardship, personal failure, and collective catastrophe. The article is split between equal treatments of the two narratives, biographical criticism, and reference to Williams' other work.