

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE DEAD: CRISIS IN THE HUMANITIES AND THE
AMERICAN COLLEGE NOVEL

by

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(Under the Direction of Douglas Anderson)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the dual histories of modern literary studies in the university and the American “college novel,” a genre that includes both student- and faculty-centered narratives. I pay particular attention to the substantial volume of antipathy shown by novelists toward the academy, and suggest causes ranging from student frustration with curricular standards, professorial angst regarding departmental and bureaucratic politics, and the essential question of mission in the university humanities—how can literary studies justify themselves to the public and to modern technologically- and vocationally-oriented institutions of higher education? The central primary texts of this study are F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Saul Bellow’s *The Dean’s December* (1982), and Michael Chabon’s *Wonder Boys* (1995), which I put into conversation with commentary on education from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Charles William Eliot, John Dewey, C. P. Snow, Allan Bloom, and Mark McGurl.

INDEX WORDS: College novel, Humanities, Literary studies, University history, Ralph Waldo Emerson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Saul Bellow, Michael Chabon, James Hynes

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Preface

The following discussion is about two things: the evolution of the humanities in the modern research university, and the way in which college novels—a genre that has suffered a surprising level of critical indifference—have treated that evolution. The profession of the modern “lit prof” is a young one, and college fiction, which more often than not puts the figure of the literature professor in its sights, is a young form; the fact that their growing pains might reverberate off of one another, and that the latter would calibrate on the former, is such a natural eventuality as to be not particularly worth mentioning. What *has* gone unnoticed and what *is* worth exploring is that the authors of college novels have consistently used that medium to voice concerns over the theories and practices that characterize university humanities. What follows will analyze these concerns using F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*, Saul Bellow’s *The Dean’s December*, and Michael Chabon’s *Wonder Boys* as representative texts implicating a wide range of issues: the curriculum, the effect of departmental politics, innovations in the field such as the rise of creative writing, and the essential question of mission—how do the humanities justify themselves to the world outside, especially in a university setting that increasingly demands technological and vocational justification?

The earlier iterations of the genre tended to lean toward the student narrative. Fitzgerald’s novel is the story of Amory Blaine, Princetonian, and the devivified study of literature he encounters in his college experience. Amory is bright and eager, but the classroom is a place of disappointment for him, its curriculum lockstep and its teachers wooden. Fitzgerald’s novel

echoes earlier student-centered novels from Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* (1828) to Owen Johnson's *Stover at Yale* (1912), and sets the tone for later student novels, which tend to promote autonomy for the learner in curricular decisions so that a student's passion might better manifest itself, a reflection of reforms at the time which saw the shift from the rigid classical curriculum to the elective system. Philosophically, this was a shift that suggested the flexibility of education—a uniform body of knowledge no longer represented “education” as it had in the era of the classical school.

Mid-century saw the ascent of the “academic novel,” one that treated the issues particular to faculty life and career. Saul Bellow wrote more consistently about the professor figure than perhaps anyone other than Nabokov (not coincidentally, both spent significant portions of their careers working in a university environment). The discussion of Bellow here centers primarily on *The Dean's December*, but counts that novel's companion texts—*Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and *Ravelstein*—as integral parts of one musing on the professorial life, particularly on how the humanities can be quantified, digested, packaged, and used for the good of humankind beyond the proverbial ivory tower. Bellow asks, what is it that counts as real work in the humanities? What good do advanced studies and research in the humanities actually do? What constitutes “research” in the humanities? And what benefit does humanism bestow not only on the general public, but on the individual scholar or student?

The question of justification posed by Bellow, especially how the humanities impact the individual scholar/student, is also the subject of Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys*, a novel about a creative writing professor, Grady Tripp, whose work has run aground and whose stalled career has spilled over into his personal life. *Wonder Boys* depicts Tripp struggling to justify the practice of creative writing to one of his students over the course of a harried long weekend. It

calls into question the rise of creative writing in the academy and posits a primarily personal and therapeutic benefit from its practice, something a bit at odds with the modern dictate that university work be to the benefit of the larger community and not just for the individual practitioner. *Wonder Boys* explores this reflexive justification for the humanities and how it relates to more traditional modes of literary scholarship.

The relationship between the arts and the academy has always been uneasy, particularly as regards the literary arts. This unease has become more intense with the rise of the modern literature department, which has declared that the professional scholar's duty is to explain either the meaning or the relevance of what the artist has created; the artists more often than not have believed that their points need no further clarification—as Emerson wrote, “Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare.” The college novel genre has been particularly poised and repeatedly used to voice the concerns of authors against those who would appropriate their message. But beyond this territoriality, the college novel has been a record of the century-long revolution in literary studies that saw the ebb of the classics, the development of a contemporary canon, the advent of theory, and the inclusion of the creative alongside the scholarly. It is often a biased history and conveyed by many voices, but it is a narrative to which the humanities, facing an uncertain future, ought to pay attention.

Chapter One

Introduction: Rationality, Romance, and the American College Novel

But you should not assume, Hippocrates, that the instruction of Protagoras is of this nature: may you not learn of him in the same way that you learned the arts of the grammarian, or musician, or trainer, not with the view of making any of them a profession, but only as a part of education, and because a private gentleman and freeman ought to know them?

— Plato, *Protagoras*¹

The story of *Fanshawe*'s publication and failure is perhaps better known than the contents of the narrative itself. Nathaniel Hawthorne's first attempt at a novel, it centers on a love triangle at Harley College, a fictional analogue of Hawthorne's Bowdoin. Its eponymous character is a bookish student who assists a classmate, Edward, in rescuing and courting a female charge of the school's headmaster. Hawthorne published the novel himself, anonymously, and, after its failure, burned the remaining copies. He was so secretive about having written it that his wife Sophia would claim, after Hawthorne's death, that her husband had never written such a book.² It was an inauspicious beginning for what would become, in the following century, one of the cornerstone genres of American fiction. The college novel—a designation that ought to be treated with some elasticity but generally denotes any lengthy work of fiction centered on an

institution of higher education or counts as its principal character a student, professor, or other member of a university community—represents hundreds of examples in the American tradition³ with many of America’s premier authors among its advocates. When John O. Lyons wrote in 1962 that “only a few such novels are by major authors, and a few others are what the movie people call ‘sleepers,’” and that “the bulk of them have suffered one edition and then been consigned to the remainder piles,”⁴ he had only a few “major authors” to look back on—Fitzgerald, Cather, and Wolfe among them—and a body of literature dominated by nostalgia and moralism.

The authorship of a college novel has since become a virtual rite of passage for novelists. Twelve of the Pulitzer Prizes awarded between 1950 and 2002 went to authors with at least one entry in John E. Kramer’s annotated bibliography of the American College Novel (at least one more had Kramer counted Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* or *Sanctuary*), as did twenty-three of the National Book Awards winners during the same period. Not only has the genre steadily grown over the past century (roughly since the 1912 publication of Owen Johnson’s *Stover at Yale*), the content has changed over time, as well. Gone, by and large, are the prankster-picaresques and the wistful remembrances. The college novels of more recent years trend toward serious investigations and criticisms of higher education pedagogy, politics, and culture. Predictably, the bulk of them take aim at literary studies—implicating a wider swath, the humanities, what Allan Bloom would call the “submerged old Atlantis” of the university—and ask hard questions as to what place the study of culture has within the realm of the increasingly technological and vocational modern institution of higher education. As the university has abandoned the old classical school paradigm to become an institution of scientific research and career certification, the study of the humanities, rooted in the romantic and essentially

aristocratic classical tradition, has attempted, abortively at times, to adapt. The question would haunt literary studies: in a research university, what constitutes research for the scholar of literature? The benefits of literary study in the old manner were intangible and had their roots in the romantic invisible community of human experience. Literature was to be read for its innate value, not for something that could be pulled from it to build a stronger bridge or revise economic policy, the sort of study on which the new university would pride itself. If there were a direct benefit from literature (for example, a moral benefit, such as to encourage the reader to sympathize with the downtrodden), then the books spoke for themselves. They needed no further research. But humanistic study in higher education has tried to mimic the success and prestige of science through sociopolitical or economic reinterpretations of literature, mechanically deconstructing them to find out how they work. But uprooted and placed on the laboratory examination table, literature not only withers, it seems wholly out of place. This tenuousness of mission in the humanities has formed a consistent thematic undercurrent of the college novel in the past century.

Fanshawe is the earliest American college novel by a significant margin,⁵ yet it established a tradition that has come, rather quietly, to dominate American fiction. Though its influence is too slight to say that it established certain tropes of the genre, it was the first to represent many aspects of college fiction: the bucolic setting, the student high jinks, the fogeyish faculty. It was also something of a snapshot of the situation of the classical school in America; its students are “sons of the forest,”⁷ and its prestige, like many of the struggling, subscription-reliant schools of the day, is low: “On two of its annual ‘Commencement days,’ there [had] been a total deficiency of Baccalaureates; and the lawyers and divines, on whom Doctorates in the respective professions [were] gratuitously inflicted, [were] not accustomed to consider the

distinction as an honor.”⁷ Harley College’s setting, “so far secluded from the sight and sound of the busy world,” is deemed “peculiarly favorable to the moral, if not to the literary habits of its students,”⁸ which reflected the dominant attitude of the time that, as university historian Frederick Rudolph put it,

life was sounder, more moral, more character-building where the college was nestled among the hills or planted on the prairie. Supporting this belief was the attachment of the American people to an agrarian myth, to a view of the world that saw the land as the source of virtue and as the great moving force in history.⁹

This monastic isolation was favorable not only for the headmaster who needed a narrower range to corral his flock, but also for the student, like Fanshawe, particularly inclined to study. As a student, Fanshawe is reclusive, detached from his physical surroundings. For him, his society of thinkers, represented by his great books, is more important than his society of friends:

The books were around him, which had hitherto been to him like those fabled volumes of Magic, from which the reader could not turn away his eye, till death were the consequence of his studies. But there were unaccustomed thoughts in his bosom, now; and to these, leaning his head on one of the unopened volumes, he resigned himself.

He called up in review the years, that, even at his early age, he had spent in solitary study—in conversation with the dead—while he had scorned to mingle with the living world, or to be actuated by any of its motives. He asked himself, to what purpose was all this destructive labor, and where was the happiness of superior knowledge? He had climbed but a few steps of a ladder that reached to

infinity—he had thrown away his life in discovering, that, after a thousand such lives, he should still know comparatively nothing.¹⁰ He even looked forward with dread—though once the thought had been dear to him—to the eternity of improvement that lay before him. It seemed now a weary way, without a resting place, and without a termination; and, at the moment, he would have preferred the dreamless sleep of the brutes that perish, to man’s proudest attribute, of immortality.¹¹

This sounds a bit like Emerson’s “meek young men . . . in libraries” in “The American Scholar” who do not realize that the books around them were authored not by gods but by perishable men such as themselves; Fanshawe’s study is one approached with fear and trembling. And there is no getting around the mysticism in this passage. His books are like “those fabled volumes of Magic,” offering “immortality” through their study and composition. They are not like the work of the representative, rather oblivious faculty member, Dr. Melmoth, who has been writing, as he puts it, “a learned treatise, important not only to the present age, but to posterity, for whose sakes [he] must take heed to [his] safety.”¹² Hawthorne meant this portrait satirically; the nature of Melmoth’s treatise is unclear, but he is certainly no source of immortal thought. Melmoth’s “learned treatise” is a book of scholarship, something secondary to the cultural artifacts with which Fanshawe wears himself. This is one of the earliest critiques of the place of scholarship in literary studies: the “fabled volumes” are key, not Melmoth’s commentaries. But Fanshawe’s studies are empowering not only in their “superior knowledge,” but also in the way in which they transform his otherwise meek manner, giving him “a mysterious and unearthly power in [his] voice,” and, in confrontation, giving him “the influence of a superior mind, [...] maintain[ing] the boldness of look and bearing, that seemed natural to him.”¹³

Generally, perhaps *Fanshawe* is not particularly worthy of note; it is melodramatic and its style is fluid but monotonous. After rescuing Ellen, Melmoth's charge, Fanshawe and Edward return home, Edward and Ellen marry, and Fanshawe dies of some unspecified malady, buried under a tombstone reading "THE ASHES OF A HARD STUDENT AND A GOOD SCHOLAR."¹⁴ But the novel is worth study insofar as it sets up certain trends that would hold in the college novel for more than a century, especially in the student narrative that would dominate the genre's earlier iterations: experience and action are paramount and healthy for the mind as well as body, study leads to obliviousness (Melmoth) or physical weakness (Fanshawe), and the wisdom of the library is somehow intangible, mystical, infinite.

After *Fanshawe*, the college novel landscape was fairly quiet.¹⁵ The bulk of texts written during the nineteenth century were light narratives, often nostalgic, cautionary, or moralistic. But despite the relative dearth of nineteenth century novels treating the college setting, the American literary world maintained a steadfast vigil over the development of higher education in the States. The transcendental stamp was particularly heavy. Thoreau, who attended Harvard from 1833-1837, lamented the economic inefficiency of the university, and presaged twentieth century reformers such as John Dewey by suggesting that theoretical studies were best taught when accompanied by their practical applications: "Which would have advanced the most at the end of a month," he asked,

the boy who had made his own jackknife from the ore which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary for this,—or the boy who had attended the lectures on metallurgy at the Institute in the mean while, and had received a Rogers penknife from his father? Which would be most likely to cut his fingers? . . . To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college that I had

studied navigation!—why, if I had taken one turn down the harbor I should have known more about it.¹⁶

Students “should not *play* life [...] while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly *live* it,” Thoreau famously insists. Emerson took the same course, but did so much more theoretically. Even before he declared America’s intellectual independence in “The American Scholar,” he was touching on educational concerns in his sermons. “What are the great men and great things that surround you?” he asked in his first turn at the pulpit, suggesting that true education was an internal rather than external matter, “all that they can do for you is dust, and less than dust to what you can do for yourself.”¹⁷ Rather, turn to experience, he said in his thirty-ninth sermon, because “all nature is a book on which one lesson is written, and blessed are the eyes that can read it.”¹⁸ And in his fortieth he declaimed that scholarship provides nothing unless the scholar understands himself: “it is only by looking inward that the outward means of knowledge can be made of any avail.”¹⁹ All of these sentiments would carry over to “The American Scholar,” when Emerson would make his most forceful statement on education in America.

The nation had grown in cultural prowess and the time approached “when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertion of mechanical skill.” Key, here, is the notion that intellect is separate from “mechanical skill,” reiterating the function of culture as a means of understanding a transcendent rather than practical reality. This partition was important in Emerson’s time, but as a means of elevating the humanities; in time, it would serve to put them in a box. “Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands,” he

stated, “draws to a close.”²⁰ It was time for America to find its native intellectual idiom. And if scholarship in a vacuum was not possible, some variety of inner scholarship was desirable:

The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books.²¹

“Books,” he went on, “are for the scholar’s idle times.”²² Of course, this assertion is merely a recalibration of attitude; what it means in practical terms for the nation’s institutions of higher learning is unclear. “History and exact science,” the “elements,” consist of objective knowledge that the college must store on behalf of, and disseminate to, its students. But the greater objective must be “not to drill, but to create.” Colleges must engage in this “indispensable office” of creation, lest they “recede in the public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.”²³ But the line between culture and the elements, poetry and science, is one that is difficult to draw when they must coexist within one institution. As Allan Bloom put it, “if creativity presupposes chaos—hence strife and overcoming—and man is now creating an order of peace in which there is no strife, is successfully rationalizing the world, the conditions for creativity, i.e., humanity, will be destroyed.”²⁴ Science presupposes a rational ordering of the world, art a world beyond rational ordering. Hence the essential trouble with putting the two under the same institutional roof.

The Emersonian footprint would extend farther, to the reform movements of the twentieth century. Consider some of the chapter titles of John Dewey's seminal *Democracy and Education*: "Experience and Thinking," "Thinking in Education," "The Nature of Method," and "The Nature of Subject Matter"—surely an Emersonian stamp. And Dewey's practicum models echo the transcendental "study with hands and mind" approach:

While books and conversation can do much, these agencies are usually relied upon too exclusively. Schools require for the full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a *social* sense of their own powers and of the materials and appliances used.²⁵

Of course Dewey's concern was with education's social effects, the transcendentalists primarily with its communion with the oversoul. But the principles that would begin to drive a wedge between the classical curriculum—the content of which was freighted with the humanities but the pedagogy at odds with the humanist dictum of creativity—and the education of experience exist along a continuum that begins with Emerson's call for an end to America's dependence on foreign ideas and continues with the tumult that would see the rise of the research university, the practical learning advocated by Dewey, and the careerism of today. And while many of Allan Bloom's ideas conflict with Emerson's in "The American Scholar," particularly the notion that America must wean itself from its European forebears, the echo is clear:

[the university] must be contemptuous of public opinion because it has within it the source of autonomy—the quest for and even discovery of the truth according to nature. It must concentrate on philosophy, theology, the literary classics, and on those scientists like Newton, Descartes, and Leibniz who have the most comprehensive scientific vision and a sense of the relation of what they do to the

order of the whole of things. These must help preserve what is most likely to be neglected in a democracy. They are not dogmatisms but precisely the opposite: what is necessary to fight dogmatism.²⁶

Bloom's words evoke Emerson's call: "free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, 'without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.'" ²⁷ Bloom would go on to write that our knowledge of "philosophy, history, and literature . . . was never a native plant. We were dependent on Europe for it. All of our peaks were derivative, with full self-awareness and without being ashamed of it." ²⁸ But though the knowledge of libraries was not a "native plant," Emerson never was "ashamed" of having drawn his fundamentals from Europe and the Attic world. In "The American Scholar" he merely advocates the same sort of self-reliance he would espouse thereafter: understand the heritage, read the books, but *ne te quæiveris extra*.²⁹

The fifty years following Emerson's 1838 address saw the advent of the modern university in America, imported from Germany and manifested in the likes of Johns Hopkins and Chicago. But the college novel remained a student-centered province of the old college well into the next century. This clash would become evident in the reform-minded college narrative. While the modern, reformist college novel really begins with *Stover*, there were adumbrations, around the turn of the century, of the critiques to come. Among them was literature that chronicled the experiences of students at women's colleges, which "flooded the market" and helped pave the road for broader acceptance of the principles of coeducation.³⁰ Elsewhere, Harriet Stark's *The Bacillus of Beauty*, which involves a biology professor at Barnard experimenting on a graduate student, raises questions of research ethics. And Owen Wister's *Philosophy 4*, perhaps the best known of the college novels around the turn of the century,

criticized the classical method of teaching. In it, two privileged Harvard students, Bertie and Billy, hire a poorer, but more diligent student, Oscar, to tutor them for their Philosophy final exam. Oscar is a rote learner of the old style. “The sharp line of demarcation which Descartes drew between consciousness and the material world,” he whispers to himself “with satisfaction,” knowing “that if Descartes were on the examination paper he could start with this and go on for nearly twenty lines before he would have to use any words of his own.”³¹ Bertie and Billy endure one study session with Oscar, then dismiss him to gallivant about the countryside in search of a saloon of mythic repute. Returning for their final exam, woefully underprepared, they still earn higher marks than Oscar because, unlike Oscar, they have somehow “lived” philosophy in some more fundamental sense. While the novel superficially praises some sort of vernal wood romantic education—Theodore Roosevelt praised its “deep and subtle moral”³²—Wister apparently meant it as a satire on precisely that notion. Even so, the novel asks pertinent questions about the method and utility of humanistic education, whether memorizing ideas about ideas, as in the Oscar/Descartes example above, counts as much as coming to ideas on one’s own, as Emerson had charged.

John O. Lyons wrote that he was “almost tempted to side with Isabel Patterson who, in a review of *The Education of Peter* by John Wiley (1924), said, ‘I doubt if an undergrad is worth a novel.’”³³ It is a coarse assessment, something like saying that a salesman is not worth a play or a daffodil worth a poem. Even so, student narratives, often authored by individuals only recently undergrads themselves, are susceptible to callowness and delusion. But they can also represent the most vivid assessments of the effectiveness of the higher learning. The bulk of college novels before mid-century were student novels, and this was during the heyday of radical university reforms, during the paradigm shift to the research university format, the variations of the elective

principle, and to the Deweyan ethos of institutional social service. Owen Johnson's *Stover at Yale* is one of the most ardent calls for multi-tiered reform. It is the story of Dink Stover, aspirant "Big Man," who climbs the social ladder, falls amid campus social turmoil, and—unlike Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine—redeems himself to the university community. The first half of the novel is the fairly unremarkable story of Stover's rise to prominence on the football field. But after he has made a name for himself, become something of a local celebrity, and joined the sophomore society of which he was most desirous, he begins to question the justice of the strict campus social hierarchy. The novel's preoccupation with internal social structuring is meant to be reflective of external social hierarchies, as well as to question the practical efficacy and morality of an education that sets the Yale student apart from his fellow citizen. An acquaintance of Stover's, Tom Regan, spends his summer doing manual labor. When Stover asks him why, Regan replies:

"The opportunity to meet the fellow who gets the grind of life—to understand what he thinks of himself, and especially what he thinks of those above him. I won't have many more chances to see him on the ground floor, and some day I've got to know him well enough to convince him. See? By the way, it would be a good college course for a lot of you fellows if you got in touch with the real thing also."

"Are you a socialist?" said Stover, who vaguely associated the term with dynamite and destruction.

"I may be, but I don't know it."³⁴

The question of socialism will recur in *This Side of Paradise*; since the student novels of this period virtually all take place at privileged institutions, it represents a deep-seated social anxiety. But beyond the broad ideological critique, *Stover* engages a number of practical pedagogical questions. Brockhurst, the student most commonly seen advocating for various reforms, says, “The great fault [...] lies [...] with the colleges. The whole theory is wrong, archaic and ridiculous—the theory of education by schedule.” He states that “all education can do is to instil [sic] the love of knowledge. You get that, you catch the fire of it—you educate yourself.” Fanshawe had caught that fire, Bertie and Billie had educated themselves, Amory Blaine would educate himself while, unlike Bertie and Billie, failing to abide by the universities curricular dictates. “All education does to-day is to develop the memory at the expense of the imagination,” continues Brockhurst, “It says: ‘Here are so many pounds of Greek, Latin, mathematics, history, literature. In four years our problem is to pass them through the heads of these hundreds of young barbarians so that they will come out with a lip knowledge.’”³⁵ Yale at the time had failed to embrace the rising tide of electivism, but even the elective system prescribes “education by schedule” in its own way. What the student novel would declare, time and again, is that the student ought to have a greater hand in his or her own education, that the university exists to provide the materials (library, laboratory, etc.) and the direction (faculty), but the curriculum is best left to the learner.

As the novel goes on, Stover quits his sophomore society, facilitates a campus social rebellion, becomes a drunk, rehabilitates, undergoes a series of moral crises that display his potential for leadership, and is ultimately tapped for Skull and Bones. This final event is something of a contradiction to the book’s anti-hierarchical message. Even so, *Stover* is a reformist novel, though its protagonist’s reconciliation with the campus hierarchy presents a

mixed message. But Stover himself was never the vehicle for Johnson's commentary; that duty fell to the numerous liminal characters who would steer Stover away from the sophomore societies and toward campus revolution. The most outspoken of them was Brockhurst, privileged with the rather grandiose closing words of the novel:

"The trouble with me is just that. I'm impractical; have strange ideas. I'm not satisfied with Yale as a magnificent factory on democratic business lines; I dream of something else, something visionary, a great institution not of boys, clean, lovable and honest, but of men of brains, of courage, of leadership, a great center of thought, to stir the country and bring it back to the understanding of what man creates with his imagination, and dares with his will. It's visionary—it will come."³⁶

Brockhurst's "strange ideas" are not really very strange; he wants Yale to be a "great center of thought" that produces leaders on a national scale, a mission statement not far afield from what one would find in the promotional materials put forth by any ranking institution. But his assertion that Yale ought not be a "factory" and that it should emphasize and encourage the "will" of its students is very much in line with the curricular reforms of the era, the shift to the elective and the notion that the student might be capable of self-education. The same idea would be declaimed many a time by Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, Stover's inheritor.

Among the standout novels in the genre later in the century, and one of the first to really dig into campus politics at a faculty rather than student level, is Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952). It is one of the first "academic" novels, a subgenre of the college novel centered on the professor rather than student, a perspective that would dramatically gain popularity in the second half of the twentieth century. *Groves* is the story of Henry Mulcahy, a

literature professor soon to be ousted by Jocelyn College's president, Maynard Hoar. Mulcahy plays politics with politics, feigning Communist ties to allow himself to claim political oppression and keep his job. In the end, Mulcahy's dismissal is turned on its head and Hoar ends up resigning after a series of scandals. This was the forebear of a long line of novels predicated on academic in-fighting. Some, like *Groves* or Saul Bellow's *The Dean's December* treat the topic seriously, but the bulk, especially more recent novels of the type, lampoon the academy, where very bright people behave in very dim, puerile ways. As Mark McGurl wrote in his study of creative writing in academia, *The Program Era*:

Typically written as satire, this genre usually registers not the metaphysics but, more humbly, the ironies of institutionalization. Unlike works from earlier in the century, [...] the postwar campus novel is most often written from the perspective of the faculty, taking as its focus one or another ludicrous dimension of departmental life, and almost always portraying literary scholars as the petty, cynical idiots we are.³⁷

Of the 648 novels included in Kramer's bibliography, 319 are student-centered annotations, 156 (49%) of which were published before 1960, beginning in 1828; of the staff-centered annotations, 228 of 329 (69%) were published after 1960 (another 37 titles after 1950). These numbers show the persisting popularity of the student narrative balanced with an increasing appetite for the faculty narrative. There are a few potential reasons for this shift, the first being the rarity of the protagonist's position. In the interest of "literary tourism," titles that explore more rarified positions (but which are still of common interest) can have a more significant appeal; when the college student was more rarified, the student novel could carry this weight, but

with the rising ubiquity of college education, the next level, the faculty level, becomes of more common interest while remaining rarified.

Secondly, with the Postmodern emphasis on the collective—broad social commentary above the individual experience—faculty and staff novels are better able to address social issues from a “bird’s eye” view; this factor would lead to a number of allegorical and satirical faculty-centered college novels in the late 1950s and 1960s (e.g., Nabokov’s *Pnin* (1957) and *Pale Fire* (1962) and Barth’s *The End of the Road* (1958) and *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966)). Given that most authors writing college novels have studied literature at the university beyond the base curricular requirements, and given that many of them have been faculty members in some branch of literary studies, it is unsurprising that the bulk of faculty novels involve members of English departments or some related field. 206 of the titles in Kramer’s bibliography that are tied to specific disciplines are centered on the study of English-language literature; 279 titles represent all other fields combined (the next most represented field is history, with 39 titles). When fields related to English (linguistics, lexicography, classics, journalism, foreign language and literature, and poetry) are combined with these 206, a majority of Kramer’s bibliographed titles represent the field. While this propensity is obviously a natural product of writers writing about writing and writers, much of this emphasis is perhaps also due to the relative youth of the study of “modern” literature at the university level and the accompanying tenuousness, anxiety, and directionlessness that the field has suffered since it first appeared a little more than a century ago.

The college novel often represents humanities adrift, without a clear mission. That it would do so is natural given that, first, the genre tends to focus on the humanities, and, second, that literary studies is a young field. For example, in 1896, Yale professor William L. Phelps’s course in the modern novel (including Kipling, Stevenson, and Tolstoy) was cancelled because

the faculty determined that such study was superfluous, given that students would likely be “studying” these novels in their own spare time, whereas they would not study Pliny and Homer on their own.³⁸ The institutionalized study of literature since Milton is a relatively new phenomenon on college campuses, and the past hundred years has accordingly seen a great deal of “feeling out” to learn its place and its methods. Philology akin to the old classicism, New Criticism, the various limbs of the theory tree have all taken turns and warred for supremacy, but none has unequivocally won out, at least not in the way that the elegant simplicity of the scientific method standardizes the hard sciences. Between this clash of approaches and competition for the limited professorships, especially high-end professorships, literature professors make for a tortured bunch, particularly vulnerable to social and professional satire.

Few novels have treated professorial angst better than James Hynes’s 2001 novel *The Lecturer’s Tale*. It is replete with trod-upon composition teachers, flamboyant theorists, and intransigent traditionalists. Its protagonist, Nelson Humboldt had, in an effort to mainstream himself, written his dissertation on “Conrad and postcolonialism.” Of course, having written on Joseph Conrad excluded him from consideration as a postcolonialist, but his work did attract the attention of Great Books proponent Mort Weissman³⁹ at the very prominent University of the Midwest, netting him an improbably prestigious postdoctoral fellowship. The novel begins as Nelson’s fellowship is running out and he is begging for sections of composition to tide him over until he finds a tenure-track position. A freak accident severs one of his fingers, which, reattached, endows him with the supernatural ability to bend others to his will when he touches them. Thus he begins his rise up the departmental ladder. Having served his time in composition, he identifies with the plight of the comp teachers:

They combined the bitter esprit de corps of assembly-line workers with the literate wit of the overeducated: They were the steerage of the English Department, the first to drown if the budget sprang a leak. They were the Morlocks to the Eloi of the eighth floor. *Pace* Wallerstein, they were the colonial periphery, harvesting for pennies a day the department's raw material—undergraduates—and shipping these processed students farther up the hierarchy, thus creating the leisure for the professors at the imperial center to pursue their interests in feminist theory and postcolonial literature.⁴⁰

Only slightly less exploited are the creative writers, whom the fiery Irish poet in the department refers to as the “idiot savants who create the grist for your fucking mill.”⁴¹ This poet, known only as “The Coogan” laments having become a “tamed poet [...] [an] artist in captivity” in exchange for “lifetime employment and summers off.”⁴² “I should have been an Elizabethan,” he cries,

Even if it meant being a bloody Englishman. *There* were poets, by Christ. Ben Jonson laid bricks and soldiered some and went to fuckin' prison. Kit Marlowe spied and whored and died in a barroom, stabbed to death in the forehead. They were after fighting over the check, don't ye know. Now *that's* a poet's death. [...] Whereas the worst that'll happen to me [...] is I'll lose my fuckin' tenure. It's a pusillanimous time to be a poet, Kinch. I ought to be ashamed of myself.⁴³

But the creative writers, even if treated more as curiosities than professionals, are still well-compensated for their work, whereas the composition teachers are not. The two most put-upon classes of individuals in the department are the composition instructors, who teach the most practical classes in the department, and the creative writers, who actually produce the product that justifies the scholars' livelihoods.

Hynes savages the theorists. During a scholarly luncheon to discuss “the lesbian phallus in Oscar Wilde,” the Coogan, exasperated, cries, “We’re a fuckin’ English department, aren’t we? [...] So what’s all this shite about penises, and what’s it got to do with literature?”⁴⁴ A scuffle promptly ensues between the Coogan and the anarchic theorist Kraljevic. Lampooning the theory-minded continues as the middle portion of the novel is devoted to a job search in which three highly prominent theorists are brought in to interview. One of them, a pop culture scholar, deconstructs an Elvis Presley movie that never actually existed, claiming that its non-existence is beside the point. Another, Lester Antilles (depending on the reader’s taste, the novel is either blessed or cursed with such names), is the world’s leading postcolonial scholar who, as a graduate student

had announced to his dissertation committee that doctoral theses at major Western universities were a primary locus of the objectifying colonialist gaze on native subjects, and he refused on principle to participate in the marginalization of indigenous voices or to become complicit with the hegemonic discourse of Western postcolonial cultural imperialism.⁴⁵

Hence, he never took classes or wrote a dissertation. His reward was an endowed professorship at Columbia, at which he refused to “teach any classes, hold any office hours, publish any books, serve on any committees, or supervise any dissertations.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, he had risen to the very peak of the field.

But *The Lecturer’s Tale* does more than exaggerate the foibles of the profession. It also asks hard and practical questions about literary study: Who is doing the real work of the department? What is that work? What real good does it do? Toward the end of the novel, the university’s main library burns to the ground. Students and faculty flee and a corporation steps in

to purchase what was left of a once prestigious institution, turning it into a degree mill of dubious acclaim. But Nelson, left in the power vacuum that ensues, becomes the new head of the English department. Professors are taken down a step, tenure is abolished, comp teachers rise to claim their long-awaited respect. And Nelson, stepping into the classroom to teach students several notches less qualified than the Midwest students of previous years, muses

the odds were very good that, even with a college education, most of the men and women before him would end up behind the counter in a convenience store, or in the grease pit of an auto repair shop, or, at best, in a little gray cubicle in some vast, fluorescent-lit office. Sometimes he wondered if he was doing them any good at all. Would having read *The Great Gatsby* raise their pay? Would *Wuthering Heights* lighten the burden of a dead-end job? He looked into his open briefcase and saw only his lunch and his battered old Penguin edition of *Copperfield*. What earthly use was *David Copperfield* to these people? What earthly use was *David Copperfield* to anybody? What earthly use, thought Nelson, has *David Copperfield* ever been to me?⁴⁷

The persistent anxiety: why does literature matter? Nelson's new students are unlikely ever to make waves in the scholarly world of either the sciences or arts, and even Nelson, professor of literature, is left to wonder what good it had ever done him. But the conclusion is not as entirely bleak as this. He opens his lecture—"Chapter One," the novel begins, "I Am Born"; the story, literature, goes on, its mission somehow implicit yet beyond explanation. Nelson's war had all along been not with the texts, but with their explicators.

But Hynes is just a more recent iteration of literary angst regarding academia. Literary antipathy toward the academy in general has deep roots in American writing. While Phillis

Wheatley's "To the University of Cambridge, in New England" charges students to "scan the heights" in pursuit of scientific and theological truth, she cautions that their present "privileges" may be fleeting should they "remit [their] guard" against sin, presumably a ready menace at Harvard.⁴⁸ In Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, Clara notes that she and her brother had been schooled at home, "instructed in most branches of useful knowledge, and were saved from the corruption and tyranny of colleges and boarding-schools."⁴⁹ While one of Benjamin Franklin's two lamentations on settling in Pennsylvania was that the state had no college (the other was that it had no militia),⁵⁰ he also mentions early in his autobiography the "mean Living many so educated were afterwards able to obtain," casting a shadow on the most practical of questions related to higher education.⁵¹

Franklin, at a younger age, had been harsher toward the products of Harvard when he wrote in *The New England Courant* that it was where the wealthy sent their sons so that, "for want of a suitable Genius, they learn little more than to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteely."⁵² This frustration with the superficiality of the college product, like Henry Adams's statement that Harvard created a "type but not a will,"⁵³ sat uneasily with a national ethos that prized real work over the pretense of erudition. As Frederick Rudolph explains:

Because democratic growth in the United States was contemporaneous with the growth of the colleges, they experienced some difficulty in establishing rigorous learning as one of their fundamental interests. Americans were on the whole much impressed by the careers of self-taught, self-made men, men whose elevation to positions of responsibility, eminence, and wealth was accomplished without the benefit of formal schooling. Against this record of success the colleges could with difficulty advance the necessity of close, rigorous intellectual exercise as a

justification for attending college. In the end, the colleges to a certain extent incorporated a posture of anti-intellectualism in their behavior.⁵⁴

Henry Adams, in his *Education*, would echo Thoreau's practical concerns: "had his father kept the boy at home, and given him half an hour's direction every day, he would have done more for him than school ever could do for them." He acknowledges that "school-taught men and boys looked down on home-bred boys, and rather prided themselves on their own ignorance, but the man of sixty can generally see what he needed in life, and in Henry Adams's opinion it was not school."⁵⁵ Adams alleged that Harvard created "a type but not a will" and that "four years of Harvard College, if successful, resulted in an autobiographical blank, a mind on which only a water-mark had been stamped. [...] It taught little, and taught that little ill, but it left the mind open, free from bias, ignorant of facts, but docile."⁵⁶

The "type" and "will" binary is important insofar as it represents the division that would be the perceived flaw for many literary commentators on higher education. The "type" is protocol, programming, rote memorization, ultimately a flawed transmission of what the humanities, the "will," are meant to impart. In *Philosophy 4*, Oscar had "type," but Bertie and Billy had "will." Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine would rail against the curriculum that was making literature mechanical. Bellow would later gnash teeth over a society that saw in the humanities nothing but dead culture, again, merely a hollow "type." Hynes's assault on academia was, in part, the allegation that the faculty had adopted a new status quo, a hollow imitation of the cultural revolution they had inherited; Louis Menand, in *The Marketplace of Ideas*, echoes Hynes, noting that "the stars [of new academia] were the people who talked about the failures and omissions in their own fields. [...] They awakened to find that history, in its cunning, has made them rulers of the towns they once set out to burn down."⁵⁷ The "type" is playing by a set

of pre-established rules, but the humanities, rooted in art and fed by chaos, eschew circumscription. This tension, between living art and studied art, would be the philosophical backbone of much of the college novelists' frustration with the manner in which the humanities are and have been studied in the university.

There would also be more worldly concerns. Naturalism, for its part, would carry the literary unease with the academy along class lines. Frank Norris's *McTeague* involves a brutish San Francisco dentist who had apprenticed into his trade rather than attended dental school. A romantic rival learns of this and uses it to have McTeague stripped of his dental practice. For Naturalism, a literary trend situated on social pathologies and the arbitrary, and ultimately inefficient, primacy of wealth and immovable social strictures, the university (here, dental school as proxy), serves as a representative implement of pessimistic determinism. McTeague's shadowy early life among the mining camps would not provide the social and economic trajectory that would lead him to formal education. And while McTeague had transcended his inherited academic shortcomings, having educated himself with his seven volumes of *Allen's Practical Dentist* (by all accounts in the novel, he is a capable practitioner), he has failed to acquire certification by the new cultural norm, the college system. This, of course, sets in motion the tragic events of the remainder of his life—the loss of his livelihood, his descent into alcoholism and murder, his sojourn in the mining camps, and his death in the desert.

But, while writers of the naturalistic stripe might resent higher education as a bastion of the elite, practical concerns would in short order force writers to look to the university for their livelihoods. As Lawrence Rainey noted,

The Great Depression devastated the fragile economy of Modernism, and in the absence of the patron-investors who had sustained it during the teens and

twenties, Modernism turned to the university, welcoming its direct support (T. S. Eliot gives the Clark lectures at Cambridge in 1926, the Norton lectures at Harvard in 1933) or assenting to its canonization, so guaranteeing a new market of pliant students, rather than unruly general readers.⁵⁸

Writers like Ezra Pound sought direct support through employment, but, of course, Pound's experience at Wabash did not turn out well for either him or the college. His personal style and classroom manner clashed with the conservative Midwestern school and he was dismissed, with severance pay, after sharing his boarding room with a traveling female thespian.⁵⁹ Pound's troubles at Wabash, and his periodic clashes with his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, gave him a grudge to nurse. He wrote in his *Guide to Kulchur* that "the American University system is run by hirelings and by boors in great part. The last trick of the bleeders and gombeen men is to suppress learning by endowment. You give so many gothic buildings to a University that its whole income goes in the upkeep of anachronistic monstrosities."⁶⁰ The academy had offered shelter to writers, but not without a price. To Pound, this meant a university that discouraged organic creativity to appease old-school financiers.

The criticisms and reasons to criticize or satirize were multiple, but the literary attitude toward the university means little without its context in modern higher education reform. The American university began as an imported product, a recreation of the English college: residential, regimented, patriarchal, classical, and focused on teaching rather than research. As the number of colleges grew in the nineteenth century, the old assumptions about Latin and Greek fell afoul of a nation that admired primarily the fruits of manual labor. The old curriculum was out-of-touch and aristocratic. Rudolph records one dire summary of the situation:

Surveying the collegiate scene in 1850, Francis Wayland of Brown summed up a half century of American collegiate history and then asked the question that the next half century would answer: “We have produced an article for which the demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and still the demand diminishes. Is it not time to inquire whether we cannot furnish an article for which the demand will be, at least, somewhat more remunerative?”⁶¹

The whole structure was in danger of failing unless something radical was done to change it. As Michael G. Moran notes, that change would have to do with adapting higher education to meet the needs of the industrial era: “The Civil War had been won by the North’s industrial and technological superiority as well as its army [...], a fact that might have been lost on the old college traditionalist but not on the public at large.”⁶² The university would, for the first time in America, have to justify its existence in terms of concrete benefit.

There was also grumbling with the standardized curriculum, which led to electivist reforms, allowing the students to set, to one degree or another, their own course. While President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard was not the first to suggest this system, Harvard’s switch to the elective principle was perhaps the most influential and helped the institution rise from a regional, if regionally prestigious, institution, to a leader in American higher education. Eliot’s argument was clear: since the student would only be able to take advantage of a fraction of the faculty and coursework that Harvard had to offer, why not allow him some say in which fraction it would be.⁶³ After all, he reasoned, European institutions do the same and “the American boy is decidedly more mature and more capable of taking care of himself” than his European counterpart.⁶⁴ He declared that the “temperament, physical constitution, mental aptitudes, and

moral quality of a boy” are all determined by his eighteenth year; he was mature enough to decide his own course of study.⁶⁵

Eliot’s reform was a smashing success for Harvard. Rudolph notes that “during the forty years in which the elective principle was insinuating its way into every aspect of Harvard life, the faculty was growing from sixty to six hundred and the endowment from two to twenty million dollars.”⁶⁶ Other schools followed suit. The College of Charleston “surrendered to the elective principle, and two years after that had to build a new dormitory in order to handle the increase in enrollment.”⁶⁷ But, despite Eliot’s optimism that by eighteen “the potential man is already revealed,”⁶⁸ the system was subject to abuse. Again, Rudolph:

[The elective system] reached the epitome of curricular expression at the University of Nebraska where, by 1931, a student could take courses in early Irish, creative thinking, American English, first aid, advanced clothing, ice cream and ices, third-year Czechoslovakian, football, sewerage, and a man’s problems in the modern home.

Yet, hidden in the absurdity of such an offering and in all of the impulse to growth was the fact that between 1890 and 1925 enrollment in institutions of higher education grew 4.7 times as fast as the population.⁶⁹

Electivism, the increasing matriculation of minorities and women, and the rapidly growing total enrollment were all signs of the democratization of the American university. It was finally becoming *res publicus*. But it was also becoming *res juvenis*. In time and in conjunction with the commodification of higher education, democratization would enable the student body to determine not only their general course of study but also to begin to influence the individual

syllabi. Departments compete with one another for students, hence funds, therefore giving the students what they want would become the nature of the beast. This would sit well with the English department teaching more accessible contemporary literature, pushing the Classics departments on which the college humanities curricula had been constructed farther into the wilds.

As the university saw its role in American society boom in the twentieth century, so did its mission become increasingly confused, especially as concerns the place of the humanities. The classical school, vestigial and humanistic, had been, by the turn of the century, supplanted by the modern research university, which was technical, business-like, and outcome-oriented, as Gail McDonald notes,

according to [the new university's] rules, depth of study in a specialized area of expertise was more in keeping with measurable standards of competence; furthermore, a narrow focus was more likely to yield results. Expertise and productivity—characteristics valued by both businessmen and scientists—edged out breadth and leisure as academic values.⁷⁰

The humanities would have to adapt to justify their inclusion in the new order, and attempted to do so in a number of ways. There was the old philology, the search for fact and history in language and literature. This fit in the new model in the sense that it produced demonstrable results; however, it ran afoul of the essence of humanism. Ezra Pound would describe the philologist's work as "spend[ing] most of his time learning what his author wore and ate" to the extent that he or she would be "no longer able as of old to fill themselves with the beauty of the classics."⁷¹ He would compare them to slaves who "contribute[] 'blocks' to a 'pyramid that will

be of no especial use except as a monument.”⁷² He would also, in his *Hell Cantos*, condemn philologists to the “bog of stupidities” as the “betrayers of language.”⁷³

The philologist was a historian in literary scholar’s clothes, contributing to the *knowing* of literature, but not to the *understanding*. Pound’s approach (more or less endorsed by Eliot, though the latter would compare the former’s zealous “effort to establish serious credentials for literary modernism” to “a man trying to convey to a very deaf person the fact that the house is on fire”⁷⁴) would be to attempt to “professionalize” poetry, hence Pound’s tireless involvement in the business end of literature:

Born and educated in a world that respected professionals, Pound and Eliot set out consciously to turn the creation and criticism of poetry into an occupation equal in rigour, precision, and importance to the work of the medical diagnosticians and research scientists with whom they often compared themselves.⁷⁵

But where Pound saw the production of poetry and criticism as a practice for the world beyond the academy, Eliot, for example in *The Sacred Wood*, endorsed the notion of the academic practice of criticism. But even Eliot conceded that entrenched scholarship in any extant form was detrimental to poetry. “In the year he finished his dissertation,” notes McDonald, “Eliot, sounding more like Pound, wrote in the *New Statesman* that the labour of preparing a doctoral thesis was ‘fatal to the development of intellectual powers. It crushes originality, it kills style.’”⁷⁶

As the century moved on and New Criticism came and went, literary studies turned to the armchair socioeconomics of literary theory, a critical bent facilitated in large part by sociological principles. Like sociology, which justifies its inclusion in the academic technocracy by applying science-like methods to non-scientific subjects, theory would put literature on the examination

table, deconstructing it in laboratory fashion. Toward the end of the century, it had succeeded in imbuing literary studies with a hue of scientific analysis and enriching individual scholars, as Elaine Showalter recalled in her critical memoir *Faculty Towers*:

Literary theory and women's studies became institutionalized in the university at almost the same time in the 1980s. Theory was the ticket to intellectual and professional legitimacy, and it became the basis of the academic star system, in which universities hotly competed for the services of a few celebrated, expensive, and mobile theorists, while anonymous exploited masses taught literature and composition.⁷⁷

Unsurprisingly, Showalter was among Hynes's champions, endorsing the vision of put-upon instructors depicted in *The Lecturer's Tale* in both *Faculty Towers* and in book reviews. The study of culture in higher education was developing an entrenched caste system in which the administration of English departments sought out the active participants in the theory conversations. While this provided the field a relatively untapped and fruitful vein for discussion, it also served to dislocate it from its original target demographic, the undergraduate. The rise of the literary professoriate was due in large part to the eagerness of students to study contemporary literature in the college classroom, what Mark McGurl calls in *The Program Era* "that quasi-erotic institutional-economic force known as 'student demand.'"⁷⁸ But as the focus in literary studies, a rewarding but somewhat recreational pursuit, shifted dramatically to theory, discussing discussions of texts rather than discussing texts, literary studies lost its prime mandate. To compensate, departments have seen the rise of the university creative writing program, a third way beyond textual analysis (set aside as Great Books and New Criticism fell out of favor) and theory; creative writing has given university literary studies a new dimension, but has also

substituted what McGurl calls one “supremely impractical pursuit” for another.⁷⁹ McGurl goes on to suggest that literary studies offers “excellent training” for the “increasingly symbol-driven and fiction-laden postindustrial economy,” though he leaves the precise mechanism at work in this hypothesis unspecified. Perhaps it is something like Margaret Edson’s doctor in *W;t*, who claims to have found the study of Donne excellent intellectual training for clinical medicine. More than that, though, it rings of a hollow justification, another attempt to make literature fit neatly within the realm of science, the prime motivator of the new university.

The tenuous position of literary studies (and the humanities at large) is representative of the greater attempt to define the place of the university in society. Universities are expensive, after all, and the question arose as to how the nation might justify, morally and economically, subsidizing a sort of glorified book club, especially later in the century as the written narrative became less and less the predominant form of cultural transmission. That literature (or some iteration of the combined force of narrative and philosophy) is important is rarely questioned in either academic fiction or pedagogical theory; but the extent to which its formalized study in university English departments is a beneficent occurrence is frequently doubted (note the plethora of recent books and articles devoted to the question of whether the humanities will survive the 21st century). In the industrial and post-industrial ages, the university increasingly became a place of scientific exploration for the good of all and a place of practical training for the good of the individual. A course of study in which the benefits are at best personal and tangential, or perhaps fully ineffable, does not fit the paradigm.

At mid-century, the struggle to make literary studies fit in the new university would give rise to the sort of phenomenon explored in C. P. Snow’s curiously controversial “Two Cultures” lecture. Parsing the divide between the “literary intellectual” and the scientist, Snow

constantly [...] felt [he] was moving among two groups—comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not grossly different in social origin, earning about the same incomes, who had almost ceased to communicate at all, who in intellectual, moral and psychological climate had so little in common that instead of going from Burlington House or South Kensington to Chelsea, one might have crossed an ocean.⁸⁰

The scientists thought that Dickens was, in Snow's terms, "an extraordinarily esoteric, tangled and dubiously rewarding writer, something like Rainer Maria Rilke,"⁸¹ and that the literati were so oblivious of the basic terms of science that none could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics, something he claimed would be the literary equivalent of "can you read?"⁸² Referencing *Lucky Jim* as an illustration, he acknowledges that those in the humanities must face the perils of a life's work judged by subjective means and must do so for considerably less pay and job security than a person in the sciences.⁸³ However, he seemed to believe that this imbalance was justified by the net good provided by the sciences:

It is all very well for one, as a personal choice, to reject industrialization—do a modern Walden, if you like, and if you go without much food, see most of your children die in infancy, despise the comforts of literacy, accept twenty years off your own life, then I respect you for the strength of your aesthetic revulsion. But I don't respect you in the slightest if, even passively, you try to impose the same choice on others who are not free to choose. In fact, we know what their choice would be. For, with singular unanimity, in any country where they have had the chance, the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them.⁸⁴

Snow's essential position, that the humanities and the sciences were alienated from one another, that they might be somehow better integrated for the benefit of all, and that the sciences provide the only direct route to alleviating human suffering is sound enough. Agriculture, medicine, and engineering need not explain their relevance as to the greater good. Even so, Snow's lecture elicited a heady backlash. F. R. Leavis stated that he, "unlike Snow," believed that for "our humanness, for the sake of a human future," the university must be a place consisting of "more than specialist departments" but rather "a centre of human consciousness: perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility."⁸⁵ He wrote:

And this, for me, evokes that total vision which makes Snow's "social hope" unintoxicating to many of us—the vision of our imminent tomorrow in today's America: the energy, the triumphant technology, the productivity, the high standard of living and the life-impoverishment—the human emptiness; emptiness and boredom craving alcohol—of one kind or another. Who will assert that the average member of a modern society is more fully human, or more alive, than a Bushman, an Indian peasant, or a member of one of those poignantly surviving primitive peoples, with their marvelous art and skills and vital intelligence?⁸⁶

Of course, it was exactly these vague notions about "perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility" and the nativist romanticizing of undeveloped economies that prompted Snow to value science over the humanities in the beginning. The problem of vague justifications for the study of culture has been persistent. The usual language advocates for the preservation of "humanness" or something similarly inscrutable. Frank Aydelotte, in *Breaking the Academic Lockstep*, wrote that

only by education can we translate into practice the great aims for which we have been fighting. Those aims are in the last analysis intellectual and spiritual. They can never be realized by the mere mastery of scientific and engineering and economic techniques. They can never be realized by turning men into machines, even though food, clothing, shelter, and amusements are guaranteed.⁸⁷

But when it comes time to apportion resources to the preservation of culture or of life, art or technology, the latter wins by virtue of its tangible effects. Michael Yudkin, writing in tandem with Leavis, responded as to the Dickens/Thermodynamics examples that

it is idle to deplore the lack of scientific knowledge in specialists in other fields. To understand what is meant by mass or acceleration can certainly be of no practical help to a student of classical literature, nor could it have the more subtle effect on the personality that might be its other justification. It would be, strictly, useless knowledge.⁸⁸

Rephrased, literature is of use, even if only in its “subtle effect,” to anyone; science is of use only to the scientist. But, the other “culture” might reply, the scientist is of direct utility to all.

Responding to Leavis, Snow stated that the conception of the artist as one “free from society” (in Lionel Trilling’s phrase), is inherently selfish and represents the “romantic conception of the artist carried to the extreme,”⁸⁹ a pulsing beacon of Western decadence, an idealistic presumption that the artist could save the world. “Man doesn’t live by bread alone,” he wrote, “yes, that has been said often enough in the course of these discussions. It has been said occasionally with a lack of imagination, a provincialism, that makes the mind boggle.”⁹⁰ There is no simple solution to the two cultures problem, no more than there was in Snow’s time. But it is

this ideological struggle that provides much of the dramatic tension that makes the university fertile ground for novels of ideas, an immaterial battlefield for romance and rationality, science and spirit.

If science is the saving grace of humanity and the university is, more and more, the home of science, where do the humanities belong? It is a variation of the Protagoran problem: “Then about what does the Sophist make him eloquent?” asks Socrates, “must he not make him eloquent in that which he understands?”⁹¹ The humanities claim to offer a unique perspective, but perspective is not substance. Even so, some voices in the wilderness, like McGurl’s assertion that literary study enables the student to navigate the “increasingly symbol-driven and fiction-laden postindustrial economy,” have tried to tie specific benefits from literary training to benefits in the pursuit of science. In *W;t*, Margaret Edson writes of a former student, now the attending physician, of a dying Donne scholar. He remembers the course he took with her in the metaphysical poets: “The puzzle takes over. You’re not even trying to solve it anymore. Fascinating, really. Great training for lab research. Looking at things in increasing levels of complexity.”⁹² In this view, the study of literature improves the sort of intellectual dexterity required of science, a vague but more practical notion than what Frank Aydelotte wrote in *Breaking the Academic Lock-Step*: “liberal knowledge is not a formula; it is a point of view.”⁹³ Or as Moran would phrase it in his study on Aydelotte:

A broad education would create specialists who also possess humane, liberal knowledge. This background, with its understanding of essential human problems delineated by both literature and the sciences, would cause specialists to become more than competent; it would help them become [...] the best in their area. After being educated in the best that had been thought and done in the world,

engineering students would always compare their endeavors to the highest standards, and this process would encourage them to strive for the highest goals.⁹⁴

But of course, the precise mechanism at work, prompting the student to these higher aims, is unclear. How does literature provoke the committed oncologist to striving any harder to cure cancer? The “bread alone” dictum remains imprecise. Again, McGurl:

For better or worse, the modern university is predicated on the values of the Enlightenment, on the attempt (however difficult, perhaps even futile) to trade our childish enchantments for valid knowledge, including knowledge of the ways and means of enchantment. Valuing the experience of enchantment above all else, Nabokov’s theory of literature short-circuits the pursuit of literary knowledge on behalf of a mystical submission to aesthetic authority felt along the spine. His is the crudest form of what a certain kind of literary scholar calls the “ideology of the aesthetic,” and in generally less militant forms it is endemic to the discipline of creative writing, whose ultimate commitment is not to knowledge but to what Donald Barthelme called “Not-Knowing.” This is not a commitment to ignorance, exactly, but it does entail a commitment to innocence: the aura of literature must be protected at all costs, and the mysteries of the creative process must be explored without being dispelled. Although literary studies as we know it is probably unthinkable except as built upon a foundation of awe—supplying it one of its strongest motives—Nabokov’s scholarly contemporaries were better equipped than he to make literary criticism seem a genuinely intellectual, if not exactly a scientific, endeavor.⁹⁵

One potential, perhaps more practical, justification for literary studies is McGurl's assertion that creative writing is a manifestation of "reflexive modernity," that the practice of the creative arts allows practitioners to understand themselves, thereby offering a sort of therapeutic benefit.⁹⁶ Or the supposition, supported by Saul Bellow among others, that the study of artistic tradition provides an invaluable set of cultural markers by which we can relate to one another; without them, we fail to recognize each other as communal extensions of ourselves. But, by this theory, these cultural markers are better experienced themselves rather than digested and repackaged by subsequent interpreters. As Bellow's colleague Allan Bloom would write, "the fact that most of us never would have heard of Oedipus if it were not for Freud should make us aware that we are almost utterly dependent on our German missionaries or intermediaries for our knowledge of Greece, Rome, Judaism and Christianity."⁹⁷ Ezra Pound offered a similar argument in his *Guide to Kulchur*: "Can I direct the reader's curiosity by prodding him with the probability that 50,000 people can define a stoic for every one who knows or has heard that Zeno was the father of stoic philosophy."⁹⁸ The problem has become one of derivatives; education viewed through this lens is about secondary culture, not engaging with the texts that spawned ideas, but accepting the appropriation of those ideas as filtered by others.

But with this muddling of purpose would come the problem of motivation for both student and faculty. Without an urgent purpose, the rigors of study, for student and faculty, would be difficult to undergo. Frederick Rudolph, with his irrepressible penchant for anecdote, would describe the situation as such:

A few days after the Battle of Bunker Hill a Harvard undergraduate wrote in his diary: "Amid all the terrors of battle I was so busily engaged in Harvard Library that I never even heard of . . . [it] until it was completed." A hundred and fifty

years later professors who complained of apathetic students were advised by Knute Rockne, the great coach at Notre Dame: “Make your classes as interesting as football.” Obviously some time between the Battle of Bunker Hill and the titanic football struggles of the 1920’s at South Bend there had developed in the American college what may probably best be called “the motivation problem.”⁹⁹

The revolutionary-era student presumably had commitment to an academic purpose; by the rise of inter-collegiate athletics, that purpose had faded from view. Emerson’s solution was practical: “A college professor should be elected by setting all the candidates loose on a miscellaneous gang of young men taken at large from the street. He who could get the ear of the greatest number of these youths, should be professor.”¹⁰⁰ There must be a level of passion (or at least theatrics) for a professor to be effective, the sort of “campus wildman” method that Bellow would disparage in *Ravelstein*. Before the rise of research over teaching as the alpha-trait of professorship, the professor was seen primarily as an instigator or stifler of his students’ passions. More often than not, early college fiction would paint the professor as the latter. Fitzgerald and Johnson were harsh on the droning professor, as was Henry Adams in his *Education*. A 1926 poem published in *American Mercury* summed up the scene: “Here he sits droning / On some forgotten truth; / Heedless of Springtime, / Intolerant of youth. / Here he sits dryly / Talking all day; / Woodenly sober / And slim as his pay.”¹⁰¹ Dean Andrew Fleming West of Princeton would worry that his “scholars seem to be subjects of some petty principality rather than freemen in the commonwealth of knowledge” and insisted that “the kind of scholar any man is to become [...] is determined in the last resort not so much by what he knows or says as by what he believes and loves.”¹⁰² The effective professor, according to Dean West, is to be a

person of great passion as well as knowledge. But the notion of stage presence as a prerequisite of great teaching treats the symptom of apathy, not the cause.

The likelihood of a college curriculum setting intellectual fire to its students is not solely an issue of impassioned or unimpassioned teachers. Bloom wonders

what image does a first-rank college or university present today to a teen-ager leaving home for the first time, off to the adventure of a liberal education? He has four years of freedom to discover himself—a space between the intellectual wasteland he has left behind and the inevitable dreary professional training that awaits him after the baccalaureate. In this short time he must learn that there is a great world beyond the little one he knows, experience the exhilaration of it and digest enough of it to sustain himself in the intellectual deserts he is destined to traverse. He must do this, that is, if he is to have any hope of a higher life. These are the charmed years when he can, if he so chooses, become anything he wishes and when he has the opportunity to survey his alternatives, not merely those current in his time or provided by careers, but those available to him as a human being. The importance of these years for an American cannot be overestimated.

They are civilization's only chance to get him.¹⁰³

Of course, this notion that college is “civilization's only chance” presumes that the student comes into the university from some sort of academic wasteland, which is not always the case. Those raised in “reading” households are more likely to have a liberal education already and to have acquired the intellectual incentive (learning as an end in itself) to further this education on their own; these students could be more trusted with their own course of study. These students also tend to find their way to more financially and academically privileged collegiate

environments. Students who do not have this household background are less likely to find their way to “first-rank” colleges and are less likely to have intuited the benefits of studying the humanities. Therefore the students who are relatively untutored in the humanities coming in to college are less likely to discover enthusiasm for the humanities once they arrive. As Theodore Weiss recalled of a conversation he had with Elizabeth Bowen:

Bowen, some years ago serving as a visiting writer in the Princeton Writing Program, well expressed the chilly, unpromising background from which that change had sprung. In a moment’s confidence she said, “Just between us I think teaching writing quite absurd.” Before I could respond she went on, “But then I also consider it absurd to teach English literature at the university. In earlier days it was taken quite for granted that a young man of good family, come to Oxford or Cambridge, would have read English literature, certainly modern things, at home.” To my asking, “Well, why was that teaching introduced?” she replied, “Oh, for Indians, Australians, and other colonials.” “And for Americans?” I injected. “Well, yes, since you say so.”¹⁰⁴

Or as Bloom would write, with characteristic dismay, “there is one simple rule for the university’s activity: it need not concern itself with providing its students with experiences that are available in democratic society.”¹⁰⁵ Cerebral reading, as the financial reports of any literary publisher will show, is troubled. And as forms such as the novel, short story, and poem go the way of the epic, lose their popular luster and become less and less the dominant form of cultural memory, the incentive for people to read them will fade. Reading may become something laborious. As the comedian Jim Gaffigan joked, “ever get a book as a present? [What,] is this an

assignment? No, it's a present. Well why don't you read it? Here I got a present for you: go mow my lawn."¹⁰⁶

The motivation issue is not solely a problem for the student. Assigned to be the "token humanist" in a vast artificial intelligence project, the protagonist of Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* muses:

How long could I show up at the Center and produce nothing of use to anyone?

The productivity problem. The pure-research problem. The inspiration, the blind-trust problem. I could drift without limit and still not be reprimanded. I had the year gratis. I might do nothing but prime the pump, rest and recharge, and still I would not ruffle so much as a mite's mood where it camped on the eyelash of the emergent digital oversoul.¹⁰⁷

Powers's humanist is hired to provide merely a veneer of human culture to a scientific endeavor. But he "had the year gratis." The scientists and administrators were vaguely sure they needed a culturist in their ranks but did not know what to expect of him. Scaled differently, this is the problem of the humanist in the university generally. What are they expected to do, especially once tenured, other than provide a suggestion of human sensitivity for an institution that otherwise preoccupies itself with bettering the physical existence of humankind?

Another problem, particularly as the college environment becomes more vocationally centered, is the fact that, if vocation is the prime motivator, four years of education are too many. As Bloom notes, four years of practical training is only appropriate for the "hardest of the hard natural sciences."¹⁰⁸ What has evolved is an attempt to balance the two or so years needed to prepare the students for their jobs with a roughly equivalent amount of training in the humanities.

But to the extent that the college degree is considered more and more a badge of career competence rather than intellectuality, the student understandably rebels against the humanities, which become apparently arbitrary barriers to completing that certification.¹⁰⁹ The humanities are “in something like the condition of churches as opposed to, say, hospitals,” Bloom writes, “nobody is quite certain of what the religious institutions are supposed to do anymore, but they do have some kind of role either responding to real human need or as the vestige of what was once a need, and they invite the exploitation of quacks, adventurers, cranks and fanatics.”¹¹⁰ Without a defined, outcome-oriented objective for the course of study, the humanities lose pace alongside those disciplines that can answer to a tangible human need.

This overarching problem of mission, alongside the practical issues of pedagogy and administration has been the undercurrent theme binding the college writing of the past century. Given that the genre (or sub-genre) has flourished so greatly during this time, any attempt to narrow its study to a handful of representative texts is inherently risky. But since the student narrative was most characteristic of the early half of the century and the faculty narrative of the later half, it makes sense to approach texts along that line. Representative of this pattern are F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and Saul Bellow’s *The Dean’s December* (1982); the former depicts the humanities-minded student adrift in a curriculum that disregards the creative essence of the humanities, and the latter portrays a faculty member attempting to make his ideas relevant to a wider public. Michael Chabon’s *Wonder Boys* (1995) focuses on both faculty and student issues in the context of a university creative writing program, an effective capstone text in that it introduces a justification for the future of humanistic study reliant not on what good it does for the community but for the individual practitioner, a departure from

traditional modes of literary scholarship that have mimicked the outward-looking goals of sciences.

Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, given its broad popularity at publication, its status as flapper manifesto, its artistic sympathies with Modernist trends, and its situation at the core of the university crisis early in the Twentieth Century, is ideal for a study of earlier student-novel manifestations blooming from the *Stover* soil. *Paradise*, according to Lyons, "is the first attempt in American novels of college life to describe an intellectual awakening, and for this reason it might be said that *This Side of Paradise* is the first American novel of education. Before Amory Blaine the college novels describe undergraduate disillusionment or simple maturation, but never awakening."¹¹ Here, Lyons oversteps. *Stover*, if a bit more ham-handedly so, certainly attempts to depict a deep social awakening in its protagonist and compatriots. But Fitzgerald's Princeton and its usually hapless student, Amory Blaine, are different in their consciousness of a new culture rising. Fitzgerald had the benefit of observing, first hand, the broad socio-cultural reboot known as Modernism. And like any semi-scandalous book should, *Paradise* opened a Pandora's box of like-minded libertinism, as Lyons observes: "When Fitzgerald's book is compared with something like Irving Stone's *Pageant of Youth* (1933), in which there are two nymphomaniacs, three suicides, three abortions, two sterilizations, etc., Fitzgerald seems like a fuddy-duddy."¹² But beyond its defiantly (ca. 1920) youthful cast, the novel exhibits keen frustration on behalf of its protagonist, Amory Blaine, toward the Princeton curricular system, the problem of education-by-schedule that would frustrate Frank Aydelotte on behalf of the gifted, self-motivated students:

The academic system as ordinarily administered is for these better and more ambitious students a kind of lock step: it holds them back, wastes their time, and blunts their interest by subjecting them to a slow-moving routine which they do

not need. It causes, furthermore, the atrophy of the qualities of independence and initiative in more gifted individuals by furnishing too little opportunity for their exercise.¹¹³

Amory's frustration with the system that would, as it had with Fitzgerald himself, stifle great enthusiasm for learning in the service of drilling geometric formulae goes hand-in-hand with his greater realizations about all flawed human "systems."

Showalter notes that "the genre [presumably academic rather than undergraduate fiction] has arisen and flourished only since about 1950, when American universities were growing rapidly, first to absorb the returning veterans, and then to take in a larger and larger percentage of the baby-booming population."¹¹⁴ The post-war period did represent a paradigm shift in the college novel, from the focus on the student problem to those associated with the faculty life and career. When Lyons published his study of the American college novel in 1962, the landscape was quite different from what it would quickly become. Lyons noted that "when the professor is made the hero he invariably operates in a world of more rigid values"¹¹⁵ and that

he is usually shown as a timid buffoon guilty of uxoriousness, or a demonic changeling who would employ guile, tyranny, or adultery, to achieve his desires.

When he is treated as a comic character the humor tends to be heavy-footed.

When he is treated seriously he turns out to be a vehicle of satire. The professor is therefore not as romantic a figure as the undergraduate for he has no quest for adventure or truth. It is his duty to inculcate his already discovered truth into youth-and often in a hated pedantic fashion—to get them to conform to a static, finite, and therefore false view of the world.¹¹⁶

This formulation may be a fair description of a Melmoth or even a Pnin, but not for a Herzog. Saul Bellow approached the academic question perhaps more consistently and thoroughly than any other major writer of the late twentieth century. In his novels after *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow could not resist investigation of the scholarly life. The undergraduate novel had flourished enough in the early half of the century that it had developed its own bevy of clichés. “This is why,” writes McGurl, “one finds defensive blurbs like the one on the dust jacket of Saul Bellow’s *The Dean’s December* (1982), which assures its readers that this ‘extraordinarily vivid book’ is ‘anything but a campus novel,’ as though these two things are fundamentally at odds.”¹¹⁷ While *The Dean’s December* is perhaps not Bellow’s most academically-minded novel, it is the best snapshot of the professor’s personal and professional crises: Dean Albert Corde wrestles throughout the novel with the problem of transmitting his perspective, garnered from a lifetime of study, to the masses without being censored by the academic powers-that-be. It is a variation that Bellow played through at least four times: in *Herzog*, where the eponymous protagonist wrestles with his stalled treatise and writes imaginary letters to the world’s movers and shakers; in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, where Sammler sees a world without culture becoming a world that has lost its reason for being; in *The Dean’s December*; and in *Ravelstein*, where finally the professor’s voice is heard and appreciated, but only shortly before his own death. “The professors of humanities are in an impossible situation,” wrote Allan Bloom,

and do not believe in themselves or what they do. Like it or not, they are essentially involved with interpreting and transmitting old books, preserving what we call tradition, in a democratic order where tradition is not privileged. They are partisans of the leisured and beautiful in a place where evident utility is the only passport.¹¹⁸

This dilemma is further complicated by the notion, as Lyons phrases it, that “the specialization required for an advanced degree simply increases the difficulty of communication between the professor and the student.”¹¹⁹ Or as Emerson had long before journaled: “The teacher should be the complement of the pupil; now for the most part they are earth’s diameters wide of each other.” One lives in the realm of the mind, the other wants just enough information for that realm to be relevant. This concern, the problem of conveying the relevance of culture to the broader population, is the source of Bellow’s disquietude.

Since Bellow’s heyday, college novels have drifted toward satire. While they vary as to how dark or dire they may be, and while they may fall on any point of the spectrum between the fantastic and realistic, satire is the order of the genre in its recent iteration. Hynes is a good example, as are David Lodge’s academic novels, and others such as Richard Russo’s *Straight Man*. But those authors, more often than not, are playing to the prior paradigm. They are still about academia as it has been.

Among the great shifts in the past 50 years is the now nearly universal inclusion of creative writing as an academic discipline alongside more traditional forms of literary study, reflecting the old (and again new) notion that literature functions primarily not as a window into populations, as the theorists and philologists tend to conceive, but as a window into the private soul. “Conceived,” McGurl writes, “[...] in the firmament of early twentieth century progressive educational reform, creative writing is surely one of the purest expressions of that movement’s abiding concern for student enrichment through autonomous self-creation.”¹²⁰ A graduate of such a program, Michael Chabon has particular insight into how this “autonomous self-creation” functions in the classroom. In *Wonder Boys*, through the dual forces of his professor-protagonist, Grady Tripp, and star pupil, James Leer, Chabon investigates the frequently multi-linear world of

the creative writer in academia, whose place alongside students and professors of established forms of literary study is tenuous enough to allow them to inhabit a world apart. The problem with the “reflexive” motivation underlying academic creative writing, focusing on the individual author’s problems of self-identity, is that it turns in the opposing direction of established protocols, which insist that literary studies behave more like their scientific co-signees in the university project. But perhaps, especially given the meteoric rise of creative writing on college campuses, it represents a third, a truer, path to understanding literature.

Chapter Two

Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and the Modern(ist) Student Narrative

Oh, father and mother pay all the bills,

And we have all the fun.

That's the way we do in college life.

Hooray!

— Collegiate drinking song from *Stover at Yale*¹

A title card for Harold Lloyd's 1925 film *The Freshman* reads "the opening of the Fall term at Tate University—a large football stadium with a college attached."² The film reminisces of a time when "going to College was greater than going to Congress—and you'd rather be Right Tackle than President." This fictional Tate University, like many of the invented colleges of the early twentieth-century student-centered narrative is a place of indulgent social idylls where one might, with diligent attention to manners, ascend the ladder of microcosmic prominence; the era of the flaming youth was ripe for the college narrative, so long as that narrative did not pertain in any particular way to academics but rather rested on the trials and tragedies of post-pubescent relationships. The story of Harold Lamb, the protagonist of *The Freshman*, is typical: the youth prepares for college in the hopes of obtaining "big man" status, arrives on campus and in a series

of social misadventures fails at this quest, reevaluates himself and his surroundings, and emerges a stronger, surer, more confident individual. Such would be the template for a number of student narratives. The 1920s saw a dramatic increase in the number of college narratives in both the theater and on the bookshelf. The reasons for this up-tick are multiple. The years between 1890 and 1925 saw college enrollment—spurred by the boom in college foundings, the cost of college, relative economic prosperity, and educational reforms such as the elective principle—outpace American population growth at-large by 470%.³ The Jazz Age worshipped youth, from the flapper⁴ to the recklessness of speakeasy-life, freed of tomorrow’s concerns, the sort of world epitomized by the college setting. It was also the first period in the modern era during which adolescence and early-adulthood was viewed as a “transition” phase, segregated from the adult world, so that it might, for the first time through modern eyes, appear idyllic.⁵

Among those engaging the zeitgeist was a young F. Scott Fitzgerald, writing sketches about college life as a student at Princeton (1913-1917) and drafting a novel titled *The Romantic Egotist*, a college story, while hiding his notepad behind “Small Problems for Infantry” at the canteen on weekends at officer training camp at Ft. Leavenworth.⁶ Eventually these amateur efforts would coalesce into his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, published in 1920. Kirk Curnutt has noted that,

only five years before *This Side of Paradise* was published, *Saturday Review of Literature* founder Henry Seidel Canby had complained that publishers were indifferent toward the campus novel. But after *Paradise* sold fifty thousand copies, the world of the co-ed became a common literary setting.⁷

Whatever Henry Canby had said, his statement is not entirely accurate; the founder of this feast seems to have been Owen Johnson, whose *Stover at Yale* was acknowledged by Fitzgerald as an

influence for *Paradise*.⁸ The Kramer bibliography of the American college novel lists a total of thirty-three student-centered texts from *Fanshawe* in 1828 to 1911. Between *Stover*'s publication in 1912 and *Paradise* in 1920, eleven more appeared, a pronounced increase. The last text listed for the 1920s, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), is thirty-one spots later in the bibliography: the 1920s produced on average 3.6 student-centered college novels each year, more in that decade than in all of the previous century (among them, incidentally, Russell Holman's novelization of *The Freshman*⁹). Johnson had given the form legs; Fitzgerald merely taught it to run.

A good many of the texts followed established patterns of the nineteenth century, using the college setting to facilitate a "typical sentimental romance plot," but others "like Percy Marks's *The Plastic Age* (1924) or Kathleen Millay's *Against the Wall* (1929) were serious critiques of the pedagogical imperatives of higher education, often portraying the university as a 'prison,' with 'administrators [as] smooth, cold wardens . . . faculty [as] tired and uninspired' and 'thinking [as] dangerous.'"¹⁰ Fitzgerald's novel was perhaps less weighty or explicit in its criticisms of the university; the Kramer bibliography is, consequently, dismissive: "during the story the self-indulgent [Amory] Blaine drinks to excess, has a number of romances, and sometimes engages his classmates in conversations about the role of Princeton in American society."¹¹ *Paradise* has endured nearly a century of relative critical neglect, mostly stemming from one early review (Edmund Wilson's biting reflection on the novel in 1922), and most Fitzgerald scholars fail to notice that Amory's dissolution and the fragmented episodes of the narrative combine to exemplify the Modernist novel. And the fact that *Paradise* is virtually free of college administrators/"wardens" and the attitude its protagonist would have toward faculty and classroom study carries its own rather forceful critique of lockstep curricular standardization

in the university, a critique that is reinforced elsewhere in Fitzgerald's work and that coincides neatly with central tenets of Modernist aesthetics.

Fitzgerald spent "the better part of four years" at Princeton, though he never earned a degree.¹² But he never truly left the university. Throughout his life he would visit Princeton as often as he could and remained a devoted fan of the Princeton football team. Throughout his fiction, characters are often identified by university affiliation, and he could never resist coming back to the question of what the central function of the university should be: a sort of intellectual country club, where members mutually reinforce their own quests for knowledge and social standing according to their own desires (this seems to be the operative philosophy of which the author approved) or the conventional immersion in Latin, Greek, and conical sections.

While Fitzgerald was concerned throughout his career and writing with the question of education (explicit doubts as to the efficacy of formal education at the university level appear in every one of his novels), *Paradise* would be his first sustained inquiry on the matter. It was an inquiry that rewarded the young author with fame, and, briefly, fortune, and greased the track for a wave of similar stories, as Curnutt notes:

while critics protested its condemnation of elitism and pedantry, campus fiction inspired intense reader loyalty. Students at the University of Illinois were so devoted to a Midwestern variation on Fitzgerald's debut novel, Lynn and Lois Montross's *Town and Gown* (1923), that when a lukewarm review appeared in the student newspaper, the editor found himself on the receiving end of a month-long barrage of angry letters. Another novel that rivaled *Paradise* in sales and influence, Warner Fabian's *Flaming Youth* (1923), proved such a phenomenon that even Fitzgerald was compelled to write the author. "Who the devil are you?"

he playfully demanded during a brief correspondence with Fabian. “Do you know at least a dozen people have asked me if I wrote *Flaming Youth*? I wish I had but I’m sure I didn’t.”¹³

This Side of Paradise had been taken up as a behavioral manifesto by his generation, giving the men license to philosophize-by-cocktail and the women a model in Amory’s great love, Rosalind Connage, by whom they might follow Freud’s dicta¹⁴ (as Kendall Taylor would put it, Rosalind, the flapper prototype, would become “the year’s most widely known and imitated exemplar”¹⁵). Fitzgerald had not written *Flaming Youth*, but he had contributed significantly to the fire.

From a young age, Fitzgerald’s course of study was of his own choosing, and “at no time in his academic career [did he take] his formal studies seriously.”¹⁶ *Formal* studies is key to this equation. Fitzgerald was a passionate reader from a young age and his first novel notoriously sets out to prove this, mentioning or quoting from over 70 specific works.¹⁷ Early reviews saw this as pretentious or over-eager, though Dorothy Ballweg Good makes a cogent case for this effusion of reference as a subtextual reinforcement of Amory’s intellectual progress and makes note of a particular instance in the novel during which Amory, rattling off his reading list, expects his audience, a fellow student, to be only “partially taken in” by the display.¹⁸ He recognized that showy erudition is gauche; the reading lists of *Paradise* were an attempt to illustrate Amory’s failures and incompetencies as well as his growth and success.

Fitzgerald’s early life was itinerant—St. Paul to Buffalo to Syracuse, back to Buffalo, and then to again to St. Paul in July of 1908,¹⁹ when he was eleven years old. At this point, he was enrolled at St. Paul’s Academy, where, “instead of expending his energies on routine school assignments, he preferred reading the books of his choice and further developing his talent as a

writer by turning out a considerable amount of juvenilia.”²⁰ By the time he went away to the Newman School in 1911,²¹ it seems his eventual destination for college was already set:

He decided on Princeton, the nine-year old Scott told his playmates in Buffalo, after attending a Princeton Glee Club concert in 1905. Or he made the choice, according to a note in his scrapbook, after watching Sam White race 95 yards with a blocked field goal to score the winning touchdown at the 1911 Princeton-Harvard game. Or he opted for Old Nassau, he told *Saturday Evening Post* readers, when he came across the Triangle Club score for “His Honor the Sultan” in the spring of 1913. Or, and this is most likely, there was no one determining occasion but instead an accumulating impression that Princeton would suit him better than either Yale or Harvard, the only alternatives he seems to have considered.²²

The college atmosphere Fitzgerald would encounter was one of flamboyancy fueled by cultural insecurity. At the time, college campuses were shaking off the Victorian hangover, trying desperately to tap a pre-Victorian vein, settling on the vaguely Romantic:

Campus aesthetes were vainly trying to transform prosaic Harvard yard into “an after-image of Oxford in the 1890’s.” Everyone was reading Casanova’s *Memoirs*, Pater, Petronius, and discussing the art of Aubrey Beardsley and the “voluptuousness of the Church.” Dormitory bedrooms flaunted crucifixes and students tried to look as much as possible like “prematurely decayed poets.”²³

It was an era of affectation, but affect spurred by genuine anxiety as to what the new, emerging paradigm would be. Fitzgerald arrived at Princeton in 1913 and was quickly taken under the

wings of Edmund Wilson and John Peale Bishop. At this time, Fitzgerald became enamored of Verlaine and Keats and wrote copiously. By the time he would leave Princeton, he had published in school magazines, newspapers, and literary journals thirteen short stories, two one-act plays (including “The Débutante,” which would become part of *This Side of Paradise*), five book reviews, and six poems.²⁴ It was a good time for an aspiring author (at the time desiring to be known as a poet²⁵) to be at that particular institution:

By good fortune, Fitzgerald’s career at Princeton, 1913-1917, coincided with the liveliest literary renaissance in that institution’s history; certainly, at any rate, it was the liveliest since that other poetic awakening one-hundred and fifty years earlier when Philip Freneau, James Madison, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge had all been members of the class of 1771.²⁶

This literary milieu was not entirely propitious for the following of what Fitzgerald would later call “a curriculum that is after all made for the average student.”²⁷ By October 7 of his freshman year, he had been called into the dean’s office to learn that he was failing three subjects and was underperforming in four others (his best grade, a “fourth group,” was in English).²⁸ He would later brag that he had failed practically every class that year to write a show for the Triangle Club: “I spent my entire freshman year writing an operetta for [Triangle]. To do this I failed in algebra, trigonometry, coördinate geometry and hygiene.”²⁹ The classroom aspect of Princeton would continue to be a frustrating experience for him. He would later write, after criticizing the dehumanizing aspects of the formal regimen of the university in a letter to its president, John Grier Hibben, “I don’t mean at all that Princeton is not the happiest time in most boys’ lives. It is, of course—I simply say it wasn’t the happiest time in mine.” He would, though, follow that statement immediately after by writing “I love it now better than any place on earth.”³⁰ This is

perhaps the perpetual “old grad” scenario, but Fitzgerald seemed to mean what he said. He would always, after having left, reflect fondly on Princeton, and when in 1940 Fitzgerald suffered his fatal heart attack, he was thumbing through the *Princeton Alumni Magazine*, making notes in the margin of an article about the football team.³¹

He had left Princeton in some disgrace in 1917, and his ledger for November of that year reads “Begun novel,”³² as though he had set out immediately to prove himself despite his failures. Having shelved his youthful ambition to be a writer of verse, what he had thought of as “the only thing worth while,” he set out to write a novel called *The Romantic Egotist*.³³ James L. W. West, III sets out the composition history of this novel and its inheritor, *This Side of Paradise*, in brief:

The Romantic Egotist was written from October 1917 to March 1918, submitted to Charles Scribner’s Sons in May 1918, turned down for the first time in mid-August 1918, revised by Fitzgerald and submitted again in September 1918, and again rejected by Scribner’s in October 1918. This rejected manuscript formed the basis for *This Side of Paradise*, which was assembled by Fitzgerald during the summer of 1919 and accepted by Scribner’s in September of that year.³⁴

The Romantic Egotist—what can be learned from the surviving evidence—is a rambling character study of Stephen Palms, who, like Amory Blaine, would operate under a “philosophy which was a sort of aristocratic egotism.”³⁵ The two protagonists are both moderately wealthy. Their mothers—tremendously important to both characters—are of a similar cast, and their personal trajectories, each awash in ideas and flamboyant literary fantasies, follow a similar arc. Stephen was Amory’s harbinger, but he was not, as some commentary suggests, Amory. Joan Allen supposes that “Stephen Blaine [Amory’s father] is named for St. Stephen the Martyr.”³⁶

This is not supported by any external evidence, however, and it may also be posited that the elder Blaine's first name is a literary necronymic, named for the forsaken Stephen Palms, Amory Blaine's literary "father."³⁷ But little of the original text of *The Romantic Egotist* remains, and the residual detail left on the record is hearsay. While Fitzgerald built *Paradise* from his first attempt, he also always wrote long-hand; *Paradise* would be a story unto itself.

The rest of the story "is well-known: madly in love with Zelda Sayre, a young impressionable F. Scott Fitzgerald secludes himself at his home in Minnesota and feverishly rewrites his previously rejected first novel."³⁸ He would risk much in the process. His family's "disapproval of his [desire to put his rather bleak outlook on humanity into his writing] was not decreased when a St. Paul firm, Griggs Cooper, offered him the position of advertising manager at a very good salary and he refused it."³⁹ Fitzgerald's attitude that "life is too strong and remorseless for the sons of men" (a notion he drew from Dreiser and Conrad)⁴⁰ was not popular in St. Paul, but his desire to see this through in fiction, and his willingness to forgo a comfortable, middle-class existence to stake everything on the dubious prospect of literary success, demonstrates tremendous belief in himself and his message. The message of the "superficially ironic but fundamentally romantic young man"⁴¹ at this point was that the world, including its educational apparatus, had failed his generation in many ways. It was now "a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (284). And in style and substance, it would adumbrate the Modern wave approaching and follow suit of the Moderns already making themselves felt.

Matthew Bruccoli's declaration that "Fitzgerald never tried to be, or wanted to be, an experimental or avant-garde writer"⁴² is not quite true. Fitzgerald's stated intent in *Paradise's*

forerunner, *The Romantic Egotist*, was to “ramble and be picaresque. I shall be intellectual and echo H. G. Wells, and improper like Compton Mackenzie. . . . My form will be very original for it will mingle verse and prose and not be vers libre.”⁴³ Fitzgerald’s first novel was set with the intent of being a warped reflection of established literary customs; the present tide of scholarship that sees Modernism as a vanguard reimagining of Romanticism, that Modernism exploits and recrafts existing Romantic patterns just as Fitzgerald would do, supports the notion that he succeeded in doing what he set out to do, something “very original.”

Paradise was published March 26, 1920 and had sold 32,786 copies by November.⁴⁴ It was a remarkable success for a first novel, not a true bestseller, but much read, much discussed, and with sufficient commercial heft to allow the newly-married Fitzgeralds to live in luxury for a time. Fitzgerald, the inveterate social striver and self-conscious parvenu, must have had an ear out for commercial and cultural validation. While people he had never met would read and love his novel, the encouragement he most desired, that of his friends and alma mater, would never quite come.

Generally, the reaction from Princeton was mixed. While he was unable, as he wanted, to be in Princeton the day of its release,⁴⁵ he would have been gratified that there was “something like a stampede” at the Princeton book store on that day.⁴⁶ But the university administration did not take kindly to the novel’s depiction of lay-about social climbers being the normative undergraduate type. President Hibben wrote Fitzgerald a remonstrative letter, and an admissions officer would state that “no one will ever know the damage Scott Fitzgerald did when he called this place a country club.”⁴⁷ Fitzgerald responded to Hibben with a letter that wandered from obsequious to indignant. “I want to thank you very much,” he wrote, “for your letter and to confess that the honor of a letter from you outweighed my real regret that my book gave you

concern.”⁴⁸ Later in the letter, he admits that he had “overaccentuated the gayety and country club atmosphere of Princeton,” but indicates that he did so because

after the curriculum had tied me up, taken away the honors I’d wanted, bent my nose over a chemistry book and said “No fun, no activities, no offices, no Triangle trips—no, not even a diploma if you can’t do chemistry”—after that I retired. It is easy for the successful man in college, the man who has gotten what he wanted to say,

“It’s all fine. It makes men. It made me, see”—

—but it seems to me it’s like the captain of a company when he has his men lined up at attention for inspection. He sees only the tightly buttoned coat and the shaved faces. He doesn’t know that perhaps a private in the rear rank is half crazy because a pin is sticking in his back and he can’t move, or another private is thinking that his wife is dying and he can’t leave because too many men in the company are gone already.⁴⁹

Princeton had hurt him, and now was his chance to air grievances. The chief problem, as he saw it, was the lack of compassion from the top down, the likelihood of a worthy student lost whose great virtue would tragically go fallow for a flaw arbitrarily magnified. For all of this, ultimately, the rigid Princeton curriculum was to blame.

But the apparent smirch on Princeton would linger for years. In March 1956, a little more than fifteen years after Fitzgerald’s death, the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* ran a series of articles to commemorate the publication of the Fitzgerald anthology *Afternoon of an Author*. In the introductory remarks, the editor wrote that Fitzgerald was “the greatest of Princeton authors, not

only because of the distinction of his work but because he was the most Princetonian.” This elicited huffs of displeasure from alumni, one writing, “let us not contribute unnecessarily to the caricature [sic] of ourselves.”⁵⁰

The initial reviews were often fairly positive, but with reservations as to either the moral character of the text or to the novel’s unorthodox blend of prose fiction, epistle, verse, and dramatic script. More detail-oriented reviewers (as well as Fitzgerald’s personal acquaintances) would harp on the fact that Scribner’s released the novel without proper proofreading and riddled with errors. This fault could be chalked up to Fitzgerald—the author would later defend himself by writing, “my God—did they expect me to spell? If I was such a hot shot couldn’t the proof-readers do the spelling?”⁵¹—or his editor, Maxwell Perkins, who maintained a career disinterest in proofreading and preferred to defer to the Princeton-educated, college-newspaper-editing English major who had written the novel in question.⁵² This is not to mention the numerous copy editors, typists, and printers in the Scribner’s machine. Many of the errors had to do with the extensive cultural references; in his effort to make either himself or his protagonist (or both) appear erudite, Fitzgerald peppered the text with references to writers, philosophers, and sundry originators of culture, often misspelling their names, their titles, or misquoting their works. Notoriously, when Fitzgerald dedicated the novel to Monsignor Sigourney Fay, he omitted the “u” of his friend’s first name. Perhaps the cruelest criticism was the comparison to Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors*, written when Ashford was nine years old (though published years later, in 1917) and retaining in publication the various errors its child author had made.⁵³

The harshest review would not come until 1922, when Edmund Wilson anonymously published an assault on Fitzgerald’s literary acumen in general (it seems that Fitzgerald himself knew the author’s identity). Wilson, a fellow Princetonian and close friend, referred to *Paradise*

as “one of the most illiterate books of any merit ever published (a fault which the publisher’s wretched proof-reading apparently made no effort to correct). It is not only full of bogus ideas and faked literary references but it is full of English words misused with most reckless abandon.”⁵⁴ Wilson makes much of the faulty copy-editing—too much, perhaps—and harps on Fitzgerald’s debt to Compton Mackenzie (he never gets around to explaining which ideas were “bogus” and which literary references were “faked”⁵⁵). Curiously, though, Wilson acknowledges that Fitzgerald improves on Mackenzie’s prototype: “he [Amory Blaine] had more emotional life, it is true, than the phantom Michael Fane [protagonist of Mackenzie’s *Sinister Street*], who, like most of Mackenzie’s creations, had none at all.” But Wilson’s criticism never gets to particulars, other than stating that he, as a personal friend of Fitzgerald, knew of Scott’s infatuation with Mackenzie and that Scott could not spell. Wilson biographer David Castronovo posits a temperamental barrier between the two that might have turned Wilson off:

Wilson is both sympathetic and demanding when he examines Fitzgerald’s situation in our culture. He understands the anarchic, postwar America of Fitzgerald because he, too, is intensely part of it: the impulse to debunk official culture, to show institutions “without point or dignity,” is very much a part of his own reporting. But Fitzgerald allows his readers to draw an inference that Wilson always rejects, whether in the poetry of aesthetes or the life of his age: “The inference we are led to draw is that, in such a civilization as this, the sanest and most honorable course is to escape from organized society and live for the excitement of the moment.” Wilson may find this impulse understandable, but he cannot but resist it.⁵⁶

Of course, Wilson may just as well have been a jealous colleague. He was a year ahead of Fitzgerald at Princeton, and would later superciliously remember Fitzgerald, “not long after we got out of college” saying, “I want to be one of the greatest writers who ever lived, don’t you?” Wilson “had not [himself] really quite entertained this fantasy because [he] had been reading Plato and Dante. Scott had been reading Booth Tarkington, Compton Mackenzie, H. G. Wells and Swinburne”⁵⁷; Wilson, in his early twenties, was too smart to try to be “one of the greatest writers.” By 1922, Fitzgerald had produced one tremendously successful novel and was in the process of putting out a second, *The Beautiful and Damned* (to which much of the ire of Wilson’s review is also directed). Wilson had always seen Fitzgerald as something of a little brother, but now Fitzgerald was a little brother who had bested him. In the review, Wilson would begrudgingly admit that Fitzgerald “has an instinct for graceful and vivid prose which some of his more serious fellows might envy.”⁵⁸ Wilson was one of Fitzgerald’s “more serious fellows” and his scathing, if somewhat imprecise, bite has left its marks. As Clinton S. Burhans noted, the lineage of commentary on *Paradise* generally follows “the lines sketched out by Edmund Wilson in 1922”⁵⁹; it was dismissed by a young Edmund Wilson, and a generation who later came of age knowing only *the* Edmund Wilson would defer. Even so, it is possible that Wilson felt himself to have overstepped; when, only two months after the review was published, Fitzgerald asked for advance comments on his play-in-progress, *The Vegetable*, Wilson responded effusively, “I think that the play as a whole is marvelous—no doubt, the best American comedy ever written,”⁶⁰ remarks that distort the quality of the play almost as much as Wilson had exaggerated the weaknesses of *This Side of Paradise*, suggesting an implicit apology for fresh crimes.

Current approaches to *This Side of Paradise* rely too much on the expectation that it should fall neatly in line with *The Great Gatsby* or *Tender Is the Night*, or that it should conform

to pre-Modern standards. But it is a novel apart. Reading *Paradise* for what it is requires a divorce from conceptualizations of genre and from traditional structural modalities. The readiest formal comparison for *Paradise* is to the *bildungsroman*.⁶¹ But where a *bildungsroman* of the Goethean cast provides the illusion of coherence, the built-in notion that the rise to maturity consists of a logical narrative arc, *Paradise* has the narrative coherence of a twenty-year scrapbook, what Fitzgerald on at least two occasions described as a “casserole.”⁶²

“Amory Blaine,” the novel begins, “inherited from his mother every trait, except the stray inexpressible few, that made him worth while” (11). Even as a child he would, like his mother, Beatrice O’Hara Blaine, be sophisticated and self-possessed (or so he would think) with a penchant for dramatic excess. He would be tutored, but he would learn principally from his mother, who had herself

absorbed the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again; a tutelage measured by the number of things and people one could be contemptuous of and charming about; a culture rich in all arts and traditions, barren of all ideas, in the last of those days when the great gardener clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud. (12)

Under her instruction, Amory would learn of the finer things; he would “outgrow” his “natural repugnance to chamber music and symphonies” (12) so that “at eleven he could talk glibly, if rather reminiscently, of Brahms and Mozart and Beethoven” (13). He thereafter “tutored occasionally—the idea being that he was to ‘keep up,’ at each place ‘taking up the work where he left off,’ yet as no tutor ever found the place he left off, his mind was still in very good shape” (15). This is the novel’s earliest assessment of the educational process, and it is a telling one: the

education that keeps up is that which is social and experiential, what he gained by following his mother's cultural lead. The tutors are the agents of corruption.

His early formal schooling follows this line. After he and Beatrice settle down and he enrolls in school in Minneapolis, his worldly education sets him apart:

He had shown off one day in French class (he was in senior French class) to the utter confusion of Mr. Reardon, whose accent Amory damned contemptuously, and to the delight of the class. Mr. Reardon, who had spent several weeks in Paris ten years before, took his revenge on the verbs, whenever he had his book open.

(16)

Thereafter, "school ruined his French and gave him a distaste for standard authors. His masters considered him idle, unreliable and superficially clever" (25). Even so,

Amory marked himself a fortunate youth, capable of infinite expansion for good or evil. He did not consider himself a "strong char'c'ter," but relied on his facility (learn things sorta quick) and his superior mentality (read a lotta deep books). He was proud of the fact that he could never become a mechanical or scientific genius. From no other heights was he debarred.

Physically.—Amory thought that he was exceedingly handsome. He was. He fancied himself an athlete of possibilities and a supple dancer.

Socially.—Here his condition was, perhaps, most dangerous. He granted himself personality, charm, magnetism, poise, the power of dominating all contemporary males, the gift of fascinating all women.

Mentally.—Complete, unquestioned superiority. (26)

This list is a hold-over from Fitzgerald's own boyhood. He had compiled a list of personal strengths and weaknesses while at Newman, though that list ends with a self-effacing final point: "Generally—I knew that at bottom I lacked the essentials. At the last crisis, I knew I had no real courage, perseverance or self respect."⁶³ The assessment, modified, also appeared in *The Romantic Egotist*, which kept the final "general" judgment.⁶⁴ It is perhaps not surprising that Fitzgerald omitted that last note for *Paradise*, given that Amory relies much on his cockiness for his charm, but it also extends in the other direction; by leaving this out, Amory boasts too much, and the sort of insecurities that would prompt such a personal reflection rise to the surface.

In time, Amory would enter adolescence, experience the first quakes of love under the spell of Myra St. Claire, and would leave Minneapolis for St. Regis' in "New England, the land of schools" (31). After peremptorily taking his entrance exams, he goes to visit Monsignor Thayer Darcy (modeled on Monsignor Sigourney Fay), one of his mother's former lovers and a faithful family friend. Darcy is pleased that Amory is attending St. Regis', a "gentleman's school" where "democracy won't hit [him] so early" (he goes on to say that Amory would get "plenty of that in college")(32). Amory tells Darcy that, in time, he will attend Princeton. "I don't know why," he says, "but I think of all Harvard men as sissies, like I used to be, and all Yale men as wearing big blue sweaters and smoking pipes." For Amory, Princeton is "lazy and good-looking and aristocratic—you know, like a spring day. Harvard seems sort of indoors." Darcy, a Yale alumnus, finishes the thought: "And Yale is November, crisp and energetic" (32). This conversation establishes a pattern, the persistent urge to classify everything and everyone, that would extend throughout their relationship and stay with Amory after Darcy's death:

"Why do I make lists?" Amory asked [Darcy] one night. "Lists of all sorts of things?"

“Because you’re a mediaevalist,” Monsignor answered. “We both are. It’s the passion for classifying and finding a type.”

“It’s a desire to get something definite.”

“It’s the nucleus of scholastic philosophy.” (109)

It is in Darcy’s company that Amory meets Thornton Hancock, modeled on Henry Adams,⁶⁵ who thinks of Amory as “a radiant boy” whose “education ought not be intrusted to a school or college” (34).⁶⁶

The debt *Paradise* owes Adams and Adams’s *Education* is substantial. Superficially, *The Education of Henry Adams* provided *This Side of Paradise* with a working title (*The Education of a Personage*)⁶⁷ and Hancock, a minor but important character. Fitzgerald met Adams briefly while visiting childhood mentor Sigourney Fay,⁶⁸ and the *Education* provides *Paradise* with two of its most important themes: first, that education is a matter of the world, not the classroom (what Adams would call an “accidental education”⁶⁹), and second, that the gulf between the archaic and modern is too broad to be bridged by schooling. As Adams notes, “what could become of such a child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when he should wake up to find himself required to play the game of the twentieth?”⁷⁰ This is a persistent conundrum for Amory, given that he will attempt to rise to literary prominence in the new era while standing on idolized shoulders of the nineteenth century. Adams’s memories of childhood schooling are also reminiscent of Amory’s deprecatory attitude toward his Minneapolis teachers: “Mentally [Adams’s generation] never were boys. Their education as men should have begun at ten years old. They were fully five years more mature than the English or European boy for whom schools were made.”⁷¹ By the end of the novel, Hancock would become a ghost representing the flawed

forbears that have led Amory's generation astray. Hancock, in Amory's youth, was the authority, but the authority was only an illusion. He ponders that

there was, for example, Thornton Hancock, respected by half the intellectual world as an authority on life, a man who had verified and believed the code he lived by, an educator of educators, an adviser to Presidents—yet Amory knew that this man had, in his heart, leaned on the priest of another religion. (267)

This “priest of another religion,” Thayer Darcy, thereafter likewise becomes a flawed authority, who, while standing for the church, Amory knows to have had his own theological doubts.

At St. Regis', Amory tries too hard to rise to the top of the social class, is thought of as “rather too fresh” by his schoolmates, and is counseled by Mr. Margotson, the “well-meaning professor” who tries to steer Amory aright (36). Amory eventually finds social equilibrium and even succeeds as a member of the football team:

It had pleased him to be the lightest and youngest man on the first football squad; it pleased him when Doctor Dougall told him at the end of a heated conference that he could, if he wished, get the best marks in school. But Doctor Dougall was wrong. It was temperamentally impossible for Amory to get the best marks in school. (35)

Like his earlier pride that “he could never become a mechanical or scientific genius,” Amory believes that his failure “to get the best marks” sets him on an elevated plain. It is a Nietzschean current that would follow him throughout the narrative, a rejection not of knowledge but of conformity, a struggle between individualism and social type manifests itself early and often.

On one of his last nights at St. Regis', Amory stays up late with Rahill, president of the sixth form, and the two delineate the differences between the campus "Slicker" (named for having his hair slicked back) and the "Big Man." They compose a list of five complementary qualities that set the two apart, the Big Man is a leader of the traditional mold, who "goes out for everything out of a sense of duty" (43). The Slicker is the egotist, the individualist, fashion-savvy and somehow both above and beholden to social class. The irony, as always, is palpable: were the Slicker truly an individual, he would surely defy classification. Accordingly, the definition has a shelf life, and "Amory found the slicker a most valuable classification until his junior year in college, when the outline became so blurred and indeterminate that it had to be subdivided many times, and became only a quality" (42).

Princeton is the pivot point for the novel; Amory's youth is predicated entirely on preparing him socially and philosophically for it, and the second half of the novel, after he leaves, is largely a matter of Amory trying to figure out exactly what college did to him. Given that Amory had looked forward to Princeton for much of his adolescence, it is unsurprising that he "loved Princeton" as soon as he arrived: "its lazy beauty, its half-grasped significance, the wild moonlight revel of the rushes, the handsome, prosperous big-game crowds, and under it all the air of struggle that pervaded his class" (50). The "half-grasped significance" is an important detail. Throughout his college experience and until the end of the narrative, Amory never quite understands why Princeton has the effect on him that it does. This goes to the core of Fitzgerald's quarrel with institutional education. What is "half-grasped" about the university's significance is something experiential, something that cannot be verbalized. For Fitzgerald and for Amory, the matter of the classroom would be a distraction to the real "significance" of college, the student's social, philosophical, and spiritual education.

He arrives “having decided to be one of the gods of the class,” which, naturally meant that “he reported for freshman football practice” (50). Notably he is playing quarterback, the leadership position (by his second week he had already been “paragraphed in corners of the *Princetonian*”), when “he wrenched his knee seriously enough to put him out for the rest of the season. This forced him to retire and consider the situation” (50). The reconsideration would prove a delicate balancing act. He notes that “being personally conspicuous was not tolerated, and the influential man was the non-committal man, until at club elections in sophomore year every one should be sewed up in some bag for the rest of his college career” (52); while football would have been a straight and sure shot to prominence, without it he would have to tread carefully. He must take on the right extracurriculars and join the right clubs. Among his friends are two brothers, Kerry and Burne Holiday, who will at some point in their individual careers become campus revolutionaries. On one occasion, Kerry chastises Amory for being obsessed with social stature; as Jarom Lyle McDonald notes,

Kerry provides an ideological voice speaking out against class systems in general; he knows that struggling for social mobility just reinforces Amory’s own position as an outsider. Such an ideological position maintains that actions will not cultivate status, but that status is somehow innate. All of Amory’s aspirations for social mobility are wrapped up in a sense of defeated movement, and Amory’s dreams themselves are what keep him firmly locked in the middle class.⁷²

Kerry knows that the socially secure do not strive, and that those who strive are not socially secure. Even so, Amory cannot help himself, and while he would eventually rise to some level of notoriety, the stars, or so Amory thinks, would align against him. When his academic shortcomings cost him his leadership position on the *Princetonian* and result in “the slaughter of

his chances for the Senior Council” (101), his friend Alec Connage says it was his “own laziness.” Amory, who would see even a tendency to shirk as the product of kismet, responds, “no—something deeper than that. I’ve begun to feel that I was meant to lose this chance” (103).

His skeptical attitude as to the classroom would only worsen after this first real academic failure. He had been an indifferent student before; he would be a hostile student after, searching for and finding timidity and incompetence in the professors:

Amory rather scornfully avoided the popular professors who dispensed easy epigrams and thimblefuls of Chartreuse to groups of admirers every night. He was disappointed, too, at the air of general uncertainty on every subject that seemed linked with the pedantic temperament. (112)

This prompts Amory to write a scornfully satiric poem of the classroom in which he castigates the blandness of a particular faculty member (“Well, here we are, your hundred sheep, / Tune up, play on, pour forth . . . we sleep”) and calls into question the importance of the professor’s having “sniffled through an era’s must” in scholarly inquiry, “enchant[ed]” by some “defunct, moth-eaten star” (112, 113). He also lampoons the “Eager Ass,” the slavish (or assiduous, if the pose is eased) student who encourages and is encouraged by the professor. In a later episode, Amory would compose a poem scathing the Victorians during a class on Tennyson and “Locksley Hall”; in a fit of cocksure condescension, he hands it to the professor at the end of class, saying “here’s a poem to the Victorians, sir” (155). This is the heart of Amory’s experience in formal education, his “indefinite revolt.” The novel never actually says that Amory finishes college, though it distantly implies such on a few occasions. If Amory is a one-for-one analogue for his author, then we can assume, like Fitzgerald, the student sees the failure to finish as one best glossed over. If Amory took his degree, then that fact, like Amory’s height, wealth,

occasional athletic prowess, and eventual combat experience, take their place together as Fitzgerald's fantasized version of himself.

Whether he takes his degree or not, by the time he leaves Princeton, the war is well underway. Amory goes off to fight, as Darcy puts it, "as a gentleman should, just as you went to school and college, because it was the thing to do. It's better to leave the blustering and tremolo-heroism to the middle classes; they do it so much better" (162). Unlike Fitzgerald, who took a commission but never left the country, Amory seems to have seen the war first-hand. He writes Tom a letter from Brest, France in 1919 in which he comments on the spiritual crises of his fellow enlisted men (165-66), and Darcy writes him a letter worrying that "one or both of us is not going to last out this war" (164). Amory would thereafter lament the effect of the war on his generation, like a tired veteran might. Like physical stature, money, and football, this is a telling departure from the autobiography that otherwise provides the subject matter for the narrative. Hemingway would later write to Fitzgerald that "the reason you are so sore you missed the war is because war is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get."⁷³ Fitzgerald apparently felt this deficiency while writing *Paradise* and compensated in two ways: to give his protagonist moral authority, he sent him to war, but to keep from having to discuss it in specific terms, he made Amory keep quiet so that it became a subcutaneous sickness, pain that he could carry quietly, thereby amplifying both masculinity and moral gravity.⁷⁴

Upon his return, there is still no indication as to what Amory intends to do professionally (a curious void that has prompted West to write an article on its consequent anxiety⁷⁵). When Rosalind, his principal love, with whom he takes up after his return, asks Amory what he wants to do, he responds flippantly, "Can't say—run for President, write—" (188)(the sentiment that

the presidency is something that one might happen to stumble into harbingers Fitzgerald's comic play, *The Vegetable*, in which the protagonist, Jerry Frost, does just that). And as Allen notes, "if it were not for the obvious parallels between Fitzgerald and Amory, it would probably not occur to the reader that Amory will eventually make his way as a writer."⁷⁶ This is a bit of a stretch. Not once does the novel indicate that Amory will be successful in any way. He takes a job as an advertising copy-writer, but quits, petulantly stating to his boss, Mr. Barlow, "I think I was rottenly underpaid. Thirty-five dollars a week—less than a good carpenter." Barlow coolly reminds him that he'd never worked before. "But it took about ten thousand dollars to educate me where I could write your darned stuff for you," Amory cries (209). Otherwise, he sells one short story which nets him sixty dollars: "a cynical story which featured his father's funeral"(212). This is the only indication that Amory will be a successful writer, and it is a paltry foundation for that assumption given that Amory seems none too excited to have sold it.

Alone and despondent (following ten pages of extended reflection in which Amory divorces himself from all prior faiths and relationships), he sets out to walk from New York to Princeton on a day when the sky "was a colorless vault, cool, high and barren of the threat of rain" (269). He is picked up by a limousine employed by Mr. Ferrenby, the father of Amory's Princeton classmate Jesse Ferrenby who had been killed in the war. Amory finds himself slipping into an impromptu speech on the virtues of socialism. It is in parts a very cogent and passionately argued diatribe, stemming from a deep resentment at being "sick of a system where the richest man gets the most beautiful girl if he wants her [Amory has just lost Rosalind to the wealthy Dawson Ryder], where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button manufacturer" (280). His operative theory, to guarantee people against either poverty or wealth so that they work for honor alone, is drawn from his Princeton experience:

if there were ten men insured against either wealth or starvation, and offered a green ribbon for five hours' work a day and blue ribbon for ten hours' work a day, nine out of ten of them would be trying for the blue ribbon. That competitive instinct only wants a badge. If the size of their house is the badge they'll sweat their heads off for that. If it's only a blue ribbon, I damn near believe they'll work just as hard. They have in other ages. (277)

This idea "isn't silly," he assures Ferrenby, "if you'd gone to college you'd have been struck by the fact that the men there would work twice as hard for any one of a hundred petty honors as those other men did who were earning their way through" (276).

The fact that Amory, obsessed with economic class and only recently divested of a private income (Beatrice, in a "sudden burst of religiosity" left half their estate to the Church shortly before her death), is here arguing vehemently on behalf of radicalism has left commentators, among them, Dan Seitters, puzzled:

Called the "magnificent Locomobile," this car serves as soap box for Amory's immature Fabianism. Luxuriating in a limousine, Amory explains—with much supercilious weariness—why he has jumped from the economic treadmill to become a radical socialist. Ironically, this socialist riding in a luxury car consents to discuss issues with Ferrenby, the capitalist who picked him up as he hitchhiked, but tells the little man, the proletarian chauffeur, to shut up. He even boasts about it in a chapter entitled "The Little Man Gets His" [. . .]. Neither narrator nor author seem to note the irony implicit in Amory's position. Instead, both writer and protagonist—who are too close to one and the same to allow for artistic

perspective—piously ride in the limousine and deplore the lack of intellectual honesty.⁷⁷

Based on this reading, Seiders claims that Fitzgerald “performs unintentional character assassination.”⁷⁸ Other commentators have arrived at similar conclusions,⁷⁹ resulting in this very important scene being the most chronically misinterpreted in the novel. It is not only not “character assassination” to have Amory find an impromptu soapbox on which he might spontaneously radicalize, it goes to the core of Amory’s personality, youth, and existential crisis.

Twice in the conversation, both instances ignored by Seiders, Amory declares that this is the first time he has ever argued for socialism (280). It is another step in Amory’s social development, what Hoffman somewhat condescendingly states “presumably represents to Fitzgerald some advance.”⁸⁰ It would be a persistent theme for Fitzgerald, inevitable given the author’s fascination with wealth and the concurrent flowering of Communism that he would develop into a half-fashioned Nietzschean Marxism over the course of his career. This is not only characteristic of the wandering politics of youthful angst, it is characteristic of politics at the first flush of Modernism, “the most notable—perhaps *only*—unifying feature [of which] was the attempt to transcend the political,” as Sara Blair put it.⁸¹ Amory states that he might be willing to be a political idealist if it were both “safe and lucrative” (272), and, with regard to Ferrenby’s driver,

If he can be educated to think clearly, concisely, and logically, freed of his habit of taking refuge in platitudes and prejudices and sentimentalisms, then I’m a militant Socialist. If he can’t, then I don’t think it matters much what happens to man or his systems, now or hereafter. (279)

By this point, Amory has “kill[ed] his conscience” (280) and risen above doctrine. He can argue, but he cannot believe.

And so when he arrives at Princeton and comes to his final revelation “I know myself [. . .] but that is all,” the line rings defiant but otherwise vacuous, as Hoffman notes: “were Amory to in fact know himself, ‘that is all’ would be quite a lot. It is unclear however whether Amory’s final formulation represents a withdrawal into splendid (narcissistic) isolation, or truly ‘a new start’—the emergence at last of a genuine self.”⁸² Or as Roulston puts it, “unfortunately, Amory is so unstable, so given to posturing, so manic-depressive that it is difficult to accept his final insights as anything other than one more transitory phase or as just another pose.”⁸³ But again, this is why the line is powerful. What Amory deeply desires is a confident belief that he, having boiled away the long chain of flawed influence that had theretofore determined his path, is somehow now whole. And he believes that he can speak this wholeness into existence.

Textual history adds another layer to the final declaration. Fitzgerald ended the sentence with a dash, not a period, which is the way it went to print. West explores the possibilities of this:

The significance of that final dash is readily apparent. During the novel Amory has adopted, one after another, various creeds and philosophies, always in search of a system that will explain reality to him. All these systems—Catholicism, the Princeton social system, American-Dream capitalism, and socialism—have failed him, and by the end of the book he is bitterly disillusioned. He has learned that no system can make sense out of the world he has seen and experienced. Amory has found no answers, but in his quest he has at least learned to know himself. The dash therefore echoes back through the entire novel and gives a modest, hesitant tone to Amory’s final line.⁸⁴

Or it may be an echoing tone, the hollow sound of impotent desire. The open-ended implications of the dash, according to West, make “Amory’s final statement a preface to his future, not a summation of his past.”⁸⁵ In a final, subtle token of irony, Fitzgerald robbed Amory of his final certainty, and the declaration, if ended in a dash, seems just another pose.

When Fitzgerald entered Princeton in 1913, it was primarily still an undergraduate college with a total enrollment of around 1,500 and 300,000 volumes in the library. Recent reforms were still in their larval phase, and

it had just begun to feel the effect of the preceptorial system introduced under President Wilson, who had recently escaped from an unhappy situation at the University into the governorship of New Jersey and had been replaced by John Grier Hibben.⁸⁶

Wilson’s “unhappy situation” stemmed from his domineering style (he had as a younger man stated his desire to become the “autocrat of Princeton”⁸⁷). The institution Wilson had inherited was one with much faculty “dead wood,” where the pedagogical “emphasis was largely on teaching and little on learning,”⁸⁸ an environment with a forced curriculum rather than encouraged erudition. His solution had been not, as Eliot had done to great success at Harvard, the elective principle,⁸⁹ but the preceptorial system, based on the Oxford tutorial concept. He wanted an “infusion of well-educated but personable, even ‘clubable,’ young men to make ‘reading men’ of the students.”⁹⁰ Fitzgerald would have none of it. He scrawled invective against his preceptors in the back of his copy of Sidney’s *Defence of Poesie*: “Gee but this man Griffin is terrible. I sit here bored to death and hear him pick English poetry to pieces. Small man, small mind. Snotty, disagreeable. Damn him. ‘Neat’ is his favorite word. [. . .] *I have the most terrible praeceptors.*”⁹¹ He later wrote that “in the preceptorial rooms [. . .] mildly poetic gentlemen

resented any warmth of discussion and called the prominent men of the class by their first names”⁹²; the “clubable” young men offered only the illusion of chumminess, and so far as their ability to elevate, Amory was skeptical. Preceptors appear only once in *This Side of Paradise*, when Amory intentionally “ran it out” by bringing to dinner “wild-eyed grad students, preceptors with strange theories of God and government, to the cynical amazement of the supercilious Cottage Club” (140). While Wilson’s reforms would eventually take hold, strengthening Princeton so as to catch upstart schools like Hopkins and Chicago, his two central pillars, a culled and rebuilt faculty and the preceptorial system, left Fitzgerald unimpressed.

But these were not the reasons Fitzgerald had sought out the school to begin with. Princeton had been a grand ideal for Fitzgerald since youth, but always with a distinct social or experiential rather than intellectual draw, and his love of the institution endured throughout his life. As his daughter, Scottie, would state, “my father belonged all his life to Princeton.”⁹³ As was the case with Amory Blaine, “Princeton [had drawn him more than other schools], with its atmosphere of bright colors and its alluring reputation as the pleasantest country club in America” (43). It was a place where “the young student would have readily concurred with John Peale Bishop that Princeton is a ‘place to loiter’”⁹⁴ and where Booth Tarkington had stood “in mid-campus in the small hours [. . .] singing tenor songs to the stars, arousing mingled emotions in the couched undergraduates according to the sentiment of their moods” (48). It was a place of lazy charm and ease, but which also represented the possibility (even if unfulfilled) of intellectual exploration: “if Princeton was a place of provincial social competition for two years and of charming relaxation for two more, [. . .] it was also a place where people with intellectual interests could educate themselves.”⁹⁵ This would not play out as well as it might, and Fitzgerald would carry some disappointment with him. In an article for *College Humor* in 1927,

Fitzgerald praised the college administration, and then singled out for mention “a fine philosophy department, an excellent department of classics . . . and a surprisingly pallid English department, top-heavy, undistinguished and with an uncanny knack for making literature distasteful to young men.”⁹⁶

Fitzgerald’s letter to Hibben after the publication of *Paradise* would single out the rigid curriculum, which he seemed to view as some excuse for his having not succeeded as both student and student-leader. As Mizener noted,

it puzzled and angered him to find that important things like the Triangle Club and his career as a Big Man could be interfered with by the academic authorities and he was presently to write a short story about this experience of taking make-up examinations called “The Spire and the Gargoyle,” in which the Spire is the imitation Gothic architecture of Princeton which stands for all the romantic success Fitzgerald dreamed of and the Gargoyle the instructor who graded his make-up examination. The irony of the story depends on the absurdity of a superior and more sensitive person like Fitzgerald’s finding himself at the mercy of this pathetic worm. This is the perennial undergraduate attitude, of course, but Fitzgerald’s version of it has a kind of classic perfection.⁹⁷

There is always something petulant and obstinate about Fitzgerald’s complaints. But there is also the fact that anxiety about the mission of higher education was fairly wide-spread and had loomed over American colleges since the beginning. Learning Greek was difficult and some practical question remained as to what good it would do a farmer’s son taming the West. It was likewise for geometry and the boardroom or algebra and social engagements.

Of course, these were not the enticements of Princeton. For Fitzgerald, the university meant opportunity for society and robust philosophical inquiry on a personal level. And, to some extent, this is precisely what it gave him. He did not learn trigonometry and he certainly never learned to spell; his facility in the modern languages was notoriously weak. But he seemed to learn quite a bit about who Scott Fitzgerald was, even if he did not realize it at the time. And in time, Scott Donaldson notes, Princeton would return in his mind to something like it had been in his youth, something higher than brick and mortar:

Like an over-eager swain, Fitzgerald repeatedly made a hash of his courtship of his Alma Mater. Had she succumbed to his blandishments, he might have modified the idealized picture of Princeton that he carried in his heart. But the university kept its distance and so remained a hallowed place for him.⁹⁸

As he wrote in his letter to Hibben, it had not been the happiest time in his life, but afterward he loved it more than any other place. His Princeton experience would provide him a stand-in Eden, forgotten for what it was and remembered for what it should have been. Like the Rosalinds and Daisys of his fiction, it became the dual torture of ideal and regret.

The key to viewing *Paradise* as a particularly Modern novel lies in the mounting commentary that ties Modernism to Romanticism and the Victorians. As James Longenbach has noted, “any qualities associated with modern poetry—violence, disorganization, obscurity—are themselves romantic phenomena.”⁹⁹ The precipitate causes of Modernism are multifold: industrialization, mechanization, urbanization, the First World War, optimism for the future, skepticism for the future, and so on. Modernism itself is notoriously diffuse, more a collection of individual cultural and artistic thrusts bound by a mutual insistence to be “new” or “modern” than an independently identifiable movement. If Modernism has a binding tie, it is the keen

awareness (or at least perception) that a new era of some sort had begun; accordingly, concerns of time and generation come to the fore. In that sense, it is paramount that Modernists would separate themselves from the preceding generations. The question, to borrow a phrase, would be one of anxiety of influence: how could one write a Modern novel when the novel itself is a form derived from the pre-Modern?

This is an ill-fated design and the Moderns would ultimately divorce themselves not from all that preceded them but from their immediate predecessors. They would blame the Victorians. As Amory would muse, “granted that his generation, however bruised and decimated from this Victorian war, were the heirs of progress” (266). He calls Tom “a blighted Shelley, changing, shifting, clever, unscrupulous, [who] represent[s] the critical consciousness of the race” (217). His generation, so he thinks, is to be something new entirely. It is a level of grandeur that belies reality, and Jack Hendricksen sees through this:

Fitzgerald creates an effective duality by presenting what on the surface seems to be a young hero leading his generation into battle against the previous generation, when in fact the hero is relatively conservative and just trying to make sense of what is going on around him.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the truth lies between, that Amory wants to engage and form the consciousness of his generation, but he has to make sense of his own existence first. In trying to start with the former, he is putting the cart before the horse.

Amory would be a keen observer on this question, however. In the closing sections of *Paradise*—philosophically the most important in the book—he sees progress as an ill-lit “labyrinth . . . people plunging blindly in and then rushing wildly back, shouting that they had

found it . . . the invisible king—the *élan vital*—the principle of evolution . . . writing a book, starting a war, founding a school. . . .” but all to no real end (ellipses in original)(268). The “systems,” a recurring catch-all term that seems to Amory to mean all social, religious, and economic protocols, have failed his generation, but his generation is doomed to repeat the pattern—unless they can divorce themselves from all attachments. Amory’s eventual ruminations would lead to a sort of enlightened insouciance; he would “kill [his] conscience,” leaving him unattached (or so would be the goal) to all prior modalities. It is only after this that he can claim to “know” himself, but, importantly, “that is all.” The flawed systems, represented through much of the book by the vestigial academic norms of nineteenth century Princeton, are the source of Amory’s call for reforms. In this sense, the novel’s Modernism is innately tied to its criticism of higher education; to change the world, one need not only alter the substance of culture, but the procedure as well, the methods of cultural transmission—that is, the way we learn. And while *This Side of Paradise* is Fitzgerald’s earliest and most thorough meditation on this topic, it is a strain that would permeate his career thereafter.

For example, when Nick and Jordan find “Owl-eyes” in Gatsby’s library, the “stout, middle-aged man [. . .] somewhat drunk” is marveling over the fact that Gatsby’s books are real, not, as he suspected, just “a nice durable cardboard.” He pulls a book from the shelf to show them. “See,” he cries, “it’s a bona fide piece of printed matter [. . .] Knew when to stop, too—didn’t cut the pages.”¹⁰¹ That Gatsby owns real books that he will never read is an important instance in Fitzgerald’s commentary on education; and that he will treat them as collectibles, not cutting the pages, rather than as vessels of knowledge, shows the effect of the illusion of erudition or the prize-badge of education. Just as Gatsby was an “Oxford man,” but not an Oxford graduate, the importance of education would be affective. It is important to have held the

key, even if the door was never unlocked. So far as a college education was concerned, Fitzgerald was skeptical to the end. His last protagonist, Monroe Stahr of *The Love of the Last Tycoon* laments on multiple occasions that he did not have “an education,” and each time he is told that college was not really all that important. “You make me sorry I didn’t get an education,” Stahr says to Pete Zavras, who took his baccalaureate in Salonika, to which the latter responds, “It isn’t worth a damn.”¹⁰² When Mort Flieshacker (Fitzgerald always had an ear for names) delivers the line “perhaps I fail to comprehend implicitly and explicitly,”¹⁰³ Fitzgerald notes that “the veins on his forehead bulged with pride at the big words from N.Y.U.”¹⁰⁴ Later in the novel, Kathleen would explain her education at the hands of her philandering royalty, a private education that has left her as apt as a graduate, mirroring the “College of One” Fitzgerald put on for Sheila Graham.¹⁰⁵ The common thread here is that in *The Last Tycoon*, as elsewhere, university affiliation seems to have no intellectual effect for better or worse, except to give a graduate the facility and the vanity to say “implicitly” and “explicitly.”

The notion that college leads only to superficial gains is an echo of earlier writings. He wrote that Tudor Baird, ill-fated fling of Gloria Patch’s in *The Beautiful and Damned* had been “a Scroll and Keys man at Yale, he possessed the correct reticences of a ‘good egg,’ the correct notions of chivalry and *noblesse oblige*—and, of course, but unfortunately, the correct biases and the correct lack of ideas.”¹⁰⁶ Baird has been robbed of some form of virility; he is mannerly and trained to make good judgments, but the judgments he will make are not his own. Elsewhere in the novel Dayton Kahler says,

Now some people [. . .] think that whether a man gets started early or late depends on whether he’s got a college education. But they’re wrong. [. . .] I had one; I was Buckleigh, class of nineteen-eleven, but when I came down to [Wall] Street I

soon found that the things that would help me here weren't the fancy things I learned in college. In fact, I had to get a lot of fancy stuff out of my head.¹⁰⁷

Some time later, Maury Noble caps a tirade on the futility of intelligence in the light of circumstance (a rant on the theme that “necessity, not intellect, is the mother of invention”) with “well, I started to tell you of my education, didn't I? But I learned nothing, you see, very little even about myself,”¹⁰⁸ an apparent transtextual reference to Amory's final declaration. In Fitzgerald's conception, the mechanisms of education themselves can invite the invidious, not just as distracted docility, but from top-down incompetence. In a Basil Duke story unpublished in the author's life, the protagonist, in grade school, is asked what the capitol of Central America is; Basil replies that there is not one and is chastised by the teacher, who settles on Mexico City and moves on with the lesson.¹⁰⁹ Here the teacher's dual incompetence and hubris have succeeded in conveying misinformation to all but Duke himself.

Aside from practical questions, what classroom education may or may not provide the participant, Fitzgerald also questioned the end-goal of scholarship as practiced in the university. The perpetually frustrated Maury Noble outlines the academic life as such:

Sitting day after day supine in a rigid chair and infinitely removed from life staring at the tip of a steeple through the trees, trying to separate, definitely and for all time, the knowable from the unknowable? Trying to take a piece of actuality and give it glamour from your own soul to make for that inexpressible quality it possessed in life and lost in transit to paper or canvas? Struggling in a laboratory through weary years for one iota of relative truth in a mass of wheels or a test tube—¹¹⁰

This sense of futility regarding academic endeavor mirrors the anecdote in *Tender Is the Night* where “a young Rumanian intellectual” tells Dick of a colleague who spent two years working on nothing but the brain of an armadillo “with the idea that he would sooner or later know more about the brain of an armadillo than any one.” When the colleague finally prepares his findings, they are rejected for publication: someone else has just submitted a paper on the same topic.¹¹¹ Even the course of study can be arbitrarily chosen; Dick “got to be a psychiatrist because there was a girl at St. Hilda’s in Oxford that went to the same lectures.”¹¹² This is a sort of “accidental education” akin to Henry Adams’s. The notion of the importance of accident to personal development was one that would recur in Fitzgerald’s works in and out of the educational arena. Cecelia Brady would characterize Stahr’s arrival in Hollywood thusly: “you could say that this was where an accidental wind blew him but I don’t think so.”¹¹³ Gatsby, lying dead in his pool, would be blown by “a small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface [. . .] enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden.”¹¹⁴ The implicit message is that growth or movement cannot be forced, but must happen naturally.

Paradise describes schooling in generative, almost procreative terms: “we have no Eton to create the self-consciousness of a governing class; we have, instead, clean, flaccid and innocuous preparatory schools” (35). There must be a mother organ capable of producing a particular social class; America is without it. The maternal resonance of the alma mater would reappear: Amory, driven by oedipal attachment to the origin of his notions of beauty, returns to Princeton to receive his revelation; Tom Buchanan cannot forget that “dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game,” the moment he came into being as a person¹¹⁵; and Abe North in *Tender Is the Night*, having been mortally wounded, crawls toward the safety, acceptance, and security of the Harvard Club.¹¹⁶ The womb-like resonance would recur as

Fitzgerald was repeatedly drawn to the idea of the romantic student ensconced in a dark dormitory room, swimming amniotic in books and deep thoughts (much like Fanshawe in his communions with the dead). Amory, Tom, and Burne would each fit this at one point in their tenure at Princeton, and Anthony Patch, protagonist of *The Beautiful and Damned*, “oblivious to the social system, [. . .] lived for a while alone and unsought in a high room in Beck Hall [at Harvard]—a slim dark boy of medium height with a shy sensitive mouth” where he surrounds himself with Swinburne, Meredith, Hardy, and an autographed letter of Keats’s.¹¹⁷

Curiously, Fitzgerald was skeptical of the undistinguished university but enamored of the un-degreed and the auto-didact. As he wrote of Gloria’s father in *The Beautiful and Damned*, “after graduating from a small but terrifying Western university, he had entered the celluloid business, and as this required only the minute intelligence he brought to it, he did well for several years.”¹¹⁸ In *The Vegetable*, Joseph Fish, an “insipid young man” is the “product of a small-town high school and a one-year business course at a state university.”¹¹⁹ But Monroe Stahr, perhaps the most self-possessed of Fitzgerald’s heroes, has no degree. And whatever Gatsby has learned, he has learned by experience; Carraway, the Yale graduate who “disapproved of him from beginning to end,”¹²⁰ could not help but portray Gatsby sympathetically.

When Amory calls Tom the “critical consciousness of the race,” he is obviously invoking the penultimate diary entry of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*: “I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated consciousness of my race.”¹²¹ The tie between these two novels, both as an acknowledged influence for Fitzgerald and as texts with profound *Bildung* affinities, has been noted.¹²² The tie is more than superficial. Just as Dedalus is intent on “the reality of experience” and “the smithy of my soul,” so would Amory and Fitzgerald preoccupy themselves with

transcendental, symbological concerns. For Moderns of the Symbolist stripe (Eliot and Pound, *inter alia*) the philosophical core of education was not a matter of adding layers, but of peeling them away. In Jungian fashion, whatever was to be truly known was intuitive, already a part of the human psychic make-up. Of course, to be able to delve into the core of knowledge, to peel away the accumulated distractions, would itself require a great deal of study; hence the peculiar intersections of “high” and “proto” modernism. Fitzgerald, while seldom dealing with the notion of heritable knowledge directly, would follow suit.¹²³ While his recurring theme would be that formal schooling is only a path toward greater confusion, frustration, and, ultimately, disillusion, a distinct preoccupation with the mystic or symbological, the notion of experiential education appears throughout his fiction. For example, as David Trotter notes of *The Great Gatsby*,

it is Symbolism which renders (by failing to render precisely) the inexhaustibleness of the “inexhaustible charm” of wealth. Thus Carraway hears, beyond Gatsby’s sentimentality, “an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago.”¹²⁴

The allure or mystique of wealth is not in its material complement but something deeper and impossible to understand without experiential knowledge. The rich “are very different from you and me,” the famous line from “The Rich Boy” goes, “they possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand.”¹²⁵ Fitzgerald spilled a great deal of ink trying to articulate that which he knew to be inarticulable. It was a problem that he revisited frequently. Late in *Tender Is the Night*, Dick Diver having just quarreled with his wife for what would be one of the final times,

opened a bathroom window, giving on a narrow and tubular court of the château, gray as rats but echoing at the moment to plaintive and peculiar music, sad as a flute. Two men were chanting in an Eastern language or dialect full of k's and l's—he leaned out but he could not see them; there was obviously a religious significance in the sounds, and tired and emotionless he let them pray for him too, but what for, save that he should not lose himself in his increasing melancholy, he did not know.¹²⁶

He does not know the language, but knows its “religious significance,” just as he can know a flute’s music to be “sad.” There is an extraverbal significance to the words, as mantras, almost as though Fitzgerald were playing on the notion of the difference between the sacred word spoke aloud and read in silence, an important aspect of Islamic and Jewish (with their “Eastern language[s] or dialect[s] full of k’s and l’s”) practice. There is something communicated beyond the limit of rational thought. In *The Last Tycoon*, Stahr, looking across a film lot, sees “a vague background spread behind [Kathleen], something more tangible than the head of Siva in the moonlight.”¹²⁷ This “head of Siva” is a film prop, and it has appeared elsewhere in the novel; when the lot floods, Stahr sees Kathleen for the first time, floating on the head. The prop head of Siva, the literal object, is still less tangible than the “vague background” behind. Shortly thereafter, Stahr claims “you do what you were born to do” and talks of others attempting to reform him.¹²⁸ This statement, delivered so soon on the heels of the reference to Siva suggests the *Bhagavad-Gita*, when Krishna assures Arjuna that it is not wrong to kill when it is one’s nature or destiny to do so.¹²⁹ These instances that play off of the rupture between distinct and indistinct knowledge align with the Modern appropriation of the Arnoldian sense of literature. Modernism would see texts, the substitute for religion, not,

as the classicist Arnold had thought, as a source of transmitted wisdom, “the best that is known and thought in the world,” but rather as the active means of questioning and discovering fundamental values, truths, and understandings for which there was no alternative grounding.¹³⁰

Fitzgerald seems to have recognized and exploited the idea that the process of knowing is fundamentally a matter of indistinct knowledge. Amory himself is something of a mantrist, a devotee of the koan; “I’m a cynical idealist,” he says, then “paused and wondered if that meant anything” (90). He has a penchant for paradox, the sound of one hand clapping, the sort of statements that extend beyond literal meaning, and “he had a sense of reality such as material things could never give him” (119).

The bulk of commentary on Fitzgerald and religion has focused on the Catholic resonances of his fiction. This is unsurprising, given that Fitzgerald was raised a Catholic and seems to have had some feud with the Church his entire life. Once in St. Paul, one of his companions would overhear him muttering to himself as they drove past a church, “God damn the Catholic Church; God damn the Church; God damn God.”¹³¹ Certainly *This Side of Paradise* involves an unflattering assessment of the church; having declared “all gods dead” and called Darcy’s faith into question,¹³²

his mind turned a corner suddenly and he found himself thinking of the Catholic Church. The idea was strong in him that there was a certain intrinsic lack in those to whom orthodox religion was necessary, and religion to Amory meant the Church of Rome. Quite conceivably it was an empty ritual but it was seemingly the only assimilative, traditionary bulwark against the decay of morals. Until the

great mobs could be educated into a moral sense some one must cry: "Thou shalt not!" Yet any acceptance was, for the present, impossible. (283)

This passage is very near the end of the novel, and accordingly carries relevance as something of a conclusion. Of course the key is that he decries those for whom "orthodox religion" is "necessary." The quarrel is not with religion in the abstract, but, in the Nietzschean conception, with those who must have their religion spelled out. It is consequently curious that Joan Allen has called the novel "Fitzgerald's most sustained overtly Catholic piece of fiction."¹³³ Perhaps "anti-Catholic" would have been a better term. While for him, religion meant "the Church of Rome," it is clear that Amory was not hostile to spiritual inclinations, and his thoughts on the spiritual and the religious are not mutually exclusive. Interestingly, he would characterize his disappointment in religion in collegiate terms:

The pageantry of his disillusion took shape in a world-old procession of Prophets, Athenians, Martyrs, Saints, Scientists, Don Juans, Jesuits, Puritans, Fausts, Poets, Pacifists; like costumed alumni at a college reunion they streamed before him as their dreams, personalities, and creeds had in turn thrown colored lights on his soul; each had tried to express the glory of life and the tremendous significance of man; each had boasted of synchronizing what had gone before into his own rickety generalities; each had depended after all on the set stage and the convention of the theatre, which is that man in his hunger for faith will feed his mind with the nearest and most convenient food. (266)

Amory's realization that the "nearest and most convenient food" is not always the most nourishing for the spirit is an important one.

At the other end of the spectrum is *The Beautiful and Damned*. The life of a mystic, especially one who seems use such as a pretext for dissolution, would be a difficult one for Anthony Patch. After reading of the various accomplishments of his fellow Harvard grads in an alumni publication, he questions his commitment to non-commitment: “in the days of his integrity he would have defended his attitude to the last—an Epicurus in Nirvana, he would have cried that to struggle was to believe, to believe was to limit.”¹³⁴³ Anthony is Fitzgerald’s most obstinately materialistic protagonist, created when Fitzgerald himself was first awash in fame and fortune. But before that, in *This Side of Paradise*, when he was himself desirous but not possessed of mammon, he would muse,

There were men like Wells and Plato, who had, half unconsciously, a strange, hidden orthodoxy, who would accept for themselves only what could be accepted for all men—incurable romanticists who never, for all their efforts, could enter the labyrinth as stark souls; there were on the other hand sword-like pioneering personalities, Samuel Butler, Renan, Voltaire who progressed much slower, yet eventually much further, not in the direct pessimistic line of speculative philosophy but concerned in the eternal attempt to attach a positive value to life. . .

Amory stopped. He began for the first time in his life to have a strong distrust of all generalities and epigrams. (267)

While indulging his habit of classification, he suddenly becomes aware that classifications can be fruitless. Just as he would earlier witness the definition of the term “slicker” vanish in endless subsets, so he realizes later in *Paradise* that type transcends words to become *logos*. Leaving Princeton, Amory calls out, ““good-by, Aaron Burr,’ [...] toward deserted Nassau Hall, ‘you and

I knew strange corners of life” (157). If “strange” can be a synonym for “peculiar” and “peculiar” for “individual,” Amory knows, as he leaves, that truth lies within.

This philosophy of indistinct knowledge, the “strange corners of life” wherein truth is a matter beyond the systematic classifications that constitute typical, formal learning, also plays a role in determining the novel’s peculiar structure. The novel is divided into two “books,” “The Romantic Egotist” and “The Education of a Personage.” These are separated by an “Interlude” which is titled according to chronology: “May, 1917-February, 1919.” The two books are subdivided into chapters (four in the first, five in the second), which are further divided into subchapters (sixty-seven all told, if the untitled introductory subchapters to each chapter are counted). The subchapters are frequently themselves divided with page-breaks. The chapters are usually related to one another by characters and context, but by little else; the novel is highly fragmented and episodic. Additionally, the novel is a pastiche of forms; while prose narrative is its standard mode, it incorporates significant quantities of verse (lines of Amory’s creation as well as snippets of verse from Swinburne, Verlaine, and numerous others), several letters, and an extended dramatic section that incorporates the bulk of Amory’s relationship with Rosalind.

Catherine Burroughs is one of the few commentators who seem to have understood the patchwork form of the novel as a virtue rather than a detriment:

critics have neglected to discuss the stylistic eclecticism of *This Side of Paradise* as it underscores Fitzgerald’s most poignant theme: his sensitive men are not nearly as special as they want to be, and their artistic yearnings are often absurdly motivated by a misguided belief that their lives are worth writing about.¹³⁵

Burroughs is apparently responding to the fact that the novel, in ways, reads like a diary or scrapbook, and Amory is the oblivious host intent on pushing it on his guests. Robert Roulston approached the problem differently, but also with a sympathetic tone: “the apparently disjointed organization of the work becomes less objectionable or even defensible as a kind of prolonged metaphor for Amory’s emersion [sic] in a swirl of events which cannot be crammed into a tight pattern.”¹³⁶ But Roulston approaches it from a starting point that might make such a viewpoint only “less objectionable.” Just as something like Ezra Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (also published in 1920) would challenge “conventional notions of poetic wholeness and closure,”¹³⁷ so does *Paradise*; insofar as the loss of wholeness is key to the theme of the narrative, this is not a fault.

The term “structure” is well-traveled in *Paradise* commentary, used both for positive and negative assessments. The novel’s detractors see *Paradise* as structurally haphazard, the incidental result of an inexperienced and hurried author. Others have pointed to intricate, inter-related textual moments in the novel as evidence of a more careful (or at least intentional) composition; Dorothy Ballweg Good points to the reading lists as progressive indications of Amory’s intellectual growth, and Jack Hendricksen notes that “connections are also seen in minor ways: the ‘Half-crystalline’ sky in Chapter One becomes the ‘crystalline radiant sky’ on the last page.”¹³⁸ The novel is self-consciously self-referential in instances such as Amory first being described as having his father’s “tendency to waver at crucial moments” (11), which balances Eleanor’s assertion that Amory has “a tendency toward wavering that prevents [him] from being the entire light of [her] life” (237). The novel is balanced in a more obvious sense in its treatment of Princeton. In both “books,” Princeton is a goal; for the first, it is what Amory

expects will allow him to realize his potential, and in the second, it is the end of Amory's trek during which he comes to know (or believes or at least asserts that he knows) himself.

"Structure," as a critical concept, is a term that implicitly favors concreteness. Recalibrating the critical outlook to ignore this bias, an apt apologetic comes from an improbable source, Mary Gordon's introduction to *The Collected Writings* of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald; Gordon suggests that a beneficial vantage point on Zelda's writing could be gained by "discarding the notion that the formal, finished and pared down is aesthetically superior to the associative and fragmentary."¹³⁹ The key to critical acceptance of the "associative and fragmentary" seems to be the existence of *external*, historical verification that such an approach is intentional, an approach that neglects the appreciation of a text as a literary found object existing for the mind rather than the ledger. While superficial evidence exists that the fragmented narrative of *Paradise* stems from the composition process and the inexperience of the writer, other evidence contravenes this stance. On two occasions, Fitzgerald referred to the novel as a "casserole"—once in a letter to Maxwell Perkins and again in the unincorporated author's preface to the text—suggesting the author was not only aware of the novel's structural peculiarities but was willing to announce this as his intent.¹⁴⁰

The nature of the student narrative inherently supports, metatextually, a manic and episodic formulation. A number of first-wave reviewers harped on the novel's structure, and the fact that Fitzgerald's follow-up, *The Beautiful and Damned*, was, as Mizener phrased it, "a painstakingly thought-out book, and for that reason . . . much less effective" than *Paradise*,¹⁴¹ suggests that Fitzgerald was self-consciously plotting his story in *The Beautiful and Damned* and that his natural mode was fragmentary (an observation supported by similar, if more judicious, jumps in chronology, voice, and perspective in *The Great Gatsby*¹⁴² and *Tender Is the Night*¹⁴³).

Finally, the fact that the fragmented narrative is so very in line with Modernist structural tendencies, and that *Paradise* either anticipates or echoes the associative texts of the period, offers credence to the notion that Fitzgerald's method was intentional. As Michael Bell has noted,

modernist literature is often concerned with the question of how to live within a new context of thought, or a new worldview. This is why, although much literature of the period is notoriously self-conscious about its own form, this frequently goes with a remarkable implicitness as to its meaning.¹⁴⁴

Paradise is not structurally dissolute because it was negligently written, but because its structure implicitly responds to the philosophic concerns of a fragmented era. Amory is living Adams's dilemma, how does one worship the gods of the past while finding one's place in the present? Catherine Burroughs answers this query: "*This Side of Paradise* plays the old lyrics of the Romantic and Victorian period to horrific effect: Amory, because he is caring and careful, is doomed only to repeat lives and literary works rather than create them."¹⁴⁵

Setting aside the problems of structure so far as they pertain to either allegedly negligent composition or the extant evidence suggesting a well-considered structure, the novel represents, on a broader scale, a very Modern agglomeration of representative moments, a marriage of disparate assertions of a unified truth. What might be similar concerns regarding Eliot's *The Waste Land* (or to a lesser degree, Pound's *Maunderley*) are drowned by a hail of veneration—despite the fact that those texts were similarly cobbled and overhauled and made—intentionally—diffuse. But if *This Side of Paradise* is put under *that* lens, it becomes likewise a triumphant blend of old and modern. It carries with it a register of heritage in its reading lists, the

catalog of fallen monuments in its portraits of institutions of culture and progress, and the final dark consolation of the lost quest for context and coherence.¹⁴⁶

The binding thread among all these elements—Fitzgerald, Symbolism, Education, and the Modern context—might be best, if improbably, explained by considering Emerson and architecture.¹⁴⁷ Amory is particularly enamored of Princeton’s Gothic buildings, and it seems that he is responding to them, as does Emerson in discussing the same, as “faint copies of an invisible archetype”¹⁴⁸:

He liked knowing that Gothic architecture, with its upward trend, was peculiarly appropriate to universities, and the idea became personal to him. The silent stretches of green, the quiet halls with an occasional late-burning scholastic light held his imagination in a strong grasp, and the chastity of the spire became a symbol of this perception. (61)

Just as Emersonian philosophy would favor the passive perception of the macro (not the tree, but the forest) so as to better understand the micro (the truth underlying the individual tree), so Amory absorbs the entire campus, so that it, en masse, is made synoptic in the “chastity of the spire” to become “a symbol of this perception.” Amory perceives the “upward trend” of the Gothic buildings, feeling it peculiarly appropriate to the sort of intuitive education he elsewhere dictates should be the central cause and function of the university. The sort of passive intensity of study—which is to say self-determined curricula and individual contemplation—that Fitzgerald promotes is itself an attempt to draw the “invisible archetype” to the foreground of consciousness. Henry Dan Piper, among the most perspicacious of Fitzgerald’s early commentators, has noted that

Fitzgerald's medieval Princeton, its spires rising out of a romantic mist, is really much closer to Mackenzie's glamorized Oxford [in *Sinister Street*] than to the pre-World War I New Jersey college, whose charming eighteenth-century Georgian campus, at that time, was being renovated by a rash of raw new imitation-Gothic edifices.¹⁴⁹

Fitzgerald apparently knew he was renovating the Princeton that occurs within the four corners of the text (i. e., the textual rather than historical Princeton), and, having freighted it with philosophical importance, doing so in order to create a particular tone. The passage, like others describing the campus, is contemplative, an environment for deep thoughts more than graphs and textbooks. Sy Kahn has noted that "if the white buildings of New York, blanched by the moon, are the symbols of evil, the gothic spires of Princeton are the architecture of sanity and safety"¹⁵⁰ (curiously, Kahn, having not considered the shape of the spire, states that the Princeton campus is free from the "phallic thrusts" of the Manhattan skyline, and therefore less intimidating). But Kahn's assertion that the architecture of Princeton represents refuge and retreat (especially insofar as concerns the psychosexual implications of high-rise buildings) misses the mark: the attraction of the campus architecture has nothing to do with Freudian anxiety, but with transcendental endeavor. Just before Amory leaves Princeton for the last time as a student, he looks over the deserted campus and offers up perhaps the most poetic passage in the novel:

The last light fades and drifts across the land—the low, long land, the sunny land of spires; the ghosts of evening tune again their lyres and wander singing in a plaintive band down the long corridors of trees; pale fires echo the night from tower top to tower: Oh, sleep that dreams, and dream that never tires, press from the petals of the lotus flower something of this to keep, the essence of an hour.

*No more to wait the twilight of the moon in this sequestered vale of star
and spire, for one eternal morning of desire passes to time and earthly afternoon.
Here, Heraclitus, did you find in fire and shifting things the prophecy you hurled
down the dead years; this midnight my desire will see, shadowed among the
embers, furling in flame, the splendor and the sadness of the world. [italics in
original] (157)*

The “last light” fades and breaks loose to drift from the “sequestered vale of star and spire,” the ethereal and its earthly symbol. The repetition of the “ire” sound underlies an interconnectedness among all elements of the passage—study and practice, sleep and waking, past and present—as does the summoning of Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic who believed in the unity of opposites and the centrality of impermanence.

Here again is Amory’s skepticism of the material and his tendency to favor the spiritual. It was a tendency that, naturally, undermined his relationships with faculty:

Co-ordinate geometry and the melancholy hexameters of Corneille and Racine held forth small allurements, and even psychology, which he had eagerly awaited, proved to be a dull subject full of muscular reactions and biological phrases rather than the study of personality and influence. That was a noon class, and it always sent him dozing. Having found that “subjective and objective, sir” answered most of the questions, he used the phrase on all occasions, and it became the class joke when, a query being levelled at him, he was nudged awake by Ferrenby or Sloane to gasp it out. (85-86)

He had been enthused at the prospect of psychology but was disappointed to find it less a study of the mind than the body. The “subjective and objective, sir” refrain at once criticizes the expectation (prepackaged answers are fine if nebulous) and the decorum (they are fine so long as one adds “sir”). Amory is following the lead of Thomas Parke D’Invilliers, modeled on John Peale Bishop, the aesthete who is similarly disinterested in enforced curricula. Well into their relationship, Tom says he wants to be “where people aren’t barred by their neckties and the roll of their coats.” Amory responds that this is an idle notion: “For better or worse we’ve stamped you; you’re a Princeton type!” (89). What, precisely, a “Princeton type” might be remains ambiguous; in fact, noting the diversity of personalities at Princeton is something of a pastime for Amory. What is important is not what a Princeton type might be, but rather that Amory feels that a Princeton type exists.

The notion of the “Princeton type” is especially troublesome given that, at times, Fitzgerald seems to go out of his way to show that the university make-up is fluid. He refers to Amory’s last two years there as “Princeton’s transition period” (124) and notes the appearance of strange new personalities on the scene:

In the old Princeton they would never have discovered Tanaduke Wylie.

Tanaduke was a sophomore, with tremendous ears and a way of saying, “The earth swirls down through the ominous moons of preconsidered generations!” that made them vaguely wonder why it did not sound quite clear, but never question that it was the utterance of a supersoul. At least so Tom and Amory took him.

They told him in all earnestness that he had a mind like Shelley’s, and featured his ultrafree free verse and prose poetry in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*. But

Tanaduke’s genius absorbed the many colors of the age, and he took to the

Bohemian life, to their great disappointment. He talked of Greenwich Village now instead of “noon-swirled moons,” and met winter muses, unacademic, and cloistered by Forty-second Street and Broadway, instead of the Shelleyan dream-children with whom he had regaled their expectant appreciation. So they surrendered Tanaduke to the futurists, deciding that he and his flaming ties would do better there. (111-12)

The issue of “type” attached to an institution would linger throughout Fitzgerald’s career. Principal characters are seldom introduced apart from their pedigree, often, as is the elevated custom, by community (Nick Carraway “graduated from New Haven,”¹⁵¹ Anthony Patch hocked his watch “when [he] was at Cambridge”¹⁵²); even minor characters follow this introduction-by-institution: the unnamed colonel of *The Beautiful and Damned* “was a West Pointer, and, mimetically, a gentleman.”¹⁵³

Merely noting that Amory’s outlook on the educational process favors auto-didacticism is too slim an assessment. The fuller trajectory is that followed from Amory’s intellectual infatuation with Tom D’Invilliers to his awe at Burne Holiday’s rapid ascension to (or transcending of) scholastic excellence. Tom is, like Amory, an incurable romantic, reveling in the models and ideals of past ages. Burne, when he begins his transformation, is seeking out “the next thing.” “I’m in a muddle about a lot of things,” Burne tells Amory, “I’ve just discovered that I’ve a mind, and I’m starting to read” (127). Under Burne’s aggressive new plan, he will become hermetic; he removes himself from club life and positions of student leadership to retreat to quiet study. While he moves away from positions of broad social prominence (so much that people who had once greatly respected him come to think of him as an eccentric outcast), his relationship with his close friends elevates and they, Amory included, become his disciples:

They talked until three, from biology to organized religion, and when Amory crept shivering into bed it was with his mind aglow with ideas and a sense of shock that some one else had discovered the path he might have followed. Burne Holiday was so evidently developing—and Amory had considered that he was doing the same. He had fallen into a deep cynicism over what had crossed his path, plotted the imperfectability of man and read Shaw and Chesterton enough to keep his mind from the edges of decadence—now suddenly all his mental processes of the last year and a half seemed stale and futile—a petty consummation of himself. (128)

Burne becomes “the first contemporary [Amory has] ever met whom [he will] admit is [his] superior in mental capacity” (135) and becomes a sort of quasi-Christ; as he removes himself further into his own studies and away from the social scene, he is ridiculed by the “Pharisee class” (136) and when Jesse Ferrenby misattributes “He who is not with me is against me” in *The Princetonian* in such a way as to have accidentally ridiculed the Son of Man, it is Burne who brings the error to light (137).

If the Burne ideal—devoted, monkish study—is at one end of the spectrum of academic types, the other end is represented by the extra tutoring class Amory needs to pass geometry:

Mr. Rooney, pander to the dull, conducted the class and smoked innumerable Pall Malls as he drew diagrams and worked equations from six in the morning until midnight. [. . .] The room was a study in stupidity—two huge stands for paper, Mr. Rooney in his shirt-sleeves in front of them, and slouched around on chairs, a dozen men: Fred Sloane, the pitcher, who absolutely *had* to get eligible; “Slim” Langeuduc, who would beat Yale this fall, if only he could master a poor fifty per

cent; McDowell, gay young sophomore, who thought it was quite a sporting thing to be tutoring here with all these prominent athletes. (100)

Amory, disdainful of the class and its underlying function, would follow his nature and fail. It costs him his position on the *Princetonian*, his weightiest claim to social prominence. But there is some integrity extending beyond undergraduate rebellion. When he receives the results of the class, he knows that if a pink slip comes out of the envelope, he has passed; if blue, he has failed: ““Blue as the sky, gentlemen,”” he announces to his gathered friends in an act of devil-may-care gallantry (102). This scene, tellingly, was Fitzgerald’s personal favorite in the novel.¹⁵⁴

Fitzgerald’s apparent disappointment with the formal education he received at Princeton followed him always. But he seemed to have felt some pity for the professors; while he rarely wrote book reviews, he did so once for Charles Norris’s *Brass*. Charles was the brother of Frank Norris, whose work Fitzgerald greatly admired, and which would, along with that of Zola and Dreiser, become tremendously important to Fitzgerald’s socio-political philosophies (the obvious tension and interest stemming from Fitzgerald’s idolizing wealth and class while knowing, first-hand, the accompanying social ills). He wrote that

“There was a fine delicacy in Frank Norris’s work which does not exist in his brother’s,” [. . .] illustrating his point with a reference to *McTeague*, “where the pictures almost invariably give authenticity by the appeal to the sense of smell or hearing rather than by the commoner form of word-painting. To me it was utterly new. I had never read Zola or Frank Norris or Dreiser. No one of my English professors in college ever suggested to his classes that such books were being written in America. Poor souls, they were as ignorant as I.”¹⁵⁵

He knew the human limitation of professorial duties—they could not reasonably be expected to have read everything—but laments that the canonical approval of great texts would rely on the lagging perception of academia. The curriculum could not encourage inspection of the cutting edge because the cutting edge could not have been properly vetted by university standards.

In sum, the faculty can be flawed, the mechanism can be flawed, the mission can be flawed, but the key to successful education, in Fitzgerald's terms, comes down to the student. This is why he was more comfortable with the self-educated than those who might have gone only half-way by attending a school of lesser rank. It is worth pondering whether Froggy Parker, Amory's childhood romantic rival who later attended Harvard (70), might have become *The Beautiful and Damned's* Parker Allison, who had been "the wrong sort of rounder at Harvard," and whose "notion of distinction consisted in driving a noisy red-and-yellow racing-car up Broadway with two glittering, hard-eyed girls beside him. He was the sort who dined with two girls rather than one—his imagination was almost incapable of sustaining a dialogue."¹⁵⁶ If in some way this is true—and Fitzgerald was not above playful self-reference¹⁵⁷—in the Parkers can be seen what being the "wrong sort of rounder" could mean.

The issue of practical efficacy, whether a college teaches anything useful or whether college education is merely a mill for manners, is an old one. Benjamin Franklin, age sixteen, wrote of Harvard being a place "where, for want of a suitable Genius, they learn little more than to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteely."¹⁵⁸ Adams would express similar concerns in his "type but not a will" statement. Much of this would stem from American infatuation with the auto-apotheosis, as Frederick Rudolph notes:

Because democratic growth in the United States was contemporaneous with the growth of the colleges, they experienced some difficulty in establishing rigorous

learning as one of their fundamental interests. Americans were on the whole much impressed by the careers of self-taught, self-made men, men whose elevation to positions of responsibility, eminence, and wealth was accomplished without the benefit of formal schooling. Against this record of success the colleges could with difficulty advance the necessity of close, rigorous intellectual exercise as a justification for attending college. In the end, the colleges to a certain extent incorporated a posture of anti-intellectualism in their behavior.¹⁵⁹

The collective college consciousness would eventually evolve into what Frederick Rudolph dubbed “the collegiate way,” “the notion that a curriculum, a library, a faculty, and students are not enough to make a college.”¹⁶⁰ It was no longer about merely intellectual endeavor. The undergraduate world was one of clubs and society, athleticism and pageant; education, in the classroom sense, became incidental.

There are formidable arguments that this is not such a corrosive truth. As Rudolph would note of the concomitant rise of the extracurricular with the industrial age merchantry,

The world of business was a world of dealing with people. what better preparation could there be than the collegiate life outside the classroom—the club room, the playing field, where the qualities that showed what stuff a fellow really was made of were bound to be encouraged. As the decades passed, college-going became for many a social habit, a habit which was sustained by an ever increasing standard of living and which was encouraged by the clear evidence that college men made more money than noncollege men and that money almost everywhere was the instrument of social elevation. In all of this the classroom was not terribly important.¹⁶¹

The hobgoblin of this notion that college was primarily an extracurricular affair would be the issue of student motivation. Once the notion that “book learning” was a hurdle rather than an objective became entrenched in the student psyche, turning minds toward the rigors of study, away from the rigors of social striving, would call to question the centermost reasons for the existence of baccalaureate education. While the ferocity at Bunker Hill, in Rudolph’s anecdote, did not stir the Harvard undergraduate, by the twentieth century the student needed a harder sell.

When studies take a backseat, extracurriculars fill the void. This is, of course, extracurricular in the broader sense; whether a student devotes spare time to positions of leadership or to vice, for Fitzgerald, would have to do with how tight a grip the college enforcers would have. Adams, reflecting on his college days, wrote

The habit of drinking—though the mere recollection of it made him doubt his own veracity, so fantastic it seemed later in life—may have done no great or permanent harm; but the habit of looking at life as a social relation—an affair of society—did no good. It cultivated a weakness which needed no cultivation.¹⁶²

It is a bit surprising, looking back through Amory’s period at Princeton in light of his behavior afterward, to note that he was not a particularly heavy drinker in college. He did not shy away from alcohol, but there is no reference, as there would be on multiple occasions during his tenure in New York, to his being actually drunk. In fact, he apparently has the privilege in his boarding house of looking down on “the plebeian drunks” (50). Devoting oneself to “drinking parties” was considered “running it out” (51-52) and a quick path to pariah-hood. So in this sense, the college in the novel actually promotes responsible socializing. This extends to Fitzgerald’s primary pedagogical qualm; when left to his own devices, Amory is a diligent auto-didact, but the rigid

curriculum takes him away from this, he fails, and thereafter engages in prolonged bouts of alcoholic excess.

Amory's spontaneous, if equivocal, conversion to radical socialism also reflects a concern of the time, voiced, Rudolph notes, in the "pages of such journals as *Outlook*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic*," that students were not being trained to argue passionately, but rather merely to argue effectively. As students were trained in Rogerian terms, to argue both sides of the argument, the anxiety became whether a student would remember how to determine his own will, how to stick to his guns, how to believe. This approach, in conservative circles, was "a blatant encouragement to relativism."¹⁶³ This new sophistry, in which intellectual procedure is prioritized over actual knowledge, is central to *This Side of Paradise*, wherein Amory is acclimated to a worldview in which all wars were fought and all gods dead and one's conscience needed killing. It also again echoes Henry Adams: Harvard "taught little, and taught that little ill, but it left the mind open, free from bias, ignorant of facts, but docile. The graduate had few strong prejudices. He knew little, but his mind remained supple, ready to receive knowledge."¹⁶⁴ Amory had learned little in class, but much on his own, causing him to question the established practices of education. In college he observed a system of social stratification that would lead him to question the fairness of a society founded on materialism. And he was disillusioned as to the whole model: "I was probably one of the two dozen men in my class at college who got a decent education," he says to the elder Ferrenby, "still they'd let any well-tutored flathead play football and *I* was ineligible, because some silly old men thought we should *all* profit by conic sections" (280). Ferrenby cautions that Amory is just not long enough in the world to understand properly how it works, to which Amory responds, "which may only mean that I have neither been corrupted nor made timid by contemporary experience. I possess the most valuable

experience, the experience of the race, for in spite of going to college I've managed to pick up a good education" (280). The idea that an inexperienced person is also an uncorrupted person is a natural component of youthful angst, but it underlies some well-founded frustrations that go along with a young person trying to "make it" for the first time. Dean Hawkes of Columbia addressing "a group of alumni alarmed by the radical tenor of the student newspaper [once stated] 'You fellows are, I think, color-blind. What you mistake for red is simply green.'"¹⁶⁵ It is a picturesque statement, and made with, as Rudolph characterized it, "calm, good sense." But it also ignores the fact that those who have not acclimated to cold water are perhaps best able to know that it is cold.

That Fitzgerald once deemed *This Side of Paradise* "a romance and a reading list" (which he paired with *The Sun Also Rises*, "a romance and a guide book"), is a well-worn detail. And of course, the term "romance" itself has been so frequently and alternatively used as to have lost much of its meaning. But it might be worth considering Northrop Frye's comment that "the romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages."¹⁶⁶ The journey Amory takes is one that begins with his trying very hard not to be "*in vacuo*," but rather master of the world outside himself. By the end, he has achieved precisely the opposite, if that. He does become nihilistic, killing his conscience and placing himself, if for a moment, outside the physical, social world, split apart from all conceptualizations of community and human relationships. The dual demands of formal education and social ambition lead to an unutterable and untranslatable realization that the knowledge of the self is the only knowledge to be had; or even if Amory's closing line is not true, but just another pose, that knowledge of the self is the highest goal of education. Certainly such is the highest goal of humanism.

Whether Amory's trials in the university are, as Alec supposed, just products of Amory's laziness, or whether they are steps toward some ineffable profundity is somehow both beside and precisely to the point. Amory knows only himself, because the empirical world, in the terms of Heraclitus or Heisenberg, is unknowable. *Paradise* is not a novel that can say what it means, because what it means is that true knowledge cannot be articulated. Mizener notes that Fitzgerald seemed to acknowledge this limitation as both the novel's great strength and weakness:

The genuine subject of *This Side of Paradise*, then, is the sort of transmuted biography which was always Fitzgerald's subject. Throughout the book, amidst all the cocksure badness of judgment, the immaturity of sentiment, the affectations of knowledge and style, this subject keeps reasserting itself, the incorruptible heart of Fitzgerald's imagination which he was so busy trying to beautify with borrowed feathers. Sixteen years later, still remembering what Edmund Wilson, who "had been my literary conscience" all his life, had said about the book's bogus ideas and faked references, Fitzgerald remarked: "A lot of people thought it was a fake, and perhaps it was, and a lot of others thought it was a lie which it was not."¹⁶⁷

Chapter Three

Saul Bellow, *The Dean's December*, and Professorial Duty

Hegel's moment of understanding of the West coincided with its end. The West had been demythologized and had lost its power to inspire its view of the future. Therefore, it is evident that its myths are what animates a culture, and the makers of myths are the makers of cultures and of man. They are superior to philosophers, who only study and analyze what the poets make.

— Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*¹

The latter half of the century saw the shift from the student narrative to that focused on the faculty, and few writers returned so consistently to that topic as Saul Bellow. Curiously, the only work of Bellow's listed in the Kramer bibliography of college novels is *Herzog*, though *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and *The Dean's December* had been published prior to Kramer's first edition and *Ravelstein* prior to the second. While *Herzog*'s titular character is an academic who has frittered his career away, and while the novel's plot is built on intellectual rumination, it is only slightly a college novel if it is one at all. Little of the text involves academic work, and even less of it occurs within the physical confines of academe. Its central irony, as Bellow put it, is that it involves

a Ph.D. from a good American university [who] falls apart when his wife leaves him for another man. He is taken by an epistolary fit and writes grieving, biting, ironic and rambunctious letters not only to his friends and acquaintances, but also to the great men, the giants of thought, who formed his mind. What is he to do in this moment of crisis, pull Aristotle or Spinoza from the shelf and storm through the pages looking for consolation and advice?²

While the notion that Herzog's erudition cannot help him in a crisis reflects on a potential personal disappointment of scholarly life, something akin to the irony of the physician who cannot heal himself, it is hardly material that engages the complexities of the scholar-in-society that should make up the core of a college novel situated on the faculty narrative. If a meaningful distinction can be made between the terms "intellectual" and "academic" (and one can be), *Herzog* is a narrative of the former rather than the latter. The "intellectual" is naturally solipsistic; it is erudition for the holder's benefit, or the benefit of what Bellow would elsewhere term "small-public," those "in the know." The "academic," on the other hand, is erudition for the common good, something institutional, something from the university, chartered by the community for the good of the community.

Sammler, likewise, tilts more to the intellectual than academic. It is a "dramatic essay,"³ reminiscent in substance to *Herzog*: an academic at war with his own work, laboring under some variety of dissociative crisis. Where Moses Herzog must struggle with the absence of solace provided by those who have "formed his mind," Artur Sammler follows the same formula, only on the macro rather than micro scale. The central inquiry of the novel is whether a society that has neglected the wisdom upon which it was built forfeits its right to existence. Sammler's view of New York (echoing his experiences as a persecuted Jew and resistance fighter in the Second

World War) is that it is a culture that has opened the gates to barbarism, has been infiltrated, and is so thoroughly saturated with corruption and criminality that it no longer laments its own fall; hence Sammler longs for the “austere technicians—almost a priesthood” who would, no doubt, one day colonize the moon.⁴ Even so, *Sammler* represents a step closer to the college novel proper. Where *Herzog* was built solely upon the trials of its namesake, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* treats essentially similar, but vastly inflated corruptions, implying some nexus between the academic, Sammler, who represents the cache of Culture, and the rotting city, New York, that has abandoned Culture. *Sammler* is a cranky novel, to be sure, written from Bellow’s disillusionment with the New Left and the radicalism of the protest movement. But there is a sense in *Sammler*, absent in *Herzog*, that the crisis extends far beyond its fogeyish protagonist. Herzog’s life is crumbling, but from his own missteps; Sammler’s life is crumbling because societal supports, having lost their cultural integrity, have crumbled.

Bellow was preoccupied with academia and the academic figure throughout his career. As Ben Siegel notes,

Few American novelists talk and write about the university as much as does Saul Bellow. Certainly no other subject stirs in him equal rancor and resentment. He reiterates his unhappiness with the university in lecture and interview, essay and fiction. He has done so since early in his career. His views are not totally consistent, but they are clear and uncompromising. Bellow does not underestimate the university’s importance. He knows this country’s literary activity is not concentrated in New York or Chicago or Bohemia. They are shaped in the university, he admits, with Bohemia itself now “relocated . . . near to university campuses.”⁵

Four of the five cornerstone novels of his mid-to-late career—*Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, *The Dean's December*, and *Ravelstein* (excepting only *Humboldt's Gift*, which is itself not far afield from academia)—form a sort of continued meditation on the shortcomings, frustrations, and rewards of academic life. Each of these count academics as their protagonists, and to varying degrees each treats fundamental professional questions: what relationship does the faculty (in its plural and singular senses) have to its community? what *good* does academic endeavor—particularly in the humanities—achieve? how does the individual professor surmount feelings of intellectual isolation or existential irrelevance? and, most importantly, if academic endeavor is a foundational element of society, how can the product of that endeavor be meaningfully propagated through the community it was meant to benefit—that is, having found *truth*, how can its holder possibly digest, repack, and communicate it?

Perhaps a helpful means of framing this continuum is to look at *Herzog* and *Sammler* as “principle” or “procedural” texts; the first establishes the issues pertinent to the individual academic (his learnedness cannot save him in a personal crisis), the second between academia and society (academia can preserve Culture, but needs meaningful collaboration from society before it can do any good on a broad scale). *The Dean's December* and *Ravelstein* then become case studies illustrating how the operative principles of the earlier novels might play out. These latter two novels are superficially similar; each involves a scholar in the twilight of his career having turned out a work he believes to be of great importance to transmitting his perceptions (based on a lifetime of study) to the masses. In *The Dean's December*, Dean Albert Corde's *Harper's* essays, in which he lays out the ills of urban decay in brutal terms, failing to use the “code words” dictated by progressive academia, is hostilely received, leading to his professional demise and alienating him from lifelong friends. Abe Ravelstein, on the other hand, attacks the

foundations of the sort of discourse that has felled Corde; his book (Ravelstein is not-so-loosely based on Allan Bloom and Ravelstein's book on Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*) questions taboo-creating relativism inhibiting free intellectual discourse.

Ravelstein's book is controversial, but vastly successful, in part because it works outside of established protocols, rather than within them, as Corde had done. Even so, *Ravelstein* is ambivalent as to what repercussions Abe's book will have on the intellectual world. It makes Ravelstein rich; it feeds his decadent lifestyle. But insofar as it portrays Ravelstein as counter-revolutionary rather than revolutionary,⁶ the novel suggests it succeeds on *zeitgeist*, on the caprices of market and moment. Ultimately, *Ravelstein* is a novel of fulfillment, and ends what *Herzog* began; it represents the last stage in the cycle of the academic life, a sort of satisfaction or peace that eludes Bellow's other scholar-protagonists. And while *Ravelstein* is markedly more optimistic than *Herzog*, *Sammler*, or *The Dean's December* (even accounting for the humiliating sickness and death of its hero), it is a coda to Bellow's longstanding investigation of the scholar's psyche; as part of a greater whole, it is the only one of the four to show the best-case scenario, wherein the scholar succeeds on his own terms and is gratified by personal and professional success. This was an eventuality that likely could not have occurred before Bellow's friendship with Bloom, which seemed to have renewed his faith in the institution; his approach to the university to that time had been one largely characterized by disappointment, hostility, and resentment.

Bellow spent much of his own life in academia. "By the time he was forty, [he] had taught at Minnesota, Princeton, Bard, New York University, and the New School for Social Research" and would thereafter take posts at the University of Puerto Rico, the University of Chicago (as a member of both the Committee on Social Thought and, eventually, the English

department), and Boston University.⁷ Professors, intellectuals, and sundry related social commentators rank at or near the top of nearly all his of his post-*Augie* fictions. Despite all this apparent sympathy for or interest in the plight of the professor, Bellow maintained a career antipathy toward the burgeoning academic industry, especially those practicing in the humanities. As Ben Siegel has explained in “Saul Bellow and the University as Villain,” the author worried that scholars in the cultural fields were manufacturing inflated “intellectual history” for its own sake⁸; he believed that literary scholars worked with a particular text not for that text’s beauty or importance, but to satisfy the individual scholar’s own ideological bent⁹; he thought that academic writing “lack[ed] ‘poetry,’” that the jargony discourse of the academy made it so that no educated person would feel comfortable approaching a work of literature without the aid of “ten manuals.”¹⁰ Siegel’s quirky essay aptly explains Bellow’s anxiety over the apparent gulf between the literary arts and the literary analysts:

Identifying with figures like Henry James and James Joyce, Marcel Proust and the French symbolists, they offer themselves as each master’s only true heirs and agents. [...] [quoting Bellow] Why, they talk about it; they treasure it; they make careers of it; they become an elite through it; they adorn themselves with it; they . . . take masterpieces and turn them into discourse in the modern intellectual style. I’m against that, of course. I am not for the redescription of *Moby Dick* by Marxists and existentialists and Christian symbolists, respectively. What does that do for *Moby Dick* or for me? It doesn’t do anything. It only results in the making of more books—King Solomon has already warned us against that in Ecclesiastes.¹¹

Of the career critic Bellow once proclaimed, “I’d rather inspect gas mains in Chicago.”¹² The notion that professors constitute a sort of artificial elite would trouble Bellow; his scholar-protagonists have a tendency to distance themselves from this elevated status. When Herzog argues with his lover, Ramona, she attacks him for feeling superior because of his education. Herzog then channels Socrates, claiming “Education! But I don’t know anything.” Ramona counters: “You’re in *Who’s Who*. I’m only a merchant—a petit-bourgeois type.”¹³ Herzog feels arbitrarily disconnected: why would his work be, by its essence, any more significant than that of the merchant? Or as Bellow elsewhere styled it, referring to a scholarly dust-up pertaining to the apparent (though not actual) appropriation of the name Moses Herzog, which had been referenced briefly in Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

I had no idea that I would be mixed up with Joyce. And, actually, when I later found out about it, I discovered that Herzog is a real Dublin name and that they were a prominent Dublin family. In fact, Moses Herzog had been the Chief Rabbi of Dublin. If the name has any significance in *Ulysses*, it is that Bloom (who has fallen away from the faith) might remember the name Moses Herzog as one which reminded him of organized religion. But *I* had no such idea. However, I’m used to people taking off in the wrong direction full-speed. In my boyhood I knew so many people trying to scrape together a living by selling neckties, razorblades, and shoelaces that I never have any objection to people using *me* in that way.¹⁴

This sidewise swipe at the career annotator gets at the heart of Bellow’s distaste for the modern “lit prof”: it is all well and good for them to make a living off peddling such observations, but only in perspective; there is no particular reverence for the mere event of scholarly publication, nor a necessary reverence for the scholar. The scholar, in its archetypal sense, had become

something superfluous, too wrapped up in the theory and trivia behind thought, too removed from the impetus that had created the profession, to be much more than a caricature. Charlie Citrine, the protagonist of *Humboldt's Gift*, remembers Humboldt's warning against the self-defeating nature of intellectualism via an anecdote of Antonin Artaud:

Artaud came on stage and screamed at them like a wild beast. "Opened his mouth and screamed," said Humboldt. "Raging screams. While those Parisian intellectuals sat frightened. For them it was a delicious event. And why? Artaud as the artist was a failed priest. Failed priests specialize in blasphemy. Blasphemy is aimed at a community of believers. In this case, what kind of belief? Belief only in intellect, which a Ferenczi has now charged with madness. But what does it mean in a larger sense? It means that the only art intellectuals can be interested in is an art which celebrates the primacy of ideas. Artists must interest intellectuals, this new class. This is why the state of culture and the history of culture become the subject matter of art. This is why a refined audience of Frenchmen listens respectfully to Artaud screaming. For them the whole purpose of art is to suggest and inspire ideas and discourse. The educated people of modern countries are a thinking rabble at the stage of what Marx called primitive accumulation. Their business is to reduce masterpieces to discourse. Artaud's scream is an intellectual thing. First, an attack on the nineteenth-century 'religion of art,' which the religion of discourse wants to replace."¹⁵

This is the modern intellectual, which became, for Bellow, the modern humanist professor: a "thinking rabble" divorced from the peaks and valleys of art that inspired it, retreated to the horizontal plain of anodyne discourse. Art, the fount of the intellectual's relevance, had dried up,

or had been at least diverted in the service of something ersatz. This, for Bellow's scholar-protagonists, is an existential crisis; each, in some way, has lost sight of his professional justification. Musing on his lover Ramona's attitude toward the scholarly career, Herzog knows he has come up short of producing "real, relevant work."¹⁶ His first book, *Christianity and Romanticism* has become something of a seminal text, but he was unable to follow it up. Having received a grant from the Narragansett Corporation to continue his work, he retreated from the academy, only to find that, without the ivory tower, he had no compulsion to finish his ideas. Robert Dutton sees this shortfall as the result of Narragansett's "charitable gratuity, a pat on the head from this machine, that makes a man subconsciously doubt his value."¹⁷ But there is another layer: in removing himself from his academic post to subsist purely on the grant and work entirely on his own steam, Herzog had transitioned from the academic to the intellectual. He no longer had the validation of the university mandate, and his work lost its underlying impetus. He later reflects on his career, lamenting that he had come short of the standard of having produced "real, relevant work," but much of Herzog's dissatisfaction comes from the fact that he had taken to work for himself, separated from the institutional blessing and sense of community afforded by the academy. In a vacuum, without the implicit communal consecration of his efforts, he no longer feels that what he is doing is worth doing.

Much of this anxiety has political resonance from Bellow's younger days as a casual Trotskyite activist. A passage from one of Upton Sinclair's "Dead Hand" series, *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education* (1923), with which Bellow might well have been familiar,¹⁸ mocks the notion of academia's social relevance thusly:

Slaves in Boston's great department store, in which Harvard University owns twenty-five hundred shares of stock, be reconciled to your long hours and low

wages and sentence to die of tuberculosis—because upon the wealth which you produce some learned person has prepared for mankind full data on “The strong Verb in Chaucer.” [...] Men who slave twelve hours a day in front of blazing white furnaces of Bethlehem, Midvale and Illinois Steel, cheer up and take a fresh grip on your shovels—you are making it possible for mankind to acquire exact knowledge concerning “The Beginnings of the Epistolary Novel in the Romance Languages.”¹⁹

Sinclair’s vitriol suggests that the early twentieth century would have to struggle to justify devoting much needed communal resources to esoterica. If the work of the humanist scholar has relevance, it is in the foundational elements, the primary texts, events, and ideas, and less so in their explanations. The estrangement from foundational elements—Culture, broadly—is the precipitating factor behind the societal decay portrayed in *Sammler* and *The Dean’s December*. And for Bellow, the academy is the culprit:

Writers and readers—unlike professors—desire from literature “the living moment.” They wish to read about “men and women alive—a circumambient world.” Instead of such vital responses, students and readers get from professors laborious explications. These academic critics restate and redefine “everything downward, blackening the present age and denying creative scope to their contemporaries.”²⁰

By setting aside literature to talk about theories of literature, the university has broken the link between the necessary underpinnings of society and society itself; education is no longer about culture—it is about hypothetical culture. Ben Siegel describes Bellow’s annoyance that

tenured faculty humanists [. . .] despite their ignorance [. . .] never suffer writer's block and are able always to supply literary articles so cheaply they have "all but wiped out . . . professional competitors." They want to wrench literature from writers and keep it for themselves.²¹

"Wrenching literature from writers" means controlling the mode of discourse. Education is no longer left to the masters upon whom a field of study is built, but to those who would explain them. This presumption that the professor can better explain *Moby-Dick* than could Melville is one of Bellow's deepest frustrations. In his foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, he wrote

To me, this is not the book of a professor, but that of a thinker who is willing to take the risks more frequently taken by writers. It is risky in a book of ideas to speak in one's own voice, but it reminds us that the sources of the truest truths are inevitably profoundly personal.²²

Hence, professors' books are not personal, nor true, and, there is something inherently impersonal and hence untrue about the nature of the scholarly enterprise.

What drew Bellow's ire as much as anything else was the physical relegation of the writer to the academy. Bellow was himself tied to academic posts out of financial necessity for much of his life. As he once sarcastically remarked to Herbert Gold, "I love the professorial bit. [. . .] What a marvelous racket."²³ But there was something demoralizing in this dependency:

Bellow conceded that the practice of hiring writers to teach wasn't wholly pernicious; there was good conversation to be had in the faculty lounge, and a bucolic campus wasn't necessarily any more unreal than Greenwich Village:

“You may find illumination anywhere—in the gutter, in the college, in the corporation, in a submarine, in the library.” All the same, too many professors were “discouraged people who stand dully upon a brilliant plane, in charge of masterpieces but not themselves inspired, people who are to literature what Samuel Butler’s clergymen were to religion.”²⁴

For writers, academia was “what the reservation was to the Indian.”²⁵ There are two parts to this sentiment. First, the writer in the university is no longer wholly independent. Just as professors, like Albert Corde and Abe Ravelstein, must play the academic game, full of politics, so must modern writers if they wish to eat. Second, placing writers alongside critics is inherently demeaning: to the extent that the critic has appropriated the discourse on writing (and to Bellow, this seems to have happened to its fullest capacity), keeping the writer in the university is a tethering and an assertion of dominance. The writer in the academic setting becomes a spectacle. Compounding these problems is that the writer’s sojourn in the academy has become a matter of course, of practical necessity, which inhibits the organic growth of art: as James Atlas styled it in his biography of Bellow, “Greenwich Village, once a haven for writers, had been relocated to the perimeter of the university: Berkeley, Harvard Square, Hyde Park” and, for Siegel, “American universities have littered the cultural landscape ‘with small Daedaluses who teach literature, edit magazines, write critical articles and can be seen swarming far from Crete or Dublin.’”²⁶ Since the Second World War, the American college has told the writer, “here is your place,” and, by geographic and social restraint, “here is your subject.” Hence the resentment Bellow would aim at the new, paternalistic system of artistic welfare.

While the practical fate of the author was perhaps the determining factor behind Bellow's antipathy toward the university, this distaste evolved into an articulate criticism of the academic marketplace and its participants, as James Atlas notes:

The practitioners of "culture-history" increasingly became the objects of Bellow's wrath, especially the ones who practiced this specious discipline within the confines of the academy. In "Skepticism and the Depth of Life," a lecture he gave at colleges around the country during the sixties, Bellow argued that "universities had no such thing as a unified intellectual life." Professors were "manufacturers of intellectual opinion," "agents, managers or impresarios of Henry James or the French Symbolists," he complained, sounding a note first heard a decade earlier in "The University as Villain." They constituted a new professional elite—what Bellow, appropriating a term of Stendhal's, derisively called "the happy few of culture."²⁷

Where Bellow frequently lamented the substance of academia, another component of his anxiety had to do with its evolving tone. Where he would, in "The University as Villain," decry the cliquishness and regionalism supported by the university appropriation of artists that was dilapidating the sort of creative villages that had been set up earlier in the century in Paris and New York, as well as the cold, jargony, and ballooning manufacture of literary analysis, he also lamented the coarsening of academic discourse beginning in the 1960s and '70s. This was, in ways, the dirty underbelly of democratization that Bellow would mourn (and that would become a sticking point for his critics) throughout his career. As he would write much later in *Ravelstein*, "the public saw higher education as a right. The White House affirmed it. Students were like 'the mackerel-crowded seas.' Thirty thousand dollars was the average annual college tuition. But

what were students learning? The universities were permissive, lax.”²⁸ The universities had begun to cater to, rather than lead, their students.

This transition came into stark focus during the question-and-answer portion of a lecture Bellow gave at San Francisco State College in 1968. A poet-instructor named Floyd Salas barged late into the auditorium, and, having not heard Bellow’s speech, began to yell out accusations that Bellow’s work encouraged the university to be a sort of island set apart from the “vulgarity of the contemporary world.” Bellow declined to respond, but Salas persisted, working himself into a frenzy and yelling “you’re a fucking square. You’re full of shit. You’re an old man, Bellow. You haven’t got any balls.”²⁹ Salas was, of course, correct in his assessment that, for Bellow, the university was by necessity a sort of elevated retreat. As Bellow would later write of Bloom’s book:

The heart of Professor Bloom’s argument is that the university, in a society ruled by public opinion, was to have been an island of intellectual freedom where all views were investigated without restriction. Liberal democracy in its generosity made this possible, but by consenting to play an active or “positive,” a participatory role in society, the university has become inundated and saturated with the backflow of society’s “problems.”³⁰

Salas was correct, but he also had missed the point. There had been a long-standing divide as to what relationship the academy had to the community, whether it was to be an institution of direct or indirect public service; this debate had seen the “college settlement” movement during the Depression, in which some universities set themselves up to become institutions of direct social support by, according to Frederick Rudolph, “cop[ing] with slum problems” and teaching “the philosophy of the co-operative idea to men from the tenements.”³¹ This activism was at odds

with the traditional view, which saw the university as a world apart so that it might observe society more judiciously and be therefore better able to objectively solve its problems (or, less actively, contribute to its conscious understanding). But apart from this fundamental (and perfectly debatable) question of mission, Bellow's encounter with Salas was a harsh introduction to what he would see as a generation of faculty members with arms twisted into pandering to the youth, fomenters of rage rather than teachers of enlightenment. "So I left the platform in defeat," Bellow wrote to Mark Harris after the incident, "undefended by the bullied elders of the faculty. While your suck-up-to-the-young colleagues swallowed their joyful saliva."³²

Where pandering and rage had taken hold on one end, Bellow at other times would feel similarly defeated by the rise of narrow intellectualism, those academic plutocrats who had co-opted the humanities in the service of cliquish pedantry. The ideal was somewhere between. Later, Abe Ravelstein would epitomize the dual dismissal of the haughty professor and the crass soap-boxer:

This tall pin- or chalk striped dude with his bald head (you always felt there was something dangerous about its whiteness, its white force, its dents) did not step up to the platform to bore you silly with the correct order of the epochs (the Age of Faith, the Age of Reason, the Romantic Revolution), nor did he present himself as an academic, or as a campus rebel encouraging revolutionary behavior. The strikes and campus takeovers of the sixties had set the country back significantly, he said. He did not court students by putting on bull-session airs or try to scandalize them—entertain them actually, as histrionic lecturers do—by shouting "Shit!" or "Fuck!" There was nothing at all of the campus wildman about him. His frailties were visible. He obsessively knew what it was to be sunk by his

faults or his errors. But before he went under he would describe Plato's Cave to you. He would tell you about your soul, already thin, and shrinking fast—faster and faster.³³

Bellow's relationship with Allan Bloom had done much to restore his faith in the university (Bloom was the blueprint for Ravelstein).³⁴ Bloom was a departure from the academic standard type, a flagrant materialist who nevertheless worshipped the notion of Soul and the Western classics. Bloom, by Bellow's assessment, was a scholar and a teacher, a "particular case" worthy of exception.³⁵ But Bloom's success also restored Bellow's faith in academia generally. A decade after the publication of *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bellow would publish *Ravelstein*, a thinly veiled memoir and eulogy in which he reconciles himself to the academic life.

But his earlier loathing of the professional scholar side-stepped one obvious irony: "That Bellow himself made a living as a professor seemed not to have occurred to him—if it did, he exempted himself on unspecified and unstated grounds."³⁶ But perhaps this was not so "unspecified." In the *Closing of the American Mind* foreword, Bellow wrote:

I am of course, an autodidact, as modern writers always are. That spirited newcomer, the nineteenth-century novelist, guessed, ventured, conjectured daringly. Independent intelligence made its synthesis. Balzac declared, "The world belongs to me because I *understand* it." Professor Bloom's book makes me fear that the book of the world, so richly studied by autodidacts, is being closed by the "learned" who are raising walls of opinions to shut the world out.³⁷

Bellow was a man apart because he was self-taught (or so he fancied):

Reluctantly, my father allowed me at seventeen to enter the university, where I was an enthusiastic (wildly excited) but erratic and contrary student. If I signed up for Economics 201, I was sure to spend all my time reading Ibsen and Shaw. Registering for a poetry course, I was soon bored by meters and stanzas, and shifted my attention to Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* and Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* My tastes and habits were those of a writer. I preferred to read poetry on my own without the benefit of lectures on the caesura.³⁸

He had studied literature as an undergraduate at Chicago and Northwestern and had begun Ph.D. work in the department of sociology and anthropology at Wisconsin (the English department head at Northwestern had refused to write a letter of recommendation for graduate study in literature, telling Bellow that he was not "born to it"³⁹—perhaps another seed of discontent regarding the humanities). But Bellow was not, by pedigree, an academic. Like Albert Corde, "he hadn't come up from the academic ranks, hadn't been shaped by the Ph.D. process."⁴⁰ The fact that Bellow worked as an academic but lacked the standard academic background seemed to have liberated him to work within, but with objectivity. His lack of pedigree gave him the privilege of didacticism, his ability to criticize the critics.

But the humanities, as an aggregate discipline, were always especially troublesome. They were not directly applicable to society; they were not a science. This anxiety would comprise the core philosophical tension of *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. In the wake of a barely-fictionalized rehash of the San Francisco State debacle, in which Sammler comes under the same hostility in a public lecture, he thinks that

He was not sorry to have met the facts, however saddening, regrettable the facts.

But the effect was that Mr. Sammler did feel somewhat separated from the rest of

his species, if not in some fashion severed—severed not so much by age as by preoccupations too different and remote, disproportionate on the side of the spiritual, Platonic, Augustinian, thirteenth-century.⁴¹

Sammler's cultured world is no longer the world in which he lives. He finds himself in a brutal environment that prizes the empirical and has, in the process of divorcing itself from culture, descended into a maelstrom of decay and violence. Michael Glenday sees this attitude as an outright hostility toward science and fear that those who operate outside its boundaries are to be excluded from academic life:

It is, I think, no exaggeration to assert that in this passage are contained the major themes of Bellow's later fiction: the anxieties about the dissolution of personal (that is, emotionally articulate, spiritually aware) life in the face of the juggernauts of utilitarian ethics and materialist conformities, and the fear (which will consolidate into a conviction in *The Dean's December* and *Humboldt's Gift*) that those who refuse to withdraw from dissention, who instead insist wittingly or unwittingly (as is the case, respectively, with Corde and Humboldt) on challenging the orthodox reality, will be eradicated, discredited as public figures.⁴²

But Sammler longs for a method whereby the humanities can be made precise in a way so as to be directly applicable, and therefore once again palatable, to society. In a conversation with his nephew Wallace, he tries to envision a method by which humans can be abstractly converted into integers, the humanities into equations, so that the value of the humanities can be demonstrable.⁴³ But he knows this cannot be, that the underlying logic of the humanities is at best too vast to be comprehended by an individual mind and at worst simply ineffable, something

mystical and beyond definite comprehension. As he would think of Marx, “his ideological hashish was very potent.”⁴⁴ The great thinkers and writers are manufacturers of narcotics that can be experienced but not explained. The field of art, history, and culture is so broad that it might be chewed, but never swallowed and digested, and its net benefit, if there is one, is necessarily inscrutable.

This problem of production is a primary stumbling block to Bellow’s scholar-protagonists reconciling their careers with their elevated status, explaining, in direct terms, what good it was that they were doing. The humanities had begun in service of humanity, but had that impetus gone astray? Bellow provided a sort of analogue in a classroom question and answer session he gave at Franklin and Marshall College in 1972:

American writers always imagined that they were populists—that is, writing about the people, for the people, etc. I would say that from at least the time of Whitman on this was so. Of course, the “people” did not know Walt Whitman was writing for them. Nevertheless, his democratic loyalties were very strong. His language, however, was anything but the language of the people.⁴⁵

While not necessarily what Bellow had in mind, his evocation of Whitman calls to mind the second stanza of “Song of the Banner at Daybreak” from *Drum-taps*:

Words! book-words! what are you?

Words no more, for hearken and see,

My song is there in the open air, and I must sing,

With the banner and pennant a-flapping.⁴⁶

Words, especially in the idiom of American populism, are always secondary to experience. But this apparent gulf between populism and writing on behalf of the populace was not a limiting factor for Bellow, who readily conceded that “here and there I am probably hard to read, and I am likely to become harder as the illiteracy of the public increases.”⁴⁷ For Bellow, the American culture was in decline, but this was not an invitation to lower standards. Rather, the solution was to revitalize popular enthusiasm for culture, which was, in his assessment, exactly the opposite of what the professorial enclave was doing. If the pedagogical imperative now said that it now took “ten manuals” to read *Moby-Dick*, then why should the layperson bother? But if the significance were put back on the text itself, rather than secondary interpretations of it, then all the more reason for the public to go back to reading. The key was returning to *experience* rather than *explanation*, as Sammler mused:

It was not the behaviour that was gone. What was gone was the old words. Forms and signs were absent. Not honor but the word honor. Not virtuous impulse, but the terms beaten into flat nonsense. Not compassion; but what was a compassionate utterance? And compassionate utterance was a mortal necessity. Utterance, sounds of hope and desire, exclamations of grief. Such things were suppressed, as if illicit.⁴⁸

Or Herzog: “Still, what can thoughtful people and humanists do but struggle toward suitable words? Take me, for instance. I’ve been writing letters helter-skelter in all directions. More words. I go after reality with language. Perhaps I’d like to change it all into language.”⁴⁹ This is an earlier version of Sammler’s human-integer notion. Words, like numbers, are manageable; but words, unlike numbers, have no significance purely in the abstract. This idea is rooted in the Great Books philosophy, which comprised the bulk of Bellow’s own education, in which

students are made to experience the evolution of thought as it happened. Bellow's experience with Great Books would later be the reason he gravitated so enthusiastically to Bloom's defense of the Western classics, and why he would embrace Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophy, which sought "to bridge [the] gulf [between the private, inward-dwelling experience of human consciousness and the primacy of science in the modern world] to transcend the limits of empirical human knowledge and attain another, higher form of consciousness, a higher 'spiritual reality.'"⁵⁰ These gulfs between science and culture, between logical reality and actual reality—ultimately between the experience of Culture and the relevance of Culture—were a persistent sticking point for Bellow. His literary method relied on a working knowledge of the classics, and one of his central themes was the grotesqueries inherent in their loss. But how to express the loss of culture when a prerequisite to expressing such was a knowledge of culture?

Therein is the puzzle. If the stock-in-trade of the humanities has only a tangential relationship to society and bears little but the satisfaction of *knowing* for its individual holder, why does Bellow himself insist on making the copious infusion of belles-lettre-isms one of his defining characteristics? The answer seems to be that bona fide erudition—scholasticism—was the necessary component of education, but that it must be somehow experienced rather than taught. Ravelstein was essentially a guide to his students, one who challenged them by asking "with what, in this modern democracy, will you meet the demands of your soul?"⁵¹ Eugene Henderson, the Rain King, relied on the philosophy that "truth comes with blows," and his esoteric mentor, King Dahfu, was himself largely an autodidact. These are not self-serving, "small public" scholars, but learners themselves who teach by showing the path they have followed rather than the path they have blazed. But this is not to say that the role of the faculty member was inessential. As Henderson lamented:

When I started to read something about France, I realized I didn't know anything about Rome, which came first, and then Greece, and then Egypt, going backward all the time to the primitive abyss. As a matter of fact, I didn't know enough to read one single book.⁵²

Bellow was, like Fitzgerald, not antipathetic to the scholar or teacher. He knew that books were not sufficient on their own. The problem was in the execution of the pedagogical mechanism. And the global significance of effective teaching was integral to the spiritual and cultural revitalization of the masses. Herzog, reflecting on his recent position teaching night classes, writes to his administrator in one of his "epistolary fits" that

the people who come to evening classes are only ostensibly after culture. Their great need, their hunger, is for good sense, clarity, truth—even an atom of it.

People are dying—it is no metaphor—for lack of something real to carry home when day is done. See how willing they are to accept the wildest nonsense. O

Smithers, my whiskered brother! what a responsibility we bear, in this fat country of ours! Think what America could mean to the world. Then see what it is. What a breed it might have produced. But look at us—at you, at me. Read the paper, if you can bear to.⁵³

If there is popular hunger for culture, asserts Bellow, then there must be someone to satisfy it.

The heart of Bellow's (and Bloom's) criticism lies also with the undergraduate process and its rising tide of philistinism. Where the American university had originally been modeled on the English residential college, the curriculum of which constituted a precursor of what would

become the Great Books tradition, it had, over the course of the nineteenth century shifted to what Rudolph called “the collegiate way”:

Adherents to the collegiate way became ecstatic over the beneficial influence which classmates exerted on one another, over the superiority of the college community as an agency of education over mere studies. They pointed with satisfaction to the extracurriculum, to the whole range of social life and development, to the benefits of religious influence and orientation. Until, finally, what had been a rationale for a seventeenth-century English college became in the nineteenth-century American college a prop for low academic standards and a rationale for a de-emphasis on intellectual values. After all, a college could not be everything.⁵⁴

Bellow and Bloom, however, were University of Chicago men. Chicago, like its immediate predecessor Johns Hopkins, was founded on the continental university model and saw rigorous academic study as the primary (in theory, only) goal of higher education:

The chief architect of this intellectual efflorescence [at Chicago] was Robert M. Hutchins, the university’s president, a determined proponent of general education. “An Aristotelian and a Thomist,” as Bellow described him, “he saw to it that the huge fortunes amassed in slaughterhouses and steel mills were spent teaching generations of students the main achievements of Western culture.”⁵⁵

Chicago was first and foremost a scholarly institute, and, in Bellow’s time there, one settled securely on the Great Books regimen. This methodology has, of course, in time come under fire as elitist and ethnocentric. Bellow was himself no stranger to criticisms along these same lines,

from his nativist depictions of Africans in *Henderson* and the barbaric depictions of urban African-Americans in *Sammler* and *The Dean's December* to his statement (which he always claimed was misrepresented) in *Time* magazine regarding non-Western literature: "who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?" he asked. "The Proust of the Papuans? I'd be glad to read him."⁵⁶ But aside from questions of syllabus there are those of methodology. The "lax" and "permissive" professoriate had failed to challenge the students (or the challenge lay in the students' reinforcing of their professors' secondary interpretations). Especially troubling for Bellow was the notion that this was the result of trying to please the students. This democratization of the college was rooted in the decline of the standard, core curriculum of the 1800s. With the rise of the elective principle, students began to neglect the roots of humanism, as Frederick Rudolph notes:

One tendency of these developments therefore was the growth of the idea that the liberal arts programs and courses were essentially feminine. Coeducation helped to divide the subjects of the curriculum and the courses of study into those which were useful, full-blooded, and manly, and those which were ornamental, dilettantish, and feminine. Into the latter category, in the atmosphere provided by coeducation, went all the older liberal studies which were, and are, man's noblest inheritance. [...] Even in the men's colleges the study of the languages, the humanities, the study of history were subjected to the insulting epithet "culture course."⁵⁷

America, having historically erred on the side of masculinity, would, according to this analysis, have set aside the "feminized" culture courses to favor the practical. With this epithetical discarding would come, a few generations after, the troubled worlds of *Sammler* and *Dean Albert Corde*.

Bellow's aggregate thesis seems to be as follows: the individual scholarly project (or even scholarly career) is without meaning except insofar as it participates in a global pool of cultural consciousness. Thus, the individual scholar, however lauded or neglected, cannot himself ever understand the full impact of his work, and no single academic can ever understand even a fraction of the total catalog (here are the dual sources of academic existential dissatisfaction). The scholarly impulse, undergirded by the will to compose a consistent and comprehensive understanding, is a Sisyphean task. Compounded by the coarsening of academic discourse, the democratizing effects of giving the students too much say in their own education, and various deleterious aspects of the profession such as department politics and bureaucracy and the gratuitous security (hence complacency) of tenure, academia has fallen short, or even lost sight, of its mission. These problems trickle into society generally and are responsible for social breakdowns at every level. In his letter to Adlai Stevenson, Herzog writes, "so things go on as before with those who think a great deal and effect nothing, and those who think nothing evidently doing it all."⁵⁸

But the barrier to "those who think a great deal" effecting something is often a personal matter, best described by the plight of Albert Corde. He is misunderstood and underappreciated. His trials are fodder for gossip and his writing is made the source of popular and academic protest. And at the core of it, he cannot explain to himself why he left his previous profession (as a journalist) to enter the academy. It was a decision that puzzled his relatives and friends. "I admit some disappointment there," he says. "My late brother-in-law, Zaehner, used to tease me about academic life. He would say a professor with tenure is like a woman on welfare with ten illegitimate kids. They're both set for life, never again have to work" (246). Zaehner's comment reflects the matter of tenured complacency and disrespect from those outside of academia, but

also something more; there are the problems of discourse, of strict sociopolitical attitudes amounting to prior restraint, and, chiefly, of the frustration of becoming a voice in the wilderness, auguring a social cataclysm that, by the suicidal tendencies of a culture without Culture, will go unheralded.

Generally, *The Dean's December* is the story of Albert Corde, a Chicago dean and journalism professor, accompanying his wife, Minna, to Romania so that she may tend to her dying mother. It is a welcome sojourn for Corde, who has stirred controversy back home by writing a series of articles for *Harper's* that take a harsh stance on the city's urban decay (the articles portray black neighborhoods with special bleakness). Controversy grows when Corde assists in the prosecution of a young black male accused of killing a Chicago graduate student; the dean's nephew, Mason, taking a radical line, has mobilized the school's activists:

Student reaction was also quick. That was Mason's doing. Immediately, he organized something; Corde couldn't tell you what that something was—a resistance movement, a defense campaign. The radical student line was that the college waged a secret war against blacks and that the Dean was scheming with the prosecution, using the college's clout to nail the black man. Resolutions were passed and published in the student daily, which took up the case in a big way.

(30)

Corde, having published his articles without clearance from the university administration, now caught up in brewing racial and class strife, sees his time in the academy waning, and this realization provokes a series of existential crises. Waking one morning in Romania, he pulls on his "Chicago socks and sweaters (good cashmere, but thinning at the heels and elbows), assembling a dean who was less and less a dean within" (51). This last phrase, especially the

final preposition, is important. His status as Dean is deteriorating both externally and internally. Like Herzog, his authority is rotting not only relative to his profession but to his personal autonomy as well. He senses that he is to be forced out of his job but begins to wonder whether his articles and cooperation with the city attorney in the murder case had not been a response to some imbedded career thanatosis. Much of the novel thereafter consists of a series of meditations and conversations on why this impulse might have existed, why he abdicated a career in journalism for an academic post, and, like Sammler and Herzog, what worth, what “real, relevant work” could have come of that transformation.

This is an especially difficult query for Corde given that most of his personal relationships, from which he derives his frame of reference for assessing himself, are derived from outside the academic sphere. His acquaintances, relatives, and closest friends seem to have little understanding of what it is Corde actually *does*, and their attitudes tend to be harsh, vacillating from blue-collar declarations that Corde is not in the “real world,” to pitying assessments that his retreat into university life was some form of enervated, premature retirement. His brother-in-law believes that

the Dean had given up the real world to take refuge with philosophy and art.

Academics were hacks and phonies. Old Mason could seem ponderously respectful, following polite protocol for liberals, but the bottom line was this: he said, or growled, with narrowed eyes, “I make my living by tipping over garbage cans, but at least I go in the alley and tip them over myself.” (42)

Some of this resentment is practical: academia is funded in order to create order but fails to do so, and its disconnection from the public it is meant to serve results in the public disconnecting itself from academia. Corde’s childhood friend, Dewey Spangler,⁵⁹ is more sympathetic, but

patronizing. The two of them had begun their professional careers on parallel tracks; they were both bookish young journalists of promise. But where Spangler learned to set aside his voracious reading habits to tend to hard journalism, Corde sunk farther into his intellectual pursuits, burned out early, and found himself a professor and college administrator. Spangler happens to be in Romania, and the two reunite for the first time in decades. Unbeknownst to Corde, Spangler is preparing to write a magazine profile on his old friend, the man who disappeared into the academy to emerge years after, fulminating against urban decay in a manner that Spangler finds off-putting in its apparent surprise by the urban situation, the implication of which being that Corde had not been enough with the world to make an informed declaration:

You're back in America, [says Spangler] a prof and a dean. Is it a kind of retirement? You're reading books, talking to academics, trying to get the right handle on things, I presume. Then all at once it's: Bam! Here is how things look. Is there salvation for this order? The harsh things of the soul, what do we do about them in America? You hit Chicago with everything you've got. [...] It was when you got apocalyptic about it that you lost me: the dragon coming out of the abyss, the sun turning black like sackcloth, the heavens rolled up like a scroll, Death on his ashen horse. Wow! You sounded like Reverend Jones of Jonestown. You give yourself the luxury of crying out about doom, and next thing you know you're up to your own neck in squalor. So unless your purpose was to get the discussion into a better key, I can't see what you gained. Actually, I think you were sore as hell with your academic colleagues, because they hadn't found the right key to play all this in. Isn't that what they were supposed to do—and why they got so many privileges? (246)

The implication is that Corde had gone into academia to get a better frame of reference, that conversations with colleagues and a level of philosophical saturation would enable Corde to return to society equipped to repair it. The irony, as Dewey sees it, is that the retreat had in fact only served to distance Corde from the real world, not to provide objectivity, but to curse him with a deteriorated, dislocated understanding. While Corde's conversations elsewhere indicate that an inclination toward the scholarly life had not been his rationale for leaving his journalistic career, Corde frequently concedes that he does not know why he had done it, other than to reclaim what he would vaguely term his "modernity" (193). But when Corde had gone out into the urban waste land, his rustication seems to have thinned his capacity to shrug off the devastation. He had become shockable. Spangler insightfully notes that Corde's problem is not a matter of content but of "key." Corde would consistently acknowledge that the articles were ill-received not because of what they said but because of how they said it:

Corde [had begun] to speak in his articles of "superfluous populations," "written off," "doomed peoples." That didn't go down well. You could use terms from sociology or Durkheim or Marx, you could speak of anomie or the lumpenproletariat, the black underclass, of economically redundant peasantries, the Third World, the effects of opium on the Chinese masses in the nineteenth century—as long as it was sufficiently theoretical it went over easily enough. You could discuss welfare politics, medical and social work bureaucracies, without objection. But when Corde began to make statements to the effect that in the wild, monstrous half-demolished cities the choice that was offered was between a slow death and a sudden one, between attrition and quick destruction, he enraged a good many subscribers. Something went wrong. He wrote about whirling souls

and became a whirling soul himself, lifted up, caught up, spinning, streaming with passions, compulsive protests, inspirations. (192-193)

Corde's "apocalyptic" vision of the city had left the page and had become a sort of personal apocalypse:

He experienced, as he saw when he looked back, a kind of air anarchy. He began to use strange expressions. He wrote, for instance, that Toby Winthrop was a "reconstituted" human being, a "murderer-savior" type; that Winthrop was therefore an advanced modern case. Why? Because the advanced modern consciousness was a reduced consciousness inasmuch as it contained only the minimum of furniture that civilization was able to install (practical judgments, bare outlines of morality, sketches, cartoons instead of human beings); and this consciousness, because its equipment was humanly so meager, so abstract, was basically murderous. It was for this reason that murder was so easy to "understand" (or had he written "extenuate"? Thinness for thinness). He never did get around to explaining how we must reconstitute ourselves. Because of the incompleteness of his argument he confused many readers. Some wrote contemptuously, others were incensed. He hadn't meant to make such a stir. It took him by surprise. (193)

Winthrop's tale was one of the controversial aspects of the *Harper's* articles. He was a black man who had abducted a white woman by the name of Sathers, kept her in the trunk of his car, then repeatedly raped her over a two-day period before killing her. The factual narrative includes a few instances in which Sathers could arguably have escaped, leading Winthrop's defense attorney, a public defender named Varennes, to imply that Sathers had become complicit in her

ordeal. Corde includes this in his article, but his voice is not entirely his own. His interview with Varennes was highly confrontational; Varennes vets Corde to see that he has the appropriate liberal sympathies that will enable him to explain Winthrop. The conversation contains several instances in which the attorney disparagingly refers to Corde as “Dean” (206), mocking the position and the person attached (“Why should an important man in Chicago give information to any punk journalist who came along, calling himself a professor?” (156)). Corde, somewhat beaten by the encounter, channels Varennes (who is himself alternately speaking for Winthrop and Sathers). The resulting gallimaufry seems to have confused one of Bellow’s commentators:

Curiously, the two victims in the book—Rickie Lester, the student pushed to a terrifying death, and Mrs. Sathers, the young suburban housewife who is abducted and murdered—are submitted to ethical cross-examinations that manage to turn them both into subtle accomplices. Ricky Lester encounters his two eventual murderers in a bar where he’s gone in search of kinky sex, leaving his wife alone in their apartment; he invites the whore he brings home to join him in the toilet, “to go down on him while she was shitting.” Mrs. Sathers, it emerges, is also a collaborator in her own violent demise. Why didn’t she avail herself of the few opportunities she had to escape? According to Corde, she unconsciously gave in to her aggressor. “There must be a sense of complicity in rapes,” he theorizes, in conversation with the public defender. “The sex nerves can stream all by themselves. If people think they’re going to be murdered anyway when it’s over, they may desperately let go.” In these two strikingly similar scenarios, the victim becomes a virtual collaborator in the act of victimization.⁶⁰

That she “unconsciously gave in” is not really according to Corde, but to Varennes, whose aggressive advocacy for his client entails casting doubt on the integrity of the victim. Ricky Lester, the graduate student whose killer Corde is helping to prosecute, is subject to his own post-mortem inquisition. But the two victims play complementary roles, not, as James Atlas suggests, parallel roles. Lester, in a way, earns his, thereby reinforcing the relativist notion that the murdered individual has drawn their fate upon them, providing the psycho-social framework to go that far with Sathers. But that is too far in her case. Sathers, tortured, isolated, and confused, is less a collaborator or solicitor than Lester. But the senselessness of the deaths and the complexities of victimization open the door for the “whirling souls” of Corde’s articles, leading to him becoming “a whirling soul himself, lifted up, caught up, spinning, streaming with passions, compulsive protests, inspirations” (193). Even with his erudite background and his objective perch on the battlements of academia, Corde’s understanding is lacking. Hence, Spangler’s unease with the articles and with Corde’s profession:

I didn’t criticize you for becoming a prof, Albert. I’ve pushed you about it mainly from curiosity. I myself have thought it would be nice to retire to an academic setting eventually, I never got to go to college. But it shouldn’t be too hard, with my record in public life, to become a fellow somewhere. [...] I may ask you for advice on universities one of these days, although to judge by your attitudes you may not be the party to turn to.” (248)

Corde’s response, that Spangler “ought to be able to name [his] own spot [. . .] like Hubert Humphrey or Dean Rusk,” is unflattering; their sojourns in academia amounted to stays in geriatric facilities. But Corde’s statement is at once a jab and an admission. At play in this passage is Spangler’s downgrading of both the position and importance of Corde’s work.

Spangler believes that he is due a university post, even though he “never got to go to college.” It is a notion that Corde would likely not find insulting in and of itself. Corde had been

much less ambitious than Spangler, wrote for a smaller public, seemed sometimes unnecessarily obscure (even, as one of his editors had said, “reclusive”). And when Corde became a professor (no big distinction; by now there were millions of professors), Spangler interpreted it as a victory [. . .] Spangler was the worldly one, a shrewder man by far. (69)

The position of “professor” is not, by either of their standards, anything particularly lofty, “no big distinction.” But Spangler, playing the foil role of Corde-that-might-have-been, is a valuable frame of reference. Given their similar starting points and temperaments, Dewey’s inquiry forces Corde to push his self-examination further:

Dewey had asked him one really hot question: Why a professor in Chicago? Corde might have answered that the reason was coming, it was on its way. There were hidden and extensive fantasy ambitions and grand designs connected with it. At the moment of decision, it had been convenient that he should have no clear outline. He remembered how surprised his sister had been when he moved back. “Why a college, and why here?” [his sister] Elfrida inquired.

He couldn’t really answer, but he did say, “For me it’s more like the front lines. Here is where the action is.” (133)

He cannot answer Elfrida, but he offers an explanation anyway; this is a mode of discourse central to the academic life. It is an explanation that he believes would satisfy an outsider, or at least an explanation that does not lead to further inquiry. But in reflecting on Spangler’s and

Elfrida's skepticism, Corde comes to a Herzogian conclusion: here at the end of it, his career has no real justification. But the question as to why he chose it persists.

The passage in which Corde refers to Winthrop as an "advanced modern case," is important. He repeatedly uses the word "modern," which resonates with Corde's claim that he had gone to the university to reclaim his lost "modernity":

I gave up writing for the papers ten years ago [he says] because—well, because my modernity was all used up. I became a college professor in order to cure my ignorance. We made a trade. I teach young people to write for the papers and in return I have an opportunity to learn why my modernity was used up. At the college I had time to read scads of books. In Paris I was too busy doing art items and intellectual chitchat. (228)

The irony that Corde neglects is that the "art items and intellectual chitchat" was, in some way "modern," or at least contemporary. The progression, then, is that Corde was modern, his modernity was somehow "used up," he retreated to academia where he tried to make sense of modernity, returned to the modern world to bring this understanding to modernity (his *Harper's* exposés), and modernity rejected this understanding or perspective. The question for Corde is whether this new perspective was a clear perspective, or, once in the academy, had he been too immersed in abstraction to be able thereafter to reclaim a connection with the real/modern? If Winthrop is the "advanced modern prototype" in his dislocation from cultured humanity, is Corde unlike Winthrop because he is cultured? and is this level of primevality what Corde is hoping to find in himself? In discussing his profession with Elfrida, she questions his motivation: "You want to spend the rest of your life reading books in a college? Don't expect me to swallow that. I know you better. You're not a retirement type. You don't look it, but you're a combative

type” (134). The claim that he is a “combative type” rings hollow; Corde is generally passive and contemplative. But perhaps the regression to the university was an attempt to find and reclaim his “martial instincts” (134), his “modernity.”

But the quest for justification persists. Attempting to pull strings to allow Minna more time to visit her mother (which the strict Romanian regime opposed), Corde visits the American ambassador, who happens to have been a devotee of Corde’s work from his Paris years. Asked what he was doing now, Corde replies that he is a “professor of journalism back in my hometown. Even a dean. I’m not a real administrative type. I doubt that I can call myself a real professor, but I was curious to see what it was like.” Corde is immediately defensive of his chosen path, but the ambassador is cordial, warmly suggesting that Corde had left the Fourth Estate because he must have “had cultural inclinations you couldn’t satisfy by journalism.”

Corde responds,

“Right you are. It would have to be a very special need to transfer from Paris to Chicago. I had some reading to do, and wanted to find people to talk to. The right people to talk to—that’s the hardest part of all.”

“You must be interested in especially difficult things.”

“I don’t think they’re all that difficult or esoteric. I was too busy in Paris. When busyness takes hold of you, then art, philosophy, poetry, those things go out the window. Just before I made the decision to move I was reading Rilke, especially his wartime letters.”

“I don’t know those.” (60-61)

Here is another example of Corde engaging with a person who seems a bit mystified by, and happily indifferent to, the academic milieu. Corde thereafter muses that “when Rilke had complained about his inability to find an adequate attitude to the things and people about him, Corde had thought, Yes, that’s very common—that’s me, too” (61). But here, also, is the disappointing gulf between expectation and experience. Corde suggests he went to his post to find “the right people to talk to,” but he never has. His move to the university drew him away from those he knew in his former profession (in which he was successful and admired), but never replaced those relationships with new ones. Corde had found time enough at last for his bibliophilia, but he came to the university as something of an interloper, as the Provost’s attitude makes clear:

The Dean’s appointment had been a mistake, and it was the Provost’s job to clear up the mess. Corde was an outsider, he hadn’t come up from the academic ranks, hadn’t been shaped by the Ph.D. process. It wasn’t even clear why he had wanted to become an academic, and even an administrator. (178)

There is a difference here between the apparent *skill set* it takes to be an academic (which Corde has) and the *personality type* that fits the mold (which Corde does not). This type, extrapolating from Corde’s articles, attitudes, and inability to firmly situate himself in his academic role, is something constitutional. It cannot be learned or adapted to, and, by Corde’s trials and failures, apparently cannot be done without.

His wife, Minna, is herself an academic, but in the hard sciences; she is a renowned astrophysicist. While both members of the academy, the gulf between disciplines inhibits communication. Discussing the public reaction to his articles,

the Dean said [reassuring Minna], “Don’t you believe it. [. . .] That’s just the way journalists pump, promote, gild and bedizen themselves, and build up their profession, which is basically a bad profession.” The Cordes had a language problem. When he let himself go she didn’t understand what he was saying.

(What was *bedizen*?) (26)

Like the discussion between Sammler, a professor in the humanities, and Govinda Lal, a scientist, on the troubled relationship between their disciplines, this passage is an important reiteration of the frustrating divide between the empirical and the cultural. This division is compounded by Corde’s relationship to a scientist named Beech, who has devoted himself to dubious notions having to do with concentrations of lead in the city contributing to urban problems. Having read the *Harper’s* essays, Beech thinks he has a champion in Corde, someone sympathetic and capable of framing his ideas in a manner rhetorically accessible to the public. Corde is skeptical of Beech’s ideas, but Minna has shown interest, based seemingly on the superficial aspect of Corde potentially involving himself in science. Minna had grown up in soviet Romania, where, “behind the iron curtain, history and literature were phony subjects, but mathematics and the physical sciences were incorruptible” (25). In her eyes, this was Corde’s opportunity to do something *real*.

But the Cordes’ problem is also something more rudimentary: a shortcoming of vocabulary among a shared language. Beneath this is a subtler complication: language is part of the humanities, and Minna’s confusion hints at a more profound separateness. Later in the novel, Minna accuses Corde of having a compulsion to lecture. “You lecture me,” she accuses. “You lecture. I could make *you* these speeches now. You even put it into your *Harper’s* article, about Plato’s Cave, and the Antichrist” (263). Beyond the compulsion to lecture, though, is the

compulsion to allude. Corde's mode of narration or explanation is Bellow's mode: cultural markers are the correlative means of explanation. But when the audience does not have the capability of decoding, then meaning is lost. Put in the context of Bellow's life and work, this idea resonates again with the notion that shared first-hand knowledge of cultural referents is essential to broad-based social communication. But when Corde has observed a social ill and needs the classics to communicate his observations, his cries fall on deaf, confused, or resentful ears. Corde thinks there is "something bogus and grotesque about this [. . .] 'modern public consciousness.' There was no real experience in it, none whatever. The forms that made true experience were corrupted" (122). As with Herzog and Sammler's semiotic and symbological frustrations (the conundrum of meaning into words and vice versa), so is Corde frustrated by the cultural demotion of experience in the "modern public consciousness":

You see (Corde saw), you begin to lose contact with human beings and with the world. You experience spiritual loneliness. And of course there are the classics of this condition to study—or rather to mull over: Dostoevsky's apathy-with-intensity, and the rage for goodness so near to vileness and murderousness, and Nietzsche and the Existentialists, and all the rest of that. Then you tire of this preoccupation with the condition of being cut off and it seems better to go out and see at first hand the big manifestations of disorder and take a fresh reading from them. Not quite sufficient to say that at this moment of history the philosophical problems are identical with the political ones. This is true. It's okay. Only it's insufficient. (161)

“The condition of being cut off” has become a matter of course and faith for the new public, and an excuse for setting aside cultural focal points. With regard to the “pound[ing] into dust” of the American ideas of “liberty, equality, justice, democracy, abundance,” Corde thinks

here is what things are like today in a city like Chicago. Have a look! How does the public apprehend events? It doesn’t apprehend them. It has been deprived of the capacity to experience them. Corde recognized how arrogant he had been. *His* patience was at an end. *He* had had enough. *He* was now opening his mouth to speak. And now, look out! (123)

Again, the importance of culture is paramount, but subtle. It needed a lion to roar its importance, but Corde, attempting to fill this role, had fallen flat (as had his predecessors Sammler and Herzog).

A companion frustration to that of Corde’s inability to express himself to his home community is the closed society he witnesses in Romania; Corde’s thoughts on the strictures of Soviet life hint that similar thought-policing has occurred at home:

He was from the blessed world outside. The West. He was free to speak. For them it was impossible. All conversations with foreigners had to be reported. Few people were bold enough to visit the American library. Those who sat in the reading room were probably secret agents. It was one of the greatest achievements of Communism to seal off so many millions of people. You wouldn’t have thought it possible in this day and age that the techniques of censorship should equal the techniques of transmission. (57)

But Corde's story implies that even in a "free" society, the transmission of ideas can exact a price. Communism in the Eastern Bloc provides a ready analogue for authoritarianism in even its civil forms, given that the hostility Corde received for his articles translates, for Bellow, as another form of shrill barbarism. For Corde, urban decay is a form of cultural collapse; Corde attacked it; the public counter-attacked; therefore, the counter-attack was a defense, even a celebration of the death of Culture. The fact that the counter-attack at its most strident originated in the university makes this all the worse, as the university was meant, by Bellow's model, to be the defender of culture, not a panacea for social ills. As he wrote in the wake of the San Francisco State debacle, "you don't found universities in order to destroy culture. For that you want a Nazi party."⁶¹ The lynchpin here is that the university has transformed from an island of culture and uninhibited discourse to an authoritarian regime. Statements made therein must be submitted for vetting. "The real vexation," muses Corde, "was that he had published those magazine articles without a clearance from the college. Not to submit them for approval was out of line, unheard of, dangerous to the last degree—wild!" (179).

Ultimately, it is the disconnection from society inherent in the academic bubble that compels him to write his *Harper's* essays. Just as he had rebelled against the practice of journalism (he needed more time to devote to his studies), so he rejected the academy:

He was [. . .] Huguenot and Irish by descent, a Midwesterner flattened out by the prairies, a journalist and a lousy college dean. He suspected that the academic connection had been getting to him. He could feel, with Dr. Faustus, "O would that I had never seen Wittenberg, never read a book"; and it was no wonder that the classroom, the library environment, had driven him finally into the streets of Chicago, or that he had written—well, written that at the Cabrini Green black

housing project, some man had butchered a hog in his apartment and had thrown the guts on the staircase, where a woman, slipping on them, had broken her arm, and screamed curses in the ambulance. She was smeared with pig's blood and shriller than the siren. It was illumination from a different side, Chicago light and color, not the Sermon on the Mount. (130-131)

He had first turned away from the media and toward the university, then turned away from the university and toward the media. Hence, neither world was happy with him. While this back-and-forth implies a barrier between the academy and the outside world (one must choose one or the other), Corde's crisis is that he does not see the two as mutually exclusive, as Spangler explains in his profile:

If the Dean is hard on the media he is even more bitter about academics. The media are part of corporate America. They are part of the problem, hence their "impartiality" is meaningless. But the universities are a deep disappointment to him. I gather from his conversation that he thinks academics are not different from other Americans, they are dominated by the same consensus and ruled by public opinion. They were not set apart, with all their privileges, to be like everybody else but to be *different*. If they could not accept difference they could not make the contribution to culture that society needed. The challenge to the Humanists was the challenge to produce new models. (301-302)

These "new models" were to be something practical, useful, something in direct service of the community that authorized the university. But this had not happened. Rather, the university had drawn farther and farther into itself. The dissatisfaction and misunderstanding was widespread. "Some professors work hard," writes Spangler, "Most of them do. But a professor when he gets

tenure doesn't *have* to do anything. A tenured professor and a welfare mother with eight kids have much in common" (302). Spangler, here, misattributes Zaehner's quote, giving Corde the credit. This is arguably the most damning portion of Spangler's article, and possibly the most insurmountable so far as Corde keeping his job. But the misattribution is telling. Spangler is a capable journalist, and the fact that he hands the "welfare mother" assessment off to Corde demonstrates that Corde's frustrated confidences were overwhelmingly sympathetic to Zaehner's assessment, so much so that Spangler could not keep the two apart. Just as welfare gratuities can be as spiritually enervating for their recipients, so tenure, to Corde, has taken the urgency of scholastic enterprise out of the scholar. Ultimately, according to Glenday, the betrayal is not Spangler to Corde, but Corde to himself:

This final *coup de main* [Spangler's article] discloses the impotence Corde comes to feel. It is an impotence of language, of communication, enforced by a society equipped to understand only Spangler-speak, "the passwords, the code words," and which rejects as unAmerican, as treasonable, seditious, Corde's *Harper's* essays. [...] The muzzle will stay on Corde until he is willing to learn the language of American realism—as insidious and implacable in its influence on American life as socialist realism has been on Soviet dissidents.⁶²

Glenday is right in that the fundamental disjoinder is one of communication, but the implication in the novel, in the intelligentsia's hostility toward the articles, is that Corde's fault is not that he fails to use the nomenclature of *realism* but rather that he neglects the idiom of academic discourse that softens the meaning into something more politically sensitive.

Bellow would revisit this idea of political sensitivity as a stumbling block to academic acceptance in *Ravelstein*. Having then seen someone succeed despite violating academic

sociopolitical and rhetorical conventions, he seems to have had this last novel in mind as a specific reimagining of *The Dean's December*: both reference the “urban jungle”⁶³ and minority ghettos⁶⁴ in the same, cringe-worthy light; Chick, the ostensible protagonist/memoirist of *Ravelstein*, is nervous about representing his friend’s ideas in a manner similar to Corde’s attitude toward Beech⁶⁵; both make references to Guernica as a foundational moment of the modern consciousness⁶⁶; and Chick, reminiscing, thinks “though I was his senior by some years he saw himself as my teacher. Well, that was his trade—he was an educator. He never presented himself as a philosopher—professors of philosophy were not philosophers”⁶⁷ (likewise, professors of journalism, like Corde, are not journalists, though Corde violates this precept). But the operative principle remains, as Glenday notes, and the two novels are merely singular battles in Bellow’s war on barbarism:

Like *Citrine*, Albert Corde is made to find that “the first act of morality was to disinter the reality, retrieve reality, dig it out from the trash, represent it anew as art would represent it” [. . .][suggesting] the tendency at work in the novel as a whole—one of existential penetration, a process of continual ingression, a working towards those elements of individual and collective humanity which remain unsullied by the “trash” of cultural degradation.⁶⁸

Chapter Four

Reflexive Modernity, Creative Writing, and the Academy in Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys*

American law has not yet recognized teacher malpractice as a tort. [...] Would it be better to live in a regime, like Socrates's Athens, where corrupting the youth was a capital crime? Whatever Athens's sin against philosophy, it at least regarded education as a serious business, serious enough to kill a man for.

— William T. Braithwaite, "Mr. Bloom and His Critics"¹

When Mark McGurl wrote in *The Program Era* that "traditional literary studies [...] offers excellent training to students entering the increasingly symbol-driven and fiction-laden postindustrial economy," he acknowledged the central tenet of "reflexive modernity": that we "write" the metaphorical "texts" of our own lives. Hence, "excellent training" for the "symbol driven and fiction-laden" world helps one understand the plight of the reflexive self. "One can see by comparison to creative writing," he went on, "how literary studies has the disadvantage, in this economy, of being oriented toward the past, and of making students submissive to the genius of someone other than themselves."² Education has taken Emerson's charge to heart. The formalized study of creative writing, problems though it has, is ultimately about dealing with

literature on its own terms, with a reality between the lines and beyond the page, rather than a parsed and prodded subject of literal investigation. Creative writing in higher education has not only established a foothold in literature departments, the dual forces of student-preference consumerism and a broader skepticism toward the canon have provided it with staying power and enough intellectual heft to influence the way the academy approaches literature.

The popularity of creative writing as an academic endeavor is undeniable and has seen dramatic growth in the past fifty years, as McGurl notes:

The handful of creative writing programs that existed in the 1940s had, by 1975, increased to 52 in number. By 1984 there were some 150 graduate degree programs (offering the M.A., M.F.A., or Ph.D.), and as of 2004 there were more than 350 creative writing programs in the United States, all of them staffed by practicing writers, most of whom, by now, are themselves holders of an advanced degree in creative writing. (If one includes undergraduate degree programs, that number soars to 720.)³

But aside from the fact that students seem to enjoy creative writing—or the idea of creative writing, anyway—the question begs itself as to what theoretical justification it has to take its place alongside the endorsed, traditional approaches to teaching and studying literature. It could be argued that nothing teaches a student better what goes into literature than having that student produce literature, an adaptation of Thoreau’s notion from *Walden* about the given versus the self-made penknife. Also, if *Stover*’s Brockhurst is given credence when he says that “all education can do is instil [sic] the love of knowledge. You get that, you catch the fire of it—you educate yourself,” then perhaps nothing can better contribute to a student’s enthusiasm for literature than having that student create literature, ideally setting off a chain reaction that would

lead him or her to further study in order to better understand and create his or her own work. But, aside from these two justifications, what creative writing certainly does is offer a third way apart from the two old edifices of theory and philology. Like the Great Books approach, creative writing is a way of *experiencing* rather than *explaining* the written word.

Perhaps predictably, the rise of institutionalized creative writing is a comfortable bedfellow for the college novel. Writers, writing what they know, now knowing perhaps more about the academic world than they do about other fields of endeavor (at least relative to what they would have known of academia a century ago), are comfortable writing about the academy. In the era of Twains, Cranes, and Hemingways, the author had more often cut teeth as a journalist, as a shuttler of information from the “real” to the literary. Now, authors are far more likely to have learned to write while students of the academy, writing in an academic context, the literary for the literary and all within an academic frame of reference. Among the most successful of MFA graduates in recent years is Michael Chabon, 2001 Pulitzer Prize winner, author of two college novels, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988) and *Wonder Boys* (1995), and graduate of the writing program at the University of California, Irvine. Both novels are set in his native Pittsburgh, where he did his undergraduate work at Carnegie-Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh. He comments regularly on his experiences in a graduate creative writing program, as here in his 2009 essay collection, *Manhood for Amateurs*:

Twenty-odd years and nine books after receiving my MFA in creative writing [...]—and seventy years after the founding of the original MFA program, the Iowa Writers’ Workshop—I still get questions about writing programs, as if my having come through one were a fluky detour like doing a hitch in a Goofy suit at Disneyland, and the institution itself a compound of rumor and scam.⁴

His first novel (and first college novel), *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, was his thesis at Irvine. *Mysteries* is a promising debut but relatively immature, a tale of a youth reflecting on his youth, sentimental and fantastic without any transcendent realization to take in the artistic slack. It happens in the twilight days of Arthur Bechstein's university career and sees him through the summer following, during which time he crosses a series of sexual and experiential thresholds. It is perhaps better suited to a study of the phenomena common to first novels than college novels, but it does include some commentary on the university and the college experience worthy of mention, especially in light of a discussion of *Wonder Boys*, Chabon's second novel, also a tale of maturation in the college context.

Arthur's "sad and cynical" major is economics.⁵ Like many novels of youth, *Mysteries* lauds the capricious and turns its nose up at the practical. "You're an economics major," says Arthur's girlfriend, "when obviously you should be making movies, or traveling, or reviewing restaurants, or something frivolous"⁶—as though food critics and film directors and the similarly frivolous got where they did by wishing it so. Arthur finds himself in and out of love as he finds himself also in and out of a criminal subplot involving a friend of an occasional boyfriend (Arthur is trying to decide whether or not he is gay for much of the narrative), mingling with opulent youth of a Fitzgeraldesque cast and their bohemian playmates, drinking and smoking constantly, all with grand swings between enthusiasm and ennui. And while the characters and events were outlandish and extreme, Arthur admits as much in the closing of the novel: "The people I loved were celebrities, surrounded by rumor and fanfare; the places I sat with them movie lots and monuments. No doubt all of this is not true remembrance but the ruinous work of nostalgia, which obliterates the past, and no doubt, as usual, I have exaggerated everything."⁷ But the ground work is laid in *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* for the blur of the fantastic and

realistic that would characterize Chabon's career thereafter; Arthur, as his name would suggest, is an amalgam of daydream and what passes in adolescent perception as earthy grit. And his time in college is a reflection of his fantastic self-image; it is a period of his life full of adventure and Cloud Factories (their pot-addled poetic of a neighborhood smokestack), but also one in which young people live in intentional destitution because they know, better than their elders, that life is more about the romantic than the real. His affection for his college years is clear insofar as he insists on mooning about the college library even after his graduation. His destiny is shaped by his college experience, but, as in most undergraduate novels, the physical classroom is a distraction to the richer life of the fantasy. The act of forsaking economics, his "sad and cynical major," occurs only to show that his time as a collegiate number-cruncher gives him the privilege of enlightened and deliberate squalor among the impassioned artistes.

One of Chabon's professors recommended *Mysteries* to an agent, who agreed to represent it, and it was published to quiet acclaim. "I'm kind of a poster boy for the more tangible benefits that a good writing program can bestow," he writes:

But the most important thing that happened to me as a graduate student in creative writing had little directly to do with writing or publishing or agents or subject matter or style. When I started the program in 1985, I was a little shit; by the time I left Irvine, I was not just a published novelist, I was something that had begun, inwardly, to resemble a man.⁸

Here, as in McGurl's appraisal, creative writing is about reflexive self-realization, a fundamentally therapeutic assignment. It is, by these accounts, a worthy and effective endeavor. But the question remains as to why this sort of study—especially knowing that not every student attempt would lead to significant publication—would warrant a place in a scholarly department,

especially given the trend over the course of the twentieth century to insist that literary studies show objectively quantifiable “results.”

In an interview, Chabon would state that he finds it strange that creative writing gets taken to task while the visual and performing arts are not; they are all arts which require technique drawn from a particular body of experience and knowledge.⁹ Of course, a ready answer to that question would be that painting, piccolos, and pirouettes require particular *physical* aptitudes, equipment, and mechanics, where literary arts do not—the point of a creative writing class is not to teach a student to type, but to create. But further, why have a creative art in a scholarly department at all? An answer might be that this self-study is the fundamental function of literature, that literary studies is a world apart and ought to be allowed its subjectiveness, and that its study is an act leading to an intuitive rather than measured knowledge of the world. Its contrary nature is to be allowed precisely because it is contrary. Elsewhere in *Manhood* Chabon railed against the sort of arbitrary taxonomic exercises common in the humanities:

There is no more useless activity than that of periodization, in particular cultural history, into discrete eras—the Jazz Age, the Greatest Generation, the Eisenhower years, the Sixties. Such periods can never be honestly articulated without recourse to so many demurrals and arbitrary demarcations, and the granting of so many exceptions, as to render them practically useless for any kind of serious historical purpose.¹⁰

It is a common notion among authors when addressing the stock-in-trade of the humanities. Emerson had rejected the same thing in “The American Scholar”:

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences.¹¹

Elsewhere, Amory Blaine's discussion with Thayer Darcy about being prone to classification in his "desire to get something definite" has a hollow ring and it seems that by the end of the novel, when Amory knows nothing but himself and has wandered in and out of all creeds and "systems," he has rejected this very approach and embraced the sort of intuitive, superrationality that will presumably give him what he needs to become the writer he wants to be. Likewise, Abe Ravelstein "did not step up to the platform to bore you silly with the correct order of the epochs (the Age of Faith, the Age of Reason, the Romantic Revolution)."¹² Fiction of the college and campus has almost uniformly rejected the sort of categorical analysis on which modern literary studies is built. If the writers are the gods of the page, the scholars are their uninspired prophets, capable only of specious and incomplete recreations of what the artists had done before them.

But if the scholars have it all wrong, then what is the creative writer's place when it comes to the academy? If the writers have spoken for themselves, delivered their plenary statements, and if the act of creative writing is inherently reflexive, the student arriving equipped with all they need, then what use is the teacher or analyst? The linguist Roman Jakobson joked about hiring Vladimir Nabokov to teach literature at Wellesley, "what's next, shall we appoint elephants to teach zoology?"¹³ The joke is that to be a practitioner requires a different skill-set than to be an instructor. The professor's view of a text supersedes the author's; the author knows only enough to write the text, not to enlighten students on how a text might be written. Or the

fictional Richard Powers, protagonist of the actual Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*, after having been told by another faculty member that he, as a writer, is "king of cats": "You're joking," he replies, "Were, maybe. A hundred years ago. It's all movies and lit crit now."¹⁴ The function of the author for Powers has fallen behind that of the pop-culturist and the literary analyst. Here, the author has been outmoded by those who have remained true to the popular discourse (the rise of cinema culture) and those who have claimed dominion over literature (the scholars) and have, in the attempt to be part of both worlds, lost their place in each. But if authors have lost some sort of broad social cachet, they still outstrip the literary intellectual, of whom only a few, if any, could be considered publicly known, as McGurl points out:

The creative writer [has a] distinct claim to prestige in the English departments to which writing programs tend to be attached: although typically relatively undereducated for that milieu, such a writer may actually be known to a nonacademic readership. This fact, combined with the spiritual privilege derived from the writer's intimate commerce with the Muse, and with the apparently bottomless desire of undergraduates to take creative writing classes, offsets to some degree the intramural dominance of the Ph.D. scholars who largely run the place but who are famous, if at all, only to each other.¹⁵

McGurl also notes the "deep continuity between *creativity* and R&D," the driving force of the modern techno-university.¹⁶ Having a real writer on faculty means that the department is producing—ideally—actual new work for the marketplace, moving things forward, whereas traditional scholarship is intrinsically bent on looking back at what has already been. Biology departments, after all, are not as interested in what the state of the biological sciences was a

century earlier as they are in what has come to be known about them today (or, more importantly, what will be known tomorrow).

But this theoretical bridge between creative writing and R&D neglects to specify the link between a product that entails a tangible good for the greater marketplace, something the hard sciences have in spades, and whatever intangible effect it is that literary studies or creative writing actually has. The principle of reflexivity, that an author's product is firmly tethered to that author's personal experience, limits what literary "R&D" can do for the world beyond the individual. Oftentimes what is produced is by authors, for themselves; McGurl notes the potential danger of producing "works of forbiddingly difficult self-enclosure, works that only a coterie could love,"¹⁷ works of "self-tourism,"¹⁸ not something that necessarily infuses itself into broad social consciousness. These are works written by the academy for the academy. According to McGurl, literary studies needs to produce "works that resonate broadly with the concerns of serious readers everywhere, living, as they do, multiply institutionalized and indeed self-reflexive lives"¹⁹: reflexive texts that explain alien reflexivity. It is a tall order with an unclear goal. To be viable, the work of literary studies needs to be, as Bellow phrased it, "real, relevant work," something removed from the career hobbyism of the English department endemic both to creative and scholarly pursuits. There should be something demonstrably worthwhile about academic literary studies. It seems improbably quaint phrased as such, but, simply, they ought to teach, not produce.

The two-pronged function of the literary faculty member, production in the classroom and on the bookshelf, has always been uneasily balanced; in the classical model, teaching was primary (though that teaching allegedly often took the form of rote drilling), and, in the research model, scholarly production is the first concern of the professor. But if the authors of college

fiction, so often dismissive of scholarship and frustrated with in-class performance, are given credence, then the professor's functionality ought to be measured in the classroom, closer to the classical model. Of course, success in front of a class is more difficult to measure than publications and citations. Setting aside the problem of literary-scholars-as-teachers, though, the role of the creative writing professor can be just as problematic. McGurl finds contradictions in the role of creative writing and positive production:

Bad enough, as the broken record of romanticism keeps telling us, that it tries to institutionalize what should remain wild and free—creativity. But it is also implicated somehow in a market-driven Americanism, then how could the citizens of the world possibly approve of it? Is the creative writing program, as some have said of “child-centered” progressive education in general, merely an academic adjunct to that consumerist apparatus, a sop to narcissistic desire?²⁰

Would the creative writing professor be relegated to emotional mollicoddling? And their precise function in the classroom is also unclear; again, McGurl casts doubt on the role of professors in this position, considering “the outsourcing of self-discipline [the creative writing program] facilitates, where the artifice of deadlines and grades helps the apprentice push through the quagmire that leaves untold thousands of citizens in the perpetual state of (not) ‘working on their novel.’”²¹ This is mere whip-cracking, neither intellectual nor artistic, and well beneath the professional scope of trained thinkers and artisans.

This problem of mission is, in a way, the conundrum facing Grady Tripp, Chabon's protagonist in *Wonder Boys*. Tripp is a creative writing professor who has not himself published in years; his professional life, literary and pedagogical, has run out of steam. Like many novels in the college genre, *Wonder Boys* is a novel of personal realization and reckoning in which the

characters earnestly seek to define exactly what their role is in the world. Tripp is no longer an author in a functional sense. His work-in-progress, the eponymous *Wonder Boys*, an epic-scale fantasy about a family by the name of Wonder, has ballooned well beyond its 2000th page. He has lost control of it and writing the novel has become as much a quest to define himself—a task he is not, at present, able to do—as to tell the story he wants to tell. In the absence of a promising professional future as a writer, he has little else to console him. He is a professor, but wonders “what kind of teacher was I?”²² given that his workshops, at which he tends to be mentally absent, devolve into student-to-student whipping sessions, and that he tends to lead his students into trouble both in and out of the classroom.

His personal life is beleaguered by the trickle-down effects of his professional woes, and his efforts to define himself as he defines his mythic Wonders becomes a chicken-and-egg problem; his wife has just left him, his lover is pregnant, and a student to whom he rents a room has developed an infatuation that will only be broken when she reads the ill-formed draft of the novel he has been working on. The amorous aspect of his private life tandems neatly with his romanticized ideal of the writer-as-creator in that it carries connate implications of writer-as-procreator. In a novel as thoroughly metatextual as *Wonder Boys*, there is little difference between the literal and the fictional child. But as Tripp’s creative life is disordered, so is his procreative life; he has impregnated the chancellor of the college, Sara Gaskell, who is also the wife of the English department chairperson, Walter Gaskell, Tripp’s immediate superior in the workplace. Furthering the chaos, and metaphorically endangering Tripp’s creative/procreative “world,” is the fact that Sara is tentatively planning to have an abortion. In the sense of the family romance on which Marthe Robert would build a literary theory of the god-sired “foundling,” Tripp is a literary god (as author) bereft of control over his quixotic world and a

literal orphan (both parents died when he was young) losing control over the quotidian.²³ This interplay between the reality of the page and of the reality of the real is the novel's driving force. At its core, *Wonder Boys* is about the anxiety of order in the creative writing teacher who both abhors order as the enemy of creativity but requires it before he can impart the necessary orderliness implicit in his professorial charge.

"The first real writer I ever knew," the novel begins, "was a man who did all of his work under the name of August Van Zorn [né Albert Vetch]. He lived at the McClelland Hotel, which my grandmother owned, in the uppermost room of its turret, and taught English literature at Coxley, a small college on the other side of the minor Pennsylvania river that split our town in two" (3). Immediately, Chabon calls up the nexus between writer and scholar; it is clear in the subsequent passage which aspect of Van Zorn is to be given priority:

He wrote horror stories, hundreds of them, many of which were eventually published, in such periodicals of the day as *Weird Tales*, *Strange Stories*, *Black Tower*, and the like. They were in the gothic mode, after the manner of Lovecraft, set in quiet little Pennsylvania towns that had the misfortune to have been built over the forgotten sites of visitations by bloodthirsty alien gods and of Iroquois torture cults—but written in a dry, ironic, at times almost whimsical idiom, an echo of which I was later to discover in the fiction of John Collier.²⁴ He worked at night, using a fountain pen, in a bentwood rocking chair, with a Hudson Bay blanket draped across his lap and a bottle of bourbon on the table before him. (3)

The clichés of the writing life abound, and Van Zorn, as the archetypal "writer," would, naturally, later take his own life. "He set a kind of example," Grady continues, "that, as a writer, I've been living up to ever since. I only hope that I haven't invented him" (5). But Tripp has

invented him, or at least played into the invented persona “August Van Zorn.” For Tripp, the focus is not on who Van Zorn was, but rather who Tripp would like to conceive of him being: note that Tripp would rather refer to him by his penname than his given name. It is the original invention, Van Zorn, and further invention that Tripp creates, the “example” that he has been living up to, that constitute the only reality in which Tripp is interested. Here is the uneasy dance between writer and writer-figure; the aspirant leads the life of the archetypal writer in the hope of becoming the writer. Grady’s preoccupation with Van Zorn is not a matter of anxiety of influence, but rather eagerness to be influenced. There is a particular shadow that the real, live writer casts, and Tripp, in his youth, wanted be in it long enough that he might himself transform into a writer.

Vetch/Van Zorn ignited Tripp’s youthful infatuation with writing and the writing life. Later, having been offered a spot on the Coxley football team, he absconds in the eleventh hour to find himself in the American West:

Let’s just say that I’d read Kerouac the year before, and had conceived the usual picture of myself as an outlaw-poet-pathfinder, a kind of Zen-masterly John C. Frémont on amphetamines with a marbled dime-store pad of lined paper in the back pocket of my denim pants. I still see myself that way, I suppose, and I’m probably none the better for it. (17)

The task of becoming a writer was one, firstly, of affectation. This is part of the novel’s operative anxiety, that for the character to find the self, the character must become the writer (something apart from the real world), but for the character to become the writer, he must mimic other writers, thereby divorcing himself from his own self. In the Keseyan idiom, as McGurl explains it, “if Native Americans and African Americans could be understood as ‘liminal’ figures in

American culture, then the white primitives of the counterculture could at least become ‘liminoid.’”²⁵ Tripp, in his youth, longed for this “liminoid” status, but having risen to it, he burned through it. Where he was once “the chest-thumping Sasquatch of American fiction,” he finds himself now a has-been, a sagging hulk of a man, his creative spring long since smothered in the marijuana cigarette stubs that litter the story. This is one of *Wonder Boys* persisting themes: the durability of writerhood. Tripp is no longer writing anything that he can reasonably expect to see print. Is he therefore still a writer? If he is no longer a writer, then does he have a self? If he is still somehow a writer despite, for all practical purposes, no longer writing, was he already a writer before he became the phenom, *wunderkind* Grady Tripp?

Tripp tends to remember others he has known as being “real writers.” It is difficult to determine with certainty whether this is meant only to ring of wide-eyed ingenuousness or to differentiate the “real” writers from the student writers, or perhaps to establish a sort of caste system—he only gives the designation to those in creative writing, never to his scholarly colleagues who write but are not “writers.” Among the “real” writers is John Jose Fahey, an ill-fated colleague of Tripp’s, and the author of four novels. Tripp remembers that Fahey fell apart after taking a post at a small college in Tennessee. Fahey had been “a disciplined writer [...] with an admirable gift for narrative digression he claimed to have inherited from his Mexican mother, and very few bad or unmanageable habits.” Nevertheless, something in or around the college gig breaks him. Chabon never explains the correlation, only the effects: “He pulled off the difficult trick of losing his tenured job at the Tennessee college, when he started showing up drunk for work, spoke with unpardonable cruelty to the talentless element of his classes, and one day waved a loaded pistol from the lectern and instructed his pupils to write about Fear” (13). Fahey, again, like a real writer apparently would, eventually kills himself. His story is much like

Tripp's: early acclaim, a publisher's advance, an imagination stalled by career security, and, finally, the ultimate manifestation of the writer's career-in-stasis, the job of creative writing professor, at which point the writer is no longer a writer and spirals into a shadowy second life borrowed from the first.

Tripp's career also began under the call of trumpets, a "well reviewed" first novel that he considers to be his "truest work," his third novel winning a PEN award. Chabon never specifies precisely the circumstances of when or why Tripp took his present post at Pitt, but he has been there for some time. He remembers that he

had been dangling unhappily from the rope of my new life as an English professor in Pittsburgh for about three months, friendless, bored, and living alone in a cramped flat over a Ukrainian coffee shop on the South Side, when [his friend Terry] Crabtree showed up, dressed in a knee-length leather policeman's coat, with a sheet of Mickey Mouse acid and sixty-five hundred dollars in severance pay from a men's fashion magazine that had just decided to fire its literary editor and get out of the unprofitable fiction business once and for all. (99-100)

Crabtree is clearly not only an individual involved in literature; he is a literary figure. The two of them met in a short story seminar at the University of California, where Tripp found himself "after a few years of unhappy and often depraved existence." Terry, not a "real" writer, but a person who wanted to be in the writing scene, had

gotten in [to the seminar] on the strength of a story he'd written in the tenth grade, about an encounter, at a watering place, between the aging Sherlock Holmes and a youthful Adolf Hitler,²⁶ who has come from Vienna to Carlsbad to rob invalid

ladies of their jewelry. It was a remarkable trick for a fifteen-year-old to have performed, but it was unique; Crabtree had written nothing since then, not a line.

(18)

Crabtree and Tripp's destiny will coincide when the former, as a junior editor, will take a chance on the latter's early work, which becomes a success, propelling the two simultaneously to the top of their professions. But as their career ascensions were each tied to Tripp's creative abilities, so would their relative declines begin when Tripp fails to continue writing to the level of his early promise. The two met when each pilfered an obscure story of Van Zorn's, made creative edits, and distributed them to the workshop where they were read aloud to the class by the professor, who thought that the best way to have students "experience" a story (22). Despite the fact that they had each essentially turned in the same narrative, no one in the class, not even the professor, realizes:

I've never been able to decide if it was his tedious way of reading, or the turgid unpunctuated labyrinthine sentences of Mocknapatawpha prose with which he was forced to contend, or the total over-the-top incomprehensibility of my demysticized, hot-hot-sexy finale, composed in ten minutes after forty-six hours without sleep, but, in the end, nobody noticed that it was essentially the same story as Crabtree's. (23)

The professor, like Tripp and Fahey in their stints in the same profession, is mentally removed from his classroom. But Terry Crabtree's relationship to the literary world, in which he intends to make himself a peripheral figure, is worth note. The most mobile, flamboyant, and libidinous character in the novel, Crabtree is its most literary character. Notably, he is also its most self-possessed, therefore less in need of the sort of artistic clarification craved by Tripp and his

students. Crabtree is himself a “character,” therefore less in need of creating characters. Tripp likewise remembers his college creative writing professor,

a *real* writer, too, a lean, handsome cowboy writer from an old Central Valley ranching family, who revered Faulkner and who in his younger days had published a fat, controversial novel that was made into a movie with Robert Mitchum and Mercedes McCambridge.²⁷ He was given to epigrams and I filled an entire notebook, since lost, with his gnomic utterances, all of which every night I committed to the care of my memory, since ruined. I swear but cannot independently confirm that one of them ran, “At the end of every short story the reader should feel as if a cloud has been lifted from the face of the moon.” (19)
[emphasis added]

This “gnomic” figure is the final in a series of characters in which Tripp presents his models of the literary life: Van Zorn, the lone wolf with an identity crisis whose fictional worlds cannot prop up a life doomed to suicide; Fahey, the burned out writer-made-teacher whose life in an academic corral accelerated his final destruction; Crabtree, an individual who seems to be living his own outlandish narrative rather than committing it to the page (though his need to be near writers indicates that he wants his story to be immortalized by someone else); and the professor, who, through passivity toward his classroom duties, has been able to maintain the writer’s persona he brought with him to the academy.

After this series of flashbacks, the novel settles into its primary setting, Wordfest, in which “the chairman of the English Department, had been charging aspiring writers several hundred dollars for the privilege of meeting and receiving counsel of a staff of more or less well-known writers, along with agents, editors, and assorted other New Yorkers with an astonishing

capacity for alcohol and gossip” (31). Tripp does not find “anything wrong with [Wordfest], any more than [he] find[s] anything amiss in the practice of loading up an enormous floating replica of Las Vegas with a bunch of fearful Americans and whipping them past a dozen tourist-oriented ports of call at thirty knots” (31-32). The aspirant writers are tourists, and the bevy of agents and publishing representatives are exotic attractions whose world they might, for a moment, presume to share. But the enterprise is ultimately superficial, and Tripp avoids the bulk of Wordfest events; he separates himself from the inaugural meet-and-greet party by stepping outside for a marijuana break and situates himself at the rear of the auditorium during the opening address. All of this goes to suggest that whatever the college is providing via this more or less writerly social event has less to do with what it means to be a writer than what fun it is to pretend to be one.

Among the opening festivities of Wordfest is a party held at the Gaskells’ home. Walter, Sara’s spouse, is an ineffectual husband, either impotent or uninterested in sex, and Sara informs Tripp that their illicit union has resulted in pregnancy. Despite *Wonder Boys* being set in a university English department, and despite the fact that its protagonist is largely dependent on the financial security his post brings, Chabon is harsh toward Walter and the other faculty members who flit briefly in and out of the story. Worth noting is the fact that it is the writer, not the scholar, who is able to fulfill the generative role (though the fact that this only occurs once Tripp has lost his ability as an artist sends a mixed message). Walter is not only sexually incapable—Tripp “knew that [Sara] and Walter had not made love in several years” (45)—but intellectually so as well. Tripp lampoons Walter’s personal fixation with baseball history as it has passed through his ivory tower filter to become a convoluted analysis of the marriage of Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe:

The DiMaggio-Monroe union was a significant obsession of Walter's, and the subject of his own magnum opus, his *Wonder Boys*, an impenetrable seven-hundred-page critical "reading," as yet unpublished, of the marriage of Marilyn and Joe and its "function" in what Walter, in his lighter moods, liked to call "American mythopoetics." In that brief unhappy tale of jealousy, affection, self-deception, and bad luck he claimed to find, as far as I understood it, a typically American narrative of hyperbole and disappointment, "the wedding as spectacular antievent"; an allegory of the Husband as Slugger; and conclusive proof of what he called, in one memorable passage, "the American tendency to view every marriage as a cross between tabooed exogamy and corporate merger." (60-61)

As it happens, Tripp's star student, James Leer—also attending the party—is writing a period-piece novel in which the protagonist meets a young Norma Jean Mortensen before her ascension. Leer's poetic rendition is presented in a more favorable light, the star without the glamour, as a person, worthy of experiencing but lacking the iconographic "significance" that Walter has found in the same subject, implying that the writer has manufactured the real, the scholar merely a convoluted abstraction.

But writers are, themselves, worth little apart from their work. As abusive as Tripp can be toward the scholastic faculty, he is perhaps more dismayed by their creative counterparts. At the party, Tripp is

reintroduced to a shy, elfin man whose prose style is among the most admired in this country, whose company I had enjoyed in the past, and this time found him a leering, self-important old windbag who flirted with young girls to stave off the fear of death; I met a woman whose short stories have broken my heart over and

over again for the last fifteen years and saw only the withered neck and hollow stare of a woman who had wasted her life. (44)

Even though their stories lived on, the people who authored them were fading. Part of this bleak analysis is perhaps also due to the fact that Tripp is seeing himself less and less as an author; insofar as he had idolized his cohorts-in-craft because in them he saw—or hoped to see—something of himself, he now, uncertain of his own craft, sees them as fragile people, not gods of the page.

At this point in the story, things begin to happen quickly. Tripp, stepping away from the party, encounters James Leer. James is crashing the party, but Tripp takes him under his wing, and after the other guests leave to attend the opening lecture, Tripp takes James into Walter and Sara's bedroom, where he opens Walter's safe. Tripp is aware that James is obsessed with the yesteryear of Hollywood, and among the contents of the safe is Walter's most prized piece of memorabilia, the jacket Marilyn Monroe wore on the day she was married to DiMaggio. In short order, James, unbeknownst to Tripp, pilfers the jacket, Tripp is attacked by the Gaskells' dog, Doctor Dee, James shoots the dog with a derringer he happened to have in his pocket (he would later insinuate he was carrying it so that he might take his own life), the two hide the corpse in Tripp's car (a Ford Galaxie with a sketchy chain-of-title he won in a poker game), and, finally, to quell the pain of the dog-bite and to get the stiff-shirted James to loosen up, the two partake of prescription pain-killers and whiskey before heading to Wordfest's inaugural address. Such is Chabon's eager flair for plot.

The opening address takes place at Thaw Hall—incidentally, the only campus landmark in the novel tied to an actual university, situating the story at the University of Pittsburgh, where Thaw houses part of the physics department.²⁸ The address, delivered by the “elfin man” at the

party, a renowned writer elsewhere identified in the novel only as “Q.,” is on the subject of “The Writer as Doppelgänger” and will begin with a passage from Conrad’s *The Secret Sharer* (53). The title and topic of the address are important on many levels. Most immediately, the “shy little elf,” had, just prior, been labeled a “self-important windbag.” Again, Chabon reiterates the difference between writer-as-person (writer) and person-as-writer (doppelgänger). In a vacuum, the elf is shy, apparently reposed; this is Q. as merely human. But when he is in the company of artists and intellectuals, forced to don the writer’s mantle, he becomes a figure, a bombastic letch—in Thayer Darcy’s terms in *This Side of Paradise*, a “personality” rather than a “personage.” But the notion of “the writer as doppelgänger” has further resonance in the novel. Just as Tripp had modeled himself on Van Zorn (not Vetch), had sought out the larger-than-life imprint of the Creator of Stories—Creator of Worlds—so would this conflict between what he was and what he sought to become manifest as the primary emotional conflict of the novel. In his “pirate days, before stars were lost from certain constellations” (i. e., before reality interrupted his romantic, perhaps Platonic, conception of himself), he had been

a monstrous thing [...], a Yeti, a Swamp Thing, the chest-thumping Sasquatch of American fiction. I wore my hair long and tipped the scales at an ungraceful but dirigible two hundred and thirty-five pounds. I exercised my appetites freely, with a young man’s wild discipline. I moved my big frame across the floors of barrooms like a Cuban dancer with a knife in his boot and a hibiscus in the band of his Panama hat. (98)

But that was when he allowed himself the freedom to think of himself as a figure of literature. His writing, and in suit his person, have fallen. Noting his own “native genius for externalizing self-hatred,” he realizes for the first time that he had subconsciously driven his wife, Emily,

away. This, he speculates, was a manifestation of his hostility toward his literal self (as opposed to his literary self): “Not only would I never want to belong to any club that would have me for a member—if elected I would wear street shoes onto the squash court and set fire to the ballroom curtains” (128). After a night of excess that includes dancing at an R&B establishment, James getting drunk for the first time in his life and being molested by Crabtree, the revelation that the Galaxie is ill-gotten followed by a run-in with its rightful owner, and the loss and recovery of James’s knapsack (which contains, as it turns out, a draft of his first novel), Tripp awakens to toil compulsively on the agonizing deadweight of his novel. As he rolls another blank sheet into his typewriter in the early hours, he thinks of the blighted figure of Joe Fahey, the career-suicide-turned-actual-suicide (134). Tripp’s life is spiraling downward, and he needs some form of comfort. Presently at odds with Sara over the pregnancy, he seeks out his soon-to-be ex-in-laws, the Warshaws, who are to be celebrating Passover in their hometown, which, a bit on the nose, is called Kinship. James, who has slept off the prior evening’s excesses at Tripp’s home, comes along for the ride.

Importantly, all of Emily’s family members carry with them specific artistic associations. When introducing James to Irene Warshaw, Tripp notes that James is a “very talented writer.” Irene, having majored in English, is very excited about this, and Tripp notes that she “esteemed writers far too highly,” apparently unable to see far enough beyond her nose to realize that the writer to whom she is closest, Tripp, has devastated her daughter emotionally (172). Irene’s husband Irv, having later in his education turned to metallurgical engineering, first studied music composition “with an émigré pupil of Schoenberg’s, and [had] written a few unlistenable pieces with titles like *Molecules I-XXIV*, *Concerto for Klein Bottle*, and *Reductio ad Infinitum*” (178). That these two are the feast-founders of the group is important given that Irene’s association is

with an idealized notion of authorship and Irv's is with, presumably, atonal experimentation, which, combined with the resonances between metallurgy and alchemy, presents a chaos-creative dynamic. Together, they represent the literary world as Tripp sees it, disordered, fantastic, romantic, unassailed by the strictures of reality.

Unfortunately, their children only became shadow-images of a creative tradition that never would be. Their libertine daughter Deborah, whose native language is not English, apparently spurned reading at an early age and "rarely read anything" other than comic books (179).²⁹ Their son, Sam, died before he progressed beyond anything above juvenile fantasy of the Buck Rodgers variety. Tripp's estranged wife is a failed-novelist-turned-ad-writer, whose abortiveness at the page is apparently surpassed only by her incompetence in the kitchen, as Tripp muses when her Passover dinner comes, half-cooked and jerry-rigged, to the table:

I think she saw a kind of parable of her life, having started out aspiring to write heart-stopping novels and short stories, and ended up generating ad copy for the biggest kielbasa in the world. It seemed to her that she must have left something out, or taken something too soon off the burner.

"It tastes like something," said Deborah, poker-faced. "Something we used to eat in school. Oh, I know." She nodded. "Paste." (223)

Tripp wonders (as might the reader) several times why it is that he is choosing to attend this gathering. The Warshaw's are not his blood kin, and in short order neither will they be related by law. Obviously, they fill a void left by his not having a family (his mother had died when he was an infant of an infected, over-nursed nipple and his father later committed suicide), but more than that, Tripp is the artist that the Warshaws might have wanted but never had. They fill

complementary, if hollow roles with regard to one another. But Tripp's artistry has long since begun to fade, and by this point in *Wonder Boys*, he has begun to accept that he no longer fills the role he once did.

After dinner, James having again drunk too much and passed out, Tripp traipses about the Warshaw family grounds, eventually deciding it to be a fit place to bury the corpse of Doctor Dee, still in his trunk. Finding a shovel and appropriate plot of ground, he begins to dig and in so doing is reminded of the great number of literal holes in his fiction. All of his novels have ended, in one way or another, with a character digging or entering into the earth, burying evidence, living in basements, canoeing into underwater caverns. He thinks about his stories, how they "were all," like Van Zorn's "about the horror of emptiness," and reflects that Van Zorn had "put a pistol to his temple because in the end there were too many whistling black holes in his room in the McClelland Hotel" (234). "This was the writer's true doppelgänger," Tripp considers, "not some invisible imp of the perverse who watched you from the shadows, periodically appearing, dressed in your clothes and carrying your house keys, to set fire to your life; but rather the typical protagonist of your work [...] whose narratives at first reflected but in time came to determine your life's very course" (234).

In his attempt to bury the dog's corpse, he falls short of breath, his heart too labored, and after a few minutes realizes "my career as a character in one of my own books was over. I couldn't dig anymore. I leaned against the horse chestnut tree and tried to catch my breath, looking down into a hole deep enough, I calculated, to hold a largish Pomeranian. So much for my fucking doppelgänger, I thought" (236-237). He thinks about the holes that characters in his own work have dug, monstrous holes, basements, caves, holes to bury human bodies. But those holes, symbolizing the emptiness of those characters, existed only in the life of the mind.

Whereas their emptinesses had been epic, substantial in the scope of their vacuum, Tripp's own, beginning where the meta- leaves the text, is not even deep enough to represent the gape in his soul where his own novel should be. At this point in the story, he realizes he is no longer a novelist. The heady abandonment to insubstantiality that had characterized his work was no longer there. Perhaps it was the fetus in his lover's womb or the fact that he now had a meaningful connection to one of his students—Tripp never mentions having had a relationship like what he was experiencing with James Leer—but he had lost his zen, his meaningful emptiness. Now he was merely empty.³⁰

After James had passed out and Tripp began to question the professional ethics of what he had exposed his student to, he had called James's parents. James is brought down, his mother "sound[ing] as though she intended to yank James out of bed by his ear and drag him by this handle down the stairs and out to the car." Tripp wonders whether he had done the right thing by calling them. After all, he thinks, "people [James's] age were allowed to get drunk and pass out. I might even have argued that they ought to be required to do so" (240-241). But of course, Tripp had involved James in much more than intoxication. The previous evening's events had included a blurred variety of characters and outlandish events. As Tripp had mused on the ride to Kinship:

I wondered if perhaps it were all dawning on him at last; if he were beginning to realize that, having engaged, the night before, in activities as diverse as being dragged bodily and giggling from a crowded auditorium, committing grand larceny, and getting a hand job in a public place, he was now on his way to spend Passover, of all things, with the family of his dissolute professor's estranged wife, in a dented Ford Galaxie within whose trunk lay the body of a dog he had killed.
(159-160)

Guilty about having called in the parental ambush, Tripp finds the manuscript of James's novel, *The Love Parade*, and reads all 250 pages straight through without stopping. He is pleasantly surprised that James seemed to have "abandoned [the] silly experiments with syntax and punctuation" that had caused derision among his writing workshop peers, and Tripp notes that "like most good first novels it possessed an imperturbable, mistaken confidence that all the shocking incidents and extremes of human behavior it dished up would strike new chords of outrage and amazement in the reader" (249).³¹ In broad terms, it is the prototypic first novel, melodramatic and confident in a voice it does not fully understand. Apparently, James has grown as a writer (and, by extension, as a person), even if this stands at logical odds with the chronology of the novel. By all accounts, James, prior to his weekend adventures with Tripp, was a static individual, caught up in an illusory, idealized golden age of which he was never a part. "Why *The Love Parade*?" Tripp wonders, noting that it, like most of Leer's titles, found its provenance in bygone cinema³²:

James seemed to have chosen it, as usual, more for its status *as a title* than for any evident connection to the plot or characters of his story. There was a kind of sympathetic magic in the way James titled his fictions, as if by producing works called *Stagecoach* and *Greed* he hoped to make of himself not simply a writer but an entire studio; to raise, on the patch of vacant scrub that was his life, a teeming city of costumers, soundmen, hoplites, buccaneers, and Kickapoo Indians, where he could be producer and director, screenwriter and gaffer and makeup artist, the walk-on destined for stardom and the leading lady at the peak of her career. (251)

James, like Tripp, is using his writing to make himself feel more complete. Later in the novel, Tripp, having been informed that James was part Jewish, asks James whether being with the

Warshaws made him feel Jewish. James replies “it made me feel like I wasn’t anything.” Tripp pushes him and he rephrases “like I’m nothing” (282). In James’s character, there are many empty places: his preoccupation with Old Hollywood is escapism; likewise, he lies about most aspects of his life to make them sound more exciting; and in his fiction he hopes to find some power, to be able to assert dominance over some environment, even if that environment lives only in his mind and the mind of his readers, the signatories of James’s psychic constitution.

Having read *The Love Parade*, Tripp sets it aside and thinks that perhaps he was not the fairest possible judge of what James Leer had done. In my heart, I knew, I was jealous of the kid: of his talent, although I had talent of my own; of his youth and energy, although there was no point in regretting the loss of those; but mostly of his simply having *finished* his book. (250)

By finishing his book, James has made something and through that has become something. The sad but implied coda to this is that on James’s horizon might well be the sort of flame-out Tripp and Fahey had encountered. He had mined his soul to give life to a homemade world. But was it strip-mining? He was now god of the *Love Parade* universe. But James’s novel had been finished before any of the previous evening’s bizarreries had commenced and before James would admit to still feeling “like [...] nothing.” In the philosophy of reflexive self-attainment, whereby the student writes so that he or she might better come to know the literal self, the process of writing has failed him as it had failed Tripp. When the teacher wonders whether he was “the fairest possible judge” of his student, perhaps what he means is that in the attempt to fill that hole, the excavation in the end only makes the hole larger.

Tripp returns from Kinship alone to find his house overrun with an impromptu party thrown by Crabtree as an underground social corollary to the apparently tame, official Wordfest events. It is full of local writers, prompting Tripp to make a dig at the local color: “And there were so many Pittsburgh poets in my hallway that if, at that instant, a meteorite had come smashing through my roof, there would never have been another stanza written about rusting fathers and impotent steelworks and the Bessemer converter of love” (256). Clearly, he has lost his adolescent awe of the writer-figure. He calls Crabtree aside, informs him that he had handed James over to parental authority, and Crabtree, who for the previous 24 hours has developed both a sexual interest and career curiosity about James, revolts. After discussion, the two agree to spring James from his parents’ home. Among the various tales that James has concocted to represent his personal history is the fact that his parents (note: he claims that they are actually his grandparents and that he was sired by his grandfather, which happens to parallel the plot of *The Love Parade*) keep him locked in their basement in the family mansion. The absurdity of the notion that two grown, professional men might break a post-adolescent out of his family home is not lost on Tripp:

Ever since the day, nearly twenty-five years before, that I’d first fallen under the spell of Jack Kerouac and his free-form Arthurian hobo jazz, with all its dangerous softheartedness and poor punctuation, I had always, consciously and by some unthinking reflex of my heart, taken it as an article of faith that escapades like the rescue of James Leer from his Sewickley Heights dungeon, or the retrieval of the missing jacket, were intrinsically good: good for the production of literature, good for barroom conversation, good for the soul. Chaos! I ought to have been gulping it down the way Knut Hamsun, perched atop a locomotive as it

hurtled across the American heartland, swallowed a thousand miles of icy air in a successful attempt to rid his body of tubercles. I ought to have been welcoming the bright angel of disorder into my life like the prickling flow of blood into a limb that had fallen asleep. (323)

It is the absurdity of the act that attracts Tripp, an extreme act that might very well be a plot point in one of his novels. After this act of practical fantasy, the three of them retire to Tripp's home, where Crabtree and James retire together to consummate the relationship that had begun the previous evening. While Tripp has himself been staring down the incipient crash of his career and persona throughout the course of the novel, the union of Crabtree and James Leer represents the beginning of an outward rather than inward crisis. Now, his prize pupil has taken up with a Manhattan book editor; the teacher has lost his charge and the longtime friend and editor has found a new rising star.

Along the way, Hannah, the student to whom Tripp rents a room, has taken the copy of *Wonder Boys* that he has accidentally left sitting out and read it. She is unimpressed, noting that Tripp made no "choices" in electing what details of the story to include and what to leave out, further implicating Tripp's personal identity crisis with the composition of his novel. Her infatuation subsequently fades. He falls further when, the next morning, he realizes that Crabtree has likewise lost what admiration he had had for Tripp:

He looked at me, then; it was the first close examination he had given me all morning. He wasn't, I thought, especially impressed by what he saw. The wind had picked up, and I shivered, and all of a sudden it occurred to me that when Terry Crabtree gazed at me with such an air of cool and unconcerned appraisal he was no longer really seeing me, his oldest friend, in whom all the outlandish

promises of life and every chance for glory intimately and anciently inhered. He was seeing only the pot-addled author of a bloated, boneless, half-imaginary two-thousand-page kraken of a novel, a hoax whose trusting and credulous pursuit had cost him tens upon tens of thousands of dollars and, seemingly, his career. (298)

“All male friendships are essentially quixotic,” Tripp muses later in the novel, “they last only so long as each man is willing to polish the shaving-bowl helmet, climb on his donkey, and ride off after the other in pursuit of illusive glory and questionable adventure” (326). Crabtree and Tripp’s dual adventure in their fading *La Mancha* is over. And the realization that they have found themselves in the real world is not one that can be undone.³³ Along with Crabtree’s reappraisal of his friend, there are other clues that the real world has gotten its claws in.

The rightful owner of Tripp’s *Galaxie* was an odd-looking man they had first seen in the R&B club and around whom they had built a wide-ranging mythology. His name was Vernon Hardapple, they said, and he had been a mob-connected jockey who accidentally facilitated the assassination of his brother, which has caused his present addiction painkillers (this is a streamlined rendition of their story; as they originally hash it out, it is much more involved). When “Vernon” eventually steals his car back (which at that point was carrying James’s novel and Marilyn’s jacket), they try to remember what actual facts they knew about him. But they are at a loss, and Crabtree notes that they “kind of made the whole *guy* up.” Tripp replies, “no wonder he fucked us over, then” (299). This is the revenge of the real upon the fantasist. But more important is the subsequent loss of Tripp’s manuscript. In their attempt to retrieve *The Love Parade* and the jacket, *Wonder Boys*, which Tripp had taken to protectively carrying about, is jettisoned from a speeding car, caught in the wind, and deposited in the Monongahela River. The

fantasy that had consumed Tripp, and his last-ditch effort to create for himself an adequate vault for whatever lay inside him, is irretrievably lost.

The abrupt demise of his “two-thousand-page kraken” of a novel is the end of Grady Tripp, author. The conclusion of the novel (here, Chabon’s *Wonder Boys*, not Tripp’s) at least implies that he will never write fiction again. But the end of his authorship does not result in suicide as it did with Fahey and Vetch. They had persisted and the frustration of their efforts drove them to take their own lives. But the crushing realizations as to who he was and who his friends believed him to be have been allowed Tripp to release himself from the burden of authorship, both in the literal sense and in the sense that he was “authoring” his own life. And along with having passed his torch to another, James, and hoping that he and Sara have a contribution to make to the actual world together seems to release him of the need to be an author.

Having recovered James’s novel and the jacket, they return to Wordfest to set things straight. Crabtree has read *The Love Parade* and has agreed to publish it. He has also bribed Walter with the publication of the Monroe-DiMaggio book to keep his newest novelist out of prison, all of which is announced at the Wordfest closing ceremonies (the bribe, of course, remaining only between friends). In the wake of this, and having lost respect for himself and the respect of those around him, Tripp undergoes his transformation. Having suffered a series of fainting “spells” for some time—from some unspecified combination of his fast-living habits—he suffers one more upon his return to Thaw Hall, nearly falling over the balcony of the auditorium following his attempt to reach Sara after Wordfest’s denouement, but serendipitously falling safely backward into the aisle. He has an out-of-body experience:

I rose like a kite, in fits, tethered to the mortal husk of Grady Tripp by a thin pearly string. Below me Pittsburgh lay spread, brick and blacktop and iron bridges, fog in its hollows, half hidden by rain. The wind snapped at the flaps of my jacket and rang in my ears like blood. There were birds in my hair. A jagged beard of ice grew from my chin. I'm not making this up. (344)

He is resuscitated, apparently by Sara, though she flees as soon as he is in the hospital. He has a conversation with a doctor in which he undergoes a bout of addict's apology and leaves. In the hospital, he stops at the viewing window of the maternity ward. "Did one really *feel* the need for a child," he wonders, thinking of Sara and their unborn, "as a craving in the nerves, a spiritual yearning, the haunting prickle of a lost limb?" (350). He says aloud "Boy [...] would I like to have me one of those," and a man beside him, presumably looking at his own newborn, says with mystic certitude, "I got news for you, buddy [...] You already do" (352). Stepping outside, he notes that "all the lights in the street looked haloed and soft, as if rubbed up by the thumb of a sentimental pastelist" (352). Shortly thereafter, searching for Sara but finding that she is not at home, he is "gripped by a sudden irrational certainty that she had, in fact, already [had the abortion]" (356). Grady's transformation is complete. He has some enigmatic experience when his body shuts down, commits to clean living, becomes desirous of a family life, and sees halos in the street. Perhaps it is not as en-route-to-Damascus as all that, but his outlook is rewired from that point in the novel. His mysterious urgings and feelings of connection to others, even those who are yet to be, and his coming to terms with the likely conclusion of his writing career indicate that his hollowness has come abruptly to a close.

The story wraps up neatly. Walter gets his revenge by landing a swing on Tripp using a DiMaggio bat. James and Crabtree go off to New York. And as it turns out, Sara did not

terminate the pregnancy, and she and Tripp marry. She defers to Walter and leaves Pitt, after which she

landed the position of dean of students at Coxley College and arranged for me to be hired, part-time, by the department to which Albert Vetch had devoted so much of his life, and we moved back to this old hill town, with its houses the color of dead leaves, where a neon sign burns on a cold night with an aching clearness and it is always football season. (366-367)

Tripp willingly consigns himself to adjuncthood and writes casually, without the particular panic that had characterized his attempts at *Wonder Boys*, and finds purpose in his teaching.

Tripp's journey in and out of the reflexive quest of creative writing is curious. It had given him purpose, then success and opportunity, then a personality crisis that would feed a creative crisis that would in turn feed the personality crisis and so on. His transformation and subsequent peace with the world is a reboot caused by his experiences in the writing world. But creative writing as an educational endeavor, of course, cannot aim to provide this exactly for each student. But perhaps it is the most direct route to teach the sort of critical perspective necessary in a democracy, a cure for the mechanism by which, as Henry Adams phrased it, education could become "a sort of dynamo machine for polarizing the popular mind."³⁴ The examined life, ushered in by the process of creative writing, is a life apart from the popular poles. Or perhaps it is a way of more fully realizing our immediate context and how we communicate with one another. Creative writing is more likely to address the popular mode of discourse, as Emerson notes: "This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made."³⁵ But what college creative writing has certainly done is upped the sheer volume of writers with some training (hence, presumably, some more

confidence in their abilities). The corollary to this may be that we have authors more interested in their own material, rather than a crowd eager to watch talent coalesce at the top of the field, as McGurl writes:

Of course, we can only measure literary excellence on our own terms, and the task of elevating individual authors high above their numerous accomplished peers has become increasingly difficult. This may have produced, as with the disappearance of the .400 hitter in professional baseball, a kind of optical illusion of encroaching mediocrity: being the dominant figure in Shakespeare's or even Pound's time was, by comparison to today, easy as pie. But laying aside our anachronistic prejudices for the One over the Many Ones, moving our minds from the Pound Era into the Program Era, do we not bear daily witness to a surfeit of literary excellence, an embarrassment of riches? Is there not more excellent fiction being produced now than anyone has time to read?

What kind of traitor to the mission of mass higher education would you have to be to think otherwise?³⁶

The focus, again, is on individual growth through creative writing, about the author fulfilling himself rather than others. There is more "being produced," which is, itself, telling diction, "than anyone has time to read." The rise of many authors through the growth of creative writing as a part of the study of literature, the dimming of the brightest stars to allow the others to shine, carries with it an implicit admission of the shift from the written narrative as a mode of transmission to one of introspection. But as Theodore Weiss put it, "if it is difficult to discover an Ezra Pound or a Wallace Stevens in the jostling crowd, we can certainly relish the fact that, for the first time in the United States, hundreds of able, dedicated poets are hard at work."³⁷ The

quality at the top may have remained the same, but the total volume of work at levels approaching that quality has dramatically increased.

Still, the mission behind the creation of new literature in the academy and instruction as to how it best be created is unclear. But the student hunger for whatever it is to be dispensed does not wane. Ben Siegel notes that

many academics argue that the creative artist is simply an anomalous figure on campus. They appear to feel this way even when the writer holds a Ph.D, but they do so in particular when he is a writer-in-residence (long or short term) without the customary academic degrees. He (or she) generally is appointed to add a cultural veneer to the literature department and perhaps to attract students. What the writer inevitably attracts is his academic colleagues' envy and hostility.³⁸

But more importantly, the creative writer in an English department must be a person apart, a refugee displaced by the academic conflict. But while the combatants that have crowded out the writer continue in battles of endless interpretation, the writer goes on, quietly profiteering.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: What of “Submerged Old Atlantis”?

When all is said and done, the rapt saint is found the only logician.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Method of Nature”¹

The rise of the college novel over the past century happened alongside the instigation and various restructurings of the field of literary studies. Given that the author of the college novel would naturally gravitate toward literary studies as the context of his or her investigation of academic life, such authors have naturally had much to say on the series of predicaments facing literary humanism: How does one institutionalize that which, by romantic conception, must remain free? Given that literary art is an organic and constantly evolving mode, how could the academy possibly engineer a workable canon as a basis of inquiry? What does the profession actually entail, especially as concerns research, and how can literary studies market its mission to those outside the field? What role, if any, does the actual creation of new literary art have in literary studies? In a strict sense, literary studies cannot be a research discipline. Philology or literary history is an investigative stance that capitalizes more on the historical than the literary. At the other end is the theoretical mode, pure commentary and not “research” in any real sense, which has often succumbed to the danger of becoming commentary on commentary as much as

commentary on literature, hence removed from the subject that granted its original relevance. Theory also runs the risk of treating literature, an art, as a body of data rather than a body of expression. And even if the compromise were struck that gave literary studies a clear, central directive, the question would remain as to how these “research” goals would balance against the scholar’s duties as a teacher. These concerns have been at the heart of the criticisms implicit and explicit in the American college novel of the past century.

Fitzgerald wrote of the humanist student, rebelling against the fixtures of a structured curriculum that was, as he said, “made for the average student,” not the student with an outlier’s passion for literature. Bellow saw dire writing on the wall and wondered what role a cultural department could have in a society that had dismissed Culture. Chabon set aside the traditional modes of literary investigation to seek out the creative spark that made literature worthy of study in the first place, along the way meditating on what effect the strictures of departmental life would have on its practitioners. Numerous other college novelists have weighed in, as well. James Hynes and Richard Russo have followed Mary McCarthy in pointing out the political foibles that distract scholars from their professional charge. In *End Zone*, Don DeLillo echoed a half-century of authors of student narratives by depicting the lack of concrete direction offered by the faculty. Willa Cather, Thomas Wolfe, and others have depicted the isolation of students and professors in the academic context. The authors of college novels know much about the problems facing the humanities and the humanities would benefit by seeking their advice.

In short, the situation is this: literary studies and the humanities more generally are founded on romantic ideology. Since the industrial revolution, the university has become a place of empirical, scientific inquiry, forcing out the romantic. To compensate, the humanities have adopted various pseudo-scientific methodologies, be they philology, New Criticism, or literary

theory, but these methodologies, so goes the allegation, have removed the student and practitioner from the heart of literary endeavor, which was traditionally ineffable. The mission of literature had, until the rise of literary academics, been to let the experience of the text speak for itself, something that extends beyond the pedagogical. The literary scholar of the past century broke this mold, and authors of academic fiction have noticed. As Stanley Trachtenberg writes of the scholars in Joyce Carol Oates's campus fiction, they are "uniformly portrayed as egocentric villains, [...] comically frustrated by their inability to impose a subjective vision upon the solidity of experience. Their single-minded efforts to do so result in joyless lives, shaped by the funneling of desire into an increasingly narrow vision."²

The recent goal of scholarship in literary studies—to generate an objective explanation of the subjective experience of readership, to convert textual experience into quantifiable product—is inherently befouled by the notion, central to the literary ethos, that reading is a personal experience. As Bellow would lament, who can tell you more about Ahab than Melville? Or Emerson: "Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare, and even he can tell nothing except to the Shakespeare in us, that is, to our most apprehensive and sympathetic hour."³ Frustrating any attempt to contextualize literary studies in the modern university is literature's original and inherent function as a means of post-rational dialogue, essentially a means of romantic or spiritual communication, something out of place in a rational, technical, and tenaciously secular institution. Structuralism was perhaps an attempt to bring this function into the appropriate fold (to materially comment on the immaterial), but in the post-structuralist context, Arnoldian ideals have little weight.

The founding of modern literary studies began as a way to offset the rise of research, a way to professionalize, and hence ensure the survival of, culture in the university. As Gerald Graff noted in his history of the profession, *Professing Literature*,

those who most wanted the [original] mission [of literary studies] to succeed thought it had failed right from the start. The hope that the study of English would restore national leadership to the academic custodians of high culture disintegrated very early. On the one hand, high literary culture was increasingly marginal to the commercial and corporate interests dominating modern life, making laughable the pretensions of the literary elite to cultural leadership.⁴

Setting aside such elitist goals as Graff points out, the study of literature as we now know it in higher education had the bad luck to come into being at the moment that “high” culture saw itself marginalized. Compounding this was the rise of non-literary popular culture, the adaptation of the syllabus to accommodate student preference, and the increasing perception that the university is a place of technological advancement, looking forward rather than backward. Now, nearly a century since the study of literature cemented its place in the university, it has found itself adrift. As Frank Donoghue recently mused in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “what *has* happened [to the humanities relative to the university mission] is that the center of gravity at almost all universities has shifted so far away from the humanities that the most pertinent answer to the question ‘Will the humanities survive in the 21st century?’ is not ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ but ‘Who cares?’”⁵ Two hundred years ago, the study of culture, riding the wave of the now infamous Yale Report of 1828, was the basis of the American university; a century ago, it had to find ways to shoehorn itself into the curriculum; today, it is, as Allan Bloom wrote, the “submerged old Atlantis,” something grand and irrelevant.

The college novels of the last hundred years have recognized and confronted the problems of humanism. The student narratives tend to lament factual, “lockstep” education, preferring that the student experience ideas according to his or her own proclivities. The faculty narrative has stepped back to wonder just what the place of the literary intellectual is in the modern university, what justification they have when their own careers revolve around arguments within, and only important to, their own communities, in Graff’s words, their own “professional clique.”⁶ As the university became an archipelago, comprised of many independent research “departments,” humanism became an island unto itself. But when the island across campus claims to be curing disease or solving economic problems of the third world, and when the students want primarily to acquire the skill-sets they will need as professionals, the islands of literary history and theory have become less attractive.

What college novels have to say about humanism is neither flattering nor reassuring. Of the dozens of narratives considered in and for this study, not a single one depicted personal enlightenment as a direct result of *academic* literary study; while characters in these novels are often tied to their books and identified with and influenced by what they have read (Amory Blaine, Moses Herzog, and Grady Tripp to name a few), the books that made them who they were originated outside the curriculum. Nor did any of the texts support the idea that the methods used in literature departments have any real benefit to anyone not on the departmental payroll; hence, the professors in academic fiction carry the implied stigma of hobbyism. Bellow is among the few to lament the neglect of Culture while considering Culture to be a driving force intimately connected to the academy; in his fiction, he seems to allot to the faculty the benefit of the doubt as to their professional endeavors. But outside his novels, he was always very skeptical of the professors. His frustrations were part environmental (why have a cultural department if no

one wants Culture?) and part procedural (what is it that the professors are doing to make their mission relevant to those whom it was meant to serve?).

There are responses to these questions, but they tend to suffer from vagueness. F. R. Leavis's response to C. P. Snow's "two cultures" comparison was that focus on science leaves our "humanness" imperiled; he did not explain what, precisely, "humanness" was. Numerous commentators have attempted quasi-practical applications of literature to other areas of endeavor. For example, Richard Weisberg, in *Poethics: And Other Strategies of Law and Literature*, has made the case that the legal profession can rekindle its jurisprudential flame through the study of literature, thereby keeping its focus on the core principle of justice (his notions might easily be more broadly applied to any profession).⁷ Allan Bloom has suggested that Culture mitigates the dangers inherent in applied technology: "Science [. . .] increases man's power without increasing his virtue, hence increasing his power to do both good and evil"⁸; without Culture, Hitlers, Stalins, and Pol Pots are free to manipulate science however they see fit. Erich Fromm, commenting on the notion of the necessity of enlightened disobedience, voiced a similar idea:

But the fact is that, while we are living technically in the Modern Age, the majority of men—including most of those who are in power—still live emotionally in the Stone Age; that while our mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences are of the twentieth century, most of our ideas about politics, the state, and society lag far behind the age of science.⁹

But is there a set of books that can improve an individual's moral compass? Stalin, after all, was very well-read. In the world of two academic cultures, the scientific provides for the machine, and the humanistic for the ghost.¹⁰ The problem is that in a world that demands narrow

evidentiary results, improvement of the ghost, intrinsically unquantifiable, seems expendable. Even if the humanities exist to improve us as humans so that we might apply our technology to “moral” ends, this is an inherently unempirical position.

In the two culture paradigm, the attempt to make the literary intellectual appear to act according to the same methods as the scientific intellectual has been a smokescreen that has distracted literary scholars themselves. Viewing literary studies as a research discipline along philological lines sidesteps the key irony that production of research in this field does not entail actual production of knowledge in the way discoveries in science may generate knowledge not theretofore known. Rather, it constitutes merely the most recent identification of previously known facts. And, to the extent that new research will inevitably be buried by its successors only to be rediscovered, digested, and catalogued by future generations, scholarly “production” is illusory, representing only that information’s latest repackaging. Viewing literary studies as a research discipline along theoretical lines risks making literary scholarship a coterie conversation.

And just as Chabon lampooning of Walter Gaskell’s illumination of the Monroe/DiMaggio union represents a frustration that the academic is alienating itself from the public it is meant to serve, so does this attitude reappear time and again in the college novel—in Hynes, for example, and even in Bellow. Professional literary scholarship may be detrimental to literature also in the sense that it removes the mass audience from the written word. Literature becomes a specialized study—something for the professor or student—not an enlightening pastime for the average person. Just as professional athletics could be said to have contributed to the decline of recreational athleticism (sport is now something we *watch* rather than something we *do*), so has literature been relegated from the couch to the classroom. Just as the flawed

pedagogy of the classical school cultivated a distaste for Greek and Latin, ultimately hastening their cultural decline, so does literary studies run the risk of separating the would-be audience from its text.

The history of literary unease toward academia runs deep. Long before Rasselas's astronomer and Gulliver's Balnibarbi were Plato's assaults on the Sophists (criticizing the procedures of scholarship) and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* (derogating the lifestyles of professional scholars). This lengthy tradition has continued in America and has apparently hit upon a zeitgeist, given the popularity of the academic pasquinade among both writers and readers. There is, of course, something superficial in all of it, a natural grudge of the writers to whom was once entrusted "the best that has been said and thought." As Billy Collins has recently written, "would anyone care to join me / in flicking a few pebbles in the direction / of teachers who are fond of asking the question: / 'What is the poet trying to say?' / as if Thomas Hardy and Emily Dickinson / had struggled but ultimately failed in their efforts— / inarticulate wretches that they were, / biting their pens and staring out the window for a clue."¹¹ The writers' resentment is territorial (and perhaps defensive). But the din of wondering what role the humanities are to play in the future of higher education is rising. And the writers were among the first to rumble.

Notes

Chapter One

1. Plato, "Protagoras," in *The Portable Plato*, Ed. Scott Buchanan (New York: Penguin, 1977), 49-50.
2. Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 78.
3. John E. Kramer's *The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography* lists 648 such texts and is, by Kramer's own admission, not comprehensive. John E. Kramer, *The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2d ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004).
4. John O. Lyons, *The College Novel in America* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), xiii.
5. *Fanshawe* is widely regarded as being the first American college novel, though it is worthy of note that John O. Lyons, in *The American College Novel*, bizarrely declared that it had "little to do with college life." Lyons, *College Novel*, xvi.
6. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Fanshawe, a Tale* in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Novels* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 5.
7. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 3.
8. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 3.

9. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 95.
10. A sentiment that Bellow would reiterate in *Henderson, the Rain King*.
11. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 18.
12. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 77.
13. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 29-30.
14. Hawthorne, *Fanshawe*, 113.
15. Kramer lists only 21 novels between *Fanshawe* and 1900.
16. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*, Ed. William Rossi (New York: Norton, 2008), 38-39.
17. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sermon I, in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 7.
18. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sermon XXXIX, in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 10.
19. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sermon XC, in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 17.
20. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 56.
21. Emerson, "American Scholar," 59.
22. Emerson, "American Scholar," 60.

23. Emerson, "American Scholar," 61.
24. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 221.
25. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 40.
26. Bloom, *Closing*, 254.
27. Emerson, "American Scholar," 64.
28. Bloom, *Closing*, 321.
29. Emerson's epigraph to "Self-Reliance," from Persius's *Satires* (translated, "do not seek outside yourself").
30. Sherrie A. Inness, *Intimate Communities: Representation and Social Transformation in Women's College Fiction, 1895-1910* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 4.
31. Owen Wister, *Philosophy 4* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1927), 55.
32. Kramer, *College Novel*, 12.
33. Lyons, *American College Novel*, xiv.
34. Johnson, *Stover*, 150-151.
35. Johnson, *Stover*, 331.
36. Johnson, *Stover*, 385-386.
37. Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 47.

38. “Modern Novels at Yale; Prof. William L. Phelps’s Course Stopped by the Faculty,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 1896, page 16.

39. In *Faculty Towers*, Elaine Showalter assumes that Weismann is modeled on Cleanth Brooks, but he is more likely a recreation of Saul Bellow. He says at one point in the novel “‘They want to teach our children that Africans invented the airplane! [...] I ask you! Who’s the Tolstoy of the Zulus? Show me the Shakespeare of the Hottentots, and I’ll put him in my syllabus!’” This almost a word-for-word rehash of Bellow’s infamous outburst. James Hynes, *The Lecturer’s Tale* (New York: Picador, 2001), 103.

40. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 63.

41. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 149.

42. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 146.

43. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 141.

44. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 94.

45. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 204.

46. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 204.

47. Hynes, *Lecturer’s Tale*, 385-386.

48. Phillis Wheatley, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (Bedford, MA: Applewood), 1995), 13.

49. Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland, or the Transformation* (New York: Hafner, 1960), 22.

50. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale U P, 2003), 181.

51. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 53.
52. Qtd. in Rudolph, *American College*, 20.
53. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Mariner, 2000), 55.
54. Rudolph, *American College*, 63.
55. Adams, *Education of Henry Adams*, 38.
56. Adams, *Education of Henry Adams*, 55.
57. Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas* (New York: Norton, 2010), 86-87.
58. Lawrence Rainey, "The Cultural Economy of Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62.
59. Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 23.
60. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Peter Owen, 1966), 61-62.
61. Rudolph, *American College*, 220.
62. Michael G. Moran, *Frank Aydelotte and the Oxford Approach to English Studies in America, 1908-1940* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 3.
63. Charles William Eliot, "Liberty in Education," in *Educational Reform: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1909): 123-148.
64. Eliot, "Liberty in Education," 128.
65. Eliot, "Liberty in Education," 131.
66. Rudolph, *American College*, 294.

67. Rudolph, *American College*, 296.
68. Eliot, "Liberty in Education," 131.
69. Rudolph, *American College*, 442.
70. Gail McDonald, *Learning To Be Modern: Pound, Eliot, and the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 67-68.
71. Qtd. in McDonald, *Learning*, 10.
72. McDonald, *Learning*, 10.
73. McDonald, *Learning*, 108.
74. McDonald, *Learning*, 92.
75. McDonald, *Learning*, 75.
76. McDonald, *Learning*, 43.
77. Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 68.
78. McGurl, *Program Era*, 363.
79. McGurl, *Program Era*, 363-364.
80. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: and a Second Look, an Expanded Version of The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 2.
81. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 12.
82. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 14-15.
83. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 18.

84. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 25-26.
85. F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 49.
86. Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 46.
87. Frank Aydelotte, *Breaking the Academic Lockstep* (New York: Harper, 1944), 9.
88. Michael Yudkin, "An Essay on Sir Charles Snow's Rede Lecture" in F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 58.
89. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 96.
90. Snow, *Two Cultures*, 78-79.
91. Plato, *Protagoras*, 51.
92. Margaret Edson, *W;t* (New York: Faber, 1999), 76.
93. Aydelotte, *Academic Lockstep*, 7.
94. Moran, *Aydelotte*, 95.
95. McGurl, *Program Era*, 9-10.
96. McGurl, *Program Era*, 12.
97. Bloom, *Closing*, 156.
98. Pound, *Kulchur*, 25.
99. Rudolph, *American College*, 287.
100. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal Entry—August 23, 1846, in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 515.

101. Qtd. in Rudolph, *American College*, 395.
102. Qtd. in Rudolph, *American College*, 401-402.
103. Bloom, *Closing*, 336.
104. Theodore Weiss, "A Personal View: Poetry, Pedagogy, Per-versities," in *The American Writer and the University* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 149.
105. Bloom, *Closing*, 356.
106. Jim Gaffigan, *Doing My Time*, compact disc, Comedy Central Records, 2004.
107. Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2* (New York: Farrar, 1995), 9-10.
108. Bloom, *Closing*, 340.
109. My evidence here is anecdotal, though I suspect it holds broadly true: I once assigned students in a first-year composition class to write an essay either justifying or criticizing the general education curriculum (it was their option to support or detract). To a one, they decided that general education was largely without relevance and an impediment to their collegiate/career goals, most of them citing humanities classes as specifically obstructive.
110. Bloom, *Closing*, 342.
111. Lyons, *American College Novel*, 28.
112. Lyons, *American College Novel*, 31.
113. Aydelotte, *Academic Lockstep*, 14.
114. Showalter, *Faculty Towers*, 1.
115. Lyons, *College Novel*, 106.

116. Lyons, *College Novel*, 132-133.

117. McGurl, *Program Era*, 47.

118. Bloom, *Closing*, 353.

119. Lyons, *College Novel*, 156.

120. McGurl, *Program Era*, 3.

Chapter Two

1. Owen Johnson, *Stover at Yale* (New York: Grosset, 1912), 229.

2. Harold Lloyd, *The Freshman*, DVD, directed by Fred C. Neymeyer and Sam Taylor. Los Angeles: New Line Home Video, 2005.

3. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 442.

4. Not, of course, universally worshipped, as D. H. Lawrence's Tommy Dukes would put it later in the decade: "Love's another of those half-witted performances today. Fellows with swaying waists fucking little jazz girls with small boy buttocks, like two collar studs!" *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 41.

5. Kirk Curnutt, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Age Consciousness, and the Rise of American Youth Culture" in *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Ruth Prigozy (New York: Cambridge U P, 2007), 27-28.

6. James L. W. West, III, *The Making of This Side of Paradise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 10.

7. Curnutt, "Age Consciousness," 42.
8. West, *Making*, 33.
9. Kramer, *College Novel*, 26.
10. Curnutt, "Age Consciousness," 42.
11. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 19.
12. Gene D. Phillips, *Fiction, Film, and F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986), 85.
13. Curnutt, "Age Consciousness," 42-43.
14. Curnutt's article is a good starting point for connecting ideas of infantile sexuality and the childlike sexual aesthetic of the flapper, dovetailing with Freud's notions of prepubescent and infantile sexual consciousness.
15. Kendall Taylor, *Sometimes Madness Is Wisdom: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald: A Marriage* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), 10.
16. Philips, *Fiction, Film*, 83.
17. Dorothy Ballweg Good, "'A Romance and a Reading List': The Literary References in *This Side of Paradise*," in *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1976*, 36.
18. Good, "Literary References," 37.
19. Sergio Perosa, *The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, trans. Charles Matz and Sergio Perosa (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 1-2. Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 12.

20. Philips, *Fiction, Film*, 83.
21. Mizener, *Far Side*, 21.
22. Scott Donaldson, *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Congdon, 1983), 18.
23. Henry Dan Piper, "Fitzgerald's Cult of Disillusion," *American Quarterly* 3.1 (1951), 73.
24. West, *Making*, 3.
25. West, *Making* 5.
26. Piper, "Cult of Disillusion," 73.
27. Andrew Turnbull, ed. *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Scribner, 1963), 462.
28. Mizener, *Far Side*, 43.
29. Mizener, *Far Side*, 47.
30. *Letters*, 462.
31. Philips, *Fiction, Film*, 85. Mizener, *Far Side*, 355. Perhaps Fitzgerald had seen something worrisome regarding the upcoming season: fresh off a 5-2-1 season at Fitzgerald's death, the team would follow with a 2-6, the worst of coach Tad Wieman's Princeton tenure.
32. West, *Making*, 3.
33. West, *Making*, 5. It is worth noting at some point, this as good as any other, that, while "the distinction between 'egoist' and 'egotist' has become blurred today, [. . .] in

Fitzgerald's time an 'egoist' was a confident, self-assured person, while an 'egotist' was a conceited, boastful talker." West, *Making*, 9.

34. West, *Making*, 5.

35. West, *Making*, 26.

36. Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights: The Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 68.

37. Palms, it has been suggested by West and others, was himself named for Stephen Fane, the protagonist of Compton MacKenzie's *Sinister Street*, to which Fitzgerald acknowledged a debt. It is also worth noting that Thayer Darcy at one point refers to his belief that he and Amory share a common ancestor: "Stephen was his name, I think." F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (New York: Scribner's, 1995), 162. All subsequent references from the novel come from this edition and will be acknowledged, where appropriate, in-text.

38. Jack Hendricksen, *This Side of Paradise as a Bildungsroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 1.

39. Mizener, *Far Side*, 93.

40. Mizener, *Far Side*, 93.

41. Mizener, *Far Side*, 283.

42. Matthew J. Bruccoli, preface to *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Scribner's, 1989), xiv.

43. West, *Making*, 25.

44. Mizener, *Far Side*, 95.

45. Mizener, *Far Side*, 117.

46. Mizener, *Far Side*, 118.

47. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 26.

48. *Letters*, 461-462.

49. *Letters*, 462.

50. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 40.

51. West, *Making*, 119.

52. West, *Making*, 97.

53. West, *Making*, 104.

54. "The Literary Spotlight VI: F. Scott Fitzgerald," *Bookman*, March 1922, 22. About eighteen years later, an equally important "friend," Sheila Graham, would read the novel and would simply say, "well, it isn't Dickens." Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 202.

55. Both Good's article and Lynn Haywood's note on the historical references in *Paradise* seem to indicate that the references were perfectly adequate. Lynn Haywood, "Historical Notes for *This Side of Paradise*," *Resources for American Literary Study* 10 (1980): 191-208.

56. David Castronovo, *Edmund Wilson* (New York: Ungar, 1984), 62-63.

57. Mizener, *Far Side*, 36. The Mackenzie comparison upon which Wilson relies is a dangerous one, on any account. Fitzgerald loved *Sinister Street*, and while the novels may have some affinities of philosophy and prose style, they do not share the youthful vigor or the passion for episode and pastiche that are *Paradise*'s two most distinguishing features.

58. "Literary Spotlight," 22.

59. Clinton S. Burhans, Jr. "Structure and Theme in *This Side of Paradise*," *JEGP* 68 (1969), 605.

60. Charles Scribner, III, preface to F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Vegetable* (New York: Scribner, 1976), ix.

61. The chapter devoted to *Paradise* in Eugen Huonder's *The Functional Significance of Setting in the Novels of Francis Scott Fitzgerald* begins bluntly: "*This Side of Paradise* is a *Bildungsroman*." (Bern, Switzerland: European University Papers, 1974), 21. More recently, Jack Hendricksen's *This Side of Paradise as Bildungsroman* treats the issue with a thorough comparison between *Paradise* and the form's European progenitors.

62. West, *Making*, 77, 83. Intersecting this in a roundabout way is Fitzgerald's later reference to the "modernistic buffet" in *Tender Is the Night*. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 281.

63. Mizener, *Far Side*, 22.

64. West, *Making*, 26-27.

65. *Letters*, 138.

66. Curiously, Adams would be reinserted into the Fitzgerald story by the *Dial*'s review of *The Beautiful and Damned*, which stated that parts of the novel sounded "like a résumé of *The Education of Henry Adams* filtered through a particularly thick page of *The Smart Set*." Mizener, *Far Side*, 153.

67. West, *Making*, 44.

68. Though the extent of the meeting is as yet not fully explored. One of Scott's letters to Maxwell Perkins is postscripted "Thornton Hancock is Henry Adams—I didn't do him thoroughly, of course—but I knew him when I was a boy." *Letters*, 138. Joan Allen notes that Fay and Adams were friends, bound by a mutual love of "twelfth- and thirteenth-century music." Allen, *Candles*, 37.

69. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Mariner, 2000), 83.

70. Adams, *Education*, 4.

71. Adams, *Education*, 54.

72. Jarom Lyle McDonald, *Sports, Narrative, and Nation in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 56.

73. Ernest Hemingway, *Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1981), 176.

74. Fitzgerald would explore these feelings more thoroughly in *The Beautiful and Damned* when Anthony Patch spends his wartime in the Deep South and, riding the train home, indulgently poses as a soldier returning from war. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 304.

75. James L. W. West, III, "The Question of Vocation in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*," in *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Ruth Prigozy (New York: Cambridge U P, 2007): 48-56.

76. Allen, *Candles*, 63.

77. Seitters, *Image Patterns*, 18.

78. Seitters, *Image Patterns*, 17-18.

79. See, e.g., Robert Roulston, “*This Side of Paradise*: The Ghost of Rupert Brooke,” in *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual 1975*, 124; Hoffman, “Pathological Narcissism,” 182; and Burhans, “Structure,” 622.

80. Hoffman, “Pathological Narcissism,” 182.

81. Sara Blair, “Modernism and the Politics of Culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 157.

82. Hoffman, “Pathological Narcissism,” 184.

83. Roulston, “Rupert Brooke,” 124.

84. West, *Making*, 74.

85. West, *Making*, 74.

86. Mizener, *Far Side*, 30.

87. James Axtell, *The Making of Princeton University: From Woodrow Wilson to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 48.

88. Axtell, *Making of Princeton*, 63.

89. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 287-306.

90. Axtell, *Making of Princeton*, 64.

91. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 22.

92. Mizener, *Far Side*, 35-36.

93. Philips, *Fiction, Film*, 85.

94. Huonder, *Functional Significance*, 26.

95. Mizener, *Far Side*, 35-36.
96. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 21.
97. Mizener, *Far Side*, 48.
98. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 40.
99. James Longenbach, "Modern Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge U P, 1999), 100, 101.
100. Hendricksen, *Bildungsroman*, 105.
101. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 45, 46.
102. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 61.
103. Which sounds a bit like "both subjective and objective, sir," in *Paradise*.
104. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 47-48.
105. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 91. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 203.
106. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 301.
107. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 186.
108. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 209.
109. Mizener, *Far Side*, 10-11.
110. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 208.
111. Fitzgerald, *Tender*, 117.
112. Fitzgerald, *Tender*, 138.

113. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 21.
114. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 162.
115. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 6.
116. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 199.
117. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 6.
118. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 33.
119. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Vegetable* (New York: Scribner, 1976), 50.
120. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 154.
121. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Signet, 1981), 253.
122. Perosa, *Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 17-18. Trotter, "Modernist Novel," 80.
123. Though he was not above poking fun at these luminaries. See, e.g., "the love song of an ear, nose, and throat specialist." Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 222.
124. David Trotter, "The Modernist Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge U P, 1999), 80.
125. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Rich Boy," in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A New Collection*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Scriber, 1989), 318.
126. Fitzgerald, *Tender*, 260.
127. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 81.
128. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 82.

129. “Know what your duty is / and do it without hesitation. / For a warrior, there is nothing better / than a battle that duty enjoins.” *Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harmony, 2000), 51.

130. Michael Bell, “The Metaphysics of Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

131. Mizener, *Far Side*, 151.

132. The attitude toward Darcy, his longtime mentor is surprisingly harsh:

And Monsignor, upon whom a cardinal rested, had moments of strange and horrible insecurity—inexplicable in a religion that explained even disbelief in terms of its own faith: if you doubted the devil it was the devil that made you doubt him. Amory had seen Monsignor go to the houses of stolid philistines, read popular novels furiously, saturate himself in routine, to escape from that horror.
(267)

133. Allen, *Candles*, 63.

134. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 231.

135. Catherine B. Burroughs, “Of ‘Sheer Being’: Fitzgerald’s Aesthetic Typology and the Burden of Transcription,” *Modern Language Studies* 22.1 (1992), 104.

136. Roulston, “Rupert Brooke,” 128.

137. Trotter, “Modernist Novel,” 117.

138. Hendricksen, *Bildungsroman*, 110.

139. Mary Gordon, introduction to *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1991), xvii.

140. West, *Making*, 77, 83.

141. Mizener, *Far Side*, 151.

142. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 37-38, 74, 110.

143. Fitzgerald, *Tender*, 159.

144. Bell, "Metaphysics," 10.

145. Burroughs, "Sheer Being," 105.

146. An inverse justification could be drawn from David Trotter's statement concerning Dowell, the protagonist of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, whose "ability to tell a straight story is an aspect of his inability to know and be himself." If a neat narrative is part and parcel to the disingenuous solipsist, then the "casserole" might be indicative of one who is looking deeply and honestly into himself. Trotter, "Modernist Novel," 71.

147. This is not to draw a direct line between the two, though Emerson does make infrequent appearances in Fitzgerald's fiction. In *Paradise*, he's one of the "remarkable looking" celebrities, and when Stahr and Kathleen walk the beach in *The Last Tycoon*, the Negro philosopher carries Emerson in his shirt. Fitzgerald, *Last Tycoon*, 93.

148. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature: A Facsimile of the First Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 84.

149. Piper, "Cult of Disillusion," 74-75.

150. Sy Kahn, "This Side of Paradise: The Pageantry of Disillusion," *Midwest Quarterly* 7 (1966), 183.
151. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 3.
152. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 351.
153. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 270.
154. Donaldson, *Fool for Love*, 25.
155. Henry Dan Piper, "Frank Norris and Scott Fitzgerald," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 19.4 (1956), 396.
156. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 339.
157. In addition to the aforementioned reference to *Paradise* in *The Beautiful and Damned*, there is also the recurring fictional film studio, Films Par Excellence, in Both *Beautiful* and *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald, *Beautiful and Damned*, 110. Fitzgerald, *Gatsby*, 62.
158. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 20.
159. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 63.
160. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 87.
161. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 289.
162. Adams, *Education*, 65.
163. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 451.
164. Adams, *Education* 55.
165. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 467.

166. Northrop Frye, excerpt from *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 6.

167. Mizener, *Far Side*, 117.

Chapter Three

1. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 204.

2. Saul Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 15.

3. James Atlas, *Bellow, a Biography* (New York: Random House, 2000), 392.

4. Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 54.

5. Ben Siegel, "Saul Bellow and the University as Villain," in *The American Writer and the University* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 114.

6. For example, the passages in and around which he is described not a "campus rebel encouraging revolutionary behavior." Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein* (New York: Viking, 2000), 19-20.

7. Atlas, *Bellow*, 227, 302, 565.

8. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 124.

9. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 124.

10. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 126.

11. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 123.
12. Atlas, *Bellow*, 464.
13. Strangely, Ramona, in claiming not to be an academic, uses academic lingo to express herself. Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 166.
14. Sanford Pinsker, "Saul Bellow in the Classroom," *College English* 34 (1973), 975-82, reprinted in Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel, eds., *Conversations with Saul Bellow* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 98.
15. Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift* (New York, Penguin, 2008), 32.
16. Bellow, *Herzog*, 342.
17. Robert R. Dutton, *Saul Bellow* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 123.
18. Sinclair was lionized in Bellow's political circles during the author's youth (*The Jungle*, of course, was required reading), and Bellow would later praise Sinclair alongside Dreiser, Anderson, Zola, and Dickens for addressing "grand issues of social justice and political concern," what Bellow would occasionally, perhaps selectively, deem the core mission of literature. Atlas, *Bellow*, 448.
19. Qtd. in Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 402.
20. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 125.
21. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 123.
22. Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 12.
23. Atlas, *Bellow*, 322.

24. Atlas, *Bellow*, 227.
25. Atlas, *Bellow*, 356.
26. Siegel, "Saul Bellow," 115.
27. Atlas, *Bellow*, 355-356.
28. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 14-15.
29. Atlas, *Bellow*, 375.
30. Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 18.
31. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 367.
32. Atlas, *Bellow*, 376.
33. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 19-20.
34. The affinities were so thorough that one reviewer of *The Closing of the American Mind*, Robert Paul Wolff, posited that *Closing* was actually a novel by Bellow, and the "author," Bloom, was merely a character. Robert Paul Wolff, review of *The Closing of the American Mind*, reprinted in *Essays on The Closing of the American Mind*, ed. Robert L. Stone (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1989): 18-21.
35. Atlas, *Bellow*, 150. Atlas's phrase, there, refers to Bloom's sexuality and Bellow's general unease with homosexuality. Still, the circumstances are parallel.
36. Atlas, *Bellow*, 355-356.
37. Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 15.

38. Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 15. Bellow made a similar proclamation in his Nobel acceptance speech:

I was a very contrary undergraduate more than forty years ago. It was my habit to register for a course and then to do most of my reading in another field of study, so that when I should have been grinding away at “Money and Banking” I was reading the novels of Joseph Conrad.

Dutton, *Saul Bellow*, 5.

39. Atlas, *Bellow*, 57.

40. Saul Bellow, *The Dean's December* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 178. All subsequent references from the novel come from this edition and will be acknowledged, where appropriate, in-text.

41. Bellow, *Sammler*, 35.

42. Michael K. Glenday, *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 94.

43. Bellow, *Sammler*, 84.

44. Bellow, *Sammler*, 175.

45. Pinsker, “Saul Bellow in the Classroom,” 94.

46. Walt Whitman, “Banner at Daybreak,” *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 420-26.

47. Bellow, foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, 15.

48. Bellow, *Sammler*, 216.

49. Bellow, *Herzog*, 296.

50. Atlas, *Bellow*, 436.

51. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 19.

52. Saul Bellow, *Henderson, the Rain King* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 244.

53. Bellow, *Herzog*, 32.

54. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 89.

55. Atlas, *Bellow*, 39.

56. Atlas, *Bellow*, 534.

57. Rudolph, *American College and University*, 324.

58. Bellow, *Herzog*, 73.

59. Spangler is likely some reference to Oswald Spengler, whom Bellow counted as a formative influence. The implication is distant, though; just as Spangler represents an alternate reality, in terms of career path, for Corde, the frustration extends to Spengler's theories about Jews and Bellow's having been "deeply wounded" by learning that he was "by heredity disqualified" from the civilization of which he so wanted to be a part. It is a parallel of expectation, segregation, and disappointment. Atlas, *Bellow*, 25.

60. Atlas, *Bellow*, 498.

61. Atlas, *Bellow*, 376.

62. Glenday, *Decline of Humanism*, 16.

63. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 141.

64. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 142.

65. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 164.

66. Bellow, *The Dean's December*, 173; *Ravelstein*, 13. The Guernica reference in *Ravelstein* is perhaps tenuous in this regard, but there is a case to be made. Here, it is Picasso's rendition of the event that appears when Ravelstein "laugh[s] like Picasso's wounded horse in *Guernica*, rearing back." But these are the closing words of the opening scene in which Ravelstein has provided Chick with a ten-cent survey of twentieth century history and economics. Hence, Guernica serves as a subtle form of punctuation to the lecture (and a catalyst for its subject).

67. Bellow, *Ravelstein*, 173.

68. Glenday, *Decline of Humanism*, 144-145.

Chapter Four

1. William T. Braithwaite, "Mr. Bloom and His Critics: What Could It All Mean?," in *Essays on The Closing of the American Mind*, ed. Robert L. Stone (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1989), 375.

2. Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 364.

3. McGurl, *Program Era*, 24.

4. Michael Chabon, *Manhood for Amateurs* (New York: Harper, 2009), 231.

5. Michael Chabon, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 10-11.
6. Chabon, *Mysteries*, 166.
7. Chabon, *Mysteries*, 297.
8. Chabon, *Manhood*, 231-232.
9. Scott Tobias, "An Interview with Michael Chabon," *The Onion* 36, no. 42 (2000), archived at <http://www.mcsweeneys.net/authorpages/chabon/chabon8.html> (accessed August 26, 2010).
10. Chabon, *Manhood*, 199.
11. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 66.
12. Saul Bellow, *Ravelstein* (New York: Viking, 2000), 19-20.
13. McGurl, *Program Era*, 6.
14. Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2* (New York: Farrar, 1995), 24.
15. McGurl, *Program Era*, 27.
16. McGurl, *Program Era*, 20.
17. McGurl, *Program Era*, xi.
18. McGurl, *Program Era*, 16.
19. McGurl, *Program Era*, xi.
20. McGurl, *Program Era*, 362-363.

21. McGurl, *Program Era*, 16.

22. Michael Chabon, *Wonder Boys* (New York: Random House, 2008), 231. All subsequent references from this novel come from this edition and will be acknowledged, where appropriate, in-text.

23. Tripp would elsewhere refer to the Wonders as his “family.” Chabon, *Wonder Boys*, 203. See also, generally, Marthe Robert, *Roman des origins et origins du roman* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972).

24. It is perhaps worth noting (and perhaps not) that John Collier never attended a university and contributed to many screenplays, including *The African Queen* and *I Am a Camera* (film version of Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*).

25. McGurl, *Program Era*, 198.

26. Chabon’s recent novella, *The Final Solution*, is, incidentally, about Sherlock Holmes, age 89, during the Second World War.

27. Again it is perhaps worth nothing (and again perhaps not) that the two never did a film together (but were both featured in the 1998 Academy Awards ceremony).

28. And, for a further reference point, whatever it might be worth, Emily’s father Irv makes reference to Frank Capra dying “last fall,” which puts the action of the novel in winter ‘91/’92 or the winter of ‘92/’93 (184). Note, also, that director Curtis Hanson, in the DVD commentary for the film version of *Wonder Boys*, incorrectly states that Chabon neglected to specify at which Pittsburgh college the narrative takes place; hence the filmmaker’s decision to film at the perhaps more visually stunning Carnegie-Mellon.

29. Of course, Chabon would be the last to consign such to a lower station: not only was his Pulitzer novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, about comic book authors, he was also the co-author of the screenplay to the comic book film *Spider-Man 2* (incidentally, the best film in the series so far), pitched a spec script for *X-Men*, and is admittedly a lifelong comic book fan.

30. Chabon has made note of the caverns in his own fiction:

All of those activities, it seems to me now, helped form the basis for my life as a writer, a denizen of the basement of my soul. I suppose it is no accident that basements, hidden lairs, and underground settings have featured so routinely in my fiction: the gang rape of Happy the collie in the basement of the Bellwethers' house in *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, the macabre hideout of James Leer in *Wonder Boys*, the numerous hiding places and fortresses of solitude in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, the mysterious subterranean Untershtot of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, accessible by hole from the archetypal basement of the Hotel Zamenhof.

Manhood, 209.

31. Chabon might well have had his own first novel in mind. In fact, the opening of *The Love Parade* ("On Friday afternoon his daddy handed him a hundred wrinkled one dollar bills and told him to buy himself a sportjacket for the Homecoming Dance. He rode the Greyhound over to Wilkes-Barre and spent the money on a pretty chrome gun") and of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* ("At the beginning of the summer I had lunch with my father, the gangster, who was

in town for the weekend to transact some of his vague business”) sound familiar: father, son, and “vague” but dangerous business.

32. *The Love Parade* (1929), starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald, is commonly touted as the first true movie musical—i. e., the first to integrate speech with musical numbers that meaningfully move the plot forward. It bears little resemblance to either Leer’s *The Love Parade* or Chabon’s *Wonder Boys* except that all three entail minor, fairly outlandish plots involving pistols. The film also includes singing dogs, though there is unlikely a reference in the ill-fated Doctor Dee.

33. A bit at odds with Emerson’s assertion that “every materialist will be an idealist; but an idealist can never go backward to be a materialist.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Transcendentalist,” in *Emerson’s Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 94.

34. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Mariner, 2000), 78.

35. Emerson, “American Scholar,” 62.

36. McGurl, *Program Era*, 410.

37. Theodore Weiss, “A Personal View: Poetry, Pedagogy, Per-versities,” in *The American Writer and the University* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 158.

38. Ben Siegel, “Poets, Novelists, and Professors—A Bittersweet Mix,” in *The American Writer and the University* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 9.

Chapter Five

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Method of Nature," in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 82.
2. Stanley Trachtenberg, "Desire, Hypocrisy, and Ambition in Academe: Joyce Carol Oates's *Hungry Ghosts*," in *The American Writer and the University* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 40.
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare, or the Poet," in *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001), 256.
4. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12.
5. Frank Donoghue, "Can the Humanities Survive the 21st Century?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 5, 2010, archived at <http://chronicle.com/article/Can-the-Humanities-Survive-the/124222> (accessed November 8, 2010).
6. Graff, *Professing Literature*, 12.
7. Richard Weisberg, *Poethics: And Other Strategies of Law and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
8. Bloom, *Closing*, 298.
9. Erich Fromm, "Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem," *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 18.
10. Here I am, admittedly at my own convenience, sidestepping the ironical gist of Gilbert Ryle's celebrated phrase.

11. Billy Collins, “The Effort,” *Ballistics: Poems* (New York: Random House, 2008), 60.