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Loneliness in the Gold: The American Campus Novel and the Corporatization of the University

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LONELINESS IN THE GOLD: THE AMERICAN CAMPUS NOVEL AND THE

CORPORATIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Loneliness in the Gold: The American Campus Novel and the Corporatization of the University

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This project studies the patterns of two parallel narratives (traditional vs. marginalized student perspectives) in the literary genre of campus novels in three representative periods over the 20th Century to understand how shifts in higher education over that time period have affected American academics and culture and how students' experiences in higher education, as a rite of passage into society, have also shifted. Using campus novels of both the master narrative and of marginalized cultures and in applying the theorists of Critical University Studies, this project presents the major changes in academia over the 20th century through the scope of literary study, thereby correlating the production and interpretation of the American campus novel with the particular, dynamic experiences of students.

The project makes use of three distinct eras of higher education in The United States during the 20th century, as posited by Critical University Studies Theorists: The Pre-Golden Age (1900-1945), the Golden Age (1945-1975), and the Post-Golden Age (1975-present). Critical University Theorists are central to this portion of the discussion and include: Bill Readings, Jeffrey J. Williams, Christopher Newfield, Marc Bousquet, and Henry A. Giroux.

Campus novels are essential to this study as they allegorically illustrate the experience of the student while attending college. The shifts in higher education over the 20th century are emphasized in the experiences of the protagonist students and can be shown to affect their passage into the post-collegiate world. Therefore, performing a close study of a range of texts

from throughout the century, split between the two parallel narratives, gives a clear picture of the correlation between the shifting eras of the 20th century and student experiences. Literary authors include: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ralph Ellison, Shirley Jackson, and others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL UNIVERSITY STUDY OF THE

CAMPUS NOVEL IN THREE HISTORICAL PHASES

The changes in U.S. higher education during the 20th century reflect dynamic ideological

and economic shifts that altered the function, mission, and identity of higher education. These

changes have accelerated in the 21st century, especially under the neoliberal regime of

privatization, defunding of public education at all levels, and the commodification of nearly

every facet of the university. Many studies have now documented these changes, especially the

work of the growing body of scholars contributing to what has been called "critical university

studies" (CUS)[1]. Many of these socio-historical studies have analyzed the effect these

institutional changes have had on student life (see Armstrong and Hamilton; Bousquet; Rose;

etc.), but there have been very few studies that draw on literary representations of the college

experience, especially in correlation with the structural changes in higher education.

This dissertation aims to correct that neglect by offering a materialist study of how and to

what extent the geopolitical economy affects and is affected by the literary genre of campus

novels in three representative periods over the 20th Century. Throughout the study, I have tried to

pay particular attention not only to the experiences of mainstream, dominant, white males but

also to the marginalized "others," those students who rarely even show up as characters in most

of the academic novels prior to World War II. Secondly, I have provided a strategic focus for this

analysis by attending to one of the most recurring features of campus novels: as many critics

have pointed out, most campus novel representations of student experiences typically conceive

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[1] See, for example, C. Newfield's two books, *Unmaking the Public University*, and more recently, *The Great Mistake*; Slaughter and Leslie's *Academic Capitalism*; Bousquet's *How the University Works*; Henry Giroux, *The University in Chains*; Jeffrey Williams's "The Post-Welfare University," among many others.

of their individual experiences as a rite of passage into adult society. This theme is, of course, to be expected given that most college students are in the 18-22 year-old period when they are making the transition to adulthood. Many factors contribute to student experience and without question many of these factors only indirectly relate to the geopolitical economy. Thus, we would expect students to have tensions from their early childhood, their family experiences, adolescent and young adult sexual experiences, religious issues, and many other forces. Nevertheless, their rite of passage also directly and indirectly reflects, resists, relates to, or yields to socioeconomic forces, often in complex ways interdependent with the other factors. I have chosen throughout to emphasize the material, socioeconomic dimension, consistent with my thematic focus. I, therefore, draw on the empirical, sociological and historical work of many CUS writers who have provided detailed analyses of how the wide-ranging effects of the capitalist world system impact higher education, but none of it focuses on literary texts as I do. By focusing on the well-recognized pattern of the rite of passage, I can, therefore, relate the broad geopolitical economy to the individual experiences of the students.

At the end of the 20th century, and now into the 21st, there were and are significant debates as to what colleges are and should be, what benefits students truly get from engaging with the rigors of study, what the relationship to the corporate, capitalistic economy serves in engaging with college campuses, and if the fluidity with which higher education flexes to meet the demands of contemporary society violates its supposed epistemological orientation.

Despite the profundity of discourse aligned with these essential debates, there is a significant gap in scholarship that could help to better illustrate the function of higher education as the 20th century progressed. A comprehension of the student experience in relation to the pedagogical construct of the American college and its sociocultural importance must be

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understood in order to gauge the paramountcy of higher education and the potential problematic contemporary constructs that may threaten not just how college is perceived, but its sincere correlation to democratic ideals and self-development. Specifically, a critical analysis of American literature over the course of the century can act as a barometer by which the student's experience is viewed in relation to the changes in higher education. Literature has the essential, duel-purpose of representing an artistic—and thus, cultural—artefactual integrity that can be used to plot the plasticity of societal changes over a large period of time and also it can act as a social critique aimed at problematizing how subjective endeavors harm society at large.

This study is necessary not only because it provides an archival study of a range of texts to comprehend larger systems and structures but that it is, at its core, a criticism of practices that disenfranchise higher education itself. Pedagogically, this study serves the classroom directly. Professors interested in and perhaps wary of the corporate changes in higher education can learn about the student's experience and needs in a rapidly changing academic climate. Though the corporate changes of the Post-Golden Age have been around for over thirty years, there may be a widening disconnect between the professor in their professional duties and the student experience, which has perhaps changed since the professor's time in college. Professors and scholars can also hope to locate the pressures on higher education wrought from a capitalistic system, including how students choose majors, the preference for STEM fields over the Humanities (in economic consciousness), and working students facing extreme debt, which forces them to prioritize capital gain over study. For CUS theorists, illustrating the detrimental effects of corporate ideology on higher education can act as ammunition toward public awareness in their calls for restructuring and refunding.

It is essential not to ignore the primary focus of this study: students. In the classroom, professors can help students understand the myriad and complex systems that have led to their present state of learned helplessness in the face of overwhelming debt and narrowed academic choices based strictly on vocational needs. "Teaching the University," as Williams refers to it, assists students in comprehending their own relationship to higher education. In studying campus novels and academic novels, students can establish an anchor to their own experience and become more cerebral and metacognitive in their education in addition to recognizing how society demands they make educational decisions consistent with financial concerns. Williams concludes, "[Students] are not only the subject of higher education but will soon be our citizenry, so they might more knowledgeably decide what systems they want, how it might promote an enhanced public life, and how it might contribute to the flourishing of those who pass through its classrooms" ("Deconstructing").

The project will chronologically focus on three distinct eras of higher education in the United States during the 20th century, as posited by Critical University Studies theorists: The Pre-Golden Age (1900-1945), The Golden Age (1945-1975), and the Post-Golden Age (1975-present). The pre-Golden Age of higher education sustained many of the oppressive standards and structures of American society at the time. Colleges were largely exclusive and only offered matriculation to white men from socioeconomically stable backgrounds. As such, the literature that does focus on higher education of this era rarely focuses on the socioeconomic role of higher education, so I often have to selectively attend to details ignored by most critical interpretations of these works. The Golden Age of higher education, so named by John Thelin, was a period of expansion in the United States, when a proliferation in public funding resulted in the opening of more schools and higher population enrollments. Finally, the Post-Golden Age takes shape as a

dramatic period of constriction, the defunding of public higher education, and privatization all

around: yet despite these constrictions, student populations continued to expand dramatically

from about 12 million students in 1980 to more than 20 million today. In the last thirty years, the

public defunding has resulted in dramatic increases in student tuition and student debt. Campus

novels are essential to this study as they often render in rich detail the experience of the student

while attending college. The shifts in higher education over the 20th century are emphasized in

the experiences of the protagonist students and can be shown to affect their passage into the post-

collegiate world. Understanding the nuances of the collegiate experience between traditional and

marginalized peoples helps to pinpoint cultural shifts in education for specific demographics;

and, as higher education has become over the 20th century an increasingly foundational

institution in American culture, the divide in the diverse experiences of different students posits a

deeper ideological divide of fairness and equal opportunity in American culture.

The Campus Novel and Oppositional Narratives

To begin, we must define the genre of campus novels, locate the campus novel in its

broader socio-historic context, and relate it to the scholarly approaches of CUS and literary

theory. I share Jeffrey J. Williams's assumption in his article "The Rise of the Academic Novel"

that, "Contrary to the image of its being an elite experience, college has become mass culture,

and the proliferation of both campus and academic novels…obviously responds to the greater

centrality of higher education in American life" (577).

Williams posits that campus novels are novels that feature students as protagonists where

the narrative is primarily focused on the student's interaction with higher education. This

disqualifies novels that feature students, or feature a campus as a setting, but are not interested in

the specific relationship between student, college, and society. For contrast, a more popular—

and more studied—genre to the campus novel would be its cousin, the "academic" novel, which focuses mostly on professors and administrators in higher education. Though this genre is more popular culturally (that is, they sell more books, are more frequently made into films, are given more scholarly attention, etc.) the absence of a deep critical study of campus novels makes it necessary to consider the experience of the student, who is, theoretically (or should be), the primary element of the university's focus. The shifts in higher education over the 20th century are emphasized in the experiences of the protagonist students and can be shown to affect their passage into the post-collegiate world. Campus novels, then, are, along with the sociological data and historical analyses of the CUS theorists, some of the most viable artifacts for understanding the changes in higher education over the 20th century and to gauge their effects— for better or worse—on students, faculty, and society.

It is not surprising that campus novels are not given as much attention as academic novels; scholars are often focused on their particular station, which would explain why academic novels are both more popular for study and given more critical thought. This results in the experience of the student as being secondary to the academic focus of literature. However, the expansion of the discourse to focus on campus novels is particularly useful because it works well with CUS theorists and their primary motivation: the disenfranchisement of students through the relentless commodification of higher education, especially during the third or Post-Golden Age Era. Campus novels are extraordinarily important to pinpoint how American novelists interact with the culture of academia as it changed over the century. And again, in connecting this to the idea of education being a rite of passage, plotting the experience of students over the century through the texts is essentially new to the discipline. Williams affirms the connection between the genre and its sociocultural context, "Rather than an asylum, the university was assumed to be

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a main battlefield of American culture, and the academic novel became a kind of roman à clef of current cultural politics" ("Rise" 570). Joining this assumption about the academic novel, the campus novel works similarly, acting as a bildungsroman for students as they negotiate American culture.

There are some significant commonalities among many campus novels of the 20th century. Campus novels are often less curricularly-focused in favor of using social advancement as the student's primary locus of attention.   Interestingly, although campus novels mostly occur on campuses, they very seldom feature classroom scenes. Heavily reliant on dorm/fraternity settings, the campus grounds, a professor's office, a football stadium, and various other social settings, the novels tend to ignore the literal, curricular education of the student. Williams confirms, "Most academic [and campus] novels depict academe in terms of social entanglements rather than intellectual conversation" ("Rise" 574). There are a number of pragmatic reasons for this phenomenon: curricular knowledge can be seen as esoteric and misaligned with the thrust of the plot, a focus on lectures does not drive literary narrative, such highbrow discourse could ostracize an uneducated reading public, and/or classroom scenes are not consistent with the criticisms the authors are trying to make. However, I argue that the more crucial reason classroom scenes are often omitted from campus novels is because the authors of such novels identify the value of college more in terms of the social and economic rites of passage than in its intellectual benefits. Theoretically, a student learns their vocational knowledge primarily in the classroom, whereas the personal and social growth and social responsibility occur outside the class. Of course, a student develops self-growth and social responsibility in class and can learn about the specifics of an industry through social relationships extra-curricularly, but it seems the authors of these novels locate the catalyst to the student's evolution outside of the classroom,

perhaps suggesting that it is the extra-curricular aspect to college that is more valuable to the student.

Interestingly, in many campus novels, the professors are often antagonists and impediments to the student's achievement of their social passage. Students often operate antithetically to their instructors in the narratives. As will be seen in some books, professors act as central obstructions in the progress of the student, as in *The Tangerine Tango Equation*, where a professor steals his student's ideas for his own careerist purposes. In other instances, the opposition between professor and student is less direct and nefarious, but still is counted—in the mind of the student—as counterintuitive to the student's advancement. Though it may at first seem as if this antagonism represents a schism between student and professor—acolyte and master—, and that authors of campus novels view professors as foes in restricting a student's rite of passage, a cursory analysis of this may prove superficial. In other words, professors willfully place obstacles in the way of the student to inspire their rigor in completing their tasks, ultimately achieving what this level of education proffers. In a number of the novels, this becomes clear to the student protagonist by the narrative's end.

Another commonality in campus novels is a recurrent theme of isolation. In the bildungsroman sense, the student is forced to find their own way in a complex machine (academia) that will only lead them to a more complex machine (society). The prospect is often frustrating and frightening for student protagonists, which results in a secluded sort of identity for the characters. The student has—often—left the relatively safe and comfortable confines of their known world to venture to academia, where they encounter a host of circumstances beyond their experience. In doing so, they are vulnerable to the hardships that arise from the impending confusion, which results in an isolated mentality. In *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and*

Achievements of America's Underprepared, Mike Rose discusses how alien college can seem to a newly-matriculated student: "The discourse of academics is marked by terms and expressions that represent an elaborate set of shared concepts and orientations…This language weaves through so many lectures and textbooks, is integral to so many learned discussions, that it's easy to forget what a foreign language it can be" (192). By virtue of this foreignness, the student can often feel detached from the rest of the college community.

Similarly, the college itself is often isolated, at least seemingly (students are often not aware of the complex economic relationship between higher education and the rest of society). Colleges have their own rules, structures, hierarchies, etiquettes, and idiosyncrasies that can seem impenetrable at the beginning of one's education. To the student, the college can seem cordoned off from the rest of society; in campus novels, this is often depicted in the boundaries of the college being often impermeable. In fact, when a student *does* venture beyond the college grounds, they become vulnerable to an array of troubles—even violence—which suggests the isolation of the college in the novels is central to it being a vehicle for the student's evolution. There is a recurring sense of exclusivity in campus novels from the rest of society that very closely parallels the genuine exclusivity of college communities. Because many colleges are selective about their students, often charge tuitions that make college less accessible to all, and offer a curriculum that can be deemed esoteric and remote to the uneducated person; the campus becomes a place apart from the communities that surround it. As a result of the 1862 Morrill Act, public universities developed in non-urban areas throughout the country, often isolating them geographically. Furthermore, in *Inside the Teaching Machine: Rhetoric and the Globalization of the U.S. Public Research University*, Critical University Studies theorist Catherine Chaput—often antagonistic to what she calls a false "nostalgia" for colleges beyond

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their economic ties—argues that in the early 20th century, localized knowledge production "was no longer tenable within large, dense, and heterogeneous city populations. The research university solved this problem by supplying a new space from which to create and disseminate knowledge" (42). This new space was often in places that allowed the college to exist in its own geographic vacuum. Of course, this is an incomplete view of the college's relationship to society, but in campus novels, the theme of isolation is important to the construct of the narrative and represents the isolation the student feels.

Another prototypical motif of campus novels is the schism between the student's expectations of college and the reality of the college experience. Often, the student has a romantic, idealistic interpretation of college life prior to enrolling. This is frequently defeated when the student arrives at college to find the experience inconsistent with the fantasy. This mirrors the student's supposition of what the world after college will be like (often, in terms of the working world), which is often depicted in contrast to the realities of life after graduation. Authors of campus novels seem to create this redundancy because of the legitimate discord between what college supposes to promise students (at least in social ideology) versus the prospects students have upon completion of their academic work. In other words, the passage into society with the boon of education may have had intellectual and social benefits, but the economic realities of the world often lead to tension in the student's expectation. As suggested before, this results from an increased corporatization of higher education; and though traces of this can be seen in campus novels from the early part of the century, the anxiety proliferates as the century progresses when privatization and corporate/academic relationships become even more common and necessary to the survival of higher education.

As a result, campus novels are often suspicious of higher education as a means of transition. This does not mean that higher education does not in fact provide a rite of passage for the student into society, just that, in the perspective of campus novels, the suspicion of higher education to that social end is blunted by the challenges students face both in the general aspects of matriculation as well as in the increasingly privatized university during the Post-Golden Age period. Student protagonists are often jaded and cynical, perhaps in accordance with the authors' blasé attitudes toward college. Though providing the setting for their fiction, the college is treated often as an adversary by the authors. But the sardonic treatment of the college seems far more complex than simply suggesting the authors are frustrated with their own college experience and so depict colleges as antagonistic. Indeed, in the very same novels that illustrate the college as problematic, there are often images that suggest a profound nostalgia and fondness for the college experience. Therefore, it is safe to assume that how the college is depicted—which *does* change dramatically from the Pre- to the Post-Golden Era, often in satire—is intrinsically related to the changing experiences of students in academia as well as the changing culture of America that affects how colleges operate.

Finally, in further distancing campus and academic novels, the former often avoid the pedantry and careerism of the latter, as the focus is on students rather than professors. Therefore, pedagogy is important, even if seldom depicted in the classroom. But pedagogy itself seems to have an unsteady foothold in academia in the early part of the last century; as the century progressed, the student's anxieties wrought from a diminishing focus on pedagogy reflect the increasing corporatization of higher education. Dan Clawson and Max Page, in their text *The Future of Higher Education,* suggest, "In this business model, students are the customers" (18). In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings offers a further critique: "Educated properly, the

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subject learns the rules of thought, not a content of positive knowledge" (67). The implication

here is that the student is *not always* being educated properly, that they are often being fashioned

into market-focused subjects vulnerable to the whims of corporate industry.

Academia has never been immune to the biases of instutionalized racism, patriarchy,

classism, etc.; in recognizing these issues as directly influential to both a student's success and

passage into society, a clearer picture of the value of higher education as the 20th century

progressed surfaces. We can then track the changes, access, and rite of passage benefits of

college by looking at two groupings of campus novels: traditionally hegemonic narratives (male,

wealthy, Caucasian) and narratives from typically marginalized cultures (women, those living in

poverty, ethnic minorities, etc.) in contrast to one another. Of course, this diversity is much

easier to track in the most recent period, so it takes some selective attention to details often over-

looked into order to find marginalized experiences in the early 20th century. Frankly, it can be

argued that clumping all of these "typically marginalized" cultures together and in opposition to

"traditionally hegemonic" characters reduces the idiosyncrasies of each individual subset.

Indeed, further study could venture to examine the particularities of the woman's experience in

college, or the LGBTQ person's experience in college, or the college experience of a person

living in poverty—although these kinds of focus are much more likely in the more recent period.

These two experiential foci will illustrate the variance of experience between the two

groups and will better emphasize how the increasing corporatization of higher education has

dissimilar effects on different demographic groups. Writing during the contemporary period,

Rose suggests, "Nothing is more exclusive than the academic club: its language is highbrow, it

has fancy badges, and it worships tradition" (*Lives* 58). He goes on to say, "The more I come to

understand about education, the more I've come to believe in the power of invitation" (*Lives*

132). This language suggests that access to higher education has historically been tenuous for marginalized groups, although the demographics of higher education changed dramatically after World War II. But despite these changes, academic curricula remain primarily designed to serve the interests of the ruling classes in the United States. Even though multiculturalism and diversity have been written into most university mission statements in recent years, the dominant curricular design creates a system wherein minority students are often disenfranchised even before matriculating into higher education, resulting in both academic and psychological disadvantages for students attempting to participate in the rite of passage. Rose sees, as epidemic, how the assessment of a student's knowledge in class (grading) and the disproportionate results in student success is popularly located in the faults of the student rather than in the prejudices of the system:

> We seem to have a need as a society to explain poor performance by reaching deep into the basic stuff of those designated as other: into their souls, or into the deep recesses of their minds, or into the very ligature of their language. It seems harder for us to keep focus on the politics and sociology of intellectual failure, to keep before our eyes the negative power of the unfamiliar, the way information poverty constrains performance, the effect of despair on cognition. (222)

Campus novels featuring student protagonists from traditionally hegemonic cultures tend to represent hierarchal impressions of the American ideal. Laced within these narratives are themes of self-development, autonomy, "boot-strap" determination, and the sense that hard work will help the student prevail against any adversary. Especially during the Pre-Golden Era, the protagonist must fit certain criteria: they must be Caucasian, male, and financially stable (most are affluent but the central concern is that money is not—at least at first—a detriment to the

student). They are often Christian, though the denomination is often unimportant, if not covert.

The motivation of these students is often about access to the world beyond college, primarily

concerning social and economic success. Interestingly—something that contrasts the typically

marginalized narrative—campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students are largely

about the personal, individual experience. The focus is seldom about greater social interests or

any metaphysical cognition; rather, the student is the center of the novel and his experiences

count for all of the narrative attention. This seems anchored to stereotypical American

ideological rhetoric: the American Dream, rugged individualism, self-determination; all things

that are often false consciousnesses to not just marginalized students but to traditional students as

well.

Such campus novels, especially those from the first period, often seem to function as

cautionary tales, teaching young readers—themselves, presumably, impending students—how to

negotiate the pitfalls and easy mistakes of their forebears while extolling the virtues of American

work ethic. They seem to instruct how to survive college but can be interpreted as allegorical, as

blueprints by which to survive life, even after graduation. The novels often feature a period of

debauchery, where the immature young man makes mistakes concerning substance abuse, sex,

cheating, and other ethical misadventures before coming to the realization that education is the

key to maturation away from these childlike faults and impulses. In these novels, the sustention

of social hierarchy is best evidenced by the dearth of discourse concerning social inequity. For

the student protagonists, privilege is a common motif; and though privilege is often

philosophically and metacognitivly present, it dodges extensive examination, especially in

contrast to less-privileged individuals. Remarkably, though the changes in higher education

provide for a similarly changing student experience with the traditionally hegemonic population, the above themes seem to often replay themselves in campus novels throughout the 20th century.

I have relied heavily on John E. Kramer's reference text, *The American College Novel, An Annotated Bibliography*, which lists and summarizes 648 campus and academic novels from the late 19th century until roughly the end of the 20th century. From this skeleton key of sorts, I have selected novels for study by acclaimed novelists as well as those whose work was never celebrated (and is, today, largely difficult to find). Doing so has put the campus novel as a genre in the larger sociocultural context in an effort to apply CUS theory as a construct by which the student protagonist experience can reveal what actual American college students face in higher education.

The Functions of the University, Critical University Studies, and the Three Historical Phases of

U.S. Higher Education

In taking a closer look at how a student's education consists of a sociocultural rite of passage, we must begin to break apart the tripartite elements of higher education that are often cached in specific disciplines and represent the paradigms by which society accepts the graduate into its ranks. Those elements include the intellectual, economic, and social functions of higher education.

The *intellectual function*, often harbored in the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences, is the core of a liberal arts curriculum. This is perhaps where scholars and professors—most commonly in the Humanities—locate higher education's mission as primarily in the individual's self-development. The intellectual function promotes in the student the essential qualities of creative, independent thought that will allow them to develop rational, contemplative reactions to the world around them. The disciplines serving this function instill in the student critical

thinking and analytical skills as well as creativity, problem-solving and abstraction, open-mindedness, and effective communication. All of these things are essential in initiating the student as an able member of society's dynamic, complicated structures. Christopher Newfield, a Critical University Studies theorist and professor, argues that the "major goal of undergraduate Humanities instruction [is] to instill a capacity for individual agency that allow[s] for self-governed human development even within complex institutions" (*Unmaking* 7). Therefore, the intellectual function of higher education acts as a rite of passage for a student to develop this— for lack of a better term—humanistic capacity. If we correctly assume that society is not autonomous from the humans that orchestrate it, then higher education's building of an intellectual human theoretically fosters a strong, equitable society.

The *economic function* of higher education is primarily a vocational one, wherein the student learns applicable skills for the acquisition of employment after graduation. In courses and disciplines where students learn specializations of a particular trade, they become equipped with a job-specific knowledge that will prepare them for working in their field of choice. This sort of technical instruction has become increasingly popular in recent times, forcing colleges (particularly community colleges) to develop vocational programs centered upon providing students with readily commodifiable skills for a presumption of present economic needs. The construct supports concrete knowledge, or, physical experimentation and training in empirical "facts." There is not much room for exploration or supposition; rather, the crux of the training is on fundamental, passed down skills.

The belief is that these sorts of skills are best served in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields (currently understood as STEM). Naturally, because of this sort of STEM-leading bias, both culturally and in regard to funding, the Humanities are disenfranchised

as not viable disciplines for job training. Readings offers, "The physical sciences may be studied for the knowledge of the life-world they give us, but the living unity of knowledge, the understanding of the place of knowledge in the world, will find its formulation in literature" (76). Of course, such a dismissal of the value of the Humanities is reductive and false (where, indeed do students learn the communication skills of reading, writing, and speech; intercultural considerations; ethics; history; etc.?), but when this sort of false consciousness becomes ideological, there are legitimate problems for Humanities disciplines, such as reduced funding and less declaration of Humanities majors in students.

For instance, in his 2013 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama declared, "We'll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers, and create classes that focus on science, technology, engineering, and math – the skills today's employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future" (6). Latent within this discourse is the implication that schools that focus on the Humanities will not be "rewarded," sustaining the current hierarchy that has marginalized the Humanities. Obama continued, "Colleges must do their part to keep costs down, and it's our job to make sure they do" (7). Again, this rhetoric ignores the reality that it is the Federal Government's suspension of financial support that has put colleges in dire straits in the first place. Further, it puts pressure on colleges to adopt business-like models because the onus has shifted from providing an education to surviving in a competitive capitalistic economy. Clawson and Page refute the college's responsibility Obama calls for: "The most important reason for rising [tuition] prices is the withdrawal of government support" (26). It seems even our politicians are caught in the popular zeitgeist of STEM over Humanities, despite their own responsibility to the system they criticize. Newfield agrees, seeing all disciplines at the university as symbiotically important: "The Humanities are vitally important

to the future of knowledge and society, and getting them back on their financial feet should be a

priority. Yet we need to think about the university as a whole as an integrated, massively

interdisciplinary site of innovation, imagination, and transformation" ("The End of the American

Funding Model" 629). Indeed, Newfield's claim affirms the connection between the intellectual

and economic functions of higher education.

The third element of higher education is the *social function*. This function provides

social benefits to the public in general. More important perhaps to the social function than the

stereotype of the valuable academic is the development of civic responsibility and equitable

philosophical democracy bolstered by a college education. Ideally, progressing through a

curriculum helps a student identify their connection to society and demands in them a meta-

cognitive recognition of how they can serve their world with what they've learned. It is a public,

social benefit, not just a private good. The inherent value of the social function is that it works in

coordination with the intellectual and economic functions; indeed, it may be the adhesive

between them, even though they are fundamentally non-market values. In other words, if a

student develops a sense of civic responsibility while aligning with a zeitgeist of democracy,

they can apply that to their self-development *and* to their employment. Fittingly, many college

mission statements reflect this social awareness. The Community College of Philadelphia's

mission statement, for example, attempts to incorporate the three aforementioned functions:

> [CCP's] programs of study in the liberal arts and sciences, career technologies,
>
> and basic academic skills provide a coherent foundation for college transfer,
>
> employment and lifelong learning. The College serves Philadelphia by preparing
>
> its students to be informed and concerned citizens, active participants in the

cultural life of the city, and enabled to meet the changing needs of business, industry and the professions. (CCP website)

Perhaps an apt metaphor to understand these three functions and their interrelation would be an engine. The intellectual function would promote the idea and development of the engine; the economic function would inspire the proper use, maintenance, and functioning of the engine; and the social function would articulate the proper ethical, democratic use of the engine as a social benefit for all. Chaput affirms the tripartite function of higher education illustrated above: "The mutually reinforcing motions of social equity and democracy suggest that public universities are designed to produce and disseminate a wide spectrum of knowledge, to teach citizenship, to provide socioeconomic mobility, and to be universally accessible to all interested students" (119).

As the 20th century progressed, there seemed to be a widening gap between the intellectual/social functions and the economic function, the latter being deemed more essential. However, if taken as a rite of passage, a focus on the economic function to the detriment of the intellectual and social functions can prove problematic both for the student and the society they will join upon graduation. Essentially, the student will have technical expertise without the theoretical or ethical background with which to apply and deploy it.

The value of studying campus novels next to this framework is that they explore these rites of passage, often criticize the emphasis on the economic function, and explore the marginalization of those for whom college is not accessible, thusly protesting an oppressive, hierarchal social structure. Interestingly, campus novels seem to have less to do with curriculum and more to do with the social aspects of college; this suggests a rejection of the vocational, "job-training" focus of college in favor of the development of the individual (the intellectual rite

of passage) as they relate to their society (the social rite of passage). Traces of formal education are always apparent—if only in the background—in the thematic discourse of the campus novel. This subjugation of formal knowledge may point to the authors' communal questioning of the value of formal education, or that the perceived value is inconsistent with the actual worth. Certainly, as will be shown in the forthcoming critical analysis of the literature itself, there are rampant instances of the student metaphysically questioning the variance between expectations of college and the reality the student meets while attending.

Campus novels emphasize the problems associated with the changes in higher education as the 20th century progressed. Analyzing the novels of the Pre-Golden Age helps to establish a foundational framework as to how the genre treats education, access, and the student experience. This constitutes a platform by which the next era of education (the Golden Age) is illustrated in the American literature of the time as a period of expansion of the cultural values of higher education alongside the physical establishment of new colleges and a rapidly growing student population representing increasing demographic diversity and the subsequent era (the Post-Golden Age) is depicted in the literature as a period of rapid contraction where state and federal funding cuts amidst a continually growing student body results in a much more precarious future for American higher education, professors, and students.

In terms of positioning rites of passage amongst the cultural shifts in higher education over the 20th century, it is valuable to understand that, ideologically, such rites were forced to shift in reaction to the changing American culture. Williams claims, "In the actual history of the American university, if there is a principle, it is adaptability" ("Post-Welfare" 190). In other words, colleges are *not* autonomous from the society around them; they are flexible to the needs of the other institutions (such as economy and culture) to which they introduce students as the

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students go through their passage rites. Newfield simultaneously admits that "college years [are] a time of awakening to a larger world…to unknown capacities in [students]" (Ivy 15) while acknowledging, "The university has always symbolized independent thought, but it has never been an independent institution….The research university has never been anything like a monastery or an ivory tower. It developed after the Civil War in partnership with business and government" (*Ivy* 16). The synthesis of these ideas is that the rites of passage for students— though indeed intellectual and social—also reflect deep socioeconomic factors at all levels and in all periods, even though they seem more prominent in the recent period. At the advent of the 20th century, this economic ideology had sure footing in academia; over the course of the subsequent one hundred years, the idea of college as an economic rite of passage would grow to enormous proportions, quickly overshadowing the value of its intellectual and social companion functions.

As Newfield explains, "Privatization has systematically diminished the public university's distinctive features. One of these was top quality at a low cost to the individual student and his or her family. The result of this synthesis was freedom to choose a field of study without overriding awareness of its future income potential" (*Unmaking* 270). In *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*, Henry A. Giroux echoes Newfield's sentiment about this recent and dramatic re-structuring of higher education:

> Saddled with enormous debts, many students find that their career choices are severely limited to jobs in a corporate workforce that offer them entry-level salaries that make it possible to pay off their loans. Indentured for decades in order to pay off such loans, these students find it difficult to consider public service jobs or jobs that offer rewards other than high salaries. (109-10)

The corporatization of higher education in recent years is rapidly facilitating a great collegiate illusion. For the intellectual and social rites of passage, the student's "call to adventure," or "rite of separation," is enrollment in college. The challenges they face in their "rites of transition" on the way to their goal (degree) include the development of ideas, critical thinking, empirical study, social responsibility, ethics, creativity, etc. After achieving the degree, the students then return back into society ("rites of incorporation") with the intellectual and socially conscious skills necessary to traverse the complexities of society with reason and democratic purpose. The value of the experience is in the obstacles that enhance the student's self, not the degree itself, which conducts the student into society. The focus here is the overall academic experience, rather than its aesthetic result (a diploma). Of course, the diploma represents aptitudes that are relevant to the job market, but a pinpointed focus on the degree circumvents the more robust benefits of the college experience.

Conversely, if indeed the late-20th century ushered in an ideological epoch of capitalistic thinking in higher education, than the rites of passage motif changes in the following way: the initiation into college remains the same when the student enrolls at the college. However, the focus of obstacles shifts from personal and social development to strategies for monetary agency. These rites of transition might include choosing majors with the supposition that they will prove financially lucrative (here, it may be necessary to suggest that the student's perception of financially lucrative fields—the sciences, business—is clouded by the realities of job opportunities in these fields upon graduation), searching for the easiest route through a curriculum (easy professors, online learning, for-profit colleges), attempting to correlate curricular skills with future occupational prospects, a disenfranchisement of the correlation between education and personal/social value, the learned-helplessness of debt, etc. The

attainment of the goal in this scenario still results in the student's passage into society, but this time, it is centrally financial. The focus is solely on the degree, which equates—often, only theoretically—to capital; the intellectual and social experiences are ignored. Pragmatically, students entrust the faith of their economic futures in the STEM disciplines rather than the Humanities. A false consciousness of economic idealism develops, which potentially denigrates the entire academic system and what it hopes to achieve for the individual and society. Often, the real world does not live up to the expectations of the college-educated student, culminating in a devaluing of college as a rite of passage and subsequently promoting a culture disinterested in personal growth and social awareness.

As the rites of passage for students attending higher education have shifted in response to broader socioeconomic changes in the world, scholars have become concerned with how an institution seemingly so entrenched in the very fabric of culture has been reduced to economic measures for capital gain. What might this mean for students who, really, are the future leaders of society? What does it mean for future educators, when the social value for education is reduced to market metrics and economic growth, leading to dangerously debilitating budget cuts, attacks on tenure, and thus diminishing of academic freedom? What does it mean for society at large, which has actually become increasingly dependent on higher education in a knowledge economy, when the social, non-market benefits of its educational core have been stripped from its core mission? These poignant questions are the central focus of Critical University Studies and, in shifting the focus to a profound examination of this rather recent scholarly genre, one can begin to contextualize the potential problems of these cultural shifts in the rites of passage and historical shifts in the ideology of higher education.

According to Williams, the genesis of CUS began in the 1990s when "scholars began realizing what was happening to higher education." Specifically, CUS theorists are interested in three central arenas: the rise of corporate interests infiltrating the university, the "deteriorating conditions of academic labor," and the "problems of students" facing higher tuitions, "and their escalating debt" ("Deconstructing Academe"). Not incidentally, CUS theorists often use a Marxist and Historicist approach to analyze how economic interests have had and continue to have a role in how the university changes over time. Though indeed it comes as no surprise that higher education has had to evolve as American culture has in a rapidly changing global environment, most CUS theorists are deeply concerned with the increasing privatization and defunding of public higher education. The public, social, and non-market benefits to university missions have been swept away, endangering some of the most vital functions of higher education. Of course, though CUS theorists differ in their specific analyses, they generally agree that their work "focuses on the ways in which current practices serve power or wealth and contribute to injustice or inequality rather than social hope" (Williams, "Deconstructing Academe").

It was, indeed, the work of CUS theorists who periodized the 20th and 21st century history of higher education in the United States into the three eras of higher education by which I have organized this study. Though such periodizing runs the risk of oversimplifying the complexities of the 20th century, such historical framing is necessary to understand historical change. So, before I turn to the individual campus novels, let me summarize the three periods.

At the beginning of the 20th century, higher education was experiencing rapid changes while sustaining some of its traditional principles. The era referred to as the Pre-Golden Age (1900-1945) saw a developing importance between the university's mission and the sense of

national American identity (as opposed to, say, individual state identities). The previous century's Morrill Land-Grant Act (1862) established space for agricultural colleges in each state in order to connect state and national interests. Chaput argues, "Not unlike large grants of land and money given to the railroad corporations or other commercial endeavors meant to support a national infrastructure, these land-grant colleges and universities bolstered local economies while simultaneously serving national interests" (51). This meant that more public universities were opening, offering access to a larger population of American students. Chaput continues, "During this time the four-year collegiate experience became revaluated from an elite rite of passage into an American myth of social mobility" (45). As the analysis of campus novels in the next chapter will show, however, the aforementioned "social mobility" was mythological in that it was still only conceptual and offered to a small demographic population of Americans. Specifically, white men were still most of those matriculating into college curricula, ostracizing non-traditional students (women, minorities, immigrants) and thereby leaving the "democratic" function of the university incomplete.

After World War II, American higher education went through a period of tremendous expansion; this era is referred to as the Golden Age (1945-1975) and features the structural establishment of universities as they are understood today. In reaction to global victories in war and a bolstered post-war economy, the United States began to recognize the importance of colleges and the research performed therein for both economic and militaristic prosperity. Frank and Gabler contend, "The end of World War II appears indeed to have marked a sea-change in the global-institutional environment" (67). In other words, the US government recognized that in order to remain economically viable in the rapidly changing global economy, it would have to foster American innovation, invention, and culture; all cultivated in higher education. Therefore,

the government took advantage of using public funding for the establishment of more schools and to bolster student enrollments through the GI Bill (1944), the Truman Commission on Higher Education (1956), and the National Defense Student Act (1958).

With so many soldiers returning from war and looking to contribute to this new cultural phenomenon, the GI Bill was instituted to provide returning veterans with subsidized funding for education: "The postwar period's major student story was the GI Bill and the enormous expansion of enrollments, especially at public universities" (Newfield, *Ivy* 115). This resulted in an influx of students in this period, which explains the tremendous population growth in colleges around the country. Additionally, Community Colleges were founded to allow for less expensive opportunities for enrollment.

The rapidly expanding public funding of higher education after the War helped to strengthen the American middle class and offered academic opportunities to "non-traditional" students, or, students from marginalized communities for whom education was not previously available. And though it is true this period fostered the beginnings of diversity in colleges— specifically for women and minority populations—it must be noted that access for non-traditional groups was still significantly lower than it was for the hegemonic, white male group. Newfield explains, "The major political story was ethnocentric progressivism: political and educational leaders routinely praised universities as the engine of growth and prosperity, but racialized communities were largely excluded from this version of economic democracy" (*Ivy* 116). In short, though the population demographics of the Golden Age were still heavily skewed to favor the hegemonic elite, the period saw an expansion of access that was to be the beginning of a more diverse student body.

The Post-Golden Age era of higher education (1975-present) is a period where the university changed by succumbing to the corporate capitalist ideology of market thinking. In other words, academia rapidly changed by beginning to function as a business model for the good of the economic market, potentially disenfranchising students and faculty, and misappropriating the mission of the college. This period of contraction—in contrast to the Golden Age's period of expansion—was precipitated by cuts in federal funding for public education, privatization of education at all levels, increased tuition, and higher student debt. Despite funding cuts, student populations continued to rise dramatically. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 1900-2000, the student population of colleges rose from 237,592 to 14,731,224 (Williams, "Deconstructing"), and by 2015 student enrollment surpassed 20 million.

The genesis of this shift comes from a memo sent by Lewis Powell to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 1971. In the letter, Powell, a lawyer who would soon become a Supreme Court Justice, argues that American business and capitalism is under attack by liberal, socialistic thinking, often harbored on college campuses. The memo acts as a rhetorical call-to-arms for businesses and government regulators to quell the antagonism generated by liberal thinking: "The time has come—indeed, it is long overdue—for the wisdom, ingenuity and resources of American business to be marshaled against those who would destroy it" (9). He calls for a variety of regulations aimed at keeping capitalistic interests close to and involved with all academic endeavors: "The ultimate responsibility for intellectual integrity on the campus must remain on the administrations and faculties of our colleges and universities. But organizations such as the Chamber [of Commerce] can assist and activate constructive change in many ways" (15). Those ways include the hiring of right-wing, capitalistically-minded faculty, an editing of

textbooks to foster capitalistic rhetorical argument, and journals and speaking engagements to promote market-based ideology, amongst others. Though clearly based in mid-century fear of socialism and communism, the memo was important because it acted as a propaganda piece that shifted both public and private opinion of the university away from its democratic agenda. For instance, at the time, the university was still the place reserved for the development of knowledge without the complete bias of market competition. Powell's memo provided business owners with the necessary ammunition to confront academia's cornering of the knowledge market by commandeering public support and developing their own strategies for research and knowledge production, including the development of private think tanks to circumvent their reliance on university research: "Those who eschew the mainstream of the system, often remain in key positions of influence where they mold public opinion and often shape governmental action" (14). This claim is important because it acts as a precursor for the next decade's federal funding cuts for higher education under Ronald Reagan while affirming the work of CUS theorists, who, likewise, wish to return the university to its socially valuable standing by reclaiming the graces of public opinion.

The recession of the 1970s and Reagan's economic ideology of the following decade prompted a movement away from the "welfare state"; at this juncture in American history, government funding for socialistic services (education, mental health, homelessness) ceded to free-market capitalism's insistence that if the rich get richer, the wealth will "trickle down" to the needy. This movement forced universities to look externally for funding. Bousquet suggests that, because of this external financial dependence, the mission of the university (at least at the administrative level) went from academic to financial: "The system's logic is not designed to

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provide better teaching…it is designed to accommodate capital accumulation" (25). This causes serious problems for how students interact with their education.

Williams explains the adverse effects of the Reagan-era budget cuts on higher education, "The university was part of the strategic defunding of the welfare state from the Reagan Era onwards, and universities have come to operate more as self-sustaining private entities than as subsidized public ones" ("Post-Welfare" 195). Though Williams readily admits, "The actual history of the American university…is its adaptability" ("Post-Welfare" 190), some critics— such as Newfield— believe the particular cutbacks to funding act as attacks on liberal values, democratic diversity, and the middle class.

In reaction to such cutbacks, universities were forced to begin finding outside sources of revenue; for instance, corporate sponsorship and research funding, which resulted in private industry's increased presence on academic campuses. Additionally, tuition costs rose (and continue to rise), which influenced severe psychological and academic choices for students: "Educational debt levels have reached the point that they are forcing graduates out of public service and into income-maximizing posts in the private sector, regardless of the actual goals or values of the graduates" (Newfield, *Unmaking* 226). Finally, university administrators have begun using business ethics and models to run colleges, resulting in attacks on faculty and academic freedom. Bousquet argues, "Through management theory…campus upper administrators are wholeheartedly cultural materialists" who seek "control of the institution by seeking to retool the values, practices, and sense of institutional reality that comprise faculty and student culture" (13).

One of the biggest issues was that "market factors had to compete with educational goals" (Newfield, *Unmaking* 69). In other words, in being forced to focus on financial

sustainability and market ideology, the pursuit of knowledge and pedagogy become a secondary endeavor to higher education even though in principle, those endeavors are really the educational core. For students, education is no longer about self-development and knowledge. No longer can a student explore and discover new avenues of thought, objective perspectives, and critical thought without having the anxiety of debt and the uncertainty of future prospects burrowed into their psyches. Most critically, and perhaps most frighteningly, this ideology can affect students' academic focuses and career choices. Williams argues that this is demonstrated in the increase in enrollment in Business degrees ("Pedagogy" 164). It is difficult to blame students for this mindset; they must be conscious of how tuition debt will affect their futures and how future employment will affect their livelihoods. What it does, however, is make students understand their education as part of a work force rather than part of a self/social consciousness and development.

Student debt is one of the most sinister aspects of Post-Golden Age higher education. Clawson and Page discuss temptations for students for alternative forms of education and how debt can affect students who do not graduate: "An increasing problem is that students are accumulating large amounts of debt and not even graduating. One major culprit is the for-profit and online universities, who make it exceptionally easy to register and take out loans, and exceptionally hard to complete classes and degrees" (34). For students, life choices in college are confused by economic considerations and life after college is mired in future anxiety. Williams points out another problem with student debt: "Debt teaches that the primary ordering principle of the world is the capitalist market, and that the market is natural, inevitable, and implacable" ("Pedagogy" 164). In other words, the corporatization of higher education and proliferation of student debt creates a vicious cycle sustained by an actively-developed right-

wing rhetoric, which ceaselessly disenfranchises students and devalues education culturally. It also jeopardizes the advances in diversity seen in higher education in the Post-Golden Age. Williams points out how, with an increase in student debt, only wealthy students can go to college, "skew[ing] the scales of equal opportunity" ("Pedagogy" 162). Rather than allow for more educational opportunity to more students, student debt and an ideological devaluing of academia persuades students from previously marginalized cultures to reconsider enrolling in college, thusly returning campuses to their more nefarious, homogeneous pasts. Newfield calls this phenomenon "pseudointegration," meaning, "a state that formally rejects racial segregation without leading to producing racial integration" (*Unmaking* 121). In essence, an ever-increasing connection between higher education and corporate capitalism innately disenfranchises already and previously marginalized communities. Giroux agrees that contemporary corporate ideology in education reestablishes hierarchies: "The distinctions between democratic values and market interests, between education and job training, collapse" (112).

As we will see, these anxieties become the central focus of the campus novels of the recent era. Student protagonists, like their real-life counterparts, are under constant pressure to equate their experience in college with their economic future, rendering them anxious about prospects and distrusting of higher education in general. There is a sense in the literature that students often question the purpose/value of education. In fact, if there is one unifying element of literature that features students, this metacognitive questioning stands out. Students seem to straddle the problem of trusting their education and the suspicion that there is a falsehood to the myth that learning can "escape the life [they are] living now" (Bousquet 148). As cultural artifacts critical of the behaviors of society that disenfranchise its population, literature helps to

expose how these changes in higher education adversely affect all of American society, not just students.

Though many CUS theorists maintain a discourse that reflects concerns about the corporatization of higher education, there are some who suggest there is an elevated sense of nostalgia for an academic past that is more complex than being simply about the development of the individual. This push-back against the rhetoric of antagonism of economic interests in higher education primarily comes from the sense that economy has *always* had an interest in the university and that the university has *always* been directly interested in the economy (both in its institutional survival and in the future needs of its students). Historically, it seems vocational and national economic interests have been a part of the American university since the mid-19th century. The growth of academia's dependence on business models may have been a direct result of recession in the 1970s and conservative legislation in the 80s and 90s, but there is a strong precedent in earlier parts of the century that suggest economic and academic affairs have always been intrinsically linked. Therefore, it is wrong to dismiss vocational/economic academic motivations. In fact, theorists like Chaput question whether or not the university ever had democratic principles at all (19). She proposes a "corrective to the myriad nostalgia [that] calls for a return to the democratic mission of higher education," which "never existed" (30). In other words, the idea that the university ever lived autonomously outside of the structures of society, with more noble notions than its financial well-being, is compromised. Newfield agrees, "The research university and the business corporation grew up together" (*Ivy* 3), but in his recent book, *The Great Mistake*, he argues persuasively that there are many good reasons that we must reassert the non-market, social benefits of higher education, and thus restore strong public funding for universities.

Three Periods in Three Chapters

There are quite a large number of campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic

students in the three eras of higher education being studied that emphasize these characteristic

traits. In each of the succeeding three chapters, I have selected novels for analysis that dramatize

the links between broad-ranging socioeconomic factors and the individual experiences of

students as so commonly represented in this genre as an individual rite of passage. I have also

attempted to present a cross-section of more renowned, even canonical authors with lesser-

known and more marginalized works in order to engage both mainstream and more secondary

student experiences. Indeed, I have selected novels as exemplary representations of some of the

different marginalized groups (women, African Americans, those living in poverty, Jewish

students) by sampling the campus novels that were written in each period. It is valuable to note

that the existence of American campus novels in each decade of the 20th century featuring

diverse student protagonists is not always a given.

In Chapter 2, I address the Pre-Golden Age of higher education (1900-1945). F. Scott

Fitzgerald's debut novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920) features a young Amory Blaine, who must

negotiate his cloistered childhood and overbearing mother to brave the challenging curriculum of

Princeton University. A bildungsroman but also a roman a clef, *This Side of Paradise* represents

one of the earliest examples of early 20th century campus novel featuring a student from privilege

while directly illustrating some of Fitzgerald's own experiences. Similarly, Percy Marks's 1924

campus novel, *The Plastic Age*, follows protagonist Hugh Carver and his experiences in the

fictional Sanford College. Although this novel has most often been seen as dogmatic and

reductive in its representation of campus life, we can still see that Hugh must develop a sense of

identity despite the "plasticity" of a changing college ideology. In considering typically

marginalized narratives, I examine Clarkson Crane's *The Western Shore* (1925), which features

vignettes of a variety of different student perspectives, including students who are affected

adversely by their economic circumstances. Additionally, though never explicit, there are

homosexual undertones in the novel that are relevant to explore. *Big Ben* (1942), by Earl

Schenck Miers, features an African American student in the early 20th century whose success in

college is consistent with his athletic prowess. As one of the earliest examples of African

American students on campus—and despite being written by a white author—racial tension

plays a significant role in the novel's structure and thematic rhetoric.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the Golden Age of higher education (1945-1975). I have selected

two novels that emphasize how the great financial boon of the mid-century affects the way

young, male student protagonists view their self-worth in relation to their education. In *Let Me

Be Awake* (1959) by Stuart Mitchner, the student protagonist Vince suffers from the self-doubt

and fear typical in most matriculating freshmen in campus novels (emphasized by his pervasive

fear of death). Though this novel occurs during the ideological and economic highpoint in

higher education for his demographic group, Vince is intimidated by his peers and professors and

his decision to either remain in college or drop out is consistent with the pressures felt by

students in a culture that features an ever-growing social importance on one's academic success.

Most interestingly, a critical feminist reading of this novel, as pertains to Vince's relationship

with his girlfriend, positions how typical marginalized students (in this case, a woman) are

secondary or supporting characters to the primary interests of the hegemonic student. William

Maxwell's novel *The Folded Leaf* (1945) features two students as they navigate their personal

relationship against the backdrop of their new college experience. At the heart of Maxwell's

bildungsroman narrative is the question of survival in platonic friendship while the students

undergo the maturation process of the college experience and deal with more clandestine, amorous realities. I also examine Shirley Jackson's *Hangsaman* (1951) because it features a ripe discourse of feminism, as Natalie Waite begins to undergo her own feminine rite of passage in a male-centric academic system. She must simultaneously encounter patriarchy in the institution of higher education while negotiating an intellectual independence from her overbearing academic father. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), though celebrated for its vociferous assault on the social inequities of the United States, features its unnamed protagonist as a student at a negro college in the early chapters. These pages profoundly reflect the problems of racial prejudice for higher education in the middle of the century.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the Post-Golden Age. Barry Targan's novel, *The Tangerine Tango Equation: Or, How I Discovered Sex, Deception, and a New Theory of Physics in Three Short Months* (1990) features prodigy genius Nick Burden as he negotiates the more nefarious waters of higher education: professors and colleagues who wish to steal his brilliance for their own careerist motivations. Atypical to most campus novels (there are classroom scenes!), Targan's novel does not shy away from proposing higher education has a potentially detrimental value for its students. *Joe College* (2000), by Tom Perrotta, features Danny, a morally objectionable protagonist student whose experience at Yale University forces him to question the validity of higher education as a rite of passage and economic boon. Because these novels are situated in the part of the century when corporatization was at its most invasive in higher education, they act as apt markers for exposing the problems higher education holds for students when it adopts capitalist principles. Addressing minority experiences, I also show how Gil Scott-Heron's inflammatorily titled *The Nigger Factory* (1972) purposefully and rhetorically stands in opposition to the hegemonic structures of academia. Perhaps in relation to Ellison's novel,

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Scott-Heron's students also attend an all-black college but actively confront a curriculum that does not reflect the cultural diversity of their campus. A direct social criticism, *The Nigger Factory* is the only text to blatantly attack the inequitable structures of higher education in this study. Phillip Roth's 2008 novel, *Indignation*, features a Jewish student whose racial and religious identity puts him at odds with the conventions of his college, which results in mortal consequences.

CHAPTER 2

RITES OF PASSAGE IN THE PRE-GOLDEN AGE

Before we can understand the contemporary shifts toward the corporate university, we
need an historical understanding of the Pre-Golden Age of higher education (1900-1945).
Several representative novels from this period help to clarify the relationship between the market
and education so that we can better understand the student's matriculation through college as an
intellectual, economic, and social rite of passage. We can then see how institutional structures
established in the early 20th century set the stage for many of the problems we encounter in the
contemporary university.

As explained in the Introduction, the framework of this study is to contrast the
traditionally hegemonic with the typically marginalized student experience while historicizing
the sociocultural function of higher education through the critical analysis of the literature. This
can be a difficult strategy for approaching campus novels in the early 20th century because the
majority of them focus on the master narrative to the exclusion of minority issues. Most student
protagonists are male, come from affluence (or, at minimum, are not primarily concerned with
economic survival), are heterosexual, Protestant, and of European descent. That demographic
alone reflects the realities of higher education in the United States during the period.

One can, therefore, postulate two distinct realities: first, that the early 20th century and
before represented a cultural exclusivity that resulted in a dearth of students enrolled in higher
education. In 1900, only about 3% of citizens attended some form of higher education
(Williams, "Post-Welfare" 192). Naturally, such an imbalanced access to higher education, as
well as the ideologies of racism, sexism, and working class exploitation, resulted in grave
socioeconomic disparities. Secondly, the lack of literature representing diversity suggests very

few writers were considering this as an issue at all, which centralizes the problem of an exclusionary higher education system on the supposition that academia was reserved for populations American culture wanted to sustain as hierarchally superior. It is also reasonable to presume that authors who *were* writing about non-hegemonic populations were not being published, nor were writers *of* these populations finding publishers for work that may better represent the holistic realities of the prejudices in higher education at the time.

This leaves us with the central problem of artefactual evidence: like much scholarship concerned with preceding literary movements invested in expanding the civic and human rights of marginalized peoples, there simply is not a supply of texts to best represent a wide spectrum of student experience. Therefore, inferences must be made in using the texts of traditionally hegemonic students by way of attending to secondary characters who do not represent the dominant hierarchy just as we must also attend to the few but essential texts featuring student protagonists of typically marginalized cultures. All the evidence clearly indicates that higher education at the beginning of the 20th century did *not* serve a democratic ideal of social equity and a wide dispersion of social agency.

For instance, Owen Wister's 1903 campus novel, *Philosophy 4*, substantiates this claim. There is a distinct class difference among the students in the story. The protagonists, who decide to procrastinate and not study for an exam, are able to hire a significantly less wealthy student/tutor in order to cram for their exam because "they could well afford it" (9). The laissez-faire attitude of the protagonists is acceptable and moreover available to them simply because of their social class. Conversely, the tutor, who is significantly less wealthy than the protagonists, must endure the mockery and truancy of his colleagues because he has to find economic avenues (their payment) to stay in college: "He had given his education to himself; he had for its sake

toiled, traded, outwitted, and saved. He had sent himself to college, where most of the hours not given to education and more education, went to toiling and more toiling, that he might pay he meagre way through the college world" (16). The tutor struggles endlessly because he is not afforded the advantage of procrastination: "His young days had been dedicated to getting the better of his neighbor, because otherwise his neighbor would get the better of him" (28).

The conclusion of the novel contains a paragraph that enumerates the successes of the book's characters beyond graduation. For the procrastinating protagonists, their successes are ubiquitously occupational; one becomes a "treasurer of the New Amsterdam Trust Company" while the other "is superintendent of passenger traffic of the New York and Chicago Air Line." Interestingly, the student tutor is "successful too. He has acquired a lot of information" (51). Here, there is a clear delineation between occupational and intellectual success. This final element confirms the economic drive of students to complete their educations in order to sustain themselves (or increase their status) in the economic hierarchy. Though the novel attempts to glorify life experience as a complement to formal education, it is nestled in a consistent discourse of economics and class hierarchies.

Similarly, the role of women in higher education during the Pre-Golden Age was delimited by powerful gender stereotypes. As in most campus novels featuring female protagonists, there is a constant tension between a woman's education and her suitability for marriage. Women are often tasked with deciding between being a successful student or being a viable wife. In Dorothy Foster Gilman's campus novel *The Bloom of Youth* (1916), Leslie—the student protagonist—chooses to forgo "coming out" and selecting a husband in favor of enrolling in college. Gilman does not cloak her disdain for the lack of options for women in the early 20th century: "Marriage…is a degradation. Individual freedom is foresworn by any woman

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who submits to that ceremony, which is in all essential a relic of barbarism" (118). Indeed, Gilman even links the gender inequities to the capitalist system. As one of Leslie's antagonists claims, "A Socialist forgets one fundamental thing—Competition. Without that no one will do his best work" (220). As Leslie matriculates through college and develops a more socially democratic political stance, she must meet this adversarial rhetoric that hopes to sustain the very hierarchy that disenfranchises women as economically inferior to men. Unfortunately, though perhaps predictably, the novel lands on an anti-feminist platform, where Leslie ultimately realizes marrying the central male figure of the book is more valuable than her academic experience. Any progressively radical ideas ultimately revert back to conformity: "Thus the New Woman yielded to the 'Old-fashioned Man'" (340). *The Bloom of Youth* attempts to position higher education as an avenue of agency for early-century women, but falls short by relegating Leslie back into the prescribed gender role of subservient wife.

During this time period, campus novels are rife with the constructs of early American ideology, including a valuation of individualism, self-efficiency, hard work, picking one's self up by their bootstraps, etc. It must be noted that these ideologies, however, serve to sustain the hegemonic economic principles of the American Dream: the false promise that anyone can succeed in a "free," "democratic" society if they are courageous and capable enough to work for it. In short, if a person fails to succeed in a free society—and we can read here, a free market—it is their own failing and not society's. Campus novels are not immune to these cultural myths. Nevertheless, some of them demonstrate the flaws of American ideology. In *Stover at Yale* (1912), for instance, Owen Johnson's students hold "bull sessions," that offer a degree of critique of the dominant American ideology. As one student exclaims, "The country has changed, the function of a college has changed. It is now the problem of educating masses and not

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individuals. To-day it is a question of perfecting a high average. That's what happens

everywhere in college: we all tend toward the average; what some lose others gain" (65). What

is intriguing about this is that the logic still operates under the presumption that education should

serve the ideological ideal of individualism, yet there is also recognition of the escalating shift

toward commodification.

Sally Dalton-Brown, in her essay, "Is There Life Outside of (the Genre of) the Campus

Novel? The Academic Struggles to Find a Place in Today's World," argues that campus novels

demand the reader to think beyond the student's intellectual capability in order to conquer their

obstacles: "Characters are deliberately placed within an environment that is cognitively limited,

fated to follow the predictable path toward the moral dilemma that the campus novel presents, in

order to demonstrate the limitations placed on the intellect" (592). Perhaps this is why

curricular, overtly academic, and pedagogical discourses in the narrative are sacrificed for the

more-prevalent social foci that students understand as the primary vehicle for their passage.

Campus novels seem to challenge the sense that intellect is the only thing necessary to mature

into adult society. As Dalton-Brown explains, "There seems remarkably little point to most of

the work undertaken by many academic protagonists, who remain enmeshed in their own

driveling discourse, or who refute its use" (595). This suggests that authors of campus novels

purposely avoid academic pedantry in order to underscore the problems associated with notions

of intellectual superiority. If, indeed, American culture views those with college degrees as the

intellectual elite of the country, it is understandable that the novels themselves feature student

protagonists who contend that undergraduate work is, essentially, useless.

Carlin Romano, in "A Campus Novel about Leaving Campus Behind," suggests that

there is a "built-in tension between the noble ideals of higher ed and the ignoble characters who

participate in them" (1). This discord suggests a wide-spread belief about the social and

economic function of higher education. The student protagonists of campus novels often dismiss

or ignore the nobility (to use Romano's word) of academic idealism. Nevertheless, we also find

that many characters ultimately return to the basic tenants of hard work and tenacity to succeed.

This common trope extends to both traditionally hegemonic and typically marginalized cultures,

as will be seen in the following analyses. Therefore, campus novels of the time initiate a cultural

criticism, but ultimately fall back on tradition. It seems that part of the passage process for

students is to critically engage the structures of the system, become skeptical about its uses, only

to return to its structures in order to conform to the needs of society. There are examples of

campus novels where insurgent students aim to disrupt the structures of higher education—

particularly in novels of typically marginalized populations—but these actions often result in

negative consequences for the non-conformists.

More often, in the dominant narratives, there is a penchant for piousness in the student

protagonist. When it comes to alcohol and sex, which, are often components of the genre

generally, the students are presented with these as obstacles to their academic success, which

constitute cautionary tales about getting side-tracked from academic goals. In "Campus Novels

and the Nation of Peers," Travis M. Foster suggests, "If undergraduates and preundergraduates

learned in part how to become college students and interact within college social networks

precisely by becoming familiar with a novelistic genre, then a feedback loop finds itself

completed when contemporaneous reviewers praise the novels' verisimilitude" (467).

Prohibition was a result of decades of antagonism toward alcohol use, which situates these

novels historically and explains why alcohol and sex, mired to early-century perceptions of

unethical behavior, are often represented as barriers for students.

Higher education in the early 20th century was not immune to many of the legislative and historical circumstances of the time preceding the turn of the century and the military conflicts essential to American culture and the sense of patriotic national identity. The Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 resulted in a proliferation of colleges throughout the country. Certainly, this promoted higher education and a rise in enrollment, but more so instigated a cultural shift in the role of the university in society. This, alongside America's involvement in World War I and other historic enterprises, promoted a national sense of identity, as Catherine Chaput argues:

> The acquisition of land from coast to coast, a transcontinental railroad system, national unification after the Civil War, entry into World War I, and the development of a national university system all characterize this historical moment as one of profound nationalization—so much so that no local community or state could fully conceive itself in isolation from the larger nation-state. (57)

Furthermore, the culture of higher education became more instrumental in American society and was not divorced from economic interests. Chaput continues by suggesting that universities were defined "in clear collaboration with the needs of industrial capitalism" (57). This is important because it situates the university as having an intrinsic relationship to capitalism and American economy even as it became more socially and culturally essential at the beginning of the century.

In terms of campus novels, WWI also resulted in young men returning to the country with little sense of purpose, who then looked toward colleges for answers both metaphysically and economically. This "lost" generation of American veterans subscribed to the budding sense

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of American nationalism and sense that social agency could be obtained through education, as will be seen in Clarkson Crane's *The Western Shore* (1925).

<center>*American Campus Novel Origins*</center>

Before examining the selected texts in the Pre-Golden Age of higher education, it can be illuminating to examine briefly what is considered the first American campus novel: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* (1828). Though the campus novel had been a genre in England for some time, it was not until *Fanshawe* that the American novel ventured to examine student life in the United States. As a precursor to the novels in this study, *Fanshawe* begins to represent higher education as both a sociocultural rite of passage and an economic engine. Almost as if anticipating Chaput's argument that academia and nationalism are intertwined, Hawthorne argues that "the college has supplied—what the emergencies of the country demanded" (74).

Though it is arguable that Hawthorne's novel is more a romance than a novel where academics are the sole focus, there are elements of the work that still help to locate American thought concerning academia long before the 20th century. *Fanshawe* follows the story of Edward Walcott and Fanshawe, both students in a denominational college before the Civil War, and their attempts to woo the archetypical beauty Ellen. The plot, following a near-clichéd linear narrative of mystery, suspense, and ultimately, heroic resolution; pits the young college boys against a sea-faring interloper who hopes to kidnap Ellen and glean from a clandestine marriage, her father's riches. Though Hawthorne himself decried the novel as an inept attempt to break into fiction, its merit perhaps lies in its criticism of high-brow academic culture—a precursor for the pejorative metaphor of the Ivory Tower—that boasts characters who are disengaged from the world and whose fidelity to study prevent them from experiencing the more typical joys of life, like love.

The setting of the novel, Harley College, caters largely to those most favored by the society: male, Christian, Caucasians. As Hawthorne puts it, only through philanthropy can "descendants of aborigines" obtain the "benefits of civilization" (76). The obvious distinction between what can be understood as savage versus civilized culture lies in traditional cultural hierarchies; the college, then, acts as a sustention of this hierarchal model. It attempts to foster the students of hegemonic background and introduce those of "aboriginal" background to the dominant culture of the time, presumably in an attempt to assimilate them.

Additionally, something that occurs in many 20th century campus novels is the quest for students to achieve economic dominance rather than intellectual competence. Thematically, but certainly representative of academic culture as a whole, students tend to restrict their focus to an economic future and position their studies to serve those interests. One such student in *Fanshawe* "set his heart to gather gold" (79). That capitalistic enterprise is prevalent in the motivations of students is not surprising, especially when considering the aforementioned connection between academia and the national economy, nor is it surprising to find it in the rhetoric of contemporary colleges. *Fanshawe* therefore provides evidence for the argument that higher education has never had a purely democratic mission; that it has always been fundamentally in league with economic concerns.

Hawthorne's view of the academy is inherently critical. As an educated man himself, he posits as one of his central themes the crisis and potential degradation of over-study. Though it is not uncommon for authors to satirize and condemn the very institution that perhaps provided them with the linguistic skills of literary art, Hawthorne veils his contempt in an underdeveloped love story.

Fanshawe is studious to a fault. He is isolated from the outside world and is only

temporarily distracted from his studies by his affection for Ellen. After his quasi-heroic effort to

save her (he merely stands upon a cliff's face while the antagonist climbs to dispose of him; the

attacker slips and falls) she offers herself to him but he refuses in order to, obligatorily, resume

his studies. In the midst of this academic lapse, Fanshawe questions his studious obsession. He

notes that despite all his learning, he feels he knows very little. He goes so far as to refer to his

life's dedication to study as a "waste" (93). Indeed, even Dr. Walcott, the president of Harley

College, is painted as buffoonish, lacking in pragmatic logic or social grace because of his

dedication to study; because he's spent so much time in academic study, he is like a child to the

world (166).

But much of this becomes emphasized with the novel's absurd ending. Fanshawe, so

weakened by his incessant study, dies as a result. Of course, this histrionic conclusion falls

victim to the romantic culture of pre-20th Century literature, but it is telling of Hawthorne's

personal beliefs considering education. Carl Bode, in an essay entitled, "Hawthorne's Fanshawe:

The Promising of Greatness," suggests, "Hawthorne makes the earliest announcement of one of

his greatest themes: that man must not cut himself off from man. That is the unforgivable sin.

Even when committed for the sake of knowledge of the great intellectual past, it will bring death-

like despair with it" (238). It seems that the cerebral world of the mind, in Hawthorne's view,

fails to access the more transcendent world of love and human relationship (Edward, the less-

academic student, ends up with Ellen). It is safe to say that these two elements are not mutually

exclusive; certainly one can simultaneously find intellectual and emotional value in life, but it is

intriguing that such a criticism would populate such an early novel. Bode concludes, "Fanshawe

decides in favor of his books—he sees ultimately that it is the only thing he can do—and yet in

so doing he commits the unforgivable sin of isolating himself from mankind" (242). In Hawthorne's construction, the focus on education prevents the student from self-actualization. Perhaps this cynical view of higher education will infiltrate the consciousness of American authors of the campus novel in the following century.

Amory Blaine, the Hegemonic Egoist

Shortly after the publication of his novel *This Side of Paradise*, F. Scott Fitzgerald argues that, "An author ought to write for the youth of his own generation, the critics of the next, and the schoolmasters of ever afterward" (*This Side* vii). In augmenting his comment to be more gender inclusive and in recognizing our stake in the "ever after" point, a scholar of today can use a text to comprehend their world's intimate relationship with those that have preceded it. And because campus novels are the most apt for illustrating this concept in the student enrolled in higher education, they are so primed to instruct today's scholars in the origins of our present concerns.

This Side of Paradise (1920), Fitzgerald's first novel, is one of the earliest and perhaps most recognized texts in the genre. It follows the progress of Amory Blaine (a sort of roman-a-clef version of the author himself) from his wealthy, eccentric, and pretentious upbringing; through his college years at Princeton; through various love affairs; and into the vague potential of life post-college. Amory, who alternately struggles with the pedantry and process of college and yet who wants to "be admired" (38), must augment his ambitions when he loses his family fortune, goes to war (WWI), and returns with little job prospects. This fatalistic turn provides Amory with his (née Fitzgerald's) latent socialistic thesis, offered in a concluding diatribe with conservative capitalists who pick up Amory as he hitchhikes back to Princeton. In "Hot Cats and Big Men on Campus: From This Side of Paradise to the Freshman," Alan Bilton contends that

for modern critics, "It seems difficult to quite comprehend the aura of glamour and mystery attached to college campuses at the start of the twenties, a heightened allure central to the college craze of the period" (93). Fitzgerald's novel, then, helps to understand the idealism centered in the romantic notion of the university at the start of the 20th century. What it also does is show how higher education was organized to benefit the wealthy of American society. The novel is inundated with class discourse, suggests only the wealthy attend colleges, and, as Amory's financial situation becomes unstable, posits that there is no room for students who do not belong to the socioeconomic elite. This is best evidenced in Amory's early college arrogance that is replaced with a more humanitarian view when his own economic security is jeopardized.

Fitzgerald, himself a WWI veteran who wrestled with the post-war psychological stress and idle prospects of returning soldiers—a member of the eponymous "lost generation"—builds in his student protagonist the disquiet of the young men of his generation. Amory says, "I simply state that I'm a product of a versatile mind in a restless generation—with every reason to throw my mind and pen in with the radicals" (215). It seems as if the anxieties of post-war young American men ushered them into non-conformist ideologies; in the case of this novel, this becomes a fidelity to socialistic political interests. This is interesting because the dominant capitalistic construct, which mirrors contemporary American ideology in a less furtive but still impactful way, is challenged by Fitzgerald as somehow *not* panacean to young men who may be psychologically fragile and who face uncertain economic realities. This is best illustrated in Amory's unrealistic biases concerning wealth and economic structure, wrought from the subjectivity and ignorance of his own hierarchal class thinking: "Almost all normal people want to be rich without great effort" (208). Perhaps he is right in this assumption—despite the reductive generalization of normalcy—but it is a symptom of the destructive power of

capitalistic ideology and, worse, a figment of unrealistic imagination. Still, according to Craig Monk, in "The Political F. Scott Fitzgerald: Liberal Illusion And Disillusion in 'This Side Of Paradise'," the novel, "written during a time of great personal optimism, is Fitzgerald's attempt to vindicate, with some reservations, many of the liberal ideals prevalent at the time of America's involvement in World War I."

Amory's academic maturation is situated in parallel to his economic circumstances. At the beginning of the novel, he egotistically asserts, "Oh, it isn't that I mind the glittering caste system….I like having a bunch of hot cats on top, but…I've got to be one of them" (37). In a later sequence, when his prospects have shrunk, Amory compares poverty to his time in war, calling it "dirtier than any battle-field he had seen" (199). And in a moment where Amory's future financial prospects cause him to become thoughtful about his own station, he exclaims, "I detest poor people….[Poverty] is the ugliest thing in the world….This problem of poverty transformed, magnified, attached to some grander, more dignified attitude might some day even be his problem; at present it roused only his profound distaste" (199). He is not immune to the economic pressures associated with his rite of passage into adulthood and, because he started the narrative wealthy, his disenfranchisement at losing his familial money is consistent with his budding sense of social activism. Inarguably, this does not make Amory a heroic character. It is only in the loss of his own money that he begins considering others; but the text very clearly correlates the pressures of economy in a capitalistic society with historic circumstance and with education. Not only did the World War period take from him his family's wealth, it also took him from Princeton, which profoundly underscores his lack of economic access.

Though at times elementary in its construction, *This Side of Paradise* captures the early twentieth-century anxiety and ennui of young, rich, male students as they determine their place

in the scholastic and economic world. Decidedly, all of the central characters are in positions of

agency, as they are in little want of resources. These distinct class separations permeate the latent

racism, sexism, and antisemitism to which Fitzgerald either latently subscribes or that he

represents in a social criticism. For instance, Amory's own egoism creates a perceived

stratification of human value in his mind as he considers others on a train:

> The berths across from him were occupied by stinking aliens—Greeks, he
>
> guessed, or Russians. He thought how much easier patriotism had been to a
>
> homogeneous race, how much easier it would have been to fight as the Colonies
>
> fought, or as the Confederacy fought. And he did no sleeping that night, but
>
> listened to the aliens guffaw and snore while they filled the car with the heavy
>
> scent of latest America. (114)

These prejudices and suggestions of hierarchal thinking are not only character flaws, but

representations of actual ideologies toward minority culture in the period. It is important to

fixate upon typically marginalized populations when analyzing this text, even if there are scant

examples, because these rare instances are retrospective portholes that help to identify the

prejudices of a prior time, even if they are unpopular to articulate.

The novel can be understood in four phases: pre-Princeton, Princeton, WWI, and post-

war. These phases track Amory's changing attitudes concerning self-worth (he is referred to

often in subtitles as the "egoist"), romance (his name unmistakably consistent with the Latin-

based languages' translation for "love"), and economy.

Pre-Princeton, Amory desires adolescent experience and a "place" in the world. This can

typify a generational desire to assume a role of importance in society, particularly through

economic agency. Moreover, his status, that of the wealthy class, allows him flexibility with his

thoughts and ambitions. Romantically, he is experimental (wanting to kiss a childhood sweetheart then feeling repulsed when his wish is granted) and inexperienced. In this position of privilege, Fitzgerald illustrates Amory's self-focus as a clear fault of immature character; he is frequently frustrated by his designs both intellectually and romantically. These failures are linked to Amory's lack of development; it is only when he enrolls in Princeton that he begins the metamorphosis that will result in his nuanced sense of self and success. Monk suggests that Amory, like other young men of his generation, has difficulty reacting to the turn-of-the-century shifts of American culture, precipitated by changing economic interests and global war: "Amory's personal development is hindered throughout *This Side of Paradise* by the reality behind his observation that American society is changing all around him, complicating any attempts to take his bearings within the volatile social milieu of the second decade of the twentieth century."

There is a sense that the university ushers Amory from the protected and maternal confines of his child life into the mature, patriarchal, challenges of male adulthood. Higher education "very painfully drilled Beatrice [his mother] out of [Amory]" (26). School, in this case, is almost parental, or extra-parental, in the development of the individual. Additionally, the collegiate experience seems to present Amory with a sense of development that he began with his egoistic (pre-Princeton) youth, as it is explained to him by Darcy, who articulates his impending rite of passage toward maturity in education: "But you're developing. This has given you time to think and you're casting off a lot of your old luggage about success and the superman and all" (80). Here, we see a distinct shift in Amory's psyche as he begins to mature through his academic situation. He starts an "egoist" (interested only in the self) and ends a "personage" (interested in others—specifically, via socialistic political ideology). Both of these

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are Fitzgerald's terms. Of course, Amory must still participate in the obligatory social rite of passage that is higher education ("Mostly there were parties" [63]) but there seems a latent social benefit to be garnered as well: "Princeton invariably gives the thoughtful man a social sense" (65). And in keeping with the theory that higher education is a rite of passage in the maturation toward adulthood, it is later suggested that leaving college is leaving the "whole heritage of youth" (119). During his Princeton years, Amory is swept into the desire to participate in the various social elements of the Ivy League. Interestingly, his personal studies are secondary (nearly unmentioned in the novel) to his participation in the prestigious social clubs of Princeton and in working for the school paper. He thus begins to develop a sense of knowledge that will usher in his rite of passage through college, though it is unformed and juvenile. Romantically, he falls for Rosalind, and is disappointed as she chooses a man (despite her claimed love for Amory) who is more financially stable. This obvious class distinction and problem forces Amory to understand the inequities in economic status of the early 20th century.

Amory's WWI experience acts as a segue between his academic years and his subsequent "working" years. Bilton suggests, "Of course in many ways, the craze [of higher education] can also be seen as a symptom of the idolisation of youth that seemed a natural consequence of the devastation of the First World War. A sense of waste, of young lives sacrificed by old fools, underpinned the decade's desire to turn its back on the past and embrace the future" (93). We do not get a sense of what Amory will do for finances after this period (it coincides with the loss of his familial fortune) but it is interesting to understand how this essential rite of passage (that from the schoolboy to the intellectual to working member of the "real world") manifests through the global cultural and intellectual changes initiated by the first World War. This phase can easily be interpreted as a representation of Amory's sociocultural maturation into the adult world

and, because campus novels of the time often act as cautionary tales for aspiring students, Fitzgerald offers a warning to impending students that can be viewed as premonitory to students and scholars of the late 20th century interested in the problems of corporatization in higher education. Amory very rapidly loses much of his agency: through this class disenfranchisement and post-war malaise, he becomes introverted and intellectual despite the troubles he faces from his new status. This is reflected in Fitzgerald's use of the Rupert Brooke quote in the epigraph, "There's little comfort in the wise." The second epigraph, from Oscar Wilde, "Experience is the name so many people give to their mistakes," suggests a tenuous nature to growth through experience, suggesting a recognition must be made between the problem of "mistakes" with the fact of passage. Despite his new knowledge—or, by virtue of it—Amory must struggle, but that struggle is what defines his passage. In "History and Masculinity in F. Scott Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise," Pearl James suggests, "Fitzgerald's epigraphs indicate the difficulties that confronted him as the author of a male bildungsroman in 1920. Together, the quotes from Brooke and Wilde find 'little comfort' in wisdom and deflate the notion of individual progress. These references do allow Fitzgerald to trace the failure of his coming-of-age narrative to other writers, but they also betray anxiety about masculinity" (2). It is essential to situate this discourse in masculinities studies because the construct of the male student as the traditionally hegemonic protagonist in campus novels correlates with the patriarchal biases of higher education and society at large in the early 20th century.

His post-war period is the vaguest, and offers Fitzgerald's most notable criticism of capitalistic practices in early 20th century America. Like many Realist novels (Fitzgerald being famously known as a Modernist novelist but was not yet exactly able to distance himself from his Realist predecessors in this early work), the final section is reserved for a more-or-less

academic discourse on socialism that becomes a social criticism. Amory, collating all of his

experience and passage, now develops his theoretical thesis moving forward. The post-

Princeton, post-WWI period, shapes what Amory has learned in terms of the expectations of duty

for a matured individual. As Monsignor Darcy, writes to him, "You went to war as a gentleman

should, just as you went to school and college, because it was the thing to do" (121). These

duties, which at first strike Amory as grievous injustices, ultimately formulate his dubious final

status: that of a politically conscious intellectual who finally begins to perceive the world beyond

his own personal interests. His definitions of success have changed in his development, from

finding some vague "place in society" (pre-Princeton) to social recognition over academic

pursuit (Princeton) to finally a political ideology aligned with socialistic thought (post-Princeton,

post-WWI). The end of the novel illustrates these changes both prosaically and metaphorically.

In confronting men whose ideas can be interpreted as corporate capitalistic, Amory begins a

socialist soliloquy that includes sentiments that he was "dragged through college" and that

"every boy ought to have an equal start" (211). His moral maturity is represented by a social

obligation to his fellow man. Even though, for him, his coursework does not seem to warrant

this, his academic experience does in fact lead to his developed thoughts at the end of the novel.

Fitzgerald cleverly organizes this by having the final scene feature Amory walking back toward

Princeton's campus, eager to again see the "towers and spires" (218). James reads this

conversion differently, "Some readers of *Paradise* emphasize Amory's late espousal of socialism

as the 'solution' to his inconsistencies as a character. According to that reading, class-

consciousness gives Amory (and Fitzgerald) what he has been lacking all along. But to other

readers, Amory's snobbery, along with his political apathy, make the turn to socialism ironic, if

not simply ridiculous" (24). Indeed this "solution" to the problems associated with Amory's

egoism throughout the novel may simply represent Fitzgerald's underdeveloped writing. It may also represent Fitzgerald's easy and incomplete notion of how to engage with rampant capitalism at the turn of the century. College could be the place where the student learns how to confront such socioeconomic disparities, but Amory has to leave the campus in order to develop these more complex notions. His "eagerness" to return to Princeton may be his desire to bring back to the university what he has achieved in his evolution. His progress towards the "towers and spires" of the campus, though seemingly ancient and eternal, may now be confronted by his new sense of social responsibility; in effect, he may now see himself to be the force that overcomes the more nefarious, capitalistic concerns of higher education. In any case, it is useful to recognize the shift in Amory as ideologically pertinent to changing economic circumstances of the general American public around WWI.

From a Gender Studies perspective, male students in traditional campus novels often associate their rite of passage in relation to romantic or sexual conquest. Amory's childhood sweetheart accepts his affection but it disturbs him. Contrastingly, his collegiate love interest jilts him for a wealthier man. As Judith Butler famously argues in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," a person's gender "is in no way a stable identity…rather, it is…an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (900). Amory's love and sex acts throughout the novel reinforce and question his masculine gender roles, which act as obstacles to his passage into maturity. Bilton argues, "Indeed, one of the novel's more problematic assumptions is that there is something inherently false about femininity, in that it appears as an illusion, a staged (and deceitful) performance" (98). James agrees: "Fitzgerald's novel betrays a suspicion that character, in the sense that it held for nineteenth-century writers, no longer seems tenable. Instead, identity is performed and relatively unstable" (3). The female characters of the novel

"perform" as supplements to Amory's development only, rendering them and their identity consistent with the female performance, but not as truly realized individuals.

Amory is a problematic character; in positioning him against the women of the novel (who only really act as romantic foils) and in expecting that he is truly representative of a student's experience in the early 20th century, the reader could mistake Fitzgerald's particularities for universalisms. The reality is that Amory is better at epitomizing the prototypical egoisms and subjectivities of the hegemony: the classes best suited in early 20th century American society to engage with academia and prosper, intellectually and economically. Taking his character as example, then, does not do well to offer legitimate knowledge into the student's circumstance in higher education at the time, but it does help to pinpoint a portion of how higher education was expected to serve the established dominating classes of America and how the early 20th century sustained the hierarchal privilege of the previous century. This provides important textual data that, along with more literary analysis, can substantiate a wider understanding of the student experience at the time and inform contemporary scholars about present correlations between the two seemingly distant periods.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald seems to suggest self-knowledge comes from evolving beyond childish solipsism and becoming a member of the community. Amory's coming-of-age parallels his academic rites of passage, as he is reincorporated back into society a more socially conscious and mature individual whose identity is cemented with his final cry, "I know myself…but that is all" (218). This enigmatic conclusion to the novel seems to suggest that he has come to some final maturation and that it was not achieved through a curriculum but through an awareness he gained away from college. That he knows nothing beyond himself

suggests the function of higher education as he sees it—to teach him about the world in which he finds himself—cedes to the more important enlightenment gained beyond college.

Fitzgerald seems to concur with the notion that the student's rite of passage is as much economic as it is social and intellectual. In fact, Amory's evolution throughout the course of the narrative seems to straddle a discourse on a more metaphysical and spiritual metamorphosis while never disassociating with the perfunctory needs of economic stability. Late in the novel, Amory asks himself a sequence of metacognitive questions, resulting in the realization, "I am merely afraid of being poor" (200). Simultaneously, however, he recognizes virtue in his education as he "escaped from a small enclosure into a great labyrinth" (205). This seems to suggest a sort of duality where Amory perhaps does not readily correlate his economic needs with the intellectual maturation he receives in college; he is only able to rectify his egoist/personage, epistemological/economic, and student/soldier binaries by straddling the worlds of college and society beyond college.

It is easy to be critical of Fitzgerald's early novel in its insistence of generalized and reductive tropes that act better to situate the ruling classes in their particular struggles of identity than to truly represent the variety of student experience in higher education; but as a precursor—a foundation for the systems to come—*This Side of Paradise* helps to situate the early 20th century ideology that would continue to serve only the very few and become further problematized after the Golden Age.

Hugh Carver, the Prudish Frat Boy

Percy Marks's 1924 novel, *The Plastic Age*, follows the exploits of its protagonist Hugh Carver, who enrolls at the fictitious Sanford College and matures with his collegiate experience over the subsequent four years. Definitively illustrating a rite of passage in an academic hero's

journey, Hugh arrives at Sanford young, impressionable, and eager to initiate himself into the "manhood" of college education while maintaining the idealistic ignorance the promise of education supposedly proffers.

As Hugh's college years transpire, his entrance anxieties cede to acceptance anxieties as he negotiates initiation into his father's fraternity, participates in collegiate sports, and navigates the rigors of the curriculum. In his underclassmen years, Hugh's impressionability results in what Marks would certainly claim to be uncouth behavior: he drinks, contemplates sex, and joins a fraternity that is overtly racist and anti-Semitic. Later, however, he begins to develop a sense of independence from the conformist majority; rejects sex, alcohol, and the popular prejudices of his fraternity; and becomes nostalgic of what college has meant to him as he prepares to leave it. The economic concerns of the future are always latent in the minds of Hugh and his classmates; the economic world beyond the campus always seems to infiltrate their decisions and the bonds they make. This helps to position the role of higher education in the economic development of the nation through the development of student leaders, especially those willing to answer the call to complete the obstacles of the college journey.

The very first page suggests, with the college being built on a hill where "any one ambitious enough to climb the hill was a man fit to wrestle with learning" (4) that the college experience parallels the parabola that typically represents the Hero's Journey (embarking, facing challenges, accomplishing a Boon, returning to the world). Hugh, like all college students, must accept the challenge of this process, realizing how it has surrounded and engulfed him: "He felt that he belonged, that Sanford, the 'mother of men,' had taken him to her heart" (22). The anthropomorphization of college itself comes to represent the entire journey a student must enter and complete to be initiated into society.

Hugh's primary desire when he matriculates into Sanford is to be considered manlier. He "didn't like it" when someone "called him a nice boy" (5). College, for him, is representative of one's transference from the degrading patronization of boyhood into the independent and dominant strata of adult men. In remembering the presumption that higher education acts as a rite of passage socially, economically, and intellectually, Hugh's college experience will provide him with more than simply intelligence or employment (it should be noted that for students representing the hegemony, like Hugh, the strains of financial burdens are often not included in their anxieties) but a sense of purpose in society at large. This sentiment is delivered in the president of Sanford's speech to the incumbent freshmen when he speaks of "the work [Sanford graduates] had done for America and the world, of the work he hoped future Sanford men, they, the freshmen, would some day do for America and the world" (17). Later, a professor echoes the idea, "You are the intellectual aristocracy of America, the men who are going to lead the masses to a brighter and broader vision of life" (93). The patriarchal tone suggests that to be a man, one must use his education and intellectual prowess to affect society in some vague way, most likely to do the university proud as an alumnus who gains status and wealth. Whichever the result, a hierarchal thinking is rhetorically positioned in the minds of the students and, because they represent hegemonic ideology, this indoctrination can lead them to sustain the belief of superiority for white, Christian men against and in opposition to the perceived insignificance of those who do not represent their privileged station.

The correlation between the achievement of manhood and obtaining a college education is consistent in the campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students at the beginning of the 20th century. Knowledge supplants ignorance, which deconstructs the childlike nature of the student for him to become a capable, confident man. Latent in this dynamic, of course, is the

development of the student's critical thinking, which separates him from the beliefs and biases of those who have previously had an influence on his own intellectual development, "[Hugh] was miserably confused...he had believed everything that his father and mother—and the minister—had told him, and he found himself beginning to discard their ideas" (79). The longer he takes classes and holds "bull sessions" with his classmates, the more shattered his former beliefs become, stripping the cocoon of childhood from him so he can alight beyond his education a capable man: "College was disturbing his peace of mind" (80).

Like many campus novels, however, the idea of "manhood" and the "real world" (for lack of a better term) create the typical anxiety a student feels as graduation looms. Despite all of the benefits of an education, it seems students have very little idea of what is in store for them after their commencement, including how to survive financially. In the way that college itself failed to match up with Hugh's expectation of it, "He had come to Sanford with very definite ideas about the place, and those ideas were already groggy from the unmerciful pounding they were receiving" (32), there is a sense that Hugh "was much too young to hear the rumble of the distant drum" (82), or, that he had no idea what to expect post-college. This theme is echoed as he approaches the reality of leaving college behind: "What was he going to do? Life stretched ahead of him for one year like a smooth, flowered plain—and then the abyss" (136). And again later, "College had been very beautiful—and the 'world outside,' what was it? What did it have in store for them?" (156). It is not directly insinuated, but a large part of the pressure Hugh and his classmates feel relates to future economic prospects. They feel they are following the prescribed paths to become initiated into American society and to sustain themselves via the capitalistic principles organized within the structures of academia and society at large. And,

despite the privilege of higher education bestowed upon them as members of the hegemony, they feel there is no guarantee that the future will hold endless financial possibilities for them.

In nearly every campus novel—regardless of time or student identity—there are moments when students question the validity of their education. As the experience of coursework, social interaction, the frail humanity and pedantry of professors, and the arbitrariness of administrators do little to match the student's assumption of the college experience; they are often left wondering if the social expectation to attend is an elaborate ruse constructed by the very system they hope to challenge in their own development. *The Plastic Age* is full of examples where Hugh and his classmates question the validity of their college experience: "He damned college with all his heart and soul. What good had it done him anyway?...Four years of studying and lectures and examinations, and the first time he bucked up against a bit of life he was licked" (140). Similarly, as a classmate tells Hugh, "I certainly don't feel that I know anything now as a result of my four years of 'higher education'" (141). Dalton-Brown, in speaking of the theme of disillusionment in student protagonists, suggests, "The campus novel, as a satiric and comic genre, arguably belongs to that type of comedy called the comedy of degradation, which stresses the discovery of the base behind the lofty, of the paltry behind the great, of the ugly behind the beautiful, and of the absurd behind the obvious" (597). Additionally, as campus novels of this period seem to act as cautionary tales for young students to help them negotiate the tentative structures of higher education, the inclusion of such disillusionment may be used to preemptively predict how students may feel in college and, in showing how the student protagonists often shrug off these insecurities for later success that validate the college experience, the notion seems to be that persisting despite these anxieties must be one of the central aims of actual college students.

In writing about early campus novels like *The Plastic Age*, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz writes in her article "Undergraduate Cultures" that these texts:

> Presented young heroes who went through an archetypal pattern. A young man entered college enthusiastically and wanted to become a college success. He had promise and seemed destined for victory. Then disillusion set in. He saw evil existed in organized college life. Although books and ideas began to matter, temptation proved stronger than morality, and cynicism reigned for a season. But at the end of the four years, the hero departed with an adult realism, a mature and grounded self-knowledge that gave him a solid basis for belief in himself. He went out into the world as a knight ready to do battle and work for personal success and social good.

The suggestion seems to be that the student's disillusionment is a necessary part of the transference between child and adult. In other words, the college experience, in its development of critical thinking and perhaps inability to live up to idealistic expectations, forces students to become skeptical even of it, which prompts their intellectual development.

The essential idea is that the college experience is an insular one, protected as it is from the responsibilities and dubious reality of the outside world. However, as this experience is a rite of passage, concluding with a "commencement" into said outside world, the student must learn to transition from that insular protection of the college to the more unstable reality of their future. For Hugh—presumably, for all graduating students—the future is both alive with prospects and dark with uncertainty. Of course, part of this uncertainty lies in the need for students to procure work in order to sustain themselves. Work often seems the end goal of a college education, but a potential problem with this paradigm lies not just in the archaic nature of early 20th century life,

but in a misinterpretation of his journey toward maturation itself. Following the structure of the journey, the idealistic journey in education would be a recognition that the value of the experience is in the entire four years: the classes, the development of ideas, the intellectual challenge, the critical thinking; rather than the goal (the degree). Further, it is this journey particularly that acts as the rite of passage into society. However, in market-minded thinking, the focus seems to be on the goal itself, the degree, which equates to an economic entrance to society (that of finding a job and acquiring wealth) rather than an appreciation for the academic experience itself. This directed economic focus of education is a false consciousness that has the student's attention fixated on the correlation of major to potential job and the desire to finish a curriculum via the easiest route.

As the 20th century progressed, it becomes more apparent through these novels that the rite of passage in education is toward an economic end (generated by capitalistic/materialistic American society) with a focus on the degree and what it can abstractly obtain rather than the experience of education as a whole (knowledge, critical thinking, maturation of experience), which ushers in the passage to society. Thus, the entire academic system is denigrated by the development of economic idealism.

Because Hugh and his classmates enjoy the privilege of being members of the American hegemony—despite perhaps being unconscious of said privilege—understanding how economic motivations are impactful in a student's decision-making is dependent upon recognizing the correlations between academic achievement and economic security. To begin reading *The Plastic Age* with this agenda in mind, we can view the class disparity and economic hierarchies that exist at Sanford College as latent representations of how economy and education fit together. Admitting that successfully completing one's degree is essential in establishing oneself in the

American economic hierarchy, recognizing the problematic inequities and anxieties correlated to class structure in the novel helps to understand it as a precursor to CUS's concerns. For instance, in a sequence where Hugh's father gives him advice on how to negotiate the crass temptations of college life, he says, "Crude men—vulgarians do not commonly go to college. Vulgarity has no place in college. You may, I presume, meet some men not altogether admirable, but it will not be necessary for you to know them" (33). While, at first, this admonition may seem typical and innocuous, there is a sense that college is reserved for stoic men of a certain standard of class— high society—who do not participate in the base distractions of common life. On thinking of his father's advice, Hugh admits, "It was pretty tough on the fellows whose fathers had never been to college. Poor fellows, they didn't know the ropes the way he did" (34). The class hierarchy inherent in early-20th century American academia has direct implications on whether or not a student can succeed in college, completing their rite of passage, and commencing into the economic world post-college.

The idea of college as a democratic institution available for all is seldom supported in the literature, though the characters are not all ignorant of the disparity. Professor Henley chastises his narrow-minded students, "Democracy! Rot! This college isn't democratic," also lamenting in them, "You swagger around utterly contemptuous of the man who hasn't gone to college" (93). The hierarchies among college students and between those who have and have not attended college helps to construct and maintain both the ideology of human importance relevant to class and the anxieties felt by students to adhere to the demands of the academic structure in order to survive. Newfield suggests, "Democracy [is] dependent on [the] recognition of the political and economic realities created by that group life—by systematic racial inequalities, by ongoing racial disparities, by racism past and present" (*Unmaking* 109). And though the primary focus of

campus novels at the time are the white, privileged students, there are instances where direct examples of racism, anti-Semitism, classism and misogyny substantiate the claim that higher education does not serve pure democratic principles.

At one point, Hugh is scolded by a fraternity brother, "You could be as popular as the devil if you wanted to, but you go chasing around with kikes and micks" (96). In fact, Hugh's fraternity—Nu Delta—epitomizes many prejudices against a disenfranchised "Other" culture found in many traditionally hegemonic campus novels of the period, "Only Protestants were eligible to Nu Delta," and as Hugh is further criticized for his social choices by the president of the fraternity: "We don't want any Jews around the house" (81). Hugh is constantly challenged by his fraternity to conform to the standard subjugations of students who do not fit the accepted model. His social interests intersect with his morality, and though Hugh can be celebrated for facing these structures in opposing their laws, their existence sheds particular insight into how prejudice played a significant role in the social structures of higher education and society as a whole. Because entrance to fraternities and the social rites of passage therein were so important to the student's future work prospects, it can be concluded that such prejudicial ideology had definitive effects on typically marginalized people's ability to engage equitably with the economic world.

The perspective of women in *The Plastic Age* is also problematic and sexist. For all Hugh's denial of Nu Delta's prohibitions against ethnic interaction, he sustains the patriarchy inherent in male-dominated higher education: "Women, he was sure, were shallow creatures, dangerous to a man's peace of mind and self-respect. They were all right to dance with and pet a bit; but that was all, absolutely all" (136). This sexism can be traced to Marks's pious caution levied upon the intended readers of his book: matriculating college men. Sex is often depicted as

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a shameful, disastrous act; Hugh's roommate drops out of college after having sex with a prostitute and contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Hugh, shamed about getting drunk and pursuing sex with a woman, becomes contrite to the extent of crying and condemning himself to a disappointed classmate, who is so distressed by Hugh's behavior that he cannot look at him similarly ever again. In all of the cases of histrionic piousness in the book, women are depicted as the vehicles for the male character's downfall. Marks never examines the hierarchal structures that disenfranchise women, nor does he question the behaviors of the male students toward the women. Rather, he positions women as obstacles men must overcome to complete their rite of passage. As Hugh wrestles with his affections for a woman he alternately views as a harlot and the love of his life, she muses about herself as the obstacle to his success: "She did not say that she knew that he did not love her; she did not tell him how much his quixotic chivalry moved her. Nor did she tell him that she knew only too well that she could lead him to hell…but that was the only place that she could lead him" (153). Clearly, Marks's discourse on women is reflective not just of the intrinsic sexisms of early 20th century America, but also of how, in academia, women were part of the challenges male students must face in order to be successful.

These bigotries, which can be used as evidence for how undemocratic the institutions of America were (and are), also show how the very structures that facilitate these ideologies—like academia—can be used to further divide agency amongst diverse cultures. Mike Rose identifies this complicity in contemporary education: "The schools could have intervened but instead seemed to misperceive [marginalized students] and place them on the margin" (*Lives* 101). Rose's point is relevant to the early 20th century as well; although claiming to be a facet of American democracy, it is clear that higher education worked best as a stratifying entity rather than a unifying one. Of course, social stratification was and is a result of a collection of factors

in an unequitable society, but higher education played a large role in the hierarchal structure and would continue to increasingly as the century progressed.

Near the end of *The Plastic Age*, a respected English professor (Henley) lectures his students on the value of the education system, which acts as Marks's essential discourse on what education provides people in American society. Though strained through the passing of time, many of Henley's ideas are astute. His ideas are consistent with my standard belief that the education system acts as a rite of passage for students. He suggests, "A boy's college years are the years when he finds out that life isn't what he thought it, and the finding out is a painful experience" (146). These "painful" years represent the literal and metaphysical challenges the student goes through while shedding his/her immature world for the new world: the world post-college. It also may directly refer to the struggles the students will face upon graduating and transitioning to the working world, which may not correlate as succinctly to their expectations as they may have presumed while studying. Discussing her experience in academia, Elaine Showalter suggests, in her book *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, "I measured the gap between what I lived and what I read [in the novels]" (2). She is talking about being a faculty member here, but the gap is much larger for students, whose expectations for life beyond college—cultivated both by idealism and the atmosphere of higher education—become challenged by the realities they face when they leave the campus behind.

This sentiment is echoed later when Hugh approaches graduation and muses on the word "commencement." He recognizes that this event (as situated as it is as a rite of passage, full of regalia and ceremony) is the beginning of his life, that the college education has been an experience of passage that ushers in whatever is next. He exclaims, "Good-by, boyhood" (150) and later realizes, "He had been a boy; now he seemed a man" (151). There is an evident

correlation between the successful completion of the academic journey and his maturation toward manhood. Despite Hugh's successful maturation by the novel's end, the text as a whole still reflects the particular concerns of the traditionally hegemonic population. This both represents and panders to an early-century population that believed in the sustention of the social hierarchy. From a contemporary perspective, this reveals blatant inequities in the ideology of higher education; at the time, however, the novel does not engage with inequity but reinstalls the structure by which white male students ascend the social ranks while all other populations remain statically oppressed. Therefore, analyzing the directly problematic structure of campus novels that feature typically marginalized students during the early 20th century becomes, then, even more essential, as will be seen in the following sections.

George Towne, Tom Gresham, and Philip Burton; the Unquiet Western Front

In 1925, Clarkson Crane published his first novel, *The Western Shore*, as a series of vignettes featuring students at the University of California at Berkeley. Though at times a sentimental and nostalgic rumination on the beauty of the Bay Area, and at times using the standard tropes and themes of the campus novel, *The Western Shore* is one of the earliest campus novels to focus at least part of its narrative on students from typically marginalized backgrounds as major protagonists. In addition to this distinction—and in recognizing that traditionally hegemonic students are still represented in the novel—Crane's text deviates from the genre in attempting to blend the campus novel discourse with aesthetic writing that may be called "literary" by today's standards. In other words, *The Western Shore* attempts to discuss diverse student experiences while maintaining an artistic standard for eloquence and creativity in the writing itself. As Oscar Lewis suggests in the Introduction to the 1985 edition, "For here was a novel that, as one critic put it, was 'entirely free from the facetious and self-conscious juvenility'

that had long been the hallmark of college fiction" (viii). Perhaps Crane recognized a fallaciousness to campus novels in their commitment to being cautionary tales for undergraduates, and instead hoped to create a novel that better represented the aspects of academic life that are less idealistic and blatantly exclusive to the hegemony.

According to some scholars, campus novels often take satirical—or, at least, allegorical—approaches to interacting with academia, especially in the later 20th century. This tonal theme may account for how the authors viewed higher education as a whole, recognizing it as a flawed system that promised more than it could provide; or, that higher education, in its stoic arcaneness, demanded narratives that exposed its comic and more humane form. In a *Los Angeles Times* book review for *The Western Shore*, Kay Boyle suggests, "Novels about campus life in America had, until [*The Western Shore*], presented the college scene as a four-year ball, an innocent round of parties, football games, fraternity dances and romance. And here was a ruthless, if gently proffered, would-be expose of that scene." *The Western Shore* does not abide by the standard satirical structure of the American campus novel; rather, it articulates a modernist account of the interaction of people who just so happen to be on a college campus. And though, at first, this might seem to jeopardize my insistence that the campus be central to the narrative in considering it a campus novel and selecting it for this study, I posit that though Crane's aim may have been to critically engage with the lives of students and professors in the tenuous period of American history after WWI, the campus may—inadvertently—be more of a determining factor in his characters' interactions than he may have been able to see. And in considering students of typically marginalized communities as they relate to the existing structures of higher education at the time period, Crane's novel prompts significant thought as to how these students interacted with early-20th century prejudices, oppressions, and offices of

exclusion. As Christopher Findeisen notes in the article "The One Place Money Makes No Difference: The Campus Novel from *Stover at Yale* through *The Art of Fielding*," "Even though the society from which the campus novel emerged has changed radically, the conventions through which the campus novel defines itself have not" (69). Therefore, the thematic stasis of campus novels allows them to act as pertinent artifacts by which we can understand how the disenfranchisements of marginalized communities in *The Western Shore* are equitable to those faced by habitually marginalized communities in higher education today.

There are a large number of protagonists in *The Western Shore* that represent an array of identities and socioeconomic standings. There are, for instance, a number of students who represent the traditionally hegemonic population in the United States at the time; and though it may be beneficial to perform a cursory analysis on these characters, it is unnecessary to devote an abundance of time on them, as they are best represented in the sections of this study dedicated to such populations. Instead, I have selected three characters on which to critically focus who either presently or have in the past interacted with higher education in the novel as it pertains to their marginalized status in early 20th century America: George Towne, a student living in poverty who must consistently consider his financial circumstances as they get in the way of his studies; Tom Gresham, a graduate whose life in the working world post-graduation prompts a feeling of emptiness and sense of nostalgia for his fraternity; and Philip Burton, an English professor who makes inappropriate sexual advances to his male students.

The Western Shore looks at how poverty and education correspond to one another in terms of agency and oppression. In Karl Marx's famous text, "Wage Labor and Capital," he suggests what workers "sell to the capitalist for money is their labor power" (659). Marc Bousquet, who writes about academic labor, extends Marx's labor principle to include students,

in suggesting that intellectual work *is* labor and that the commodification of said "knowledge work" disenfranchises working class students (61). The intellectual work of students who must work for wages in order to support themselves is often ignored, as is the reality that they cannot focus on their studies for the necessity of wage working. For the students of Crane's novel, education seems at odds with the working world, as one student points out, "If I can get in with him, to hell with school. I won't waste any more of my time around that joint" (13). Even though, as Bousquet suggests, the student's work is a commodifiable work, it is not regarded as such by academia and so poor students must both work jobs to survive and pay for their education while meeting the requirements of their classes.

George Towne is an impoverished student who has previously flunked out of college and now must work in order to support himself and pay his tuition. According to Burton, his English professor, George "works as a dishwasher, [and] finds it very difficult to give the best he has in him to his studies" (120). As academia does not recognize the intellectual work of the student as a legitimate commodity, poor students remain disenfranchised in an academic structure that boasts high tuitions and forces them to look outside of college for economic survival, ultimately resulting in a sacrifice of their studies. This prompts a classmate, Mabel, to lament George's survivalist needs: "Isn't that awful…I always feel so sorry for a boy who really wants to succeed and is awfully poor. Especially when you see so many rich men's sons" (120). For George, who begins the novel working as a dishwasher in the fraternity house of one of the other student protagonists and ends up taking the proffered extra room in Burton's house, the economic circumstances he feels in being poor entreat upon his own needs and orientations. At the recognition of the homosexual advances of Burton, George thinks, "He was willing to try anything once, especially when he could get a room for nothing" (112). In contemplating

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prostitution in order to not have to worry about rent, George must face struggles that his privileged classmates do not. For him, his education is meaningful in that it claims to offer him freedom from these circumstances. However, as in many campus novels, he questions the legitimacy of this belief: "There would be many [exams], one after another, reaching ahead of him for three years; and, after that, were he to take law, many more. The prospect made him infinitely weary, for would he be any better off when he had a degree?" (290). The notion here is that George is concerned as to whether or not the degree will improve his financial circumstances.

The Western Shore features a number of students who can focus on their studies and who struggle with the commonplace themes articulated by most campus novels. The journey of maturation motif occurs here as well: "A young man must have real ambition to leave home and come so far away in search of education" (239). But what makes George's character so interesting is that his studies—suspended as they are because of his financial circumstances—correlate directly to his means, which is unique to campus novels of the time. Rather than being all about fraternity, social one-upmanship, and self-discovery; Crane seems to be making a direct criticism of class hierarchies and how they negatively affect a student's ability to succeed in college.

Crane's criticism has a direct relationship to the sociocultural circumstances of the time. Findeisen quotes from Colin B. Burke's text in stating:

> At the turn of the century, only 6 percent of young people graduated from high school and only 4 percent went to college… As for the tiny fraction of lower-class students who were academically prepared for college, costs were often prohibitive. During the 1860s, the average price of higher education was 60

percent of a skilled tradesman's income, and only 2 percent of American families

could reasonably afford it (Burke 1982, 50, 56). But even when they suspended

the language requirement and charged no tuition at all—as was the case for many

land-grant institutions during the postbellum years—colleges had a difficult time

recruiting and retaining lower-class students due to opportunity costs. (70)

These realities make George's circumstances even more dubious. Set in 1919 and heavily mired

to post-WWI feelings of being lost and a pessimism for the future, *The Western Shore* pits

George against his economic status. His education is the only thing that can rectify his financial

shortcomings, but academia is—paradoxically—an accessory to attrition in poor students.

George functions well as an antagonist ideology to the capitalistic hegemony of the privileged

student during the period, as he stands in direct opposition to the belief that hard work and

rugged individualism are all that are necessary for academic (and thus, economic) success.

Newfield argues how a college education is problematic for the ruling economic classes in

America: "The university was a problem for conservative views because of the independent

insider it was creating—because of the 'critical thinker' that university leaders…had claimed to

create for the top and middle ranks of the corporate world" (*Unmaking* 54). What this amounts

to is a realization that academia, as an institution constructed and sustained by hegemonic power,

is mostly interested in sustaining the power structure, as it would potentially deliver agency to

poor students who otherwise would remain disenfranchised. The stress George feels in

attempting to procure his education despite these factors is emphasized rather often in the novel.

During George's first attempt at college, his working left him "little time…for study,"

ultimately leading to his flunking out (6). Having reenrolled after a year of hard labor, George

returns to Berkeley and enrolls in English, which forces a classmate to question the economic

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value of the choice: "George is wasting his time with all these English courses. Why doesn't he take something practical?" (55). This faux pragmatism results in the following discourse between George and the classmate, who asks, "Got any money?" George responds, "Not a damn cent." The classmate retorts, "Well, how are we going to eat?" (55). The notion here is that there is a direct correlation between George's academic choice and his consistent poverty. This foreshadows what will come to be understood as an attack on the Humanities in contemporary higher education. The Humanities become threatening to market thinking because "[they] had traditionally provided the standard language about the university's noneconomic missions" (Newfield, *Ivy* 133). George's focus on English study, though it is his passion, seems foolish because he does so in the face of economic pressures to study something with a definitive financial future.

Ultimately, because his professor—Burton—is attracted to him, George is able to live rent free and to procure a job at the college library. These things ease his financial concerns, which allow him to recognize the leisurely joys of academic pursuit minus the stress of financial worry: "He enjoyed this tranquil existence….He slept more and worked less than before, and as he walked occasionally up the hill from the university, he began to look fresh and clear-eyed" (191). Although the reader does not get a full conclusion as to George's future at the end of the book, it is important to note that his newfound clarity is perhaps a bit optimistic; for the vast majority of students living in poverty, the realization of college success is much more improbable.

In positioning the societal conflicts of the early 20th century with the historical and psychological results of WWI, Lewis offers, "Now that a return to the peacetime campuses was under way, not everyone could make the transition [to college] without abrasive

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confrontations….The American campus was likely to be a place of contention and dissent" (viii-ix). There are a number of passages where the post-WWI psychology of returning veterans is addressed; for example, as one student's girlfriend asks, "But don't you think that most of the men who were in the war have a hard time readjusting themselves to ordinary life?...Every one seems so restless." To which he replies, "'Yes, maybe that's so,' rather pleased at being victim of an epoch" (41). Crane accentuates this when describing Tom Gresham, a veteran of the war and a college graduate who decides to leave his job in San Francisco to return to Berkeley and pursue graduate school, not for economic reasons, but because he found the working world empty, "He had blindly followed a vague discontent" (259). Tom is an interesting character because he does not begin the novel as a student. We are introduced to him working in a job that does not provide him with any passionate joy. After quitting his job to return to college, Tom eventually finds the resumed rigors of study too much to pursue and drops out to again join the working world.

Tom can be seen as a bridge character between the idealism of the student in campus novels and the result of rejoining the "real" working world after the rite of passage has been concluded. As was mentioned before, campus novels often feature student protagonists keen about and concerned with their future prospects after graduation; this being so, very seldom do the novels actually feature what becomes of the student when they graduate. Analyzing Tom's reaction to the emptiness of the working world is Crane's criticism of the strict connection between academics and economics. In other words, if the economic rite of passage that is higher education trumps the intellectual and social rites, the student may end up finding work, but that work may not provide them with a sense of accomplishment and contentment in their everyday lives. Tom has a difficult time wrestling with his nostalgia, thinking of the new students, "They

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have the best four years of their life ahead of them" (69). This prompts him to consider his own life post-college, "For a moment Tom had a feeling of comfort and pride that he was making good in the bond business, but that same kind of intimate desolation followed. Why was he doing it? Why was he doing anything?" (72). This malaise prompts his leaving the working world to return to college, which culminates in a sort of histrionic nostalgia despite the protests of his friends: "He was turning back from this world where everything had seemed so futile and resisting, and was going home" (147). Of course, Tom fails to realize that, regardless of his reenrollment at the college, the end result will be a return to the very world he hoped to leave.

Findeisen claims of campus novels, "The opposition between business and education…remains the genre's fundamental antagonism" (69). Tom represents what happens when too much focus on one's economic future transitions to the future. Crane illustrates what future CUS theorists understand as capitalistic ideology infiltrating higher education. Indeed, there has always been an economic relationship between higher education and the workforce, but when that relationship becomes the sole motivation for enrollment, the student may have to sacrifice other needs, such as intellectual progression, social relationships, and a sense of fulfillment. Crane cleverly criticizes the role higher education plays in developing workers for a drab and meaningless working existence. To this extent, he is criticizing higher education and the structures by which it demands students not focus beyond their economic needs. Foster suggests:

> These are books that detest books in general and "text-books" most of all; they're novels set within institutions of higher learning that position themselves entirely in opposition to instruction. The genre deals with formal education either by ignoring it entirely or assuming an actively hostile stance toward the faculty who

so rudely impose it. In valuing "college life" over book learning and native intelligence over rote memorization, campus novels suggest the civic qualities of a college degree come about through relaxed sociality rather than the acquisition of any particular knowledge. (466)

This quote is relevant to Tom because, upon reenrolling at Berkeley in order to avoid the empty life of the working world, he ceases to persist in any of his studies, preferring instead to loaf around his fraternity house and participate in the social, but otherwise wasteful activities of rushing and initiation. In a "grass-is-always-greener" moment that results in Tom's dropping out, he muses, "Last year, when he had no books to study, he used to awake every morning in his room on Taylor Street, free from all care…. He wanted all at once to go back to San Francisco and to live that life again" (258-9). Tom, reversing his undergraduate desire to focus on economy, has instead focused his graduate career on social interaction, which also leaves him feeling empty. As previously mentioned, Tom impulsively leaves school and rejoins the working world, leaving the reader feeling pessimistic that he will ever find contentment and completion. In taking cue from the authors of campus novels before him, Crane orchestrates Tom's character perhaps as a cautionary tale resistant to the constructs of other texts of the genre. Focusing on one's economic future is surely important, but it does not lead to a complete realization of all one's wants and needs.

The early-20th century campus novel does not feature many characters from typically marginalized populations as they struggle to either conform to or resist the oppressive structures of American society. In *The Western Shore*, Philip Burton—not a student but a professor—does not challenge the homophobic constructs of heteronormative society; nor does he overtly pursue a homosexual lifestyle (outside of inappropriately flirting with male students), but he serves as

an apt example of some of the problematic constraints of American society for people who live outside of the traditional norms of culture.

At the onset of the novel, there are a number of subtle suggestions of Burton's homosexuality: "He put the money in George's hand, which he squeezed for a moment" (64). But what makes Burton's character more dynamic, and what connects him to his marginalized status in a hyper-patriarchal academic system, is that he must pass as heterosexual in order to keep his status and position at the university; in short, his job. Burton pretends to be engaged to a woman and spends much of his time eluding circumstances that may jeopardize his cover, including inviting his mother to stay with him—ostensibly denying him the ability to pursue romantic relationships with women.

Burton is a veteran of WWI and former classmate of Tom Gresham's, which posits him in direct conflict with the masculine gender roles he must face as a homosexual male. Indeed, it cannot be denied that his advances toward his students are inappropriate and unethical, but it is interesting to see how the latent homophobia of the institution and culture of the time play into Burton's inability to realize his own needs and desires. Indeed, there are often suggestions that some of the male students either are not antagonized by Burton's sexuality or may wish to requite the advances, as is the case with Milton Granger, an aspiring writer. But the mores of early-20th century America intercept any potential realization of these feelings, proving how restrictions from heteronormative society marginalize homosexual people. George, for instance, only relates Burton's homosexual advances to how his fellow students may perceive him. He notices, "Until a week before he had suspected nothing behind Burton's kindly presence; but when he heard the rumors abroad concerning his tendencies in love (it was whispered that he had made advances to a freshman whom he had invited to his rooms) he began to think back over the

period of their acquaintanceship, in search of confirmation" (103). But, when faced with the prospect of being associated with Burton publicly, George balks for fear of losing his reputation, "He did not like to be seen with Burton after all he had heard…there was no use being seen with him too publicly" (106).

The idea here is that the homophobia Burton faces and George affirms is representative of greater cultural problems of how homosexual students may face similar subjugations. The working assumption is that higher education acts as an intellectual, economic, and social rite of passage that is united with the overt prejudices of the academic system—which, would prevent students of marginalized cultures to enroll, persist, and succeed in college—so it becomes clear how higher education helps better to sustain the hegemonic, traditional cultures than it does to progress towards democratic notions of equity. *The Western Shore* is unique in that Crane seems to be criticizing the institution for these very problems. It is unclear how one's education will fulfill them in the working world; it is similarly clear how latent cultural prejudices oppress students and faculty whose identity is contrary to the master narrative. This analysis of higher education by Crane makes the novel very important; it becomes one of the first campus novels to directly criticize academia without offering "happy endings" where the student's previous chagrin is rectified to an appreciation of the college experience, as is suggested, "The glamour had departed from intellectual life" (293).

Crane ends his novel with some loose ends. All told, the characters seem to sink back into normalcy. When asked about George returning to college after being called home to Wyoming to tend to his sick father and his father's hotel, Burton says, "He'll settle down and be contented. The country is full of men like him. False beginnings. A momentary flicker. Nothing more" (300). Though this pretentious pessimism may come from an intellectual being

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critical of the common person, the quote is pregnant with Crane's perhaps more sardonic suggestion: that higher education is not an omnipotent elixir for all the ills of modern society or the "lostness" of veterans returning from war. In this way, *The Western Shore* is very much a traditional campus novel, where the disillusionment the student feels after their education is consistent with the trepidation about the future. Where the novel stands apart is that it lacks the idealism of its predecessors and contemporaries at its conclusion, which may directly correspond to the fact that its handling of typically marginalized cultures reveals more deeply troubling realities than the campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students.

It is important, then, to continue to analyze literature that perhaps even better focuses on the pursuits and obstacles of minority populations in higher education. Doing so, and attributing one's financial future as pertains to both success in higher education and aligning with hegemonic culture, we can develop a finer sense of the structures of higher education, the corporate and economic interests therein, and the particular disenfranchisements the institutionalized prejudices of the system levy upon non-traditional students.

Ben Johnson, the Football Hero

It is no surprise that campus novels featuring student protagonists from typically marginalized cultures are in short supply in this era; the dearth of texts is representative of both the deeply-rooted prejudices of American culture that restrict cultural representation for oppressed populations as well as the lack of access for said cultures in higher education. Because campus novels so concisely represent the standard academic ideologies of the era of their construction, the first, and perhaps most prevalent, revelation when studying the texts is that academia's exclusivity prevents equitable opportunity to people from typically marginalized populations. As if by design, academia acts as a sociocultural gateway into society, which

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allows for—among other things—the student's financial stability. If, then, academia prevents certain cultures from matriculating and garnering the vast benefits higher education proffers, than it works more to sustain stratified hierarchies than to challenge the constructs that continually disenfranchise people. Newfield argues that public universities are designed to strengthen a diverse middle class, and that such a strengthening is threatening to conservative ideology:

> I have described a decentralized and complex campaign to discredit the cultural foundations of a group that had come to threaten the position of traditional American business and political elites. That group was the increasingly multiracial, blue- and white-collar, college-educated middle class. I have been telling the story of what made this broad middle class and its signature institution, the public university, a danger to conservative rule. (*Unmaking* 267)

In short, it seems that higher education has become a battleground for the "culture wars," the chasm between conservative right and liberal left ideologies. Caught in the crossfire are students—particularly marginalized students—who view higher education as a balm from oppression but encounter a system that resists inclusion.

Therefore, finding campus novels that best represent the experiences of minority cultures in higher education—especially in the case of African Americans during the early parts of the 20th century—is difficult. Often, we must look to the margins of novels, to secondary or tertiary characters of marginalized cultures who serve more to contextualize the hegemonic main protagonists than to promote their own academic progress, in order to develop an understanding of the interaction between higher education and cultural oppression. There are, however scant, examples of campus novels that feature minority students as central protagonists. Earl Schenck

Miers's 1942 novel, *Big Ben*, for example, centers around the titular Ben Johnson, an African American student who enrolls at a state school in New Jersey (presumably modeled after Rutgers University) and must struggle against the current of racial prejudice while attending classes, on the football field, and upon graduation, where the promise of future financial success is tempered by the realities of a racist working world. While not a particularly challenging or inspired work of literary merit, the novel's rhetorical purpose seems to be to instigate a discourse on the inequities of higher education concerning African Americans as the middle of the century approached.

As the century progressed, there was a great movement of inclusion, wherein students of diverse backgrounds—including African Americans, Latin Americans, Asian Americans, those living in poverty, etc.—began to matriculate into college. As Henry Louis Gates suggests in "The Blackness of Blackness"—in the case of African Americans, but this can be expanded to other previously marginalized groups—"Much of the Afro-American literary tradition can be read as successive attempts to create a new narrative space for representation" (995). This representation, as told through the narratives of minority students negotiating a dominantly white hegemonic institution, explains how traditional structures of education were subordinating to students of non-white backgrounds.

In the discipline of literature, specifically, as the century progressed there were more writers of diverse backgrounds being published and, thus, taught at the university. Toni Morrison criticizes the previous stalwart of euro-centric literary traditions in America previous to this point in her text "Playing in the Dark": "American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States" (1006). It

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follows, then, that campus novels written by minority authors can expose the injustices of the academic system and how these injustices move into the social realm beyond graduation. It is essential to recognize that the early 20th century and its movement toward the middle century—despite this ideological movement toward inclusion—was not comprehensive. In many ways, this period saw a great increase in college enrollment generally, most of which was still confined to traditionally hegemonic people. Therefore, the temptation to see increased enrollments of typically marginalized peoples as representative of democratic advancements in American society is short-sighted. Literature concerned with these marginalized cultures, then, becomes more necessary for study and criticism.

   Big Ben is a fiction inspired by the real-life Paul Robeson (1898-1976), a Civil Rights activist and singer who experienced racism while attending Rutgers University, where he was the "only Negro among more than five hundred students" (Miers xii). According to the author's introduction, "[Robeson] knew that his presence on the campus would be resented by some, and there was at least one moment when violence sprang from that resentment; he knew, too, that there was a line over which he could not pass, and he never tried to" (xii). Interestingly, however, despite the traumas that Robeson faced while at Rutgers, he considered his college experience to be "the happiest of his life" (xii). It is important, in analyzing the novel, to rectify this seemingly glaring paradox; how can it be that the very institution that supported overt racism and habitual lack of access—if Robeson was the "only Negro" than we must imagine the countless other African Americans left out of college—was also one that brought Robeson such contentment? Answering that question is dependent upon analyzing Ben Johnson's experience in *Big Ben* against the subjectivity of Miers as a white writer and the cultural realities that prevented equitable inclusion in higher education in the early-20th century. Perhaps more

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importantly, such an analysis may help us to trace these problems into contemporary academia, where issues of exclusion are persistent concerns.

Before analyzing the text itself, it is important to be contextually critical of the author and his rhetorical purposes. From a contemporary perspective, it is debatable as to whether or not Miers is participating in cultural appropriation when he writes about the plight of the African American in college. Certainly, it seems that Miers's goal is to address the problematic structures of higher education as it pertains to African Americans, and certainly the discourse more aptly resembles social criticism over literary production, but identifying Miers as a Caucasian writer instantaneously initiates a question of authenticity and subjectivity. How genuinely can Miers understand and articulate the African American experience? How much of his own biases, privileges, and motivations enter the discourse to potentially skew his conclusions? Is it possible that his status as a white writer can perpetrate some of the very prejudices he hopes to conquer in the text?

The debate over cultural appropriation and license to write beyond one's own identity experience is longstanding and rich. For this venue, it is most important to locate Miers's potential biases inside of his motivations, perhaps beyond even what he could recognize. Though it is certainly a noble undertaking to be critical of our culture's oppressions, and though we can develop insight as to how white writers viewed marginalized students by studying *Big Ben*, it is likewise essential that this is always done through positioning Miers's status as severed from his subject's.

Miers does not seem to be coy with his rhetoric. As with many social-justice-minded texts in literature, the thesis is overt and is presented in such a way as to convince the reading audience of the author's claims, as Miers writes, "Would [a white audience] see…the splendid

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ruggedness of Ben's body and the strength of the whole Negro race which it symbolized?" (229).

But of course, the problem with allegorically representing the entire African American population through the spectacle of appropriating one man's "body" is problematic because it creates an unfair universalism that does not represent the whole. It also sustains the concept that the black body is objectified as the subject of a white writer's rhetoric, as opposed to it belonging to a human being. This is best represented in the novel by strange caricatures of African American characters from Miers's perspective. All of the African American characters are written stereotypically, from their behaviors to their speech to their physical descriptions: "He was all Negro, she thought—high, sloping forehead, tight, kinky hair, big lips….There could be no denying his good Bantu blood, for his skin was as black as a starless night" (138). Additionally, there are more strident racist descriptions in the novel: "Well, sure, he could sing about Uncle Eb. Why not? He could make them feel what it meant to be a happy, lazy Nigger" (214). Even the songs Ben sings to adoring white audiences are laced with caricatures with heavily racist undertones: "Monkey married the baboon's sister,/ Smacked his lips and then he kiss'd her" (219). In short, Miers is not immune to the prejudicial standards of his time; even in a text clearly devoted to emphasizing the problems of racial inequality, it is warped by the very elements it hopes to disband.

More troubling is Miers's often-promoted call-to-arms. Rather than ever attack the institutional structures of racism in American society, he puts the onus on African Americans themselves in order to create racial equity. The white characters—some harboring violent racist bigotries—are often let off the hook for their racist displays and are not held responsible for the culture that privileges them over Ben. It is up to Ben, then, to succeed in college to bolster his entire race. At one point, Ben's love interest, Laura, says to him of his college career, "You're

forgetting about your father, about the people back on Prince street and what your going to college means to them….You're forgetting that we're not just us, you and me. We have work to do. We're missionaries. We're dedicated to a purpose, both of us, and that purpose is more important than our own little egos" (115). As will be seen, this is a constant discourse in the narrative. Unlike the student protagonists of traditionally hegemonic campus novels, Ben is not going to college for himself, to develop the individual and succeed independently but to represent his entire race. This unfair double-standard provokes a conscious stress on Ben, who feels his success is related to the success of all African Americans. This seems to be Miers's opinion, and it is interesting that the setting of the novel—indeed, in Miers's very selection of the subject—is the college campus. Miers seems to claim that the racist institution of higher education is the only place—if the African American student can recognize the great social responsibility he has for his people—he can overcome the oppressions of his culture. Again, this is problematic because it creates diverging motivations for college: white students can go to college to learn and develop both intellectually and economically; African American students must go to college in order to lead their race out of the oppressions wrought from white-dominant culture. In this scenario, African American students, like Ben, have no choice but to understand what they represent, even if in representing an entire culture, they have to sacrifice their own personal identities. Clearly, this reductive thinking is a result of Miers's station and subjectivity. In not condemning white privilege and American racism, but promoting the idea that African Americans must serve themselves despite the suffocating subjugations of American institutions, Miers does little to actively progress his novel's dedicated problem toward a more just conclusion.

Ben must constantly consider not only his own academic interests and the racist obstacles that threaten his advancement, but also the expectations that he provide the service of advancing the circumstances of all African Americans, as a member of Ben's community observes, "You're not going to college just for yourself. You represent all these people and what they can hope for their sons and grandsons maybe" (81). This sort of discourse occurs often throughout the novel, but the duty Ben feels for leading his people—levied upon him by Miers—is constructed through a vague notion of what Ben *can* do, if anything. In other words, the claim is that Ben's education will somehow positively affect the entire African American population, but it is never clear exactly how that is so. Therefore, Ben is left with the notion of responsibility to represent his race not only despite the prejudices of the academic system but with no definitive means of doing so. Miers follows the standard trope that it is education that can help challenge oppression and develop society, but he does not give Ben a pragmatic trajectory that connects his education with fighting racism, which illustrates the more poignant reality that education alone cannot challenge the deeply-rooted prejudicial ideologies of the United States.

The obstacles Ben faces while taking classes at a "white man's college" are acceptable to Ben because "an education's worth it" (18). Even so, Miers does well to rhetorically criticize racial prejudice by producing a number of racist circumstances for Ben that can act inflammatorily in the reader's mind. A major setting of the novel and vehicle for Miers's rhetoric is the football field. Ben quickly becomes a star player for his college's football team, but does so amidst the prejudices of his classmates and other schools. In one pivotal scene, the early antagonist, Jed, spikes Ben's hand with his cleat, tearing Ben's skin and ultimately scarring him, an image that is revisited a number of times throughout the rest of the novel: "Unexpectedly in the next instant pain struck through his whole body, shutting out every bit of sunlight in one

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sudden, blinding explosion before his eyes….He would see the cleat marks where the shoe had stepped on it" (44). Jed's attack against Ben is representative of the violence African Americans are exposed to in a prejudicial society that views them as inferior. Despite this violent episode, however, Ben persists in dominating the football field during games, earning him the respect of his peers (and, formulaically, eventually Jed): "After classes, on the campus, when he stopped for his mail in the college bookstore, fellows he had never seen before spoke to him, seeking his opinion on the team's prospects….It was astonishing how quickly the change had come" (54). Though it may at first seem victorious that Ben has won the favor of his classmates via his athletic aptitude, I argue that this is a form of ersatz inclusion; Ben's campus popularity is wholly dependent upon his athletic prowess. He is a spectacle to his classmates, to be watched and admired and accepted because he brings them what they desire: victory and school pride. Furthermore, he must do so at the expense of his body, being forced to participate in a violent sport (he had won a football scholarship). Without this unique skill, Ben may have been unable to bridge the racial divide between himself and his classmates. This is obviously problematic because not all African American students can easily negotiate the subjugations of racism through such activity. Ben's football heroism is a simplistic interpretation of how fraternity through sports and love for one's school can overcome something as heinous as racism. Foster suggests, "By locating [campus novels'] impetus for national belonging ('class feeling' writ large) in the extracurricular activities of college kids, these popular texts help us to see the historical momentum toward white reconciliation in places we're not accustomed to look" (464). This sense of "white reconciliation" (the argument being that the genre supports a post-Civil War communion amongst whites) in *Big Ben* is facilitated through an eventual affection for Ben in his football success. The white students come together, indeed, to support Ben, but also to

relinquish their own adversaries. The group rallies around helping Jed pass his courses, they come together to run a diner when the friendly white owner becomes sick, and they come together to beat the favored football rival. Ben acts as catalyst, but again, this subtracts his humanness to serve the needs of his hegemonic classmates.

Prior to the big Dixie Tech game, Ben gets word that the southern school will not play State if Ben is on the roster. They protest by not wanting to play against an African American. At first, the team rallies around Ben. Eventually, however, they submit to the futility of their cause and play without him, winning it "for him." Once again, this simplistic result overshadows the overt and constant prejudice Ben faces in his everyday life. Interestingly, in a 1942 Peabody Book Review of the novel, the editors suggest, "The situation of co-education of the races in the book is foreign to Southern thought. The race situations may be stimulating for Northerners" (185). This suggests that at the time (approaching the middle of the century), the racial divide between the north and south was still prevalent and volatile.   Ben's subtraction from the Dixie Tech game draws attention to this divide but does not go so far as to outright condemn it. Certainly, Ben and his classmates are irate, but the result of the team's triumph without him questions his worth in a culture that actively attempts to marginalize him (in this case, literally: on the sidelines). His team's victory does little to confront the fact that the system's blatant racism prevented an African American man's access to the white world.

Perhaps the most scathing criticism of social injustice in racism that Miers delivers is in the post-college realities Ben faces upon graduating. In connecting *Big Ben* to the concerns of Critical University Studies theorists, and in recognizing the economic concerns of marginalized cultures, Ben's future employment prospects, despite the assertion that a degree in higher education will provide for a student economically, are mired to the fact that his race precedes his

ability to find work. Ben is not ignorant to the potential trials of future job prospects while still

in college: "What was the sense of going to college?...Even with a degree what future was

assured him?" (114). Although this concern is echoed in near all campus novels, even those

featuring traditionally hegemonic students, in Ben's case, the realities of the working world, as

depicted in the novel after he graduates, suggest that the cultural racism of employment

substantiates Ben's very real concerns.

The sequence of future prospects for Ben is interesting to analyze. Ben begins college

with a desire to be a lawyer. He often muses on his future title: "Ben Johnson, Lawyer," a motif

that motivates him to study hard and persist despite adversity. Because of his football success,

however, Ben is offered a contract to play for a professional team, which would pay him a large

salary. He ultimately decides to forgo the football contract in favor of continuing his education

toward the law degree, mostly because he feels there is more pride in such a professional career

and that it best reflects his anxious need to represent his people. This idealistic notion meets the

constrictions of the real world, as later in the novel, when Ben is looking for work, he realizes,

"So much of that future seemed bright save for one detail—the job. A Negro who wanted a

professional career was shooting for the stars" (191).

Ben cannot find work despite his college degree. In illustrating this, the text seems to

sever the notion that one's education automatically results in one's financial stability, especially

for marginalized students. This is an important precursor for CUS because—as will be realized

when considering campus novels of the contemporary era—the question of economic security as

correlates to higher education becomes more tenuous as corporate interests infiltrate academia.

Ben's white classmates cannot understand his particular circumstance: "Ben frowned.

Why were Max and Jed worrying about jobs? They'd do all right. He was the one who was

going to have to scratch hard. Let them look in the classified advertising sections and see how

many of the help-wanted advertisements stipulated: 'White only'" (193). Ben does work briefly

in a law firm, but quits when he is confronted with egregious racism in the workplace.

Interestingly, Ben is ultimately discovered for his singing voice and receives a record contract to

sing the songs of his people for white audiences. Like his football career, Ben becomes a

spectacle of African American culture for white audiences; this brings him popularity (and

financial stability) but objectifies him.

Miers intends his ending to be heroic and inspirational; like the real-life Paul Robeson,

Ben presumably goes on to make a living singing and recording records. Lost in this conclusion,

however, is the fact that Ben does not get the opportunity to pursue his first ambition, that of

becoming a lawyer. And it is debatable whether or not he serves the African American

community by singing their traditional music, but the feel-good result of the novel must be

constrained in recognizing white agency and superiority has not been challenged. Ben's

education had nothing to do with his success; it was chance discovery in the music industry that

serves him economically. Nor does Ben positively reflect the plight of most of his African

American companions. *Big Ben* may promote the grandeur of its titular protagonist but it better

illustrates how the latent prejudices of the early 20th century resulted in a continued academic

and economic oppression of typically marginalized populations, and that higher education was

not yet ready to take such dilemmas to task.

Conclusion

Campus novels of the early 20th century teach us many things about the student

experience in higher education as well as cultural ideologies that are foundational to

contemporary academic structures, corporatization, and scholastic access. Predominantly,

colleges were insular and exclusive, essentially admitting only students from the already-elite

classes of American society in order to sustain the hierarchal stratifications of a racist, classist,

and misogynistic American ideology. And though the concerns of the CUS theorists at the end

of the century are only represented in trace examples of student anxiety about the future and the

structurally situated correlations between higher education and financial prospects, it is easy to

see how budding notions of academia as an economic driving force that could be capitalized

upon in the succeeding decades are illustrated again and again. Very seldom, if ever, would a

campus novel feature a student who does not eventually attempt to correlate their education to

future prospects. Because of this, as the century progressed, the notion of higher education as

avenue for economic agency became more situated in the bedrock of American ideology,

resulting in the mass proliferation of college campuses opening in the Golden Age of higher

education, vastly expanding student populations (both in number and in cultural diversity), and

keener equitability between one's degree and one's future employment. Because of this critical

cultural shift, it is natural that market-based thinking would eventually infiltrate the popular and

growing industry of educating students. It is only a short step, then, to the essential problems

most concerning to CUS theorists, to be discussed in Chapter 4.

The college experience as a sociocultural rite of passage is perhaps the one thread that

extends to all campus novels. Foster agrees, "Campus novels track their hero from her or his

freshman to senior year, recording the trials and subsequent maturation that ensue, ultimately

ending with graduation, followed occasionally by marriage to the sister or brother of a friend.

The novels are thus bildungsromans, in the sense that they trace a young person's emergence

from the family into the social world" (465). Near universally, authors of campus novels

recognize some sort of metamorphosis in students as they engage in the social and intellectual

elements of college life. This is important to note because, in American culture, higher

education may be the essential social rite of passage that has persisted since European

populations settled on the continent. Invariably, that education is thusly connected to financial

stability and economic superiority becomes obvious. Connecting this notion with the

expectation that higher education acts as a conduit by which this market dominance is achieved,

it is no wonder that campus novels of the early 20th century depict population inequities,

hegemonic solipsism, and apprehension over the need to best one's classmates. The presumption

that college was developed solely to educate the members of society and to create and maintain a

democratic society is, then, decidedly false. Rather, at least in the early part of the century, it

was a tool to sustain the economically hierarchal hegemony against the insurgent marginalized

classes struggling for inclusion and social power.

Campus novels of the early 20th century help us to identify the standard academic

practices that may still exist on contemporary campuses and in contemporary classrooms. As

rooted to American culture and economy as higher education was in the 19th and early 20th

centuries, it was not until the end of WWII that higher education became essential to the very

fabric of American culture and students began to flock, in droves, to academia. The

establishment of new colleges, the practice of enrolling more and more diverse students, and

legislative innovations such as the GI Bill would forever change the dynamic of higher education

and how it interacted with the American population. The campus novels of the Golden Age of

higher education help to pinpoint these shifts, show how the economic boon of post-WWII

America directly correlated to increased student enrollments and an expanding middle class, and

prompted the late-century conservative attack on higher education, which resulted in

contemporary crises and critical scholarly pushback. Analyzing the student protagonists of these

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novels at the middle point of the century will help to situate the student experience amidst these

dynamic and grandiose changes.

CHAPTER 3

THE PASSAGE OF RIGHTS IN THE GOLDEN AGE

For the system of higher education in the United States, the period directly following

World War II instigated a rapid expansion that included the establishment of new colleges,

increased student populations, faculty job security, federal funding, and a more diverse student

body. Public policies such as the Truman Commission and the GI Bill allowed for more colleges

and more students to access a higher education system that had traditionally been reserved for

the most privileged classes. Tuition was low and job prospects for the college educated

proliferated. It seemed as if the national identity of the United States was consistent with the

country's devotion to the establishment and evolution of its system of public higher education.

Of course, John Thelin's utopic nomenclature, "The Golden Age" of higher education continued

to serve mostly the privileged population so that marginalized students still found access to

higher education difficult or impossible, which makes the notion that it was "golden" for

everyone shortsighted. Even so, the rapid growth of academia in the United States—both

physically, in new campuses, and ideologically, in popularity—in the post-war period was

consistent with the economic success and the democratic mission of the mid-century United

States. Newfield points out, "The United States was far ahead of European rivals in high school

graduation rates by 1940 and developed a similar lead over virtually every other country in

college graduation rates in the thirty years after World War II. It consolidated this lead during

the economic 'golden age' of high growth and broadening national prosperity" ("American

Funding Model" 611).

The academic "prosperity" of the United States during that time coincided directly with

the general economic strength of the country as it was then positioned as a global power. Chaput

articulates how the growth of academia in the United States was not coincidently independent from the concerns of the economic boon: "National political interests certainly helped define universities, but they did so in clear collaborations with the needs of industrial capitalism" (57). In other words, the growth of universities in the Golden Age was in part motivated by the economic needs of a nation recently established as a global "superpower" during the period of the Cold War.

From a contemporary perspective, the tentative balance between the more liberal and humanitarian motives of higher education (held by most CUS scholars and perhaps even faculty) and the economic interests of corporations investing in higher education created a rift in the policies, pedagogies, and academic practices among all of the constituents of higher education: from college presidents to students. However, Chaput clarifies this schism by acknowledging how the Golden Age did not champion one but both of these ideological paradigms within the confines of the same campus walls:

> The establishment of public higher education created institutions for an entirely different class of students, helped industrialize the nation, and distinguished the United States from its European competitor nations….Universities also entered into major corporate contracts, conducted research for the federal government, and reproduced a capitalist culture stylized around consumerism long before the so-called corporatization of the university. (74)

In acknowledging this historical truth, it may seem that the concerns of contemporary CUS theorists who posit the detrimental effects of rampant corporatization of higher education jeopardize the entire structure of knowledge acquisition in academia are overinflated. If, indeed, higher education in the United States, even in its most prosperous time, was so intrinsically

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linked to economics, how then can the current corporate practices continue to be deemed problematic to the system of higher education? In short, what is new about corporatizing higher education that demands such fervent criticism?

Though this chapter focuses primarily on campus novels of the Golden Age of higher education (and even then, my focus is on novels in the early years of this period), it is worth noting that they act as precursors for such issues in contemporary times. Starting with the most pressing issues faced by contemporary students in the university, we can then trace the problems to a historical locus during the Golden Age, using the literature of campus novels as the vessel by which we can locate and explore how higher education went from a national and economic engine to a system that potentially disenfranchises its very students.

The campus novels of the Golden Age of higher education are not immune to these contemporary concerns; in fact, it seems as if the final anxieties of a contemporary academic system beguiled by corporate capitalist concerns can be felt by students in the middle of the 20th century. This may indicate that although the nation and the system of higher education were in a period of rapid expansion and economic success, students were still burdened by the uncertainty of vague job prospects, and social barriers to their maturation passage. Campus novels of the Golden Age depict a marked contrast between the traditionally hegemonic and typically marginalized narratives. Indeed, there is, in this period, a much larger pool of texts concerning marginalized communities and identity politics than in the era previous, which allows for a more profound and analytical study on the interaction between marginalized cultures and higher education. For instance, with the production and publication of novels considering the marginalized experience in higher education, one can make conclusions about the role of literature as a social criticism to inequities in the social institutions in a society claiming to

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operate democratically. As will be seen, such novels are often overt in defaming the disparity of higher education and are strident in condemning the latent institutionalized prejudices the system of American higher education continues to represent.

For instance, Chester Himes's 1954 novel, *The Third Generation*, centers around an African American family whose son, Charles, wishes to matriculate at a predominantly white college while being forced to encounter the racisms of the time. Charles believes that his education will help him improve himself, making him someone "worthwhile" (15). Just as in Earl Schenck Miers's campus novel *Big Ben* (1942), and in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) (to be analyzed in this chapter), Himes's novel wrestles with the problem of expectation. The African American students feel a cultural pressure to contribute to the struggles against racial oppression rather than develop personally and individually, as their white counterparts are often privileged enough to do. As an African American professor muses, "In spite of the indignities there was a certain inalienable dignity in the work itself, in bringing enlightenment to these eager young black people" (68). Although this idea is not replete with the anxiety of shouldering the burden of an entire race the way discourse concerning African American students often does, it shows that campus novels featuring marginalized African Americans are self-reflexively conscious of how academia is useful for the advancement of a group of people rather than the bolstering of the individual inside of society.

Charles, in attempting to survive the ostracizing circumstances of a racist system feels "all alone; alone against them all" (161). In addition to the pressure of representing his entire race, he has trouble rectifying higher education's proposed value to the imposed bigotries he has to face, rendering his feelings toward the system as counterintuitive to their promises. Ultimately, as a result of the injustices he receives on account of his race, he ultimately leaves

the school, believing his education was worthless to the point that his textbooks made him physically nauseous:

> Charles was in conflict with the university from the day of his arrival. He was at once inspired by the thought of being a student, and dispirited by the knowledge this thought inspired….he was fettered by every circumstance of the university life which relegated him to insignificance. He dreaded the classes where no one spoke to him, he hated the clubs he couldn't join, he scorned the restaurants in which he couldn't eat. (261)

That Himes has Charles leave college as a result of the Otherness he experiences reveals his narrative thesis: though higher education affords the promise of progress and socioeconomic passage, even in the mid-20th century its access remains available only to the most privileged of society. Despite new attempts to allow for a more diverse demographic, and because colleges were still rooted in Western traditions that marginalized non-hegemonic cultures, they ultimately still prevented the success of students for whom they were not originally designed.

Another text interested in the college experience of typically marginalized groups—in this case, women—is Mary McCarthy's novel *The Group* (1963). The novel's multiple female protagonists—all recent graduates of Vassar College between the Great Depression and WWI— explore the limited options available to women upon graduating, such as: marriage and motherhood, work (in male-dominated industries), travel (if wealthy), or political antagonism (often socialistic in nature). McCarthy's novel often features the sexual encounters of the women and describes them with overtly explicit tones; avant garde for the 1960s, this affirmation of women's sexuality paralleled the liberation of the female body, a concept of second-wave

feminism. As one of the character's gynecologists suggests, young women "have the right to expect the deepest satisfaction from the sexual act" (86).

One of the novel's primary focuses is on Kay Leiland Strong, who bookends the novel with her wedding and death. Although Kay—like the other women—is educated, and is granted a certain level of agency with that education, her life is largely dependent upon her husband, which harkens to Wollstonecraft's claim in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, "Women are…to be considered…so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men" (502). Kay's husband is abusive, adulterous, and neglectful, but she remains relegated to an inferior status to him, which ultimately results in her dubious demise. Judith Butler, in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," claims that "culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism" (908). Though Kay attempts to conform to the archetype of the subservient wife, her education causes her to question her circumstances, ultimately violating her engendered identity, which results, in part, in her death.

As a fundamental patriarchal binary, marriage is contrasted with education in the novel. The mother of one of the female students recognizes the loss of her own agency in her lack of education: "She harbored a mysterious grievance against [her husband] for not having been permitted to finish…her education" (131). It seems as if McCarthy is pitting the traditional expectation of women (subservience to men in marriage) against an independence wrought from a freeing education.

A major theme of McCarthy's novel is female agency in education and its antagonism to patriarchal constructs. One of the women, Norine, admits, "Our Vassar education made it tough for me to accept my womanly role" (443). Though this difficulty may pose particular problems

for women in male-dominated society, it nevertheless serves the political and personal needs of Norine and her classmates. McCarthy's novel complicates the lives of its female protagonists by not simply allowing their education to free them from the bounds of patriarchal oppression; such social inequity is far more complex and culturally ingrained than that. However, that her characters are educated positions them in tenuous roles that made social life in the middle of the twentieth century uncomfortable, which demanded attention to the evolving place of women in society and how higher education situates such an evolution.

As a feminist text, one could read McCarthy's novel both as an inclusion of women's themes into a largely male-dominated genre (the novel, in short; the campus novel, at large). Focusing on educated women and their potential agencies and subjugations in early 20th Century America adds to the discourse of higher education and its ritualistic enterprise of developing the student into productive members of society, particularly in terms of economic agency. The social and economic passage for women is commiserate with an anxiety of life beyond the security of the college experience. For instance, Helena "had been amazingly altered" by her college education, which had "changed her from a shy, pretty, somewhat heavy Western girl…into a thin, hard-driving, authoritative young woman" (3). And though the need to enter the working world was an economic necessity for most of the women, there is a sense of social responsibility wedded to their work, as women "were going into business, anthropology, medicine, not because they had to, but because they knew they had something to contribute to our emergent America" (11-12). Even so, jobs for educated women were not in abundance; for instance, in Libby's case, "The job she had been promised by a publisher, just before graduation, had not exactly materialized" (231). Because of these social and economic concerns post-graduation, higher education has not directly added to the overall life experience (at least not

obviously) of most of the women; there is a suggestion that the entire college experience was somehow negative, as evidenced in a discussion between Priss and Norine: "You really feel our education was a mistake?" Priss asks of Norine late in the novel. "Oh, completely…I've been crippled for life" (445). The conclusion to be gleaned from McCarthy's clever use of the campus novel for her discourse is that despite women's inclusion in one of America's most democratic and progressive institutions—higher education—patriarchal society continued to subjugate women to inferior roles. That she used the genre of the campus novel to criticize this notion shows that such texts in the middle of the 20th century were increasingly being used as avenues for social criticism and the dismantling of superiority paradigms.

The conclusion of WWII also serves as a cultural and philosophical crux for Western identity and ideology, especially in the use of nuclear weaponry and in the wake of the Holocaust, which—in part—ushered in the postmodern era. Postmodernism, which heavily influences and is often centralized in the arts and philosophy, wrestles with the question of reality, and assumes that there is no finite or permanent definition of the "real" or the "truth." Certainly, with the advent of weapons of mass destruction that have the ability to destroy human civilization as we know it, an existential crisis arose resulting in an intellectual and spiritual questioning of existence, reality, purpose, and tradition. Additionally, in reflecting upon the atrocities of the Holocaust, the very question of human morality and ethics became tenuous; stalwart beliefs about human virtue were instantaneously dismissed as constructed rather than "real." The resulting fear, uncertainty, and curiosity over existence would infiltrate much of the writing of the post-war era, including campus novels, and would posit the profound questions of postmodernism alongside the traditional theses of the genre. According to *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* by Bran Nicol, the three main elements of a postmodern text

include 1) self-reflexivity, the text's acknowledgement that it is constructed; 2) a criticism of realism; and 3) an active engagement with the reader, in forcing them to recognize their role in the production and analysis of literature (xvi). If we are to adopt these elements in the study of postmodern campus novels, we would have to understand at the beginning that the texts of the Golden Age of higher education were rhetorical tools used to not only identify with a growing ideological shift of post-WWII America, but to also question the virtues of academia that were once taken for granted. Indeed, the post-Golden Age era will be even more indebted to postmodern forms and fictions, but it is valuable to examine postmodernism's roots here.

In terms of literary production, the anxieties of postmodernism are represented in the narrative structure of mid-century novels, both in how the texts are constructed (the meta-fictitious, self-reflexive style of deconstructing the system of linguistics and challenging literary conventions) and how the characters think and react to their situations. Perhaps unlike the characters, however, the texts understand they are texts (metacognition) and such an awareness adds to the questioning of value and purpose in traditional sociocultural structures. It is evident, then, that in the genre of the campus novel, such nuanced concerns would extend to a questioning of the system of higher education itself. Where, in the previous era, the student's questioning of academia was rooted in the solipsistic concern of future prospects and how the system best (if at all) served them, the postmodern student (and campus novel) now questions the very fabric of traditional ideals, pondering what—if any—benefit comes from thinking or even maturing. Nicol suggests, "What postmodern fiction does repeatedly is prevent us from passively entering the fictional world by constantly reminding us that it *is* a fictional world…and that the way authors deal with fictional worlds might teach us something about the real world" (39-40). The benefit of this is to analyze campus novels of this—and the following—era as

cultural artifacts that do more than attempt to describe a narrative experience; they expressly attempt to position academia as a social institution wherein the individual benefit is as dubious as existence itself.

What might be seen as a virtue of postmodernism, furthermore, is that it helps us become aware of what marginalization is. To question the traditions and realities of society/culture means to also criticize the expected assumptions popular in the zeitgeist. Therefore, postmodernism took what was marginalized and moved it to the center. This is perhaps why campus novels from the typically marginalized perspective demanded a wider depth of study and consideration, and why the themes therein were relevant to an uncertain and changing society. Nicol asserts, "Both postmodernism and postcolonialism challenge the notion of a single authoritative viewpoint which claims to be universal, which conceives of human beings as sharing an 'essential' core of subjectivity, and which is associated with European Enlightenment thought" (122). In other words, postmodernism positions what was once considered the "Other" in the forefront of the discourse, deconstructing notions of superiority latent within Eurocentric thinking. This also is relevant to the literary work of and about women and Feminist Literary Theory, as Nicol articulates, "[Feminist writers'] work directs its postmodern techniques towards uncompromisingly feminist ends, continually insisting on what is different about female experience of the contemporary world and why this needs to be taken into account" (141). It seems, in short, that writers in the postmodern era saw literature as an avenue to dismantle the reigning notions of hierarchal stratifications in the modernist era of literature before WWII.

To some extent, the campus novels I have chosen to analyze for this section were published close to the end of WWII and the advent of postmodernism. The intention here is to recognize the direct impact of these enormous cultural shifts on literature as they were in the

midst of occurring. The residual impact on the genre can and will be analyzed in the post-Golden Age section in the following chapter. And though, by virtue of the publication dates, the students in some of the novels attend college before WWII, I am more interested in how the authors of the novels, in writing in the newly-established postmodern era and at the beginning of the thriving Golden Age of higher education, are reacting to the cultural shifts. When it comes to the traditionally hegemonic student experience, it will become apparent that the student's narrative and concerns are very similar to those of the previous era, but the authors' constructions of the narratives differ in that they now reflect postmodern ideology and the extreme shifts in higher education's proposed sociocultural value in establishing and bolstering American national idealism, while challenging this value with a nuanced form of skepticism.

The campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students in the Golden Age of higher education are not nearly as cognizant of social prejudice and the experience of the marginalized student. But they are—at least in tone—aware of the national ideological change that includes discourses on marginalized communities and education. As a result, these novels seem rife with tension, as the to-date sustained structure of the hegemonic students' hierarchy is now challenged. Such students, once so comfortable in the privilege they were never aware of, begin to feel as if they are losing social agency to a momentum of rights movements centered upon equity for groups previously denied access to institutions such as academia. The resulting anxiety enhances the typical anxiety/dread for the future found in the novels of the previous era.

This is perhaps typified elegantly by Richard Yates's excellent novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961), which may not constitute a campus novel per say—the narrative begins with the characters post-college—but the static, benign life the protagonists live is depicted in stark contrast to the enthusiasm of their college idealism.

Revolutionary Road is a subtle but scathing criticism of the budding suburban culture of 1950s America. Developed with a careful attention to the strain of conformity on the minds of educated youth, Yates's novel challenges the constructs of normalcy and social expectation while subjecting his characters to the trauma of suburban middle-class concerns.

Frank and April Wheeler are young, college-educated New York City socialites whose ideas and motivations revolve around the arts (April studied theatre) and culture derived from their college experience. However, upon their marriage and subsequent pregnancy, the two decide to move to suburban Connecticut, where they can cheaply afford a house, while Frank commutes to New York to work at a job he despises. For a time, they conform to their adopted environment, pretentiously maintaining the belief that they are different and more cultivated than their suburban neighbors; Frank, interestingly, even demands that his job is pointless and that he does it almost out of spite and irony (as his father worked for the same business). However, the extreme conformity and monotony of their lives eventually wear on the couple, forcing a number of violent rows between husband and wife that threaten their family.

As an intended balm to their tribulations, Frank and April plan to expatriate to France, something they dreamed about in college; this decision (something troubling to their neighbors) alleviates much of their stress, until April finds she is once again pregnant, and the trip is cancelled. The characters' final tragedy concerns April attempting a self-abortion and fatally wounding herself. Yates seems to point fiercely at the oppressions of conformist suburban society and condemns the construct of hyper-normalcy that the American suburbs suggest to maintain.

Yates pits the ideas of youthful idealism against the fundamental aspects of survival in a capitalistic country. For Frank, there is no question that he must work to provide material

comfort and living conditions for his family, despite the fact that his job is "the dullest job you can possibly imagine" (13). He conforms to these expectations because he sustains an image of himself as an intellectual, someone apart from his suburban neighbors and whose intellect is in stasis only until he finds an escape (however elusive and imaginary) from his suburban trap. He maintains, "It's bad enough having to *live* among all these damn little suburban types" (24) but wrestles with the slow recognition that he himself has become what he detests: a suburban father working a job he does not care for without any sense of freedom from the paradigm. Frank begins, then, to have what could be understood as a postmodern existential crisis, "What the hell kind of life was this? What in God's name was the point or the meaning or the purpose of a life like this?" (57). It is evident that Frank's suburban malaise and his subsequent anxiety are meant to overtly criticize the constructs of American suburbia; Yates, furthermore, specifically shows the problematic result this has on the infrastructure of the family.

April's seemingly impulsive decision to end her pregnancy is truly a violent attempt to wrestle her family from the clutches of empty suburban life, which she calls a "trap" (27). Her suggestion that they move to Paris is designed (at least, geographically) to deny the potentially demoralizing culture of her time and location. Though Yates paints her as an often hysterical person (demanding a feminist reading of this work to look into potentially stereotypical gender roles), her response to their situation seems to be an articulation to the reader that the constructed, insular world of the suburbs is false and destructive. She refers to modern American culture as "an enormous, obscene delusion—this idea that people have to resign from real life and 'settle down' when they have families. It's the great sentimental lie of the suburbs" (112). However, April's attempt to forcibly remove herself from this paradigm ultimately results in her

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death and the destruction of her family, suggesting that there is little hope to escape the extreme conformity of the time.

Though *Revolutionary Road* does not contain illustrations of Frank and April in college, there are a plethora of instances where their post-graduation lives are inconsistent with the romanticized idea of their futures experienced while in college, which suggests there is a schism somewhere between the safe structure of higher education and the more dangerous reality of the "real world." This divergence is an idea repeated in campus novels but expounded upon in the postmodern era; seldom do the collegiate expectations of life equal reality and seldom is reality constructed by understood rules. In *Revolutionary Road*, Frank and April's tragedy seem a direct result of this problem.

The novel opens with April performing in a community play that fails to meet her (or anyone's) artistic expectations. April takes the production of and her performance in the play seriously, as she went to a prestigious acting school in NYC. But because the play is a failure, it forces her to realize how her idealistic impression of life after college diverged from her actual life, which causes the central antagonism for her husband throughout the rest of the novel. Frank, unable to see this at first, demands, "It's sure as hell not my fault you didn't turn out to be an actress" (25). He is yet to realize how her disappointment in the dissolution of her expectations will soon mirror his own.

There is a constant discourse about the intellectual mind and its potential to divert from the conformity of the American suburbs. Frank ponders, "Intelligent, thinking people could take things like this in their stride….Economic circumstance might force you to live in this environment, but the important thing was to keep from being contaminated. The important thing, always, was to remember who you were" (20). This idealism, early in the novel, cedes quickly to

the reality that it is a false consciousness designed to be a defense mechanism against the truth: that he has become that which he despises most. Yates subtly hints, however, that the exchange from college to the "real world" inherently initiates this anxiety: "But as college wore on he began to be haunted by numberless small depressions, and these tended to increase in the weeks after college was over" (22). This seems to suggest the anxiety for inclusion and survival in the world post-college was prevalent in Frank's mind even before graduating, a theme echoed in many campus novels. In contemplating his own utility, he suggests, "Okay, let's say I was a promising kid. The point is there were plenty of promising kids at Columbia" (114). He is chained to the disappointment between his expectations and the reality in which he finds himself.

These anxieties translate into what Frank refers to as, "The hopeless emptiness of everything in this country" (189). His (as does April's) "real world" experience does not match the idealistic expectations he had in college—which are reflected in the never-to-materialize expatriation to Paris—which forces the ultimate tragedy.

In further closely analyzing the traditionally hegemonic campus novels of the Golden Age of higher education, the postmodern concerns and economic reverberations of a post-WWII world become evident and further emphasize how higher education in 20th century America was changing and acts as a foundation for contemporary concerns.

Spud and Lymie, the Postmodern Fellows

In 1945, William Maxwell published the novel *The Folded Leaf*, which performs very similarly to the campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students in the previous era. His protagonists, Lymie Peters and Spud Lathem, are young white men who view the college experience ostensibly as a rite of passage toward some vague masculine maturity. And while these similarities may at first seem consistent with the genre and redundant to the theme,

Maxwell troubles the narrative with episodes and considerations that reflect the tumultuous time of America's involvement in WWII and the mid-century development of what will become the postmodern psychology. In short, *The Folded Leaf* rejects much of the idealism of the pre-Golden Age campus novels; Lymie and Spud, both living with the privilege of their hegemonic station, wrestle with themes the reader will find common, but Maxwell complicates the traditional moves of the genre by including a clandestine, quasi-requited homosexual attraction that leads to Lymie's suicide attempt. Infusing the genre with darker—though arguably, more realistic—elements shows a maturation of the genre itself; no longer is the traditionally hegemonic campus novel about the challenging but basic passage of a privileged man into society. The novels, at this point of the century, begin to reflect the troubling cultural shift for the hegemonic psychology post-WWII, where efforts toward social equity in marginalized cultures threaten to displace the agency innately held by the dominant culture. In other words, the novels become self-aware (the postmodern element of self-reflexivity) as the authors begin to engage with the then-incomprehensible changes of a rapidly contemporizing society.

Maxwell publishes the novel at the end of WWII and sets his characters between the wars. This is relevant because there is a distinctive cultural ideology at play in both periods. The novel, being set just after WWI, concerns a generation of (mostly) men attempting to figure out reason in life after the modernization of warfare brought into question mankind's philosophical and transcendent meaning. The psychological climate of the time was one of pessimistic defeatism, as is illustrated by one of Lymie's professors, "Over the last five thousand years the human mind has had every possible chance to make something of itself and so far…it has failed" (238). Similarly, WWII ushered in the postmodern era, where not only were questions of reality and perception typical academic fodder, they were discussed by a growing

population of college students, who flooded the ever-growing state universities in the United States. The insecurities of the culture after both wars seems mitigated by a surge of students attempting the rite of passage through academia, a feat that could result in more than just the boon of a degree, but a boon of self-discovery in trying psychological times.

The experience of Lymie Peters can be used as an example of how the academic rite of passage for contemporary youth acts as a sort of journey despite the environmental anxieties that surround him, "To live in the world at all is to be committed to some kind of journey" (81). Here, we see he is aware that he is on a transformative quest, one that will become more specific as he continues his college career.

Maxwell seems to at first align with the campus novels of the pre-Golden Age that deal mostly with the insular and subjective experience of male social passage. In one sequence, where Lymie and his friend, Spud, are being initiated into a fraternity, Maxwell uses language that reflects the rituals that act as obstacles in the rite of passage of academia. In mentioning the initiation, Lymie suggests, "The initiation should have been held in a long hut under the darkest trees in the forest, but that couldn't be managed" (49).

The passage continues as the fraternity brothers were "re-enacting, without knowing it, a play from the most primitive time of man…the boys of the village were torn from the arms of their mothers, rounded up, and made to undergo a period of immense torture. This torture may even have been a symbolic substitution for punishment by death" (53). The initiation sequence ends with the metaphor of boys being swallowed by a deity where, "after a period of digestion" they are "restored to life, sometimes with a tooth missing, and always minus their foreskin" (55). Through this process, Lymie becomes part of a community so that he can better face the impending rigors of academic life. Indeed, the re-enacting of the ritualistic passage scene is

consistent with Maxwell's re-enactment of the campus novel's central themes without hinting at his ultimate upsetting of the paradigms by which the genre traditionally functions. He sets the reader up to recognize the genre and the conventional moves of campus novels before frustrating the reader's expectation and providing a deeper criticism concerning the troubling nature of the students' contemporary world.

In the novel, the obstacles of the rite of passage are represented by literal impediments—in an early chapter, the characters struggle with some of the more radical pretentions of a professor's devotion to grammar—as well as philosophical, wherein students question whether the college experience is even valuable at all. When Lymie and Spud attempt to rent a room, it does not meet their fantastical vision of college life, "It was not the room they had imagined for themselves. It was not at all like the college room in the picture of the young collegian smoking a long-stemmed clay pipe" (132). The room is a metaphor for all of their expectations of college, which pale in comparison to their constructed fantasy. This sentiment is echoed later in the book: "But there is so often a discrepancy between real life and the life of the imagination, and people tend not to allow for it, or at least not sufficiently" (259). These sorts of obstacles do not cripple the students, but demand their deep attention if they are to pass them and move on toward their objective, vague as that remains in the narrative.

Another similarity between *The Folded Leaf* and campus novels of the previous era is that Lymie and Spud question the value of higher education while in the midst of completing their work in the same way that their predecessors from decades past did. In an episode where Lymie and Spud are tasked with collecting specimens from a lake for a botany class, they become cognizant of the conflict between academic study and the pure—perhaps childish—joy of playful exploration: "They came out of the water bearing slimy specimens in their hands and

in their eyes the sorrowful realization of all that they had lost by starting to school at the age of six" (227). Formal education is at odds with the more general but more authentic pursuit of experiential knowledge, and Maxwell uses this recurrent concept to criticize the institution of higher education for its supposition that it provides a social benefit to students when—according to his discourse—what it does is remove the earnest curiosity from which the students began.

Just because Maxwell subverts much of the genre's standards by including elements that reflect the budding postmodern anxieties, does not mean *The Folded Leaf* is not, at its heart, a book about the maturation of students. In Lymie's case, the idea of maturation is often thwarted by his histrionic reactions to his relationship with Spud and his displeasure at college. According to the essay, "The Child, the Adolescent, and the Adult: Stages of Consciousness in Three Early Novels of William Maxwell," by James F. Maxfield, Lymie's maturation is stunted by his fear of growth and lack of deep attention: "But the positive signs of Lymie's maturity at the end of *The Folded Leaf* are balanced—and perhaps overbalanced—by signs of his continuing refusal to grow up" (328). In other words, Lymie's journey is dependent on his conscious decision to allow his transformation to occur, which he is hesitant to do. This is consistent with the latent postmodern concern for "reality" and the inability to imagine a future where the impending doom of powerful weaponry has become more than a fear but a potential truth. Though some scholars may not consider *The Folded Leaf* to be a postmodern text, I posit that it conforms to the postmodern impetus to challenge the Modernist and Realist literary traditions, which claim to represent "reality" but often shirk their responsibility to actual life by creating universalist, utopian, and stereotypical realities that better serve a genre rather than express "real" human problems. *The Folded Leaf*, in troubling the Realist and Modernist idealisms of the college experience in conjunction with the nascent postmodern ideology, does precisely that: grants the

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reader a nuanced and more "real" perspective into an established genre with a relatively consistent thesis.

Additionally, though the Golden Age of higher education was consistent with the post-WWII economic boom of the American economy, students were still trepidatious about their financial futures. Maxwell does not allow his characters the reprieve of pondering their financial expectations as hegemonic men in American society. Because of the impending boon at the time of this novel's publication, it is probable that Maxwell re-emphasized the economic concerns of Lymie and Spud because there was an increased expectation of young educated men to aspire to economic greatness. Both Lymie and Spud's fathers are largely distant in the novel, mostly because they must spend the majority of their time making money. In fact, Maxwell illustrates Lymie's father as a man who conforms to the American ideological idealism of self-made success and "bootstrap" economic determinism. He correlates Lymie's interests in "whatever was artistic and impractical" with Lymie's pre-collegiate disinterest in financial success, which is a concern for him as Lymie's father:

> He had tried therefore to make Lymie realize that before you have a right to
> indulge in any kind of activity which is not practical, you must learn the value of
> money. If earning a living takes all your time and energy, it is something that you
> must resign yourself to….If a person is ambitious and really wants to make
> something of himself; if he can keep his chin up no matter what happens to him,
> and never complains, never offers excuses or alibis…he will have all the more
> success to come and he need feel no fear of the future. (86)

Lymie's father's depression-era anxieties prompt him to pressure Lymie into abandoning his more "artistic and impractical" concerns for whatever will prove economically relevant. Lymie then carries this into his college experience.

Such concerns, then, are not lost on the students, who thusly identify their college education with their financial prospects: "Sometimes they just talked, in a relaxed way, about school and what colleges were the best and how much money they were going to make when they finished studying and got out into the world" (67). Indeed, though these musings are "relaxed" (it is important to note that the scene takes place while Lymie and Spud are in high school and are largely exempt from economic concerns at this point), it is evident that their concept of school cannot be divorced from the capitalistic notion that their education is consistent with monetary acquisition and that there is a severance between the campus and "the world." College, then, is little more than a springboard from financially dependent boyhood to economically independent manhood. Of course, acknowledging that this construct is not inherently problematic—because, as has been illustrated, modern higher education has always been cognizant of economic concerns—it sets a precedent for the rampant corporatization of American higher education at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, creating both an apathetic attitude toward Humanities education, pedagogy, and non-vocational learning and an apathetic disregard for rising tuition costs and falling job prospects. At one point in the novel, Spud muses, "It is foolish to contend that money doesn't make any difference" (185), and though it is a reasonable-enough logic, taking it as *pro forma* that money makes *all* of the difference in students' lives distances them from the other merits of higher education; indeed, it makes the entire system of higher education vulnerable to collapse.

This is because teaching and pedagogy are central to the Humanities disciplines and are often focused on engaging students' critical thought while generating and transferring knowledge. With more and more students recognizing that teaching careers are derived from many years of higher education at great cost and result in low wages and positions contrary to the moves of administrators, the profession—at every level—becomes threatened. Students who would otherwise refine and condition their talents to serve academia are now finding the profession one solely of "goodwill" without any financial payoff, which prompts them to look elsewhere for work, denigrating the pool of talented faculty and thusly, schools and the system at large. In a July 2016 article in *The Inquirer* entitled, "Career in Teaching? College Students Turning Away in Droves," Kathy Boccella makes the argument that such an economic focus in a progressively capitalistic society causes students to reconsider careers in education. According to the article, "Temple University has seen a 20 percent decrease in education majors in the last five years. Gregory Anderson, dean of the College of Education, cites not only a diminished job market but also low pay relative to other professions, and the general public's 'jaundiced view' of schools." This sample represents a greater national trend, where education majors are ceding to a rise in Business majors, ostensibly because of the student assumption that business degrees will result in jobs in business and therefore, money, despite how vague that assumption is.

In *The Folded Leaf*, this phenomenon appears in a conversation among Lymie, his English instructor (Professor Severance) and Professor Severance's mother. Beyond the ominousness of Professor Severance's name, there is the sense that the teaching profession, though rewarding in transcendental and metaphysical ways, is impotent when it comes to making a living. Professor Sevarance's mother says to Lymie, "William also tells me that you like poetry….Why don't you become a professor? It's a very pleasant life. So safe. Nothing to

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worry about as long as you live. You don't make any money, of course, but I can tell just by looking at you that you'll never make much money anyway" (191). The insinuation here is that Lymie does not have what it takes to be ruthless enough to garner a lot of money and that he should, therefore, *settle* for being a teacher. This reductive thinking is exaggerated by her misassumption that professors have "nothing to worry about." Such discourse acts as a precursor for contemporary issues in higher education. Indeed, there are enormous differences in the issues of the Golden and post-Golden Ages, but understanding the ideological foundations of future problems helps to contextualize contemporary issues. For instance, in *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, Marc Bousquet outlines a number of problems associated with the labor force in higher education in the post-Golden Age, including the unregulated work of adjunct faculty and graduate students whose difficult positions jeopardize the standards of teaching: "One way of getting into the undergraduate experience is to ask how teaching in the mode of information affects their learning: that is, if it sucks to be a disposable teacher, what does it mean to be *taught by* this 'sayonara faculty,' the soon-to-be-disposed-of cheap teachers laboring in the informatics mode?" (85). So the student—like Lymie—who may consider a profession in teaching must consider the drawbacks more than the advantages of pursuing a career in education, as Bousquet continues, "There is plenty of work in higher education for everyone who wants to do it. The problem is that this enormous quantity of work no longer comes in the bundle of tenure, dignity, scholarship, and a living wage that we call a 'job'" (41). Granted, Bousquet is talking about the contemporary world of higher education, something Lymie does not have to consider, but because we are looking at campus novels of the previous century to search for foundational principles that have become the realities of the contemporary world, it is relevant to note how Professor Severance's mother's

interpretation of a teaching life is a foreshadowing of the concerns of CUS theorists in the 21st century. More importantly, Lymie is dissuaded by Professor Severance's mother's discourse, which extends to the large number of students today who may be similarly dissuaded by financial considerations and a lack of job prospects in the field.

Even though this conversation is set to have taken place between the World Wars, the relevance of students deciding to settle for teaching positions resonates into contemporary times, where a similar ideology has begun to exist at alarmingly epidemic rates. What this all results in is a system of higher education that cannot attract adept thinkers to join its faculty ranks and subjugates those who do choose to despite the economic disparities to economic classes that make it difficult to survive in contemporary America. These concepts are consistent with the postmodern sense of doom that Maxwell feeds into, whether he is metacognitively aware of it or not.

While it is true that *The Folded Leaf* follows many of the typical traditions of the traditionally hegemonic student campus novel, it is possible to recognize instances of typically marginalized students and how their status as contrary to the dominant culture affects their ability to access the agency of higher education. Rather than align with the majority of the bigotries infecting American society in the mid-century, Maxwell uses perverse examples of injustice and crass instances of violence to underscore how such oppressions are negative to society's growth. In one instance, occurring off campus, an African American boxer loses the decision of a match despite the fact that he dominates his white opponent, often knocking him to the ground. In a more insidious moment, the campus itself becomes the setting for violations of human rights against an oppressed student—this time, a woman. In what amounts to one of the more chilling moments of the novel, a raucous crowd of students, instigated by nothing more

than impulse and a bonfire, begins to wreak havoc on the campus. When the crowd intercepts a male and female student on a date, they beat up the male student and sexually assault the female. Maxwell writes of this incident, "This little unpleasantness, this token rape, seemed to give the mob confidence" (231). Beyond this expression, the scene shifts and the abusive encounter is not mentioned again. The reader is unable to rectify the generally benign nature of the student ruckus and the incendiary description of the sexual assault. Maxwell's cursory handling of the event may at first seem like a failed opportunity to condemn such acts but the casual way with which he uses such fierce expressions in clearly caustic ways prompts the reader to pause upon the singular paragraph, appalled at the event. This is consistent with Maxwell's troubling of the status of typically marginalized students on college campuses. As his predecessors (campus novel writers in the pre-Golden age) have shown, non-hegemonic students have a more difficult time gaining the advantages of higher education. Maxwell, however, deviates from them by positioning these disenfranchisements as problematic, rather than simply the residual effects of an inequitable society.

Nowhere are these concerns more evident than in the relationship between Spud and Lymie, which is articulated as platonic and fraternal throughout the text, but is rife with instances of homosexual attraction and interaction that jeopardizes the students' friendship and ultimately leads to the culminating act of Lymie's suicide attempt. In a 1995 interview with Kay Bonetti for the American Audio Prose Library, Maxwell says about his plan for constructing the novel, "I saw myself walking across flat territory, such as you'd find in eastern Colorado, toward the mountains. I knew that when I got to [Lymie's] suicide attempt I would have the novel. That's where the heart of the novel was. So I just kept getting closer to the mountains by creating scenes" (90). In other words, the aforementioned suicide attempt is the crux of the entire novel,

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and though it is never stated directly, it is propagated by an unrequited romantic affection for Spud by Lymie. That the entire novel would center on this problem indicates Maxwell's main concern: that of problematizing the accepted heteronormative construct of young college men at the point of their intellectual and sexual maturation.

Though the tenderness between the young men seems mutual, Lymie's feelings for Spud often betray deeper emotional feelings, "Very often, looking at Spud, [Lymie] felt the desire which he sometimes had looking at statues—to put out his hand and touch some part of Spud, the intricate interlaced muscles of his side, of his shoulder blades, or his back, or his flat stomach, or the veins at his wrists, or his small pointed ears" (115). Lymie may not be fully aware of his sexual feelings for Spud, but Maxwell cleverly connects such eros with Lymie's impending suicide attempt. By Lymie focusing, in part, on the veins in Spud's wrists, Maxwell foreshadows Lymie's suicide attempt by way of the cutting his own wrists. The tension achieved in the unrequited sexual attention demands that the reader focus away from the typical concerns of campus novels—of economic futures, peer competition, pressures for vague success, etc.— into this new realm of nuanced concerns for students in the middle of the 20th century. American culture, by virtue of the postmodern psychology, economic boon, and post-WWII ideology change concerning higher education, was shifting from individual concerns—marked mostly by what was important strictly to the hegemony—to larger social problems. The traditionally hegemonic student and his narrative, even in campus novels that focus on white men, begin to cede to the concerns of populations outside of the traditional discourse and their unique experiences.

The homoerotic proximity between Lymie and Spud manifests in a variety of ways, from sleeping, "In the big icy-cold bed they clung to each other, shivering like puppies, until the heat

of their bodies began to penetrate through the outing flannel of their pajamas and their heavy woolen bathrobes" (138) to showering, "Spud handed Lymie the soap and the nailbrush, and bent over with his hands braced against his knees. Lymie understood what was expected of him" (144). But Maxwell is almost coy with what he considered to be the focus of the novel. That is, Lymie's suicide attempt is thinly veiled as a result of a row between him and Spud concerning Sally, the sole female protagonist of the novel who begins an amorous relationship with Spud halfway through the novel. The conflict arises when Spud mistakes Sally's and Lymie's platonic friendship for romantic, causing him to distance himself from Lymie and thusly prompting the suicide attempt.

This ersatz reasoning reels in the face of the homosexual undertones mentioned previously. It is difficult to accept that Lymie is driven to ending his own life because Spud misunderstands Lymie's relationship with his girlfriend. It is more reasonable, conversely, to conclude that Lymie's attempt is a result of unrequited sexual and romantic feelings for his friend, who, in his own maturation process (or, in reaction to a homophobic society), has chosen a female partner. Additionally, to complicate it further, Lymie's suicide attempt is consistent with the postmodern existential crisis felt by youth that may not have been lost on Maxwell. With a dubious grasp on life's purpose and the fears of the unsteadiness of the human condition, Lymie's decision reflects the psychological learned helplessness of young people coming to maturity at such a befuddling time.

In his article, Maxfield contends, "Lymie attempts to bring about a similar change in Spud's attitude by committing suicide. Although the suicide attempt fails, it (perhaps somewhat unrealistically) achieves exactly the effect Lymie must have desired. Spud recognizes Lymie's love and for a moment at least responds to it in kind" (326). An idealistic ending for sure, but

the thesis is achieved: the experience of the traditionally hegemonic student is complicated by the postmodern and non-heteronormative identities. Maxfield continues:

> It is clear that given the choice between retreating from the difficulties of adolescence back to childhood and pressing forward from them on into maturity, Lymie would unhesitatingly choose the former course. Since this choice is impossible, however, there is no reason to assume that Lymie will not pass beyond his adolescent homoerotic attachment to Spud and enter into a mature sexual relationship. (327-8)

Although Maxfield's argument that Lymie may be able to survive beyond his unrequited love for Spud may be correct, it seems reductive to stratify Lymie's "adolescent homoerotic attachment" with a future "mature sexual relationship." The intonation here is that the homosexual feelings Lymie has are simply a result of an immature, underdeveloped young man that may be alleviated by physical and intellectual maturation into an adult. Of course, this thinking disqualifies the potential reality that Lymie is a homosexual young man who will continue to struggle with his identity in a mid-century American culture not primed for comprehension, compassion, and tolerance toward LGBT identities. Because campus novels are often concerned with a student's passage from youth to adulthood via higher education and the realities of the "real world" beyond campus walls, it is safe to presume that Lymie's suicide attempt is indicative of a greater social concern that will persist in his life long after his college experience concludes and his is able to grow beyond his affection for Spud. Unlike the supremely idealistic endings of pre-Golden Age campus novels featuring students from traditionally hegemonic backgrounds, *The Folded Leaf* foreshadows a perpetual identity shift for all students in the postmodern era.

The Folded Leaf was one of the first campus novels of the Golden Age of higher education to complicate the standard themes and narrative elements of the campus novel. In many ways, it bridges the gap between the exclusive, distant world of higher education that was reserved for a select few in the early 20th century to the campus novels of the Golden Age and beyond, which tend to shift focus away from the standard into the realm of the subjective, individual that is at odds with the structures of society.

Vince Reed, the Chauvinist Dropout

In many ways, Stuart Mitchner's 1959 novel *Let Me Be Awake* does not have the literary merit that *The Folded Leaf* or other campus novels have. Mitchner's prose is largely rudimentary and the narrative exposes significant problems with the author's appreciation for identities outside of his own, particularly when it comes to women. Much to the novel's detriment, Mitchner wrote the book largely "in contempt of the Beat Generation" (inside cover flap), which results in petty condemnation for the works of some of America's most renown writers and an insufficient interpretation—through a pedantic mock re-rendering—of Beat poetry. This rhetoric underscores a narrative that cheapens the academic journey through the subjective experience of its central character, who fails to grasp (as perhaps, does his author) the larger value of his discourse. The protagonist, Vince Reed, has a characteristic pessimism that might be over-typical for freshman college students: he is afraid of death, struggles with his inability to have sex with his female counterparts, and is intimidated by his peers and professors. The title, taken from "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," suggests—through the second person—that some enlightenment is being demanded, that an exposure to some nuance will "awaken" Vince from his childlike stupor. Typically in the genre, especially when considering the traditionally hegemonic student, this enlightenment and awakening comes from the course of one's education,

from passing into intellectual maturity through the tribulations of the college experience. For

Mitchner's hero, however, higher education seems to lull Vince into sleep, or keep him

continually unconscious of true enlightenment. His experience in college cripples him to the

extent that he eventually drops out and returns home, to the origin of his immaturity. This return

to infancy in the failed completion of his passage is foreshadowed in an early line, "He sat up,

wondering how many times his mother had opened the door and knelt beside the bed to wake

him with the cooing routine he pretended to hate, but actually loved" (4). Not incidentally, the

book opens with Vince's mother waking him so he can attend his high school graduation, the

moment that prods him toward college and his subsequent defeat.

That *Let Me Be Awake* may not be considered a work of profound art need not excuse it

for analysis in considering its correlation to this discourse. In fact, there are a number of

elements in the text that both correlate the novel to the standard of the traditionally hegemonic

campus novel and represent the particular anxieties of students who access higher education in

the Golden Age and postmodern era. As mentioned, Vince does not succeed in college; this

result is very atypical of campus novels written up to this point. Usually, students face adversity,

question the validity of their college experience, then come to a moment of "awakening" where

they understand higher education's role in their lives, make adjustments to conform to

academia's expectations, and graduate into the unknown world. In Vince's case, his budding

apathy and existential questioning seemingly derives from his histrionic reactions to his college

experience: "Lately Vince had not passed a day without stopping to ponder the uselessness of

life—the fact that you didn't want to end it opposed to the fact that if you knew it would never

end, you could not stand it" (247). As has been examined, this sort of inflammatory thinking is

consistent with the postmodern psychology post-WWII, which calls into question all of the

presupposed values of mankind prior to the war. In Vince's case, predictably but no less

disappointedly, most of his ennui and frustration stems from his inability to convince/coerce his

girlfriend to sleep with him, as will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

The novel begins by following the prototypical pattern of the campus novel narrative; the

student begins by being idealistic about the impending college experience before it begins, as

Vince muses to himself in the third person, "Vincent, you must not let anything stand before you.

You are destined to be a great actor and that is what you *will* become if you push everything else

aside" (32). True to form, Vince's idealistic expectation of college quickly diminishes at his

high school graduation, where the prospect becomes the reality of his having to engage with the

next, more trying, stage of his life: "I guess graduating makes people moody. It's quite a let-

down, isn't it?" (37).

This disillusionment is shared in a hyperbolic way by the elusive Alec Strickland, a

young man Vince meets in a New York City nightclub who, after homophobically jilting a man

sitting next to Vince, convinces Vince to attend Allen College, where his naïve sentimentalism

will surely cede to mature cynicism:

> You get out here to the East and go to Allen College…then your world will open
>
> a little, and a lot of things you don't like will fall on top of you and you'll start
>
> seeing how ludicrous people and emotions can be. It all stinks! If I only had a
>
> machine gun, and if it were legal, don't think I wouldn't' relish spattering some of
>
> these fat, foul fools against the wall! (63-4)

Clearly, this extreme reaction to the college experience is overwrought and disturbing; it does

not prevent Vince from applying and enrolling at Allen College, however. It also exemplifies

the growing displeasure of the privileged class of white males who attend college in order to

advance socially but are finding more and more students from previously marginalized

backgrounds on their campus. Alec presents himself as misogynistic in a number of episodes

throughout the novel and there is even a hint that he has raped Laura, Vince's eventual love

interest. These things, in addition to the persistent self-reflexive questioning of the postmodern

period, constitute Alec's—and eventually Vince's—aggressive attitude.

A repeated element of Vince's personality is his young idealism, expressed in an

incessant desire for public notoriety: "Vince dreamed of fame" (67). His transition from

immature child stuck in a rural Indiana town, to the college—which becomes his locus of

transformation—will, in his estimation, prompt his development, which will feed his persistent

desire for attention: "As soon as he escaped from the childlike world of Morgan City, he would

be free to chase fame" (115). Interestingly, that Vince egotistically wishes to pursue fame—by

becoming a stage actor—suggests something of the childlike solipsistic perspective from which

he wishes to mature. Like the Amory Blaines before him, Vince's ego directs his enrollment at

the college (under the presumption that a famous script writer and another famous drama

instructor will become his mentors) and propels his academic interests.

Unlike Amory, however, Vince develops a strong pessimism for the college experience,

from which he cannot recover. Such an advanced disillusionment takes its toll on Vince's desire

for fame, not because he realizes the emptiness of the desire but because he recognizes the

unlikelihood that he will be able to arrive at his intended aspiration. In a drug store on campus,

while thumbing through a magazine, he muses, "How futile it was to try to be anything glorious.

You only returned, like the magazine, to the rack of tedium and routine" (102). This is

especially pertinent when his ideal of the stage life and his place in it is shaken by the reality that

his would-be mentors only teach upperclassmen and the school play only casts juniors and

seniors previously invested in the school's drama department. At his first audition—at which he chooses to not even perform—Vince realizes that his presumption of how his future will be collides with the reality he must experience. In speaking with Laura, he says the audition is "just the opposite of everything I had hoped for" (145). He later continues the mantra of frustration: "I'd looked forward to this school so much. Why must everything be a disappointment?" (164).

At first, it may seem that Vince's oscillation between idealism and pessimism is consistent enough with the genre; indeed, his discourse mirrors much of that of his traditionally hegemonic contemporaries throughout the 20th century. But where Vince differs from his peers is that his disappointment does not lead to any greater form of enlightenment, which often occurs in other campus novels featuring protagonists like him. Instead of absorbing his disappointments and using them to continue his transition into adult life, using higher education as the catapult to his passage, Vince buckles under the loss of his idealism, leaves school, and faces an even more uncertain future than the trepidatious ones with which his contemporaries are concerned. Vince becomes incapacitated in the liminal stage of passage, unable to remain a child and resistant to maturity: "Why did he have to be young? Either he should be a little boy in a safe, stable world, or else an older person with a purpose" (282). In this sense, his immaturity is more profound than even the other students of the novel; that Mitchner makes Vince the protagonist, then, affirms the shift of existential uncertainty derived from the postmodern anxieties young men felt after WWII. The dour tone of Vince's decline and dearth of resurrection is more consistent with the faltering belief in the virtues of higher education at the time than the genre's prototypical construct of temporary disillusionment prior to an acquiescence and assent. The interesting thing about this is, of course, that the Golden Age of higher education was a period of proliferating expansion; despite this, however, it seems the student's mentality—as depicted in the novels of

the time—was not correlated with the expanding access. More students were enrolling in

colleges but the novels indicate a deeper ideological schism between higher education and

social/intellectual development, as propagated by the postmodern era.

There are little illustrations of Vince's concerns for future finances, though he does

participate in the stratification of class, race, religion, and sex to which his decade panders.

Mitchner, for all the narrative faults, does present the mid-century problematizing of diverse

multicultural relations. In an interesting passage wherein Jim Greene, "the only negro" at

Vince's high school, is considered by the author, there is the sense that Mitchner is—if only

cursorily so—conscious of the discord in the time immediately preceding the Civil Rights

Movement. Mitchner's sarcasm and curtness is especially vivid in the passage:

> Jim Greene was one of the happiest Negros in the world. The white boys and
>
> girls of the social set all liked him and treated him kindly—but only, of course,
>
> because he *was* a Negro….In being nice to and accepting a Negro, the white
>
> students were selfishly fulfilling their obligation to the battle against prejudice.
>
> They thought of themselves as broad-minded teenage emancipators….Jim Greene
>
> dreaded graduation. It would be lonely in the new world. (20)

The novel offers a number of other indicators that the mid-20th century was a time of social

unrest for a country developing an identity crisis when it came to marginalized cultures. In

addition to his discourse on African American subjugation, Mitchner affirms the pre-WWII anti-

Semitism with Vince's best friend Tom Zeller, a Jewish student who will "have a hard time in

college" because of his faith (30). Tom, who instead elects to go into military service, remarks

inflammatorily, "I'm a Yid, boy!...I guess they a-gonna throw me in an oven any day now" (28).

The laissez-faire attitude Tom takes is certainly crass and inappropriate, but combined with his

choosing the military over school, it suggests the role the anti-Semitic prejudice seen in early

campus novels continues to plague institutions of higher education and the society at large.

There is also a commentary on homosexuality in the novel, though it is much more veiled

than Mitchner's more strident attention to minority concerns. At one point, excited for the

prospect of high school graduation and college, Vince and Tom embrace privately and dance

around a room. When they are walked-in-on by a couple classmates, who are incredulous about

the innocence of the discovery, Vince and Tom reel from one another: "They had been caught in

a state that should have remained private, one that they had no intention of displaying before

anyone else. Now they were discovered, and as good as naked" (32-3). Later, concerning the

same incident (which, incidentally, has no further bearing on the novel), a classmate asks of

Vince and Tom, "You aren't turnin' queer on us, are you?" (48). The brief but poignant

questioning of Vince's sexuality acts both as a criticism for the penchant for homophobia in

America in the middle of the 20th century and also to question Vince's masculinity, which is

consistently challenged in the novel. His failure in college and to sexually lure Laura relegate

him to a childish, immature stature where he must move home with his parents (he identifies

home with his mother) and participate in a mundane life of routine and expectancy. In a tirade

against Laura at the end of the novel, after Vince has decided to leave the college, he

sarcastically enumerates the future now before him (though I posit the rhetoric may still be

aimed at seducing her):

> Yes, I know that I'm going back to Morgan City to my castle in the corn, to my
>
> land of corn-fed beauties with apple cheeks and minds and bodies as clear as the
>
> sun and the blue, blue sky. I'm going back home to my brooding mother who will
>
> cry out for affection and never get it; I'm going back to my tight-lipped father and

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the tense, strained cloud of irritation that lurks forever around our dinners, and

everywhere in that house I know so well. Back to the petty arguments! Back to

being babied and scolded. (299)

Mitchner correlates Vince's academic failure to a loss of his manhood and maturity. He returns

home with no clear plans or motivations and seems content to laden Laura with the guilt that she

has something to do with his failure, simply because she does not requite his "love" physically.

Where Mitchner succeeds in identifying the oppressive nature of his society in some

areas of marginalization, he almost certainly fails to do so when it comes to discussing the role of

women in academia. In fact, the novel's ultimate pivot point is Vince's estranged relationship

with Laura, which serves as the most interesting part of the novel and can serve to support the

notion that Mitchner's commentary concerning women is misogynistic.

Sexist stratification exists throughout, though it seems Mitchner is not as consistent with

his criticism of it. In fact, he may instigate prejudice further. In leaving behind his high school

sweetheart, Vince imagines himself part of a new hierarchy, someone beyond the small values of

his home. He thinks of her, "But he was entering a society in which she did not belong. He

primed himself for his new world" (120). Clearly, he believes his college experience will lead

him to places exclusive to those in elevated stations and so he cuts ties with those who anchor

him to his past. His treatment of his young girlfriend foreshadows the more insidious portion of

the book: Vince's jilting of Laura because she refuses to have sex with him.

In terms of campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students where the male

protagonist is the center of the narrative, there is perhaps no better female student appropriate for

analysis than Laura. The prototypical beauty, Laura enters the college and the novel via Vince's

History class, immediately stalling the students (and professor) with her ethereal, Helenic beauty

that runs abreast of the stereotypical but serves the narrative function: to distract Vince from his academic and dramatic pursuits and put all his efforts in obtaining this "object" of his desire. Indeed, Laura is objectified by every male in the novel; she is the dependent object of the male gaze and male sexual fantasy. It is no surprise that she is intimately related to all of the men featured, from Vince, to Alec, to Professor Clifford Hartman; and all of them claim her and her body for their own unsatisfied needs.

What makes Laura unique is that she wishes to practice abstinence with Vince when their romantic relationship begins to mature. However, rather than do so out of religious piety or general prudishness, Laura hints often that her aversion to sex has to do with a previously experienced set of traumas directly related to her beauty and encounters with men. In short, Laura is so beautiful that men have committed a range of sexual assaults against her, from threatening her to even a suggestion of rape by Alec. She covertly exclaims to Vince, "If you had any idea, if you only knew *what* it was. I'm so ashamed" (183). Mitchner seems to focus his vitriol on Alec, especially when it comes to the violent misogyny he associates with the student's character. In speaking of a girl who slapped him for making inappropriate comments, Alec tells Vince, "This girl always softens up! She has a fine, fine body, Mr. Reed. If it wasn't for that body, I'd ditch her. But it's smooth as satin, milky and full of curves and pink and budding. A flower to pluck and press against one's nether regions. Oh, to drill her!" (153). He goes on to say, "The woman is *my* plaything" (154).

Shortly after this episode, Laura is sexually assaulted by her and Vince's History professor, Hartman, who requests an interview with Laura under the pretense of discussing her grade but attempts to seduce her, threatening her academically. Though Vince listens to Laura's retelling of the incident, and though he gets angry enough at Hartman to begin covertly

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threatening him, Vince only reacts this way because he wants Laura for himself; he remains unable to see why she is so bothered by the experience. He tells her, when she concludes her story concerning Hartman, "You've become upset about nothing" (168) and "I know you're making this worse than it is" (169). He is able to recognize she is upset, but cannot fathom how his impending pressuring her to sex is consistent with the other traumas she has faced at the expectations of other men; nor can he see the detrimental effects sexual assault has on a young woman.

Laura's problem is that she genuinely begins to have feelings for Vince, and wants to express her feelings, but because of the stress of her trauma, she cannot commit to a physical relationship. She begins to blame herself for their impasse: "I've been so terrible to you….You should stay away from me. I know there's nothing you can say to all this. It was wrong of me to tell you what I did" (170). Of course, Laura has certainly done nothing wrong. But in a sexist, patriarchal society, where women are the dependent object to their essential subject male counterparts, she blames herself for the assaults she's endured, feels spoiled, and cannot even think to consummate her feelings with Vince.

Of course, Vince is persistent. As the campus novel hero, it is his prerogative to suggest he is "different" than the other males in the novel; he truly cares for Laura and so she should answer his sexual advances. When he tries to kiss her, she recoils: "No, Vince, I'm sorry….I don't want that. I'm through with it. If you care for me, you'll bear with me" (172). Vince is, unfortunately, unable to understand Laura's position or the traumas she has endured. He still plots his sexual conquest, thinking, "Gradually, she would become used to the idea and he might at last feel her arms around his neck, her lips warm-soft against his. He could stand the wait. The prize was the most tempting possible" (173). This sort of interchange persists throughout

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the rest of the novel. Laura recoils from affection, states that it has to do with troubling episodes

of her past, and Vince is inspired even further to have her body. Moody and histrionic when

Laura does not invite him inside her house when her parents are not home, Vince mistakes her

reaction entirely: "He saw passion flare up in her eyes. He wanted to tell her that he would like

to see her naked; that he would like to take all her clothes off and make love to her" (186). This

sort of thinking relegates Vince to a position no better than that of Alec or Hartman. He presents

to Laura an image of a true and sincere lover but inherently only wishes to conquer her sexually.

Vince believes he is morally superior to his two male antagonists and Mitchner extends

the early sexism of the novel to extreme bounds when Vince finally confronts Hartford and

Hartford arrogantly waves off Vince's concern with overt misogyny: "She's a first-rate bitch, if

you'll pardon my strong language. They oughta *kill* girls like that. Gosh darnit, they make the

temperature of some poor boy rise up, an' then they spit in his face. Yessir, girls like that oughta

be killed" (235). It is doubtful that Vince confronts Hartford out of a desire to shame the

professor but rather to impress Laura, to convince her that he is on her side, in order to seduce

her further. A similar occurrence happens when Vince finally confronts Alec, who in referring

to Laura, says, "Like any good animal, she loved her trainer, and she did everything possible to

please him" (286). He later says about her sexual abstinence, "Every now and then, you just

come up with a defective animal, that's all" (287).

Through all of this, Vince has the opportunity to rise in contrast to these deplorable

figures. He fails, however. Because his ultimate aim—despite confronting Alec and Hartman—

is to have sex with Laura, and because she is steadfast in her resolve to withhold her sexual

affection as a result of her previous trauma, Vince leaves her. He takes up the mindsets of Alec

and Hartman rather than look at the situation objectively and recognize Laura's burden. Vince's

failure with Laura, not necessarily his poor work at his studies, prompts his final retreat from her and the college. The two failures are inextricably linked: his emasculation at not succeeding in his academic rite of passage and his failure to seduce Laura combine to instigate Vince's total downfall. It becomes clear, then, in his rhetorical soliloquy where he tells Laura of his going home to his parents, that he does so only as a last effort to blame her and shame her into submitting to his will: "Let's accept the fact that I'm just a little boy….Why, Laura, you're a grown woman with a woman's body, and, unfortunately, the panting misery of a middle-aged woman's mind….So I'm running away" (300). Vince's reprehensible behavior at the end of the novel constitutes his inability to allow his experiences to teach him; his education is finally incomplete and neither he nor Laura has a clear future ahead.

Clearly, Laura's experience in college is jeopardized by the sexual assaults and misogyny of her peers and professors. Even in the middle of the 20th century, where higher education was experiencing a boom and female students were finding more access to traditionally male campuses, phallocentric institutions protected male aggressors and female students would have had difficulty focusing on studying when they were so incessantly attacked. Laura clearly has emotional feelings for Vince and is deeply hurt that he cannot understand her feelings and struggle. While these episodes could point to Mitchner's condemnation of the behavior of the men in the novel, it is just as possible that the misogyny illustrated in the text is infiltrated by the sexism in mid-century American society and permeates through the cover of the book and into the lives of the characters.

Let Me Be Awake teaches the reader about the changing experience of the traditionally hegemonic student in the Golden Age of higher education, but more effectively, it underscores the persistent prejudices alive in America despite the growing trend of academia's popularity and

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demands for racial and gender equality. The traditionally hegemonic student's experience becomes more and more dubious as concerns for the marginalized student experience become more pertinent, and the place of the white male in the cultural hierarchy becomes challenged. Indeed, in studying the campus novels of typically marginalized populations of the Golden Age of higher education, it becomes apparent that the genre of the campus novel evolved in the mid-century to better address the concerns of students like Laura, as opposed to Vince.

Natalie Waite, the Feminist Subconscious

Shirley Jackson's 1951 campus novel *Hangsaman* follows the story of Natalie Waite, as she leaves the shadow of her overbearing, over-academic writer father to enter into the world of academia and personal independence. At once wholly dedicated to her work and reclusive from her peers, Natalie attempts the rite of passage that is leaving the world of the child for the complex world of the mature adult. This exodus, wrought with perturbation and challenge, is best described by Natalie herself, as like "Going out of a warm, firelit house into the heartbreaking cold" (165).

Campus novels by and about women are integral to comprehending shifts in the inclusion of women in higher education in the twentieth century. Though women have enrolled in college since the 19th century, their experience until the middle of the 20th century, both academically and socially, has largely been relegated to a secondary or subjugated status in comparison to their male counterparts. Since then, women have continued to struggle for inclusion and academic fairness. What makes campus novels specifically important, then, is that they illustrate not only the experience of female students and their particular struggles in patriarchal contexts but often do so using a narrative structure that is antagonistic to the paradigms of oppression that affect women, female students, and writers.

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Campus novels show how, in the early 20th century, women were often subjugated by being literally segregated in separate "women's colleges." These colleges, often offshoots of all-male universities, focused less on the sciences and technical disciplines than they did on subjects presumed to be relevant to women and more specifically, relevant to women homemakers: home economics and teaching (that is, children), for example. In fact, the concept was that education made them more apt at becoming wives. As Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex*, "In marrying [a woman, the man] gives her social standing" (1269), but her status as being educated elevates the husband's. This becomes relevant in considering the male-female relationships Jackson presents in *Hangsaman*.

Jackson's brilliance in describing the uncertainty of Natalie's rite of passage is not limited to the narrative plot; the very writing style and tone of the novel suggest disquiet in the mind of the transitioning person: Natalie is quite macabre and masochistic in her thinking. Throughout the early part of the novel, Natalie imagines herself under interrogation for a fictitious murder. In the course of dialogue with other characters and the general thrust of the narrative, a detective interjects into Natalie's consciousness (to which the reader is privy), at first questioning and later accusing Natalie of crimes that, not only did she not commit, but that were never committed. These subconscious interjections represent Natalie's inner turmoil. Jackson is adept at rendering the interlocutions of a teenage mind as believably consistent with Natalie's own discomforts during the transitory time of leaving the home and entering into college. As mentioned before, the postmodern psychology and existential questioning in the mid-20th century and consistent in many campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students are not lost on Jackson and Natalie. In fact, Jackson mentions the weaponry of WWII specifically in a section featuring Natalie musing about the abstraction of her and all life: "Listen to what I dreamed; I

dreamed there was a war; I dreamed there was a thing called television; I dreamed—listen to this—that there was something called an atom bomb. An *atom* bomb—*I* don't know; I tell you I *dreamed* it" (151). But of course, Natalie did *not* dream the atom bomb. It—perhaps more precisely, the idea of it—became central to art and culture of the mid-century, which is why campus novels like *Hangsaman* are constructed on the premise that there is something wrong or deeply troubling about everything in the world and the very logic of existence. These elements, combined with the more traditional frustrations of students in campus novels, articulate the uniqueness of experience of the female college student within the restricting bounds of mid-century patriarchy.

As with most campus novels, the theme of uncertainty features greatly in the lives of Natalie and her peers. Though by the middle of the 20th Century the expectation for a young person to go to college had become habitual, the process of transition for the student was one of unease and question. This anxiety seems paired with an enthusiasm for what the transition may bring; Natalie is "desperately afraid of going away to college" while "almost enjoying her fear of going away" (4). The sense of escape from the life of the child that is going away to school is thrilling to the student, despite the inability to grasp what the experience may entail. Natalie is told by her pretentious academic father's friend not to rest until she finds herself (29). It is this sense of adventure that drives Natalie beyond her fear during her separation from her childhood home and parents.

Naturally, when Natalie gets to her small, liberal arts college, she finds the experience of learning "excruciating," "bewildering," and "drastic" (47). Her abstract sense of enthusiasm for finding herself is tempered by the reality of college work and the peculiarity that is the isolated

world of the college campus. Natalie's character represents the anxieties of higher education as it expanded in the Golden Age up to about 1975.

Like many of her colleagues in the genre, Natalie's college experience does not match her expectation, leading her to contemplate the value of her endeavor: "For the whole first afternoon that she was alone at college Natalie asked herself constantly, 'Is this meaningful? Is this important? Is this part of what I am to go home knowing?'" (52). This confusion in the value of education shows a maturation in the student; no longer does Natalie consume what is expected of her without question (represented by her imposing father who makes her follow a strict regimen of personal scholarship). Rather, she develops a sense of independence in questioning the constructs of her academic community.

Jackson hyperbolizes the ideological construct of college life and how it is linked to one's future social survival. The concept, proliferated throughout American culture, demands that students matriculate through college in order to join the professional strata and acquire decent paying jobs; therefore, in a literal way, college success equals sustaining the student's life. Clearly, Jackson challenges this construct, instigating the notion that this form of social survival is ingrained into young Americans. When Natalie contemplates her dorm room, she muses, "This was, after all, the only room she had ever known where she would be, privately, working out her own salvation" (51). Natalie might not yet understand the extreme nature of the suggestion but Jackson's near sarcasm is apparent. Natalie feels the need to sustain herself through her college education deeply; she—in the early parts of the novel—buys into the programmed structures that her future is dependent on her current work. In her journal, she contemplates, "I wish I knew why I am so excited all the time. I keep thinking something is going to happen" (107) but owing to the vague notion of excitement and impending

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"something," she cautions herself to be wary of the potential fallaciousness of the promise, "Never wish for anything until it's ready for you. Never try to make things happen until it's on its way. The formal way is best, after all; no short cuts allowed in this passage" (109).

But Natalie undergoes a transition in her rite of passage in the novel that is not necessarily consistent with her education. Indeed, like many campus novels, there are no classroom scenes, forcing the reader to acknowledge that her transformation is extra-curricular. In Natalie's case, her transformation is one from the conformist conditioning of systems (like academia and family) to an independent, individual genesis. She first comes to realize her transition from daughter and sister to student, "her family behind and the college ahead" (167), and she later understands her transition from student of an oppressive and contained system to a free and unstructured person with vast imagination: "Everything is waiting for me to go off and do something by myself, everything is waiting for me to act without someone else" (214). Campus novels such as this affirm feminist theoretical and political discourse by placing women in contrast to patriarchal structure. In the early twentieth century, they do so by questioning but ultimately conforming to phallocentric archetypes for women (such as marriage and motherhood). In the second half of the twentieth century, female student protagonists reject convention by exploring femininity outside of patriarchal constructs. All of them criticize male dominance and socially constructed gender roles in academia. As Mary Wollstonecraft suggested as far back as the late 18th century, virtue comes with educated reason and this agency should be given to women through equality in education (498). The novels suggest that academia disenfranchises women students, which—operating under the recognition that education is an avenue for agency—keeps them subservient to men. Again, Wollstonecraft understood this dynamic long before: "Women are not *allowed* to have sufficient strength of

mind" (emphasis mine) (496). In other words, the inequities of the educational system over the twentieth century immediately relegate women to a secondary, non-essential status to men. In the novels, female students strive for intellectual independence, which grants them social independence.

Themes such as career vs. marriage and motherhood vs. personal independence are consistent in the novels, and Cixous's concept of the *écriture feminine*—non-linear, non-logical writing that is distinctly feminine—develops the texts, such as in *Hangsaman*, where the rather typical narrative structure gives way to a dreamlike, unorthodox series of passages. Luce Irigaray, in "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," affirms this stylistic mode, suggesting that it "cannot be upheld as a thesis, cannot be the object of a position"; rather, "it is always *fluid*" (797).

In an article entitled "Chambers of Yearning: Shirley Jackson's Use of the Gothic," John G. Parks argues that Natalie's transition is a form of escapism: "Natalie needs to escape from the heavy dominance of an egotistical and narcissistic father who seeks to create Natalie in his own image….Natalie's only outlet has been her rich imagination and fantasy life to which she turns to escape the intrusive assaults of her father" (19). Natalie's "fantasy life" literally separates her from her family, thus allowing for her successful escape, but it represents her yearning to escape from patriarchal oppression. In creating control over her thoughts and relationships to domineering men (this will include her English professor), Natalie is simultaneously subverting the restrictions placed upon her by a society that positions her as inferior and creating for herself an alternative sense of passage through her own experiential education. Parks later claims, "Out of desperation and loneliness, Natalie retreats deep into herself and her rich fantasy life" (19), but I contend that this is only a partial analysis of her introversion. Rather than a retreat from

reality, her fantastical creations are the beginnings of a budding independence that will result in her triumph over her expectations and engendered roles.

It is this sense of independence that creates the evolved Natalie, the student who understands her education is as much about her understanding herself and her needs as it is learning the formal curriculum of a university. Her personal objective, then, becomes to release herself from the confines of the traditional, patriarchal world, one that is innately antagonistic to female independence:

> It then became perfectly clear to her that this was the reasonable consequence of all her life, from the beginning until now. She had done so much to preserve herself from this kind of captivity and had taken inevitably one of the many roads which would lead her to the same torment; she was helpless among people who hated her and showed it by holding her motionless until they should choose to release her. (200)

Natalie's eventual rejection of this nefarious restraint is the point of her maturity and Jackson's thesis for the book. In such an oppressive circumstance—in this case, patriarchy and all of its structures—independence must come from the victim in her rejection of that which binds her. Natalie comes into herself in the establishment of her counter-patriarchal philosophy, which college brings her, albeit in a roundabout way.

Ultimately, as Natalie questions the value of conforming and begins to distance herself from her college peers, she reflects, "This damn place…it always turns out not to have the things I want, after all" (148). Natalie's seeming perturbation at her misinterpretations of education's values may at first appear like a failure of the system, but the college experience actually

provides her with the motivation and tools necessary to establish herself within a construct more comfortable to her: one of her own choosing.

In fact, as will be shown, it is not the system of higher education as it existed in the mid-20th century that Natalie uses to establish her mature self, as it is riddled with the patriarchal and stratifying traditions that subjugated women since the establishment of higher education in the United States. Rather, Jackson cleverly constructs a narrative directly critical of the established practices of higher education while offering recourse for women who still must, nevertheless, operate in an oppressive society. The campus is still a necessary setting for Natalie's transformation, but Jackson urges the reader to understand how true maturation comes from within and is not bound to the structures of society external to the individual.

Hangsaman offers an important discourse concerning the role of women both in academics and in society. Beauvoir claims that patriarchal oppression strips women from their independent subject-hood and makes them dependent objects of men, which "den[ies] against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being" (1266). Nowhere is this more evident in *Hangsaman* than in Natalie's relationship with her overbearing father, whose strange patronage subjugates her to a position constantly below his. Mr. Waite, though not a member of any college or faculty, is a respected writer of academic papers. Natalie's professors know of him and yearn for his approval. Likewise, he hosts events at his house for thinkers, artists, and scholars to share their mutual affection for the life of the mind. Natalie, however, is more introspective, more adverse to the structures and rigidity that guide her father's life.

The father-daughter dynamic is best on display later in the novel when Mr. Waite sends Natalie a letter at college. In the letter, Mr. Waite employs the Western mythical paradigm of chivalrous knight writing to embowered princess. He writes to her, his "captive" princess, and

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wishes to "rescue" her from some "dragon." This semi-romantic exposition is belittling and renders Natalie to a hierarchally inferior position to him, the more established academic. His diminutive manner relegates her to a weak status and, further commenting on the compunction of women to desire such a relegation, states, "It has always been my opinion…that princesses are confined to towers only because they choose to stay confined, and the only dragon required to keep them there was their own desire to be kept" (137). Mr. Waite cannot comprehend nor admit to the potential subjugation derived from patriarchal culture because he is planted firmly within its structure and enjoys his reputation because of it. He concludes this passage, "And I further believe, now, that if you *erect a tower*, princesses will flock to it demanding to be locked up therein" (emphasis mine) (137). The sexual suggestion here and general nature of Mr. Waite's dealing with Natalie are consistent with his sexist and reductive presumptions of power over her, which mirrors how patriarchy objectifies and sexualizes women to position them as inferior to men.

In an earlier letter, he objectifies her as an element of his grand design: "It has been *my* plan, Natalie, all of it, and when you approach despair remember that even your despair is part of my plan" (118). He is unable to release her into her own independence and sees her only as an extension of himself, arrogantly offering that he intends for her to suffer for some elusive and vague purpose.

The traditional paradigm of the subservient woman, perhaps typified by her father's dealings with her, seems to have always caused Natalie chagrin. As the novel progresses, however, Natalie begins to separate from her father to find her own identity through both formal and more experiential education. Early in the novel, Natalie recognizes that her education will distance herself from the traditional, restrictive fate of women. She muses, "I thought being

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married was everything I wanted" (19) but she ultimately rejects that concept, admitting she would be "thirty-four, and old. Married, probably. Perhaps—and the thought was nauseating—senselessly afflicted with children of her own" (9). It seems, as she breaks down the constructs of patriarchal academic life later in the novel, that she is commandeering her education to arm against this "nauseating" potential.

But Natalie is not immune to the changing culture of academia in the 20th century and her own need for financial stability in the post-WWII era. Unlike other students in the campus novels of the time, Natalie (and by extension, Jackson) is cognizant that higher education is going through a dramatic change, as illustrated metaphorically, "It might also be noted that the 'original beams' having been found to need constant repair, plastic brick had been substituted whenever possible" (50). The dual-meaning of the phrase "plastic brick" suggests a demotion of the pretentiousness of the college as well as a need for flexibility in the structure of higher education in the shifting time. Jeffrey J. Williams underscores a similar point: "Sometimes, in accounts of the university, it seems as if the university has developed from a singular and continuous 'idea'…. But, in the actual history of the American university, if there is a principle, it is adaptability" ("Post-Welfare" 190).

Though *Hangsaman* focuses predominantly on Natalie's rite of passage into adulthood and her challenging the constraints of the academic system, Jackson maintains a discourse on how economics are influential in a student's life and choices. For women, especially, a college education could be understood to be the difference between a social agency often unavailable to women and a life of banality. Unfortunately, because of the expense, this latter scenario is the fate of many young women, even in the time of great academic and economic expansion. Jackson writes, "There were offices where secretaries (local girls who could not afford college)

typed busily" (184). The idea here is that obtaining a college education is essentially impossible

for poor girls. Natalie is born into wealth, and it is never a question as to whether or not she will

attend college, despite the fact that she is conscious of her privilege. Christopher Findeisen

claims that contemporary students are more critical with regard to if they do or do not "deserve"

their wealth, further explaining that "It's not just that they take pride in their academic

achievements; it's that without the educational meritocracy there would be nothing to imagine

yourself being proud of" (83).

    But even so, she feels pressure from the economic burden her parents must endure to pay

her tuition. As her mother reminds her, "I've said it before, Natalie, and you know I hate to keep

dwelling on it—but you *do* know that the money sending you to college is really more than your

father can afford. We have deprived ourselves of many things." She concludes this line of

thinking by saying, "Just try to do better with your studies and with the other girls and even with

your professors" (163). The connection of these two ideas—of the economic burden of college

on the family and her performance in coursework—causes Natalie to feel guilty, so she feels

compelled to focus on schoolwork out of an economic responsibility rather than an intellectual

pursuit. This ultimately forces her to understand her future, in part, through economic terms. In

speaking of herself in the third person, Natalie muses, "She thought too of the worlds that lay

ahead for Natalie Waite, and tried to estimate them by a secret formula of her own: one hundred,

for instance—one hundred years, one hundred dollars" (167). The financial burdens of college,

alongside the uncertainty of job prospects for women after graduation, come to a paradoxical

head for Natalie, who understands a latent value in education but is troubled by the conundrum

of the reality she perceives around her.

Natalie's situation, which can be understood as the circumstance for many female students at the time, forces a critical understanding of what the Golden Age of higher education truly meant for students and the country at large. It is often seen in contrast to the following era of federal funding cuts and rising student debt, which means there may be a connection between the two, a potential element of the post-Golden Age concern in the Golden Age itself. In an article entitled, "Student Debt and the Siren Song of Systemic Risk," Jonathan D. Glater says, "To be clear, rising indebtedness does pose a threat to student borrowers and their families. Debt, especially in combination with adverse life events, can tragically sabotage borrowers by imposing repayment obligations greater than they can afford" (105). And though what Glater is describing is the specific student debt increase in the 21st century, it is evident that such concerns were nascent in the mid-20th century, during the so-called boom of higher education. Natalie's obligations to her parents and to society's strict guidelines for women puts her in an emotional debt: to her father and to the expectation that she make something of her education. Her burden is not as literally financial as that of the students of the late 20th and 21st centuries, but it is still predicated on the idea that her education and her future economy are intrinsically symbiotic, for which she derives an uncomfortable pressure.

There are a number of examples in the novel of how women are reduced to secondary roles in both higher education and society at large. Such instances extend to female characters beyond Natalie. Her mother, arguably, has had to endure her father for much longer and, therefore, has accepted her female gender roles as truth, remanding herself to a subservient position in the household. When Mr. Waite throws weekly parties for the intellectual elite (the guests are always *his* friends and colleagues), Mrs. Waite must coordinate the food, drink, and festivities. Natalie helps in the kitchen, about which Mrs. Waite "thought of this as good training

for her daughter" (16). The kitchen, and Mrs. Waite's attitude concerning Natalie's role there, represent a stereotypical female space underscoring the domestic expectations of women. And though Natalie is largely conscious of her mother's station in the family, she does not completely connect it to the patriarchal phallocentrism of her father; nor does she recognize the inconsistency with which he sees his future in her (a daughter) rather than in her less academically-minded brother. Mrs. Waite, though not articulate enough to have a persistent resonance in her daughter, still tries to impress upon Natalie her own circumstance and how it was wrought from the inequitable gender roles prescribed to women:

> It isn't any *single* thing….It's just that—well, look, Natalie. This is the only life I've *got*—you understand? I mean, this is *all*. And look what's happening to me. I spend most of my time just thinking about how nice things used to be and wondering if they'll ever be nice again….[I would] *make* everything all happy and exciting again the way it used to be—but I'm too tired. (34)

She concludes her frustrations later by admonishing Natalie about her relationship to her father, which is truly his relationship, as a patriarch, to all women, "And you watch out—the minute you start getting too big, he'll be after you, too" (36).

This patriarchal construct extends to Arthur Langdon, Natalie's English professor, and his wife, Elizabeth. Jackson cleverly links these characters to others in the novel. Langdon, for instance, mirrors much of Mr. Waite's dealings with Natalie and other women. Langdon even wonders if Mr. Waite had read any of his work and what his reactions were. He seems to take an intellectual interest in Natalie and her work but this is complicated by the fact that Elizabeth is actually a former student of his, who married Langdon and dropped out of school, a fact that surprises Natalie in her sardonic response to the news: "'You didn't finish college before you

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married?' asked Natalie with interest, *here* was an achievement to be envied" (80). Jackson's sarcasm in referring to Elizabeth's marrying Langdon as an "achievement" recognizes how women have no agency other than to marry into wealth and/or position. The reader understands that Elizabeth's situation is not a positive one and that she acts as a sort of divergent doppelganger for Natalie. Consistent with many campus novels where marriage and education are pitted as antagonists for the female student, Elizabeth falls for her professor, chooses him over her work, and suffers in the marriage as he increasingly ignores her and sleeps with other students.

Natalie immediately recognizes the commonalities between herself and Elizabeth. Originally enamored by Langdon's "genius" and the romantic implications of a professor-student relationship, she understands how easily she could *become* Elizabeth, if she conforms to society's expectations of her. This also explains why Elizabeth has such a fondness for Natalie, often inviting her over to the Langdons' house and getting her drunk. On one such occasion, Langdon says of Natalie's writing, "I have the *greatest* faith in Natalie's talent," to which Elizabeth replies, "I suppose that sort of thing is all right to do until you're married" (126). The reductive thought that women can pursue their interests prior to becoming married is a result of Elizabeth's status as Langdon's wife. She does not truly believe in the virtue of the suggestion but acknowledges the paralysis of her experience.

These elements suggest that women of the middle 20th Century were not yet seen as equals in academic discourse and society. Though this point is not groundbreaking, it acts as a foundation for Natalie's stream-of-consciousness final section, where she attempts to free herself from the boundaries of the male-oriented system by searching for independence unique to herself. Jackson does this by using a feministic style of writing (reminiscent of Cixous's idea of

non-linear feminine writing) that breaks from the traditional narrative arch sustained by many male-centric campus novels. The final sequence is mystical, frightening, peculiar, and supernatural. The result is an insistence of the feminine, a right for women to enjoy the intellectual freedom traditionally only provided to their male counterparts. Natalie's relationship with (indeed, her relation to) Elizabeth carries into this section where Natalie invents another student—Tony—who acts as the antithesis to Elizabeth and prompts Natalie's final maturation.

The invention of Tony—a wonderfully androgynously-named student who Natalie thinks is real—represents Natalie's psychological break from the pressures she experiences but also her uniquely independent agency in ushering *herself* into adulthood. Tony is directly oppositional to Elizabeth. Where Elizabeth is static in her home, Tony convinces Natalie to follow her on a bizarre trip into a nearby town and ultimately, to an abandoned clearing in the woods near a shuttered amusement park. Where Elizabeth represents the resigned acceptance of female gender roles, Tony represents opposition to patriarchy. Where Elizabeth participates in the structures of society, Tony outright rejects them. It is no surprise, then, that Natalie leaves her life of the college and the Langdons behind to follow Tony into the unknown.

It is never mentioned that Tony is an invention, but she does not interact with other characters (though, interestingly, Elizabeth claims to have seen her), appears on campus just at the end of the book, and disappears after she brings Natalie to the point of her maturation. When Tony, under the auspices of friendship and exploration, leads Natalie into the clearing and subsequently leaves her, Natalie begins the uncomfortable and frightening process of awakening that makes *Hangsaman* unique. In most campus novels, the student becomes aware of their maturation by ultimately ascribing value to the education they receive—both experiential and curricular—by the novel's end. Jackson challenges the virtues of higher education, particularly

in their insistence of maintaining patriarchy, by having Natalie's evolution occur away from the campus, in a dark woods where Natalie feels something is coming to get her. Abandoned by her friend, she begins to understand that her discomfort in life is a result of her interaction with an oppressive social structure, as represented by her interaction with men. In addition to her father and Langdon, Natalie is sexually assaulted early in the novel by an elderly man at one of her father's parties. He, too, leads her into the woods, but to rape her. The following morning, Natalie displays her psychological trauma: "'I will not think about it, it doesn't matter,' she told herself, and her mind repeated idiotically, It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, until, desperately, she said aloud, 'I don't remember, nothing happened, nothing that I remember happened'" (43). Clearly, Natalie is reacting to the crime in a way that suggests she cannot accurately comprehend it. It is possible that this psychological trauma is what ultimately creates Tony, who, in leading her into another woods, begins a process of rectification from the earlier trespass.

When Natalie loses Tony for a moment, Tony responds, "I was there." Natalie retorts, "Only one antagonist…only one enemy" (212). This discourse on the antagonist occurs earlier in the passage where Natalie claims that if she were inventing the world (note the term "inventing," as she has done with Tony) she would "invent for each [person] a single antagonist, who was calculated to be strong in exactly the right points." Of course, she is reflecting upon her own invention of Tony, so Tony replies accordingly, "The trouble is…that you've got this world, see? And you've got enemies in it, and they're enemies because they're smarter. So you invent someone smart enough to destroy your enemies" (203). In the essay, "Only One Antagonist: The Demon Lover and The Feminine Experience in the Work of Shirley Jackson," Wyatt Bonikowski suggests, "In emphasizing the singularity of the antagonist, Jackson suggests that all

manifestations of hostility directed against the protagonist inevitably refer back to some original, primordial enemy" (67). The vagueness of the term "enemy" is intentional, but Jackson's repetitive construct of men reducing Natalie to an object and her rejection of higher education as a patriarchal system allows the reader to presume the greater structure of patriarchal oppression is the primary "enemy." Therefore, Tony exists to deliver Natalie from the binds that harbor her.

As Natalie begins to understand this, Tony again disappears. This time, she does not reply to Natalie's beckoning for her to return. She realizes, "I will never see Tony any more; she is gone, and knew that, theatrical or not, it was true. She had defeated her own enemy" (215). But what may get lost in the use of the word "enemy" is that her experience with Tony is what allowed for her to mature into her final evolution at the end of the novel. Tony has been an internal guide against oppression, and Natalie has found herself beyond the walls of the campus, which was supposed to be where the student is prompted to change. Interestingly, Natalie returns to the college, presumably to finish her studies. When she arrives, however, she is different, and no longer has the consternation she had before leaving with Tony: "The reassuring bulk of the college buildings showed ahead of her, and she looked fondly up at them and smiled. As she had never been before, she was now alone, and grown-up, and powerful, and not at all afraid" (218).

Natalie's rite of passage into adulthood is a uniquely female one. It rejects the standard structure of academic passage (the novel itself rejects the standard structure of narrative). Jackson's triumph in writing *Hangsaman* is that it provocatively situates the feminist concerns of dismantling patriarchy and increasing female agency within the heavily patriarchal structure of higher education. That Natalie is victorious in her evolution at the end of the novel indicates that—for students who do not fit the hegemonic traditions of American society—higher

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education itself may not be enough to prompt intellectual maturation. Perhaps, more so, they

must explore the particular circumstances of their marginalized identity in order to challenge the

structures that mean to restrict them.

<center>*Unnamed Narrator, the Invisible Dissident*</center>

Perhaps the most canonical text in this study, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), may

not at first strike many readers as a traditional campus novel, but the first six chapters feature the

unnamed protagonist as he attempts to access higher education, hoping to achieve the promise

and expectation granted to students, especially those who come from extremely marginalized

cultures. In an introduction to the Vintage edition, Ellison claims that he was concerned with a

"fictional character who was bent upon finding his way in areas of society whose manners,

motives and rituals were baffling" (viii). Of course, for young African Americans interested in

higher education, such an exclusive institution would indeed be baffling.

Ralph Ellison's tour-de-force novel concerns the "invisible" or secondary nature of

African Americans in American society. Gates believes that Ellison "tropes the myth of

presence" in his novel, which inverts the "would-be correlation between blackness and presence

with a narrative strategy that correlates invisibility (ultimate sign of absence) with the presence

of self-narration and therefore self-creation" (999). This "self-creation" and the resistance of

dominant culture in the protagonist's maturation can be seen in the first six chapters of the novel.

The sequence begins with a violent shaming of the narrator, which leads to a scholarship, and

ends with his expulsion from college for not protecting a white benefactor from the real horrors

of impoverished African American life.

It is interesting that Ellison would choose to begin his novel—a text focused on

criticizing the treatment of African descendants by Western traditions—in academia. Indeed,

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Ellison's direct goal may be to protest the separatist ideas of Booker T. Washington, but I posit

his use of academia to begin the novel is especially pertinent to the perceived ideological post-

WWII value placed on education in the Golden Age, which claims to allow for agency for a

viciously oppressed African American culture. The establishment of the Freedman's Bureau

and, subsequently, of Negro Colleges can be understood as one of the first attempts of reparation

and parity after abolition. However, Ellison's treatment of the college and the narrator's unfair

expulsion present academia in a different light, one that constitutes a false-consciousness

concerning the advancement of African Americans after slavery.

During the "Battle Royal" scene, the narrator must fight other young black men while

blindfolded in order to give a speech to the town's wealthy white leaders. This spectacle results

in a strange happenstance where one of the white men gives the narrator a briefcase, inside

which is a scholarship to college, saying, "Take this prize and keep it well…[it] will help shape

the destiny of your people" (32). This faux-patronage represents how education (in the

jurisdiction and power of the racist white members of society) is still negotiated for the African

American through white supremacy. Either the African American student aligns with the

paradigm or must fight (both literally and figuratively) against it. Later, in a dream, the narrator

opens the briefcase again only to find Ellison's critical reinterpretation of the scholarship, "To

Whom It May Concern…Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" (33). Ellison does not graze the

subject of inequity in education; he rather bluntly situates disenfranchised African American

students within an institutionally racist academic structure controlled and presided over by the

dominant white culture. In "The Crisis of Coming of Age in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and

the Late Harlem Bildungsroman," Tamlyn E. Avery states:

The hypocrisy of the Southern socio-economy is figuratively actualised in the poignant symbolism of the young black adolescents, who are induced to beat each other to bloody pulps for the amusement of rich white patrons, with the promise of coins as reward (which, they later discover, are counterfeit). Like many members of the Jazz Age intelligentsia before him, Ellison is interested in satirising the cultural apologue of an American "aristocracy" built on slavery in a pure, high capitalist society where there has never been a decline of the ruling class. (4)

In short, the consistent disenfranchisement of the African American student is a result of the desire of the hegemonic elite to sustain their economic stance at a time in American history when they felt it was jeopardized. The emancipation of the slaves and the establishment of Negro Colleges symbolized for early 20th century wealthy whites a shift in social power that was largely economic; Ellison's depiction of the brutal and inhuman treatment of the boys in the Battle Royal scene serves to fiercely emphasize the faulty mechanism of higher education as it was first presented to freed slaves. Though African Americans could strive to progress their circumstances, such a progress could only be achieved through the white man's jurisdiction. Avery agrees, "The scholarship papers inside the calf satchel form a fierce, early symbol of capitalist objectification in the narrative. It comes at a point in which Invisible Man is not yet mature or educated enough to form a personal resistance against a society which will use and ultimately discard him like any other commodity under the false guise of generosity and reward" (7).

The opening chapter also sets the tone for the rest of the novel. As was mentioned before, campus novels of typically marginalized cultures often harbor—unlike their traditionally

hegemonic counterparts—the theme of social criticism against a prejudicial and biased academic system. Most go so far as to demand a critical analysis and revision of existent structures to be more equitable. The most common, troublesome theme that often appears in the campus novels of African American students is that their education is meant to assist them in progressing the needs of their entire race, as opposed to the individual desires and pursuits of the student themselves. As was shown in Earl Schenck Miers's earlier novel, *Big Ben*, the student's personal needs must cede to those of his "people," a vague concept often ascribed to the student's educational motivation by white characters who have the privilege of pursuing a higher education for selfish (often economic) reasons. Ellison continues this disproportionate tradition; while giving the scholarship, one of the white men who had just subjected the narrator to the abuses of the Battle Royal says, "Keep developing as you are and some day [the briefcase] will be filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people" (32). The faux-alliance in this statement seems an attempt to blunt the trauma of the previous transgressions on the narrator, but it is consistent with academia's lopsided demand of African American students to foster an elusive "people" over the traditional academic motive of developing the self.

In the introduction, Ellison addresses how African American characters are focused beyond intellectual concerns because of their reduced status in American society and need to survive in a violently oppressive social system. He addresses:

> The question of why most protagonists of Afro-American fiction (not to mention the black characters in fiction written by whites) were without intellectual depth. Too often they were figures caught up in the most intense forms of social struggle, subject to the most extreme forms of the human predicament but yet seldom able to articulate the issues which tortured them. (xix)

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In other words, the African American students, focused as they were on the needs of survival, were unable to donate a specific attention to academics, which allowed for their continued demotion as intellectually inferior. Paradoxically, they were expected to continue to sacrifice intellectual development for an unclear allegiance to advancing their race. This notion of fidelity to an abstract progress plagues the narrator of *Invisible Man* through much of the early chapters and defines his attraction to and interaction with his college.

Ellison establishes his narrator's impression of college and college life as consistent with the campus novels that came before, both of traditionally hegemonic and typically marginalized cultures. Chapter 2 begins, "It was a beautiful college" and continues for some time enumerating the aesthetic value of the campus (34). The narrator's college is typically understood to be a model of Tuskegee University, a traditional southern, black college. This seemingly superficial appreciation for the campus parallels the narrator's conceptualization of his academic pursuits in particular relation to his own identity. Claudia May, in an article titled, "The Genesis of Eden: Scriptual (Re) Translations and the (Un) Making of an Academic Eden in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," claims that the narrator's utopian impression of the campus lends to his buying in to the ideological problems of the academic system: "Ellison's Invisible Man illustrates that Eden's pre 'Fall' status as a battle-free zone cannot be 'regained' because, even in its biblical form, any semblance of peace emerging from this setting could not be maintained" (422). It could not be maintained because it is built on a false-premise: that academia offers equitable education in an equitable society. May subsequently relates, "Like the scriptural Eden, the potential for this place and America to accommodate a range of peoples and ethnic groups through their geographical makeup is not a far-fetched notion" (434).

When he faces expulsion later, he presumes his identity is intrinsically linked to the college and what detrimental result his expulsion might mean for his future: "Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it. In this brief moment of passage I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams" (99). Ellison sustains his narrator's ignorance as to how the oppressive structures of society—including the system of higher education—continue to subjugate him as inferior. That his original college matriculation was a result of the injustice that was the battle royal does not occur to the narrator, but it is not lost on the reader, who recognizes Ellison's blatant antagonism. Avery notes:

> The hypocritical bureaucracies of a Booker T. Washington Southern education system are ironically set against the vividly romantic, pastoral descriptions of a "beautiful college," with buildings that are "old and covered with vines" and gracefully winding roads, "lined with hedges and wild roses that dazzled the eyes in the summer sun." The effect of the juxtaposition between the beauty of the school and the hypocrisy of its system is a resounding critique of the "accommodationist education." (8)

Ellison's social criticism seems focused on the severance between the ideological reparation of slavery in the establishment of avenues of higher education for African Americans, such as black colleges, and the reality that such institutions further demoralize and disenfranchise their students. The narrator's experience with a wealthy college trustee further exaggerates this point.

While at college, the narrator is tasked with chauffeuring a wealthy, white benefactor (Mr. Norton) on a tour of the college grounds and environs. The tour begins to go awry when they meet Trueblood, a poor African American who has had illicit sexual encounters with his

daughter and Norton gives him money (in a similar manner that he gives money to the black

college), sustaining the motif that white money will solve the problems of African Americans.

At the Golden Day, a black bar, later, one of the men at the bar explains to Norton how he

(Norton) sees his destiny linked to the students at the college: "To you he is a mark on the

scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less—a black amorphous

thing" (95). In other words, Norton objectifies the African American students not as men, but as

achievements for his own interests and feelings of self-worth. Morrison contends that literature

such as this "was a reflection…of the marginal impact that blacks had on the lives of the

characters in the work" (1010). This shows that, even in academia, the African American

characters are marginalized in relation to their white counterparts.

Indeed, an early motif in *Invisible Man* is the appropriation of African American progress

and success by white figures who deem their altruistic enthusiasm for their black counterparts as

a social service. Of course, this sort of thinking is reductive and problematic, further sustaining

the supposition that African Americans have only faltered due to their own ineptitude and can

only succeed with the help of benevolent white people. In speaking about the college's

Founder's vision for the college, Mr. Norton exclaims, "Sometimes I don't know whether it was

[the Founder's] vision or mine" (39) and later states, "I felt even as a young man that your

people were somehow closely connected with my destiny" (41). Mr. Norton cannot see how his

thinking is structured upon the premise of white superiority; indeed, he presumes he is providing

a service. This is Ellison's criticism of the entire system of higher education in the United

States. Mr. Norton can be read as the white response (perhaps the government's response) to the

problem of emancipation: how to rectify an obvious, egregious wrong, while serving the nation's

new sense of moral and ethical rightness—all while keeping such philosophy in the domain of the white establishment.

At the Golden Day, an African American veteran, disabled by PTSD, provides the theoretical framework for Ellison's criticism in a brief moment of clarity, which is largely ignored by Mr. Norton and the narrator: "[The narrator] believes in that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right" (95). He is suggesting that white notions of progress and superiority are still ingrained in the structures of the country, regardless of the reality of emancipation, and that these structures inherently prohibit the development and progress of an African American individual. Ellison cleverly articulates this in a passage where the narrator is musing upon how the winter "turned the campus into a world of whiteness" (100). Again, he cannot differentiate his appreciation for the white beauty of the campus with Ellison's more nefarious and poignant criticism that higher education is structurally white, even in black colleges, as it supports white superiority.

Perhaps the best illustration of this phenomenon is when the President of the narrator's college, Mr. Bledsoe, exclaims, "Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here?" (139). Ellison's vitriol here is aimed at Booker T. Washington's separatist compliance to dominant white culture. In developing a character in Bledsoe who purposefully disenfranchises the African American student—by expelling him—Ellison shows how destructive the faulty premise of compliance is to African Americans and how the system of higher education is no more than a ruse to contain African American advancement. Bledsoe refers to the narrator as a "black educated fool," (143) which Ellison uses as an oxymoron. To be black and educated means to be critical of the weaknesses of the academic system while also

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intoning it is foolish to presume any sort of criticism would be effective against the strength of centuries-long prejudice and violence. Bledsoe determines that such a criticism is too dangerous to the Reconstruction structures that people like he have achieved, and so removes the narrator and his ideas from the system entirely. The effort, of course, is to excise that sort of thought from academia and to teach compliance to the narrator.

The ultimate expulsion of the narrator weighs heavily on his mind as he laments the loss of his education, which he saw as the determining factor of his future success; his expulsion "stabbed [his] insides." He goes on to say, "I stood there on the moonlit walk, trying to think ahead to its effects, imagining the satisfaction of those who envied my success, the shame and disappointment of my parents. I would never live down my disgrace" (146). Ultimately, the narrator is disenfranchised by education in two ways: by originally being part of a system oriented toward white self-worth to begin with and to be expelled from it for not protecting the white man from noticing the reality of the African Americans' stratified, inferior situation. His fear of expulsion is made worse by the previously-stated presumption that he is striving for more than just himself but for his entire race. Failing at his education, theoretically, then, is detrimental for his people, which is a shame beyond the expected guilt of not completing one's education: "I sat thinking of the dread possibility of having to leave all this, of being expelled; imagining the return home and the rebukes of my parents" (117). For the narrator, "Leaving the campus would be like the parting of flesh" (133) but perhaps it can become a good thing. Perhaps, as Ellison aims to articulate, an oppressive education can only lead to sustained oppressive ideologies; so, like Jackson's thesis in *Hangsaman*, the student from a typically marginalized culture must find reprieve outside of the oppressive system of higher education.

In most campus novels, there is a direct relationship between a student's education and their future job prospects. Interestingly, even though the narrator is expelled from college, the idea of future financial and occupational success is nevertheless implanted into his psyche. Ingrained into the ideological system that demands students understand their education as solely economically interested, the narrator cannot lament the loss of his education without being conscious of how that will affect his future job prospects. At first, he even intends on returning to college, thinking, "I would pay my debt as quickly as possible and return to building my career" (147). This falsehood is amplified by Bledsoe's later, more insipid, disingenuousness to the narrator. Bledsoe follows the thinking that, if not an education, the narrator should begin looking for work. He writes letters to friends of the college on behalf of the narrator as introductions and recommendations for a job, claiming, "The school tries to look out for its own" (149). Later, the narrator finds out that the letters do the exact opposite, denigrating him as "one for whom we held great expectations [and] has gone astray, and who in his fall threatens to upset the certain delicate relationships between certain interested individuals and the school" (191). Bledsoe may be coy in his condemnation, but the "individuals" he refers to—represented by Mr. Norton—represent the white people he lies to in order to keep his position and continue the financial support offered by white men who deem black academic success part of their legacy.

This is the most apparent result of the narrator's failed academic experience (which, it is important to note, had nothing to do with academics). His consternation was correct: not only did he lose his ability to continue his studies, but he must now enter the working world with no support or credentials. Throughout the opening chapters, Ellison carefully foreshadows these financial concerns, which only result in the narrator's financial disenfranchisement. All along, there is a discourse concerning the relationship between higher education and a socioeconomic

rite of passage alongside the reality that financial disenfranchisement is an extension of slavery. This is best evidenced in Trueblood, who the narrator claimed he hated out of fear. He explains, "How all of us at the college hated the black-belt people, the 'peasants,' during those days! We were trying to lift them up and they, like Trueblood, did everything it seemed to pull us down" (47). The clear hierarchal stratification and intra-racism of this passage shows the divide between the African American college student tasked with bolstering their entire race and the poor, uneducated slave descendent who, simply by being uneducated, prevents his race's progress. Ellison uses this conundrum to emphasize the false consciousness of the education system as it works to further segregate the African American community into hierarchies created and sustained by white superiority, regardless of the college mission or a college's designation as "black." The college students, endowed with the money of the wealthy white trustees, stand in opposition to the impoverished African American laborers (and the disabled vets of the Golden Day) as hierarchally superior. Having accessed higher education, it is understood that they too can access financial wealth, which will bolster themselves in white society by using white society's vessel of success. When Ellison removes this possibility from the narrator, the fallaciousness of the construct becomes readily apparent. Leaving college, never to return, the narrator is given his first glimpse into the truth of his circumstance—of his invisibility—the second-class nature of men of his race in an America structured upon white dominance.

Invisible Man is a novel about marginalization that is now firmly rooted in the American literary canon. It simultaneously criticizes the purported value of the American higher education system in the Reconstruction era of the United States and sets up a novel-length discourse of the continued disenfranchisement of African Americans in the middle of the 20th century. Writing from the Golden Age of higher education but before the truly great expansion of higher

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education in the United States, Ellison found it important to begin his novel in academia in order to oppose the developing presumption that mid-20th century academia was becoming more inclusive and that in assimilating to the structure, young African Americans could penetrate the heavily-guarded bastions of white supremacy in society through their study. Though the Golden Age of higher education was a period of expansion, as Ellison shows, it may not have been equitable in its allowance treatment of diverse students.

Conclusion

Analyzing the campus novels of the Golden Age of higher education provides for a deeper understanding of the student experience—at least from the perspective of the novelists of the time. While the country was celebrating victory from WWII and a rapid economic expansion of social structures and institutions, students in higher education maintained many of the tribulations and discomfort felt by their early-century predecessors. Still, students were concerned for their economic futures and ability to engage with the world beyond the campus. Many of the novels feature the prototypical rite of passage into adult maturity, using the bildungsroman motif to situate academia as the contemporary catalyst for personal evolution in the 20th century. And very much like the campus novels of the pre-Golden Age, these texts wrestle with the ideologically-accepted intrinsic value of higher education itself.

Where the campus novels of the mid-20th century most deviate are in two particular realms: that of the budding postmodern psychology, and in concerning typically marginalized students, whose experience in higher education is better represented in the larger proliferation of campus novels being produced at that time. Postmodern theory asserts that art—including literature—after WWII shifted its focus from ideas of "realism" to an appreciation of what is "unreal," or how reality is constructed. It also helps to explain growing existential anxieties in

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individuals—in this case, students—who question the validity of the authority they have taken for granted. Most importantly, perhaps, postmodernism centralizes what was marginalized, identifying as its focal point the experiences of people who have traditionally been relegated to positions of inferiority in society. Therefore, the new narrative becomes more inclusive and complex, which problematizes the previously accepted notions of fairness and superiority.

Campus novels can be seen as literary works on the forefront of this discourse. The concerns of students whose profiles do not fit the traditionally hegemonic become more and more profound and literarily relevant. More authors from previously marginalized positions wrote campus novels, more of the novels were published, and essentially all of them are directly critical of the disparities in the system of higher education when it comes to equal access, curricular diversity, and social benefit for all. In the campus novels of the early 20th century that featured typically marginalized students, the problems the students had with the academic structures were ultimately relieved and the students were able to—using their education— succeed. In such texts in the Golden Age, however, the students often continue to work in opposition to the system and structures of higher education, often either leaving it entirely or bending it to fit their particular needs.

Of course, it is impossible to argue that the Golden Age was less inclusive than previous eras, despite the acknowledgement that inclusivity is only a partial panacea for deeply-rooted social injustices. However, the very fact that more novels concerning typically marginalized students were published and praised (and still resonate today) suggests a shifting ideology of what higher education means to the greater public. In the coming decades, college campuses would experience great demographic changes where people of color would join their white

counterparts in class. Indeed, an argument can be made that the very criticisms of these novels were instrumental in actual changes to the academic system in the decades to come.

And perhaps most relevant to this study, the campus novels of the mid-20th century provide evidential precedent for the circumstances of the post-Golden Age. All of the concerns, trends, and shifts of students in campus novels culminate in the texts of the post-Golden Age of higher education in late-20th and early 21st centuries. There are still two narratives at play—that of the traditionally hegemonic and the typically marginalized—and many of the redundant tropes and motifs appear again, but the novels of the most recent period can help to locate the most concerning problems of contemporary higher education for all students. The contemporary campus novels harken to their predecessors but bring to the forefront the results of the 20th century shifts in higher education, culminating in a complete picture of American academic ideology and the interaction it has with the students who trust in it to foster their futures.

CHAPTER 4

IVORY DISPLACEMENT: LONELINESS IN THE GOLD

> There is so much loneliness in that gold.
>
> The moon these nights is not the moon
>
> the first Adam saw. Long centuries
>
> of human sleeplessness have filled her
>
> with ancient tears. Look at her. She is your mirror.

> —Borges (Weinfield)

Campus novels of the post-Golden Age perform a sort of meta-criticism: taking the prompt from the campus novels of previous time periods that criticize social injustices, contemporary campus novels become more critical of the institution itself and the disenfranchisement of students, often through the use of satire, hyperbole, and direct condemnation of practices counterintuitive to a perceived college mission of humanitarian and social development. Although most theorists, scholars, and members of the college community agree that there have been advancements in the intellectual elements of higher education (diverse programs, increased cultural awareness, inclusivity on college campuses, etc.) the material failings proliferate. The rise of student debt; privatization of campus programs, curricula, and research; and subjugation of a faculty and student workforce has strained the college mission. The novels of the period absorb and reflect these anxieties.

Academic novels can be distinguished from campus novels to the extent that the former focus on the faculty rather than the student, but both genres contribute to the critical assessment of higher education. Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, for instance, follows a plagued faculty member of African descent who passes as white but is fired because a benign comment of his

was misconstrued as a racial epithet. Roth seems to criticize a hyper-sensitivity in higher education that condemns its constituents for minor violations rather than solve problems through the use of its vaunted commitment to scientific reason. Similarly, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* renders academia as absurd by satirizing nearly all of its elements. *White Noise* uses postmodern techniques to force the reader into active engagement that spurs a recognition of their loss of identity and existential loneliness. Setting the narrative in academia focuses the attention of this discord on education, which is ideally meant to be the foundation of social progress and individual development, but too often reinforces exactly the opposite: class-based inequality and racial superiority.

Because the rapid corporatization of higher education in the United States undercuts the intellectual and social missions of colleges, campus novels at the end of the 20th century and into the present era serve as the best barometers for witnessing up close this structural transformation of higher education. If, for instance, the argument is that using a business model in academia creates a for-profit culture that serves corporations rather than students and society at large, than examining the campus novels of the post-Golden Age can either substantiate or debunk this. Because the novels are so linked with the actual climate of academic culture in the time period of their construction, they begin to do more than trace the trends of the century; higher education is so central to contemporary culture that it plays a major role in fulfilling the neoliberal objectives of corporate ideology. As Jeffrey J. Williams explains, "Our present dismay at the state of the university has a good deal to do with our tacit expectation of the postwar university, which is the horizon on which we judge current events, rather than on the full and mixed history of American universities" ("Post-Welfare" 195). Eric Gould affirms the need to understand the university in its modern context:

The search for important knowledge in technoscience is not going to slow down. University bureaucracies are not going to look less like corporate bureaucracies in the future. Students are not going to cease to search for credentials for the workplace. Neither are they going to have fewer problems financing their education. Discipline-based knowledge in the arts and sciences is not going to become less professionalized. The old ideal of a liberal education as something that is pursued for its own sake is most unlikely to have a revival. (qtd. in Newfield, *Unmaking* 225)

Indeed, is it even possible to understand the university today in comparison to the Golden Age's university, or expect it to function similarly? The world economy has changed and the United States faces such severe competition with other economic superpowers in order to maintain its global influence that it can seem no more than nostalgic to work for the social and humanitarian principles harbored in higher education that develop concerned citizens and a progressive society. Such principles, in the corporate paradigm, are vulnerable. As Newfield argues, "The university's cultural missions have declined at the same time as leaders in politics, economics, and the media have lost much of their capacity to understand the world in noneconomic terms, to understand cultural divergence as its own kind of enlightenment and as in any case a fact that will never submit to political or economic coercion" (*Unmaking* 14). In other words, the obsession with profit-loss ratios in a "free market" economy deeply threatens the humanitarian and idealistic goals that justified the pursuit and maintenance of academic freedom, the cornerstone of higher education.

Newfield suggests that the "traditional concern for educators" was "to preserve the university's independence from society's rulers. This had meant freedom from the direct control

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of the church or the crown or an elected state authority or big labor or big business. It had meant

freedom from any ruling ideology, for society's conventional wisdom blocked the pursuit of both

truth and justice" (221). Newfield's idealistic terminology is nevertheless relevant; where else

can the exploration for "truth" and the pursuit of "justice" thrive but in a venue protected by

academic freedom? The fear is that such enterprises are stifled by the needs of corporations,

which have little purpose for truth—beyond which methods proffer the most profit—nor

justice—unless this is to protect their material assets. Such concerns exist perpetually in the tone

and narratives of campus novels.

Students find their rite of passage into society thwarted as education becomes a

commodity. Giroux claims, "Students need to learn how to be responsible for their own ideas,

take intellectual risks, develop a sense of respect for others different from themselves, and think

critically in order to shape the conditions that influence how they participate in a wider

democratic culture" (201), but this may be impossible when the motives of their academic

institution are not about democracy but an inequitable hierarchy. As has been shown in previous

campus novels and will be shown in the novels of the post-Golden Age, college has become

progressively difficult to afford, which makes education increasingly available only to those who

can independently afford it. Students are led to believe that attending college will not only

improve their lifetime earnings but also provide them with social agency and security, something

Bousquet calls the university's "core promise." But such a promise becomes flighty when

knowledge functions merely as a commodity itself only to serve capitalistic goals. Bousquet

continues, "The campus brokers the deal: give us, our vendors, and our employing partners what

we want (tuition, fees, and a fair chunk of labor time over several years), and you can escape the

life you're living now" (148). This is, however, a false consciousness. The above transaction

does not necessarily provide for such an "escape" and can even further disenfranchise the

idealistic student (especially in the case of radical corporate strategies, such as for-profit

universities and the development of an adjunct-only faculty workforce).

Among contemporary scholars, it seems the most pressing issue of criticism is the

constant rise in tuition that results in insurmountable student debt. Williams suggests that

"[debt] is in fact the new paradigm of college funding. Consequently it is also, or will soon be,

the new paradigm of early to middle adult life" ("Pedagogy" 156). In short, students are aware

that the debt they incur in college—despite the increasingly sardonic adage that academic debt is

"good debt"—will persist into their future lives beyond college, compounding the already

tenuous grasp college students have on their futures, as shown previously in the campus novels

of the pre-Golden Age.

But debt is far more serious than an ideological academic paradigm for the nation as a

whole. The paradox of demanding that people be college educated in order to obtain vague

"good jobs" and then to saddle them with debilitating debt and a dearth of high-paying jobs

results in a society of highly-educated, under-employed Americans yearning for, at most, a

middle class existence while wondering what happened to the promise of higher education. This

paradox, though flagrant in its problem, seems to not dissuade students from enrolling in the

scheme, as enrollments continue to rise. In an article analyzing the American Studies

Association presidential address of Chris Marez, Miranda Joseph posits additional problems with

student debt: "[Marez] argues that student debt performs both domination and normalization,

reiterating gender roles and racial difference as it colonizes futures and suffocates aspirations by

tying people to low-wage work, and even to specific institutions" (283). Miranda affirms

Marez's argument but adds that debt extends beyond over-charging students to a culture of debt

for which the university itself is ensnared, "The university is not only the locus or medium for the generation of student loans that can be securitized and traded as financial instruments….Universities are also enmeshed in the financial system as issuers of bonds for building construction; and, of course, public universities are dependent on state revenues that have been affected by the collapse of mortgaged housing markets" (283-4). This indicates that there is a larger, more systemic problem that views debt as a natural part of the social process, which results in faulty thinking—on the part of students, but also on legislators and college administrators—that college debt is natural and to be expected.

The combination of high interest loans leading to insurmountable student debt and the decline of high-paying jobs for college graduates is perhaps the greatest detriment to the contemporary college student. Future college students and their families are becoming aware of this problem and this could lead to a negative change for how higher education interacts with culture as well as for the university itself. In an article titled, "Institutional Determinants of American Undergraduate Student Debt," J. Dean Craig and Samuel R. Raisanen suggest that "Accruing debt can clearly affect the choices that students make, including, which major to attain, which job to take upon graduation, which university to attend and even whether to attend university at all" (662). Additionally, in acknowledging that student debt and poor job prospects have the potential to re-marginalize students from previously (and continuously) oppressed backgrounds and identities, it is possible to imagine a culture of higher education in the near future that mirrors the stratified and unjust education system that existed prior to the middle of the 20th century. Craig and Raisanen find that "Schools with better students, measured by scores on entrance exams of admitted freshmen, graduate students with less average debt" (672). This implies that students who do not score well on entrance exams (and here I find it important to

abandon the term "better" as it fails to acknowledge the myriad social structures that go into stratifying how students learn and what sort of education they receive, especially in underserved communities) are prone to more debt. Of course, the students who score well on entrance exams typically have had more advantage in the academic system already: better schools with more funding, active family members who themselves graduated from college, access to learning materials, stable living environments, etc. Marginalized students end up with more debt, so they are likely to continue the very cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement for which higher education was itself supposed to mitigate. This becomes especially obvious in the campus novels of the post-Golden Age concerning typically marginalized students.

Students, however, are not the only people directly affected by their debt. The national economy itself may face a disturbing future if the problem of student debt is not addressed. Max Fraser, in "Student Debt and the Next Bailout," argues that "There is widespread agreement that runaway individual debt loads—which average more than $35,000 per student for the class of 2015, nearly three-quarters of whom have graduated with some amount of debt—are careening toward default on a massive, systemic scale" (104). Fraser likens such a default to the recession of the early 2000s. In short, it is necessary for the system of higher education, students, and the economy at large to understand the dire ramifications of debt as correlated to the hyper-corporatization of higher education and to create a new paradigm that does not continue such unsustainable practices.

The capitalistic use of higher education for monetary gain initiates a sense that students are future workers in global competition with foreign industry, which forces administrators, faculty, and students to invest time, attention, and finances to fields that presumably engage with such competition. Of course, if there is a dedicated attention to STEM disciplines (the areas of

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study most bolstered by capitalistic ideology) and more funding directly allocated to such disciplines, other fields must certainly suffer. In the current academic paradigm, Humanities disciplines are vulnerable to downsizing. In the campus novels of the most recent and current era, students often wrestle with a tension between the psychological and the social: a personal need to examine the art, philosophy, history, and creativity of the Humanities while feeling the pressure of vocational and job training. This schism between the Sciences and the Humanities creates multiple problems for academia and student populations pressured into making choices in a stratified hierarchy of disciplines.

In Barry Targan's 1990 novel, *The Tangerine Tango Equation: or, How I Discovered Sex, Deception, and a New Theory of Physics in Three Short Months* (to be discussed in greater detail later), the narrator, Nick Burden, often finds himself divided between his predisposition for physics and his growing fondness for painting (both in appreciation and in creating). In fact, it can be surmised that one of Targan's main theses of the novel is to criticize the displacement of the Humanities in higher education not at the hands of physics itself, but at the growing tendency of administrators and educators to appreciate the STEM disciplines as more meaningful. The novel makes many statements to this end. The most blatant, perhaps, are Burden's similarly idiosyncratic professors of Physics (Culver) and Literature (Appleton), who, despite both having less-than-noble motivations with their students, are mutually influential in Burden's academic development. The novel alternates between Nick's groundbreaking work in physics and his growing fondness for poetry, emphasizing a cohesion of how these fields—in tandem—benefit students rather than how they are segregated and stratified in contemporary academic culture. When Nick begins pondering the value of his education, he focuses not on what he has learned about physics (empirical knowledge) but what the Humanities have taught him about how to

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live. He muses, "All my life…if I encountered a blank spot, I got to the books that would fill me in and filled myself in" (228). Nick's ability to "learn" by plugging gaps in his knowledge (what Freire would think of as "banking" learning) has not allowed for expansive or creative thought. Contrastingly, in thinking about his literature professor, he says, "Maybe from him, or through him, I was learning something important. Not information or the complex ideas, but more about the nature of complexity itself, the complexity of experiencing, at which I was a novice, as distinct from the complexity of knowing, at which I was a master" (228). The Humanities are often considered the bastions of critical thinking, which can be used in conjunction with the Sciences, as opposed to understanding them as unprofitable and thus, unnecessary.

The STEM disciplines are not new to our contemporary era (despite this new "rebranding": the acronym working as a marketing tool); it goes without saying that they have been intrinsic to the idea of higher education since the 19th century emergence of the modern university. An economic and ideological preference for the STEM disciplines, however, propagates a marginalization of the Humanities, resulting in a number of problems for not just dialectic thought, but also for the STEM disciplines themselves, which use the Humanities as propellants to their progress, in terms of ethical use, democratic social awareness, creative ingenuity, etc.

As previously mentioned, over the last thirty to forty years, federal funding to higher education has decreased. Maurice R. Berube, in *The Urban University in America*, suggests, "Enlightened educators…have argued for the past decade for a progressive increase in federal aid as the only solution to the problems of higher education" (129). Of course, this aid has not come. This results in colleges incorporating business-like models of operation by administrators with degrees in Business rather than Education (or a traditionally academic discipline) who are

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driven by the need to increase capital. This can be detrimental because "In the university-as-business model, the central figure is the CEO administrator, who comes in from the outside, shakes things up, increases fundraising, raises the school's ranking, and then moves on to a more prestigious university to do the same all over again" (Clawson and Page 39). The solidarity of the academic community is displaced by a never-ending need to accrue capital, resulting in the competitive initiatives used often in business but that are usually kept outside of the college community.

What results are the competition-based formulas of business translated to academia: Student Learning Outcomes that commodify education and offer a product value for a course; class-size inflation to garner more paying students without having to pay more faculty; the cutting of "unsuccessful" programs, or, programs that do not enroll large numbers of students; dividing departments; and focusing money on the STEM disciplines, based on a belief that these disciplines will provide students with the education necessary to be competitive in today's job market.

Martha C. Nussbaum, in her book *Cultivating Humanity*, argues, "[The Humanities] face some peril in our time, above all the risk of being undermined by a growing interest in vocational, rather than liberal, education. It now seems to many administrators (and parents and students) too costly to indulge in the apparently useless business of learning for the enrichment of life" (297). Nussbaum brings up a good point; perhaps, in difficult economic times, people believe they must run their *lives* like businesses, in which the "enrichment of life" means little to basic survival (at least, in the meanest sense). But Nussbaum goes on to say that Humanities departments are portrayed as "faddish" and "insubstantial," which leads "to curtailment of

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departments and programs and to the rise of narrow professional studies" (298). This is a mirage

sustained by the financial backing of corporations in the STEM disciplines.

An argument can also be made that without the Humanities—and in their cousin Social

Science disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, etc.—we

could lose our sense of social justice. These disciplines examine, understand, and rectify

problems with society, social justice issues that often deal with marginalized peoples: race, class,

gender, sexual preference, religion, etc. The Humanities explore these and without them, we can

run the risk of losing the value of criticizing culture and society. Nussbaum, in *Not for Profit*,

notes colleges must "give a central role in the curriculum to the humanities and the arts,

cultivating a participatory type of education that activates and refines the capacity to see the

world through another person's eyes" (96). She further states, "We hope…to justify…our

nation's claim to be a valuable member of a world community of nations that must increasingly

learn how to understand, respect, and communicate, if our common human problems are to be

constructively addressed" (*Cultivating Humanity* 294). Here is an argument that these branches

of the Humanities and the Social Sciences have much larger global and cultural impacts than

may at first be perceived, and their loss could be detrimental to a wide range of what we claim to

value.

Ultimately, it is the Humanities that support the STEM disciplines. Nussbaum believes

that imagination is imperative to all aspects of what matters, including "a conversation with a

friend, a study of economic transactions, a scientific experiment" (*Not for Profit* 103).

Essentially, she calls for a remarriage for what was divorced: philosophy and science, or the

Humanities and STEM. It is a comprehension of how the two are compatible—and more,

necessary to each other—that will insist on a balance of both within higher education. It is, then,

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necessary to show how the Humanities are relevant not just to themselves and the many faculty and students devoted to them, but to the STEM disciplines as well.

Traditional English studies revolve around the two main sub-disciplines: 1) literary criticism involving the analysis of texts; and 2) composition and the writing of non-literary texts. In our current world of commodified higher education, the practical tasks of writing and composing have taken precedence over the less practical, or less vocational, aspirations of reading literature. So, if students desirous of the STEM disciplines are to advance through their educations and subsequent careers, they will depend on the English classes offered to them at their colleges. How are reports written? How do we standardize written info? How do humans communicate? Even in science, the skills garnered from an education in English are imperative to the necessary tools one will need in the sciences, technologies, engineering, math, business, etc. But the virtues of a broad-based, non-strictly vocational education including the liberal arts such as literature will not go away. As Nussbaum suggests:

> We discover that [the arts] are essential for the goal of economic growth and the maintenance of a healthy business culture. Leading business educators have long understood that a developed capacity to imagine is a keystone of a healthy business culture…literature and the arts cultivate these capacities…Again and again, liberal arts graduates are hired in preference to students who have had a narrower preprofessional education. (*Not for Profit* 112)

Nussbaum effectively refutes most of the claims against the Humanities in this single quote. Readings agrees: "The physical sciences may be studied for the knowledge of the life-world they give us, but the living unity of knowledge, the understanding of the place of knowledge in the

world, will find its formulation in literature" (76). Again, English studies prove themselves to be integral in the other, more scientific, disciplines.

Novels like *The Tangerine Tango Equation* center this issue at the forefront of the narrative. Indeed, the student protagonist is still the focus of the text, but greater meta-fictive attention is brought to the institution than the genre traditionally illustrates.

Above all else, what studying the campus novels of the late 20th and early 21st centuries provide is a critical look into the anxieties and troubles students face as the system of higher education in the United States becomes more and more corporatized. Relatedly, the enduring issue of student debt factors greatly on students' minds and in their academic decisions, something that can increasingly be seen in novels representing student populations. The novels also join the criticism concerning the disenfranchisement of the Humanities.

In the short story "How to Become a Writer," Lorrie Moore gives humorous, sardonic "advice" about becoming a story writer. She urges her reader to at first "fail" so that they can experience "early, critical disillusionment" (144). The story, told in the second person in the style of a self-help manual, articulates the choices a student will make in college while considering their career. Despite wanting to write, she says, the student will apply as a child psychology major. Creative writing can be an elective (145). This confirms the stratified hierarchy of how students are forced to view different disciplines. Certainly, claims the narrator, child psychology will financially benefit the student more than writing.

Eventually, the character begins neglecting her psychology courses, prompting her guidance counselor to admonish, "What you spend the most time on should be what you're majoring in" (146). To the character—and to most students today—the counselor's words are utopian and idealistic. Newfield insists, "The common view that market-oriented fields earn

while sociocultural fields take is false" (*Unmaking* 218). In other words, the belief that business-centric disciplines will net the student more money is not necessarily true. Still, for the student, whose "only happiness…is writing something" (Moore 146), it is difficult to justify majoring in anything else.

Ultimately, the character *does* switch to a writing major, prompting her mother to hand her a book titled *How to Become a Business Executive* (147). Surely, her mother only wishes the best for her, which includes being considerate of her economic future, but the suggestion here is that her choice to switch majors was a mistake and that she should focus on the vague but alluring world of "business." In the 1990s, just after the publication of this short story, there were massive layoffs of educated people (Newfield, *Unmaking* 81). It is not unreasonable, then, to presume the anxiety of finding a job was shared by the student and her mother. After her undergraduate education, Moore's character is forced to "work odd jobs and take writing courses at night" (147). This is not atypical, as Bousquet explains, "As many as one-third of…four-year graduates report involuntary unemployment of several months or more in the years after graduation" (62). The suggestion of the story seems to be that there is a severance between practical employment via education and one's passion. Moore seems to advocate a following of one's passion, but this is not a sentiment shared by the majority of college students.

Donna Tartt's novel, *The Secret History*, expresses themes similar to the previous works of literature. Like in Moore's story, the narrator of Tartt's novel must major in pre-med: "Money, you see, was the only way to improve my fortunes, doctors make a lot of money" and so he only takes a language course as a Humanities elective (9). Also, like Moore's character, the narrator switches his major to English Literature, only this time, "Without telling my parents"; how he continues shows the consternation associated with Humanities degrees in

contemporary academic ideology, "I felt that I was cutting my own throat by this…convinced that it was better to fail in a lucrative field than to thrive in one that my father…had assured me was most unprofitable" (10).

It is apparent that the economic concerns influencing how an academic discipline is perceived as profitable is at the forefront of the student's anxiety. Regardless of the student's natural inclination, choosing to major in the Humanities is deemed a mistake. Also echoing many campus novels, there is a consistent anxiety concerning the student's future after college, in specific relation to getting a job, as in Tartt's novel when a friend of the English major asks, "Do you have any plans?...What are you doing for the next forty or fifty years of your life?" (103). Tartt emphasizes a sort of post-college malaise in how her characters view life beyond study: "The alumni magazine was depressing. Hampden graduates never seemed to do anything after they got out of school but start little ceramics shops in Nantucket or join ashrams in Nepal" (264). For students, life choices in college are confused by economic considerations and life after college is mired in future anxiety.

Neal Stephenson's satirical 1984 novel, *The Big U*, focuses on a small cluster of students from varying backgrounds and with varying scholastic intents, who reside and study at the American Megaversity, Stephenson's allegorical prototype of the higher education system in the United States. The campus itself, comprised of concrete towers around a central compound, which house residence halls, classrooms, and administrative offices; is closed off from the outside world and functions as a microcosmic world severed from any sense of reality.

The characters (students, faculty, and administrators alike) range from hard-boiled academics to marauding rapists, often proliferating the most stereotypical archetypes of

American college life in order to criticize the institution as a whole as unrealistic and contrary to the workings of the "real" world.

As a contract dispute between faculty and the administration escalates, the campus becomes the site of a violent civil war wherein disputing factions fight within the concrete towers while the protagonists (a random selection of generally moral students and a professor) attempt to wrestle the college mission away from greedy corporate warmongers. The war itself is metaphoric for what students must go through while matriculating through a curriculum, as a faculty member foreshadowingly says to a student early in the novel, "Perhaps you are in a war now" (44). The culmination of these events includes the destruction of the University; the towers collapse and all of the formerly insular characters must attempt life in the "real" world.

As with many satirical novels, *The Big U* features quite a number of social criticisms that all tend to focus on one thesis: that the University structure itself is problematic in its claim to the development of the student and for the good of society. Rather, Stephenson seems to conclude it is a seething territory of reckless students, inept faculty, and greedy administrators who have no teaching experience but who work with businessmen toward dubious aims. Stephenson's often comical (if not lazily written) novel exposes the university from an internal vantage, condemning it for its self-interest and delusions of grandeur.

Perhaps some of the most apt ways that Stephenson levels his aggression are the metaphors he constructs to support his thesis. He likens the University to an:

> Immense vending machine, cautiously crafted so that any denomination too
> ancient or foreign or irregular would rattle about randomly for a while, find its
> way into the stairway system, and inevitably be deposited in the reject tray on the
> barren back side. Meanwhile, brightly colored graduates with attractively

packaged degrees were dispensed out front every June, swept up by traffic on the

Parkway and carried away for leisurely consumption." (22)

His suggestion is that the University does not allow for unique thought or scholarship, but is

focused strictly on production: a business model that fits the schema of American society more

than it does the ethical pedagogical mission of a college.

This is expanded further in his final and most volatile conceit: the sewers under the

college have been used for the disposal of toxic waste. The Board of Trustees, including

weapons manufacturers, found this was an appropriate way for the college to remain solvent

economically. In questioning this strategy, a student asks, "You really think universities should

be garbage dumps for the worst by-products of civilization?" to which there seems no dissent

(277). In general, Stephenson seems to facilitate the contemporary claim that higher education is

about special interests more than the intellectual development of the student. This is evidenced

best when a particularly bright student, who has invented a magnetic rail gun for a weapons

manufacturer, is asked to continue the work rather than focus on his degree: "There's no reason

for you to be stuck in silly-ass classes if you can do this kind of work" (177).

Most glaringly an example of student disenfranchisement is the character of Sarah, a

once-president of the Student Government who spends most of her time navigating the absurd

pitfalls of the administration, advisors, and pretentious professors (including the arbitrariness of

their grading systems). The environment of the college is satire, but Sarah seems a rational

person caught in the nightmarishly troubling insanity of the construction. Sarah (a senior

English major) is forced to take remedial English her senior year because her stepmother is from

Wales and "statistical analysis shows that children of one or more foreign nationals are often

gifted with Special Challenges" even though she was "exempted from Freshman English because of [her] high test scores" (52).

Sarah's experience at American Megaversity details Stephenson's impression of what a typical rational student must go through when they matriculate into higher education. The world of academia, which Stephenson sees as satirical itself, is less conducive to its proposed mission of scholarship and development and more conducive to the absurdities that lay within, if in more innocuous forms.

Another thing campus novels of this era signify is the penchant for the interest of elements within academia (administrators, faculty, outside corporations) to supersede the needs and/or passage of students. In *The Tangerine Tango Equation*, even Nick's beloved English teacher betrays him for his own careerist motivations: "Here the machine began to send what I soon saw was an essay that Appleton was writing about me. The essay was structured around the essays I had shown him, the essays about my father that I had told him I did not want read in class" (276). Lost in the shuffle of politics, career advancement, and capitalistic endeavors, students and the value they expect to receive from their education are overlooked.

Lastly, campus novels show how the contemporary, post-Golden Age of higher education has the potential to re-marginalize people from groups that were once blatantly marginalized, including ethnic minorities, women, and those of the lower classes. As economy and business— much like the increasing tendency in education—is institutionally biased against non-hegemonic cultures, the ability for said cultures to matriculate, pay for, and persist in higher education becomes increasingly difficult.

Gish Jen's novel, *Typical American*, follows a Chinese immigrant family as they negotiate the particular struggles of assimilation into American culture. The novel's protagonist,

Yifeng, becomes "Ralph" and enrolls in college, which is a "much greater opportunity....He could bring back a degree!" (6). Ralph's near obsessive dedication to obtaining his degree is checked by the dangers of assimilating to another culture, "How dangerous a place, this country!" (142). His identity is in constant flux as he negotiates the need to acquire an education under the terms of American academia and balance his own ethnic, immigrant psychology. Lisa Lowe articulates:

> Asian American discourses of ethnicity are far from uniform or consistent; rather, these discussions contain a wide spectrum of articulations that includes, at one end, the desire for an identity represented by a fixed profile of ethnic traits, and at another, challenge to the very notions of identity and singularity which celebrate ethnicity as a fluctuating composition of differences. (1034)

This fluctuation becomes apparent in Ralph's multi-modal setbacks when facing education. Not only must he encounter the specific challenges of graduate work, but he must do so adrift in a culture he has yet to fully comprehend, rendering him an Other forced to learn both his discipline and the adopted culture: "But this was America he was in now, which meant who-knew-what…Ralph began watching Americans…who, actually liked to…tell him what they thought a young Chinaman should know" (17).

Lowe suggests the "disruption of tradition [is] loss" (1033), which manifests for Ralph and his family in having to learn English, "The language of *outside the house* had seeped well inside" (Jen 124). The pejorative tone underscores what is lost when one's culture is sacrificed in reaction to assimilation.

Education, therefore, becomes the only viable avenue for Ralph, and immigrants like him, to negotiate the adopted culture of America: "To be nonwhite in this society was indeed to

need education, accomplishment—some source of dignity. A white person was by definition somebody. Other people needed, across their hearts, one steel rib" (200).

Newfield explains how college accessibility for typically marginalized students dwindled in the early 1990s: "Racial gaps in college participation rates stopped closing around that time" (*Unmaking* 66). Ultimately, the reality is that the contemporary structure of higher education is less inclusive to minority cultures, which harkens back to previous eras of academic discrimination. Newfield centers this upon a conservative anxiety concerning minority agency in an expanding democracy: "The specter of this multiracial, worker-inclusive majority—formed not exclusively but influentially through higher education—motivated twenty-five years of conservative attacks on the university and its emerging, inclusive, hybrid middle class" (*Unmaking* 5).

Jane Smiley's 1995 novel *Moo* features a number of faculty and students as they revolve around the fictional land grant university satirically named Moo U. The novel features a number of narrative themes and crosses genres, including satire of the university structure itself and criticism of the economic and political undercurrents of academic endeavor. With administrative assistants wielding great power, faculty and administrators rioting against each other's principles, and the overfeeding of a pig as part of an agricultural experiment; Smiley cleverly analyzes a variety of issues pertinent to higher education. The university, at once heralded for its social and intellectual achievements and criticized for its lack of inclusion, costs, and hierarchal traditions; becomes the central character of the novel. On its campus the characters seem more secondary to its greater anthropomorphic scheme: to exist in the world as an organism unto itself.

One of Smiley's most strident critical discourses in a novel replete with themes is the role of the economy in both the development of university curriculum as well as the fostering of an

academic environment. Often, she seems critical of the role capital plays in higher education, suggesting there is a deviation there from the more lofty ideals of intellectualism. Students are often referred to as "customers" and the curricula contemporarily understood to be technical or vocational have been torn from the catalog as if inferior to disciplines of "higher" thought, "The classes in slaughtering and meat cutting…were long removed to the purview of the junior college forty miles away, along with…everything else Bob's dad and uncles would have considered respectable work" (6). At Moo U, conversely, what is respectable seems to be jobs that lead to distinct economic opportunities.

Smiley goes on to further criticize outside special interests in the university: "Associations of mutual interest between the university and the corporations were natural, inevitable, and widely accepted. According to the legislature, they were to be actively pursued" (22). It seems Smiley wonders about the potential for corruption and impurity wrought from such political and capitally-charged relationships. Similarly, as is the case with many campus novels, a schism between pedagogy and research appears, this time as it correlates to the university's money lust: "Right now, as an accompaniment to talking about future money, everyone was talking about present money—namely, what Dean could expect to get for his research" (95). Rather than displaying any fidelity toward teaching (there is only one scene in the entire novel that actually features students in class lecture), faculty and administrators seem equally and only interested in the capital their endeavors might elicit. Smiley further uses poignant and poetic description to underscore how the academic community is money-centric: "What was really best…was gobs and gobs of dough, simoleons raining down in torrents, choking great wads of cash that would give everyone confidence just by its presence" (122). In Smiley's clever commentary on the matter, she suggests that the only people who are not to be considered in the

capital gain are the students, as an administrator states in a letter to all school personnel: "Please remember that our customers do not have a 'right' to any particular services in return for their dollar, though they may think that they do" (115).

Even the most cutthroat of Smiley's characters, the villainous economist Dr. Gift, admits, "We spend our whole lives thinking that value is an object, and collecting gold, or diamonds, or stocks and bonds, but even while you are piling it up, even while you are watching it, value is flowing ceaselessly into and out of it" (355). The tenuous nature of capital and value itself extends its unsure footing when in conflict with academia's more "pure" concerns: those of education, exploration, and critical thought. At the end of the novel, Smiley coyly tries to rectify these two worlds: "At the very least, the students could expect to think true, beautiful, and profound thoughts, and thereafter live better lives. At the very very least, students could expect to slip the parental traces, get drunk, get high, have sex, seek passion, taste freedom and irresponsibility surrounded by the best facilities that money could buy" (386).

It is, however, the experience of the minority students where Smiley's biting capitalistic criticism extends to social justice. Mary, the novel's sole African American student, becomes a symbol of underrepresentation in a very homogenous place, where the students are characterized as, "Twenty-one blond heads, in rows of five, unrelieved by a single brunette" (16). Mary, from the Southside of Chicago, realizes the value of her education, both in terms of how much it costs (she gets into arguments with her pragmatic sister concerning tuition) and what it may provide for her future. As a member of a marginalized culture, the promise of education for Mary is marred by her actual experience of the academic world: "It seemed to her right then that her place in this world, which had been small enough to begin with, had suddenly grown smaller, had gotten to be just a pinpoint that she could balance on for a while until it disappeared

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completely" (254). She realizes, "There wasn't even a space where a black person should be" (381). The perception that education creates social parity is struck down by Smiley's demand that her reader look at the latent prejudices within the system of higher education. Smiley even ventures into academic discourse (literary theory) to discuss the institutionalized racism of the academic system. In frustration over the acceptance of political literary theories (Feminism, Critical Race Theory) over New Criticism, Margaret (an English professor) betrays pure antagonism to how academics may help disenfranchised populations: "She did not think it any coincidence that ideas denigrating literary authorship had taken center stage simultaneously with the emergence of formerly silent voices for whom the act of writing, and publishing, had the deepest and most delicious possible meaning, simultaneously with the emergence of an audience for whom the act of reading and thinking was an act of skeptical anger, sometimes a transitional act of violence" (135). This change of political interest in students and scholars is actively opposed by stalwart faculty of an earlier age.

Examining the campus novels of traditional hegemonic students in the post-Golden Age of the 21st century helps us to understand students' relationships to their colleges at this most critical point: when their positions of agency in society are threatened by corporate interests.

Nick Burden, the Cheated Genius

In the 1990s, Barry Targan joined the discourse of campus novels and the coming-of-age narrative in his novel, *The Tangerine Tango Equation*. The novel features a child genius whose exuberance towards education is such that academia is unable to meet his intellectual demands. Diverging from both Fitzgerald and Mitchner—and the campus novel genre in general— Targan's protagonist, Nick Burden, is not only over-prepared for college rigor (he matriculates early) but finds himself the pawn of careerist professors and fellow students who see his genius

as a commodifiable asset for themselves. Targan makes no secret of his use of the

bildungsroman genre to instigate a reimagining of the values of higher education. From a brief

prologue, Targan insists, "This is the story of a boy—Nick—who became a man," and though

there are a number of elements that position the novel consistently with others of the genre, the

differences accumulate to show Targan's belief that higher education no longer serves the

student as it once had and that individual development may come from beyond the campus walls.

Nick begins his college career with the typical expectation of his new life of other

campus novels; he says, "Wonder. Awe. Risk. Courage. Were these my goals, a quest?" (6).

Targan, through Nick, agrees that there is some evolutionary process in matriculating through

college, that a social maturation takes place when the student engages with this new, foreign

world. But Nick is different because his maturation does not have epistemological or

philosophical origins. Not in need of the intellectual benefits of college, Nick's evolution is to

come from his social transformation solely, as his mother indicates, "Yes, sweetie, but what you

need to learn isn't in books, right?" (73). All the characters in the novel—from the Dean to the

expert physicists who visit campus to meet Nick—are aware that the college, to some extent,

only serves a perfunctory function. It is the place where Nick will be introduced, not to the

world of the mind, but to the world. Nick clearly seems aware of this potentiality; though he is

intrigued by his classes and classmates, they are generally no match for his advanced intellect.

However, college "has been terrific for [him] because [he's] had the chance to be [himself]"

(94). In other words, Nick is designed to specifically represent the social maturation process of

the college experience. By divesting the character, and thus, the reader, of both the desire and

the pragmatics of learning empirical knowledge, Targan emphasizes the function of higher

education that may be lost in hyper-corporatization and in the politics of class stratification and

in job hunting. This, the personal, individual, subjective development of the individual, is where Nick is most successful; it is where Targan assails academia for its other, more nefarious, burdens. This is best emphasized late in the novel with Nick's poetic need for self-discovery: "It was more this endless collision between purpose and possibility, the playing off of who I was against who I was, this floundering in the riptide of knowing everything and being nothing. This hunger for an illusive shape" (285). Despite the traumas of his short college career, Nick seems to engage with higher education and leave it nearly unscathed, having reached a new level of identity despite the designed setbacks of the academic system.

Nick's namesake burden comes from his external pursuit of identity. Unlike Amory and Vince, Nick's genius does not amount to an egoism that stunts his passage into maturity. Rather, Nick begins with maturity, seeming to understand physics as much as he does his social role to add to the discipline; he is aware of what his brand of genius can do for the betterment of the human race, if applied through correct channels. His obstacle, then, comes in the form of antagonisms from the very external identity markers he seeks to affirm himself: academia, professors, and romantic relationships. His classes are too rudimentary to inspire him, his professors steal his ideas, and his girlfriend uses him to bolster her career in journalism.

Not only does Nick encounter academic pressure, but sexual pressure as well. With his introduction to women and sex, Nick begins to weigh his masculinity between his intellectual pursuits and his sexual maturation. Despite his potential genius, his performative gender role as a masculine student interested in women trumps his serious study: "How trivial did the curvature of outer space now seem compared to the gentle roundness of Ricki's ample breasts or Janie's rump" (162). In participating in the action of sexual conquest and objectifying women's bodies, Nick affirms his identity through the codes of male-gendered stereotypes.

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Despite significant variances, Nick exhibits similarities to his colleagues of the earlier twentieth century. Like Amory and Vince, he is uncertain about his future: "I'm enjoying [college]. It's just this…sense of something waiting for me. I'm not afraid of it at all. What I'm afraid of is missing it" (212). His successes do not necessarily equate to comfort in the future. Like all students in campus novels, what occurs on the other side of the rite of passage, what happens when one comes of age, remains a mystery.

When his family drops him off at college, Nick understands he's begun a transformative passage; he's entered a liminal phase that will result in a personal evolution: "And then they were gone and here I was on this playing field or maybe battleground without any idea which way to go or how to begin" (12). The pejorative use of "battleground" in reference to the campus suggests Nick's uncertainty and fear for what the college experience will provide. As was illustrated above, in Alec's case, the coming-of-age narrative demands the death of youth. When Nick meets a famous physicist, who desires to take him under his tutelage, he completes the liminal or transitory phase: "Still I couldn't believe it. The meeting had the feeling for me of pivot or fulcrum: the balance in my own life might shift across that dinner table" (122). The metaphorical shift Nick feels is his movement toward something beyond where he currently is: into adulthood. As he matriculates through classes, but more importantly, engages with the letdowns of the social collegiate experiences, he reaches what can be interpreted as a postliminal phase of achieving a sense of his own identity: "I had become, was certainly becoming, perfectly human" (186). Again, the language here suggests a movement in Nick's life from a lack of knowledge (not the epistemological kind, but the experiential) to a more mature, complete person.

Nowhere is Nick's ongoing transition more apparent than when a drug dealer beats him up for transgressions his roommate made against the dealer: "I got to my knees and he socked me again and I went down. Blood ran out of my nose into my mouth. I felt a tooth loosen. Like a Masai youth become a warrior, a true member of his tribe, I thought, exalting even in my terror" (293). Again, even though his genius disallows academia to prompt his change, he still finds it in the experience of being at college and in living beyond his intellect.

Nick, like most of his campus novel colleagues, is concerned with his unknowable future: "But for a guy who knows everything, or can if he wants to, there is one thing he doesn't know, just like a lot of the rest of us. What does he want to do with his future? What does he want to be?" (124). This ontological conundrum is the quintessential concern of most campus novel students (often in tandem with the need for economic security and social survival). Targan, despite creating a character who differs largely from his peers—both in the book and in the genre—still saddles Nick with the need to be considerate about his prospects. This is because such an anxiety seems concurrent with the matriculation through a college curriculum, despite the era. Nick's genius seems to warrant some sort of enormous future financial reward but he is still confused about what is to come, perhaps shifting his trepidation from how much he will make to what he wants to "be."

Targan invokes Walt Whitman's poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" as his springboard for positioning a criticism of the rift between the Sciences and Humanities. Because Nick is predisposed to physics but becomes increasingly interested in painting, he turns to Whitman's poem to help himself understand the fallacious divide between his interests. Further, the poem serves to represent the conflict between the genius student and the self-interested college: Targan's central criticism for contemporary education. Whitman writes:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns

 before me,

When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide

and measure them[,]

 When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with

 much   applause in the lecture-room,

How soon unaccountable I [became] tired and sick,

Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars. (qtd. in Targan 87-88)

One of the themes of *The Tangerine Tango Equation* is the contrast between the pragmatic

knowledge of science (commodifiable) versus the awe and wonder of art and nature

(metaphysical). Targan seems to argue—in using Whitman and positioning Nick at the crux of

the conflict—that higher education is responsible for the segregation of the disciplines. CUS

theorists would argue that such a segregation is the result of corporate interests finding more

financial benefit in "practical" studies in the Sciences that could merit more profit. Nick begins

to see the difference between the value of "proofs," "figures," "charts," and "diagrams" and the

value of looking at the stars in "perfect silence." Fortunately, Nick does not adopt the mentality

of the segregation; he understands that both elements—the applied pragmatism of the Sciences

and the metaphysical analyses of the Humanities—are available to the student despite the

college's insistence that they are adversaries. Unfortunately, beyond this campus novel, students

seldom come to this realization. As Nick attempts to remarry the severance of disciplines ("I did

not *feel* what I knew" [23]) he draws further and further away from the college.

This relates to one of Targan's other constant criticisms: the contemporary conflict

between education for the sake of education and the commodifiable results of learning. As

mentioned before, most of the characters in the novel use Nick for his abilities in order to further

their ambitions. His roommate, Mike, runs an illegal drug smuggling campaign that implicates

an uncharacteristically naive Nick into potential legal trouble. His girlfriend, Sara, an aspiring

journalist, seduces Nick only so she can be the writer to cover his ascent to grandeur. His

professors Appleton and Culver steal his work and pass it off as their own to further their own

careerist aims. Even the Dean, who seems to mean well throughout the novel, is aware what

Nick's placement in the small college could mean for its reputation. That Nick is not destroyed

by these betrayals thrusts the narrative toward its theoretical focus: that the student must survive

not by engaging in higher education but in surviving higher education itself. This drastic

difference from the ideological purpose of higher education from earlier periods shows Targan's

disdain for contemporary academic structures and the nuanced ways in which they

disenfranchise students.

To this end, there is a persistent discourse about Nick's "responsibility" to society

(reminiscent of campus novels such as *Invisible Man*, where the student's individual

development is usurped by some flighty and vague notion that he owes something to the outside

world). It seems as if the intellectual (read: educated) mind is "burdened" to provide something

commodifiable to society, that one's mental talent is *not* for passage or development but for

some other, tangible use. When Nick confronts Professor Culver about Culver's stealing of

Nick's theories and presenting them at a national conference, Culver—unabashedly—responds,

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"We each serve ourselves, but we also serve knowledge" (270). Culver tries to create the illusion that his unethical injustice against Nick has some higher, more proletarian purpose: for the good of collective thought, generally. He concludes, "People have a right to the best knowledge in their fields. Maybe it is you who has the moral responsibility" (271). Naturally, this theft is consistent with some notion of capitalistic profit, as Mike illustrates: "The college makes the market. I'm just a consumer" (91). Mike later urges Nick to "make your power worth something" (183). And again, Mike posits, "You work, so you get something for your work." Nick responds, "Right. Something. It's called an education." To which Mike retorts, "It's called a profit" (90). Nick feels the pressure of his genius and how he is pushed towards considering profit; he thinks to himself at one point, "I was on my way to becoming a commodity" (222). But Nick is made uncomfortable by this, which leads to his reconsidering what role his college education should have in his life.

Though it is understood that Nick's family's financial situation is generally upper-middle class (he and his father go sailing off of New England's coast), "We were not well-off, though not pinched either" (2) and that he has a scholarship to Cobbton College, there is still the typically constant discourse concerning the financial responsibility of the college student, both in the costs of education (generally) and the notion that one's education will/should lead to future economic prospects. Nick ruminates, "I was going along with everyone else into a learning that glided on into a job and career" (54). As brilliant as he is as an academic and pragmatist, he is still vulnerable to the rhetoric of education and economy.

In continuing with his motif of subverting the thematic trends of campus novels, Targan's protagonist finds success only when he drops out of the university, refuses to participate in the expansion of ideas in his discipline, and instead enrolls at a community college to take art

classes. He finds ultimate comfort in the wisdom of his art professor: "You're never really ever

through with learning about what you're trying to do" (304). In the case of Nick, we can replace

"trying to do" with "trying to be," as he finally identifies this unexpected passion with his sense

of personal identity. What is remarkable about this ultimate conclusion is that Nick undergoes

the very maturation that Amory and Vince do but it differs in that success for Nick is

counterintuitive to traditional successful academic accomplishment: an enlightenment that leads

to no discernible economic end. Nick rejects such economy (he *could* have it) in favor of

pursuing that which constitutes his new identity: thought in the realm of the Humanities. His

final decision to leave Physics in favor of Art may seem socially irresponsible, but it leaves him

fulfilled and content. As much as he was betrayed by the factors of his outward search, he finds

meaning in looking inward.

Danny, the Blue-Collar Yalie

Whereas, in *The Tangerine Tango Equation*, Targan uses the campus novel genre to

explicitly criticize the function of higher education as a foundational staple to Western

civilization and culture, and does so by creating a quasi-satirical departure from the traditional

conventions of the genre, Tom Perrotta's novel, *Joe College* (2000), more closely follows its

predecessors. Like many of the campus novels of the 20th century featuring students from

traditionally hegemonic backgrounds, *Joe College* does little to break from the more rudimentary

aspects of the genre, instead using the campus to sustain a narrative about a student from a

privileged background at a highly pretentious institute who wrestles with the need to identify as

an outsider. Indeed, as a member of a working class family, Danny (the narrator) sees himself as

marginalized from the more elitist members of Yale University, often while failing to

acknowledge his own social agency from being a straight, white male. While Perrotta's novel

certainly does not merit acclaim for its imagination or prose, and while Danny is increasingly found to be reprehensible for his base attitude and actions, *Joe College* is an interesting novel for this study because, by virtue of its existence, one can conclude that the nature of the traditionally hegemonic student campus novel is essentially unchanged as the 20th century ceded to the 21st. In other words, while the novels of typically marginalized students changed radically with society, the similarities among campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students feature only cursory nuances.

From this one can draw a tentative conclusion: that though higher education has sustained numerous—some would say, disastrous—changes, and that though the rapid corporatization of higher education creates a new class of disenfranchised students, traditionally hegemonic student populations maintain a level of comfort non-existent to their typically marginalized counterparts, at least in the case of how American authors of campus novels view the system of higher education.

Joe College attempts to create a universalistic, everyman sense of the college experience. As the title suggests, Perrotta assumes his character represents a greater truth for students in college and uses this premise to guide his narrator through the rudimentary pitfalls of his maturation passage. The title is, however, itself a reflection that the white, male experience in college is universal and can be examined in the same way that the experience of typically marginalized students can be. Of course, this problematic thesis disqualifies the experience of students outside of Danny's experience and substantiates a monomythical archetype that results in the novel's essential failing. Still, it is valuable to include the text in this study to sustain the paradigm of traditionally hegemonic campus novels throughout the time periods and to locate

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evidence of new anxieties generated from the post-Golden Age's rampant corporate interests, even in the privileged student.

In an article titled, "Life 101 Has The Toughest Teacher of All," Ron Charles argues that "Perrotta's genius is his ability to depict student culture with dead-on accuracy." However, I would assert that this "accuracy" is pitifully narrow; Danny may depict one culture—a white male in the Ivy League—but the narrative strives to deem *this* experience as *the* experience. As has been demonstrated in the analysis of many campus novels over the 20th century, no singular college experience can be seen as prototypical; the only result one can derive from examining so many campus novels is that Danny's experience and depiction of student culture is only "dead-on" for himself (and Perrotta). Charles does concede, "Danny is always racked with guilt, but after a while, his guilt seems less a step toward reformation than a trendy license to keep enjoying himself. Ultimately, he gets away with it every time. The only thing he suffers in the end is the loss of his own soul." Where Danny has social leeway to make poor choices in his self-discovery, other students, from less-privileged backgrounds, suffer dire consequences, as will be seen in the novels from this period focusing on typically marginalized student cultures.

Danny approaches his college experience via the usual elements shared by nearly all campus novels: with the understanding that it marks a passage into the adult world. In preparing for college, Danny muses of the "feeling I'd had ever since I was a little kid that I was headed out of town, on to bigger and better things" (27). This egotistical expectation of grandeur beyond the familial realm, which can be compared to student narrators from Amory Blaine to Natalie Waite, puts a sort of pressure on the college experience to serve the student's needs of transformation. In other words, the chagrin that campus novel students develop for their college experience may be based on the pressure they put on the experience to provide them with some

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transcendental, epiphanous adventure. Typically, the adventure does not match the expectation, leaving the student feeling—at least temporarily—dissatisfied.

As Danny goes through his college career, however, he begins to note how he has evolved because of the experience. From his freshman and sophomore years, which were "emotionally and socially difficult" (34) to his junior year, where "the whole place just cracked wide open" (35), Danny follows the trend of traditionally hegemonic students from the campus novels before him, learning the value of the experience while amidst the experience. Intellectually, socially, and economically, higher education means for Danny an ability to transcend his previous life—a member of a lower-middle class family—and move toward a sustainable, independent future. He has this revelation while attending a school dance, where he wonders:

> If burdens I hadn't even known I was carrying were falling away from my
> body….The whole accumulated weight of the past. I felt lighter and lighter,
> pumped full of fresh air, and though my feet remained rooted to the ground, I
> experienced an odd sensation of rising, a slow inexorable ascent, as though I were
> moving upward on an invisible escalator, dancing my way into a brighter and
> easier future. (120)

Later, after encountering troubles (such as impregnating his girlfriend), Danny correlates his time at Yale to the Biblical Garden of Eden: "In my mind Yale was a garden from which I'd nearly been expelled, a haven of learning and friendship, the one place in the world where I could really be myself" (263). Such hyperbolic idealism sustains the perceived magic of the college experience. College, for Danny, is an isolated, exclusive world that sits apart from his more humble, suburban beginnings. This is most evidenced in the fact that he attends Yale University,

to him a pretentious but glamourous place impermeable to the outside world, particularly to that of his origins. When he thinks of the people of his past, he notes, "They belonged to different worlds, separated by borders only I was allowed to cross" (208). In particular, Danny hides his quasi-relationship with a girl back home because he deems her unintelligent and inferior to his new college friends, claiming, "At some point I'd realized that my association with [Cindy] struck certain of my college friends as vaguely exotic, and I'd played up the working-class angle for all it was worth" (42). Implied in this arrogant statement are two related assertions: 1) that there is a hierarchal divide between the college educated and the uneducated, and 2) that there is a commodifiable, material benefit to a college education that subjugates those who cannot enter the exclusive world of the campus to a mysterious and fetishized "working-class" existence.

Such a social disparity is problematic enough as it is, but is exacerbated when the problem extends to cultures that have been purposefully rejected from the system of higher education. For instance, when the parents of one of Danny's college friends come to visit, it is revealed that Yale did not always allow for female students to study there (Yale began allowing women to attend in 1969). The mother of Danny's friend states, "I envy you….Women weren't allowed here in my day," to which her husband misogynistically replies, "Sure they were….Just not on weekdays" (86). The discourse does not extend further, but the reader can infer the mother feels her disqualification at Yale continues to trouble her, making her realize she has been considered lesser than her husband and other men.

Danny may follow the course of many traditionally hegemonic young men in college—despite his lower-middle class status—but his financial concerns coincide particularly with the turn of the 21st century and the problems associated with the contemporary academic system. Specifically, Danny feels pressured into college as he identifies it as the only avenue by which he

can survive in his capitalistic society. Money is always at the forefront of his education, especially considering the dichotomy of his blue-collar summer job—driving his father's food truck—and his matriculation at a prestigious university. In fact, this dichotomy features greatly in the text, as if the binary of blue-collar work versus the intellectual, superior world of higher education stratifies individuals into segregated camps, which Danny is able to traverse. Danny ponders, "I came back to school and threw myself into my classes with renewed passion, thanking God every chance I got for releasing me from the bondage of the lunch truck" (34). The terms he uses suggest there is an oppressive nature to the working world, from which he finds alleviation in his belief that being enrolled at Yale makes him superior. The failing promise of post-collegiate job potential and rising cost of college leads Danny—and other characters—into wondering if the purported value of college has been little more than a ruse. His father claims, "'Fourteen thousand dollars for this?' he'd muttered over and over again, as if Yale were the biggest scam ever perpetrated in the history of humankind" (80).

Perrotta, for what he may lack in terms of aesthetics as a novelist, at least understands history. In contemplating the contemporary university with its recent problems, Perrotta sets the novel in 1982, and often points to the Reagan Administration for the divide between conservative government control (what Newfield argues as the cause for the post-Golden Age defunding of public education) and liberal sustention of academic freedom and democracy. One of Danny's professors weighs in on the so-called "culture wars": "All that stuff's just window dressing. Foreign policy, who's smarter than who, who's got the better statistic. The bottom line is that Ronald Reagan's been a great president for people like us" (100). Danny immediately questions his professor's notion of "us" and wonders if he's been included in the new American class divide. Still, what is intoned in the suggestion is that there was a newly-formed hierarchal

class system, developed by the Reagan Administration, that further segregates the typically disenfranchised groups (ethnic minorities, the poor) from education. As Williams argues, "It is now clear that the Golden Age waned through the 1970s and 1980s. Although some of the terms are still fuzzy, the university was part of the strategic defunding of the welfare state from the Reagan Era onwards, and universities have come to operate more as self-sustaining private entities than as subsidized public ones" ("Post-Welfare" 195). Newfield goes so far as to suggest that the conservative defunding of higher education was a polished strategy to protect the interests of the wealthy ruling classes over a growing middle class:

> To oversimplify somewhat, conservative elites who had been threatened by the postwar rise of college-educated economic majority have put that majority back in its place. Their roundabout weapon has been the culture wars on higher education in general, and on progressive cultural trends in the public universities that create and enfranchise the mass middle class. (*Unmaking* 5)

Danny is not in any way aware of these lofty political battles that affect him as a member of the middle class and as a college student, but he buys into the belief that enrolling in college makes him socially superior, and often notes as much when he relegates his past (including family and friends) to a reduced tier below his new station. In being forced to man his father's lunch truck over the summer, the binary-divide between the working class and the intellectual solidifies for him: "The rain affected me less as a natural phenomenon than as a personal insult, a taunting reminder that I was cut out for finer things than selling soggy sandwiches to grumbling factory workers in a relentless March downpour" (192). His reductive attitude toward the workers and his insistence that he is destined for "finer" things is part of the indoctrination of students into the

false ideology that their education makes them more valuable to society even though they are accruing momentous amounts of debt and suffer from scant job prospects.

What is perhaps the most difficult to accept about Danny and his self-righteous solipsism as a student is his rejection of his past despite the responsibility he has to it. Specifically, even though Danny views Cindy as inferior and basic, he continues to maintain a sexual relationship with her, which results in her pregnancy. This event—tempered by a *deus ex-machina* of sorts where Cindy convinces a married man to leave his wife and raise her illegitimate child with her, thusly disavowing Danny of any lasting responsibility—at first has the potential to strip Danny of his agency and reduce him back to the world of the working poor. When Cindy reveals her plan to Danny, he thinks, "I couldn't help wondering if what I was noticing were not these emotions themselves but the void created by their absence, since what I was mainly feeling just then was a combination of wild gratitude and awestruck relief, as if I'd just been rescued from a riptide or carried out of a burning building" (213). Beyond the general fear of a young man whose pseudo-girlfriend reveals their pregnancy is the acknowledgement that his status as it has diverged from hers, was momentarily in jeopardy. Charles agrees: "Even more threatening to his well being [sic] is the girlfriend he blew off when he went away to Yale. Her surprise pregnancy threatens to drag him back from the groves of academe to the aisles of Wal-Mart" (1). This hierarchal binary again situates the student over the middle class worker, a divide instigated by funding cuts in the Post-Golden Age aimed at subjugating the middle class.

Danny is a flawed protagonist because, despite all of his folly, he still manages to conclude the narrative unscathed. This is perhaps a failing of Perrotta's in the novel. What is more important to understand, however, is the shifting experience of the traditionally hegemonic student in higher education as the 20th century progressed. Danny's general sense of passage

into adulthood is not easily differentiated from the protagonists of campus novels throughout the century, but his sense of the changing financial culture for college students and the gulf of separation between the educated and the uneducated indicates a confirmation of some of the consternations of CUS theorists: that the corporatization of higher education has adverse effects on the student body. Of course, as the discourse now moves along to typically marginalized students, the gap of disenfranchisement widens radically.

Earl Thomas, the Commodified Black Product

The post-Golden Age of higher education features a period where previously marginalized students from diverse backgrounds, having found access to higher education through various civil rights movements of the middle of the century, now found themselves confronting new social and pedagogical issues on campuses. For instance, curricula situated and interested in Eurocentric traditions were challenged in order to account for the grievous disqualification of ideas, cultures, art, and even the lives of people beyond the Western hegemony. In literary studies, this meant a movement away from New Criticism towards identity theories such as Feminism and Critical Race Theory, which operate to analyze texts within the framework of understanding the oppressions of static systems (including the literary canon and the literature classroom) within society, texts, and their greater cultural contexts. In so doing, campus novels featuring typically marginalized students aim to deeply criticize the latent biases toward Eurocentric traditions that adversely affect a growing and diverse student body.

In *The Nigger Factory* (1972), Gil Scott-Heron takes aspects of Ellison's *Invisible Man* (it, too, is set at an all-black college) and radicalizes them for contemporary, 1970s culture. In the novel, the students are aware of the institutionalized inequities of their curricula and are disinterested in participating with the racisms of academia and how it "sucked in Black students

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and warped their minds" (27). They recognize academia as a white, hegemonic construct and wish to reestablish education to make it relevant to African American culture. Gates believes black writing "allows the black writer to posit a structure of feeling that…critiques…the metaphysical presuppositions inherent in Western ideas" (997). The actions the students take in the novel to undercut the Eurocentric traditions of academia function similarly; they aim to not simply make academia more inclusive, but challenge it to adapt to the diversity of its student populations by questioning Western ideas.

A radical group of students of Sutton University—self-referred to as MJUMBE ("messenger" in Swahili)—demand a number of changes at the college that are consistent with their goal of creating a more equitable academic environment, including the establishment of a Black Studies Institute, the disarming of campus security, and control over faculty hiring and firing. As a result of these demands, and the president's stubbornness to acquiesce, the students forge a strike, wherein they do not attend classes and ignore the president's insistence that they leave campus.

Scott-Heron, though mostly known for his musical accomplishments, crafts an intense and deeply profound narrative that overtly attempts to position academia as inherently racist and dedicated to its European forebears, as he demands in the author's note, "The center of our intellectual attention must be thrust away from Greek, Western thought toward Eastern and Third World thought" (ix). He claims that college (and here he is directly referring to black colleges specifically) "never…made anybody equal" and that "a college diploma is *not* a ticket on the Freedom Train" (ix). The inflammatory but appropriate title of the novel points to Scott-Heron's assertion that higher education does more to train African Americans to assimilate to the standards of white culture than to cultivate their own independent, essential critical thinking

skills. He argues, "While knowledge accumulates at a startling pace our institutions are content to produce quasi-white folks and semithinkers whose total response is trained rather than felt" (x). This being the central theoretical approach to the novel, Scott-Heron creates a narrative that attempts to illustrate the problems associated with a non-diverse system of higher education.

The college the students attend, though a black institution, subscribes to white, hegemonic culture and ideology, reducing black identity to an inferior state to dominant culture. The narrator, Earl Thomas—the SGA president who wishes for a Black Studies Institute—is critical of white mimicry: "Too often also Black people have been forced to copy the white man's life style and this both frustrates and kills the Blackness and beauty within him" (112). In essence, this mimicry extends to all academia, wherein Euro-centered dominant culture sustains the hegemonic structure that caters to the culture and sustained hierarchy of whiteness. As Morrison points out, "Agendas in criticism have disguised themselves and, in so doing, impoverished the literature it studies" (1007). Though she speaks directly about literary studies, the comment is relevant to academia as a whole, which sustains the agendas of dominant culture and resists evolutions that champion diversity.

It is clear that Scott-Heron draws some of his inspiration from Ellison's novel. The president of Sutton University, Calhoun, closely resembles Ellison's Dr. Bledsoe in that he is African American and the head of a black college, but his interests lie in careerist desires to satisfy his white superiors. The difference between the two, however, is that Scott-Heron gives Calhoun a distinct, progressive past, whereas Dr. Bledsoe's past is essentially unknown. In a late scene where Calhoun's wife threatens to leave him for his strict treatment of the striking students (he closes the University completely, institutes a re-registration process to deny those responsible for the movement, and even calls in the National Guard) it is revealed that he previously had a

role in the Civil Rights Movement. Neither he nor his wife expected his appointment as president of Sutton "because in the fifties there was an open fear of Blacks who spoke out so openly against racism and Black oppression. It had been felt that Calhoun's articles of the fifties would be held against him even ten years later by the white corporations that supplied much of the financing for private Black institutions" (202). Revealed in this quote is the genesis of Calhoun from radical activist to what the students call Tomming (or, pledging allegiance to the white benefactors); also, it correlates further to *Invisible Man* as Norton's influence over Bledsoe and the college overrule the student's needs and future prospects, which occurs again in *The Nigger Factory*.

Similarly, the notion that a minority student's college education is not designed to be beneficial to the individual but serves an abstract responsibility to their entire race—as found in previous campus novels featuring African American students—appears again in Scott-Heron's novel. One of Thomas's friends in the novel articulates, "Martin Luther King did his work. Malcom X did his work. But when they died the movements that they started died" (180). This discourse is repeated later: "Most of the students of Sutton were the post-civil-rights-marches generation of Black students….They were still inside the educational womb and their discussions were all hot air and rhetoric based on television revolutionaries and imported upheavals" (218). In other words, Scott-Heron is acknowledging how higher education, for African Americans, is about social movements rather than the development of the self. Indeed, it may seem that he champions the construct, but I argue his treatment of the higher education system is really just an allegory for all social systems that similarly and incessantly disenfranchise African Americans or expect differently of them from their white counterparts. Earl hints at this: "Sutton people have sat an' waited an' sat an' waited until every drop of blood in their bodies has gathered in the

asses. Jus' like Black people everywhere. We waited long enough" (141). Scott-Heron's call

for social justice is more a general call; his positing of the problem in higher education—much

like Ellison's—suggests that it is here, within the ideological and idealistic structure of learning

and developing, that young African Americans are forced to assimilate rather than organize.

To this end, the recurrent notion of passage found in essentially all campus novels, is

once again apparent in *The Nigger Factory*. Though it may serve a different end, higher

education in the novel still follows the construct that it allows for (and demands) a progressive

evolution in the student. All of the students of the novel are dissatisfied with their college

education, but they also acknowledge it has been beneficial in prompting their development. For

instance, one of the more radical members of MJUMBE, Abdul Menka, "had gone through a

great many changes" when he enrolled at Sutton (107). In fact, one could argue that the very

agency the students wish to achieve in their social criticism was gleaned from their education,

which developed in them a sense of social responsibility and an appreciation for past social

movements.

Additionally, there is an apparent severance in how the faculty and administrators view

the university versus what the university means for students. For the former groups, the college

is a place of employment (at least, from the perspective of the students), whereas for the

students, the college is a more intimate, domestic place. Thomas, in conversation with President

Calhoun, attempts to identify this contrast: "You have to remember, Mr Calhoun, that for you

Sutton may only be a job as it is to a number of administrators, but for the students it is home.

The workers *go home* after a day's work. We are here all day every day for nine months. We

can't take our home situation too lightly" (163). What can be understood in Thomas's assertion

is that the college should be a place of comfort and tenderness, where the student can engage

with learning while not worrying about their rights being jeopardized. This also suggests that in order to have a fair and effective educational structure, the college must operate as equitably as possible, considering all students' needs beyond the traditional, hegemonic constructs that marginalize diverse, non-Eurocentric cultures.

The acknowledgement that higher education is integrated into a greater sociocultural system of injustice is evidenced in Ralph Baker's (the leader of MJUMBE) demand that the students understand how assimilating to the current system of higher education produces students who are more qualified to join society, but a society that is designed to oppress them. He argues, in speaking of such students, "They so concerned wit' a fuckin' piece a bullshit paper that they refuse to pull their heads outta the fuckin' groun'. Who cares if they spend four years in hell and lived like pigs in a sty?" (37). In other words, Baker is arguing that the false consciousness of the education system blinds students into thinking they are developing themselves and their ethnic culture when they are really simply serving the traditional structures that have always disenfranchised African Americans. Of course, Calhoun believes this is precisely what a Sutton education is providing for the students: "We're trying to teach the boys and girls at Sutton how to be men and women and cope with their lives outside" (75). There is an acknowledgement here that higher education is latently about maturation (boys and girls to men and women) and that there is some certain relationship between what occurs on the campus and what occurs after graduation. The impasse occurs when the administration (which represents the system at large) and the students do not agree on how that transaction should function. In many ways, Scott-Heron is rekindling past theoretical notions of how to improve the conditions of African Americans. He positions the Booker T. Washington vs. W. E. B DuBois problem in education with the Civil Rights vs. Black Nationalism of social rights in his two complementary but

antagonistic student leaders. Thomas wishes to work on policy to further the students'

conditions. Baker believes policy just facilitates the vicious cycle: "Sutton could be a beautiful

place fo' Black studen's to come an' get their minds together, but what happens? Fo' years a

bullshit an' then ill-equipped people go back home an' ill-prepare another set to continue to

merry-go-round" (86).

Interestingly, Scott-Heron is cognizant as to how the greater economic needs of society

have contributed to changes within the structure of higher education. The notion of an increasing

dearth of funding effects the students both in the tuition they must pay as well as less financial

support for student needs: "Enter September and less funds for student activities than in the

previous eight years when the institution was three-quarters its present size" (143). Scott-

Heron's ability to understand the forthcoming changes in the economic academic climate is

impressive; the students of the novel recognize how defunding is affecting their daily lives in

college, forcing them to be persistently concerned with their financial realities. Such concerns

are repeated throughout the novel, as Baker says to a student assembly: "Do we plan to go back

through the same clogged channels of communication an' watch our hard-earned money go

down the drain?" (128). And later, "Will we continue to sit around daily wondering what

happened to our money?" (128-9). He is talking specifically about what value from education

they are getting from spending money on tuition but there is a tone present that the students are

almost monomaniacally fixated on money. This is not difficult to locate; when the students

come from economically depressed backgrounds, enter a system that purports to bolster them so

they can become more financially sturdy, then find the system to be entrenched in the very

structures that disenfranchised them to begin with, they begin to wonder if their participation in

the system (by paying and attending) does more to sustain their disenfranchisement or to

challenge it. Scott-Heron solidifies this notion: "Seniors have been graduating for years from Sutton having spent over ten thousand dollars during their college careers with very little idea of what happened to the money" (112-3).

Amazingly and persistently, even despite the problems associated with institutionally biased academic structures, Scott-Heron still regards education as a vessel by which effective, progressive change for the African American community may be realized, as suggested by one of the older characters (who is not a student): "One a the things that held me back in terms of maybe leadin' in the community was the fact that I didn't have much education" (182). The acknowledgement here is that education, if criticized and augmented to be more inclusive, can be a vehicle toward leadership for marginalized peoples.

The end of the novel serves to identify Scott-Heron's perspective on the issue, particularly in taking sides on the Thomas/Baker question. In what can be seen as hyperbolic satire, MJUMBE decides to take a stand against Calhoun and the National Guard by fortifying their headquarters (a fraternity house) and opposing the administration with guns and bombs. This violence ultimately ends with at least one of the MJUMBE members dying in a firefight with the National Guard (ambiguously, other students may die as well). Though the destruction of African American students is literal in the loss of their lives, it can also be viewed as metaphorical. Scott-Heron suggests an institutionally biased education system can similarly destroy African American lives. Scott-Heron seems to side with the non-violent approach of Thomas, who says to the MJUMBE members just before the violent ending, "You don't face a bazooka with a water pistol. You don't fight a tank with a slingshot. You don't risk the lives of future Black mothers jus' because you have an emotional commitment to a .22" (192). Later, even a member of MJUMBE rethinks his stance on the violence, as he suggests, in speaking to

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another member, "Some things depend on yo' ability to convince people with words that you're right" (215). The idea of using words instead of guns, of peaceful protest, seems to be Scott-Heron's final conclusion. Indeed, as a writer himself, he deems words more powerful and effective than using means that more often end in violence.

The Nigger Factory is an elegant and volatile novel that attempts to illustrate how the contemporary education system harbors some of the sustained problems of its previous iterations. In the tradition of campus novels that feature typically marginalized students, Scott-Heron's novel stridently calls for an awareness of how systemic structures continue to disenfranchise minority populations and asserts that a more concerted effort to acknowledge the needs of minority students must be realized.

Marcus Messner, the Comatose Jew

Philip Roth's 2008 novel, *Indignation*, set during the Korean War, features a young man of a working class Jewish family from Newark, NJ as he transfers from the local college to one in Ohio to leave his overprotective and progressively neurotic father.

Marcus Messner, an intelligent, straight-A student, enrolls at Winesburg College where he attempts a life of misanthropic introversion punctuated by a furtive fidelity to his studies. His most prominent apprehension has to do with the Korean War, and how his matriculation in college prevents him from being drafted. Interestingly, Marcus's father, a kosher butcher in Newark, maintains the same fear. As a result, Marcus puts all of his attention into his studies.

As the novel progresses, it becomes more evident that Marcus's introversion perturbs members of the college community, specifically the Dean of Students. In an effort to circumvent the college requisite of attending a certain number of hours in chapel as part of the curriculum, Marcus is convinced by the president of a fraternity rushing him that he should pay another

student to attend the hours in his stead. At first antagonistic to the idea, Marcus eventually relents. The student is subsequently caught, Marcus is expelled, drafted, and killed in the Korean War; ultimately justifying his father's previously suspected overbearing protectiveness. The novel ends with the philosophical recognition that even small actions may have large and dire consequences.

According to a chapter in Roth's autobiography, coincidentally titled "Joe College," much of the plot-constructs of *Indignation* come from his own personal experience. Roth, like Marcus, grew up in a working class family in Newark, NJ, and attended a local college before transferring to a more expensive rural college where chapel attendance was necessary and he struggled with his Jewish identity in an overtly anti-Semitic school and country. In speaking about his education, Roth understood the hierarchal stratification of academic disciplines and felt drawn to the Humanities despite his family's financial worries and the draw of more economically fruitful fields:

> The courses to which I was drawn typified everything that the marketplace
> deemed worthless, and yet here I was, living among its most enthusiastic
> adherents—the unrebellious sons and daughters of status-quo America at the
> dawn of the Eisenhower era—certain that mind and not money was what gave life
> meaning, and studying, in dead earnest, Literary Criticism, Modern Thought,
> Advanced Shakespeare, and Aesthetics. (*The Facts* 61-2)

Because Roth has the hindsight of being an author writing about the 1950s from the perspective of the 21st Century, his social criticisms are all the more challenging. Granted, the mid-19th Century was a time of social inequity, the imparity of the hierarchal systems of class, race, sex, and religion proliferating throughout society, let alone college campuses; but Roth cleverly

inserts a critical perspective on these hierarchal injustices through the veiled construct of his simple morality narrative. Roth may set his narrative in the middle of the 20th century but, in writing from the 21st century, he cleverly links social issues from one era to the present, post-Golden Age era. In other words, it does not matter that Marcus attends school prior to the post-Golden Age, as Roth reveals his circumstances—both as a Jew and a student behooved to economic stress—to be commiserate with students in the contemporary era.

Roth follows many of his contemporaries in illustrating education as a rite of passage. *Indignation* features this motif in both literal and metaphysical ways. That education allows for a student to opt out of mortal peril (the draft) literally emphasizes education's role in survival for contemporary society. In other words, matriculating in college in the novel is literally akin to survival; one could argue that it has become metaphysically so even in peacetime.

Indeed, education as a rite of passage and the fears therein appear in *Indignation* as they have in many 20th century texts. Marcus's father marks the transition and worries over his son's preparedness as he is "crazy with worry that his cherished only child was as unprepared for the hazards of life as anyone else entering manhood" (8). His father's fear and chagrin (which becomes increasingly crippling as the novel and war progress) is best described as a trepidation for his son's vulnerability in the "real world": "The world is waiting, it's licking its chops, to take your boy away" (14). Marcus, idealistically, of course recognizes his education not as a fearful event but as an enthusiastic transition to the next phase of his life, "I was eager to be an adult, an educated, mature, independent adult," and he feels this would be achieved by his "unique family status as a college student" (17). But despite this vague idealism, Marcus maintains an economic pragmatism, believing college will grant him opportunities for white-

collar jobs far from his family's blue-collar station: "All I knew about becoming a lawyer was that it was as far as you could get from spending your working life in a stinking apron covered with blood" (37). This last reference to his father's working as a kosher butcher suggests Marcus believes his education will release him from his family's impoverished class circumstance.

To do this, Marcus "was always working on [himself]. [He] was always pursuing a goal" (51). This pursuit of the goal aligns with many characters from campus novels of the 20th century. There seems to be a constant fidelity to philosophical and economic goal-acquisition, suggesting that the students are in the midst of their own academic adventure towards an elusive but important end. Ultimately, this rite of passage—like with many of Marcus's literary contemporaries—causes a sort of identity crises because the student is in a sensitive state of transition: "Why instead am I in conflict with everyone?…How had I gotten myself in trouble so fast, I who'd never before been in trouble in my life?" (113). He claims, "I've been in a very confused state of mind since I hit this place" (134). It seems that, despite his idealism, his college experience does not match his expectations and leads to a further confusion about his social role and future prospects. Of course, the reader views his collegiate troubles as petty until it is revealed that they indeed lead to Marcus's death. Ultimately, whether literal or metaphorical, a higher education is conducive to a student's assimilating to contemporary American society and surviving it: "I remembered from listening to [his mother] why I was at Winesburg. Forget chapel, forget Cauldwell, forget Dr. Donehower's sermons and the girls' convent curfew hours and everything else wrong with this place—endure what is and make it work. Because by leaving home you saved your life" (152).

Some of the consistent campus novel themes when considering students from typically marginalized cultures appear in Roth's novel as well; specifically, the recurrent notion that the

student's education should benefit the greater good—society at large—rather than their own egocentric needs, as his mother says to him, "You are here so someday you will become a person in the community that other people look up to and that they come to for help" (171). This notion appears almost exclusively in campus novels of the typically marginalized student while it is often reversed (preferring student-centric ideology) in campus novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students.

Roth's novel, despite being set in the 1950s, cleverly centralizes the economic concerns of students and situates them in a way that draws attention to similar, if not proliferated, economic disenfranchisements in the contemporary world. Roth is conscious of the economic problems college students face in the 21st century—as he writes from there—and locates a precursor for this struggle in the age that was supposed to foster academic expansion. Roth uses setting as a model for a greater structural problem: that education equates to survival but obtaining an education is not equitable. Being from a working class, Jewish family, Marcus determines that college is the only avenue for advancement available to people of his social status. On the very first page of the novel, Marcus mentions how he is the first member of his family to enter college. This sets the tone of a narrative where a student must negotiate the experience of higher education with no previous experience in his family.

In addition to the anti-Semitism of the time, Roth also criticizes how the poor, women, and minorities are treated within institutions of higher education. Marcus's feelings about college are in line with his class needs: "A college was a college—that you attended one and eventually earned a degree was all that mattered to a family as unworldly as mine. I was going to the one downtown because it was close to home and we could afford it" (15). However, though Marcus's family can "afford" his education if he stays close to home, he ultimately chooses to

transfer to a college out-of-state in order to leave the overprotective family that restricts his maturation, which results in an entire restructuring of their lives:

> To pay for my going to a college away from home, my father had to let go of Isaac, the polite, quiet Orthodox young fellow in a skullcap who'd begun to apprentice as an assistant after I started my first year of school, and my mother, whose job Isaac was supposed to have absorbed in time, had to take over again as my father's full-time partner. Only in this way could he make ends meet. (18)

Marcus feels an innate guilt at this. Combined with the knowledge that being enrolled in college prevents him from being drafted into war, Marcus's motivation to succeed in college is sturdy but it is fixated upon two separate demands for survival: avoiding the draft and establishing financial security. This is contrary to the notion that college education prescribes individual maturation and passage into society. Being in college, however, Marcus begins to subscribe to the typical notion of hierarchy in the educated, intellectual class over the working class. He states, "I'm not interested in the low life, Ma. I'm interested in things that matter" (11). This stratification of his new life in college against his old life working for his father in a butcher shop emphasizes the ideological divide between the educated and the uneducated. In considering his mother, later, he continues this line of thought: "If my mother hadn't married my father, she could, without difficulty, have held down any number of jobs far more demanding of the skills of diplomacy and the functioning of intelligence than what was required for work in a butcher shop" (163). The near shame Marcus begins to feel for his father's business (despite it is this industry that supports his education) is interesting because his father's preoccupation about his son is ultimately substantiated, and it is the school's strange, anti-Semitic policies that lead to Marcus's death.

The central and most obvious inequity concerns the fact that Marcus, a self-proclaimed atheist but ethnic Jew, is forced to attend chapel services as part of Winesburg College's curriculum. In a unique irony, Marcus sings the national anthem of the Chinese (in his head) who fought against Japan with the US in WWII while being forced to listen to sermons in chapel, "I must have sung this verse to myself fifty times during the course of Dr. Donehower's second sermon, and then another fifty during the choir's rendering of their Christian hymns, and every time giving special emphasis to each of the four syllables that melded together form the noun 'indignation'" (82). What makes this ironic is that it will be the Chinese, aiding the Koreans in the 1950s, who kill Marcus. Obviously, the forcing of an atheist (née Jew) to attend chapel suggests a very poignant oppression of Jews in American academia in the mid-20th century. The failure of Marcus to attend Christian chapel directly leads to his death. Roth organizes this central narrative conflict by opposing Marcus and the Dean who, despite Marcus's perfect grades, summons him to talk about the fact that Marcus is not making any social advancements. It is clear, through their subsequent discussions, that the Dean harbors a number of anti-Semitic opinions that could be part of Marcus's eventual dismissal from the college. During interviews with Marcus, the Dean continually antagonizes Marcus about his Jewishness, questioning him as to why he did not write "Jewish" under religion in his application and mentioning that he was assigned Jewish roommates despite not revealing his ethnic background. This may seem innocuous, but the Dean, being the "biggest Christer around" (122) combined with Marcus's expulsion for not attending chapel puts the interviews in a nefarious category, that of intimidation and prejudice.

The novel is rife with anti-Semitic commentary, forcing the reader to focus on Marcus's marginalization as an ethnic minority in a privileged, Christian, Midwestern institution. About

the college, Marcus explains, "There were twelve fraternities on the campus, but only two admitted Jews….The remaining ten were reserved for white Christian males, an arrangement that no one could have imagined challenging on a campus that so prided itself on tradition" (20). Later, the head of one of the Jewish fraternities tells Marcus, "It can be awfully lonely here otherwise. You know that out of twelve hundred students on this campus, less than a hundred are Jewish" (39). The culmination of this tension, Marcus's death, is Roth's assertion that the inequities in higher education can have mortal consequences. Clearly, in Marcus's case, this consequence is literal; but for many students desirous of a higher education, survival is still a motivation, be it social, economic, or even intellectual; and surviving higher education as a marginalized student can be difficult.

The Jewish identity is not the only marginalized identity in jeopardy in the novel. For women, the options were seemingly just as few: "Pinned as a junior, engaged as a senior, and married upon graduation—those were the innocent ends pursued by most of the Winesburg virgins" (26). The college maintains a number of rules, such as curfews, for female students that do not apply to men. Marcus also recognizes (through a subjective, male perspective) the "ambition" of female students: "To reestablish with a reliable young wage earner the very sort of family life from which they had temporarily been separated by attending college, and to do so as rapidly as possible" (58). This double-standard for female students not only stratifies them in roles beneath their male counterparts, but makes their college experience more difficult if not immediately inaccessible at the start. Finally, Roth's depiction of minority inaccessibility criticizes the racist infrastructure of the college, which was even more problematic when considering students were granted a reprieve from the draft: "He was one of three Negroes in the whole student body—there were none on the faculty" (40).

Focusing on Jewish identity but looking at a motley group of marginalized experiences in campus novels shows how the academic system—in its penchant to bolster the hegemony—sustains the problematic prejudices and restrictions to agency of the greater society. Roth reveals a circumstance of history but in so doing, creates an awareness that these issues have not been resolved in contemporary higher education, but perhaps have become even more critical. Interestingly, Marcus recalls the entire narrative from a metacognitive fugue state where he understands he is dead and believes he is reliving the time before his death repeatedly through some vague eternity. It is revealed to the reader that the aforementioned fugue is truly a morphine-induced delirium in which Marcus is cast having been alleviated from the pain of his mortal wounds by fellow soldiers in Korea. In his comatose state and before he truly dies, Marcus relives his college experience and what led up to his deployment. Such a narrative design indicates that this pivotal point—his education but also his disenfranchisement as a Jew therein—in correlation with his death is less a coincidence and more a result of the biased structures of the American economic system.

Conclusion

The late 20th century campus novels of the post-Golden Age of higher education retain much of the themes, tropes, motifs, and identities of their predecessors, especially in the case of the traditionally hegemonic students. Added to these consistencies are the nuanced fears and anxieties of students facing the rapid commodification of their education in corporate academia. These fictions point to a tumultuous future if the issues of corporate interest and rising student debt are not curbed. That the novels center upon students and their exploits does not negate the fact that students are becoming less the central focus of contemporary colleges themselves, despite college missions and administrative assurances.

As the campus novels featuring typically marginalized students illustrate, the rise of academic corporatization and debt returns previously disenfranchised minority cultures to a state of lessening access to higher education. According to the 2011 report *Minorities in Higher Education*, by Young M. Kim for the American Council on Education, though overall population numbers for student enrollment has increased in the past two decades, there was a discrepancy between white and African American students. Kim's findings suggest, "Despite universal progress, racial/ethnic disparities slightly worsened because of disproportionate rates of improvement" (2).

Campus novels of the post-Golden Age still maintain tenderness toward the college experience, especially in the traditionally hegemonic student, in that the students are often aware of the uniqueness of the college experience in a lifetime that will not include much formal education upon graduation. These most recent novels in the genre, however, reveal new frustrations where motivations external to the intellectual and social passage interfere with pedagogy and curriculum. These frustrations include but are not limited to: faculty careerism, administrative bureaucracy and *en vogue* policy, corporate campus infiltration, debt, future job insecurity, and a curriculum where epistemological discovery and critical thinking become secondary if not non-existent. The campus novels of the era do not often offer panaceas for these predicaments, but their focus on the problems should prompt critics to recognize how these texts, as cultural artifacts of the current academic reality, demand a concerted reaction. Ultimately, for those invested in higher education and the future of students as they engage with their passage rites into contemporary society, campus novels and their protagonists offer poignant insights into the interaction between students and academia—which are rapidly transforming themselves into customers and corporations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE CAMPUS NOVEL AND HIGHER

EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

As the 20th century progressed and higher education changed to meet the evolving

demands of American culture and society, campus novels have likewise adjusted by charting

how students engage with a changing academic climate. Indeed, studying the campus novels

over the 20th century reveals how both traditionally hegemonic, but more so, typically

marginalized student cultures engage with and react to corporate and capitalist interests

penetrating their intellectual, socio-cultural, and economic rite of passage.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, these novels reflect the needs of social

inclusion and personal development as well as the typical bigotries, prejudices, and oppressions

identifiable in many of America's cultural institutions. This makes campus novels interesting

vessels by which to study social inclusion and marginalization. If, at one of the country's most

core levels of development and initiation—educating its citizens to be members of the

population—one can explore the variations of equity, democracy, and opportunity, than so too

might this illustrate how American culture functions at all of its foundational levels. Indeed,

campus novels have the uncanny ability to focus critically on the various ways that a student

negotiates the often treacherous terrain of college life and how this intersects with their own

personal development. Rarely do campus novels feature scenes in classrooms, where the

archetypical transfer of knowledge is theoretically administered. Rather, they use the entire

college experience as a sort of catalyst for the student's maturation. Clearly, throughout such

novels, the students are completing classes, reading books, taking exams, negotiating with

academic advisors, etc.; but the genre seems more to value the extra-curricular collegiate

experience, which reinforces the notion of higher education as representative of social structure rather than a singular experience of knowledge transfer. Although the campus novel is not a popular genre, it nevertheless provides a poignant look at the changing student experience and thus, the realities of contemporary American culture.

Many campus novels maintain the "standard" fears of both academia and life. Socially, students meet with the need to interact with their peers in an enclosed setting: the cloistered and exclusive campuses of American colleges that exist somehow in league with but simultaneously outside of the surrounding society. As bildungsroman stories, the students characteristically go through changes that result in a typical growth or maturity. Of course, not all protagonists from campus novels grow; as has been shown, some either remain stagnant or even devolve by the end of the narratives. But generally, and for the most part, campus novels position students in circumstances by which they are forced to extend beyond their known selves in order to become initiated into the adult world. With a lack of specific, ritualistic, rites of passage in American society to mark the moment of maturation to adulthood, academia acts as one of the de facto avenues by which American youth can enter the adult world. Campus novels are mostly interested in this particular passage.

Beyond the social concerns of campus novels, however, there are still myriad and rather constant examples of how academia functions in the development of the student's intellectual and critical abilities. The genre is not made up of books that regard the college experience as an intrinsically positive one—especially as the century progresses—but the protagonists and even secondary characters doubtlessly develop a sense of intellectual response to their experience. Though skeptical of the system by which they learn (which may actually be a positive function of an intellectual college experience) the students nearly always reveal intellectual growth by the

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end of the novels. This suggests that the personal development of the individual as thinker and even leery critic of the outside world is rooted to the college experience. There are many examples of the students entering their college experience as egotistical, even solipsistic individuals married to their subjective experience, who grow into more dynamic, socially-concerned citizens who harbor more objective positions. Again, this is not a universal design in campus novels but a common thread that links the genre throughout the periods and across the diverse narrative perspectives.

Economically, the campus novel genre engages directly with the growing needs of students in post-industrial America, where specialized and professional degrees become more necessary in order to find employment in the knowledge economy. Students are cognizant of how their college experience is consistent (or not) with skill development that may assist them in future jobs. In fact, increasingly, as the mid-century academic boom gave way to the post-Golden Age of higher education, student protagonists became more skeptical that their coursework would benefit their future prospects, resulting in an anxiety over whether or not school could provide the necessary tools for economic survival. Of course, this anxiety—both in the novels but representatively in actual American society—pressures students to study subjects they presume will ensure vocational viability, regardless of the potential falsehoods intrinsic with these suppositions.

Such motivations, inspired by the changing climate in academia as the century progressed and favoring business models to commodify education mean that student agency and democratic education become usurped by private interests. In the campus novels of the century, this movement toward corporate interests is represented by increased student fears concerning the traditional social role of higher education. Student characters in these novels become less

capable of matching their experience in higher education with their passage into society. This is largely because colleges must become less focused on student development and pedagogy and more invested in institutional survival. This plunges colleges into a capitalistic trap: colleges must find new sources of funding to survive, the private sector presents an interested source of capital, then the private sector and market begin to mandate how the college functions at its core levels.

This project has argued that higher education serves as an intellectual, social, and economic rite of passage for students to advance themselves within American society. Chaput argues, "The mutually reinforcing notions of social equity and democracy suggest that the public universities are designed to produce and to disseminate a wide spectrum of knowledge, to teach citizenship, to provide socioeconomic mobility, and to be universally accessible to all interested students" (119). Most clearly, however, the intellectual and social passages of the student are threatened by the corporate business model of education. Directly, as education becomes more commodified, the student is more greatly perceived as a customer, which jeopardizes the pedagogical and philosophical constructs of higher education aimed at developing critical, imaginative thinking and responsible citizenship. The market becomes increasingly enmeshed with higher education, resulting in administrators investing time and money on programs that serve private interests over the public good and students focused solely on how their college experience translates into job prospects. In such a paradigm, as has been mentioned before, Humanities programs are often defunded or cut, as they are seen as less economically viable than their STEM counterparts. Newfield points out that in the 1980s, "Universities now had direct financial incentives to see 'basic' research [that is, in the Humanities] overlap with applied, science turn into technology, and the discovery process lead to commercial products" (*Ivy* 181).

Faculty, too, can be guilty of serving the market over the college mission, designing curricula that move away from the social goods of colleges and toward the vague notion (and hope) of financial success for students. Newfield shows, "The university actively pursued closer relationships with industry. Nor did university administrators impose industry sponsorship on reluctant faculty. Faculty actively pursued this sponsorship" (*Ivy* 174).

Not only are the intellectual and social aspects of the student's rite of passage in jeopardy, however, so too is the concept that the student will automatically receive gainful employment at the end of their college career, problematizing the notion that their economic rite of passage is somehow more concrete with an increased focus on privatization and corporatization in colleges. As has been argued, increases in college costs and thus, student debt, saddle students into making job choices that might feasibly bear some of the financial burden students incur for attending college. However, such a choice (and for the moment, I ignore the more existential problem of students not finding work for which they have passion) only imprisons students to lives organized around financial goals to pay back past collegiate debts. This is compounded by the inevitable future circumstance where careers that demand a college degree become less desirable—as they do not pay as much as the trades, perhaps—and so some potential college students spurn the college experience and all of its costs for more financially responsible career choices outside of academia.

It has been largely discredited that there is a perfect, tangible correlation between a degree and future wealth. William Deresiewicz, in his article "Faulty Towers" explains how he advises students interested in graduate school: "Go if you feel that your happiness depends on it—it can be a great experience in many ways—but be aware of what you're in for. You're going to be in school for at least seven years, probably more like nine, and there's a very good chance

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that you won't get a job at the end of it" (27). This sardonic view of academic success as it fails

to translate to economic success is consistent with the realities the student may face upon

graduating from college. Of course, students who graduate from college will see an increase in

their general income. It has long been argued by a great number of CUS theorists, educators, and

economists that higher education bolsters the middle class, which suggests a direct relationship

between degree acquirement and financial stability. But, as debt rises and jobs become more

elusive, the correlation between degree and job—a cornerstone paradigm on which colleges

survive—becomes more dubious. The promise of class ascension and mobility loses strength as

the connection between one's education and their future job prospects lessens. As has been

related before, there is also a false consciousness that the sciences produce more jobs or greater

wealth, at least at the individual level. Indeed, if experimentation, research and development,

and product patenting occurs in college laboratories, it could mean substantial gains for

corporations that have invested resources into faculty and programs in order to produce more

marketable commodities. What it does not do, however, is create financial opportunities for the

parties who actually develop the theories or perform the research. The campus novels of the 20th

century do well to explain how these issues directly affect the student. Acknowledging but

shifting the focus away from the object (the structures and systems of higher education) and

reestablishing it on the subject (the student), campus novels re-humanize the college experience,

insisting that it is not merely a financial transaction; this helps to illustrate the detrimental effects

of rampant corporatization on students in higher education.

Divergent Narratives

This study focuses on three diverse periods in higher education in the 20th century—the

pre-Golden Age (1900-1945), Golden Age (1945-1975), and post-Golden Age (1975-present)—

using two diverging student identity narratives—traditionally hegemonic and typically marginalized student populations. The most tangible result of reading the campus novels produced over the century and in these two categories is in acknowledging how the two identity narratives radically veer from one another as the century moves on. Specifically, in the traditionally hegemonic "master" narrative—novels featuring straight, white men as student protagonists—the values, ideologies, experiences, interactions, and results of the college experience change very little. In other words, beyond the aesthetics of the language and settings of the novels, a reader may find it difficult to differentiate between a traditionally hegemonic campus novel from 1920 and one from 1990. This phenomenon may best be answered by understanding how American society at large has not made significant moves to challenge the agency and privilege of a stratified, hierarchal culture that subjugates many of its people. Indeed, despite rights movements for women, people of color, and other typically marginalized cultures, higher education seems to continue to most benefit and support those for whom it was originally designed.

The focus of campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students is often the subject, the student himself. From F. Scott Fitzgerald's namesake "egoist," Amory Blaine, to Barry Targan's boy-genius, Nick Burden, the novels largely address the needs of the male student as he negotiates his passage through academia in order to satisfy his particular needs. Moreover, it can be argued that the college experience for the traditionally hegemonic student—both in campus novels and in the actual world of higher education—closely resembles the ritualistic rite of passage instigated by cultural anthropologists for decades. In other words, there seems a penchant for higher education to function in the particular way of being a vessel for the traditionally hegemonic student's rite of passage into a society that is ready to greet him as an

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already-initiated member. While students who do not fit the rubric of the hegemony must struggle against academic structures that render them secondary only to alight upon a society that is institutionally and systemically biased against them, campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students feature men who more easily glide through their experience and are welcomed into the waiting world. Once again, this illustrates how campus novels function as cultural barometers wherein social injustice becomes obvious. Occasionally, like in Stuart Mitchner's *Let Me Be Awake* or in Tom Perrota's *Joe College*, the traditionally hegemonic campus novel harbors reprehensible student protagonists who sustain hegemonic agency by using their privilege (ostensibly, they are unaware of it at all) to marginalize other characters (mostly female) in order to satisfy their own needs and curiosities. This only leads to a deeper recognition of how the campus novel genre differs depending on the identity of the student protagonist.

The one interesting evolution in the traditionally hegemonic student narrative over the 20th century is the increasing level of economic concern that threatens the students' inherent dominance. Though it is true that in nearly every campus novel (regardless of the identity of the student protagonist) there is some mention of economic concern, either in the form of the need to join society through employment or the direct lack of financial security, the novels do feature nuanced anxieties as the decades passed. In the post-Golden Age of higher education, the novels featuring traditionally hegemonic students become increasingly suspect about higher education's ability to provide them with financial stability. Skepticism has long been a trope of the genre, but in the pre-Golden Age, it is largely dispelled by the end of the narrative, the student's faith in his social position restored. From the mid-century to present day, however, the novels seem to present a more tenuous grasp on social agency for students who have largely enjoyed cultural

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privilege. This may be a direct result of the changing corporate climate on college campuses and the latent discomfort felt by students as a result of such shifts.

The biggest narrative shift, however, occurs not in the novels of traditionally hegemonic students but in those of the typically marginalized students. As has been shown, the frequency of campus novels written by and about marginalized cultures increased dramatically as the century progressed. Though I have focused at times on specifically marginalized cultures (women, African Americans, those living in poverty, Jewish Americans, etc.), I have largely generalized the marginalized experience as a contrast to the hegemonic one. Indeed, further research could focus more intently on any of the aforementioned marginalized cultures within the campus novel genre in order to get a more profound understanding of a particular student experience, but my interest was to initiate the discourse by positioning any typical marginalization against the paradigm of the hegemonic student experience. This derives from the theory that higher education was built for and is currently sustained by the dominant culture. Therefore, following students who fit this identity set against students who deviate in any way creates the beginning of a discourse that shows the specific inequities in higher education, how they are proliferated by rampant corporatization, and how they continue to disenfranchise marginalized cultures.

The Academic Other

Campus novels featuring typically marginalized students changed significantly as the century progressed. Starting perhaps as companion pieces to their traditionally hegemonic counterparts, the novels—though infrequent—sometimes touch upon the injustices of a biased education system but largely do not jeopardize the inherently problematic structures. In the Golden Age of higher education, which corresponded with the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and Second-Wave Feminism, the novels shift drastically. They no longer focus

on the individual subject of the student but on the development of a cultural identity. The novels

become critical of academia and seem to strive toward the goal of increased agency for students

who encounter a system not designed to support them. While the campus novels of traditionally

hegemonic students continue to attempt to understand the individual experience of the subject,

the typically marginalized campus novels become self-aware: a consciousness dedicated to social

change.

　　To this end, it is appropriate to argue that campus novels featuring typically marginalized

students, from the Golden Age of higher education to the present, serve as social criticisms. In

the narrow sense, the experiences of women, ethnic minorities, people on the LGBT spectrum,

people living in poverty, religious minorities, and other disenfranchised groups are obviously

unique. Broadly, however, academia seems to become disadvantageous to them all—in contrast

to their more hegemonically representative colleagues—as it functions similarly to all the

systems and structures of society that innately benefit the archetypical ruling class of the United

States. In short, though it is reductive to claim all marginalized experiences are the same,

campus novels show a great amount of consistency when aggregating the marginalized

experience against the hegemonic. As social criticisms, campus novels are flagrant, often

satirical, but always directly critical of the disenfranchising aspects of the academic system.

Their call is to have readers recognize inequity in an effort to reposition higher education—both

curricularly and systemically—to serve a greater and diverse population.

　　Because there were more minority cultures on college campuses as the century

progressed, represented both in the student and faculty bodies, it stands to reason that the

concerns of these populations would then begin to infiltrate academic discourse and collegiate

structures. The proliferation of marginalized voices in academia challenged the common tropes

of campus novels as the marginalized student's experience is so unique from the hegemonic experience that it changes the whole academic dynamic. What a college education is and what it means to be a student in higher education could be called into question. However resistant to change it has been in the past, academia has had to evolve to reflect social changes and address social needs, beginning with efforts toward inclusion. Of course, this evolution has been slow going and the advancing corporate models for higher education threaten progress on this front. The campus novel as a genre, when dealing with the experience of these marginalized students, continues to demand reflection and reaction to the constant inequities of the system.

The student protagonists of the typically marginalized campus novels do not illustrate the same collegiate experience of their more fortunate classmates. Indeed, when the students are able to access higher education at all, they must harbor not only the common concerns of the hegemonic students, but they must also engage with the various social injustices paradigmatic to the institution as a whole. These students must navigate such pitfalls in the academic structure because it was not built for them, leading to a college experience that is not simply more difficult, but is less accessible, less robust in its serving diverse needs, and more prone to attrition in minority populations. In Petr Anténe's article, "Racial Conflicts in the Campus Novel of the Early 2000s: Phillip Roth's *The Human Stain* and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*," Anténe claims, "Controversies related to race continue to haunt academia" (34) and he posits, "These intellectual battles highlighted that knowledge production in the humanities can hardly be objective; rather, this knowledge is, in William Tierney's words, 'created, political, and contested.' Perhaps this is another reason why humanities departments provide such a useful setting for campus novels that seek to analyse contemporary society" (35). Indeed, perhaps

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campus novels themselves are apt vessels by which academia can be closely scrutinized and appropriately criticized.

Against conventional wisdom, the novels do *not* seem to suggest higher education becomes more inclusive as the century persists, despite larger enrollments by students from marginalized cultures. This is to say, higher education may have opened its doors to more minority students, but the percentage of minority students enrolled still pales in comparison to traditionally hegemonic students, and there is still a great disparity in diverse faculty appointments and in curricula, majors, and areas of study that focus on non-hegemonic cultures. As the narrator of Neal Stephenson's *The Big U*, who is an African American college professor, states, "Like a lot of whites, they didn't care much for blacks unless they were *athletic* blacks" (71). What he means is that inclusion is tolerated only when it benefits the needs of the ruling elite.

As has been illustrated in a number of campus novels featuring typically marginalized students, especially when the students are African Americans, the students are forced to consider how their education benefits their entire culture, not just their own development. Novels such as Miers's *Big Ben*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Scott Heron's *The Nigger Factory* feature students whose educations are directly related to the advancement of their entire race, which seems to overrule the students' own personal interests. Once again, this motif does not exist in the campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students. Despite this double-standard, there is an interesting reoccurring theme in the typically marginalized campus novels: the notion that education—despite its failures—can still be liberating. Even when the novels end with tragedy, such as in *The Nigger Factory*, the sense is that higher education can be utilized in order to shape a more equitable and democratic national future. The students may face the perverse injustices

of a blatantly biased system but it is not lost on the authors of these novels how higher education can still be a platform for positive change. This paradox is not without purpose. With a critical focus and concerted antagonism toward the status quo, academia can become more inclusive and can represent the diverse needs of a diverse American population.

The ultimate theme of typically marginalized campus novels is to initiate a discourse that results in displaying the injustices and latent biases of higher education as they exist foundationally. Academia is hierarchal in every branch of its popular stratification: from community colleges to the Ivy League. That a criticism of academia's inherent problems can be addressed and problematized in literature demands a similar dismantling of all of society's disenfranchising operations. In other words, where campus novels of traditionally hegemonic students see academia as an opportunity to reflect upon a critical moment in a person's life, campus novels of typically marginalized students act as a tool to break down oppression, a metaphor that can be substituted for all of what jeopardizes a democratic society.

<center>*The Price of Ivory*</center>

CUS theorists have—since the origin of the field of study—been especially interested in how contemporary changes in higher education may threaten the entire academic system, leaving thousands of students and faculty without the opportunity to engage with what an advanced education proffers. It is inarguable that such changes have occurred, but the real question is: how problematic are they? Additionally, are the adverse effects of corporatization as dire as some theorists suppose? Do corporate interests have a direct effect on the middle class, democracy, or rites of passage? As has been shown, the economy has been intrinsically related to the modern college since before the 19th century. As Chaput argues, "The map I draw of the U.S. public research university should be seen as a small section of this pattern of social

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relations, one stitched in the late nineteenth century with the politics of nation-building, the economics of emergent capitalism, and the cultures of professionalism" (29). She goes on to suggest the potential problem of being overly nostalgic about the democratic mission of higher education if it is in ignorance of the more economic role colleges play for a nation, "Assigning value, whether cultural, political, or economic, might appear to be an easy enough task, but such evaluations of higher education are fraught with contradictions and complications" (119). Perhaps this helps to explain why students from marginalized backgrounds feel they must fight the structure of higher education in campus novels. If we were to pursue the democratic nostalgia of higher education as an enlightening sphere while retaining cognitive dissonance against academia's marriage to economy, we would be tempted to read the traditionally hegemonic student narrative as the status quo. However, if we understand academia's need to be economically viable and to simultaneously recognize how the economic structures of American society are rooted in racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression, then the marginalized narratives begin to make sense. Of course students from marginalized cultures must rally against the academic structures; they are rooted in economic interests directly involved with their social disenfranchisement.

The ideologies of business and economy are essential to contemporary culture; global capitalism continues to spread to all corners of the world. Therefore, should not academia recognize and respond to serve this spread? Is this not what students themselves are interested in? Perhaps there is common ground. Academia could very well be a platform by which the economy and financially-motivated students are mutually served with some of the more philosophical and democratic ideals of higher education. This means that academia can pursue capitalistic motivations only if it is not at the expense of intellectual development and social

consciousness, things that are indeed threatened by reckless corporate models, at present. At the core of higher education, aspects that foster human development and equity should be maintained and perhaps even joined with capitalistic motivations. Things like the development of critical thinking, art and creativity, metaphysics, social awareness and equity, democratic ideology, and a commitment to the intellectual social rite of passage that are born and sustained in higher education should not be sacrificed in order to serve the interests of a wealthy few. Even research, the mode by which corporate interests are propagated and proliferated, is rendered inert by the particular interests of companies. As Chaput describes, "Corporate involvement in higher education helped expand and organize research into its contemporary form at the same time that such involvement limited the scope of that research" (63). Therefore, it is not incorrect for CUS theorists to be concerned with the role corporatization plays in higher education; what needs to be resolved, then, is how to serve economic and academic interests simultaneously. Some ideal solutions follow.

First, faculty, students, and administrators should resist involvement on campuses that do not serve the functional elements of college, such as society in general, and students and employees specifically. First and foremost, colleges should reevaluate their missions (but more importantly, how they make decisions to support such missions) to be, above all, student-centric. Whether the student is to be understood as a "customer" (a term I deplore) or a potential constructive member of American society, it is necessary to comprehend their needs and organize the educational experience around such needs. Indeed, curricula and programs should not serve outside private interests over those of students. Colleges should assess their students first, then develop ways to engage with the outside, economic world. This will not necessarily

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lessen typical student anxieties about their future financial situation, but it can assist in their development. Economic concerns can be addressed but not accentuated.

Secondly, to this above point, anything that leads to the egregiousness of student debt as we now know it should be reevaluated and eliminated. The most logical, sustainable, and applicable way to do this is to make college tuition free nationally for all interested students. Public education should be refunded, but in a magnanimous and complete way, with federal money. This will ease the institutional financial burden of colleges that results in a temptation to look toward the private sector for financial relief. Administrators will be able to focus on programmatic and institutional directives that benefit the college community unilaterally without needing to substantiate budgets in a growingly competitive capitalistic market. Ideologically, we must have faith in education as an economic catalyst and democratic engine. More access to higher education for more Americans means more responsible members of society as well as more capable workers in the growing knowledge economy. As theorists such as Dan Clawson and Max Page have shown, fully funding public higher education would not be as pricey as some would expect, "Forty-five (or one hundred) billion dollars a year [their estimated cost of funding higher education for all students] is not a trivial expense, but it is far less than the cost of the Bush-era tax breaks for the top 5 percent of the population ($1.3 trillion), or the Iraq and Afghanistan wars ($1 trillion), or the bank bailout (a minimum of $800 billion)" (51). In order to emphasize their call for such federal funding, Clawson and Page articulate how a college education does more than simply make people financially stable: "College graduates are more likely to stay married, less likely to commit crimes, more likely to vote, less likely to smoke, and more likely to volunteer. All of these represent benefits to the quality of life of the individual, but also generate a better society—more taxes paid, a stronger democracy, fewer health costs, a

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richer culture" (13). Of course, there are other factors in play that Clawson and Page do not include, but it is difficult to argue against how spending public money on public education would be beneficial to society at large.

In order to fund higher education, the federal government can reallocate funding from less-democratic institutions, such as jails and the military. Giroux agrees: "If this government can spend billions of dollars on weapons of war, and a war that has made the world unsafe for democracy, it surely can embrace a redemptive politics by reallocating defense funds for educational needs" (209). Such a "refunding" and directed interest in higher education has a number of social benefits: from broadening the Middle Class, to championing diversity/equity, to bolstering the work force in the information age.

To some extent, the federal government has recently targeted institutions that claim to but do not really support and benefit students. Most recently, for-profit colleges such as ITT Tech lost their federal funding because of dubious practices that negatively affected students, including developing marketing campaigns making false claims about their graduates finding jobs. Corinthian Colleges were fined by the government upwards of $30 million dollars for such fraud and other popular for-profit, online colleges like the University of Phoenix are under more scrutiny for their non-accredited, capitalistic motives. Such pressure should be continued in order to eliminate the faux-academic industry that focuses on material gain for its owners rather than student agency and the social good.

Another solution to the problems associated with corporate measures in higher education would be fair compensation for student and scholar workers. Faculty—both tenured and adjunct—are a highly educated, specialized workforce that should be compensated for their specialization and devotion to intellectual pursuits. At present, administrators and politicians

take advantage of the good will of educators who believe in the social value of their jobs, often by disenfranchising a part-time adjunct labor force, offering low salaries and poor benefits to faculty, raising course loads and class sizes, and failing to share collegiate governance. These sorts of administrative agendas are disastrous to higher education on many fronts; if the highly trained and motivated faculty of higher education's institutions become disenfranchised enough, it will result in a decline of qualified teachers even interested in joining academia, which would be a clear detriment to students and the academic system. Additionally, if students see their teachers, who have garnered advanced degrees, not having sustainable and equitable employment, what reason would they have to persist in their own educations? Higher education as a social institution should exhibit a more substantial commitment to a full-time teaching workforce, in much the same way teachers are committed to their professions, disciplines, and students.

Student workers should also be better compensated for their work. Teaching/Research assistants, in addition to their rigorous and hefty coursework, are often responsible for much of the less-glamourous aspects of academia, including grading papers, advising students, and calculating data. This so, many are not adequately compensated either in payment or in tuition forgiveness. Colleges are aware of their in-house near-free worker population and exploit this in order to cut financial corners. As Bousquet points out, "Once we recognize that the categories of 'student' and 'worker' increasingly overlap, we start to have a way to add to our already developed understanding of education as an ideological apparatus vis-à-vis students" (87).

Academia, generally, must promote an institutional and curricular fidelity to both vocational *and* philosophical knowledge. This means that colleges can indeed be the initiation point for job training for many students and that there is nothing wrong with developing a

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workforce on the campus. In his 2015 article, "Career and Technical Education: the Community College Connection," Mike Rose somewhat softens his previous stance on how a focus on vocational education can inherently disenfranchise poor students into becoming low-income wage earners. He argues, "Almost from its inception, vocational education has been criticized for focusing too narrowly on job training and for not intellectually challenging its students. Exceptions to this portrayal of vocational education certainly exist, both teachers and programs, secondary and postsecondary, where students have gotten an intellectually demanding education" (8). Rose believes that there can be a concerted effort by colleges—administrators and faculty working together—to integrate a student's intellectual needs and their vocational training, even if a student is not aware of how the former impacts the latter. Rose thinks that some of the benefits of this marriage have been "substantial: members of both the academic and the vocational faculty working for months to develop a curriculum that integrates academic and vocational material" (9). Indeed, there can be a reformed pedagogical approach to what colleges provide: job training, but also the development of the thinking individual, even if they desire to work in trades or other "non-professions." After all, if one of the missions of higher education is to build a stronger, more democratic society, than it must be understood how society is more than a collection of individuals. If we, then, focus on the development of the individual—both as a worker but also a responsible thinker—we are promoting society as a whole.

Another more ideological consideration can be a cultural demystification of the correlation between one's education and their human value. In other words, the enormous pressure put on members of American society to matriculate in higher education—in order to satisfy the social and economic rites of passage—creates a cultural sense that only those with an education (increasingly, a higher education or even an advanced degree) are valuable members

of society and that only they can donate to the greater good of American culture. This sort of logic is reductive as it disenfranchises those without a formal education, people who are generally already subjugated to low-paying jobs and social stations that are stigmatized as hierarchally inferior to those who work in the professions. Of course, back in academia, this puts an unnecessary stress on the economic values of education, as students enroll simply to access the mythological notion of college success as a personal, financial boon. Students focus their education—the programs and courses they choose, their extra-curricular activities, their collegiate interests, etc.—on its relevance to their future financial and social status, which is a vague notion often supported by administrators that can jeopardize the less-obvious benefits of a college education.

American society is replete with a robust and diverse population that includes people who are not cognitively capable (either through disability or inequitable social constraints) of rigorous academic standards but who are still relevant in society. Academia itself—its members: faculty, students, administrators, scholars—must demystify the notion that only the educated can benefit themselves and society, as this prejudice against those without a formal education can further magnify social hierarchies. This is not to say that members of academia should actively pursue antagonizing students from enrolling but that academics should be critical of the economically-driven, commodifiable results-based ideology that all *must* attend college in order to survive or prosper. Rather, academics can engage with vocational constructs to champion trades that could benefit a wide range of students not capable (either intellectually or through the support structures necessary to persist in school) of completing coursework and other degree requirements. Such work is necessary for society and should not be stratified as inferior. Championing such work from the academy does not threaten its survival in the social structure; it

simply acknowledges yet another hierarchal social order that disenfranchises a great many

people and puts unnecessary pressure on higher education to conform to unrealistic expectations.

The Community College Campus Novel, or Lack Thereof

It is important to note, and interesting to realize, that in all of the texts of the campus

novel genre, there is scant example that reflects upon the experience of the student at a

community college. This is relevant for a number of reasons but most specifically because the

students enrolled at various community colleges across the country typically suffer the most

from the social inequities discussed in this essay. Still, if a community college campus novel

exists, it has eluded me, and at minimum appears far less frequently than campus novels set at

four-year institutions. At the forefront, this illustrates the penchant for stratifying higher

education: the idea that there are levels of value within the academic community that translate

not just to student aptitude but also to how education results in one's future prospects. In other

words, many of the students who enroll in community colleges already come from places of

disenfranchisement: whether that is based on race, sex and gender, class, etc.; or that students

enroll as first-generation (first in their family) students; or that they have myriad responsibilities

beyond their studies such as employment and families. That they are stigmatized to a decreased

station in the academic paradigm suggests that their education will not have the same results as

their more privileged counterparts. That there is no campus novel that reflects their particular

experience is telling.

For starters, this lack may suggest that authors, scholars, and academics generally are less

interested in the groups of students whom community colleges serve. These typical

disenfranchised populations never meet the cultural zeitgeist and remain reduced to a tier of

society far below that of their university classmates. While campus novels attempt to chart the

collegiate experience of traditionally hegemonic and typically marginalized students throughout the changes in higher education of the 20th century, there is a missed opportunity to reflect upon some of the students most affected by social disparity and inequity.

Indeed, some campus novels touch upon community colleges, or feature students who matriculated to a university from a community college. Nick Burden, the genius protagonist from Barry Targan's *The Tangerine Tango Equation*, leaves his college, shuns Princeton, and ends up taking art classes at a community college. Of course, Targan places his protagonist here to show the chasm that exists in the stratified binary of community colleges and more prestigious universities. Earl Thomas, the protagonist of Gil Scott-Heron's *The Nigger Factory*, advances to Sutton University after first succeeding at a community college. Still, these campuses and the experiences students have therein are never the focus of campus novels. This seems to suggest that only at four-year colleges and universities will the passage into adulthood and the securing of financial viability be achieved.

Literature, as a subject of study and cultural art form, can extend the genre to inquire about the nuances and complexities of community colleges in the contemporary era of higher education. If the campus novels of typically marginalized students act as social criticisms by which we can discover the inequities of higher education and thus, society at large, then a community college campus novel is more apt to position this problem at its most dire source. Indeed, the unique pressures of rampant corporatization in higher education have a more substantive effect on community colleges and their students, as they are not as capable of resisting outside influences. Because students typically do not live on campus, faculty and staff are traditionally underpaid, and the colleges rely heavily upon state and federal funding, community colleges are more susceptible to corporate infiltration and all of the detrimental

circumstances that come with it. Though I have mentioned how vocational education can be integrated within curriculums without jeopardizing the standards of intellectual achievement, in community colleges, vocational education can be a method of dumping already disenfranchised student populations into jobs that will solidify them to class immobility, regardless of their intellectual aptitude. It is difficult to convince a community college student to recognize the virtues of studying a Humanities discipline, for instance, when the promise of a two-year Nursing degree and a readymade salary beckon from technical tracts.

Therefore, community college campus novels could provide even more representative accounts of the interaction between higher education and marginalized student populations than their university campus novel cousins. In the vast majority of campus novels, campuses become isolated spaces—near fantasy worlds—where students exist largely independent of the outside world and its concerns. The campus works as a barrier between students and the problems of the world beyond, allowing them to complete their passage virtually unimpeded by the realities of the outside pressures that nevertheless call to them from beyond the campus gates. At community colleges, this fabricated world does not exist. Community colleges are intimately related to the society where they exist. Perhaps the community college campus novel does not exist because it would violate the sanctity of the exclusive campus by depicting a more permutable place where students traverse study with outside life. This, of course, really indicates that universities are still largely subservient to the ideals and preferences of the hegemony. This is all to pinpoint a continued stratification of higher education and a consistent disenfranchisement of students who do not fit the hegemonic ideal.

For Further Research

The strict focus on campus novels in this project was linked to the notion that identifying the student experience in fiction would provide for a comprehensive understanding of how the changes in higher education over the 20th century potentially disenfranchised them from some of the goals of education. Studying how students navigate the academic structure in and of itself helps to ground the belief that higher education acts as a social, intellectual, and economic rite of passage. Tracking this over the century and positioning the argument within the context of CUS theory—while looking at the specific problem of corporatization—further addresses the potential failings and jeopardies associated with unchecked capitalistic endeavors in the academy. And though students are and should always be the primary focus of any academic paradigm, studying only the novels with student protagonists ignores the reality that colleges are made up of many more diverse and complex parts. Academic novels—those that typically feature faculty as protagonists—can be studied using the same structure of this project to supplement the student experience with the faculty experience. This is relevant because what happens to faculty members at a college ultimately affects students, as the faculty is often the most direct tie students have to their colleges. Novels such as Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, and Richard Russo's *Straight Man* can further the discourse to be more comprehensive about the total relationship academia has with society, both as a place of study but also employment. Studying novels concerning the faculty could enhance the discourse by affirming or problematizing the results found here in this project.

Another relevant question moving forward is: what happens to the campus novel genre as the 21st century progresses? As global capitalism continues to grow and American policies centered upon cutting funding for the public sector continue to threaten the system, there is a

likelihood that the dire straits of higher education will become more perilous. The questions become, what will 21st century writers within the genre notice about how students navigate higher education and how education works within American society? What sustained motifs and nuanced problems will reveal themselves if the corporate trend in collegiate life is not checked? How subjugated will intellectual thought, critical thinking, creativity, and all of the other skills fostered by the Humanities be if students are goaded into thinking of their education as job training? What will happen to typically marginalized cultures in both the faculty and the students as the new century progresses?

One possible question to perhaps be addressed further is the issue of authorial removal from the subject matter. I have taken for granted that many of the authors of campus novels have, themselves, been college students; but this may not always be the case. Moreover, though the novels represent the fictional protagonists' experience, how much of that is skewed by the authors' biases? In other words, does it hurt the study to recognize how our comprehension of the student experience is filtered through the screen of an author? My argument is that it does not but it would be interesting to further study the once-removed nature of novel writing—generally—from the subject matter presented. Certainly, one of the values of novels as cultural artifacts is that authors become keen analysts of the elements of their subject matter, but this does not preclude them from mishandling their topic because of personal subjectivity. Of course, this subjectivity, itself, could be studied.

Campus novels provide a powerful and important insight into what education means to people. This much is true: regardless of the complexities of the nuances, we value education. As a society and culture, we know, deeply, what an education means. Though historically, there has been great distance between ideas of how to best orchestrate and facilitate education within

society, it is reasonable to assume that for people, collectively, education is one of the most critical institutions of any society and should be therefore cherished. What policy makers, administrators, teachers, students, thinkers, and writers must do, then, is ceaselessly engage with the academy to ensure it serves that which is the most essential to us.

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