Reading the Culture Wars in the New Academic Novel, 1984-Present

Ian Butcher

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READING THE CULTURE WARS IN THE NEW ACADEMIC NOVEL, 1984-PRESENT

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Ian Butcher

December 2017
READING THE CULTURE WARS IN THE NEW ACADEMIC NOVEL, 1984-PRESENT

By

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ABSTRACT

READING THE CULTURE WARS IN THE NEW ACADEMIC NOVEL, 1984-PRESENT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Greg Barnhisel

The “new academic novel” emerged in the 1980s as what had previously been a cloistered, insular genre began to engage much more directly with the social and political import of universities and the people who work in them. I argue that an important strand of this development centres on a group of novels that through their depiction of recent developments in academia—the threat of political correctness, the so-called theory wars, the growth of contingent labour, and the elevation of a corporate logic above educational concerns—document the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant logic of American higher education and the American university’s transition away from its place within the post-WWII welfare state to the corporate university of today. Drawing out the connections between the university specific events (the collapse of the academic job market in the humanities, the casualization of academic labour, and the privatization of public higher education) that informed these developments and
the broader systemic issues to which they are related, like the rise of the gig economy and the transition to post-Fordism, I read these novels as demonstrating the use of neoliberal policies to pursue a new form of higher education that would better serve the needs of a neoliberal state. Ultimately, I suggest that these novels’ registering of otherwise hidden bureaucratic aspects of the professorial experience in the corporate university can counter the nostalgic fantasies of the post-WWII university that perpetuate neoliberalism’s hold and offer a way to reimagine American higher education’s purpose and function.
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Introduction:
Through a Novel, Darkly: Institutional History and the Academic Novel

Everyone hates a sad professor.
- R.E.M., “Sad Professor”

In 2003, The Believer sent Gideon Lewis-Kraus to the 119th Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention in San Diego. At that point, the “journalist goes to MLA, makes fun of English professors” article was old hat, but Lewis-Kraus had no desire to slam academics as such, telling his “guide,” a professor from Arizona named Charlie, that he had “spent most of [his] life not criticizing academics, but romanticizing them” (Lewis-Kraus). Over the course of three days during which he navigates pretentious keynote addresses, trendy cultural studies panels on reality television, cogent discussions of threats to academic freedom and their connection to US foreign policy, and anguished reports on the academic publishing market and university presses, Lewis-Kraus tries and fails to get the professors he encounters to confirm that they “are just dying to be relevant, but institutional wardens keep them chained up in dank library basements” (Lewis-Kraus). In his romanticized view, professors derive their relevance from their dedication to the life of the mind, as “being a professor meant being above the fray . . . [and] it was infinitely, unfathomably relevant” (Lewis-Kraus). Faced with a brief glimpse into their professional lives, though, and the air of looming disaster that hangs over the entire event, he realizes that this romantic conception is a luxury that not many professors can actually afford. As Charlie apologetically tells him, “[t]he days of spouse-swapping orgies and coke-snorting parties are long gone” (Lewis-Kraus). Amidst ongoing budget cuts and the specter of post-9/11 concerns about academic freedom in an age of jingoism, MLA proves less a gathering professors floating gloriously above the fray and more like a collection of worried professionals at any other industry convention during a downturn. Nevertheless, Lewis-Kraus’ romantic sentiments, however tempered, will not allow him to agree with his friends who describe MLA attendees as
“a bunch of sitting ducks’’ who are either “self-parodying hypocrites who claim to teach English but can’t even write it intelligibly, or hack critics who treat the magic of literature as so much grist for the reigning theoretical paradigm” (Lewis-Kraus). Instead, he somewhat wistfully concludes that “[a]ll of us, I think, would rather [English professors] be elliptically profound than banally useful,” remaining assured of the “stupefying magnificence of their jobs” (Lewis-Kraus). Though he cannot entirely recapture the reverence for academics that he had prior to attending MLA, he remains convinced of the value of the life of the mind, of an ivory tower whose denizens answer only to others who have joined them in retreating from the world. He will concede that this sphere and the lifestyles of its inhabitants are under threat, but they should be celebrated for what they are while they still exist.

Despite its hopeful ending, then, Lewis-Kraus’ report reads as a kind of “twilight of the English professor” or a eulogy for an academe that can no longer be, a genre common to the culture wars. Its emphasis on the names of MLA panels and its mild antagonism toward cultural studies and literary theory mark it as a holdover from those conflicts of the late 1980s and early-to-mid 1990s over political correctness (PC), multiculturalism, and affirmative action that shaped the public debate about higher education in these decades. Reporters often used MLA during this period to gauge the state of the culture wars in ways that were frequently unflattering toward English professors. Roger Kimball’s report on the 1992 MLA convention, “‘Heterotextuality’ and Other Literary Matters,” for example, bemoaned the event’s “57 varieties of Marxism, feminism, homosexualism, anti-dead-white-European-male-ism, all dispensed in smug academic doublespeak” (A6). As a vehicle for attacking higher education, such reports proved effective by allowing critics to stir up outrage among “parents, trustees and alumni . . . as our educational institutions are transformed into centers for political indoctrination and cultural radicalism”
Playing on existing anti-intellectualism—in Richard Hofstadter’s sense of “a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life”—these provocations also tended to note rising costs of attendance, pinning the blame on runaway efforts to foster diversity and professors who had abandoned teaching the enduring works of Western civilization for research driven by feminism, Marxism, and other form of anti-American, radical politics (Hofstadter 7). Higher education appears in these portraits as some kind of New Left cover organization with an army of graduate assistants and part-time faculty teaching most classes while taxpayer-subsidized faculty research undermines conventional standards of taste, decency and morality.ii Coverage in major newspapers like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, along with popular magazines like Time, Newsweek, and the Atlantic, and even current affairs television programs like the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, gave these attacks widespread visibility and made the declaration that “thought control, political re-education, and other basics of totalitarianism” had entered American society via university campuses seem a credible threat (“Politically Correct” A10).

Though Lewis-Kraus’ piece does not make any of these claims, his view of MLA and academe as a whole is marked by them. Indeed, his portraits of Judith Butler “giv[ing] a dense thicket of a talk . . . about U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft’s use of the word sovereignty” and his guide Charlie “sneaking lessons in Marxist insurrection into a class on Ralph Ellison or Don DeLillo” could have come from culture wars central casting (Lewis-Kraus). In his desperation to recapture that “elliptically profound” sense of academe that initially brings him to MLA, Lewis-Kraus fails to directly address the consequences of the culture wars. The pressure to be externally relevant is an important one, as it indicates how the demands for accountability
for academics (to the public, the government, and the business world) stemming from the outrage generated by the culture wars have penetrated the discipline. He fails, though, to look at the mechanisms of these calls for accountability or to connect them to the closure of university presses, the decline in faculty salaries, or the threats to academic freedom about which he talks to several attendees. For Lewis-Kraus the tensions surrounding relevance, the complaints about theory/cultural studies, and the declining professional standards for most attendees are separate issues never really linked to a concrete sense of academe as an institution with a specific mission that has a particularly history. Thus, Lewis-Kraus’ romantic notions of the professoriate rely on a view of the discipline as a relatively stable professional environment, ignoring the fact that by 2004, when this piece appeared, part-time faculty accounted for 53.2% of all faculty in English Studies (up from 41.4% in 1992), according to the National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)—a significant slide in what had already been an ongoing downward trend in professional conditions. What is more, he also neglects to mention that most faculty are not able to attend MLA and so never experience a moment in which their study of “metaphors of hydrophilia in medieval Ukrainian folk ballads” is “take[n] . . . for granted” as part of their professional identity (Lewis-Kraus). For most, cobbling together multiple sections of composition or technical writing leaves little time or financial or intellectual resources for professional development, creating a multi-tiered workforce whose increasing stratification has been actively encouraged by universities and legislators. Lewis-Kraus’ eulogy, then, proves weirdly belated, clinging to a form of the university and of faculty roles within it that had already been disappearing for some time while also playing into the rhetoric and narratives that had hastened its end.
The shortcomings in Lewis-Kraus’ piece mirror the challenges facing the postwar academic novel, whose form often cannot account for contemporary academic reality but which it cannot abandon due to its conservative nature and traditional function as a record of the experience of individual professors. In general, the academic novel has been confined to light comic, almost picaresque narratives about white male professors and their (mis)adventures in academe, as in the episodic chapters of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pnin* (1957). When there is serious conflict, it is usually related to his marriage (the hero can/cannot find a wife or wants to/has committed adultery and needs to hide the fact) or career (the hero’s contract will not be renewed or he will not be granted tenure), like in Bernard Malamud’s *A New Life* (1961) or Mary McCarthy’s *The Groves of Academe* (1951). Even these serious conflicts are usually resolved without much difficulty, with the hero being married off and either triumphing over the Dean or President who opposes his tenure/contract renewal or leaving academe behind entirely, having exposed it for the bed of pretentious hypocrites the hero has always known it to be.iii *Grey Towers* (1923), with a female protagonist, has it both ways, ending with a marriage and a triumphant exit from academe. This is not to say that academic novels have been incapable of examining serious issues. Between the First and Second World War, academic novels like Robert Herrick’s *Chimes* (1926), Minnie Hite Moody’s *Towers with Ivy* (1937), and Lawrence Edward Watkin’s *Geese in the Forum* (1940) treat the expansion of colleges and curriculums and the introduction of professional schools (e.g., law, medicine, business) to the university as potential threats, capitulating to the wider world at the expense of the ivory tower. In the 1940s and 1950s, the issue of academic freedom in the era of McCarthyism drove novels like *The Groves of Academe*, Joseph Gies’ *A Matter of Morals* (1951) and May Sarton’s *Faithful Are the Wounds* (1954). And the precarity of academic life prior to the widespread acceptance of tenure
and academic freedom was a common theme of earlier novels like *Grey Towers*. However, given their tendency toward the comic, academic novels have often perpetuated the view that higher education is an ivory tower, divorced from worldly concerns and out of touch with the lives of regular people. It can be, and very often is in these novels, a place of bitter politicking, but this is largely confined to questions of parking spaces, office location, teaching times, and other trivial matters as most narratives abide by the maxim that the fights in academe are so large because the stakes are so low.

For much of its history, the academic novel has been predicated on the idea that academe somehow exists apart from capitalism and the commercial world.\(^{iv}\) The ivory tower is not the *agora*, and the life of the mind that it shelters is one that has a purity of purpose that mere commercial considerations would sully. In many of these earlier novels, incursions from outside, and particularly ones that are driven by economic and political motivations, are seen as unusual or unnatural, rather than intrinsic to academic structures in the modern university. However, historians of the American university are quick to point out that many institutions (especially research universities) had a “constitutive financial dependence on outside sources,” a point which should be obvious to all based on the prominence of names like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Andrew W. Mellon, Leland Stanford, James Buchanan Duke, and Cornelius Vanderbilt at major institutions of higher education around the United States (Newfield *Ivy* 10).\(^{v}\) Nevertheless, academic novels register the extent to which this fiction about academe’s separation from industry pervades both internal and external conceptions of higher education, likely because most academic novels are about humanities professors, a group that has traditionally insisted on the separation between the university and the market (though not necessarily for clearly defined reasons).\(^{vi}\) Godfrey St. Peter, for example, in Willa Cather’s *The
Professor’s House, is just such an academic who considers commercial interests to be impure forces that can only corrupt. Though he acknowledges that they seem to be an inevitable part of modern life (and the university), he cannot help but view his colleague Robert Crane, a physicist, as diminished by his desire to share in some of the profits that St. Peter’s son-in-law has realized from a discovery with which Crane assisted. St. Peter had viewed Crane as the only other professor at the university who resisted “the new commercialism, the aim to ‘show results’ that was undermining and vulgarizing education,” and Crane’s newfound desire to participate in that culture (motivated in part by an expensive medical condition that strains his meagre resources) makes St. Peter feel “sad . . . [as] [t]he university . . . [and] everything around him seemed insupportable” (Cather 120, 130-31). Much criticism of the novel has followed St. Peter’s thinking, with The Professor’s House typically read “as a critique of modernity . . . [and] debased, commodified contemporary society,” points that come out of St. Peter’s critique of the modern university as an institution lacking aesthetic or spiritual wholeness (Wilson 64). The academic novel has largely stuck to these lines, insisting on some form of institutional purity even as narrative and historical events made it clear that there is no longer a definite separation (if ever there was one) between the commercial and academic spheres.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, the academic novel became more worldly, and its concerns were reflective not of the aloof resident of the ivory tower, but rather of any professional in a large corporation or institution. In these narratives characteristic of what I call, following Jeffrey Williams and others, the new academic novel, there is no pretense that the university constitutes a separate sphere from the rest of society. Its operations are firmly embedded within the social structure and respond to the same economic and political currents as American society at large. The form of the academic novel has not undergone as much change,
though, and remains best suited to narratives that conform to these earlier conceptions of the university and the role of faculty within it. As the genre’s content has evolved throughout the twentieth century in part through the development of the American university as an institution, which the academic novel is tasked with representing at least somewhat faithfully, this mismatch between form and content in the new academic novel offers an excellent opportunity to see how the contemporary university has come into existence and understand its foundational assumptions. Reading these novels—whose form preserves earlier values and conceptions of higher education as a kind of residual content while their narratives present the emergent realities of higher education—allows one to identify ideological gaps in the self-understanding of previous versions of the university. This in turn makes clear the new vision of the purpose of higher education, the function and role of faculty and students, and the relationship of the university to contemporary forms of social and political organization that animates the corporate university of today.

In my dissertation, I attempt just such a reading of contemporary academic fiction, placing these novels in conversation with histories of higher education and analyses of contemporary economic and political paradigms like post-Fordism and neoliberalism. In particular, I focus on academic novels about or set during the culture wars because of their ability to reveal the dual nature of those struggles over multiculturalist curricula, speech and conduct codes on campus, or the presence of literary theory in English departments. Through their attempts to stage these conflicts within the standard conventions of the postwar academic novel, contemporary academic novels indicate the institutional challenges facing the postwar welfare state university model in this period. The debates in which they participate about increasing faculty politicization, declining academic standards, and ongoing attempts to move
away from higher education as a tool to rank and separate students according to class interests/affiliations raise important questions about the challenges to faculty professionalization and professional identity, the purpose and function of shared governance, and the place of market interests and consumer demands in higher education. Despite providing a space for these debates, though, academic novels of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s are largely unaware of the second level of culture wars rhetoric, that of accountability, efficiency, and flexibility which played a key role in the advancement of privatization and casualization initiatives. However, the novels do document the effects of this rhetoric through their narratives and their forms as realist novels grounded in the structure and attitudes of contemporary campuses, particularly, the movements of neoliberalism across higher education. Reading the culture wars in the new academic novel, then, demonstrates how neoliberalism, as an institutional organizing principle and a political philosophy has remade higher education by offering “solutions” to the problems of the culture wars that advanced its own very narrow sense of higher education, the social, and the relationship between the two.

Through this analysis, I hope to reveal how neoliberal thinking has naturalized itself within higher education, providing a new set of constraints to imagining a different university that often short-circuits any resistance that the novels might offer. Ultimately, these novels chronicle a particular phase in the history of American higher education linked to a specific form of the university. We may now be at the end of this phase, but we continue to think about the university in older terms, conditioned like academic novels to see a university that in many ways no longer exists. If we are to regain control of higher education’s purpose and function from narrow, commercial interests and use it instead as a tool first for social advancement (even if only in the sense of Lyndon Johnson’s vow to use higher education to eliminate racism, poverty,
etc.) and then for the identification and elimination of what Herbert Marcuse called “false needs,” or the demands “superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression,” we must clearly identify the historical trajectories and relationships of those forms of the university (and attendant philosophies) that are, in the terms of Raymond Williams’ still useful scheme, dominant, emergent, and residual (5). The study of academic novels I have undertaken is one possible avenue and such analyses seem indispensable, if only to help re-establish the historicity of certain developments and so make them seem less inevitable and immoveable. Certainly, given the rise in racial and sexual violence on campuses in 2015 and 2016, along with the attempted crack down on some of the more egregious abuses of for-profit higher education over the last half-decade, neoliberal policies have failed to provide a solution to the problems encountered in these novels. Posing successful counterproposals and offering new approaches to higher education policy will require a detailed understanding of how the current policies came to be proposed and how they were successful in gaining support, a task to which I hope to contribute in what follows.

**Neoliberalism and the American University**

It would be incorrect to say that the culture wars were an entirely fabricated event. Anger about PC was and is real, and proponents of multiculturalism occasionally make outlandish statements and overreact to trivial events in their zeal. It would be naïve, however, to assume that anger about PC and outrage over excessive multiculturalist zeal did not serve the broader political interests of groups who saw as advantageous the chance to attack higher education and so reposition its purpose and function within society. Policy decisions do not emerge from the aether, and the university did not necessarily change for its own sake. From 1945 on, American higher education has experienced unprecedented growth, but this has tended to downgrade the
importance of the education side. Regardless of the definition of higher education’s mission—Cardinal Newman’s creation of gentlemen, the preparation of an educated citizenry, or the training of a professional class—the post-welfare state university has promoted the production and sale of credentials and the performance of commercially lucrative research and development activities over and above abstract ideas like the educational mission. The issues that flared up during the culture wars—maximizing access to higher education while policing academic standards, reflecting a diversifying American culture while preserving traditional ideas of that culture, responding to social ills while avoiding the appearance of overt special treatment—reflected this tension, as the use of higher education evolved in ways that increasingly conflated the social and the economic.

One of the key factors in this shifting use of higher education was the transition from the Fordist-Keynesian economic system of the “American Century” of 1945-73 to the post-Fordist neoliberalism of the 1980s and beyond. Perhaps the most important issue for higher education within this transition is the difference in the role of the state in the two systems. In general, Fordist-Keynesianism favoured a strong state that promoted “a total way of life” through capitalism, “guarantee[ing] relatively full employment” and state support of “the social wage through expenditures covering social security, healthcare, education, housing, and the like” (Harvey 135). These contributions were not, in and of themselves, intended to be revenue generating, though their social benefits were expected to provide indirect economic benefits, as with the university’s ability to generate “human capital” in the form of an educated, technologically-capable middle class. In contrast, post-Fordist neoliberalism favours a weak state, though still an interventionist one, whose responsibilities are limited to “unleash[ing] market forces wherever possible” and curtailing “the reach of political decision-making” so as to
prevent regulatory hurdles to neoliberalism’s preferred free-market operations (Mudge 704-05). In place of the state-funded social investments of Keynesian approaches, neoliberalism relies on the “privatization of state-run assets . . . and, the marketization of society through public-private partnerships and other forms of commodification” to deliver better services at a lower cost through the competition inherent in a deregulated market (Birch and Mykhnenko 5). Rather than assuming, as under the older model, a need for social investment that does not seek to generate profit, neoliberalism posits that the ability to derive profit from private—rather than government—social investment will ultimately increase such investment and its beneficial effects.

As part of their divergent visions of the role of the state in the maintenance and reproduction of social relations, both the Keynesian and Neoliberal systems offered new roles and mandates for higher education. Under the National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Higher Education Act (1965), along with programs like the GI Bill, higher education enrollment doubled between 1950 and 1960, and doubled again by 1970. During this period, the welfare state university was to “use [American] wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization” by eliminating poverty, pollution, racism, and other social ills, as Lyndon B. Johnson set out in his “Great Society” program (Johnson). These policies helped to define what Christopher Newfield has termed “Meritocracy II,” wherein higher education attempted to become “an inclusive educational system . . . [governed by] a belief that general development was better served by equality than by stratification” (Unmaking 100). This approach conflicted with “Meritocracy I,” which had traditionally set out higher education’s purpose as an evaluative tool “to rank, sort the great from the good, and create a pecking order . . . maintained by testing regimes, federal granting patterns, differential resource
allocations, and popular legends” (Newfield Unmaking 97). While not capable of achieving these somewhat utopian ends, higher education (and particularly public higher education) was to be a tool of advancement and prosperity for all.xi

Even at its peak in the 1960s, though, the Fordist-Keynesian system to which the welfare state university belonged was losing its ability to impose, support, and regulate the socioeconomic system. Faced with rising labour unrest due to “the rigidity of long-term and large-scale fixed capital investments in mass-production systems” and a need to expand social programs despite “rigidities in production restrict[ing] any expansion in the fiscal basis for state expenditures,” this system collapsed under mounting inflation and the Oil Shocks of 1973 and 1979 (Harvey 142). In response, neoliberal policies (advanced in the United States primarily by Milton Friedman and other economists out of the University of Chicago) argued for “monetarist economics [that] provided readily presentable, if ultimately flawed, ‘solutions’” to the crises of Keynesianism (Peck 5). Declining growth rates in the advanced capitalist countries undermined Keynesian assumptions about stable long term growth, and models of state interventionism that had been agreed upon in the immediate postwar period now seemed inadequate to the task of managing the economy. For neoliberals, this was inevitably the case for all such interventionist approaches, as “the ‘market’ is posited to be an information processor more powerful than any human brain,” one that “really does know better than any one of us what is good for ourselves and for society” (Mirowski Never 54, 79). Deeply suspicious of experts and claims to any kind of specialized knowledge that might direct or shape actions and behaviours at the social and political level, neoliberalism encouraged the idea that human activities were of complexity beyond human comprehension undermining key aspects of Keynesianism.xii
By presenting itself as an opponent of all managed approaches to economic policy, then, neoliberalism used the “great convulsion of world capitalism” of the 1970s and the “period of major restructuring” of the 1980s to consolidate itself “as the new dominant common sense, the paradigm shaping all policies” in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western nations like Chile (Gamble 21, 25). In practice, though, neoliberalism relied on specific, targeted state intervention to support its preferred policies. Its rhetoric of “spontaneous order” through market operations masks the neoliberal project’s radically constructivist nature, as its proponents “seek to restructure the state with numerous audit devices (under the sign of ‘accountability’ or the ‘audit society’) or impose rationalization through introduction of the ‘new public management;’ or, better yet, convert state services to private provision on a contractual basis” (Mirowski Never 57). The latter point highlights the key dual role of privatization and marketization under neoliberalism, weakening conceptions of the social and/or public by bringing services and institutions under the purview of a sphere (the market) that neoliberals claimed to be beyond the ability of the public to manage. Under neoliberalism, the university has assumed the form of what Jeffrey J. Williams has termed the post-welfare state university (also called the corporate university or managed university). In contrast to the university in the immediate postwar period, the post-welfare state university does not take the use of wealth in the service of a social mandate as its primary function (along with the preservation and transmission of culture and the production of human capital), but rather the creation of “the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations” that allow for “an articulation of state, market, and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third” (Wacquant 68, 71). Typically, these new subjectivities are grouped together under the umbrella of the “entrepreneurial subject” as they seek to create “a competitive person, wholly immersed in
global competition . . . [who] should work for enterprises as if they were working for themselves, thereby abolishing any sense of alienation and even any distance between individuals and the enterprises employing them” (Dardot and Laval). As a powerful instrument of socialization, the university’s increasing use of internships and externships, along with the tendency to redefine academic success as the acquisition of skills that will prove useful to employers or to be credentialed as a practitioner in a particular field/industry, has encouraged these attitudes. Such approaches have reinforced the notion that work is the central node of life, rather than family, and position work as the sphere most directly connected with self-fulfillment.

If, thinking back to the categories previously mentioned, neoliberal higher education’s primary function has become the production of human capital, it has also promoted alternative approaches to the resolution of social ills than the social planning that characterized the Great Society program. For neoliberals, if poverty, racism, or any other social ill proves detrimental to the actions of the market—which is the fundamental method of measuring incursions on freedom—then the market will take action to remove those behaviours or attitudes. Thus, almost 27 years to day that Johnson delivered his Great Society speech at the University of Michigan’s 1964 commencement ceremony, George H. W. Bush delivered his own commencement speech at that university, championing “free enterprise” and “the sheer ingenuity of a market that collects and distributes the wisdoms of millions of people, all pursuing their destinies in different ways” as the foundations of “the most egalitarian system in history” (Bush). Interventionist policies like the social planning required to achieve the goals of Meritocracy II inevitably attempt to operate with greater amounts of information and thereby supersede market operations, a doomed project for neoliberals given that there can be no amount of information that can provide greater insight than that contained within the market, which processes information more
efficiently than any human. Rather than the production of experts and subjectivities oriented
toward social obligations, neoliberal higher education has sought to produce subjectivities
looking to act on the information provided by the market and to extend its operations to ever
wider spheres without attempting to work at the level of the social.

Within higher education, these changes came about through its marketization and the
concurrent reduction of faculty power. During the immediate postwar period up to roughly 1975,
also known as the Golden Age of American higher education, faculty influence over university
operations reached its peak.\textsuperscript{xvi} A greater proportion of faculty members were full-time and
tenure-track than ever before, with record levels of union involvement, as well.\textsuperscript{xvii} Faculty power
was exerted through the processes of shared governance, “in which all the components [of the
university] are aware of their interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among
themselves, and of the force of joint action . . . to solve educational problems” (AAUP
“Government”). Thanks to this system, faculty came to control the “curriculum, subject matter
and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate
to the educational process” up to the limits of “[b]udgets, personnel limitations, the time element,
and the policies of other groups, bodies, and agencies having jurisdiction over the institution”
(AAUP “Government”). In practice, this vision of shared governance was achieved through the
principle of managerial democracy, in which “major decisions affecting one level of the
institution are made by levels above it, but usually with at least formal rights of consultation and
participation” (Newfield “What Was” 111). The administrative burden that faculty shouldered
was both fulfillment of the conditions for funding and guarantor of continued autonomy from
presidential fiat.
However, faculty power was a relatively new and fragile thing, particularly as they “ha[d] not for the most part won significant *formal* power, either individually or collectively over the institutions that employ them” during this period (Jencks and Riesman 16). Groups like the faculty senate remained largely ceremonial bodies, without any kind of direct institutional mandate that others were compelled to obey. As boards of trustees increasingly “delegate[d] authority to the college administration, either de jure or de facto,” any developments that reduced the importance of those areas of faculty control had a significant impact on faculty power and helped clear the way for the rise of administrative power (Jencks and Riesman 16). The first move toward privatization, which Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie describe as “*the most important higher education policy change*[] of the postwar era,” involved a shift in the flow of aid dollars for students from state and federal governments distributing them directly to schools to government organizations delivering these funds directly to the students, who were now free to spend their dollars at the institution of their choice (73). Such competition, it was argued by the policy makers, would make schools more accountable to the needs of both students *and* other groups like employers and legislators who, by influencing students’ ideas about education and careers, could indirectly reshape higher education through such funding schemes. The result was the reduction of faculty authority in the recruitment process, as colleges and universities competed for student aid dollars largely by dedicating increasing amounts of resources to lifestyle amenities (competitive sports teams, state-of-the-art fitness centres, shopping malls disguised as student centres, hotel-style dormitories) and either jettisoning or commodifying the various regional identifiers that had distinguished institutions in the pre-war period. More significantly, this marketing manoeuvre began the steady migration of state funding (formerly the main source of funding for public higher education) away from institutions, which reacted by
increasing tuition and fees, or, as in the case of institutions in California, by implementing fees and in-state tuition.\textsuperscript{xix} Funding reductions also helped to usher in “academic capitalism,” the now familiar adoption of “market and marketlike behaviors on the part of universities and faculty” as a way of “compet[ing] for funds from external resource providers” (Slaughter and Leslie 11). These behaviors include activities like engaging in “university-industry partnerships . . . [and] invest[ing] in professors’ spinoff companies” along with “more mundane endeavors, such as the sale of products and services from educational endeavors . . . profit sharing with food services and bookstores, and the like” (Slaughter and Leslie 11).\textsuperscript{xx} As universities dedicated themselves to offering an ever wider assortment of services, activities that generated less revenue like teaching in the humanities beyond the core curriculum were reduced in importance at an institutional level. To the extent that this fundraising-oriented approach reduced the effectiveness of arguments in favour of faculty control over the curriculum—which should, in this view, work like the other services offered by the university and so target maximum revenue generating potential—it provided a further reduction in faculty power.

Accountability measures were extended beyond student aid funding during the 1980s and 1990s, as neoliberalism’s “business ontology,” the idea that “it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business,” became central to university governance and reshaped faculty roles within the university (Fisher 17). Foregrounding concepts like efficiency and productivity as the chief values to which all behaviour within an organization should aspire, this neoliberal managerialism (which replaced the managerial democracy of the postwar research university) introduced finance as the lens through which these concepts would be viewed and all results communicated. This has meant, since the 1980s, a movement toward cost-cutting (typically through layoffs), in keeping with the
larger restructuring of the labour force in response to charges of rigidity during the 1960s and the
shocks and crises of the 1970s. Academic labour began to experience the same impulse toward
casualization in the 1970s, with an “increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-
contracted work arrangements,” which only accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s (Harvey
150). Where tenure offered some protection for faculty, making immediate mass casualization a
practical impossibility, in academe this process has taken the form of a steady, ongoing
casualization. As tenure lines have been replaced through retirement and attrition by a number of
cheaper, part-time positions, the larger numbers of these non-tenure-track jobs weakens the
process of shared governance, with fewer faculty eligible to serve on committees or participate in
administrative positions. In keeping with the language of accountability, such practices have
tended to be framed by proponents and policy administrators as rewarding productive faculty and
incentivizing behaviours, research agendas, and course offerings in line with public demand—an
ever more important consideration in an era of academic capitalism.

Somewhat ironically, the push toward professionalization by faculty during the postwar
period may have contributed to this phenomenon of contemporary de-professionalization. During
the peak of faculty power, professors themselves identified less with their institutions (and with
other faculty at that institution) and more with their discipline and their professional affiliations,
as embodied by membership in professional organizations like the MLA, the American Physical
Society, or the American Pharmacists Association.\textsuperscript{xxi} This change had already begun during the
1950s and 1960s, but it accelerated following the collapse of the academic job market and the
imposition of a more competitive atmosphere for academic jobs starting in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{xxii} The
emphasis on research in the Cold War university, when combined with a focus on efficiency and
productivity in faculty evaluation that tended to accept research results (including the successful
acquisition of outside funding for research) as a shorthand for faculty effectiveness, further divorced faculty from those functions like teaching, advising, committee work that gave them power within and connected them to specific institutions. Faced with the neoliberal assault on “expert knowledge” and the opening of previously closed and/or public spheres to the private market, professions (including law and medicine) found themselves increasingly compromised, losing their once robust ability to police entry and conduct according to codes that were separate and distinct from market whims. As the professional status of English Studies originally had been established through teaching (especially the teaching of freshman composition) rather than research (whose exaggerated importance appeared midcentury), the movement toward a model of professors as independent professionals housed at a university and primarily engaged in research actually eroded English Studies’ “disciplinary authority” to govern professional life within the university (Menand “Demise” 214). Lacking a language and framework by which to communicate how knowledge was created and valued within the discipline absent this professional structure forced English Studies to adopt a market-first orientation in its dealings with the university and its overseers.

Concurrent with the reduction in faculty power, administrators have become increasingly distinct from faculty, particularly at the top levels, and their office staff have expanded as many of those areas the faculty had been expected to oversee were reabsorbed back into the administrative envelope. Stanley Aronowitz condemns this “formation of a permanent administrative bureaucracy” as “the crucial internal precondition for . . . the development of the corporate university . . . which more and more responds not to faculty and students . . . but to political and corporate forces that claim sovereignty over higher education” (Knowledge 164). In practice, shared governance has largely given way to administered universities, a development
predicted during the height of the welfare state university by both progressive (Kerr) and conservative (Jacques Barzun) observers alike. This form of the university—in which “[e]very business practice imposed on the private sector is being implemented in U.S. universities and colleges,” in part due to the prevalence of “administrators [who] come directly from industry or are recruited for their corporate know-how, not their educational experience”—has reduced the power that faculty have been able to wield by reinvesting power in those administrative functions that faculty, as independent professionals, had increasingly come to shrug off (Aronowitz Knowledge 83-84; Washburn 205). Having regained some measure of control in this way, administrators were now able to put pressure on those domains in which faculty had previously been largely autonomous by extending the administrative worldview across the institution as a whole under the guise of accountability. With administrative and external forces exerting greater control over curricular and research matters, faculty were placed in a more reactionary position, subject to the consequences of institutional and policy changes without possessing a say in the process.

Unfortunately, for many professors and graduate students, especially in the humanities, the Golden Age version of higher education in the United States remains the default understanding of both a professorial career and of the structure of the university. Failure to understand the exceptional nature of that phase of the American university and the ways that it has continued to develop over the last three decades further weakens faculty claims to shared governance, let alone ownership of the university. Even the increasing attention to “alt-ac” careers betrays this orientation, for example, as the “alt” signifies not just that these jobs differ from the expected teaching (or even administrative) jobs for graduates, but also that the need for graduates to take such jobs is alternative to expected norms. Indeed, in some way alt-ac has
served as the ideological leading edge of rational choice economics in the cultural sphere, presenting business skills and a willingness to turn advanced training in the humanities to corporate needs as an ailing discipline’s salvation. The oversized influence on English Studies of external opinions about the proper duties of professors and the appropriate objects of study for the discipline becomes more understandable in this context, as faculty are caught between attempts to continue to operate according to the norms of past disciplinary and institutional conditions and to update those norms for the corporate university. Stranded between the competing demands of producing innovative (and commercially realizable) research, providing vocational training, and offering a fiscally responsible curriculum, faculty have continually pivoted between unfriendly stakeholders without necessarily knowing in advance how they are expected to respond to their views.

**A Brief Critical History of Academic Novels**

Developing as it does out of this historical context, my reading of contemporary academic fiction veers away from the traditional lines of criticism on the genre, though it is in keeping with recent trends in scholarship. My approach is broadly Marxist, foregrounding the role of capitalist social relations on these texts in part because they serve as historical narratives, and history “is inaccessible to us except in textual form . . . [O]ur approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (Jameson *PU* 35). Following from this assumption, I read academic novels (and particularly their generic form, which is the site of these “prior textualizations” of history) as revealing traces of historical developments through their narratives, which interact with the expectations (both narrative and historical) embedded in a genre as constrained as the academic novel. Indeed, though the new academic novel has been more open about the interpenetration of
academic and non-academic worlds, this has served primarily as a means of naturalizing the changes to the university that have occurred since the 1970s (and the end of the historical period to which the genre defaults), making them seem part of some inevitable historical trajectory. However, as Slavoj Žižek notes in his discussion of a Lacanian theory of ideology, the function of ideology is to generate narratives that can resolve the tensions created by contradictions in current dominant paradigms and real material conditions, replacing the transcendent force of history with a narrative of progress and development that covers over its operations (“Between” 292-94). This narrativization is never perfectly accomplished, though, and traces of those real conditions are constantly escaping narrative closure, eventually overwhelming the dominant paradigm when it can no longer create containing narratives of sufficient explanatory power (Žižek “Between” 292). As the form of contemporary academic fiction is rooted in the conditions and assumptions of an institution tied to a Fordist-Keynesian paradigm, the narrativization of more recent developments in the university cannot achieve anything approach ideological closure due to their connection to a university whose organizational logic belongs to neoliberalism. The moments in which the novels attempt to create new narratives and close ideological gaps offer glimpses of historical processes reshaping universities as part of their broader work on American society and, ultimately, the form of late capitalism. In catching glimpses of these historical processes, though, one glimpses not the kind of transcendental force that Jameson frequently identifies in *The Political Unconscious* (in which history is roughly synonymous with the Lacanian Real), but rather a more fluid set of constituent parts, often in tension with each other, as described by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature.* In contemporary academic novels, the perspective of the neoliberal university (and of neoliberalism as a historical force capable of shaping social, economic, and political developments) moves
from an emergent element to the dominant element in the institution’s self-conception. At the same time, the earlier forms and perspectives of the postwar research university remain as residual elements, along with additional, older views of the university.

It is in the exploration of these residual elements in the novels’ forms and content (along with the narrative they tell of neoliberalism’s transition from emergent to dominant force) that I have attempted to combine my literary work with the kind of historical work undertaken by scholars working in Critical University Studies. Of particular importance to my understanding of the academic novel are Marc Bousquet’s investigations into the nature and conditions of academic labour, Newfield’s historicizing of the social function of public higher education, Slaughter and Leslie’s examination of policy changes that have created and expanded academic capitalism, and Jeff Williams’ wide-ranging discussions of the politics of higher education and the institutional dimensions of English Studies. Others working in this field, like Stanley Aronowitz, Gerald Graff, Richard Ohmann, Bill Readings, and Evan Watkins, have also proved valuable in thinking about the university and its function, as have histories of higher education by Thorstein Veblen, Abraham Flexner, Kerr, Laurence Veysey, Jencks and Riesman, John R. Thelin, and Roger L. Geiger. By reading academic novels alongside these voices, I hope to provide a more serious examination of the genre than its relative success as a vehicle for comic misadventures, an approach all too common with earlier criticism. In line with more recent critical developments, I see the academic novel as a useful tool in the study of the history of higher education, a stance that continues to advance the status of the genre.

Appearing almost 150 years after the first American academic novel, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe* (1828), John O. Lyons’ *The College Novel in America* (1962) is the first monograph dedicated to the genre’s American expression. Lyons surveys a genre that has seen,
in his estimation, “no Sophocles . . . no Fielding, Flaubert, or Tolstoy,” but that nonetheless has some interest as “a literary form and social document” and potentially “a crusading instrument,” with the ability to make “an argument for racial or class tolerance or academic freedom” (xiii, xv, xviii). Providing a comprehensive overview of the genre, including a typology of the various strands of the academic novel up to that point, Lyons’ study builds on Richard C. Boys’ earlier “The American College in Fiction” (1944), previously the standard reference. Classifying pre-World War I novels as “only mildly searching by present standards,” Boys defines the genre’s production to 1945 as much more “vigorous,” highlighting novels both well known (F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* [1920] and Cather’s *The Professor’s House*) and obscure, though the latter group, including Percy Marks’ *The Plastic Age* (1924) and Herrick’s *Chimes*, tend to be well-regarded by readers of the genre (380). Ultimately, though, like Lyons, Boys concludes that “[m]ost novels centering about academic life demonstrate strikingly that we have had little first-rate fiction in this field,” with the majority offering an “unreal and distorted” view of academic life, particularly in their crude stereotypes of faculty suffering through “dreary, depressing, and stifling” lives (381-82). Interestingly, it is this failure of academic fiction to offer realistic and sympathetic accounts of academic life that Boys cites as a major component in the popular perception that “the teacher is getting all he deserves, that his job is an easy one and, if anything, overpaid” (379). As this criticism of teachers persists, one must assume that the failure to provide sympathetic accounts of academic life has remained a constant over the last seventy years.

Boys and Lyons set precedent for much of the criticism of academic novels from mid-century on, with individual critics more or less hopeful about the genre’s potential and current state. Critical consensus provided a fairly short list of exceptional academic novels—Fitzgerald’s
and Cather’s novels, McCarthy’s *The Groves of Academe*, Randall Jarrell’s *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), Nabokov’s *Pnin* and *Pale Fire* (1962), and Malamud’s *A New Life*, with Owen Wister’s *Philosophy Four* (1903), Owen Johnson’s *Stover at Yale* (1912), the anonymously authored *Grey Towers*, Marks’ *The Plastic Age*, Herrick’s *Chimes*, George Weller’s *Not to Eat, Not for Love* (1933), Thomas Wolfe’s *Of Time and the River* (1935), and Sarton’s *Faithful Are the Wounds* often serving as a second tier of good examples of the form—but the majority of the genre was, in the words of Leslie Fiedler, “hopelessly middlebrow, muted where they pretend to be moderate, melodramatic where they pretend to be tragic, commonplace where they pretend to be wise” (7). Fiedler noted the genre’s gradual shift away from students and toward professors (a trend that would increase over the subsequent decades), as well as introducing the theory that authorial intent/motivation was a key factor in the genre’s lack of quality. As “the feelings which motivate [academic] novels are, primarily, frustration and impotent rage—secondarily, the desire to strike back and be revenged by making a last minute success out failure, *i.e.*, a best-selling or critically acclaimed novel,” the genre tends to rely on stock set pieces and character types that offer little in the way of complexity or real insight (Fiedler 7). Fiedler’s dismissal of the academic novel, being the most prominent critic to have written on the genre up to that point, deepened the impression that it was at best a niche subgenre with little substance to offer readers outside of the potential for some salacious gossip.

Much of the criticism on academic novels of this period is explicitly prescriptive, suggesting how novelists could more accurately depict academic life and the significance of so doing. For example, Benjamin De Mott, in a 1962 essay offering tips to the aspiring writer of academic fiction, is more hopeful than Fiedler in the possibility of an author making the “interesting complications of character in the college grove . . . yield a good deal in the way of
human truth,” but he similarly concedes that most examples of the genre are either “killingly predictable” or “mean, nose-picking little drama[s],” relying far too heavily on stereotypes like “the Good Dean, the Evil Trustee, the Wise Chairman . . . [and the] academic gypsy” (250, 243). Even rectifying these flaws, though, will not make the academic novel anything other than a minor genre in the eye of these critics. De Mott’s criticisms of the genre’s predictable plots and overreliance on stereotyped characterizations remained critical commonplace into the twenty-first century. In a review of recent academic novels from 1985, W. Gordon Milne lists the chief failings of the genre as “stereotypical characterization . . .[,] a superficial treatment of theme . . .[,] an excessive amount of burlesque, or too corrosive a tone” caused by “the genre’s ready-made format” (34). Critics like Sanford Pinkser continued to repeat these claims in the 1990s, noting the genre’s “cardboard characters and all too predictable turns of plot” (“Who Cares” 440). Similarly, Ian Carter describes how he “would pick up a novel newly discovered in a library stack or decayed secondhand bookshop. . . . After a couple pages [he] would discover the awful truth. [He] had read it before. After a couple of years, [he] had read them all before” (15). Ultimately, according to this line of criticism, the academic novel presents “a remarkably stale picture” (Dalton-Brown 593). Sixty four years of criticism passed between Boys’ study of the genre and Dalton-Brown’s essay, but the academic novel’s flaws have remained remarkably consistent in the eyes of its detractors.

Despite their generally negative view of the genre, the early studies of the academic novel also identified the elements that would prompt its revaluation starting in the 1980s—namely, its potential contribution to the study of higher education and its ability to make social commentary. Even those critics most dismissive of the genre were willing to concede that academic novels might serve as a “complement [to] the more factual interpretations and
criticisms of educators and social scientists,” with the genre’s use of the “academic community as a microcosm reflecting the great world, an adequate symbol of our total society” a logical extension of this premise (Carpenter 443; Fielder 5). Developing the former point, Michael V. Belok’s 1961 study of fifty academic novels published since 1940 assessed the genre’s ability to “reveal some of the weakness of the teaching profession” along with “explicit or implicit attitudes toward professors” that “have an effect on the social status” of the professoriate (404). Perhaps the best explanation of the rationale for studying academic novels comes from John R. Thelin and Barbara K. Townsend, who suggest that “systematic analysis of college fiction . . . [be made] part of the study of higher education” because of its ability to “illustrat[e] facets of the prevailing national culture and their ultimate diffusion to campus life . . [and] serve as a memory of policies and practices which official accounts have overlooked” (184, 188). Critics have focused on the readership of the academic novel and their expectations for the genre as a way to describe its broader social significance, particularly its role in reinforcing negative views of academics by “tap[ping] into their readers’ collective fantasies about academe” while at the same time “shap[ing] and [being] shaped by the culture’s conceptions of academic life” (Rossen 1-2). However, as the genre in which “academics . . . consider their professional identities” and “discuss the cultural status of the scholar,” the academic novel also performs an unofficial “internal” function by serving “as a spiritual, political, and psychological guide to the profession” (Rose 56; Dalton-Brown 591-92; Showalter 118). That so much of academic fiction is negative should give one pause, but it also reaffirms the truth of Stanley Fish’s sardonic “[p]rofession despise thyself”—self-loathing would seem to be part of the spiritual guide to the profession even if, as my epigraph notes, everyone hates a sad professor.
Alongside the emergence of the new academic novel in the 1980s, criticism of the genre also became more expansive. This new strand of criticism leaves behind the view of the academic novel as mirroring the supposedly cloistered world of academe itself. Instead, critics distinguish between earlier novels in which “[t]he university is a closed world, with its own norms and values, which is thick with the possibilities of intrigue” and the novels draw unity from “a certain insulation which gives the novelist a chance to enclose the action in time and place,” and contemporary examples in which the academic world “is never sufficiently worldtight but, on the contrary, is permeable by the alien and disruptive forces of politics, sexuality and crime” (Connor 69; Lyons xiii). Exploring this permeability, the novels have revealed an academic world that is “unreliable, ambivalent, hypercomplex and on the verge of collapse” (Bevan 107). Thus, consummately “insider” topics like hiring and admissions have become occasions through which to consider the university’s larger social and national functions, rather than just the sites of academic battles (in the most pejorative sense of that term). The result has been something of a renaissance for the genre, which has moved from a “marginal genre” thought to be “quaint and eccentric” to “a mainstream genre in American fiction, with entries by a good number of prominent contemporary American novelists” (Williams “Academic Novel” 561). Novels like Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985), Brett Easton Ellis’ *The Rules of Attraction* (1987), Michael Chabon’s *Wonder Boys* (1995), Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain* (2000), Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* (2001), Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Marriage Plot* (2011) have elevated the genre’s standing, furthering the idea of a new academic novel that is not simply an exercise in rote genre fiction. In addition, novels like Jane Smiley’s *Moo* (1994) and Richard Russo’s *Straight Man* (1997) have entered the academic novel canon, along with some second-tier novels like Ishmael
Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1993), James Hynes’ *The Lecturer’s Tale* (2001), Alex Kudera’s *Fight for Your Long Day* (2010), and Julie Schumacher’s *Dear Committee Members* (2014) that have expanded the genre’s scope by focusing on academics of colour and adjunct professors or introducing a formal twist like Schumacher’s epistolary academic novel.

The “mainstreaming” of the academic novel has proceeded on two fronts simultaneously. First, the genre’s uptick in quality (demonstrated by the number of prominent writers of literary fiction who have penned academic novels over the last 25-30 years) has been matched by a significant increase in the number of academic novels published. John E. Kramer’s definitive guide to the genre, *The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography*, provided annotation for 425 novels from *Fanshawe* on in its first edition in 1981. By its second edition in 2004, an additional 225 novels were covered, 209 of which were published between 1980 and 2002 (Kramer vi).

Second, and in relation to this uptick in quality, the academic novel has increasingly tied the insider issues of the “alien world” of the ivory tower to the more familiar money troubles, threats of downsizing, declining professional opportunities, and limited paths to personal fulfillment that demonstrate professors’ affiliation with “other beleaguered white-collar workers and denizens of the middle class” (Williams “Academic Novel” 561). In this sense, academic novels have come to do more than simply “foreground the scandals and headlines of higher education,” as Elaine Showalter claims, and now represent an institution whose conflicts are “representative of the world at large,” a possibility for which earlier critics like Fiedler and De Mott had been waiting (Showalter *Faculty* 118; Martin 53). These developments befit a moment in which the university has become “a hub institution of our time, touching the lives of almost every American” (Williams “Emerging”). Faced with novels with “a far greater territorial sweep” than earlier classics like *This Side of Paradise* or *Pnin*, studies of the academic novel
have taken the genre more seriously (Bevan 107). Monographs like Kenneth Womack’s *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community* (2002) and Showalter’s *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents* (2005) both update the overview of the genre provided by Lyons and offer more complex analyses of the novels they consider.

Despite these changes, many still see the academic novel as trite and played out. Adam Begley, J. Bottum, and Dalton-Brown, for example, call for an end to the academic novel. For them, and for other critics, the genre has traded in its comic abilities for a “growing bitterness” that has compromised its abilities to offer a lighthearted take on the pleasures and frustrations of academic life (Kramer xi). In a 2013 piece for *The Guardian*, for example, Jonathan Wolff laments the genre’s turn toward the serious, recalling when novels depicted “the academic life . . . [as] little walks taken as respite from huge, alcohol-laden meals,” and suggesting that “[w]hen stories about universities start appearing in the business pages, there is only one joke to tell and only Laurie Taylor can make it funny” (Wolff). However, the genre’s “serious” turn has been a boon to critics who study changes to the university. Williams’ “The Rise of the Academic Novel” introduces the idea of a larger constellation of “anxiety narratives,” dealing with the contemporary experience of the “managed professional anxiously negotiating his or her way through postmodern institutions” that captures something of the social, political, and economic reorganizations of capitalism’s most recent phase (“Academic Novel” 581). Similarly, Christopher Findeisen’s work on the genre has revealed the role of academic fiction throughout the century in forwarding strategies of managing and solidifying class positions in the United States during the twentieth century. Both Williams and Findeisen provide examples of the overlap between criticism on academic fiction and the field of Critical University Studies (CUS), which began to take off in the 1990s as “scholars began realizing what was happening to higher
education,” directing their attention toward “the consequences of corporate methods and goals, like corrupting research and increasing managerial (as opposed to academic) control, cutting labor through reducing regular faculty positions (while increasing adjunct positions), and exploiting students by requiring them to work more and take on more debt” (Williams “Emerging”). As the genre continues to evolve and develop in line with the conditions of life within academe and the experience of those who pass through institutions of higher education, such criticism is likely to remain necessary.
“After all, the whites are the real oppressed minority”:
The Drama of Race and Sex in the PC Novel

Looking at the results of the 1994 midterm elections for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 1995, Billie Wright Dziech, in what now reads as an incredibly prescient piece, forecast trouble for academe. Noting that the elections’ pronounced rightward swing was echoed by white males’ “complain[ts] in exit polls that minority groups and other ‘special interests’ were dominating the concerns of policy makers,” she contrasted these frustrations with a moment on campuses in which affirmative action and multiculturalism “ha[d] become almost universal” while white male students “fe[lt] ostracized and castigated for conditions over which they have no control” (Dziech “Coping” B1, B2). Though these feelings fueled the white males’ move to the right, they also, by assenting to the anti-affirmative action and anti-multiculturalism platforms of Republicans, made it clear that “higher education is one of the sectors of society at which their message was directed” (Dziech “Coping” B1). Many white males, Dziech argued, “fe[lt] uneasy expressing ‘politically incorrect’ opinions” in academe and so “carr[ied] their frustrations and anger from the campuses to their workplaces and communities,” where they were increasingly public in suggesting that “affirmative action is discriminatory” and “multiculturalism dilutes the college curriculum” (“Coping” B2). For Dziech, the solution was simple: acknowledge the frustrations of white, male students, “begin to tell the truth about the use of different admission standards for different people” through affirmative action, and offer “more honest, clear descriptions of course content,” though this would not necessarily resolve the question of “whether remedying social injustice is an appropriate role for higher education”
(“Coping” B2). Without these changes, the charges of political correctness (PC) would be likely to continue and higher education would become increasingly distanced from public support.

Though Dziech had the benefit of analyzing the election results in light of a decade of increasingly vehement debate surrounding the many forms of PC said to plague daily life (particularly on campuses), concerns about this alienation of white males—and their expressions of the frustration that Dziech described—have never entirely gone away. Indeed, versions of her argument have seen a resurgence of popularity over the last several years, as PC has slowly returned to national debates.xxxvi In a widely discussed piece for New York Magazine published in 2015, Jonathan Chait resurrected the debate about PC by pointing to social media as the most recent space to fall victim to “[p]olitical correctness . . . a style of politics in which the more radical members of the left attempt to regulate political discourse by defining opposing views as bigoted and illegitimate” (Chait “Not”).xxxvii PC’s return to the national stage was completed by Donald Trump’s repeated attacks on the concept during the 2016 presidential campaign. Much post-election analysis highlighted Trump’s unabashed criticism of PC as a key part of his victory, particularly given the failure of academe and college-educated liberals and leftists to make the kind of effort that Dziech implored them to make twenty years earlier.xxxviii Certainly there was little public support for efforts on American campuses to accommodate students’ emotional needs, such as the use of trigger warnings on syllabi or ahead of lectures and class discussions, or campaigns for safe spaces and against “micro-aggressions.”xxxix Similarly, protests at universities over racial and sexual violence (at both the individual and structural levels), as at the University of Missouri, were mostly unpopular.xl Since the election, freedom of speech on campuses has again become a headline issue and multiculturalist curricula have come under fire for contributing to Trump’s victory and the rise of the far-right across North America
PC looks to be one of the defining topics in higher education policy during the second half of the decade, just as it was when Bill Clinton ran for president.

PC’s startling re-emergence mirrors its first appearance on the American scene in late 1990, when it piggybacked on larger national concerns about morality, the family, and social decay to become one of the key forces threatening America according to conservatives, free speech advocates, and anti-left liberals (Messer-Davidow 40, Berman 1, Weigel). Though it had been used in leftist circles as an ironic form of self-critique since the 1960s, political correctness was unlikely to be a term familiar to most Americans up through the 1980s. However, from roughly 1991 to 1995, the period of the “PC wars,” the supposed threats to American higher education (and, by extension, society) from PC received high-profile coverage in major newspapers, magazines, and television shows. The *New York Times*, for example, one of the key venues for disputes about PC, mentioned the terms “political correctness” or “politically correct” 102 times in the entire 1980s; in 1991 alone, the newspaper used the terms 664 times (up from 24 in 1990) and averaged 1032 uses per year between 1991 and 1995. In general, these reports were hostile toward PC and the worldview that it supposedly espoused—hatred of white males and Western culture and idealized celebrations of women, minorities, and other marginalized groups—which critics attributed to the Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists, and other radicals who were sheltered by the American university. Enabled by administrators who were themselves zealously pursuing PC ends through their tacit endorsement of identity politics via diversity requirements and speech and conduct codes, these radicals were able to attack freedom of speech and academic standards and so threatened the fabric of American society by promoting dangerous, morally relativist ideas.
Hostility toward PC and its manifestations, stoked by the circulation of a series of anecdotes depicting academe as hopelessly in thrall to PC and taking leave of all common sense, became one of the primary lenses through which to view higher education in the 1990s. In particular, the use of these anti-PC anecdotes supported the ascendance of the view of white males as under threat within higher education (and, increasingly, society at large). According to the mostly conservative groups who pushed this narrative of white male victimhood, the major structural changes in higher education that had been underway since the 1980s—the collapse of the academic job market and the subsequent limit on the number of available academic jobs, the use of part-time faculty not as a supplement to the existing tenured faculty but as a replacement for them, and the reduction in course offerings in the core curriculum as humanities disciplines had their budgets slashed even while new “diversity” offerings continued to appear—could be explained not as a result of the triumph of neoliberal policies and in response to the increasing diversity of student populations during the second half of the twentieth century but rather as an attack on white males and their culture. Though white males received academic appointments at a higher rate than all other groups, particularly tenured appointments, and female and minority faculty members remained underrepresented, the increases in the latter groups’ numbers were seen as proof of a conspiracy against white males even as their victimization by PC was denied by those within academe who championed affirmative action and other PC policies.

These sentiments were not limited to the campus or the opinion pages of newspapers, but were also reflected in academic novels of the time. In PC novels, which make the policies at issue in the PC wars (affirmative action, speech and conduct codes, and multiculturalist curricula) their central focus as threats to the continued existence of higher education, the traditional protagonist of the academic novel (the middle-aged male professor) becomes the
white male victim of PC. Similarly, the setting has been transformed from the groves of academe to the PC clubhouse, where the university’s traditional objective as understood by these novels—delivering a liberal education to students and so preparing them for active participation in public and private life—has been undermined by a single-minded focus on race and gender. Crucially, PC novels trace these failings directly to the outcomes of PC policies and limit their protagonists’ concerns about higher education to the results of their own negative interactions with PC and its representatives on campus. In this way, they minimize (if not outright ignore) the ways that the ongoing withdrawal of state and federal financial support for higher education has encouraged the adoption of policies that have accelerated the casualization of academic labour and the redefinition of the educational mission along more profitable lines. They also largely ignore the structural issues that continue to disadvantage women and minorities both as students and as faculty members, seeing instead PC as a source of unfair (because it is unearned) support at the expense of white males.

For examples of this phenomenon, I look to novels from the 1990s that participate in the drama of race and sex that entangles the white male victim of PC. These PC novels draw ideas directly from the rhetoric of the PC wars, but they rarely contextualize PC or even treat it as a political issue. Stripped from its role within the history of higher education, the anti-PC of these novels assumes the form of a return to common sense, rather than an overt attack on higher education. At worst, anti-PC appears tinged with standard American anti-intellectualism, playing into longstanding public criticisms of teachers and the education system. PC is a failing of academics in these novels, some of whom may be acting from a place of good intentions, and so it is best dealt with by common sense solutions that are, in actuality, highly political and very much in line with the larger structural changes whose effects PC is at once supposed to mask and
explain. Ishmael Reed’s *Japanese by Spring* (1993), for example, focuses on race in academe and is critical of both the anti-PC crowd for their overt racism and the typical PC defenders for their unacknowledged racism. The novel’s concluding proposal for a more expansive sense of multiculturalism that will solve the most pressing issues facing universities, though, does not acknowledge that increasing tenure-track opportunities for minorities or improving attitudes toward diversity is a zero-sum game when tenure-track jobs are continually eliminated and higher education becomes ever more the domain of those who can secure and shoulder mountainous debt. Michael Downing’s *Perfect Agreement* (1997) also focuses on race via its treatment of affirmative action and directly engages with the figure of the white male victim of PC. However, though its protagonist acknowledges that affirmative action’s failures are part of larger, systematic failures in the unevenly tiered and highly stratified world of higher education, he ultimately returns to the idea of individual failure (despite good intentions) without tracing the ways that anti-affirmative action arguments feed into the policy decisions that have caused those systemic failures. Finally, Francine Prose’s *Blue Angel* (2000) moves the focus from affirmative action to speech and conduct codes and the fallout from the sexual harassment crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Again presenting a white male whose suffering as a result of such policies overshadows all other campus concerns, *Blue Angel* misidentifies a cultural malaise as solely the result of PC, rather than a product of the context from which complaints about PC have emerged.

In all three novels, the myths and anecdotes circulated by opponents of PC serve as formal structuring devices, whether by responding to those who perpetuate the myths (as in *Japanese by Spring*, with its “black pathology merchants”), wrestling with the new campus archetypes they have produced (*Perfect Agreement*’s white male victims of PC), or wholly adopting their view of campus life and its supposed implications for American society (*Blue*
Angel). Unfortunately, even when these novels are critical of the phenomenon of PC—Japanese by Spring and Perfect Agreement offer fairly explicit rejoinders to its existence as an organized system at points, and even Blue Angel acknowledges there are inflections beyond radical leftists trying to take over academe—they fail to articulate clearly its connections to other issues with which they deal, especially economic matters like funding sources and budget cuts. The characters in these novels are aware that they exist in an era of retrenchment, as the collapse of the academic job market is a subtext in both Japanese by Spring and Perfect Agreement and the idylls of a SLAC have curdled somewhat in Blue Angel compared even to a novel like The Groves of Academe. That the phenomenon of PC is intrinsically linked to that retrenchment and its continued advancement in the name of other agendas is not reflected by these narratives. Ultimately, then, PC novels criticize changes to higher education since the 1980s and their negative impact on the ability of institutions to deliver quality instruction without identifying the real drivers of those changes. Thus, PC becomes something of a smokescreen for the continued neoliberalization of higher education, which is only ever glimpsed tangentially or implied by PC novels despite materially impacting their protagonists and their experience of higher education.

Key to discerning this creeping neoliberalism in PC novels is the structuring of their narratives of white male victimhood around the related concepts of “fairness” and “accountability.” Throughout Japanese by Spring, Perfect Agreement, and Blue Angel, these concepts function as ideogemes—at once abstract concepts within an ideological system and “protonarrative[s]” that puts that system into action as an expression of class discourse (Jameson PU 87). Within the PC novel, fairness suggests an adherence to a meritocratic process in hiring, admissions, and other aspects of university life based on traditional academic standards, while accountability refers to the effectiveness of administrative policies based on readily quantified
measurements that can be tied to financial metrics. Combined, these concepts sketch an ahistorical and largely mythical vision of the university—a distortion of the Golden Age university favoured by neoconservatives—as the province of the elite that makes a token gesture toward notions of expanded access (anyone who can meet the standards can attend) while simultaneously denying that standards are historical constructs that require contextualization. Developing material realities that developed during the 1980s and 1990s like declining state funding for higher education and the increasing casualization of the academic labour force threatened the ability of this neoconservative myth to remain a persuasive explanatory framework for conceptions of American higher education at the end of the twentieth century and dawn of the twenty-first. Through their deployment of fairness and accountability, then, PC novels use narratives of white male victimhood to set up problems (tied to the larger, structural issues that remain unnamed) that only neoliberalism can solve. In particular, in the face of PC’s continued affronts to fairness and accountability (as evidenced by its victimization of white males), adopting neoliberal ideas about competition driving performance and the free market ensuring freedom and equality became a supposed precondition for restoring fairness and accountability. Keeping with neoliberal suspicion toward expert knowledge and claims of managing social, political, or economic affairs, policy makers arguing for surrender to the market and unimpeded competition claimed that such an approach could return the university to its Golden Age conditions (or at least the neoconservative version of those conditions) precisely because it required not intervention but abstention. In their view, affirmative action, multiculturalism, and all policies derided as PC that intended to support those populations who require additional support in light of the historical circumstances of their engagement (of lack thereof) with higher education actively hindered the operation of the market. Neoliberalism on
the other hand, advised that an unimpeded market would, through an application of objective (because not directed by expert agendas) fairness and accountability, eliminate these issues should they actually prove detrimental to the working of the market, which is taken as synonymous with freedom, fairness, etc. Reading these operations in PC novels, then, provides a model for observing neoliberalism’s manifestation in other aspects of higher education throughout the culture wars.

**A Brief History of PC, 1984-1995: Canon Wars, Culture Wars, and Neoliberalism**

Though it came to have such a large role in popular perception of higher education, PC as a concept was and is slippery by design, with loosely connected activities and attitudes tied to concrete, pre-determined consequences intended to drive forward the narrative of the white male victim and the broader dangers of PC. In this way, PC served as an umbrella term (and something of a dog whistle) that identified the politicization of knowledge and the university by leftists, the promotion of non-western (and non-white, and non-male) culture above the traditional greats of art, literature, philosophy and other disciplines by feminists, minorities, and multiculturalists, and the extension of affirmative action support to an increasing number of groups that have been identified as favoured “victims” within academe by the pro-PC crowd.

The major consequences of these policies and activities was said to be the erosion of academe standards and the abandonment of liberal education, the collapse of the academic job market and the denial of job opportunities to white males, and, eventually, the broader repudiation of American society and values through the indoctrination into radical politics of college and university students. Indeed, Conservative columnists and pundits with wide readerships considered these issues a significant threat to the American way of life. George Will, for example, claimed with a straight face that then-Chairwoman of the NEH Lynne Cheney was
“secretary of domestic defense,” whose husband Dick Cheney (then Secretary of Defense) dealt with threats that were “less dangerous, in the long run” than the forces of PC (“Literary” 25). Frontal assaults on PC in universities would wane over the course of the 1990s, replaced after September 11th, 2001 by related attacks on academic freedom, but the effects of the PC wars would continue to shape perceptions of the university and the humanities well into the new century.

Crucial to any understanding of PC and its role in debates about higher education is an acknowledgement that the concept of PC was as much created by the attacks on its presence on campus as it was a really existing phenomenon. Certainly, affirmative action practices could result in a small reduction in the number of job opportunities for some groups (like white males) while creating more opportunities for other, preferred groups and multiculturalist curriculum initiatives and diversity efforts could be overly zealous of aggressive in their language and pursuit of their goals. As a defined and concerted set of practices coordinated by an alliance of Marxists, feminists, and minorities against white males the traditional values of the United States and the West, though, PC was never anything more than a useful phantom. During the 1990s, attacks against PC (and the concept of PC itself) often operated on two different registers that linked it to the larger economic and political contexts missing from PC novels: the demographic/administrative register and the cultural/political register. The former, often deployed during discussions of affirmative action and diversity initiatives, sought to address the problem of an increasingly diverse student population with a wide variety of competing interests and needs not by creating policies or procedures to manage higher education according to some social goal (such as the establishment of proportional representation of groups in terms of student enrollment and faculty appointments), but rather by bringing those policies in line with
neoliberal policies. In this way, one of the key neoliberal positions—that planned economies would necessarily fail when compared with the more efficient and spontaneously evolving solutions of the market—could be extended in a domain that had typically resisted market operations. Similarly, when discussing multiculturalism or speech and conduct codes, attacks on PC were able to appeal to these same neoliberal principles while making their arguments exclusively in cultural terms. That is, opponents of PC could say that multiculturalist curricula infringed on the ability of students, faculty, and the public to determine the value and relevance of cultural objects by choosing to consume them. The offerings put up by multiculturalists, such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú* or *The Color Purple*, to pick two particularly contentious examples, were demonstrably less valuable and relevant than the traditional cultural touchstones like Shakespeare promoted by conservatives because of their reliance on forced consumption. Market logic and accountability to the market remain behind these debates even as they focus on a work’s literary merits or artistic quality. When combined with PC’s adaptable nature and pre-made narratives, these multiple registers afforded opponents of PC broad coverage of the activities of institutions of higher education and so facilitated wide-ranging attacks on faculty, students, and administrators.

The “PC wars” of 1990-1995 served as a flashpoint, then, for debates about the nature and purpose of higher education in the United States, the kind of values it should encourage among students, and the vision of American society it should promote, but they were in some ways just the latest (and most successful) version of an attack on higher education that had been ongoing for some time. What would become the PC wars began in the early 1980s, as neoconservatives like William Bennett, William Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and Midge Dector and associated cultural conservatives (like Allan Bloom and Jacques Barzun) who rejected the
legacy of the 1960s and held higher education to be the province of the elite began to challenge what they saw as a the politicized approach to education (and to the core curriculum in particular) that had taken hold during that decade. Bennett and Bloom, the most influential figures in this first wave, along with Lynne Cheney, viewed the 1960s as an “unmitigated disaster” for higher education, with schools and faculty members abandoning “the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs” in the name of a politicized, anti-Western relativism (Bloom 320; Bennett 1). Bennett (in his 1984 report as head of the National Endowment for the Humanities To Reclaim a Legacy) and Bloom (in his sensationalistic 1987 bestseller The Closing of the American Mind) proposed a refocusing of American higher education on its “traditional” mission of presenting the Western cultural heritage from Plato to Eliot, a mission that would ensure the continuation and success of liberal democracy by producing good citizens who appreciated the right culture in the right ways. Though their agenda was seemingly noble in its defense of high culture in a disinterested time—and despite the fame of Bennett, Bloom, Cheney, and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., all of whom enjoyed significant public attention due to their positions and/or the success of their book—this first wave of conservative cultural warriors were seen as engaged in a “custodial project” that generated little urgency (Newfield “What Was” 118). As a strictly cultural issue, and one that was often framed in terms of an appeal to fairly elitist concepts related to philosophy or political science, the necessity of defending the canon from the influence of multiculturalism was a fairly niche issue.

Stephen Balch (co-founder of the National Association of Scholars), Thomas Sowell (an American economist at the Hoover Institute and prominent black conservative), and Chester E. Finn, Jr. (Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education in charge of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement under Bennett from 1985-88) served as leading voices in
establishing this more overtly political phase. Developing a portrait of university campuses as places no longer committed to free inquiry, but rather to the restriction of academic freedom by circumscribing unpopular research topics and political views—or, as Finn put it, as “island[s] of repression in a sea of freedom”—the anti-PC movement pulled in not only other right-wing groups, but also liberals associated with the Free Speech movement. Responding to arguments about the need for more women and minorities in the faculty and student bodies and a more inclusive view of American culture and cultural production as a way to address the increasingly diverse American population (including the rise in racially-motivated campus violence and vandalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s), the anti-PC movement offered a narrative that emphasized what they saw as PC’s core double standard: the victimization of white males and conservatives as a way to redress the unfair victimization of women, minorities, and the political left. This shift in focus did not abandon the cultural issues that had so alarmed Bennett, Bloom, and Cheney, but it provided a readily identifiable foe (PC, even it was not yet widely identified as such prior to 1990) with concrete crimes. The media took notice of this development and communicated the urgency that canon defense alone could not generate, helping foment the sense of a crisis on American campuses caused by a cabal of radical leftists who sought the destruction of Western culture and the American way of life.

This second phase of the anti-PC movement reached a wider array of venues, generated more widespread support, and achieved significantly more success, especially against those on the left who were tasked with “defending” PC, or at least arguing in favour of multiculturalism, affirmative action, and other PC positions and institutions. Increased coverage for the anti-PC movement in major national publications like the Wall Street Journal, the Atlantic, Time, and Newsweek, rather than more specialized publications like Commentary or The New Criterion,
added a legitimacy that was lacking from the canon warriors of the early 1980s. Instead of a
division between outsiders (social critics, politicians, journalists) and “insiders . . . [those]
conservative professors who can criticize radical scholarship in the name of upholding standards
and defending the university from the intrusion of politics,” the late 1980s and early 1990s saw
an increasing confluence between conservative critics of PC inside academe and critics of higher
education outside of academe (Wiener “Why the Right” 724). This was in part the payoff of a
long strategy of building up a network of foundations, think tanks, policy institutes, radio and
public access television shows, and campus newspapers by conservatives in the years since
William F. Buckley, Jr. had founded the National Review. Taking advantage of the typically
poor coverage of academe by journalists, this network produced a stream of para-academic
journalists and pundits who paraded as credentialed “experts” on higher education and public
policy and funneled ideologically appropriate information on PC to national publications for
wide dissemination.

Using this wider platform, the anti-PC movement was able to communicate a clear and
consistent message about PC’s aims and origins, while also appealing to new audiences through
features in ostensibly liberal publications like the New York Times and the New Republic. Attempting to establish PC’s links to radical politics, Newsweek’s cover story on the subject
claimed that PC was “[p]olitically . . . Marxist in origin” while also being “informed by
deconstructionism,” and described it as a “repressive orthodoxy” and a “totalitarian philosophy”
that threatened free speech, academic freedom, and traditional academic standards based on “the
Western intellectual tradition” (Adler 53, 49, 51, 54). New York Magazine and Time followed
suit in their coverage, linking PC to the Nazis and the People’s Republic of China in its embrace
of totalitarian practices. This genealogy was crucial to the right’s success in the PC wars because
“when told that this censorship menace had appeared on the center-left, [the media] expressed a patriotic ire” that had been notably lacking in its attention to cultural conservatives’ calls to preserve the traditional canon (Newfield “What Was” 118). Beyond PC’s ties to radical politics, though, those who were against PC advanced their cause through the circulation of anecdotes about PC and its presence on campuses. These anecdotes were memorable (though largely fictional), with clear victims and obvious, outrageous abuses at the hands of overzealous adherents of PC, such as Stephen Thernstrom’s “censoring” by Harvard when he voluntarily elected to stop teaching a class after students complained of racial insensitivity in his lectures, a short-lived speech and conduct code at the University of Connecticut which forbade, among other things, “inappropriately directed laughter,” a pamphlet provided to incoming freshmen at Smith College which cautioned students to avoid engaging in “lookism,” and Stanford University’s “dropping” of its Western Civ course when one stream (of six) added some multicultural selections (qtd. in Wilson 93-94). In practice, these anecdotes were combined with a more general rhetoric of crisis that made PC seem like a new, urgent threat and continued to pull in those not usually inclined to participate in debates about higher education. As the Wall Street Journal put it in its November 26th, 1990 editorial “Politically Correct,” “[e]very day now echoes of trouble on the nation’s campuses sound louder” and though the thought of such a threat might “strike outsiders as silly” it was in fact deeply serious because “American universities have embraced thought control, political re-education and other basics of totalitarianism” (A10). The end result made PC seem to the average reader like the modern equivalent of the SDS and the Weather Underground.

This broader coverage translated into increased support for the anti-PC movement, particularly among the centrists and liberals who had not rushed to support the canon warriors of
the early 1980s. In one sense, the anti-PC movement was simply part of a steady rightward shift in American politics that had been ongoing since the 1970s, as what would otherwise be considered radically conservative views came to be regarded as moderate and centrist. However, by galvanizing liberals (particularly free speech activists and members of the anti-communist left of the 1950s and 1960s) against academe, which had long been seen as a liberal safe haven, anti-PC gained legitimacy. Prominent scholars with liberal reputations, like C. Vann Woodward, Eugene Genovese, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., endorsed the anti-PC agenda and so added to its authority, even if some later hedged their support. Even more important to the widespread adoption of the anti-PC cause was Richard Bernstein’s “The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct,” published in the New York Times in 1990. An attack on PC by a self-described liberal, the article described PC as a “Stalinist orthodoxy . . . [that] defines a kind of ‘correct’ attitude toward the problems of the world, a sort of unofficial ideology of the university,” enforced through “a pressure to conform . . . or risk being accused of a commonly reiterated trio of thought crimes: sexism, racism, and homophobia” and promoted the idea of the white male victim (E1, E4). Often attempting to “mediate” between sides in the PC wars, liberals tended to legitimize the anti-PC narrative and delegitimize the “academic left,” as it has come to be called, for being “a class of salaried demagogues: a group who may have far more in common with one another than with the people they are supposed to represent” (Bromwich 26). This had the effect of making the left seem more radical than Bennett or Bloom or D’Souza, their over-sensitivity a greater threat to the American way of life than any increase in diversity or vicissitudes of late capitalism. Even when challenging the right’s claims about censorship on campus, as with Russell Jacoby, who claimed that “[a]n eagerness to find leftist censorship gives rise to distortions and serious exaggerations,” he admits that groupthink does exist on campus
and it “intimidates, especially fainthearted students” (41, 49). Jacoby and other liberals never claimed that there was any kind of leftist cabal based on campuses working to destroy the American way of life—indeed, they most likely would have rejected any attempt to be associated with such a claim—but their support of the attacks on PC ensured that less extreme forms of this argument (namely, the supposed leftist bias on American campuses) met with success among the American public.

The popularity of the two major books produced on the right during the PC wars—Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals* (1990) and Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* (1991)—was one measure of the right’s success through the anti-PC movement. Though Kimball’s book remains more famous for its title, a pithy phrase with which to disparage professors, than its hastily-compiled content of PC anecdotes, D’Souza’s book spent fifteen weeks on the *New York Times* Non-Fiction Best Sellers List and his writing appeared in publications across the political spectrum, from the *Wall Street Journal* to *The Atlantic*. Built around his central concept of a “victim’s revolution”—widespread reforms like affirmative action policies and multiculturalist curricula made “on behalf of minority victims”—*Illiberal Education* defines the white male (especially conservative white male) victim narrative that drove the PC wars (2, 13). For D’Souza, freedom of speech and academic freedom have been curtailed (in order to prevent unflattering truths about the performance of minorities in higher education and the failures of affirmative action from gaining widespread acceptance) and whites have been forced to suffer the consequences of PC zealots’ obsession with race in service of this victim’s revolution. What is more, in their rush for self-gratification at these demonstrations of their “correctness,” supporters of PC have forced minorities to accept a source of power (victim status) that causes further resentment and increases the likelihood of discrimination and racism (D’Souza 240-242).
Meanwhile, he claims, whites languish as affirmative action takes educational and professional opportunities away from them and awards them to minorities who are more likely to be underprepared and less likely to be successful at or even finish higher education. Moving forward, the campaign against PC followed D’Souza’s lead and increasingly focused on affirmative action and the supposed “victims” who benefit from it, all the while claiming that white conservatives were the only group truly victimised in academe. This argument piggybacked on right-wing claims that whites were also the only real victims socially and economically as globalization reshaped the world’s economy, especially in comparison with stereotypes like the “welfare queen.” Such an argument could become common sense because the book’s enormous popularity made it a convenient reference point for those opposed to PC, and the constant citations, coupled with its popularity, made *Illiberal Education* seem credible.

In contrast to the success of the right in the PC wars—where, prior to D’Souza, Bloom (thirty one weeks) and Hirsch (twenty three weeks) had each spent time on the best sellers list—fueled by an extensive and well-funded media network, the left’s response to the PC wars was weak and reactionary. There were no equivalent books like *The Closing of the American Mind* or *Illiberal Education* to galvanize a movement and draw significant public interest and attention, and no public figure as recognizable as Bennett or Cheney to stand in for the cause of multiculturalism, affirmative action, and the rest of the PC apparatus. There was no blanket media coverage of the left’s position, nor was there a series of foundations, think tanks, campus papers, and talk radio programs to disseminate the party line to the media. Indeed, there was no unified position that could be opposed to the right’s anti-PC stance, particularly given the strong stance some on the left took against PC. The left’s message rarely left the campus grounds, and
through it was largely successful on campus, that was not particularly effective as a long-term strategy.

What media coverage was afforded the left during the PC wars was often dedicated to correcting the anecdotes circulating about PC on campuses or attempting to add nuance or context to points that came across as supporting the anti-PC crowd. For example, though Stephen Thernstrom presented himself as a victim of PC who had been driven from the classroom by the new forces of a left McCarthyism, careful reporting indicted his self-inflicted victimhood, as “under McCarthyism, professors didn’t voluntarily decide not to teach after being criticized by students; they were prevented from teaching—fired—after being criticized by the government” (“Harvard” 103). Nonetheless, Thernstrom remained a commonly cited example of a victim of PC long after this correction had been issued. Similarly, academics at SUNY-Binghamton, University of Texas-Austin, Stanford, and Duke all offered significant corrections to accounts of PC excesses at their universities that were significantly less well-received than the reports of PC gone wild. Without the well-funded infrastructure that the right employed to circulate its anecdotes, these corrections were met with apathy and “alternative perspectives [were] seen as irrelevant, if not irrational” (Neilson 65). Though the right continually built from its initial audience of like-minded journals, conferences, and organizations to larger, national outlets like *Time* and *Newsweek* in order to gain momentum beyond the campus, the left’s responses were largely confined to already sympathetic outlets on (or closely associated with) campus, rather than the popular and widely circulated fora in which the right’s accounts had appeared. By emphasizing explanations, the left played to this existing audience, but failed to provide a compelling narrative or narratives that demonstrated the values of affirmative action or multiculturalist reading lists to everyday life. Particularly given the right’s sense of urgent
panic about PC on campus and its destructive short- and long-term effects, such an approach did little to change any minds about PC. For most Americans, there was a PC crisis and it was happening on campuses across the nation.

Equally damaging to the left’s ability to effectively counter the anti-PC movement was its linking of the PC wars to a fight that the right (and the anti-PC movement more broadly) never claimed it was fighting. The effort to explain and contextualize the attacks on PC allowed the left to demonstrate, through reporting like Ellen Messer-Davidow’s and Sara Diamond’s tracing of the network of financial and media support for the right in this period, the ways in which the PC wars served to naturalize post-Fordist capitalism and solidify its globalization. In this context, PC (as an invented bogeyman) needed to be understood alongside the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the continuation of a legacy of anti-communism and red scares during the twentieth century; the preparations for the Gulf War; and the culmination during the 1980s of a massive (and successful) assault on the civil rights gains of the 1960s and early 1970s, along with a redistribution of power and wealth to the upper tiers of American society via a newly resurgent financial sector. PC was a tool, one that could be used by President George H. W. Bush, for example, to argue in a 1991 commencement address at the University of Michigan that the United States must “apply the genius of the market to the needs of the Nation” through an “educational strategy . . . to reinvent the American school” along the lines of the market (1-2). In this way, the PC wars could create the “acceptance of . . . divisions of labor as natural and unchangeable: in short, the quiet reproduction of inequality and political hopelessness,” especially as the anti-PC movement could, as Dziech’s report on the 1994 midterm elections makes clear, unleash the frustrations of those who felt victimized by PC to such impotent ends (Ohmann “On ’PC’” 20). The anti-PC movement was (though not always
and rarely explicitly) an attack on certain consequences of globalization, but *not* an attack on globalization itself because it was tied to a neoliberal reshaping of higher education and American society and politics. When the left attacked globalization via the spectre of PC, the right could claim to be against (certain effects of) globalization, too, and to still be concerned about freedom of speech, academic freedom, fairness in admissions, etc., which the left had not addressed in their attacks. Ultimately, then, the left fought the wrong fight, a point made clear by the gaps in the narrative of PC provided by PC novels.

Though the PC wars had the potential to be rather esoteric and of limited interest to those outside academe, larger socioeconomic currents to which PC spoke—like the problem of diversity amid a shifting political and economic framework—gave it a place in public discourse as a shorthand for a number of policy issues. Or, as Gerald Graff put it, the PC wars became “a microcosm . . . of the clash of cultures and values in America as a whole” (Graff *Beyond 8*). These conflicts, according to James Davison Hunter’s account of the cultural and political landscape of the 1980s, *Culture Wars* (1991), represented a “comprehensive and momentous struggle to define the meaning of America—of how and on what terms will Americans live together, or what comprises the good society” (51). The culture wars were not simply a debate about abstract and rarified terms like “the good society,” however; there were real, concrete consequences to these questions of definition, illuminated by the socioeconomic backdrop for the conflict. Managing diversity had become a political, cultural, and economic necessity in the latter part of the twentieth century as the population of the United States grew in size and diversity throughout the 1980s (a process that continues unabated today). Crucially in this atmosphere, the idea of minority victims duped by politically motivated administrators and faculty who were undermining merit through affirmative action and related policies bridged the gap between the
first and second phases of the anti-PC movement and allowed cultural arguments and policy arguments to blur, trading elitism for populism. The cultural conservatism of the first phase sought to undermine the legacy of the 1960s and generate popular support for the rolling back of civil rights gains as a continuation of right-wing strategies to drive wedges between whites and other ethnic groups and fracture class alliances. The naturalization of post-Fordism and neoliberalism underscoring the second phase, though, tied into a more extensive assault on the welfare state and the extension of downsizing and other economic reshaping measures to previously secure populations, like college-educated white males.

Even with its obvious gaps, inconsistencies, and incoherencies exposed, the narrative of a coming crisis in American society pushed by the attacks on PC continued to feel right and offer readymade, easy-to-digest positions that distracted from the difficult questions posed by the significant socioeconomic changes facing the United States in the final decade of the twentieth century. As PC faded from the forefront of public consciousness—or, rather, as public attention was redirected to more “productive” concerns about education, despite their obvious (though invisible) connections to the stakes of the PC debates—the right’s version of the state of higher education remained the common-sense understanding. Indeed, charges of a liberal bias in higher education (and the humanities in particular) continue to the present day, supposedly creating and nurturing the climate in which PC flourishes. However, far from confirming any sort of liberal bias, the PC wars helped to inaugurate what Williams calls a “neoliberal bias” in higher education, one that operates much more perniciously than any reported attempts at political indoctrination in a general education humanities course.
PC Novels and the Drama of Race and Sex in Academe

Given the reliance on anecdotes to transmit the threat of PC to American households through the media, PC already functioned as something like an academic novel. As a piece of fiction, though, PC tended toward the “mean, nose-picking little drama[s]” disparaged by Benjamin De Mott as all too characteristic of academic novels (243). PC anecdotes tend to be relatively formulaic in terms of setting (the campus of a prestigious university where, ostensibly, they should know better), plot (a harmless remark or time-honoured tradition results in wildly incommensurate punishment for those involved, meted out without the slightest regard for due process, standards of evidence, and other basic rights), and characters (the noble, put upon conservative male, the shrill feminist, the overzealous administrator, the humourless female or minority student), again like academic novels. In general, academic novels are realist novels, deriving their power from their ability to reflect their audience’s preconceptions about academe and its inhabitants. PC anecdotes functioned in the same way (and provided the model or base for PC novels) through repetition, which lent them authority and transformed their portrait of academe into common sense, or “the beliefs which appear most obvious and natural . . . the source and guarantee of everything we take for granted” (Belsey 2-3). Common sense here functions in a similar fashion to Antonio Gramsci’s and Raymond Williams’ idea of hegemony: that spontaneous assent to the worldview of the dominant class and the needs of power, both of which are presented as beyond question. Drawing as they do from the realism established by PC anecdotes, PC novels present this portrait of academe (and its explanation for the changes that academic institutions were undergoing during the 1980s and 1990s) as authoritative in an attempt to close down competing or counter narratives.
The left’s linking of the PC scare to globalization and the naturalization in and extension to higher education policy of post-Fordist, neoliberal capitalism made such a move by PC novels necessary. Academic novels strip PC of this wider context in favour of the common-sense positions that had solidified in the 1990s and that pointed away from the socioeconomic factors driving change in higher education. However, PC as a concept was always beset by an inherent contradiction between its supposed defense of traditional education from radical politics on the one hand and, on the other, its naturalisation of the privatised, corporatized university, a project that was an equally radical challenge to traditional education. Academic novels that thematize PC do so through the common sense that allows PC’s fundamental contradiction to fade into the background. These novels inevitably run up against formal and imaginative limits—as Catherine Belsey argues, “common sense betrays its own inadequacy by its incoherencies, its contradictions and its silences”—at which point the contradiction re-emerges and it becomes possible to read the larger context of the PC wars back into the novels, revealing the unnamed and unacknowledged sources of their anxieties about race and sex (3). Given their tendency toward the satiric and ironic, academic novels often present a critique of academic life and practices, but typically this critique remains un- or under-realized, as in most PC novels. Reading these novels’ anxieties within the larger contexts of PC re-orient their toward a more fully realized critique, one that addresses the PC wars’ causes and significance and offers a more complex portrait of academic life.

In general, PC novels fall into two categories, with each offering a different way of approaching the problems caused by PC. Those that focus on race examine how affirmative action compromises academic standards and ideas of merit and fairness, reducing the value of achievements for its beneficiaries and the quality of opportunities for its victims. In contrast,
those that focus on gender examine the corrosive effects of speech and conduct codes on the education process, with PC’s bureaucratic machinery eliminating the trust and intimacy required for teaching to flourish through its demonization of males. In both, a white male is victimised by politicised forces within the university. Though he attempts to rise above mere politics and appeal to supposedly transcendent academic values, his skin colour or gender ultimately doom him, leading him to conclude that academe is hopeless and to forsake it. Of PC novels focused on race, Philip Roth’s The Human Stain (2000) is probably the most notable example, but Downing’s Perfect Agreement adheres closest to the template and offers perhaps the clearest sense of how PC is de-politicized in PC novels. Of those PC novels focused on gender, Prose’s Blue Angel and Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections (2001) are the most significant examples, with Prose’s novel offering both a more extensive treatment of the topic (The Corrections providing only a novella-length section that deals with it) and a complete commitment to the PC narrative, while Edward Allen’s Mustang Sally (1992), Anne Bernay’s Professor Romeo (1989), Jay Parini’s Bay of Arrows (1992), and Christopher Hill’s Virtual Morality (2000) minor examples.

Japanese by Spring would be noteworthy as a PC novel if only for its inability to fit neatly into either of these categories, but it is also the novel that most clearly attempts to think beyond PC and in so doing illustrates the limitations of PC as a lens through which to understood higher education (and society). Unlike the other PC novels, Japanese by Spring is not about the fate of a white male victim of PC, but rather a black leader of the anti-PC movement who is victimized by both PC and anti-PC forces due to systematic racism throughout academia. In this sense, it is a clear rebuttal to the narrative of the white male victim of PC that structures the other novels, as its satire is structured around the absurdity of the arguments used to support that
narrative. However, as the novel progresses and Reed’s vision of a more fully realized form of multiculturalism, what he calls “Glosso,” than that found in universities comes into play, the limits of its attempt to supplant PC and respond to the anti-PC movement become clear. Glosso does not address many of the problems facing higher education that Japanese by Spring has demonstrated; indeed, it does not really seem to address academe at all.

The story of Benjamin “Chappie” Puttbutt, a black, untenured English professor at Jack London College in California who longs to join the white middle class in the hills above the college, Japanese by Spring received some critical acclaim. The editors of the New York Times’ Books section mentioned Japanese by Spring alongside the March 14th, 1993 Best Sellers List as a “recent book of particular interest” and included the novel in both the 1993 round up of “Notable Books of the Year” and, upon its re-release in paperback in 1996, a list of “New and Noteworthy Paperbacks.” What is more, at the time of Japanese by Spring’s publication, Reed had been a vocal contributor to public debates on issues of race and gender in the United States during the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings, which he characterised in an October 18th, 1992 article for the Washington Post as a “lynching” of Thomas, criticising the “gender-first faction on the feminist movement” for “sing[ing] out black misogyny as if it were the only misogyny that exists” (“Feminists” C1). Reed attacks this same branch of feminism in Japanese by Spring as part of his larger exploration of racism, though he more directly engages with figures like Dinesh D’Souza, Thomas Sowell, and Shelby Steele, with whom Puttbutt identifies as a “black pathology merchant” who makes the kind of anti-affirmative action claims his white colleagues “could only whisper” (Reed 10). In this sense, and fitting in with Reed’s statement that he is “‘not interested in rendering a photograph of a person,’” Japanese by Spring functions as a novel of ideas, with “a gallery of devastating caricatures revealing the hollowness and corruption of
various currently fashionable positions in contemporary society” (Reed qtd. in Womack 225; Lewis 202). Puttbutt, the author of *Blacks, America’s Misfortune*—in which he writes of the effects of receiving support through affirmative action including “how your white colleagues don’t respect you . . . how you feel stigmatized . . . [and] how you feel inferior”—cleverly inverts D’Souza’s claim that PC is nothing more than liberal careerism by using his anti-PC work as a way to ingratiate himself with the college’s white faculty and get tenure (Reed 10). That he is ultimately unable to secure tenure—indeed, that those white faculty members with whom he has most sought to ingratiate himself through his performance voted against him—reveals the lack of substance behind the anti-PC movement. For Reed, Glosso offers a chance to move beyond both Puttbutt’s racist colleagues and his need to pander to them by eliminating the conditions in which such racism makes sense.

Though he has a second scholarly career as a poetry critic, for which he has gained a following in Europe, Puttbutt focuses on his more political work because of the potential professional benefits that he sees accruing to him from appealing to the conservative white males in power at Jack London College. At the novel’s outset, the strategy appears to be working for him: the college’s president loudly praises Puttbutt and backs his tenure bid, calling him a “‘[f]ine young black . . . the best affirmative action baby on campus’” and his book a “masterpiece . . . [a] brave work” (Reed 43). Puttbutt’s public statements, particularly his disparagement of those who have received affirmative action support and the ongoing existence of affirmative action programs, re-establishes the comfort of those who feel their authority has been superseded by PC. Those colleagues who can only whisper the points that he publishes, who feel their academic freedom is being abrogated by the PC orthodoxy taking over campuses, have evidence from Puttbutt’s work that they are correct. For his part, Puttbutt recognises both
the role he is playing and its potential benefits, referring to “all of the butt he had kissed, the boots he had licked” in order to set himself up for tenure (Reed 70). Even his interest in Japanese, which, per the title, he is attempting to learn by the end of Spring semester, is spurred by a desire “to take advantage of the new global realities” at the tail end of the Japanese Economic Miracle and the onset of globalization (Reed 5). In this, Puttbutt uses the language of a corporatized higher education, but one that makes sense given that under neoliberalism a “competitive individualism [i]s the central value in an entrepreneurial culture that has penetrated many walks of life” (Harvey 171). His performance simply makes good business sense, signalling that he is “a team player” who can be expected to take his place without making a fuss about difficulties encountered along the way (Reed 18). Summarizing his own evolution, Puttbutt recalls that “[w]hen the Black Power thing was in, [he] was into that. When the backlash on Black Power settled in, with its code words like reverse discrimination, he joined that. He’d been a feminist when they were in power. But now they were on the decline . . . [and] he was a neoconservative” (Reed 48-49). Though Puttbutt’s careerism is more acute than most, his history, combined with the history of other characters (like Charles Obi, the head of Black Studies at Jack London College), suggests that such careerism is simply a survival mechanism for minorities and women, as they are on hostile territory and require whatever allies are available.

*Japanese by Spring* does not simply excuse minorities who adopt anti-PC attitudes in order to advance their career, though, but rather catalogues the damage caused by this. In a clever expose of the inherent racism of D’Souza’s argument in *Illiberal Education*, Puttbutt parrots his rhetoric in response to the beating of protesting black students by the white staff members of the campus newspaper *Koons and Kikes*. Discussing the incident with a reporter,
Puttbutt explains that “'[t]he black students bring this on themselves’” because “'[t]hey should stop worrying these poor whites with their excessive demands. . . . The white students are merely giving vent to their rage. This is a healthy exercise. It’s perfectly understandable. After all, the whites are the real oppressed minority’” (Reed 6-7). Here, Puttbutt (via D’Souza) makes the seemingly reasonable suggestion that black students work together with white students to avoid such confrontations in the future, but does so by blaming those who complained about the kind of institutional racism signalled by a newspaper called *Koons and Kikes* for the violence. By forcing the reader to work through the overtly racist aspects of this argument, Reed makes the racism an unavoidable part of accepting the reasonable conclusion. Nonetheless, knowing that it will play well with people like Jack London’s president, Puttbutt continues to defend the white male victim—the “real” minority—even as he stands next to a blood-spattered sidewalk. For all his posturing, though, Puttbutt is unsuccessful in advancing his career as the English department votes to deny him tenure. This unexpected outcome makes clear to Puttbutt that despite his excellent performance as a black pathology merchant he would never have been accepted by his “colleagues . . . [who] thought that he was so reasonable,” as evidenced by the fact that they had “never invited [Puttbutt] to social occasions in their homes” (Reed 17-18). Giving up on trying to negotiate “between black and white nationalists,” Puttbutt embraces the competitive individualism that is the hallmark of neoliberal society (Reed 82). Neither his colleague’s political sympathies nor a vogue for multiculturalism and other anti-racist and anti-sexist positions can encourage the development of real solidarity when people like Puttbutt must adopt racist attitudes in the hopes of being successful.

Further limiting the potential for solidarity is what Reed sees as token support for those liberal positions—like promotion of affirmative action and multiculturalism—with which the
right took umbrage. Despite the laudable intentions behind these positions, he claims, they are undercut by the racist and sexist behaviour that is part of the institutional culture of higher education. By the late 1980s, when the novel is set, multiculturalism had become a “burgeoning industry” with “big dollars” at stake for those willing to present an allegiance to it and, as “jobs were hard to find these days,” even those who “had critiqued multiculturalism formerly” have come to embrace it “so that they might find teaching jobs” (Reed 109). Such token allegiance to multiculturalist principles is damaging and, according to *Japanese by Spring*, distressingly common. The head of Women’s Studies at Jack London, Marsha Marx, claims that “[b]oth sexism and racism are equal contradictions,” but runs an exclusively white and female department and makes essentialising comments about black males, “‘who often behave like savages’” in her eyes (Reed 107, 59). Similarily, though in more shocking fashion, Robert Hunt of the English department—“[t]he academic post-hippie. One of those radicals with tenure,” as Puttbutt characterises him—reverts to a kneejerk racism and anti-Semitism when his own job is threatened while at the same time affirming his support for multiculturalism (Reed 77). Mirroring Puttbutt’s earlier words, he complains that “‘[i]f [minorities] want white men to be fair, then they have to give us a little time to catch our breath. What’s going to happen to white men?,’” but also claims that “‘this is nothing about multiculturalism versus high art or Afrocentricity versus Eurocentricity. This is about civilization against barbarism’” (Reed 78).

Reed is at his sharpest here, pointing out that the PC wars are structured around contradictory statements given the lack of material progress accomplished in terms of advancing women and minorities in academe. Anti-PC advocates are not willing to accept minority success even outside of an affirmative action framework, he suggests, despite their rhetoric, and the support for affirmative action and multiculturalism offered by liberal allies all too often boxes women and
minorities into equally restrictive and stereotypical roles, as when they must be experts on black or women’s issues regardless of their own scholarly interests.

While these points are suitably scathing and at times uncomfortably on-the-nose, *Japanese by Spring* fails to offer a convincing vision or plan for an alternative, better higher education. Reed’s “Glosso” form of multiculturalism relies on the “more cosmopolitan” United States that he sees taking shape outside academe and its vulgar multiculturalism. Reflecting on a festival at Lake Merritt that is Glosso in action, Reed sees in the dizzying array of foods, music, dances, and fashions on display “the way the United States would look in twenty-five years” (Reed 224). Nothing about Reed’s vision seems any less exploitable than the multiculturalism found in universities, though, and it seems equally possible to coopt Glosso multiculturalism or to pass it off as unthinking valorisation of difference or tolerance. That the most successful articulation of the value of multiculturalist principles is the character of Ishmael Reed’s pitch to a wealthy conservative businessman, Jack Only (modelled after John M. Olin, the conservative arms manufacturer whose foundation poured millions of dollars into conservative think tanks and media initiatives along with endowed professorships at universities across the country), that “‘American business will lose out if it can’t compete in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural market’” would seem to confirm this (196). Reed’s exploration of Glosso multiculturalism serves as the depoliticizing element in *Japanese by Spring*’s version of PC, limiting its approach to combating institutional racism to the kind of diversity initiatives—food fairs, celebrations of cultural expression, music or dance shows—that were justifiably mocked by the anti-PC movement as incoherent responses to the problems of an increasingly diverse population. For example, the novel clearly identifies sources and kinds of funding for higher education—such as tuition from “development admits” and targeted gifts from influential
donors (like the Olin caricature mentioned above)—as an important influence on campus culture that must be considered part of the PC wars.\textsuperscript{lxvii} Convincing a donor that multicultural education is a good business venture and, presumably, Glosso multiculturalism can form the basis of that curriculum has not addressed the issue of the ideological import of university financing on campus affairs, though it has challenged a narrow portion of the anti-PC movement.\textsuperscript{lxviii}

This ultimately becomes the failing of \textit{Japanese by Spring} as a response to PC, as it does not directly address the problems in academe that it has identified, locating all of its suggestions and solutions outside academe with no clear path for change on campus. The connection between Glosso multiculturalism and the alleviation of institutional racism is unclear, beyond potentially waiting out the racists who are gradually being replaced by those more open to Glosso. Without some kind of blueprint for academe that will address the effects of the corporatization of the university—which drive both Puttbutt’s careerist embrace of the anti-PC movement and the token multiculturalism of liberals on Jack London’s campus—the rather frictionless multiculturalism of the Festival of the Lake seems impotent.\textsuperscript{lxix} Between 1989 (when the novel is set) and 1993 (when the novel was published), the composition of academic labour was experiencing some of its most dramatic changes, as the proportion of full-time faculty to part-time faculty fell from roughly 64%/36% to 60%/40% (the largest drop over a four year period since 1970) and part-time faculty accounted for approximately 77% of all growth (Snyder and Dilow 2012 418).\textsuperscript{lxx} Within the field of English, the numbers proved similarly dire: 1988-89 marked an all-time high for jobs advertised in the MLA’s \textit{Job Information List} with slightly more than 2,000, but five years later in 1993-94 that number had dropped to 1,000 (MLA “Report on JIL” 6f1). Casualization initiatives, mandated by the call to run higher education more like a business, created anxieties that the anti-PC movement could exploit by playing off
the fears of those who saw academic careers as suddenly more unstable and unavailable. Glosso does not address this, despite these fears being at the root of faculty like Robert Hunt’s turn away from radical hippie multiculturalist to a reactionary anti-PC warrior. In this environment, tensions that would already have existed as more female scholars and scholars of colour entered the ranks of the professoriate were emphasised and exaggerated by a newfound emphasis on competition that accompanied both the influx of funds from very specific sources and the decrease in available jobs.

However, though women and minorities did experience increases in representation as the overall number of available jobs was declining, they remained significant minorities compared to white males. Between 1991 and 1993, white females accounted for 49.1% of all new full-time positions, while black males and females accounted for 4.5% and white males just 0.3% over the same time. In 1993, though, white males accounted for 57.4% of total full-time positions, white females for 28.5%, and black males and females combined for 4.7% of the total. These changes could have been absorbed had full-time job growth been more than 12.7% of the growth of part-time jobs during the same period. Larger anxiety about the decline in full-time academic jobs likely exacerbated the effect of the surplus visibility of female and minority faculty members at this time, as “[f]or those who have long been in positions of dominance, any space that minorities occupy appears excessive and the voices they raise sound loud and offensive” (Patai A52). Again, Reed’s proposal fails to address the structural issues at the root of the PC wars even though it explicitly identifies PC as a structural issue stemming from institutional racism. This failure demonstrates the effect of PC’s transformation into common sense, though, where its objective existence as a standalone phenomenon rather than its function as an ideological response to specific institutional and economic challenges limits the ways in which a response
can be offered. Puttbutt’s and the faux-multiculturalists’ careerism is part of a complex network of decisions about funding for higher education, the influence of outside donors like the Olin Foundation, and an economic doctrine that stresses casualization of labour as an essential component of fiscal responsibility. Without a movement between the local anxieties of academe that PC interacts with, the larger conditions that create them, and the multicultural society in the act of becoming that the novel ends with, *Japanese by Spring*’s critique remains blunted.

Nothing in the novel’s resolution allows the reader to imagine a Glosso university, and the unresolved issues of academe make such an institution seem unlikely and inevitably compromised. This prevents *Japanese by Spring* from landing the death blow to PC as a concept it so clearly sets up.

Though *Japanese by Spring*’s satirical framework and its heterodox view of PC make it worthy of attention, Downing’s *Perfect Agreement* offers perhaps the most complete portrait of the PC university with it supposed white male victims and its declining academic standards. Roth’s *The Human Stain* is the more well-known novel tackling this issue, winning the 2001 PEN/Faulkner prize, being reviewed by influential critics and authors like Michiko Kakutani and Lorrie Moore in the *New York Times* and other major publications, and gaining further attention for its unintended resonance with the life of Anatole Broyard, the important book critic for the *New York Times* who passed as white for his entire professional career (and for whom Philip Roth was one of “the favored few” to be singled out for praise) (Staples WK12). Roth’s take on PC in the novel is lazy and meagre, though, managing to avoid simple paraphrase of the invective that littered editorial pages during the PC debates, but also largely in line with the views of cultural conservatives like Bloom. This connection makes sense, as Roth studied at the University of Chicago in the early 1950s, earning an M.A. during the period in which the
Chicago Great Books program and famed political science professor Leo Strauss helped to provide the ideological framework for an influential strain of American conservatism and “return[ing] to Chicago to teach freshman composition from 1956 to 1958,” sharing with Silk a foundation as “a 1950s-educated humanist” (Boddy 42). Ultimately, though, the novel’s laziness in its engagement with PC makes it, as Lorrie Moore notes in her review, “the sort of tirade . . . that is far drearer and more intellectually constricted than political correctness itself” (Moore 7). The Human Stain’s reliance on “a cartoon of academe” derails the provocative questions Silk should raise about “how to reconcile race, class, and gender in the early twenty-first century,” preventing any serious and sustained engagement with PC (Tierney 169). If Perfect Agreement is not quite perfect, it feels far more intellectually engaged than The Human Stain, and its premise is more believable. In this sense, Perfect Agreement acts as a more accurate register of the anxieties about race on display in the PC debates, and does a much better job of capturing how those anxieties extended to liberals on campuses as well as to conservatives.

Perfect Agreement focuses on Mark Sternum, Director of Writing Programs at fictional McClintock College in Boston. Sternum’s chief academic responsibility is administering a basic writing skills test to all incoming students and transfers to McClintock that students must pass before beginning a professional activity related to his/her major. Though “[n]inety to 95 percent of all incoming freshmen fail two or more sections of the test,” Sternum briefly becomes a celebrity among the anti-PC crowd when he is fired for refusing to pass a black female student, Rashelle Whippet, who may not be literate (Downing 52). Upheld by critics of affirmative action as “the Standard Bearer for Standards,” despite his own distaste for “the angry so-called White people who are waging a campaign against political correctness . . . to intimidate good people and to disguise their distaste for behaviors and institutional policies that acknowledge our place
in history,” Sternum parleys his newfound notoriety into a faculty position at McClintock’s more prestigious rival before he is convinced to return to McClintock by the president, who points to the good work that he does with teaching students remedial skills (Downing 4). In an ambiguous conclusion, Whippet is passed into the school’s Social Work program despite failing out of her student teaching placement, and Sternum reflects on whether McClintock’s aggressive commitment to affirmative action has helped Whippet or simply set her up for more failure.

*Perfect Agreement*’s position on affirmative action and its effects on Whippet’s education and future opportunities is not unique. D’Souza makes a similar argument in *Illiberal Education* and the widespread sense of PC as sensitivity training or political indoctrination also echoes the idea that those initiatives and reforms labeled PC serve particular ideological causes more than they address student needs. However, while Downing’s novel leaves readers with troubling questions about minority students and educational reforms designed to help them succeed, its agnosticism about PC is miles away from D’Souza’s simplistic claim that policies like affirmative action hurt those they are intended to help. Sternum’s fear that Whippet is not alone in having been failed by the system because of the inherent inequalities in the current education system is both poignant and uncomfortable (unlike some of the ideologues of the PC wars, Sternum demonstrably cares about students and their welfare), but ultimately fails to point to any systemic issue other than support for an imperfect affirmative action program. Nevertheless, in its portrait of Sternum’s career immediately post-McClintock, *Perfect Agreement* reifies the very causal links between PC and white male victimization that Sternum attempts to refute.

In its addressing of affirmative action and the concept of the white male victim, *Perfect Agreement* engages with a voluminous body of articles, studies, tracts, and invective that ties the problems of academe (like casualization and underemployment) directly to affirmative action
programs, not as an unintended consequence of their operations, but as a targeted assault on white males. Throughout the 1990s, the argument that whites are the victims of “the victims,” denied jobs and advancement in favour of less qualified or capable applicants and coworkers because of their inability to claim oppression gained increasing traction and support. Frederick Lynch, for example, author of *Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action* (1991), argued that affirmative action is misunderstood as “an equally qualified white male competing for a position with an equally qualified female or minority candidates,” when the reality is that there exists “outright preference of less qualified (or unqualified) women or minorities,” and thus “white males [a]re being injured by affirmative action” for lack of reciprocal recognition (“Surviving” 44, 45). Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* claimed in a 1994 editorial that PC rendered the white male “the only person who is truly guilty” in contemporary society, with “few defenders anywhere,” unlike the trendy “victims” embraced by the PC crowd (“Frightful” A22). Focusing on the conditions on the contemporary campus, Richard Blow, then a doctoral candidate at Harvard, describes in an article for *The New Republic* a dominant conception of the white male as someone who “ha[s] nothing of value to impart” (32). He contrasts his situation as a white male (which he claims disadvantages him professionally) with that of female and minority students, who “get into graduate school over a white male with equal or better qualifications” by virtue of their race and sex, and who “are so much in demand they’re courted like baseball’s free agents” because “[m]erit is moot . . . one can teach only what one is” (Blow 32). Though hyperbolic at best, if not outright dishonest, such reportage was among the most effective rhetorical tools available to the anti-PC movement, as it provided an easily digestible narrative of systemic, targeted discrimination against whites. Though liberals and leftists would claim that affirmative action was unable to target specific whites to discriminate
against, the anti-PC narrative felt more real, because virtually everyone could relate to the experience of not getting a job that s/he believed s/he deserved.

*Perfect Agreement* complicates this narrative by having Sternum actively reject such claims to victimhood, despite continued attempts to extend that label to him. Nor does the novel allow the concept of academic standards and the question of how they are to be enforced to go unexamined. Sternum’s firing is complicated and ideological, but also somewhat understandable. The witch hunt aspect of PC, what conservatives delighted in call the McCarthyism of the left, initially dominates the narrative, as Sternum’s actual conduct with Whippet—he displays near-heroic levels of patience in working with her on the test question-by-question, and in some cases word-by-word—is beyond reproach. Taken in a vacuum, his decision ultimately to fail Whippet, preventing her from moving on in her education program and beginning her required student teaching practicum, is similarly beyond reproach: the woman’s literacy skills are virtually nonexistent and Sternum has serious doubts about her ability to succeed in a classroom in a teaching role without further remedial education. That Whippet then, under direction and with considerable assistance from her academic advisor, writes a letter claiming that Sternum “show[ed] his prejudgism to me” by failing her does seem unfair, particularly given that she is then put into the student teaching practicum and Sternum is fired (Downing 56). Equally problematic is the question of whether Whippet wanted to accuse Sternum of racism at all, leaving him a voicemail message that suggests her academic advisor had pressured her into writing the letter and later admitting that she knew the accusation was false when she made it.

The hearing called by the college’s president would seem at first to confirm every conservative horror story about kangaroo courts and special evidence for the preferred victims, though it actually builds the framework for the novel’s understated defence of affirmative action,
at least in some form. As the events leading to Whippet’s failing grade are recounted, Sternum is repeatedly told that his problem is “‘a writing issue . . . a spelling thing . . . a skill test’” (Downing 56). At his hearing, Sternum argues Whippet “could earn her teaching credential and a bachelor’s degree without ever learning to spell at almost any other college or university in the United States” in order to foreground McClintock’s reputation as an academically rigorous school (Downing 56). However, he eventually comes to reject that McClintock’s reputation and prestige is incompatible with its actions when it “‘turn[s] a young woman who could not spell the word juic[e] into a symbol for their college’” (Downing 262). Sternum acknowledges that “[he] had failed [Whippet]. Her adviser had failed her. The Administration had failed her” in her goal of becoming literate and receiving an education and by repeatedly putting her in situations where she would fail: accepting an illiterate woman into an academically rigorous college, excusing her from necessary remedial work, and placing her into a classroom as a student-teacher with students whose literacy skills surpassed her own (Downing 76). However, he does register that “another setback of a semester or two in her academic career would defeat Rashelle,” that a woman “raising three kids . . . [working] a couple of part-time jobs, [who] could only afford her telephone for three weeks a month” was unlikely to recover from failing out of higher education or have the opportunity to pursue a degree at a different school (other than a predatory for-profit), and that there is a high “probability that [Whippet’s] education was not singularly bad” but rather just an example of one of “the 96 million fruits of our labor” (Downing 56, 136, 82). As he wonders “[o]n whose shoulders might she have stood and reached her goal,” the answer becomes clear (Downing 76). Though others might dismiss it as PC in its purest form, Sternum believes that McClintock “had been right to fire [him]” because of his failure to enact the college’s guiding principle, that “we ought to bend over backward to help people whose lives are
hard” (Downing 261, 4). When he concludes after the hearing that “in America, it is always a question of Race,” what initially seems like an excuse when viewed as part of a monolithic equation (black = victim = special treatment) becomes increasingly more nuanced throughout (Downing 58).

The initial beneficiary of the firing is Sternum, who achieves a heretofore unimaginable level of professional success following the hearing, as others thrust upon him the mantle of white male victim of PC. For all its nuance regarding affirmative action and academic standards, *Perfect Agreement*’s discussion of academic labour is less successful, falling to the same trap as *Japanese by Spring* and accepting the anti-PC narrative as some version of truth and not pushing beyond to the anxieties and their causes of which that narrative takes advantage. Where he had been a well-liked but not particularly in-demand faculty member at McClintock, following his dismissal Sternum is “invited to apply for openings at three universities and four colleges,” and at his first interview he is “offered . . . a tenure-track job as associate professor of rhetoric before [he] s[its] down” (Downing 5, 10). His undeniable success confirms other characters’ anxieties about officially sanctioned discrimination against whites even as they misunderstand the roots of those anxieties, as when his interviewer urges Sternum to accept the position quickly before “‘a woman with a degree in a real discipline’” or “‘a Nigerian poetess with a linguistics degree from the Sorbonne on a postdoc at Yale’” takes the job from him (Downing 11). Curiously, neither would be a surprising choice over Sternum, as he “‘basically teach[es] spelling’” and is looking for a job in one of the most competitive areas of the country (8). However, Sternum is a white male, not a woman or a Nigerian poetess, and the implication seems to be that he has earned his chance to capitalize on a scandal, whereas neither of the women would have earned their superior credentials.
As with the literature on white male victims discussed above, these claims stem from a hyperbolic approach to the data. Concerns about placement in academic jobs were valid in the 1990s. Between 1987 and 1997, over 195,000 faculty positions were created, of which approximately 77% were part-time. Comparatively, between 1977 and 1987, of the approximately 115,000 new positions created, roughly 65% were full-time (Snyder and Dillow 418). Roughly a decade after achieving a record of 2,075 jobs advertised in English in 1988-89, just 1,121 jobs were advertised in 1997-98, the fifth of six straight years in which fewer than 1,200 jobs were advertised, a number that had been surpassed in every year since 1970 previously (MLA “JIL 2013-14” 6). Similarly, concerns about white males’ job prospects started from a place of truth: new white male PhDs in English had just a 38% placement rate into tenure-track positions in 1996-97, while new minority PhDs had a 51% placement rate, numbers in keeping with trends established over the preceding decade, and as a whole, white males had dropped from accounting for 62% of all full-time faculty members in 1987 to 54% in 1997 (Laurence “Employment” 63, 65; Zimbler 134-35; Snyder 2000). Far from a targeted attack on white males, though, these numbers reflect a more proportionate faculty developing out of shifting enrollment numbers, as white males accounted for 31.4% of all students in 1997, down from 39.5% in in 1980, while white women continued to outpace them (as they have since 1980) at 39.4% in 1997, and all minorities (driven largely by increases in the number of Hispanic and Asian students) has increased to 26% of all students from 16.1% in 1980 (Snyder 2001). Indeed, despite their elevated placement rate, minority PhDs still accounted for less than 20% of those placed into tenure-track positions in English in 1996-97, and across higher education, minorities accounted for just 13.5% of all faculty members in 1997 (Laurence “Employment” 65; Snyder 2000).
Taken in context, then, these numbers offer a much clearer explanation for why PC was able to take hold: there were significantly fewer full-time jobs and a more diverse student population meant that a lower percentage of those jobs would go to white males than in the past.\textsuperscript{lxiii} Instead of rejecting the casualization and “right-sizing” agenda (PR speak for downsizing to cut costs), which created some of the anxieties that allowed PC to flourish, universities, departments, and professional bodies actively contributed to it by emphasizing a need to reduce the production of PhDs and funnel existing PhDs into non-academic careers. This approach, what Marc Bousquet has termed “job-market theory”—a kind of “accidental neoliberalism” that dismissively simplifies casualization of the academic labour force via a narrative of supply (job candidates) and demand (jobs) being out of balance, an issue with a “quick, technocratic fix”—that accompanied the push for “good business practices” that stressed “accountability” and “respect for profits” gave the market an independent identity that ties the hands of those technocrats supposedly overseeing its functioning (19, 20).\textsuperscript{lxiv} The first recommendation of the Final Report of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment (1997), for example, despite the report noting that “excellence in education for present and future students \textit{depends on an increase in full-time tenure-track faculty positions},” is for departments to engage in self-study, to reduce the number of graduate students admitted and PhDs produced by the department, and to focus on preparing students for non-academic careers, behaviours dictated by market conditions (S. Gilbert et al. 28, 30, 39-41).\textsuperscript{lxv} As the PC wars took hold, casualization and other productivity improvement measures were touted as ways to enforce the kind of accountability that would prevent PC zealots from indoctrinating students and silencing dissenting points of view. Radicals were much less of a problem and capable of significantly less damage without tenure.
Regardless of the misplaced anxieties that lead to the offer, Sternum accepts the new job and does his best to temper any suggestion that he has been done wrong by McClintock. In a direct appeal at the novel’s outset, Sternum warns the reader:

Before you entertain any gripes on my behalf, be aware that I will be named an associate professor of literature or the humanities (so that the students in my basic skills classes do not suspect they are being forced to do remedial work); I will be paid forty or fifty thousand dollars per academic year (not your standard year—classes meet two or three time a week and there are two fourteen-week semesters; do the math); and along with the attendant privileges, technology, support services, and benefits, I will be given parking right in the city, where off-street spaces are otherwise sold or leased as condominiums. (Downing 5-6)

Sternum’s disavowal of sympathy here rings hollow not just because it plays into some of the most pervasive anti-intellectual arguments about the professoriate and the life of the mind, namely that it requires no work and is therefore grossly overcompensated, but also because he leaves unexplored the implications of the benefits to his position that he lists. Aside from his new title, none of them are exclusive, or even primarily related to, higher education. He could be discussing any corporate benefits package, and it is the distance between the ethos of McClintock, this drive to help those in need, and the increasingly corporatized landscape in which it finds itself that should connect the novel’s nuanced discussion of affirmative action’s purpose, achievements, and flaws to its send up of the white male victim narrative. That Sternum has access to such a world, and that, statistically speaking, white males like Sternum are significantly more likely to have access (both as students and as faculty) would link the novel’s small-p politics on the individual level to a big-p Political view of PC as a structural
phenomenon. As long as a spelling issue is foregrounded and the job market is represented as a battleground for identity politics, the rhetoric of white males versus “the victims” remains seductive. The drama of race has little, in the end, to do with academic standards. When schools like McClintock’s neighbour, Massachusetts Commonwealth University, “recruit wealthy international students to bypass affirmative action quotas,” the motivation has little to do with spelling skills (Downing 5). The changes in higher education driving this search for wealthy students who can serve as ready sources of revenue also drive the anxieties about race that Perfect Agreement, The Human Stain, and other academic novels of PC explore. Without placing the operations of the anti-PC movement into this chain, though, PC stands as a self-sufficient explanation of the state of the contemporary university because its answers deflect people away from the problems they are trying to solve into imagined ones that can be resolved by combating PC.

More numerous than novels focused on affirmative action and academic standards, novels that discuss speech and conduct codes and the bureaucracy of PC are the most common form of PC novel. One particular offshoot, the sexual harassment novel, has become “the dominant plot of the Professorroman” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Showalter 100). Though “representation[s] of the male college professor as philandering cad” have become “a permanent fixture in academic fiction,” the sexual harassment novel in the wake of the PC wars offers an update from something like Bernard Malamud’s A New Life (1961), where the philandering cad largely escaped consequences, in favour of narratives in which the “cads are now starting to get their come-uppance” (Johnson 28). Typically, in these sexual harassment novels, “male professors are seduced and not just abandoned but denounced and destroyed by female students . . . [who are] predatory and deceitful . . . [and by] a rigged system
of judgment controlled by a network of militantly hostile women” (Showalter 111, 114).

Though the number of sexual harassment novels published over the past three decades makes selecting any one novel as representative of the genre difficult, *Blue Angel* is the most successful (finalist for the National Book Award) and most fully realised—longer than the sexual harassment subplot in *The Corrections*, more complex than *Professor Romeo*, and less inclined to descend into farce than *Mustang Sally*. *Blue Angel* also has the distinction of being completely focused on PC as an existing force on campuses that needs to be exposed and destroyed, free of both Reed’s satirical energy and Downing’s nuanced reflections.

As with *Perfect Agreement*, *Blue Angel* focuses on a middle-aged, white professor who, having run afoul of the PC crowd, is subjected an absurd trial that-is-not a-trial and turned into a scapegoat for the hypersensitivity of the contemporary student and faculty member. Unlike *Perfect Agreement*, though, there is no recognition of good intentions, however misguided or incomplete, in *Blue Angel*. To the end, the novel condemns PC as a witch hunt that both undermines education and gives victims near unlimited powers. Ted Swenson is a creative writing professor at Euston College in rural Vermont who is years into a rewrite of Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black* that he no longer has the desire to finish. Struggling with professional boredom on all fronts as he faces another semester of uninspired student writing, he becomes drawn to a student named Angela Argo who is working on a novel called *Eggs* about a high school student sleeping with her teacher. Argo flatters Swenson, who quickly becomes obsessed with her, and after a failed sexual encounter (memorialized in a less-than-flattering chapter in Argo’s novel) she asks him to show her work to his editor. Though Swenson is hesitant to do so, he brings up the topic with his editor, who passes on looking at the manuscript. Furious at Swenson for a perceived lack of effort, Argo secretly records Swenson admitting to having sex
with her (though claiming to be unaware of the *quid pro quo* arrangement Argo mentions on the recording) and she initiates sexual harassment proceedings against him. Disillusioned by Argo’s betrayal and frustrated by a hearing in which he is unable to present his side of events while witnesses (including Argo herself) openly lie, Swenson leaves Euston for a presumably brighter future.

Though *Blue Angel* is not unique as an academic novel treating sexual harassment, it is responding to the issue within a very specific context and to several generic conventions of the academic novel. The basic outline of *Blue Angel*’s plot might be the archetype for Showalter’s own description in *Faculty Towers*, but the subgenre of the sexual harassment novel has evolved since *Professor Romeo*. Though that novel is an almost direct response to Billie Wright Dziech and Linda Weiner’s *The Lecherous Professor* (1984) in its cause and effect relationship between increasing numbers of female students and administrators and increasing cases of sexual harassment as authorities within the university hierarchy (who are now more likely to be female than in the immediate postwar period) took the issue seriously, *Blue Angel* has additional touchstones. Two sensational sexual harassment trials during the 1990s—the Thomas-Hill and Clinton-Lewinsky cases—are much more direct references than Dziech and Wiener’s study of campus sexual harassment because of these trials’ importance to the PC wars. The Thomas-Hill trial, as discussed with *Japanese by Spring*, was often framed as feminists forcing an issue without regard for truth, evidence, or the consequences of such accusations. Similarly, Clinton’s well-publicized infidelity and the relatively harsh judgement of Monica Lewinsky by the public created backlash against the charges, particularly from other white males who saw Clinton’s crime as an exaggerated procedural offence (maybe the encounter just should not have happened in his office seemed to be the takeaway for many) rather than as any particular severe
wrongdoing.

Blue Angel’s focus on sexual harassment bring its narrative into conflict with what conservatives called “sexual correctness,” a particular strain of PC demanding conformity with “approved” (usually feminist) understandings of sexuality and conduct. lxxvii Opponents of this so-called sexual correctness, like Roiphe and Christina Hoff Sommers, were especially critical of what they saw as a concession to the idea of women as passive victims at the same that “the awesome complexity of intimate discourse between the sexes [is reduced] to the banality of ‘no means no’” (N. Gilbert A14). The net result of such cases, bolstered by the work of figures like D’Souza and Kimball on one hand (with their talk of a victim’s revolution and war against white males) and Katie Roiphe and Prose herself on the other, challenging the idea of a sexual harassment crisis as an invented crisis driven by an “everybody’s doing it” kind of attitude. lxxviii In an essay for the New York Times, Prose declared the sexual harassment crisis to be “a nasty bubble of Puritanism” driven by “feminists, academics, [and] intellectuals” (“Bad Behavior” SM36). Throughout, conservatives and freedom of speech activists fixated on the speech and conduct codes put in place at many universities to try and regulate student behaviour. Condemned as misguided as best and a tool of political oppression by others--Harvey Silverglate, for example, claimed that “only students [and faculty] with politically incorrect views will be charged and convicted” by such codes—they (along with student-led hearings) became one of the hallmarks of PC’s bureaucratic machinery (A18). After the rush of concern about their constitutionality in the late 1980s and a few sensationalist cases in the early 1990s (reports of which often distorted or manipulated details to serve an anti-PC agenda), though, most codes were modified to avoid “infring[ing] on rights . . . [and] mak[ing] the colleges themselves look silly” (Shea A37). Campus groups would continue fighting against such codes,
but the defanged version that was approved on most campuses was little threat to freedom of speech or any other constitutional right.

As with affirmative action, though, these speech and conduct codes were a necessary attempt to manage an increasingly diverse population on campus, in preparation for negotiating an increasingly diverse population throughout the United States. Between 1975 and 1999, women increased from roughly 45% of the total student population to over 56% (90.5% of total student enrollment growth) at the same time that the proportion of female, full-time faculty members rose even more sharply (Snyder and Dillow). This increase (along with a similar, though smaller, one among minority students and faculty) entailed a relatively dramatic shift in the demographics of the student and faculty populations, one that caused both logistical and political problems for higher education. Conservatives might denounce the form that freshmen orientations took in the 1990s, for example—as in Heather Mac Donald’s 1992 article for the Wall Street Journal, “Welcome, Freshman! Oppressor or Oppressed?”—but managing diversity became an important mandate for the university. Crucially, corporate demands imposed this mandate more than educational concerns, as the business world pushed for “a well-governed integration” in which “[d]ifferences are encouraged so long as basic rules and values” are adhered to by all, permitting “a more inclusive, delicate policing” (Newfield “What Was” 122, 127, 128). Surplus visibility alone does not account for the backlash that accompanied the attempts at responding to this population. In a way that affirmative action novels do not quite capture, sexual harassment novels like Blue Angel, which buy into the white male victim narrative, demonstrate the supposed corrosive effect of this victimization on the character of white males. If anything, this narrative has gained greater purchase in American culture since the turn of the century and so a novel like Blue Angel in which its crystallization can be observed
deserves closer scrutiny.

As perhaps the archetypal example of the sexual harassment novel, *Blue Angel*’s protagonist is set up as an academic everyman to whom these events happen because he is a part of a group whose power and influence have steadily declined under the influence of the officially sanctioned victims who benefit from PC. Prose deliberately set out to achieve such an effect with *Blue Angel*, noting in an interview that she sought to “‘take the male predator and turn him into a blustering, victimized professor’” in order to demonstrate that increased awareness of sexual harassment was in fact “‘sexual hostility, real gender warfare—this feeling that guys can’t be trusted’” (qtd. in Traver C5). As Jesse Kavadlo points out in his study of sexual harassment novels of the Clinton era, according to the standard narrative, the protagonists “deserve the reader’s pity, while the academic world deserves contempt” (Kavadlo 12). Critical readings of *Blue Angel* bear out Kavadlo’s statement, characterizing Swenson as “the sort of commonsensical, happy-go-lucky Jim of a professor you might expect to find in an ivy-covered novel by either one of the Amises” or “an entirely understandable, and even likable, fellow” who lives a “perfectly normal life” (Levi BR3; Tierney 169-70. Swenson exemplifies middle-class respectability: he loves his wife and attempts to keep the spark of romance alive, while in less intimate moments, he and his wife discuss their days at work, their car repairs, and their relationship with their college-aged daughter. Perhaps even more important to this characterisation, Swenson is good in the classroom, but not remarkably so. He likes his students, even “sincerely wishe[s] he could give his students what they want: talent, fame, money, a job,” but he fails as often as he succeeds (Prose 3). As with anti-affirmative action arguments and their construction of the white male victim of PC, like Mark Sternum in *Perfect Agreement*, this presentation is an effective rhetorical strategy, particularly when combined with outrage about
speech and conduct codes and divorced from PC’s wider context.

The boredom that Swenson feels in Blue Angel caused by his own professional failings, his students’ uninspired work, and his colleagues’ excessive politeness and guardedness lest they cause offence is not simply a PC-derived malaise. Swenson is clearly bothered by language policing, which he considers an infantilizing practice, but it seems to bother him more that the people who accept its existence or even celebrate its necessity are his colleagues. At a dinner party with the dean and several other teachers from his department, Swenson’s frustrations boil over and he unleashes a profanity-laced tirade, demanding that they:

- do something . . . for these wimps, these . . . whiners bitching about sexual harassment. Lock them in a room and shout dirty words at them until they grow up. . . . Nothing fancy or kinky. Ordinary, honorable, time-tested Anglo-Saxonisms. We’d be doing them a big favor, educationally, morally, spiritually, helping them mature faster than if we coddle them, indulge every whim and neurosis. (Prose 107)

That Swenson’s words are not met with the applause they seek to generate for his stand against PC confirms to him his colleague’s cowardice. Beyond the forces of PC that metaphorically silence the faculty and Euston (and literally silence him at the sexual harassment hearing, at which he is not permitted to speak with or respond to any of the witnesses), larger issues linger. As with other novels like Richard Russo’s Straight Man or Alex Kudera’s Fight for Your Long Day, there is a sense of disappointment with fate, a deep-set dissatisfaction with one’s ultimate destination, that fuels Swenson’s frustration. Euston, though charming enough, is not an elite academic institution and it is relatively isolated, both from major urban centres in Vermont and from the larger traffic of culture. In this way, Blue Angel connects the sexual harassment novel to
“the shrinking horizons of the educated middle class over the past three decades” as part of the academic novel’s general function as “‘anxiety narratives’ . . . [that] portray . . . the managed professional anxiously negotiating his or her way through postmodern institutions. They show the tensions not of entry but of established position in adult life—not of striving but of trying to hold onto one’s perch, whether at work or at home, despite obstacles lining one’s precarious path” (Williams “Rise” 576, 581). The same malaise ultimately fuels the adjunct novel, but where in that case its function is to point to the loss of earlier models of professionalism and conceptions of an academic career, here it is to mourn the declining cultural hegemony of the white male.

*Blue Angel* also underscores financial anxieties for colleges and universities as institutions that make them vulnerable to charges of insensitivity of any kind that might require monetary recompense. At a faculty assembly to open a new school year, the Dean of Euston, Francis Bentham, reminds the faculty of the school’s policy on sexual harassment, framing the discussion’s importance in terms of “‘the current zeitgeist,’” which Swenson’s wife cynically glosses as “[t]he college’s fear of litigation . . . one expensive lawsuit could push Euston—with its alarmingly tiny endowment—over the edge” (Prose 21-22). The push for putting structures like speech and conduct codes in place, along with diversity training, modified orientation activities, and other “PC initiatives” came to academe from the corporate world, as administrators at institutions “closely analyzed litigation originating in the workplace” and worried that “[i]n a vicious cycle all too familiar from the tort arena, more settlements [would] breed more lawsuits” (Dziech and Weiner xiv; Kontorovich A12). Private colleges, which are more reliant upon their endowment income, must protect themselves from such a cycle and Euston, which would have a small alumni base and probably a relatively small fundraising
footprint compared to comparable private schools in more populous states must be particularly
cognizant of this fact. Though Bentham attempts to keep the assembly somewhat light in tone,
comparing the pamphlet outlining the college’s sexual harassment policy to “‘updates on the
health plan and cafeteria hours. All of which one tosses straightaway in the trash,’” Swenson
finds the lecture degrading and condescending, the Dean a “punitive pediatrician shipped over
from England to cure the rude American children of their bad behaviour” (Prose 21). He is
particularly critical of the way that Bentham moves from “clear prohibitions” to “the fuzzy area
of the hostile workplace, the atmosphere of intimidation,” which seems to give licence to the
“wimps” and “whiners” who he feels have given rise to such issues in the first place and turns
what used to be “a perk that went with the job” into a crime (Prose 22). The prohibitions also
seem to have been drawn with little regard for the act of teaching, which Swenson characterizes
as “something erotic . . . all that information streaming back and forth like some . . . bodily
fluid” (Prose 22). To make “[e]very classroom a lion’s den, every teacher a Daniel” is antithetical
to the purpose of the institution and, crucially, even those proposing the code know it, as the dean
references “‘warfare’” and “‘witch hunters ready to burn one at the stake for the sin of smacking
one’s lips at the wrong Greek torso’” (Prose 23). In the end, though, this does not matter, as the
college’s fear of litigation means that accepting PC is the way to go.

At the core, this means that the machinery is put in place to take sexual harassment
seriously as pretext for the persecution of those who are not politically correct. Swenson already
seems to be in something of a self-destructive cycle before his affair with Argo, drinking too
much, fighting with colleagues, and going blank during classes, so he becomes a somewhat
unsurprising target of the PC machinery. Throughout the novel, discussions of PC allow Prose to
reference her own writings on the topic, dropping in phrases that echo with the content of her
essays including references to Puritans and widespread accusations of repression. The hearing scene at the end of the novel is Prose’s most explicit moment of moralizing, though. That this is gender warfare against males is confirmed for Swenson (and Prose) by the presence on the hearing committee of Lauren Healy, “the English Department specialist in the feminist misreading of literature and acting head of the Faculty-Student Women’s Alliance,” whose goal he imagines to be “announc[ing] their triumph over another male oppressor, [as] one small step along the path toward a glorious future” (Prose 20-21, 314). For Swenson, the somewhat Kafkaesque proceedings—he can be spoken about, but not spoken; he is not on trial, but witnesses are called against him and evidence is produced supporting the charge of sexual harassment. He is forced to listen to a “trial” that “would be instantly thrown out of a real court” (Shea A38). Faced with this philosophy, Swenson realizes that his belief in his students’ abilities to be “real people,” capable of complex decisions about their emotional and sexual lives—to be agents in the world, essentially—will be considered “incorrect” regardless because PC, in the eyes of its critics, replaces agency and responsibility with the easy solution of victimhood. Swenson, in contrast, considers his failing to have been “see[ing] one’s student as a real person,” which is beyond the relatively narrow understanding of appropriate attitudes and behaviours prescribed by sexual correctness (Prose 267). He leaves the hearing feeling no guilt, instead feeling “glad to be out of [Euston’s] future and into his own,” a future that leaves behind the intolerance and hypocrisy masked by PC (Prose 314).

For a critical reader, Swenson’s victory feels very easy and it is tempting just to say that Blue Angel is wrong about speech and conduct codes and be done with the novel. For all its infuriating tendencies, Blue Angel remains a useful novel through which to think about the functions of PC in relation to the emerging corporate university of the twenty-first century.
During her climactic fight with Swenson, Argo brings up their comparative levels of financial security and the difference in how they can each afford to act as justification for her manipulative behaviour. Comparing his “‘nice fat teaching job’” and “‘tenure forever and ever’” to the very real possibility that she will graduate only to find herself back in her hometown “‘working in a drugstore’” (Prose 236). Much like the anxieties about the institution’s finances and health that dance around the edges of the novel’s introduction, Argo’s comments here introduce a much larger set of issues just outside the frame. Specifically, Argo’s sense of a limited future despite her best efforts, the idea that she is already constrained in what she can do and so must resort to desperate measures in an attempt to make good on her talents points to what Jeffrey Williams has called the pedagogy of debt, wherein “the young [are] not . . . a special group to be exempted or protected from the market, but [are] already fair game in the market,” solidifying their relationship to the “realm of stress, worry, and pressure . . . with each monthly payment” (“Pedagogy” 127, 131). If, as Althusser claimed, the education system is a tool used by the ruling class to reproduce existing social relationships by teaching “the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for . . . [to] be ‘steeped’ in this ideology in order to perform their tasks ‘conscientiously,’” then debt has been one of the key tools by which the education system has done for the current neoliberal regime (132-33). Debt is at the heart of neoliberal social relations, with the “indebted man” its ideal subject given the way that debt structures “his actions, his behavior . . . [according to] the debt he has entered into. . . . You are free insofar as you assume the way of life . . . compatible with reimbursement” (Lazzarato 31). Thus, rather than the morals and good behaviours regulated by speech and conduct codes or the flashes of unrestrained difference that supposedly animated PC, it is debt that most effectively manages student
diversity, converting almost all contemporary students into the indebted man or woman. Here, then, is the crisis on American campuses growing louder and more urgent throughout the 1990s, one that points to those same socioeconomic factors whose workings in the university the PC wars would obscure.

In thinking about the PC wars and how anti-PC rhetoric evolved, it is crucial to remember ideology’s function as an explanatory device connected to dominant cultural practices and attitudes in the service of hegemonic social relations and institutions. In other words, ideology justifies what people do and believe and how those actions and beliefs are organized on a collective basis without requiring the spontaneous assent typically required of hegemonic structures. Ideology does not tell people what to do or think (activities more accurately identified with propaganda), but rather it defines the boundaries of acceptable thought and action (typically through the concept of what is possible, realistic, or reasonable) as those avenues that will reproduce existing social relationships or institutions because of their supposed necessity in delivering some benefit (e.g., delivering profits, ensuring law and order, protecting personal and property rights, etc.). Nostalgic invocations of the Golden Age university, which is roughly synonymous with the Cold War research university, are in this sense ideological constructs designed to maintain certain kinds of faculty activities and attitudes in the service of particular political and economic institutions, like liberal democracy and free market capitalism. To the extent that material realities in the 1980s and 1990s could not sustain belief in this construct, though—full-time jobs were scarce, government funding gave way increasingly to private and corporate funding, and students saw dwindling benefits and economic opportunities despite mounting debt levels—additional ideological framing was required. Here, PC emerges as a threat to exactly those areas of the university (administration, funding, teaching) that most
challenge this nostalgic appeal to the Golden Age university. In so doing, the PC wars allowed for a redefinition of the ideological justification for the higher education system, one in keeping with the emerging hegemony of neoliberalism, while also highlighting the gaps whose presence exposes the artifice of existing ideological structures.

The PC novel’s value in investigating this ideology and its function, then, stems from the way it traces the emergence of neoliberalism as the structuring principle of the corporate university through the PC wars and anti-PC rhetoric as a supplement to these nostalgic appeals to earlier forms of the university. The neoconservative attacks on higher education of the mid-to-late 1980s were inherently nostalgic in their depictions of a university before the students (and teachers) found politics while at the same time being unabashedly political. Bloom’s concerns about the university that emerged post-1968 were framed by a concern about the future of liberal democracy should the Great Books be displaced from the centre of American cultural life. Similarly, Bennett’s fears about lost cultural inheritance caused by multiculturalism and overspecialization were a direct precursor of the “war of civilizations” rhetoric that emerged during the first Gulf War and that exploded after 9/11. Where tension emerges between their accounts of what the university should be (and once was) and current realities, though, it is between the failures of these arguments to address economic and political changes that render the university to which these figures implicitly want to return an impossibility. PC ultimately comes to serve a dual ideological function in academic novels of the period: to reanimate the possibility of a return to the imagined conservative Golden Age university (one that is not beholden to contemporary ideas about access and representation) following the elimination of PC and to recast the economic and political changes that cannot be explained by the conservative vision of the Golden Age university into language and concepts that they can address through their attacks.
on PC. When *Japanese by Spring* suggests that affirmative action policies are not enough to address systemic racism in university hiring and promotion practices or *Perfect Agreement* demonstrates that an ahistorical approach to academic standards can further disadvantage those who have not been prepared to meet those standards, PC forecloses these narratives’ connections to questions about poverty and economic opportunity or institutional racism and cultural representation. Instead, the issues in these novels are effects of PC, as it denies students and professors the chance to exist within a truly meritocratic institution that evaluates each person fairly according to the same criteria. If the Golden Age cannot return because of PC, then neoliberalism appears to offer an alternative path to the realization of its principles by short circuiting the justifications for affirmative action, multiculturalism, and other cornerstones of PC that rely on alternative conceptions of standards and values.

Now that PC has returned as a bogeyman of the right (and some of the left), it is helpful to revisit these narratives, whether they focus on speech and conduct codes or affirmative action, in order to catch the deeper anxieties creeping in around the edges. Careful readings of PC novels and PC anecdotes reveal the ways that they serve as essentially managerial tools, directing behaviour toward a larger end. These narratives not only set up, through the outrageousness of PC anecdotes and their appeals to greater oversight of university affairs, the regime of accountability that quickly became synonymous with austerity measures and other financial reform measures but also equated institutional and intellectual health with financial health, further entrenching the regime of accountability for which PC served as a landing pad. Since PC was so absurdly (and fictionally) over the top in its hold on campus life and culture, academics who would otherwise never have agreed with such an approach to managing a university and the higher education system as a whole. As anxieties about neoliberalism’s ability
to deliver on any of its social, political, or economic promises have grown since 2008, and as a future of mass automation and climate disaster approaches with increasing rapidity, PC has returned to reinforce as politically useful narratives about victimization at the hands of capital wielded by foreign hands, which disadvantages white males, working Americans, and so on. Within the academic novel, additional permutations of the new academic novel would move the anxieties animating the PC wars closer to the centre of the narrative until they could no longer be ignored. The essential ideological manoeuvre of academic novels that treat the culture wars had been defined, though, and would continue to be repeated into the twenty-first century: manufacture a threat that can then be held to account for the distance between material realities and the ideological justification for higher education’s systems and policies, allowing for a correction to the existing ideological structures.
The Life and Death of Theory in the Academic Novel

He’s hung up on theory—he thinks theory is what’s in question here, rather than the larger picture.
- John L’Heureux, The Handmaid of Desire

In her 1991 essay “Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders: Academe in the Hour of the Wolf,” originally appearing in the journal Arion, Camille Paglia—self-described gadfly, enthusiastic culture warrior, and dedicated opponent of poststructuralism—scornfully reviews David M. Halperin’s One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and John J. Winkler’s The Constraints of Desire and concludes that the humanities, overrun with French theory, have bottomed out. Though Halperin’s book receives special attention for its “tortured, bloated, meandering, pretentious, [and] confused” prose and its unabashed worship of Michel Foucault, it is but one symptom of what she sees as a larger problem (Paglia 139). Far from attempting to grapple with art, culture, and their relationship to the human experience, scholars in the humanities are now devoted to “the facile industry of high-tech criticism,” peddling politically radical ideas imported from “fossilized reactionaries” like Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan and proclaiming their allegiance to whatever hot new theory pops up during conference season (176, 186). For Paglia, the humanities now have little to do with actual learning, and even the politics that are supposed to have replaced that learning have “nothing to do with leftism or genuine politics but everything to do with good old fashioned American capitalism” (185). Somewhat understandably when faced with “[t]he collapse of the job market, due to recession and university retrenchment after the baby boom era,” scholars in the humanities have responded to charges that “academics . . . [a]re useless and dispensable” with crass “commercial self-packaging” that uses a booming theory industry to prop up demand (185). Disastrously, in attempting to sell themselves via theory, humanities scholars have cleared the way for the academic corporate raiders of Paglia’s title, “lone wolves without loyalty to their
own disciplines or institutions . . . always on the trail and on the lookout, ears up for the better job and bigger salary, the next golden fleece or golden parachute” (187). Their ascendance has made a book like Halperin’s possible, Paglia maintains, as, in an age when every “greenhorn academic” engages in “insider trading and racketeering, jockeying for power by . . . pushing their shrink-wrapped product and tooting fancy new commercial slogans,” the profession necessarily abandons its commitments to knowledge and intellectual standards in favour of “performance, networking, advertisement, cruising, hustling, glad-handing, back scratching, chitchat, [and] groupthink” (186-87). Careerism reigns in this environment, which is an unsurprising development from a group of people who she claims had been “grade-grubbing in the library and brown-nosing the senior faculty” rather than laying the foundation of learning and life experience required by true humanistic scholarship (177).

Already infamous from her bestselling first book, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (1990), Paglia’s views on “the sorry state of literary criticism” got a relatively wide airing, helping to shape a growing backlash to the supposed “theory industry” (139). Portions of her essay were excerpted on the front page of the New York Times Book Review and the essay as a whole appeared in her collection Sex, Lies, and American Culture (1992), which spent ten weeks on the bestseller list between October, 1992 and January, 1993. Adding to a litany of voices who denounced literary theory (especially deconstruction) and radical politics in the academy, including Dinesh D’Souza, Roger Kimball, and Lynne Cheney, Paglia’s rhetoric about heartless, greedy corporate raiders also resonated with a half-decade of successful biographies, novels, and films about the criminal practices and excesses of Wall Street in the 1980s. Though her analysis often relies more on the force of her rhetoric than on carefully marshalled evidence, Paglia’s claims about theory and its influence on the changing
nature of English Studies and the university as a whole are not entirely unfounded. The increasing number of conferences starting in the 1970s with their increasingly specialized topics did change what qualified an academic as a top scholar in English Studies by introducing a celebrity economy that trumpeted the accomplishments of individual “academostars” (and their associated theories) over the eternal progress of the discipline.\textsuperscript{lxix} The compression of the timeline for publishing in an academic career, with at least an article required for the possibility of employment even at schools that had not traditionally emphasized research, led to a proliferation of scholarship, at least some of which was superfluous. The collapse of the academic job system has necessitated panicked (along with pragmatic) changes in the discipline’s approach to professionalization that make concessions to market forces without much in the way of pushback. Similarly, the proclamations of radical political motives by academics—particularly those working in theory—were sometimes nothing more than so many affectations used to justify less than thorough research or argumentation, but empty political rhetoric and second-rate scholarship were not unique to the era of theory, even if it focused more attention on political allegiances than during some earlier eras of the discipline.

However, for all her useful criticisms, Paglia’s central metaphor misstates the relationship between theory, changes in the profession, and market forces, which limits her ability to produce a more general analysis of the phenomenon of theory. Indeed, perhaps the central term in her analysis, “the market,” is not interrogated at all in her lengthy essay. Her argument relies on the assumption that she knows the market is in some way antithetical to her preferred version of the humanities and trusts others to accept this point without question—much as critics of multiculturalism and affirmative action appealed to unexamined notions of “tradition” and “standards.” In Paglia’s characterization, theorists function as Gordon Gekko
types, callously buying up and wrecking disciplines within the humanities in the name of profit (be it prestige, political cachet, radical credentials, or higher salary) but ultimately with the same nihilism that Gekko espouses in Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street* (1987). The rank and file who follow their lead, she suggests, do so out of bad faith motivated by a careerism that is nurtured by the market’s newfound role in the humanities. Or, to put it another way, for Paglia (as for Oliver Stone in *Wall Street*), the problem stems from unscrupulous individuals working the system to their advantage and doing damage to things like the discipline (or democracy) through their own indiscretions, whatever kind of bad way those larger structures might already be in. The sternly moralistic tone of Paglia’s essay makes clear that theorists like Halperin have been bad and should be made to pay for their sins and the lapses they have caused in others. However, far from cannily playing the market, the majority of those in English Studies were more like Bud Fox, emulating Gordon Gekko out of a naïve belief that doing so would entail some kind of disciplinary salvation and being raided in turn by the actual Gekkos leading the corporate reshaping of higher education.

Focusing on this idea of bad behaviour or individuals exploiting a new, market-oriented humanities to advance their careers ignores the mechanisms by which such an orientation came into being and how it came to be hegemonic. Theory did not singlehandedly change the discipline and usher in an era of crass careerism. Its institutional prominence cannot be understood outside of the growing synergy between the corporate and academic worlds and the collapsing of the idea of “society” into that of “the market,” begun in earnest under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which changed the structure of higher education. In particular, there has been since the 1980s increasing emphasis by politicians and higher education administrators on the notion of the university as a training and innovation centre that is to be
profitably deployed for the benefit of business rather than as a non-profit instrument of the public
good, tasked with enlightenment, moral enrichment, or cultural preservation. Such an approach
to higher education might seem counterintuitive—the dominant conservative position in the
culture wars was often presented as a defense of just those latter qualities of higher education
that were said to be under threat from multiculturalism, affirmative action, and other “leftist”
schemes—but moral enrichment and cultural preservation were remarkably effective in
mirroring and supporting neoliberalism’s ascendance in the political and economic sphere. Just
as President Bush claimed that PC blocked schools from producing students who could “apply
the genius of the market to the needs of the nation,” theory’s connection to movements like
multiculturalism that promoted alternative theories of value was said to prevent the imposition of
market-driven “accountability” measures that would streamline and reinvigorate the humanities
(and higher education as a whole) (2). After all, when the public could choose the enduring value
of Shakespeare over those greenhorn academics’ footnotes about which Paglia complained, they
would obviously (for anti-theorists) choose the former. Not to concede this point was to behave
badly, driven by a fanaticism that was anti-market and so anti-freedom (an equivalency that also
drove the PC wars). Paglia’s essay, then, helps to set the terms on which theory was to be
understood during the culture wars inside and outside academe. Those who would argue for
theory, multiculturalism, and alternative theories of value were paradoxically required to defend
these positions using the market as a central term and ultimate arbiter. In this way, theorists and
anti-theorists alike catered to an emergent neoliberalism that they neither fully understood nor
acknowledged. The hour of the wolf was to be unkind to both groups, regardless of the amount
of market savvy English Studies felt itself to be displaying in the 1990s, and the way that the
profession (and outside observers) tended to talk about theory gives some clues as to why.
Academic novels of the 1980s and 1990s discuss theory more than almost any other subject, reflecting its diffusion throughout academic life in the humanities. In the 1980s, their treatment of theory reflected its moment of triumph, as theory exerted increasing influence over the discipline’s institutional identity, including the “regularized practices . . . the professional mandates that inflect [those] practices, and . . . the institutional locations that mediate [professors’] work” (Williams “Institutionally” 1). For the most part, these novels—exemplified by the lighthearted satire of David Lodge’s *Small World* (1984), with its jet-setting stars competing on the global conference circuit for ever higher salaries and ever lighter duties—offer a sense of theory as an escape from the stuffy academicism of the New Criticism and the middlebrowism of the Great Books of Western Civilization. Undercurrents of anxiety become clear through the stakes of these new professional identities: some will succeed, and succeed massively, but the majority will not be in a position to benefit and their fate remains undecided. This undercurrent of anxiety carries over in the theory novels of the 1990s, like Robert Grudin’s *Book* (1992), which tend to be considerably darker, reflecting the turbulence of the university’s changing place within a globalizing economy. The promise of new professional identities that began emerging from the institutionalization of theory in the 1980s has not come to pass in these novels and where it has disaster has followed for English Studies, publicly and professionally. Starting from a similar position as Paglia, these later novels’ negative portrayals of theory depends on an uncritical assumption that traditional humanism is the natural (and therefore proper) state of English Studies, what everyone would be doing but for the corrupting influence of theory, and so perpetuates the idea of professors (and the discipline) as a whole behaving irrationally and straying from the true faith. In these novels, theorists are nihilists who hate literature and desire to destroy English departments and theory is a fad that must inevitably fade
in the face of the enduring power of the canon. Such novels present a return to traditional humanism as the only possibly professional redemption in the face of declining funding, increasing teaching loads, and disappearing full-time jobs.

This focus on theory as the factor most directly responsible for the problems within the profession indicates a wider myopia about the market and its role in the emerging corporate university of the 1990s that has disastrous consequences for the discipline, as further iterations of the academic novel would demonstrate. On the one hand, theory novels maintain that humanist scholarship stands outside the working of the market through its serious contemplation of topics like aesthetics and poetics, along with its concern for culture as a reflection of human nature and its probing of the human condition, since engagement with the market would be improper. On the other hand, theorists are derided for failing to position the discipline effectively within the emerging market orientation of the university to ensure long-term financial (and thus disciplinary) prosperity. Put simply, these novels suggest that while theory seemed like a good investment in the 1980s as a kind of intellectual “hot stock,” its trendiness and faddishness would ensure its inevitable crash. Shakespeare, or Milton, or T. S. Eliot, etc. are like bonds, though—safe and secure, with an enduring cultural value stemming from their superior insight into human nature and the professional-managerial class’ ongoing need for cultural capital.\textsuperscript{xc} If English Studies chooses to invest poorly by bringing theory into the curriculum and installing cultural studies in place of Great Books, then it deserves to be corrected by the market for its bad behaviour, a scenario repeatedly encountered in theory novels of the 1990s.

Much as in the PC novel of the same period, theory novels in the 1990s endorse changes to higher education in keeping with neoliberal policy in order to ostensibly curb the threat of new, dangerous ideas (theory, multiculturalism, etc.) ruining higher education despite these
policies own destructive effect on traditional ideas of higher education. The disastrous consequences of this argument, though, stem from its internalization of the logic of neoliberalism: the market should be the model for and ultimate arbiter of all economic, political, and cultural activity as it can be the only guarantor of freedom, and actors or movements that prevent or restrict the penetration of the market must be repudiated as obstacles to freedom. In later theory novels, the calls for accountability made during the PC wars (which were themselves in part a neoliberal smokescreen) have become a disciplinary imperative. Theory novels of the 1980s foreshadow this development, as their narrative of theory’s success is explicitly framed through the lens of the market. This success at once sets up the political stakes of these cultural arguments about theory versus humanism and simultaneously suggests that the problem of theory in the 1990s is how to command a greater market share. Only increased success in the market (or at least the market-like structures of the corporate university) would both firmly establish theory’s importance outside of its practitioners and restore to English Studies the supposed authority it had ceded within the contemporary university (a situation humanists blamed on theory).

In this way, theory novels naturalize the same creeping neoliberalism misidentified by PC novels of the period, suggesting that the economic and political assaults on higher education of the 1980s and 1990s were a necessary corrective for English Studies’ failure to follow market-ddictated paths of development. The increasing influence of neoliberal policies on a particularly vulnerable part of the university, English Studies, which has dealt with a much more rapid and extreme disciplining at the hands of these policies than other fields, is a necessary (though unacknowledged) subtext for these novels. Christopher Newfield terms this attitude the discipline’s “market retreat,” whereby English Studies voluntarily relinquished control of
decisions about its future to the unregulated operations of the market from which it had previously claimed to want to protect itself (Unmaking 147). In the face of continued calls for increased accountability and accommodation to corporate structures and culture throughout the culture wars, English Studies “learned one-half of the lesson of business . . . the market was to be adapted to, not to be criticized or changed” and failed to learn the equally important half: “the requirement to respond to ‘market’ environments by increasing one’s own influence over the market’s demand decisions” (Newfield Unmaking 149-50). As its grasp on the form and objectives of the discipline loosened toward the close of the twentieth century, English Studies proved to be equally ignorant about the structure of the university that it would inhabit in the twenty-first century.

This ignorance was no accident or happenstance, but rather a key feature of the neoliberal politics of knowledge, which supported the movement’s ascendance to dominant socioeconomic paradigm during the final third of the twentieth century. This politics is based on the distance between neoliberalism’s public platform (markets unburdened of intervention and regulation will spontaneously evolve an efficient order that will guarantee maximum freedom for all) and its highly constructivist nature, which relies on careful interventions designed to bring about highly managed forms of the market and state that are favourable to neoliberal policies. Under neoliberalism, outside influence on the market is prevented by organizing society according to “how little the individual participants need to know in order to be able to take the right action,” a process achieved by privileging the price system as the means of delivering such information and restricting individuals’ actions to participating in (but not shaping or influencing) the market based on their knowledge of prices (Hayek 527). Neoliberals believe in the market’s superior grasp of the significance of complex information, except where implementing neoliberal policy
is concerned. Thus, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and other founding neoliberals reserved for themselves “the imprimatur to theorize about ‘society’ as a whole” and attempt to direct its activities because of their supposedly superior understanding of the market (Mirowski Never 86).

The policies that had guided the International Monetary Fund and World Bank since the 1970s and so gained increasing global influence began to enter higher education in the 1980s and 1990s, reshaping the institution by encouraging the individuals within them to engage in market retreats just as English Studies had done. Focusing on individual theorists and pedagogical issues presented professors with a limited agency that allowed structural decisions to remain apart from these disciplinary debates, despite their intimate connection. Theory novels, then, dramatize how English Studies succumbed to, without fully understanding, a neoliberal politics of knowledge, accepting without question what the market was supposedly saying and leaving structural/institutional issues to those policy makers (be they administrators, Boards of Regents, or state legislatures) for whom intervention remained a privileged right. In this way, they help to reveal the political stakes of “cultural” arguments like those surrounding theory, and disclose a secondary terrain (institutional policy and managerial direction) for the culture wars that was in fact prioritized, though under the cover of those cultural elements.

Triumph and Decline: Theory’s 1980s and 1990s

The poles around which theory novels of the 1980s and 1990s orbit, triumphant hegemony or exhausted fad, mirror larger disciplinary arguments about theory during this same period. In the 1980s, theory enjoyed something like its public peak in the United States, while the 1990s saw a number of setbacks and scandals that combined with the rise of cultural studies to suggest the “death of theory.” This narrative is itself deeply contradictory, though, as arguments about the death of theory began appearing in the early 1980s. Indeed, in his seminal
Literary Theory: An Introduction (1983), Terry Eagleton makes the rather surprising admission that “literary theory is an illusion . . . [T]his book is less an introduction than an obituary . . . [and] we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth” (178). Many of those who wrote about the death of theory in the 1990s did so in order to distinguish the period of theory’s institutionalization and widespread acceptance in the 1980s and 1990s from its intellectual heights of the mid-1960s through the 1970s. Nonetheless, despite its contradictions, theory’s peak in the 1980s and its contrasting death in the 1990s were generally accepted by both those in academe and commentators outside of academe. The theory novels discussed in this chapter, for example, largely conform to this narrative of triumph and decline while mostly ignoring the economic and political forces at work on higher education in the 1980s and 1990s.

Perhaps the central characteristic of this narrative of theory’s triumphant 1980s and decadent 1990s is its conflation of theory and poststructuralism. Such accounts collapse theory to the work of a few (mostly French) theorists and schools who, while certainly influential and perhaps even dominant in the 1980s, do not entirely capture theory as an institutional force. For both its opponents and proponents, theory tended to be defined solely in terms of poststructuralism (what some term “high” or “big-T” theory) and, more specifically, deconstruction. As Bruce Robbins notes, these accounts demonstrate an “invidious slide from theory to European theory (excluding American roads not taken like C. S. Pierce and Kenneth Burke) to French theory (excluding the ‘Critical Theory’ of the Frankfurt School) to Derrida, who is then held to represent the politics of the whole” (“Politics” 6). This reduced scope certainly appears in Paglia’s attack on theory, which focuses almost exclusively on the outsized influence of French poststructuralists (especially Foucault, but also Derrida and Lacan) on work in the humanities but ignores the Frankfurt School, despite sharing supposedly undesirable
characteristics with the French thinkers like explicit political aims and difficult prose styles. Similarly, reports on the death of theory in the popular press in the mid-1990s explicitly tied it to declining interest in poststructuralism.\textsuperscript{xcv} Thus, Karen J. Winkler opens her 1993 article “Scholars Mark the Beginning of the Age of ‘Post-Theory’” for the \textit{Chronicle of Higher Education} by noting that “[e]ven post-structuralists are talking about it: the day of high theory is passing” (A9). A year later, Ben Yagoda’s “Retooling Critical Theory: Buddy, Can You Paradigm?” for the \textit{New York Times} follows suit, explicitly conflating the two terms when claiming that “[a]fter a quarter-century in which it dominated the study of literary criticism, the trend called ‘theory’ or ‘poststructuralism’ . . . is on the ebb” (E6). Clearly poststructuralism fit this narrative of triumph and decline, at least from an American perspective, though its supposed decline failed to explain theory’s mainstreaming as part of the curriculum and the emergence of fields like queer studies, postcolonial studies, and other drivers of theory in the 1990s.

When viewed through this narrow frame of reference, attacks on theory like Paglia’s essay made sense primarily as retrospective pieces. If theory and poststructuralism were synonymous, then theory had already had its Black Monday in, coincidentally, 1987 with the de Man scandal. Briefly, Ortwin de Graef, a Belgian graduate student, discovered articles written by de Man for a collaborationist newspaper, at least one of which, “Jews in Contemporary Literature,” was openly anti-Semitic. As de Man had been the most famous proponent of deconstruction in the United States prior to his death in 1983 and unofficial head of the so-called Yale School of deconstruction, opponents of poststructuralism seized upon the scandal as an occasion to question the worth of the whole poststructuralist project, particularly deconstruction.\textsuperscript{xcvi} For critics, de Man’s articles confirmed poststructuralism’s amoral or nihilistic bent and reopened debates about poststructuralists’ commitment with renewed vigour
on both the left and right. The De Man scandal certainly served as an accelerant for poststructuralism’s drop in popularity, but questions had already emerged within the discipline about the continued value of poststructuralism’s project and the need for new forms of analysis. J. Hillis Miller’s 1986 Presidential Address at the MLA Convention, “The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of the Material Base,” was as much an attempt to stave off emergent developments in theory that emphasized “history, culture, society, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions, the social context, the material base in the sense of institutionalization, conditions of production, technology, distribution, and consumption of ‘cultural products,’ among other products” as it was a triumphant declaration of theory’s power and ubiquity (283). Indeed, Hillis Miller’s address conceded the discipline had, despite the triumph of theory he was in the process of declaring, “turn[ed] away from theory in the sense of an orientation toward language as such” (283). Thus, the De Man scandal caught poststructuralism, and therefore theory, in the eyes of many, at a moment of weakness compared to its place even a half-decade earlier. Poststructuralism never entirely recovered its pride of place in the wake of this scandal, though it remained an influential strain of criticism.

Contemporaneous with attacks on theory by Paglia and others, a spate of books appeared in the early 1990s declaring the end of theory and reinforcing the narrative of triumph (belatedly noted by Hillis Miller) and inevitable decline. Thomas Docherty’s After Theory appeared in 1990, for example, closely followed by Paul A. Bové’s In the Wake of Theory (1992), Nancy Easterlin and Barbara Riebling’s collection After Post-Structuralism (1993), Barbara Johnson’s The Wake of Deconstruction (1994), and David Bordwell and Noël Carroll’s collection Post-Theory (1996). Authors who were not explicitly announcing the end of theory felt comfortable tracing how and why cultural studies had come to supplant theory and dominate the
discipline, as in Patrick Brantlinger’s *Crusoe’s Footprints* (1990,) or recounting and assessing theory’s project, like in Aijaz Ahmad’s *In Theory* (1992). By the time Frank Lentricchia—the man whom the *Village Voice* once called “the Dirty Harry of literary criticism” and author of seminal theory books like *After the New Criticism* (1980) and *Criticism and Social Change* (1983)—published his melodramatic “Last Will and Testament of an Ex-Literary Critic” in *Lingua Franca* in 1996 and publicly declared that he “believe[d] that literature is pleasurable and important, as literature, and not as an illustration of something else,” theory seemed officially passé, at least among the critical vanguard (59). Hillis Miller’s universal turn away from theory had concluded its (very) public phase, and English Studies in the 1990s and beyond was apparently determined to be about something other than theory.

MLA panel titles from the 1980s and 1990s, though an inexact measure of the general tenor of the discipline, tell a similar story: theory’s prestige and influence steadily grew throughout the 1980s and peaked as a popular phenomenon in the early 1990s, before swiftly declining during the middle years of that decade:

![Graph showing Theory Panels at MLA, 1975-1999](image)

In 1975, though the Literary Criticism and Theory category was one of the largest at the conference, only two American or British literature panels explicitly named any kind of...
theoretical approach. As the 1970s went on, panels on deconstruction became more frequent, and by the mid-1980s panels that explicitly identified a theoretical approach had become commonplace. The early 1990s were peak theory, in this respect, as Literary Criticism and Theory made up the largest category of panel at the convention. However, in a reversal of earlier trends, explicit theoretical/methodological tags became less common during the 1990s and panels dedicated or responding to cultural studies became more widespread. As theory declined from this peak, cultural studies became its own category (though lumped together with folklore and popular culture) and surpassed in popularity deconstruction, poststructuralism, and Marxism as a component of panel titles. Indeed, panel titles like “Victorian Literature after Poststructuralism,” “Editing after Poststructuralism,” and “Do We Still Do Literary Criticism? Should Our Students?” appeared with increasing regularity during this period. By this measure, theory was over in the early 1990s, then, and cultural studies had become both the new force of intellectual energy within the discipline and the target for conservative critics of academe and of traditionalist factions within English Studies.

As with the substitution of poststructuralism for theory more generally, though, this death of theory narrative missed key nuances in the arguments of those who had been involved with theory during its rise in the 1970s. Namely, the MLA panel data above largely supports the argument that theory’s end had not occurred during the mid-1990s but actually a decade earlier, when Eagleton was writing his introduction to a supposedly dead field and Stanley Fish declared that “theory’s day is dying; the hour is late; and the only thing left for a theorist to do is to say so” (“Consequences” 455). Paul Bové, for example, writing in 1992, defined “theory’s period in the United States, from 1964 to 1981,” a point borne out by the MLA numbers (2). Literary Criticism and Theory was not even a category at the MLA conference in 1970, and its rate of
growth until around 1982 was astounding. Though steady growth continued for another decade, it was considerably less explosive. The types of panel that appeared in the late 1970s give some indication as to why this was so. In 1977, for example, there were three panels dedicated to deconstruction featuring Hillis Miller, Gayatri Spivak, Bové, Jonathan Culler, and Barbara Johnson, a group that, outside of de Man and Geoffrey Hartman, included virtually all of the most prominent proponents and explicators of deconstruction in the United States at the time. Similarly, as Ato Quayson has pointed out, the 1983 panel “Colonialist and Postcolonialist Discourse,” chaired by Spivak and featuring Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, “mark[s] the formation of the field of postcolonial studies” (297). Collections of stars like these on panels became rarer as the decade moved on. Certainly referenda on poststructuralist criticism, like the famous exchange between Wayne Booth, M. H. Abrams, and Miller at the 1976 session on “The Limits of Pluralism,” were no longer necessary—when there exists a major journal (Critical Inquiry) willing to publish the papers from that session alongside scholarship influenced by poststructuralism and deconstruction, the referendum appears largely decided.

However, more than just an uncritical acceptance of theory’s triumph, the shifting approach to discussions of theory reflected a fatigue over its forms and methods that was not simply commercial self-positioning or kneejerk humanism. Poststructuralism’s institutional position as theory qua theory suggested a certain taming of its wild energies (particularly among those academics inclined to see being in the academy as a negative development) but more importantly also reflected the solidification of certain axioms or programmatic elements of the poststructuralist project that could be revisited and re-evaluated. By 1981, to use Bové’s dating, virtually all of the major figures mentioned in histories of theory in the United States (outside of a field like queer studies, which did not take off until the 1990s) had published major works, and
significant works by the majority of the most influential French intellectuals had been translated. Similarly, by the mid-1980s “many scholars—younger ones especially—are now beginning to suspect a stagnation of the theoretical project of the sixties and seventies and to construct an informed re-evaluation of it,” as Paul Smith noted in his introduction to an influential “After Theory” issue of the Dalhousie Review in 1984 (210). Certainly, the deaths of many of the figures who had been behind theory’s rise in the 1960s and 1970s—Roland Barthes (1980), Lacan (1981), de Man (1983), Foucault (1984), and Louis Althusser (1990, though out of the public eye since the early 1980s)—assists in the perception of the 1980s as a transitional period for theory. Cultural studies emerged as one response to the stagnation to which Smith refers and one way to conduct the revaluations and move on with cultural analysis after poststructuralist theory, developments Hillis Miller’s proclamation of the triumph of theory attempted to forestall. Indeed, in that same edition of the Dalhousie Review, Smith, Henry Giroux, David Shumway, and James Sosnoski argue for the emergence of cultural studies as a way to escape “discursive formations that generally circumscribe the nature of [academics’] inquiries,” in part by discovering an interdisciplinarity unavailable to poststructuralist theory’s intense focus on language (472). None of these developments were possible, though, without the disciplinary reshaping that English Studies had undergone through the emergence of theory (in all its forms) in the 1970s.

Theory did not die in the 1980s, despite claims to the contrary, but it did transition into a second phase that carried on its growth into the 1990s as it transitioned from intellectual project to institutional force. This greater institutional prominence did give critics ammunition for attacking theory as an industry rather than a discipline, particularly given trends in the academic job market in the 1980s and 1990s and the influence of larger economic trends within higher
education during the same period. The 1970s witnessed a steady buildup of the infrastructure of that industry, so to speak, as new journals appeared throughout the decade, like *New Literary History* (1970), *Diacritics* (1971), *boundary 2* (1973), *Critical Inquiry* (1974), and *Signs* (1975), the conference circuit expanded, and theorists ascended to tenured positions at major universities. In this sense, as Jeffrey Williams has pointed out, theory’s history mirrors trends across higher education as a whole in this period, with Cold War dollars funding the development of the research university on a mass scale and disciplines like English evolving to meet an institutional need for research (“Belletrism” 417-18). Thus, the institutionalization of theory within the discipline responded to the new professional expectations facing literature professors in the research university, particularly as they competed against the social sciences to develop a recognized research agenda. xcix

Yale and Duke serve as useful metonyms for this situation and the way that it shaped the discipline’s self-conception (and the role of theory within the discipline). Colin Campbell’s 1986 piece for the *New York Times Magazine*, “The Tyranny of the Yale Critics,” helped to birth the contemporary academostar in English Studies through its lengthy profiles of Harold Bloom, Hillis Miller, and Hartman, complete with glamorous portraits. c The profiles established theory at the centre of the discipline—firmly ensconced at Yale and the force before which the rest of the discipline must bend. These great scholars emerged with the research university, and prestige derived from their reputation as researchers. With the expansion of venues for this kind of research—both in terms of conferences and publications—came the possibility of investing in well-known, prolific researchers who would raise a school’s profile without requiring investment for the entirety of a research career. Perhaps no single institution personified this development like Duke, “hiring a number of distinguished senior literary theorists” and transforming itself,
however briefly, into the discipline’s epicenter (Culler qtd. in Jacoby 181). Under the stewardship of Fish, Duke hired Lentricchia, Jane Tompkins, Fredric Jameson, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and, briefly, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. During this period, “U.S. News and World Report would eventually rank the graduate program first in the country. Graduate student applications increased four-fold between 1985 and 1991. The department vaulted upward in the National Research Council rankings, from 27th in the country to 5th” (Scott “Discord” A1). Duke headed the theory industry, and its model contributed to the rise of faculty members whose careers “resemble[d] big-time sports or stock market speculation: Play for maximum stakes and then get out while the getting is good” (Jaffe). In this atmosphere, “[s]ix-figure salaries . . . be[came] the norm” for academostars, requiring departments to shell out huge amounts of money to keep stars from bolting for the Ivy League or other newly established power centres (Levey W13). These activities, however much they were confined to elite institutions, lent credence to people like Paglia who characterized theory as an excuse for rampant, naked careerism.

This situation was able to proliferate because of a brief job boom in the second half of the 1980s before the full emergence of the corporate university of the 1990s changed once again the role of English Studies within the university and the shape of an academic career. The job boom allowed even smaller, less prestigious universities and colleges to hire new PhDs trained in theory. Smaller schools saw an even greater culture clash between theorists and traditional humanists, which would accelerate pedagogical and curricular battles as this new generation dealt with structural and institutional challenges that had not faced their colleagues tenured in the 1960s and 1970s (a point dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 4). After a collapse of the job market in English in 1970, the discipline listed badly: the number of BAs awarded in English
between 1970-71 and 1980-81 dropped by 50%, and English BAs went from accounting for 7.6% of all bachelor’s degrees awarded to just 3.4% (Snyder 2013). Similarly, the number of PhDs awarded in English declined from a peak of 1,817 in 1972-73 to just 853 in 1986-87 and 858 in 1987-88 (Snyder 2013). Post-graduation numbers were equally discouraging: where in 1977-78, 46.9% of new PhDs in English found tenure-track positions, by 1983-84, only 39.2% were placed in tenure-track positions (Huber “MLA’s 1993-94” 3). During this period, stories about the lack of jobs in English and Foreign Languages began to appear in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, with the “taxi-driving Ph.D. an established part of the American scene,” and the 1980s forecast to be a decade of austerity (Fiske “Shortage” B10). The institutional inroads made by theory in the 1970s were unlikely to be sustained in this environment.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, though, the discipline experienced a brief resurgence, which afforded some security for the intellectual changes of the previous two decades to surface as new programs, new curricula, and new pedagogical methods. Students returned to English as the number of BAs awarded in the subject rose by 76.5% between 1982-83 and 1992-93, and the number of PhDs awarded between 1987-88 and 1997-98 increased by 73.5% (Snyder 2013). Even more importantly, the proportion of English BAs awarded relative to all bachelor’s degrees rose throughout the period from 3.3% to 4.8%. As Bérubé notes, “[t]hose numbers alone . . . determine much of the working conditions of faculty in English,” as higher ratios of English majors to the total undergraduate population leads to faculty whose members “are invited and expected to teach in the area of their ‘specialization’ . . . [and] enables the college to institutionalize a diverse array of advanced courses in English” (Employment 20). After a decade and a half of little to no improvement in job prospects, the number of jobs advertised in the MLA’s Job Information List (an imperfect measure of the overall job situation, but the most
reliable data available) increased every year between 1984-85 and 1989-90. Indeed, based on MLA records, the number of jobs advertised in the five years between 1985-86 and 1989-90 was 29.8% higher than the number advertised in the previous five years (1980-81 to 1984-85) and 51.9% higher than the number of jobs advertised over the subsequent five years (1990-91 to 1994-95) (MLA 6). What is more, the jobs advertised were largely full-time jobs and new PhDs were placing into them at much higher rates, with 49% in 1986-87 and 51.1% in 1991-92 finding full-time, tenure-track employment (Huber “MLA’s 1993-94” 3). During the same period, programs (and in some cases whole departments) in theory and cultural studies appeared at schools like Brown, Carnegie Mellon, Indiana, Pittsburgh, and Tulane, and hired recent graduates in noticeable numbers (Harpham 386-87). With these new programs and departments came a shift away from the more programmatic forms of teaching literary studies found in early works of the New Critics like Brooks and Warren’s *Understanding Poetry*. To the dismay of some, though, this shift entailed a move away from the study of literature’s formal features and the loss of a pedagogical investment in poetics, inciting resistance to theory’s methods and its insistence on politics. This boom was not limited to English Studies. Across academe the proportion of full-time to part-time faculty increased between 1986 and 1991 (when those getting jobs in the peak years of the English Studies boom would be starting), the first such increase since 1970, with roughly three quarters of the growth during this period attributable to full-time faculty positions.

This boom was relatively short lived, though, and, as developments like the PC wars supported calls for greater accountability and business sense in higher education, theory came under attack as the discipline looked to improve its place in the emerging corporate university of the 1990s. After peaking in 1988-89, the number and kind of job opportunities swiftly declined.
Advertised jobs decreased by 20.5% decrease in 1990-91 to 1989-90, and that number would continue to decrease for the next three years, followed by another four years with advertised jobs at between 52.9-57.5% of the level seen in 1988-89 (and just 80.3-89.2% of the level seen in 1982-83, prior to the boom) (MLA 6). Half a decade after over 50% of new PhDs were finding tenure-track employment, just 36.6% found such positions (Laurence “Count” 6). As part-time and non-tenure-track positions made up an increasing percentage of jobs on offer—part of the shift into a cost-conscious corporate university that sought to lower labour costs through casualization, particularly in labour-intensive situations like the teaching of freshman composition—the 1990s became a time of “lots of work but few jobs” (Dasenbrock 39). The realities of the posttheory generation were “reduced research funding, greater teaching loads, larger class sizes, [and] lower salaries (especially for nonpermanent teachers)” (Williams “Belletrism” 424). The situation in higher education mirrored the partial recovery from the recession of the early 1990s, as workers found increasing numbers of part-time, minimum-wage jobs rather than “well-paid professional, technical, and production jobs” (Aronowitz and Fazio xi). Claims originally floated in the mid-1980s by people like William Bennett and Lynne Cheney about overspecialization and political scholarship as the root cause of academic employment woes were revived in the early 1990s, despite few jobs of any kind available for either the specialist or the generalist (or theorist or humanist, for that matter).

Academostars (and theory, by extension) had once suggested the possibility of an overall improvement in occupational conditions for literature professors, even if the more rarified levels of success would remain available only to a few. David Laurence, head of the Association of Departments of English, wrote in 1989 amidst the boom that “the future we’ve all been waiting for is about to arrive,” though he would later qualify that optimism (Laurence “From” 1).
Disastrously, William G. Bowen and Julie Ann Sosa’s influential *Prospects for Faculty in the Arts and Sciences: A Study of Factors Affecting Demand and Supply, 1987 to 2012* (1989) argued that enrollment patterns projected a “significant increase in demand relative to supply as early as 1992-97—and then far more dramatic changes beginning in 1997-2002” (Laurence “From” 1; Bowen and Sosa 13). By 1997, though, when Bowen and Sosa’s dramatic changes were set to begin, the possibilities suggested by academostars and the job boom of the late 1980s had largely evaporated. The professional conditions that existed in the postwar research university had become a sales pitch used “to induce graduate students to take a crack at stardom, a crack that might last three or four years or more and, therefore, allow us to staff all those sections of composition” (O’Dair 52). Thus, theory’s critics, determined to demonstrate its damage to the field and contribution to the downturn in the job market reported on events like the Sokal Hoax (in which a physicist, Alan Sokal, submitted a hoax paper to leading cultural studies journal *Social Text* in an attempt to discredit the field of science studies for supposedly substituting ideological commitment for intellectual rigour) and the exodus of senior faculty from Duke’s English department with breathless enthusiasm. At the same time, major exposés of theory contributed to the public perception that theory, even during its boom, was an intellectual mistake.

However, understanding theory’s decline requires a more nuanced understanding of the situation of higher education than these contemporary attacks on theory provide. With the end of the Cold War, reduced funding for research (especially research that could not be commercialized) and the institutional restructuring this caused reduced access to the kind of support required to maintain the new forms of professionalism that emerged alongside theory’s institutionalization and the job boom of the second half of the 1980s. But traditional humanism
and New Critical exegesis would not have kept those advantages available to English professors, either. Technology transfer, corporate synergy, and other developments designed to make higher education respond to the needs of business rendered existing arguments about the value of English and the humanities expensive propositions. An expanded application of the concept of “return on investment” to social services had modified a discipline and institution that had been previously unconcerned with profits thanks to a robust welfare state that partially subsidized the cultural industries as part of its mandate to spend wealth in order to improve society. With the new focus on profitability came a renewed emphasis on financial accountability and the supposedly objective demands of the market—a sphere in which English (and, by extension, theory, the centre of the discipline) was depressed. Thus, in turning away from theory (an overwrought characterization that reflects the high drama of the culture wars), the discipline attempted to recoup those material advantages, or at least slow the advance of casualization and accountability measures. These institutional factors heightened the tensions surrounding theory and its place in the discipline. Humanists, unhappy with the discipline’s embrace of theory over literature, used titles like To Reclaim a Legacy not only to suggest an intellectual return, but also an economic one within the university and culture at large. Theory novels capture these anxieties, but over the course of the 1980s and 1990s they lose sight of the institutional parameters of theory. In their relatively uncritical embrace of market-based solutions, later theory novels participate less in some kind of disciplinary correction to end the tyranny of theory than they encourage the acceptance of economic and political developments that continued to compromise faculty working conditions and diminish the discipline’s self-conception and agency.
Growth Markets and the Triumph of Theory in *Small World* and *White Noise*

Writing in a special issue of *PMLA* in 1990 dedicated to “The Politics of Critical Language,” David Kaufmann suggests in his “The Profession of Theory” that “[o]ver the last two decades, theory has been the biggest growth industry in literary studies” (519). David Lodge’s *Small World* revels in theory’s booming possibilities as perhaps the definitive theory novel (and one of the definitive academic novels, rivaled only by Mary McCarthy’s *Groves of Academe* and Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim* for frequency of reference). Set largely at academic conferences around the globe in 1979, Lodge’s novel is part of a trilogy of academic novels including *Changing Places* (1975) and *Nice Work* (1988). Reprising some of the characters and locations from *Changing Places*, which was set a decade earlier during a restive spring semester in 1969, *Small World* rejects that novel’s vision of “‘the single, static campus’” in favour of the interconnected “‘global campus,’” a combined expansion of the horizons of professors and a weakening of their bond to the campus (Lodge 63, 44). *Changing Places* depicted the effects on the university of the confluence of student culture and counterculture, alongside new influences on criticism like structuralist anthropology and linguistics. *Small World* largely forgoes students, though, to focus on the exploits of a group of academostars working in various strands of theory alongside New Criticism-style formalists, computer reading specialists, and a particularly cranky man of letters (in the nineteenth-century sense) who compete throughout conference season for the inaugural UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism. As such, the novel represents the plurality of approaches and motivations encompassed by the discipline during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Though it tends toward the hyperbolic in its depiction of individual professors (for example, a faintly sinister German critic who bears some resemblance to Peter Sellers’ Dr. Strangelove or a wealthy, polyamorous Italian Marxist), Lodge blends these
portraits with events that feel similarly hyperbolic (namely, the world of international literature conferences) but speak realistically about the conditions of the professoriate. In this way, *Small World* manages both to document its time and be fairly prescient about future directions for the profession without being a strictly realist account or tending toward reportage.

*Small World* was fairly well reviewed upon publication, and it endures as an important academic novel in part because its attachment to an earlier, more insular form of the genre allows the narrative to register how theory could become so monolithic while still acknowledging the institutional inflections of literary criticism. Throughout the novel, the reader encounters both elite institutions like Oxford and Euphoria State (a stand in for Berkeley) and underfunded red bricks like Rummidge (a stand in for Birmingham). The difference between the glamour of MLA and the sleepy provincialism of small, regional conferences mirrors this split, as does the professional life of a star like Morris Zapp versus that of a young lecturer from Ireland, Persse McGarrigle. These pairings of extreme opposites give the novel fairly broad coverage of the discipline and explain some of its success, as reviewers frequently note *Small World’s* familiarity in terms of the people and locations that it evokes.\(^\text{60}\) Despite claims that the novel is “a critique of deconstructionism” and “the relativism and skepticism demanded by postmodernism,” that it “thematize[s] the debate between structuralism and post-structuralism,” or that it “combine[s] fictional accounts of academic life with theoretical polemic directed against literary theorists—deconstructionists in particular,” *Small World* only tangentially concerns itself with theory (Ahrens 290-291; Seligardi 282; Bouchard 497). Rather than dealing with the actual content of particular methodologies and providing some sort of evaluative position on their relative merits, the novel tends to focus on how the institutional setting of literary criticism has shifted since
Changing Places and new forms of the professional practitioner of literary criticism have emerged as a result of those shifts.

Through its emphasis on the “global campus” established by the proliferation of international conferences and the expansion of cheap, reliable telecommunications and the activities of the academic jet set who define professionalism at the dawn of the 1980s, Small World introduces a new kind of literature professor while at the same time acknowledging the limited potential to become such a professor. Small World, thus, looks forward to literary theory’s peak and the job boom of the second half of the 1980s, but “[h]owever enchanted the domain, there’s a deep disenchantment at the heart of Lodge’s fiction” as the insularity implied by the novel’s title unknowingly serves as a prophecy (Morrison 293). There would be few Zapps in the years to come (and few McGarrigles), a fact partially countered by the novel’s claims to being a romance, but even upon publication its “vision of perpetual conference-hopping at faculty or government expense . . . sound[ed] fantastic or even rather cruelly offensive” (Morrison 293). Nonetheless, Small World’s jet-setting has become less “comically or innocently readable” in light of continued public funding cuts and the failure to extend such luxuries to the majority of the profession despite still constituting part of the definition of a career as a literature professor (Caesar 67). For most professors, there is no opportunity to replace “the dull classes that must be taught, the fateful bills to be paid, or the uninteresting facts to be admitted” with exciting conference travel (Caesar 67). In this way, Small World foreshadows the concerns of later theory novels that are set in the corporate university of the 1990s, though the novel cannot know entirely what is in store for the discipline.

Though justly praised for its comic and satiric energies, Small World does more with its set pieces than simply put the hedonism and follies of conferences on display, as Lodge himself
has suggested, by using them to redefine the roles and activities of professors as professionals.\textsuperscript{cxii}

Looking back at his experiences at international conferences in the 1970s, Lodge noted in 1999 that “there is [now] more of a business element about” attending a conference, as “the conference has become a machine for generating publication or something equivalent. And so a lot of conferences are just put on in a kind of entrepreneurial spirit to generate papers” (Showalter “Interview” 10). While appearing too early to grasp the entirety of the application of this entrepreneurial spirit (which might more accurately be thought of as a productivity imperative imposed on institutions across the board via managerial practices like Total Quality Management), \textit{Small World} is remarkably perceptive about large scale changes that are on the way.\textsuperscript{cxiii} Thus, Zapp offers a new motto for contemporary academe, one in keeping with his own celebrity status and his jetsetting ways: “[t]o them that had, more would be given” (Lodge 151). His own career ambitions give a sense of the practical import of this way of thinking, as he desires not only to be the highest paid English professor in the world (for no reason, really, other than to inspire envy in others, though he also claims that the money will give him a scholarly authority that publishing alone could not) but also to “do nothing except to be permanently absent on some kind of sabbatical grant or fellowship” (Lodge 152). Zapp intends to keep his prestigious (and highly lucrative) professorship at Euphoria State, but he wants to spend his days traveling to various conferences, seminars, and retreats, maximizing both his mobility and visibility. To the extent that those two qualities are the most important for the would-be academostar, \textit{Small World} indicates that the function of an English professor in the 1980s is networking, rather than researching or teaching.

As academic celebrity became a more mainstream phenomenon in the 1990s, helped by the boom in theory in the 1980s, the success of publishers like Routledge in packaging theory in
a hip and relatively accessible way, and the appearance of profiles of the most famous academics in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, Zapp’s vision of the profession seemed to have fully taken hold.\textsuperscript{cxiv} In an analysis of those *Sunday Magazine* profiles, Tim Spurgin points out that they tend to “focus on the megastar’s mobility and marketability” above all other attributes (231). In this vein, Anne Matthews’ profile of the 1991 MLA Convention for the *New York Times* focuses on Andrew Ross as the quintessential new academic, describing him as “[t]all, lean, with saturnine good looks” and detailing “his hand-painted Japanese tie . . . pale mango wool-and-silk Comme des Garçons blazer . . . [and] wedge-heeled suede lace-ups,” the kind of outfit appropriate for a conference about “seeing and being seen” (SM43).\textsuperscript{cxv} In order to be seen at the right places, one must commit to several conferences. Zapp details a summer itinerary that will take him to “‘Zürich, Vienna, maybe Amsterdam, Jerusalem,’” allowing him to check up on the activities of other academostars and to deliver variations on “‘a wonderfully adaptive paper’” on theory as striptease, a deliberately provocative paper that will ensure him a big audience (Lodge 65, 200). The variations on Zapp’s theory as striptease paper function like the slight variations on car models in different regions and ensure him continued visibility throughout the summer as he travels across Europe. The work itself, though, is secondary; *being* at the conference is what matters, and the paper is simply an excuse to be listed in the program (usually the requirement to request funding support from one’s institution). Zapp has no desire to hear other papers—indeed, when imparting his version of the rules of conference going to McGarrigle, Zapp starts by telling him “‘[n]ever go to lectures. Unless you’re giving one yourself, of course’” (Lodge 18). Going to a conference, for Zapp, is about being Andrew Ross in his trendy blazer, to borrow Matthews’ example. Or, failing that, it is to see Ross not behind a podium delivering a paper but in a bar or at a party or restaurant, where powerful (because of
their informal nature) instances of seeing and being seen with the right person can improve one’s professional standing.

*Small World’s* description of the global campus, part of Zapp’s justification for his goal of permanent absence from Euphoria State, further clarifies professional roles and obligations for theory’s stars. Much like Zapp’s dream of being only nominally attached to Euphoria State, the biggest stars (like Derrida) had reached this point by the 1990s, holding multiple positions simultaneously and shuttling back and forth between guest appointments in desirable locales (Caesar 73). The contemporary academic has no real need of the physical campus, as Zapp explains to McGarrigle, because the invention of “‘jet travel, direct-dialing telephones and the Xerox machine’” allows him or her to be “‘plugged into the only university that really matters—the global campus’” (Lodge 44). Institutional affiliation, then, exists as simply a guarantee of access to necessary resources when not traveling: telephone, Xerox, and, crucially, “‘conference grant fund[ing]’” (Lodge 44). In this context, the UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism encapsulates the dreams of the academostars as they filtered back down to the profession as a whole. A “purely conceptual chair (except for the stipend) to be occupied wherever the successful candidate wished to reside,” the UNESCO Chair pays $100,000 per year, tax free, and entail no duties, as the chair would “be paid simply to think—to think and, if the mood took him, to write” (Lodge 120-21). Matching so exactly the desires of professors like Zapp and his fellow stars, the UNESCO Chair tempts even the parochial Oxford professor who detests theory and sneers at every disciplinary development that happen outside of his college.

Though it is unlikely to be occupied by anyone but the elitest of the elite, the UNESCO Chair serves as a handy device through which *Small World* can consider the future of English Studies. Crucially, the freedom from publication offered by the position reflects in an inverted
fashion the conditions facing the majority of faculty members, who lack institutional support and/or time to do research and publish. Where the teaching performed by these faculty members covers the teaching that is not performed by research-oriented faculty members, being able to abandon publication as the UNESCO Chair highlights an existing privilege (doing research) that teaching-oriented faculty cannot assume, often for lack of access to the global campus and its resources. The UNESCO Chair enjoys the physical resources afforded by an office at UNESCO (but can also retain his or her current position), furthering weakening the bond between professor and campus. Indeed, this position would advance the movement of professors away from the traditional notion of faculty members tied to a particular campus accelerated by the rise of both the research university (which provided a model for the privileging of research over teaching and assisted in the triumph of literary criticism over other modes of scholarly activity in English) and of professional organizations, (which offered an alternative guarantor of scholarly proficiency and reputation). As a result, professors tended toward being free floating professionals in the postwar period, rather than integrated members of one body (a situation ironically bolstered by that body enjoying its greatest period of power and influence in the university), evidenced in part by professors’ tendency to identify by specialty rather than school, and rarely mention “the physicist or administrator who is part of the same university plant” (Williams “Institutionally” 6). Such an environment supports the emergence of a star system and reinforces the notion of networking as a core activity for professors. Advancement here requires that professors ingratiate themselves with the members of their professional organizations (e.g., MLA), and makes conference travel not simply one aspect of a professor’s job, but rather a precondition for performing that job.
Not all conferences are MLA, though, and Lodge’s satire is at its sharpest on just this point, as Small World illustrates the ways that Zapp’s vision of the profession is unsustainable while acknowledging its undeniable hold on the imaginations of professors. As the discipline looked for a method of re-establishing markers of academic hierarchy, conference travel proved one of the most effective as the best departments could afford to send their faculty members to the best conferences and to hire those who had the best draw at those conferences (Caesar 73). Zapp may be able to provide McGarrigle with rules on how to attend conferences and explain the new goals of the profession, but nothing can change the fact that the majority of academics lacked (and continue to lack) the opportunity to travel on this scale. The depressing, regional conference that opens the novel, held at the University of Rummidge, testifies to the distance between the fantasy of membership in the academic jet set and the mundane reality of academic life. Even before the official start, attendees mill around the entrance and decide the conference is a failure because “none of the stars of the profession was in residence—no one, indeed, whom it would be worth travelling ten miles to meet, let alone the hundreds that many had come” (Lodge 4). Denied the chance to hobnob with greatness, the attendees lose interest in the conference. Being there cannot advance their professional standing, they have concluded, and, though not a paper has yet been given, most are ready to leave. Reinforcing Zapp’s claim that giving a paper (or listening to one) is simply “‘publicly performing a certain ritual’” expected of professors by the public, the muted reception of the conference-goers reveals the distance between the ostensibly scholastic function of conferences (presenting research and discussing teaching) and their actual professional function of networking and being seen (Lodge 28). Even when Zapp arrives, his attendance does not legitimate the conference or turn it into an arena for networking. Instead, his attendance underscores the failure of this conference to make the new
professional modes work: he remains the only person worth meeting, worth seeing or being seen with. That the attendees desire access to these modes through their travel neither grants them access nor improves their lot.

Though *Small World* exaggerates for comic effect, its description of life for the academic jet set is not far off the popular perception of academostars highlighted in *Lingua Franca* and the *Times Magazine* profiles mentioned above. Indeed, though Michael Greaney suggests that the UNESCO Chair “haunts” *Small World* as Lodge “struggles with the responsibility of making some authoritative pronouncement on the condition and future of critical theory,” such a reading ignores the ways that the novel deliberately undermines the importance of such a pronouncement (31). What haunts *Small World* about the UNESCO Chair, I would argue, is its implications for the profession as a whole, which was rapidly stratifying and has continued to do so since the 1980s. The small world of those who are considered candidates for the UNESCO Chair to begin with is an obvious nod to this stratification, but there are additional ways in which it separates academe into a realm of permanent (and somewhat inevitable) haves and have-nots. That the position is funded by an institution outside of academe underscores the difference between academic life at the top institutions and the conditions experienced by the much larger number of academics who teach at what Caesar memorably refers to as “second-rate universities.” For those who face a career defined by “teaching four, five, or even six courses a term, grading piles of papers, holding office hours, [and] doing ‘service’ work,” the relatively light teaching duties required of stars, their token presence on committees and in other administrative roles, and their frequent appearance as guest speakers and in the programs of the best conferences might as well constitute a separate realm outside of academe (Williams “Life” 130). Similarly, the UNESCO Chair’s designation as “conceptual” highlights the elision of
necessary labour required to support the star system. For every Zapp on permanent leave from his/her academic duties, sections of composition must be filled, tutorial sections led, committees to staffed, and any number of other tasks accomplished. While tenured faculty accept some of this work (namely committee membership and other governance tasks), increasingly these tasks are displaced onto either faculty off the tenure track or graduate students. These groups tend not to have access to conference funding (or have only very limited amounts available to them, possibly just to attend the MLA convention for job interviews in the case of grad students) and so realize very few benefits from a system designed around mobility and visibility at conferences.

That Arthur Kingfisher, the “doyen of the international community of literary theorists,” receives the UNESCO Chair, then, makes sense both narratively and in terms of the historical moment in which Small World appeared (Lodge 93). In keeping with Zapp’s motto for contemporary academe, the Chair goes to him with the most. Kingfisher’s current position at the opening of the novel most resembles the UNESCO Chair; he is “the only man in academic history to have occupied two chairs simultaneously in different continents,” flying between appointments each week (Lodge 93). For him alone, the UNESCO Chair has already been a reality, and so for him alone it becomes his academic position. Ultimately, this is the moment when Small World begins to break with the conventions of the Golden Age university and the conventions of the academic novel. Because not every static campus would have immediate access to (or be considered an integral part of) this global campus, its rhapsodic evocation by characters like Zapp indicates academe’s permanent transformation from a small world to separate worlds, despite whatever commonality membership in MLA or teaching freshman composition is supposed to offer. Echoing of similarly emergent economic, political, and cultural
inequalities that fueled the culture wars, *Small World* gestures toward a campus that, whether static or global, is hardly removed from daily affairs anymore, giving what had formerly been academic concerns a much wider purchase and resonance.

Unlike Lodge’s work, which has become something of a shorthand for academic novels more generally—the phrase “a bit like David Lodge” referring to the combination of insider knowledge and good-natured satire that characterizes *Changing Places* and *Small World*—Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* is rarely cited as an example of the academic novel. Frequently included in studies and overviews of American fiction in the 1980s, though, where it is positioned as one of the preeminent postmodern novels, *White Noise* explores consumer culture and media oversaturation in the United States during the latter stages of the twentieth century and is the kind of narrative for which, had they not already existed, thinkers like Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard would have had to have been invented. In one of the few discussions of *White Noise* as an academic novel, W. Gordon Milne explicitly compares the novel to Lodge’s *Small World* and finds DeLillo’s wanting, as it “descend[s] into farce” and induces weariness through its “exaggerations of the anti-intellectualism of the ‘mortarboard crowd’” (34). For Milne, the chief fault of *White Noise* comes from its openness, with “the college background serv[ing] a very peripheral function . . . as the author satirizes everything from the splintered family to television violence, from drug dependency to the bureaucracy of city government,” in other words, those characteristics that have ensured *White Noise* of its enduring critical reputation (35). The novel’s expanded purview marks the genre’s turn in the 1980s toward the new academic novel and the atypical form of *White Noise* compared to earlier examples of the genre foreshadows later developments, like *Moo*’s panoramic view of a Midwestern state university and *Fight for Your Long Day*’s multi-campus adjunct novel.
As a theory novel, *White Noise* could certainly be an example of Norma Bouchard’s “critifiction,” but its frame of reference is not deconstruction and poststructuralism, as with *Small World*, but rather cultural studies (and its less political cousins, American and pop culture studies). Indeed, where *Small World*’s insularity allowed its portraits of theory to remain academic, the growing prominence of cultural studies brings its cultural politics into more open conflict with traditional values, collapsing the idea of the ivory tower to which the academics in *White Noise* cling. Moreover, by illustrating the difference between popular notions of taste, propriety, and the appropriate objects of study in higher education and the “Zane Grey novels, movies, and even comic books” of cultural studies, *White Noise* helps to explain how critics of academia used these issues in the culture wars to argue for increased accountability and oversight by non-faculty groups (Brooks 36). Because of the novel’s portrait of a permeable campus that blurs the traditional boundaries between town and gown and so develops the conditions for English Studies’ market retreat explored by theory novels of the 1990s, *White Noise* is one of the most important academic novels of the 1980s.

*White Noise* draws out the tension between the new kind of academic professionalism emerging in the humanities in the 1980s and the paradoxically destabilizing effects of this increase in professionalization. Taking place at the College-on-the-Hill, a small liberal arts school in the fictional Midwestern town of Blacksmith, *White Noise* hints at a “residual fifties mythology . . . [in which] [f]ather works, mothers stays at home . . . [in] a nice house on a quiet street in a small town that is the suburb of nowhere” (Ferraro 19). In part because of this idyllic arrangement, Jack Gladney, the novel’s protagonist, is able to convince himself that “little or no resentment attaches to the College-on-the-Hill . . . semidetached [from the town], more or less scenic, suspended in political calm” (DeLillo 85). Gladney even indulges in some haughtiness
because of his academic appointment despite living a typical suburban life. He and his family are avid shoppers just like their neighbours and friends. After an unpleasant encounter with a colleague, for example, Gladney is “in the mood to shop” and so takes his family “shopp[ing] for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise [he] had no intention of buying, then buying it” (DeLillo 83-84). However, he is at once fascinated and amused by “‘the day of the station wagon,’” when students arrive on campus toting “stereo sets, radios, personal computers . . . [and] cartons of phonograph records and cassettes” (DeLillo 5, 3). Gladney and his wife make observing this day something of a spectator sport, drawing an unclear distinction between their own consumer habits—clinging to the label of “shopper” and deriving a sense of wellbeing from acquisitiveness and mindless consumption—and the way these objects seem to define the students (DeLillo 5, 3). Similarly, when an “airborne toxic event” threatens Blacksmith and forces residents to evacuate, he tells his son that “‘I’m not just a college professor. I’m the head of a department. I don’t see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event. That’s for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the country, where the fish hatcheries are’” (DeLillo 117). That he inevitably evacuates along with his family and encounters not mobile home dwellers from next to the fish hatchery but his friends and neighbours, other professionals and their families, suggests the disappearance of the distinction between the College and Blacksmith that he would like to draw. Gladney here resembles the fulfillment of the idea of the “new class” or professional-managerial class (PMC) as “the ‘universal class’ of late-twentieth-century America,” where the typical resident of middle America is a professional or knowledge worker who caters to and moves within a world inhabited largely by other professionals (Schryer 167). Rather than an elevated culture, though, the triumph of the PMC seems to engender a bland consensus of shared tastes and interests. Gladney, despite being a professor and head of an
academic department, is ultimately no different, and the College ushers new generations into the superficial cultural superiority of the PMC.

However, Gladney’s professional status and success comes not from his academic achievements, but rather from his marketing savvy, part of broader shifts in the professional status of humanities professors. These shifts were not restricted to humanities professors, but help give a sense of the way professions were drawn into what Franco Berardi has termed “semiocapitalism,” the manipulation of language and signs to produce and capture consumer engagement. As the chair of Hitler Studies at the College, a field he invented in 1968, Gladney has become a powerful figure through canny self-fashioning, “invent[ing] an extra initial and call[ing] self J. A. K. Gladney” in professional life, adding “glasses with thick black heavy frames and dark lenses” for effect, and “gain[ing] weight . . . to ‘grow out’ into Hitler . . . [and develop] an air of unhealthy excess, of padding and exaggeration, hulking massiveness” (DeLillo 16-17). In so doing, Gladney has transformed himself into a brand, and the Hitler Studies program at College-on-the-Hill is his brand’s flagship product. The “immediate and electrifying success” of Hitler Studies has made Gladney an academostar (DeLillo 4). As his friend and colleague, Murray Siskind, points out, “[n]obody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction, literally or metaphorically. . . . He is now your Hitler, Gladney’s Hitler” (DeLillo 11). Gladney is a charismatic teacher, which has not hurt his brand, but it is his marketing skills that ensured his success. Students flock to his course on Advanced Nazism, for example, partially because his description of it as “a course of study designed to cultivate . . . mature insight into the continuing mass appeal of fascist tyranny . . . three credits, written reports” makes such compelling use of “the jargon . . . [of] undergraduate catalogs” for his own
ends (DeLillo 25; Applen 143). With the emergence of the corporate university, ability like
Gladney’s has become ever more vital to academics in the humanities by facilitating their place
within a commodified higher education.

The new university places value not on the liberal arts’ traditional mission of moral
improvement or civic preparation, but on the ability to attract students and their financial aid
dollars and to contribute to the definition of the campus brand that can be marketed to those
students. Gladney does not float free of the campus like Morris Zapp in Small World—indeed, he
does his best to anchor himself to the most static of campuses: a SLAC at which professors are
still required to wear their robes while on campus. As the airborne toxic event and its fallout
make clear, though, College-on-the-Hill has also moved into the age of the global campus.
Higher education is no longer a separate sphere from the scrubby land by the fish hatcheries, and
as the line between town and campus becomes blurred the function and purpose of the professor
as professional shifts. Historically, professions have had two primary and related functions: to
provide a degree of autonomy from the demands of the market and to self-regulate entry into the
profession and the conduct of its members based on professional standards or a code of ethics
(Menand “Demise” 204-05). Professors have traditionally followed this model, operating
within the quasi-market of the academic sphere, which was held to be at arm’s length from
private enterprise, and requiring specific degrees to join the professoriate, who were overseen by
both discipline-specific organizations (like the MLA) and other, more general bodies like the
American Association of University Professors (AAUP). With the subsuming of the academic
sphere into the market proper indicated by the increasingly permeable boundaries between town
and campus, professionalization no longer offered protection and autonomy from the market
but rather encouraged professors to operate in terms of its dictates. The tenure system, for
example, substituted for the corporate ladder and provided security from performance
evaluations based on profitability during much of the twentieth century. As the proportion of
faculty actually on the tenure track dropped during the 1970s and 1980s and academostars began
aggressively playing the market the authority of this system weakened. For example, an
emphasis on technology transfer by schools and the passing of the Bayh-Dole Act (1980) cleared
the way for private companies to profit from academic partnerships supported by federal
research funds and introduced new performance measures that could be quantified in terms of
dollars, a point discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

At the same time, whereas disciplinary organizations and standards had once been
powerful regulatory forces for humanities professors, the challenge to disciplinarity posed by
theory and cultural studies introduced doubts about the enduring relevance of such organizations
and standards. As professors assumed control over more of the fundraising side of their work
through the operations of academic capitalism, professors relinquished some of their self-
regulation. In the past, professions had been able to self-regulate because of their “primary
orientation to the community interest rather than to individual self-interest” (Barber 672). With
the adoption of academic capitalism, professors could be rewarded by more than “a set of
symbols of work achievement” and so gained a considerable amount of self-interest that required
them to be judged according to the rules and values of the market (Barber 672). Thus, whereas in
the past the professions had “ma[d]e it very difficult for any one outside—even civil courts—to
pass judgment upon one of their number,” this new sense of professionalization invited
judgement from outside the profession (Hughes 657). No matter how serene or devoid of politics
the College-on-the-Hill appears, then, it cannot even remain semi-detached from Blacksmith. In
keeping with the neoliberal politics of knowledge, the specialized knowledge (in this case, the
systems and history of literary and cultural production) formerly required to evaluate the work of humanities professors has been superseded by market performance, price, and other factors that can be readily grasped and applied by the non-specialist. Since Blacksmith and the towns around it—Iron City, Glassboro, Sawyersville—are not scrubby places dominated by mobile homes, but are actually the domain of the PMC, the College must cater to their cultural expectations. Those expectations were likely to be closer in sympathy with the traditional educational missions of a SLAC than the vision of a radical poststructuralist, though with an increased emphasis on career preparation or occupational/vocational training (i.e., the “transferable skills” required for various professional jobs).

Here *White Noise* demonstrates how cultural arguments turned into or supported the economic and political arguments that undergirded the culture wars and reshaped higher education during the final quarter of the twentieth century. By the mid-1980s, Bennett, in his capacity as Chair of the NEH, had sounded the alarm that humanities departments “have given up the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs,” forsaking their Arnoldian legacy (1). Such charges were true in a limited sense, as the theory explosion had complicated the ideas of any single, unifying culture and of the possibility of simply transmitting that culture to students. Indeed, though belief in the morally/spiritually improving nature of study in the humanities remained somewhat intact, it had been reoriented to more progressive political ends. Cultural studies had a key part to play in this reorientation, as its “desire to endorse at least some expression of mass culture in the face of the traditional dismissal of it by the academy” came out of an apparent need to abandon “individualist, esoteric research” in favour of “collective inquiries into social ills” (Shumway “The Sixties” 247; Giroux et al. 473). While not sharing the same explicit political project as its British counterpart, American cultural studies maintained a
connection to identity politics, multiculturalism, and other flashpoints of the culture wars through its relationship to programs like Women’s studies and African American studies, along with the New Left and the legacy of the 1960s more generally (Shumway “Emergence” 247-49). The professors in “American Environments” at College-on-the-Hill are not obviously engaged in political scholarship with their attempts to “make a formal method of the shiny pleasures they’d known in their Europe-shadowed childhoods—an Aristotelianism of bubble gum wrappers and detergent jingles” (DeLillo 9). Nonetheless, a department full of faculty members who “who read nothing but cereal boxes,” espouse an earnest belief that television “‘overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness, and disgust’” and teach students about “‘[t]he culture of public toilets’” and its relation to the mythos of the American West necessarily challenges traditional ideas about the hierarchy of cultural value in the United States (DeLillo 10, 51, 68). A town like Blacksmith, whose culture is rooted in the cultural values of the PMC, would not support courses on public toilets, nor would it agree with the educational value of close study of wrappers, jingles, or television shows.

As Bennett, Bloom, Cheney, and other cultural conservatives linked the development of cultural studies, pop culture studies, and other methods of analyzing the cultural value of everyday objects to the radical politics of the 1960s and argued for their ongoing and deleterious effect on higher education, they were able to tap into growing public dissatisfaction with higher education in response to rising tuition prices throughout the 1980s. Parents and students found these prices particularly galling given the widespread sense that teaching at universities was failing to achieve the expected purpose of higher education, especially in the humanities. The average cost of tuition and fees at a private, four-year institution like College-on-the-Hill increased by 29.6% between 1980-81 and 1985-86 from $10,404.01 to $13,483.10 (in constant
2015 dollars), and 54.3% by decade’s end to $16,048.34 (Snyder 2013). Gladney’s self-assurance that College-on-the-Hill is “[n]ot a place designed to aggravate suspicions,” then, relies on an increasingly out-of-date version of professional norms, particularly in light of the high tuition at the College ($14,000), which is more than double the average ($6,121 in 1985-86 dollars) for a four-year, private college in 1985 (DeLillo 85). Parents whose children attended a school like College-on-the-Hill could find themselves paying almost four times what parents had paid on average in yearly tuition just half a decade earlier at a comparable institution. In this situation, Hitler Studies (and even the more innocuous pop culture studies of other faculty members at the College) seems perverse. The proposal by conservatives for increased oversight and accountability of higher education sought to limit (and possibly even reverse) the rising tuition costs through more efficient, businesslike operations and ensure that star professors would teach more classes and keep their radical politics out of the classroom. Ironically, for all of the complaints about teaching increasingly falling to TAs and burned out, underqualified part-timers, accountability measures tended to accelerate the transition away from full-time, tenure-track professors, especially in lower level classes that covered general education program requirements.

Thus, teaching about public toilets or, as in Gladney’s case, offering a course on Hitler and Nazism that attempts to set aside “question[s] of good and evil” and explore why “[s]ome people put on a uniform and feel bigger, strong, safer” at an expensive private school fails to capture consumer expectations derived from traditional notions of higher education (DeLillo 63). Such courses could be marketed as a lifestyle extension—be hip, be savvy, be an ironic consumer—that spoke to the crystalizing sensibilities of Generation X, with its valorization of trash culture and ironic disposition, in a way that a classics degree or a traditional English degree
in a Great Books-style curriculum could not. This approach was likely to resonate with a student body intricately enmeshed in consumer culture, whose interest could be seen as an endorsement of this path for the humanities. English Studies (or, more likely, Cultural Studies as its own department) would become one more attraction at a school alongside amenities like food from major restaurant chains in dining halls, stores from prestigious brands in student centres, state-of-the-art recreation and wellness centres, and sports teams that functioned as essentially minor league franchises. To the extent that such course offerings did not conform to the tastes and expectations of the PMC, though, but were instead shockingly amoral or off colour, they opened up the humanities (and humanities professors) to the calls for accountability started by cultural conservatives.

Whereas Small World’s vision of the global campus pointed to a new, expansive academe that could leverage its market success into ever more freedom from the non-academic world, White Noise punctured the idea of the market as any kind of apolitical force or path to increased disciplinary freedom. Due to the humanities’ growing stake in the market, as in Gladney’s construction of Hitler Studies, they adopted the market’s terms as arbiter of professional success and disciplinary standards by force. In a university increasingly driven by considerations of profit and loss rather than the creation of knowledge or human capital without regard to the price tag, securing continued funding and support made market-oriented behaviour the prudent path. During theory’s growth market phase, this initially worked well, as market performance and disciplinary advancement went together without much friction. However, increasing pushback by anti-theory forces within the discipline and culturally conservative journalists against the abandonment (or at least decreased focus) on canonical literary and cultural texts meant English Studies took direction from the expectations of higher education consumers in Blacksmith and
similar places, whose vision of college as a gateway to professional opportunities (or at least to jobs other than low-paying service work) did not involve deconstruction or cultural studies. This in turn paved the way for English Studies’ market retreat as the discipline internalized these accountability demands by reproducing them as professional organization mandates and the policy directives released by those organizations, reducing its ability to contest their imposition and broader cultural/political significance. The emphasis on mass culture within cultural studies helped to legitimate alternative theories of value that were supported by disciplinary standards held apart from the market. However, accountability to the tastes/demands of the PMC that accompanied the newly emergent forms of professionalization of the 1980s curbed the authority of those standards and the relevance of those theories of value. The result, then, was a need to continue to meet the demands of the market (often framed in terms of a return to the enduring value of canonical literature) that would drastically reduce the centrality of the humanities to the university more broadly and push the discipline along much more functional, service-oriented lines moving into the twenty-first century. The difference between Zapp and Gladney is an instructive one—the former’s prestige derives from his reputation as a theorist among other theorists, while the latter’s stems from his sales ability, achieving his scholarly reputation largely by being revenue generating for his home campus. Later theory novels would decry figures like Zapp and Gladney as failed models of theory at its most self-indulgent, but their arguments for the value of the humanities largely rest on the same appeals to market functions and their ultimate authority. *White Noise* answers *Small World*’s questions about the future of the discipline, then, by outlining the on-the-ground concessions that English Studies would increasingly have to make to market demands in the 1990s and 2000s.
Both *Small World* and *White Noise* appeared at the beginning of the changes they described, which accelerated throughout the second half of the 1980s as English Studies’ understanding of professionalization evolved to match the methodological development of the 1960s and 1970s. These changes were contentious, though, and the new vision for English Studies that had solidified at the start of the 1990s was not universally accepted as the path forward. If *Small World* confined academic politics to the question of whom one was seen with (or ate with, slept with, etc.), and *White Noise* largely abandoned academic politics altogether for the politics of suburban life, theory novels of the 1990s defined academic politics as a heavyweight bout between theory and anti-theory. In these novels, theory threatened the discipline by substituting arcane language games and radical political stances for the serious appreciation of literature and cultivation of aesthetic faculties that had been the traditional aim of English Studies. Such a shift supposedly turned off students (who love books, not texts), parents (who want the humanities to contribute to moral improvement, not radicalization), and administrators (who want happy students and parents to ensure a steady flow of tuition dollars and donations). In place of theory, these novels (and the critics making similar arguments) proposed a return to “traditional humanistic fundamentals” as the core element of English Studies (Graff and Warner 1). Theory had fully displaced this core, according to its critics, following an initial loss of “humanistic consensus” in the 1960s “under the combined assaults of campus radicals, permissive teachers, narrow vocationalists, selfish research specialists, and student consumers” (Graff and Warner 1). Anti-theory’s humanism, then, by addressing the needs of students, parents, and administrators, seemed to represent the only viable path forward for the discipline. Theory’s position of success at the start of the 1990s paradoxically confirmed
in these novels the correctness of this anti-theory stance: having required some attention to marketing and networking to succeed (both held to be antithetical to the aims of serious scholars), theory could neither be morally improving nor of sustained relevance or interest in the eyes of its critics. Even its popularity was seen as a sign of a lack of “real” interest in theory, especially when combined with a certain anti-elitism that was “used to dismiss new work . . . this has a certain flair, one hears, but it’s insufferably trendy. Or: I suppose this is what’s fashionable at Duke or Berkeley, but we needn’t encourage it here” (Bérubé “Literary” 136). Theory was therefore destined to fail, while traditional humanism and the Great Books, which required no marketing to support their self-evident value, would endure.

Indeed, if the second half of the 1980s had confirmed the vision of an English Studies driven by networking and commercial aspirations as the discipline’s future—as seen in Small World and White Noise—then the condition that the discipline faced in the early 1990s testified to this vision’s unsustainability. For example, departments making splashy “free agent” hires of academostars became more common during the mid-1980s, with Hillis Miller earning six figures to move from Yale to the University of California, Irvine in 1986, Duke offering similar sums to the stars that it hired throughout the 1980s, and the Ivies following suit (Lehman 30; D’Souza 161). With the late 1980s job boom, the improving numbers for majors and graduate students, and the investment in humanities research via Cold War dollars distributed through “the administrative principle of overhead,” the triumph of theory looked a lot like the triumph of English Studies as a whole (Williams “Theory Journals” 692-93). However, the turn of the decade reversed many of these trends and cast the discipline’s identity going forward in doubt. A populist anti-theory defined itself in relation to the concerns about PC, multiculturalism, and declining academic standards discussed in Chapter 1 and began to gain significant public
Theory was connected to multiculturalist initiatives to teach Alice Walker instead of Shakespeare, as Christopher Clausen (then-president of Pennsylvania State University) claimed in 1988 (Clausen A52). Even the hopes of benefitting from a less conservative NEH following the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 were mitigated by Sheldon Hackney (former president of the University of Pennsylvania, hotbed of PC controversies in the late 1980s and early 1990s) denouncing theory as “‘the intellectual form of political correctness’” during his confirmation hearings to become head of the NEH in 1993 (Burd “Hackney Clears” A33). The pushback against theory was not simply a right-wing or conservative phenomenon, though; academics who were otherwise sympathetic to the project of theory or who identified as liberal, progressive, or on the left registered objections to the form theory took as it institutionalized. In general, anti-theory arguments from the left (where they were more likely to be anti-theory industry arguments) and the right focused on similar issues: the overreliance on unquestioned authorities in argumentation and the development of “theory cults,” the overproduction of scholarship that was formulaic and turgid, the underrepresentation of literature and questions of literary value in contemporary English departments, and an overwhelming politicization of English Studies. This populist anti-theory was damaging to the realization of English Studies’ supposedly glamorous future, particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as new budgeting and managing practices by universities that stressed accountability to profit replaced Cold War practices of funding university activities that supported culture alongside the sciences (even if at a reduced rate). Funding for pure research in the sciences gave way to a demand for commercially lucrative applied research, and shifts in budgeting and management practices required the humanities to justify the funds they received, especially as cuts to state and federal budgets were a constant threat. Austerity rather than plenty became the default mode of academic life. In a period of
radically reduced job opportunities—the number of jobs advertised in the MLA’s JIL was lower than at any point since 1970 for seven straight years from 1991-92 to 1997-98—theory was no longer the ticket to the jobs that were available, as administrators “want[ed] cost-efficient teaching, and lots of it” (Matthews 69). The future of English Studies was more likely to be one where:

the educational ‘value’ of departments like English will no longer lie in high volume, in terms of sheer numbers of faculty, courses taught, and student credit hours produced. Rather, it will appear in terms of a wide array of relatively specialized services to very different audiences . . . [and] financial and institutional support may well begin to be directed . . . . at specific programs within English dependent on perceived demands for services. (Watkins “Educational” 266)

Or, as Bérubé memorably put it, “the discipline thinks it’s going from literature to culture, and the market tells us we’re going from literature to technical writing” (“Literary” 139). Certainly, as tuition continued to increase and D’Souza et al. attempted to mobilize parents and alumni to demand more accountability from universities by cutting off funding for frivolous research that promoted PC and degraded American higher education, theory could not remain as the sole (or even primary) path to marketability for English Studies. Humanism was in, then, whether one was anti-theory, anti-theory-industry, or just hoping to weather the storm.

Nevertheless, the humanism that theory novels in the 1990s tended to substitute for both the intellectual concerns of theory and the marketing savvy of stars like Zapp or Gladney (or Derrida, Greenblatt, Butler, etc.) proved reactionary. An equation of “tradition” with “cultural capital,” and “cultural capital” with “prestige” or “influence,” indicated the necessity of a return
to humanism to recapture English Studies’ place in the post-Cold War university. However, as with figures like Bennett or Hirsch, “the diagnoses [the conservatives] offer were already clichés a hundred year ago, and . . . the cures they recommend have repeatedly been tried and have always led to futility” (Graff and Warner 2). Against the concerns of these humanists, the novels depicted an aggressive, imperial theory, not content to exist as merely a part of English Studies, with theorists looking to take over and eliminate English departments and replace them with theory departments. While this plot referred to the emergence of theory programs and departments in the 1980s, it also carried the tenor of contemporary news coverage about theory into the academic novel, much as PC novels incorporated the structures of PC anecdotes. Campbell’s influential “The Tyranny of the Yale Critics,” for example, positioned theory as a foreign, invading force: “[t]he estate [of English Studies] is choked with new theoretical plants and weird new beasts of criticism, many of them French—as if a tropical French colony, a Paris with snakes, had sprung up from the turf. Some fear the jungle also shields a guerrilla camp from which armed nihilists have been launching raids on the academic countryside” (SM20). Following on from Campbell and confirming the need for anti-theory’s humanism, later theory novels depicted theorists as literature-hating nihilists, driven only by ambition for personal power and influence, without even the necessary conviction in their intellectual pursuits to replace English Studies with a real discipline. These academics looked to score points through politically correct grandstanding rather than engaging in serious intellectual work, and, in their obsession with jobs, tenure lines, access to department funds, etc., they functioned more like administrators than scholars.

For all their opposition to theory’s pervasive (and negative) influence, though, these novels failed to develop actual strategies beyond embracing humanism to negotiate the
increasingly commercial direction of higher education in the 1990s. In so doing, they contributed to English Studies’ misidentification of an issue within the discipline (how to teach literature in order to best fulfill the educational mission) for the larger shifting of English Studies’ place within a university that looked to leverage its research capabilities and the continued push for credentials in the workforce into increased revenue. In this light, Robert Grudin’s Book most exemplified Newfield’s idea of a market retreat by English Studies through its depiction of an attempted takeover of the English department at a small Pacific Northwest university by a group of theorists.\textsuperscript{xxxiii} Here, the plot to take over the English department at once foregrounded the institutional politics that Small World and White Noise only hint at, while providing a justification to reinstate the insularity of Small World even in the face of the inherent permeability of academe demonstrated by White Noise. Book’s somewhat utopian ending offered hope for a resurgence of the humanities, but any such resurgence was more likely to come out of an increased demand for service courses and technical writing rather than a rediscovery of literature and literary criticism. The market retreat advocated for by Book and other theory novels proved disastrous for English Studies institutionally, as chapters 3 and 4 will discuss.

Set at the fictional University of Washagon in Dulce, Washagon (a cross between Washington State University and the University of Oregon), Book follows the attempted murder of English professor Adam Snell by his colleague, Frank Underwood, a prominent literary theorist, as part of an attempted “libricide” that will erase the existence of Snell’s novel Sovrana Sostrata. Underwood is part of a cabal of theorists at Washagon who are attempting to take control of the department by persecuting humanists like Snell and who appear to have the backing of the administration for their attempted takeover. At the same time that they launch their offensive, though, Snell’s novel, unnoticed on its initial appearance, begins to gain some
influential backers who see to its republishing and eventual success, much to the chagrin of the theorists. Snell’s success confirms the value of literature as literature (and of traditional conceptions of criticism and critical method), and the theorists are split off into their own department, which fails to attract a single student and disappears. Book’s narrative draws on several related movements within English Studies, including the “back to literature” movement that emerged from the canon wars of the 1980s and a longstanding argument about critical style and language that accompanied theory’s institutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s. In its heavily metafictional form, *Book* extends the arguments found in journals like *PMLA* about the deleterious effect of critical language not only on the discipline but on the university as a whole. Presenting itself as an account of events long since passed, *Book*’s narrator frames the narrative as taking place at some point long after theory has disappeared, noting that “readers who wish to be reminded what literary theory was” can peruse the “informative if choppy account . . . given in Grudin’s book” (243). This account takes the form of a glossary that attempts to demonstrate how theoretical language and ideas have compromised the workings of the discipline and the university that should serve as objective judges of scholarship and merit, like peer review and post-tenure review. Humanists argued throughout the 1970s and 1980s that “verbal conglomerates” and “jargon” like “narratological,” “problematizing,” and “transgressive” distract from the task of “produc[ing] more, as well as more perceptive, readers of Shakespeare and Stendhal” (Barnard 87). By the end of the 1980s, those criticisms had become sharper, though, with Victor Brombert’s 1989 MLA Presidential Address, coming just three years after Hillis Miller’s declaration of the triumph of theory in his own address, arguing that “[t]he fashionable jargons with their pretense at technical precision” used by theorists are “pretentious gibberish . . . [and] hermetic clowning” that avoid the making of “aesthetic and moral value
judgements, which always require the exercise of taste and courage” and are “the legitimate aims of criticism” (393, 395).\textsuperscript{cxxxiv} Just as PC moved in the popular press from silliness on campuses to a threat to the American way of life, so too did these verbal conglomerates become supposed threats to truth, objectivity, fairness, and other bedrocks of the university and democracy for anti-theorists inside and outside academe.

At the same time, Book’s metafictional flourishes explore issues of genre and intertextuality through a polyvocal approach that includes traditional prose, newspaper clippings, dramatic scenes, and excerpts from the \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica} on the history of books. Rather than confirm some poststructuralist world-as-text thesis, though, the novel’s approach demonstrates how literature enriches the understanding of the world and humans in it, not just as instruments of power or political tools but as passionate, flesh-and-blood people, revealing the absurdities of a theory of literature that would create an Underwood and drive him to murder. Lentricchia’s renunciation of theory in \textit{Lingua Franca} would cover much the same ground, and Book’s view of theory is very \textit{en vogue} in that sense. Such topicality earned it positive reviews, with Sven Birkerts comparing it favourably to Lodge, Amis, and Malcolm Bradbury and describing it as a “commentary on the fragmented self-referentiality of our academic culture” in the \textit{New York Times Book Review} (BR5). Similarly positive reviews appeared in the \textit{Washington Post} and \textit{L.A. Times}, and in review services like \textit{Publisher’s Weekly}, and the novel appeared as both an editor’s choice alongside the \textit{New York Times’ Bestseller List} and a “new and noteworthy” paperback. For all its critical accolades, though, Book largely amounts to a mean-spirited joke at the expense of caricaturized versions of theory and theorists. While Grudin’s novel accurately depicts the disconnect between theory and the intellectual concerns of most undergraduates—prefiguring the plot of Franzen’s \textit{The Corrections}—it does not actually make a
case that a “return to literature” or a traditional humanist approach would do more to address those concerns. Instead, it offers up a market-based solution to avoid having to make that argument and in so doing subordinates English Studies’ agency as a discipline to its market-determined place within the corporate university.

In order to make its case for a return to literature and humanistic scholarship without abandoning narrative for criticism, Book relies on a certain form of nostalgia that scans as common sense. To do so, the novel divides its characters into two camps. The first is a group of humanists clustered around Snell who study and/or appreciate literature for its formal features (like genre) or overarching themes (man’s relationship to the environment) and rely on the judgements of other experts on that literature, formal feature, or theme to validate their claims. Their practices present, roughly, a picture of English Studies before theory. For this group, Snell’s novel serves as something of a touchstone, an example of what was once possible, even commonplace, but is now unheard of. As the publisher’s assistant, Harper Nathan, who resolves to get Snell’s novel republished with a major press, explains when questioned about the novel’s initial lack of success, “it’s the book itself that’s strange—strange, I mean, for our times. Fiction this passionate and focused and exploratory has been out of fashion for decades. We’ve just about forgotten that it’s possible to write it” (Grudin 57). The novel’s second group of characters, the theorists, align themselves explicitly against this view of Snell’s novel as an example of a return to something that has been missing from literature (and literature departments). For various members of Washagon’s English department, far from being a masterpiece worthy of wider attention, Snell’s novel is “a kind of ideological fossil . . . the political signature of a dead age, tragedy, the tragic form which exalted that ideological dinosaur called “the individual,”” “a metaphysical self-offense, a premature defication, a case of poor
esthetic toilet training,'’ and, most damningly, ‘‘a rapist book, a violent, malicious offense against the female’’ (Grudin 67, 68, 70). Underwood, who does not voice an opinion of Snell’s work during the post-tenure review meeting at which the above judgements are expressed, privately recalls his first encounter with the novel producing ‘‘a fever of rage’’ and ‘‘uncontrollable fantasies [in which] he pounced on [Sovrana, the novel’s eponymous heroine], beat her, violated her with various garden implements, tore her limb from limb’’ (Grudin 120). Despite the violence of his thoughts, Underwood comes to consider Snell ‘‘dangerous, immoral, [and] uncivilized’’ for writing such a novel, and ‘‘for a reason as pressing as it was indefinite’’ he develops his plan to murder the novel (Grudin 120). Though Underwood and the other theorists would hold themselves apart from a response like Nathan’s, who gushes that the novel deserves an ‘‘X’’ rating ‘‘for [its] naked ideas and dreams,’’ their judgements do not appear any more considered or sophisticated than hers, despite their status as leading literary critics, resting on arguments that rarely refer to the novel’s actual content and are more likely to reflect their emotional or psychological state while reading (Grudin 57).

The debate about Snell’s novel between his friends, his readers, and the theorists ties Book to the ‘‘return to literature’’ movement, but the methods employed by these groups in their work introduces the novel’s take on Brombert’s ‘‘legitimate aims of criticism’’ and its wider institutional consequences. Throughout, characters point to theory’s ability to alienate potential lovers of literature, while the less programmatic approach to literary interpretation and appreciation of Snell’s friends draws in new readers and promotes discussion. Snell’s own methods mirror those of his friends, as his follow up to his novel is a new book On Wonderment, treating:
nature, art, abstract ideas, personal experience, science, history, [and] psychology . . . [via] satire, tragedy, conversational anecdotes, philosophical discourse, humor, and belletristic essay . . . unified by the single theme of wonder . . . to render up, if discursively and rather shaggily, an honest and inclusive image of wonder and the phenomena that inspire it. (Grudin 153-54)

In its wide-ranging subject matter and multiple discursive registers, Snell’s book is not miles away from the work of some postmodern theorists. Indeed, its belletristic qualities mirror a particular turn in theory during the 1990s. Snell’s method of composition, with the disparate sections organized by “abbreviated subject codes” that he uses to copy, paste, and manoeuver the text on his computer, even mirrors Underwood’s methods. The theorist “use[s] his computer’s huge memory to simplify his own writing. With one-thousand-odd pages of current research in the computer, he could do word searches . . . [and] borrow whole paragraphs for quotation at the expense of five or six keystrokes” (Grudin 164) However, Book stresses instead connections between Snell and figures like George Santayana and other “men of letters,” befitting its nostalgic cast. Postmodern techniques, like the metafictional aspects of the novel, gain significance only when restored to this earlier tradition. Snell’s friends consider him an example of a modern “Renaissance humanist . . . who combined genuine learning with the ability to speak effectively to the general reader” (Grudin 153). That the theorists dismiss Snell’s work as “‘well enough written . . . in a kind of bourgeois history-of-ideas-y style’” seems peevish rather than substantive, as with their negative judgements of his novel (Grudin 66). If literary theorists cannot find value in work like Snell’s and cannot communicate with the general reader, how can they continue to contribute to culture in the grand tradition of Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, and other public intellectuals?
Underwood and the other theorists develop an insular world of shared references that scrub their work of the kind of concrete, readily accessible examples that draw readers to Snell’s work. For example, Underwood concerns himself primarily with the prestige of particular ideas rather than their content, tracked via a careful examination of citations to determine “how many of his colleagues and competitors had made reference to specific ideas” and his own work “gave theorists a new vocabulary for extending positions they had already developed” (Grudin 164, 41). Similarly, an excerpt from an article co-authored by two of Washagon’s leading theorists, Glanda Gazza and Sanford Eule, begins partway through a citation of seventeen different theorists and goes on to summarize and agree with six additional theorists before the end of the paragraph (Grudin 172-73). As critics like Frederick Crews point out, in a certain kind of theoretical writing “the positions declared by structuralism and poststructuralism are [held to be] permanently valuable discoveries that require no further interrogation” but do require flag-waving gestures that demonstrate one is on the right side of these discoveries (Crews 228). The result proves more like a cult with its own neologisms and jargon than anything else, in the eyes of critics, as theorists “derive their assumptions about language and literature, their methodology . . . their attitudes to life, even, from a law-giving individual or system. Adoption of the system . . . deprive[s] them of the power to criticize it, or even to reflect on it critically” (Vickers 247).

Certainly, the esoteric nature of some theory (and particularly various strands of poststructuralism) allowed anti-theorists to make arguments that deliberately abandoned important nuances in the confidence both that casual readers would not notice and that theorists would not be capable of adequately explaining these points to those readers.

More disturbing than these theorists’ insularity, though, are their motivations, at least as understood among the “return to literature” brigade, which compromise literature’s claims to
some sort of exceptional status as an object of culture without offering a replacement that can be
understood outside of careerist impulses. As opposed to Snell’s shaggy exploration of the nature
and experience of wonderment, an appropriately literary and humane topic, Underwood works
from “the rakishly skeptical line that language has no meaning at all as description,
communication, or philosophical inquiry but rather . . . is the medium for lines of power by
which individuals seek to enslave each other or protect themselves from enslavement” (Grudin
41). In his nihilistic view of the world and of culture, “[b]eauty, wisdom and order were empty
rationalizations. Love, sympathy and trust were vulgar buzzwords. Competition reigned
supreme, and the best competitors were those who could understand and exploit the then-
dominant patterns of power” (Grudin 119). Though he makes his living as (ostensibly) a literary
critic, Underwood has no great love of literature and denies that literature has any “implicit
human meaning” (Grudin 119). Instead, he views literary works of all sorts as “empty palaces,
ripe for occupation by militant forces of interpretation. The literary theorist could become a
commandant, an avenger ravaging decadent forms and establishing arbitrary authority” (Grudin
119). Until he becomes fixated on Snell and begins his murderous quest, Underwood’s nihilism
is largely abstract and confined to his view of literary interpretation, which is brutally
functionalist. He intends to use his “militant” interpretations to beat back his colleagues and
achieve the status of chief theorist, simultaneously wielding as a weapon and protected by the
rituals and forms of academic life. Stripped of even the faintest trace of the humanist belief in the
improving power of literature and criticism, the novel presents Underwood as a ridiculous,
unlikeable character (especially compared to Snell) who, if he is too intense or unpleasant for
most of the other theorist characters, is nonetheless their ground zero.
Substituting faux-leftist platitudes for Underwood’s nihilism but retaining his careerism, the other theorists’ revolutionary rhetoric about social change is largely directed at taking over the department in the name of some larger, liberatory political project. According to Gazza and Eule “[g]iven our present role as stewards of authority in so many literature departments across the continent, we may feel justified in using . . . that authority to direct inquiry along healthy and historically necessitated channels and away from such eddies, marshes and beaver dams as might impede it,” suggesting a vision of liberation that only they (and the theorists whom they approvingly cite) can see and that only they are qualified to lead society towards (Grudin 173). In reality, though, their ambitions largely amount to getting rid of Snell to open a tenure line in the hopes of luring an academostar to Washagon. At the post-tenure review meeting, Gazza reveals that with Snell’s disappearance (caused, unbeknownst to the committee, by an attempt on his life by Underwood) and his poor evaluations from the department members who speak at the meeting “[w]e need someone desperately in eighteenth century, and we need that person this fall,” a problem to which, conveniently, she has the solution: “Butzi Siskin of Yale is available, at least for next year and possibly for the duration. And she wants to come here! . . . Butzi can move into the Snell position when it’s officially vacated” (Grudin 77-78). This move to replace the humanist Snell with a professor whose work covers “[e]thno-genderal-politico-anthropological-cultural and much, much more,” fits to a T Gazza’s own personal goal to “populate her department with many others of her ilk” and so solidify her stance as department chair and reputation as a theorist (Grudin 78, 64). This in turn feeds into Book’s nostalgic version of English Studies, in which objective merit carried the day and such machinations were not couched in faux-emancipatory rhetoric. Coming immediately after the novel’s brief overview of peer review and post-tenure review, the theorists’ challenging of ideas like “authority” and
“expertise” during the post-tenure review appears deliberately designed to undermine a functioning system that would curb their ambitions.

Ultimately, Book returns to a version of Small World’s insularity, condemning theorists for their professed political slant, which serves as a mask for their own careerist ambitions more than any social concerns, while celebrating a purer love of literature that is equally unlikely to make an impact outside of English departments. Meeting with Gazza about complaints from Snell’s supporters over her handling of his post-tenure review, Washagon’s chancellor, Paul Edson, interrogates theory’s place on and value to the campus. He challenges Gazza with a series of probing questions intended to gauge theory’s ability to engage with the public and speak to an audience of non-theorists, to which Gazza has no reply: “what are these scholars up to? How come a literary theorist has never won a teaching award on campus? How come literary theory has no operative doctrine of education? How come . . . not a single literary theorist—correct me if I’m wrong—is ever asked to address a public audience?” (Grudin 146). For Edson, theory’s solipsistic failure to address the issues that define the times like “environmental emergency and massive poverty and all sorts of crime” points to a “manifest lack of social relevance [that] will make your field at best a passing vogue, at worst a tragic institutional blunder” (Grudin 147). Gazza’s rebuttals are confirmation of Edson’s argument, as she cannot defend theory’s social relevance except through the lens of theory and its questioning of both the terms “social” and “relevance.” She pleads her case that Edson is “passing judgment on us too soon,” as it is difficult to see the immediate, concrete effects of scholars “laying the groundwork for revolutionary social change,” but he remains unmoved (Grudin 146). Book sets up a typically humanist concern with teaching and the pursuit and dissemination of objective truth, determined through institutions like peer review. However, Edson’s criticism of theory and
its prominence in English departments (and universities more broadly) makes note of the mandate of the emergent corporate university. The institutional blunder of theory lies in its alienating qualities; failure to capture a public audience is a death sentence when “[o]ur products are no longer attracting world attention, and to make things worse our corporations, mad for quarterly bottom-line profits, are cutting research-and-development budgets to the bone” (Grudin 147). With corporate support for theory unlikely—in contrast with the social sciences, which were able to develop strategies to market their knowledge as a potential asset for the corporate world—a drop in public support would mean an unsellable product at a time when universities were being retrained to think of profits. Institutional politics in an era of declining R&D budgets and expanding technology transfer offices looks much different than Gazza’s maneuvering to secure tenure lines for additional theorists.

Edson does not say that the professors, like Snell and his supporters, who win teaching awards and have an “operative doctrine of education” (however unconscious it is) have a more saleable commodity than theorists, but that notion is the subtext of his remarks and of Book as a whole (Grudin 146). The idea that literature (or, more likely, Literature), close reading, and pre-cultural studies cultural criticism are more in demand than theory, though, is an apocryphal argument cut from the same cloth as Clausen’s claim about Alice Walker and Shakespeare. Curriculum committees moved to address shifting student, parental, and corporate expectations for the outcome of higher education (primarily vocational training but also increased access to professional and white collar positions that promise some kind of security) via equipping graduates with “transferable skills.” Whether those graduates gained those skills through reading Derrida or Dryden is to a large extent immaterial, particularly since English Studies’ ability to develop writing and communication skills in students is increasingly limited to freshman
composition at both R1s and at liberal arts schools like Washagon. Edson’s ultimate response to the theorists’ ambitions operates within these institutional contexts while simultaneously suggesting that neither literature nor theory can have an intentional impact on the discipline’s institutional purchase. In a move in keeping with other neoliberal reforms of institutions, Edson turns the issue over to the market, allowing the supposed free competition of attracting students (and therefore tuition dollars, prestige, funding, and other institutional support) to decide. Washagon will have both a Department of Literary Theory and a Department of English, the latter staffed “with a requisite number of real literature professors” and the former forced to defend its ability “to edify and empower students . . . in a fair arena” (Grudin 227). That theory is destined to fail this test becomes readily apparent when the new department faces a “sudden and unexpected dearth of students,” though none of the theorists seem to mind this development (Grudin 234).

Here, Book bases its plot on the unfounded assumption that theory drives away students who would otherwise major in English, which had gained significant traction by the early 1990s. Lehman, for example, makes just this spurious argument in his polemic against deconstruction, arguing that “the number of students electing to major in literature has steadily declined over the last twenty years—the period when critical theorists were becoming the hottest properties in an increasingly fashion-conscious profession” (29). However, the New York Times article he cites in support of his figures on dropping numbers of humanities majors makes no mention of theory driving away potential students but does foreground the rising number of students majoring in business because of its perceived effectiveness in landing students a job (Maeroff “Shifting” C11). Indeed, at the moment of theory’s public peak at the start of the 1990s, English Studies awarded more BAs (56,133 in 1992-93) and accounted for a greater proportion of all bachelor’s
degrees awarded (4.8% in 1991-92 and 1992-93) than at any time since the early 1970s. Since then, the number of BAs awarded in English has remained fairly constant, continuing to outnumber degrees in computer science and lag behind psychology, education, health science, and business. Theory’s ability to directly drive these figures is minor at best. While theory’s poor public reputation may have deterred some students from pursuing BAs (though it is unlikely that there were too many students reading op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal* or long *New York Times Sunday Magazine* pieces on collaborationist French professors at Yale), theory was not the only thing keeping students from majoring in English. Similarly, the notion that English had become “the laughingstock on [the] local campus these days” because of theory overstates how much interest the general public actually had in what was the most inside of inside baseball (Delbanco). Far more worrying was the emphasis on theory at the expense of formulating a response to pressures on disciplines within higher education that did not produce readily commercializable results to become more like vocational training and so replaced theory not with literature but with professional writing. At the same time, the failure to develop a response to a growing desire for straightforward, non-academic career paths given the state of the academic job market meant that what strategies eventually appeared (like the MLA’s tepid approach to alt-ac in the mid to late 1990s) were outgrowths of the mandate of the corporate university, rather than extensions or reformulations of the traditional mission of the humanities.

For all its supposed intellectual heat and light, then, *Book* portrays English Studies as a mostly passive discipline, willing to be administered according to the norms of the corporate university provided literature can be protected from theory and its careerist practitioners. Certainly, *Book’s* humanists have not made any decisive arguments that would invalidate Gazza and co.’s work. The theorists’ ambition, their naked careerism, and their extreme views on
literature and interpretation are left to serve as an explanation for and justification of theory’s demise. At the same time, the novel does little to demonstrate how English Studies (either at Washagon or across the disciple more broadly) will improve its institutional standing by purging itself of theory. Neither Snell nor any of his supporters appear in a classroom in the novel to demonstrate their teaching prowess (nor, for that matter, do any of theorists to demonstrate their supposed inferiority as teachers), and Snell’s scholarship, while a wonderful reclamation of Renaissance humanism it, does not directly translate into improved technical and professional writing instruction, the discipline’s currency in a higher education concerned with the bottom line. Though the novel more confidently predicts an end to theory than Small World, Book proves no more definitive in its suggestions of what a future English Studies might look like.

Even if theory succeeded in the kind of takeover that Book accuses it of orchestrating, the novel does not clarify how such a move would withstand the university’s transition away from the post-war research university model. As William Cain argued in 1984, theory had little impact on the structure of the discipline and its institutional place because it was “primarily a field in its own right—large, lucrative, and self-contained.” and Book reinforces this point, particularly theory’s insular focus (xvii-xviii). Absent an active response to a changing university, then, English Studies’ market retreat appears inevitable, more so than any takeover of English departments by nihilistic theorists or complete disappearance of theory from the curriculum. Careerism depends on careers, and if the shape of an academic career seemed to be fluid during the 1980s, it was solidifying into something far different during the 1990s than either the theorists or humanists intended. What is more, absent a coherent vision for a discipline that could withstand the demands for profitability and corporate synergy and a faculty empowered to fight
for the institutional power to resist this new direction *en masse*, market demand would continue to offer the most compelling version of what English Studies was to become to administrators.

**Selling Shares in Theory in the Bear Market**

By the end of the 1990s, the debate about theory’s place in literary studies had lost some of its ferocity. Few academics in either the pro- or anti-theory camps seemed ready to back down, though there were fewer public conflicts. Theory had also lost some of its galvanizing force, as the methodological revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s were not followed by equally revolutionary developments in the 1980s and 1990s. The theoretical camps that came to prominence during the 1990s like queer theory and postcolonial theory were syncretic developments that focused on extending existing principles and methods to cover overlooked or underrepresented areas of cultural production. At the turn of the century digital humanities seemed to offer the best chance for continued methodological invention and was in some cases (as in the work of Franco Moretti) explicitly presented as a replacement for theory. For the most part, though, the movement into the post-theory era that began with the supplanting of deconstruction and other forms of poststructuralism by cultural studies in the early to mid-1990s turned theory into a historical object that made it part of English Studies’ atmosphere. Theory was no longer the cutting edge, but it was inevitably part of the discipline, and to continue to argue about that fact—to be hung up about theory as opposed to the larger picture—was to ignore theory’s intimate connection with the structures of the post-war research university that were most under threat: public support for widespread access to higher education, government funding at both the state and federal levels, a robust tenure track, and an understanding of the social and economic value of the university that was not directly tied to commercialization and profits. To be sure, this form of the university had had its flaws, including a steadily increasing
reliance on adjuncts and other part-time faculty since the 1970s, a continued lack of access for low income students, and an ongoing connection with the Cold War military-industrial complex. As theory’s controversial status faded and the debate over theory in the curriculum was mostly sidestepped in favour of a slightly tweaked status quo, those who had entered the discipline during the boom of the late 1980s and the crash of the 1990s faced a corporate university that was largely unwilling to convert either theory or literature’s cultural capital into institutional power.

Chip Lambert, one of the protagonists of Franzen’s *The Corrections*, is emblematic of this group of new academics who would come to take leading roles within English Studies heading into the 2000s. His inability to “sell” theory (either to his students in the classroom or, later, at a rummage sale of used books) both continues the narrative set out in novels like *Book* of theory’s inevitable decline for lack of long term market value and pinpoints the issues facing the post-theory generation that would come to define the academic novel in the 2000s. Lambert had formerly been a successful young assistant professor of Textual Artifacts at a prestigious college before an ill-advised affair with a student (brought on in part by his faltering career as personal criticism and the return of humanism replace High Theory as the critical vanguard) leads to his dismissal. In keeping with the narrative that theory turned students away from English Studies and the humanities more generally, *The Corrections* demonstrates Chip’s absolute failure in the classroom, one that convinces him of the impossibility of theory serving as a foundation for an intellectual life of any value. For several years prior to this crisis, Chip has noted that the students in his introductory theory survey, a section of which is required for all freshmen, “were a little more resistant to hardcore theory” (Franzen 40). In response to the fear that for all his efforts the students “were doing [no] more than parroting the weekly jargon,” without a real
sense of “how to criticize mass culture,” he tests them with an advertising campaign for office equipment that “exploits a woman’s fear of breast cancer and her sympathy with its victims” in the service of a multinational corporation (Franzen 40, 43). His students fail even to parrot the jargon, though. Led by his brightest student, Melissa, the class attacks Chip, whom they see as just trying “to teach us to hate the same things you hate” (Franzen 43). Like Edson in Book, Melissa points out the lack of social relevance in the course’s implied critique of contemporary society, as “[h]ere things are getting better and better for women and people of color, and gay men and lesbians, more and more integrated and open, and all you can think about is some stupid, lame problem with signifiers and signifieds . . . because there has to be something wrong with everything” (Franzen 44). Chip withers under this assault because it targets what is for him the very obvious importance of theory and his project, that “[c]riticizing a sick culture, even if the criticism accomplished nothing . . . [is] useful work” (Franzen 45). Faced with the prospect of having to translate the value of that criticism into a tangible utility, Chip (like Gazza in Book) can only refer back to the language of theory. That his students’ conception of value is no less abstract—Melissa, for example, is the daughter of two mutual fund managers, whose work is valuable because they are “really good investors”—matters little because of the newfound authority of financial abstractions in the last two decades of the twentieth century (Franzen 50). Indeed, though they would be loath to recognize it, Chip’s belief in the value of theory and cultural criticism is as nostalgic and appeals to the same values as the humanist touting a return to literature as the salve for English Studies’ declining fortunes.

What drives home the incompatibility of Chip’s conception of utility and the dominant economic sense of the term that has flourished alongside neoliberalism’s rise is his failure to sell his theory books after leaving academe. Broke and living in New York City following his
dismissal, Chip squanders two substantial loans from his sister writing an un-filmable screenplay that opens with “‘a six-page lecture about anxieties of the phallus in Tudor drama’” (Franzen 25). Desperate for cash, he begins to sell off his theory books, naively assuming that “his books would fetch him hundreds of dollars” (Franzen 92). However, in a scene that perfectly illustrates the title of Bérubé’s “Literary and Cultural Studies in the Bear Market,” Chip’s books of Marxist theory, “in their original jackets and [with] . . . an aggregate list price of $3,900,” net him just sixty five dollars, and his “beloved cultural historians” make him a further one hundred fifteen (Franzen 92). After years of using the ideas contained in those same books to criticize commodity culture and insist that alternative conceptions of value exist that could heal a society sick with greed, he attempts to capitulate to that culture and repudiate those theories by reducing them to mere commodities. To discover, then, that no one wants them as commodities, that their value to Chip remains a value distinct from their list price as books, confirms to him that theory cannot serve as a sustainable lived practice. Certainly, according to the rules of English Studies as governed by the market, successful theorists are not reduced to shoplifting salmon steaks from a local supermarket, as Chip is forced to do in anticipation of a visit from his parents. Successful theorists can sell theory to consumers, and if Chip (who was a very successful theorist) cannot do so, then perhaps Edson, Snell, and the other humanists from Book were correct: theory has no value.

Beyond its unflattering valuation of theory, The Corrections highlights emerging problems that a humanities subservient to market demands is not prepared to solve. As “an eligible and well-published thirty-three-year-old to whom the college’s provost, Jim Leviton, had all but guaranteed lifelong employment” because he “pile[s] up the prizes and fellowships and grants that [a]re the coin of the academic realm,” Chip had been on track for great success during
the theory era (Franzen 33). However, being a star in this very academic sense proves unsatisfactory. Chip appears ill-suited to anything outside of teaching introductory theory courses, and this insularity belies societal expectations of a cultural theorist, who should be able to communicate broadly and illuminate the general experience of culture rather than wallowing in self-referentiality. What is more, he fails to read the mood of the market correctly. His form of cultural critique, however trenchant, is depressive, which proves a tough sell in the midst of the dot-com bubble. The college at which Chip teaches “depend[s] for its survival on students whose parents could pay full tuition” and so requires marketable stars to go along with its “$30 million recreation center, [and] three espresso bars” (Franzen 34). In this context, marketable means not a theory head, whose chic moment has passed, but Vendla O’Fallon, a competing theorist who publishes “a memoir called _Daddy’s Girl_ . . . declared ‘astonishing’ and ‘courageous’ and ‘deeply satisfying’” in the _New York Times Sunday Magazine_ (Franzen 52). On the one hand, the success of O’Fallon relative to Chip is a logical outcome of the celebrity economy already on display in _Small World_. However, that Chip and O’Fallon are forced to compete for only one tenure line—despite both being hired on the tenure track—clarifies how the stakes of that celebrity economy increased as the proportion of tenure-track to non-tenure-track faculty continued to fall during the 1990s and new tenure-track positions became scarce. Ultimately, while someone like O’Fallon can help increase prestige and contribute to the university’s brand (and thus register value in that way), neither she nor Chip solve the issue of cheaply staffing sections of freshman composition, technical writing, and other courses that fit into the mandate of the corporate university. Indeed, the novel presents Chip’s failure as deserved (beyond his own poor decisions to have a relationship with a student), and he comes to serve as a representative figure for the discipline as a whole, living outside its means after the
inflated peak of the mid to late 1980s. Chip responds to the signs of the declining value of theory (e.g., the increasing lack of student engagement in his survey course) not by atoning for his personal failure in making a poor investment in theory but by suggesting that the very mechanisms that recast the situation as a personal failure, bad risk, and mark of shame are in fact making the same broad cultural and political claims that are being denied to theory through its market devaluation. Such an approach has been a key neoliberal tactic, and underscores the correction of English Studies according to market demand, where that demand is figured as the continued reduction of tenure track positions and expansion of part-time teaching positions in the name of cost reduction and service course delivery.

Perhaps most disturbingly, though, to the extent that professors are evaluated based on their marketability, then the failure of theory to remain saleable eliminates the conditions for English Studies to exercise some agency in responding to and shaping the market and the demands it places on higher education. Brand protection and promotion is increasingly important for the corporate university and as the management of these tasks is handled by administrators, the decline of theory and the loss of power of English Studies in these novels mirrors the waning of faculty power more broadly in favour of administrative power. Regardless of whether or not a return to literature, a foregrounding of its formal and aesthetic properties rather than its potential political significances, and a renewed commitment to the canon (however expanded or modified) defined English departments in the 1990s—as opposed to a headlong embrace of theory, cultural studies, politics, and popular culture, as was feared by some who opposed these new developments—the debate about theory in the curriculum largely ignored the context that made such questions possible. Jobs were numerous in the late 1980s, especially full-time jobs, in a way that they would not be going forward, despite projections of mass retirements and rising
enrollments that seemed to necessitate further hiring down the road. The “death of theory” was as much a death of the professional model attached to the post-war research university (at least within the context of English Studies), which could no longer be said to serve as an accurate model for the majority of the professoriate. By 2003, according to the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, the number of full-time and part-time faculty members in the humanities (excluding history and philosophy) was the same. Giving up on theory and returning to literature might placate the D’Souzas and Kimballs of the world, though probably only if the discipline also turned its back on three decades of work to expand the canon and offered courses that would fit comfortably in the catalogues of English departments before 1964, but it would do little to address the larger processes in which English departments were enmeshed.

Responding to attacks on the content of English Studies and focusing on local, pedagogical or curricular battles forced the discipline (and higher education as a whole) to accept a neoliberal politics of knowledge that readily accommodated the debates between theorists and traditionalists because they tended to be framed in terms of the marketability of English Studies moving forward. Having reduced knowledge to “market mechanisms that included price signals and efficiency management,” these neoliberal policies looked to remake the discipline in a way that theory never could (Newfield Unmaking 68). For its parts, facing institutional retrenchment, English Studies was “more comfortable with losing to market forces than with everyday efforts to manage them” and “accept[ed] . . . the ‘market’ as the arbitrator of the shape of the profession” for the promise of survival (Newfield Unmaing 147). Such a vision of survival compromised the dream embodied by academostars and sold to graduate students, even as Bowen and Sosa’s projections continued to be pointed to as the bright future awaiting the other side of the market corrections. That such corrections were deemed necessary was largely due to
the discipline’s failure to push back against the narrative (parroted in theory novels like Book and The Corrections) that English Studies, and the humanities as a whole, “had long been ignoring market forces” and were now simply going through the painful process of “the restoration of market equilibrium” (Newfield Unmaking 147, 149). English Studies had ignored market forces only to the extent that it had ignored making concerted attempts to push back against those forces, even when sensational reports of the taxi-driving PhD were appearing in national newspapers. As with the PC novels discussed in Chapter 1, then, theory novels demonstrate the larger stakes of the culture wars primarily by failing to engage directly with those stakes. Their narratives of theory’s excesses support the idea that English Studies needs to be disciplined by the market, flouting its rules during the theory boom and paying for it in the more austere 1990s. Market equilibrium becomes the moral of the story.

Like PC novels, theory novels display the chief ideological manoeuver of culture wars narratives: to extend the ideological framework that attempts to determine the social significance of higher education and the actions and attitudes of faculty and students within it by defining a threat to nostalgic ideas about academe. Where the ideological thrust of PC novels was focused on the twin concepts of fairness and accountability, theory novels tend to deal with the concept of professionalization. Key here is the response of theory novels to the popular narrative of theory’s rise and decline. Rather than identifying that the changes the university had undergone between The Groves of Academe and Small World (and on up to The Corrections) meant that earlier models of professional behaviour and standards were no longer in line with institutional and disciplinary realities, theory novels demonstrate the same nostalgic impulse behind anti-PC rhetoric. If theory had been a fad and if the brief moment of relative prosperity English Studies had experienced during the late 1980s had consequently been unsustainable, there was little
sense in targeting developments like the star system or the theory industry without a proposal for new ways to justify the existence of English Studies within the research university framework. The calls for a return to traditional humanism and fears about the discipline’s loss of status post-theory found in theory novels like Book pointed as much to a failure by the discipline to comprehend its institutional position during the Golden Age as they did to an inherent problem with theory as an object of study. During the 1950s and 1960s, the ability to present itself as a systematic method of study akin to a science (or, more accurately, a social science) had allowed English Studies to gain institutional prominence apart from its service course offerings (like freshman composition). While theory’s success may have exacerbated some tendencies for individual faculty members as independent professionals apart from the larger campus community (as depicted by Morris Zapp in Small World), retreat to an idealized version of English Studies prior to theory and its stars left the discipline with those service courses as its primary institutional value.

As the postwar research university transitioned into the corporate university of the twenty-first century, basing the discipline’s institutional position on its ability to offer service courses meant accepting as English Studies’ guiding principle the view of education as a commodity that accompanied this newly marketized form of higher education. Indeed, far from signalling the triumphant return to traditional humanist notions as the major structuring principles of work in an English department, neoliberalism emerged as the horizon of the possible for English Studies. In order to regain the ability to foreground humanist concerns rather than those of theorists or radicals, the discipline accepted that the marketplace of ideas was much more of an actual market than a metaphysical conceit. Faculty support for such an approach, readily present in Small World, Book, and in other theory novels like John L’Heureux’s The
Handmaid of Desire, should have been unlikely: the ongoing marketization of higher education had dramatically increased casualization of English faculty and decreased opportunities for public support for the humanities. Or, to frame the issue in another way, both Morris Zapp and Chip Lambert are academics whose achievements should satisfy any evaluator, as they have both published well and won awards. Both are models of professionalization in English Studies, but there are no certainties for Lambert. His professionalization, tied as it is to his status as a theory star, represents English Studies before it accepted the market as the mechanism tasked with the oversight of those professional standards. Accountability to market demands can restore the opportunities for a scholar like Lambert should he be willing to abandon theory. The efficient market of neoliberalism, which promotes competition for resources, would restore meritocracy and therefore promote valuable ideas like humanism over faddish ones like theory.

To be sure, the changes to disciplinary standards of professionalization during the 1980s and 1990s documented by theory novels had favoured at least a partial embrace of the market as the mechanism tasked with the oversight of those professional standards. However, thanks to a relatively weak sense of English Studies’ separation from the market that exists throughout the postwar period (and is reflected in academic novels) there was little to prevent the discipline from following along with the corporate reshaping of the university as a whole. Rather than using changes in professionalization to examine structural changes to higher education as manifested at the institutional level, theory novels retreat from such a scope, accepting neoliberal ideas of market discipline and the order imposed on ideas, organizations, and institutions through the workings of the market. The result was a continued profession of faith in the importance of the older ideas of the university favoured by humanists without any suggestion of habits or attitudes that would challenge the discipline’s market retreat. Acceptance of neoliberalism within
English Studies would continue to change professional practices and the institutional locations in which those practices take place, eventually leading to changes to the form of the academic novel itself.

As the role of faculty shifted in the corporate university with the new prominence of technology transfer, external funding sources, and business-academe synergies and partnerships, though, the form of the academic novel began to shift. With an increased emphasis on financial matters came a renewed push for fundraising and other administrative tasks to take centre stage, responsibilities that had historically not belonged to the faculty but that had been (during periods of faculty strength) balanced by the diffusion of governance throughout the faculty and the administration. The divide between the faculty and the university that had been widened by the celebrity economy of academostars played into this: younger faculty, eager to play the market like the stars who exemplified disciplinary success, began to shirk governance responsibilities, a crippling blow to faculty power at a moment when increasing numbers of faculty were off the tenure track and so denied the ability to take part in governance activities. Administrators, aware of this increasing distance between faculty member and campus clawed back some governance responsibilities that had been the domain of faculty since the Second World War, increasing their claim on identification with the university. To the extent that culture wars rhetoric naturalized arguments for accountability measures and pushed for disciplinary reform along those lines, narratives about the casualization of faculty members or declining faculty power in the face of adminification could be refracted through the supposedly necessary pain of re-establishing market equilibrium, a pain that was read as self-inflicted in this scenario. Though professional conditions were declining, this approach actively worked against empowering English Studies to fight that decline. The weakness of this position paved the way for a further transferral of power
away from faculty to administrators, a corresponding weakening of faculty governance, and a continued marginalization of the concerns of both theorists and traditionalists in the form of both English Studies and the university as a whole.
Almost fifty years ago, the Wall Street Journal ran a profile of Vernon Roger Alden, then-president of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. The piece describes Alden as one of “the new breed of college presidents—young and active, with a head for business and with interests that reach far beyond the campus,” touting his “sensational job” in an era of “student discontent” (R. Martin 1). By any measure the profile applies, almost all of which are financial, Alden was a huge success: “[p]rivate contributions to Ohio U. last year [1966] rose to $3.7 million from a paltry $804,000 in 1962,” the year Alden took over as president, and “[f]ederal grants and contracts, which totaled $742,000 in 1962 have soared to $3.3 million” (R. Martin 1). At the same time, Alden was overseeing an aggressive construction campaign that sought to expand the campus and its amenities to accommodate 50,000 students by 1976, a significant increase from the 8,800 who attended in 1962. Illustrating the broad reach of the multiversity, the article notes Alden’s attempts to transform Athens into something “more than a sleepy college town” through the creation of a “Center for Economic Opportunity, financed by a Federal grant, to seek ways to speed the economic development of the surrounding Appalachia area” (R. Martin 24). The result of these activities was the evolution of a small public university by “plung[ing] the school into regional and overseas public services projects and creat[ing] a bustling atmosphere of experimentation and innovation” (R. Martin 1). Key to Alden’s multi-pronged approach to development, according to the piece, is his background. Like an increasing number of university presidents at the time, Alden did not have a PhD and was “as much a businessman and public relations man as he [wa]s a scholar” (R. Martin 1). In this, he fits Clark Kerr’s description of the...
president of a multiversity as, among other things, “a good speaker with the public, an astute bargainer with the foundations and the federal agencies, a politician with the state legislature, a friend of industry, labor, and agriculture, [and] a persuasive diplomat with donors . . . [who] enjoy[s] traveling in airplanes, eating his meals in public, and attending public ceremonies” (29-30). Though Kerr maintained the impossibility of finding a man capable of being all of these things, Alden and the rest of the “new breed” of presidents seemed just that, eclipsing the activities of all others in shaping their universities through sheer dogged hustle. Not for nothing was Alden in high demand from both major corporations and the federal government.

That Alden and others like him saw the university as a venue in which they could exercise similar powers and undertake similar development and management tasks to a government official or corporate executive suggests not only a shift in the positioning and function of the university as a social institution, but also a redefinition of the office of university president. Alden and his ilk were not part-time administrators recruited from the faculty ranks either through a sense of duty toward shared governance or as the logical step beyond a teaching and research career. They were instead businessmen running businesses, and not just ma-and-pa operations; at the height of postwar expansion, the university had become a major firm with diversified holdings and requiring serious administrative firepower. That they were outsiders with at least one foot in the business world was key as they were unlikely to treat academic norms as sacred if they interfered with further development and expansion. The results could be good—Ohio University flourished under Alden by all accounts, adding donors, improving campus facilities, increasing enrollment, and investing in athletics—but they also altered how universities conceived of themselves and how they measured the results of their activities. To the extent that executives like Alden could point to fundraising and construction as tangible markers
of progress or enrollment numbers or research expenditures as metrics of educational quality, they laid the groundwork for the imposition of a “business ontology,” or the idea that higher education should be run like a business (Fisher CR 17). This idea has been particularly influential within the corporate university that has developed since the 1980s, particularly when combined with Chicago-style neoliberalism, which nurtures a radical scepticism toward all non-empirical forms of knowledge and claims to expertise and “open[s] up the possibility that concentrations of bureaucratic and calculative capacity within the market might be a basis for better and more efficient decision-making” (Davies and McGoey 71). The central evaluative criteria that such bureaucratic concentrations can both measure and attempt to improve in the hopes of increasing the level of competition present in any system or institution (and thereby deriving maximum benefit from market activities) is efficiency (Davies and McGoey 71). Alden’s generation of presidents represents the point at which the mechanisms that have come to govern the corporate university were introduced.

This view of the university president as combination businessman and PR man, separate from academe and needed as a way to manage the institution’s increasingly deep and frequent dealings with the private sector and the rest of the public sector, was also a significant evolution away from common perceptions of such men. Portraits of presidents (and other administrators) in academic novels are not rare, from Dr. Melmouth in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Fanshawe (1828) to Maynard Hoar in Mary McCarthy’s Groves of Academe (1951) and on to Irwin Kaney in Michael Malone’s Foolscap (1991). In general, though, these treatments have been negative, with presidents “confined only to token roles” and defined chiefly by their “[v]anity” (Kramer 81n2, 82). Other administrators have fared little better, reduced to a collection of “sycophantish department chairpersons, deans, and administrative staff” (Kramer 86-87). However, the broad
powers wielded by presidents like Alden and the robust administrative support required to turn their visions for development into reality resulted in a bypassing of this unflattering comparison to faculty members. Indeed, as the administrative ranks swelled and the university continued to develop toward its current form, administrators assumed an ever more central role in its operations. This change has come to be reflected in the academic novel, as well, particularly as the new academic novel continued to take shape in the 1990s. These novels detail what Benjamin Ginsberg calls the “all-administrative university . . . controlled by administrators and staffers who make the rules and set more and more of the priorities of academic life” (1). For example, in Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*, the protagonist Coleman Silk earns a reputation as a kind of intellectual colossus, but his primary achievements come as an administrator. In his role as Dean of Faculty at Athena College, he “takes an antiquated, backwater, Sleepy Hollowish college and, not without steamrolling, put an end to the place as a gentleman’s farm by aggressively encouraging the deadwood among the faculty’s old guard to seek early retirement, recruiting ambitious young assistant professors, and revolutionizing the curriculum” (Roth 5). In contrast with the treatment of administrators in earlier novels, academic novels from the 1990s and into the 2000s grant them a larger textual presence, taking seriously their influence over campus policies and culture, and expanding their cast of characters from the more common presidents, provosts, and deans to feature support staff workers and even non-professional employees like food service workers.

In exploring this phenomenon, contemporary academic fiction documents the “adminification” of higher education, in which the formerly synecdochic relationship between the faculty and the university has been replaced by a new synecdoche in which administration comes to be identified with the university and faculty are reduced to employees of the university
who are outside institutional power and governance. These narratives reveal the faculty’s
disenfranchisement and deskillling and academic novels dealing with its effects belong to a larger
body of contemporary fiction on “beleaguered white-collar workers and denizens of the middle
class” (Williams “Rise” 561). Both Jane Smiley’s Moo (1995) and Richard Russo’s Straight Man
(1997), two of the best-known academic novels of the 1990s, use budget crises as a lens through
which to view faculty disenfranchisement and the emergence of a new kind of university,
demonstrating the extent to which governance has been ceded to administrators, and a primarily
economic understanding of higher education usurps concerns about the educational mission. In this, they are not simply narratives about corporatization and bureaucratization, though the
adminification they depict is a part of those processes. What Moo and Straight Man depict is a
shift toward the integration of tenured faculty with the other professional employees of the
university through the redefinition of their function as an expression of administrative action and
principles more generally. Teaching becomes either customer management or it is devalued and
displaced onto a contingent workforce of skilled labourers who need to be managed according to
brand enhancement strategies. Similarly, research becomes a revenue-generating opportunity
through the creation and further exploitation of business partnerships or it must be managed in
order to deliver a product that lives up to customer expectations (as with the attempts to alarm
parents and alumni about the teaching of rock music, comic books, and other “non-literary” texts
following the advent of cultural studies). If the exposure to market fundamentalism had reduced
the professional security of English professors in the 1990s, in part by undermining the
professional structures that had served as safeguards from the market’s activities, then becoming
part of the administrative apparatus offered an alternative form of professional security, one that
compromised faculty autonomy but regained them some limited institutional power to be
deployed in accordance with administrative priorities. If PC novels and theory novels help to explain how neoliberal ideas about institutional reform and management could prove seductive to faculty members, these novels of adminification help to illustrate how those ideas were put into effect, clarifying the stakes of the culture wars and the assumptions governing the corporate university.

**From Growth to Austerity:**

**Foundations of Administrative Control in the Post-Golden Age University**

The prevalence of adminification as a theme in contemporary academic fiction demonstrates a shift in universities’ self-conception from the faculty-driven Golden Age university to the managed, corporate university of today. Previously held assumptions like the predominance of educational over business concerns and the necessity of faculty involvement in (and approval of) the governance of the university gives way in these novels in the face of privatization, casualization, and declining public support for higher education. Here, the academic novel taps into much wider socioeconomic trends that stretch far beyond the university in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, the concerns of adminification novels reflect those surrounding outsourcing and downsizing throughout American industries, from heavy manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s to white-collar, managerial positions in the late-1980s and 1990s. During the early 1980s, coverage of negotiations between powerful unions like the United Automobile Workers and the Big Three automobile manufacturers focused on the implications of “the internationalization of work and the movement of jobs from America to foreign countries” (Serrin “Mobility” E8). These developments, part of an ongoing migration away from manufacturing and toward the service sector undertaken by capitalism in the 1970s, were trumpeted in the name of competitiveness, with management gurus preaching “radical
management insight and action” as the saviour of American industry through “[r]estructuring and outsourcing [which] . . . offload[] unproductive overhead and uncompetitive wage rates” (Hout and Blaxill 144). Despite the potentially global nature of this restructuring, with analysts noting early on that “advances in computer and telecommunications technologies are beginning to move office jobs offshore as well,” there was relatively little mobilization from those in white-collar jobs to support blue-collar workers “while mass layoffs overtook what had once been a flourishing blue-collar middle class” (Pollack E18; Newfield Unmaking 81). A contributing factor to this loss of solidarity was the redefinition of the university’s function away from Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society,” with its vision of the university as the proving ground for the “creation of a functional middle-and-working-class majority,” in favour of a return to its earlier role as ranker and sorter, now upgraded to illustrate who would succeed in the new economy driven by information technology (Newfield Unmaking 4). To the extent that a college degree increasingly served as the divide between the middle and working classes, higher education was used as a means of separating the interests of these two groups. The former would succeed in a society where everyone, supposedly, would be middle class, a claim that served to fulfill the promise of mass higher education without actually achieving any of its goals regarding integration and solving social ills. The working class, in this vision, would simply go away. Johnson’s Great Society project, far from becoming the formal initiation of Meritocracy II on a mass scale was instead its peak as an institutional mandate and governance policy.

By the early 1990s, though, with the transition to a service-based economy well underway thanks to those same advances in telecommunications technology, efficiency measures in the form of layoffs came even to those white-collar and skilled jobs that were supposed to be so vital to the new economy. In the face of “lean foreign rivals” who embraced not just
automation, just-in-time practices, and other strategies designed to reduce manufacturing
headcount while also streamlining at the managerial and executive levels through self-
monitoring and outsourcing, American companies responded with layoffs in which
“professionals, administrators, and other desk-holders . . . lost jobs in record numbers” (Lohr
A1). Even during the mid-1990s, with layoffs slowing slightly—8.4 million between 1993 and
1995, as opposed to 9 million between 1991 and 1993—and the “recovery” from the recession of
the early 1990s announced, trends still suggested that “increasingly the jobs that are disappearing
are those of higher-paid, white-collar workers” with many of the displaced moving into part-
time, contract, or consulting work rather than full-time employment (Uchitelle “Despite Drop”
A1; Uchitelle and Kleinfield 1). Such developments led Bob Herbert to diagnose the problem
as “a wholesale loss of clout” on the part of the American worker, reducing the ability to resist
stratification and unequal distribution of wealth because of an inability apply any pressure or call
on any mutual responsibility from “[t]he folks at the top of the pyramid” (A31). That such
circumstances would come to higher education should have been readily apparent given the
appeals to other institutions (like government, under Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush) to
adopt similar approaches, but faculty undertook relatively few actions to forestall this possibility.
As administrative control of governance solidified during the 1980s and 1990s and the new breed
of executives who brought the lessons of business with them to academe became even more
attractive in light of the valorization of the turnarounds achieved by executives who implemented
these efficiency and cost-cutting measures, the implementation of these practices on academe
was both widespread and widely supported by decision makers. Tenured faculty represented a
challenge—“[t]hey cannot easily be dismissed” and yet represent a significant cost to the
university—but they proved unable to effectively counter the use of “attrition and retirement
incentives” to thin their ranks and clear the way for the administrative agenda (Bousquet How 73, 71). Where possible, remaining tenured faculty were directed into support and implementation of that agenda by redefining their relationship to the newly created masses of contingent labour upon which the university now relied.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the roots of this development lie in the so-called Golden Age of 1945-70, ostensibly the period of greatest faculty power in the postwar era. Driven by massive increases in enrollment and generous funding for higher education established by the National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Higher Education Act (1965), faculty ranks swelled between 1950 and 1970. However, the growth seen during the Golden Age lasted for a much shorter time than is typically remembered. Though roughly similar levels of overall growth would continue to be seen through 1975, this was almost entirely fueled by increases in part-time faculty who represented 54.5% of the growth during this period. In 1960-65 and 1965-1970, part-time faculty had accounted for just 9.6% and 9.7% of all growth, respectively. 1970-75 was
much more representative of faculty growth trends to the end of the century, though, as between 1975 and 2001 63.4% of all growth came from part-time faculty. In contrast, between 1960 and 1975, 73% of all growth came from full-time faculty. The reversal in trends was notable enough that then-president of the AAUP Walter Adams declared in 1974 that the Golden Age had been over for some time, having “beg[un] with the Russian sputnik and ending with the escalation of the Vietnam war” in 1966, as “emerging scepticism about the efficacy of education as a weapon in the war against inequality . . . the backlash against the student protest[s] and campus disturbances of the late 1960s . . . [and] the general deterioration of the national economy” ushered in an era of retrenchment and austerity (119-120). Faculty salaries followed a similar trend, with the AAUP appending the title “Hard Times” to its annual “Report on the Economic Status of the Profession” for 1973-74 as “for the first time in the history of the survey of faculty compensation [which has been ongoing annually since at least the mid-1950s], the nation’s faculties actually lost ground economically” (Dorfman, Cell, and Eynonerie 171). Where the average salary for an assistant professors had risen from $51,098 in 1959-60, to $63,766 in 1965-66, and $68,738 in 1970-71, by 1975-76 it had declined to $62,037 and $54,739 in 1980-81 (all amounts in constant 2015 dollars) (Simon and Grant 1971; Snyder 2013). It would not be until 2009-10 that the average salary of an assistant professor surpassed 1970-71 levels.

The casualization and salary stagnation were symptoms of a wider austerity movement in higher education related to accelerating privatization, overseen by administrative forces that prioritized fund generation and cost-cutting in response to declining state and federal funding. By 1980, Gene I. Maeroff could state in the New York Times that the 1980s were to be a “financially perilous decade” for higher education (“Colleges Pondering” A16). Federal contributions to university research had stopped growing in the face of an increasingly expensive war in
Vietnam, necessitating greater linkages between higher education and the corporate world—and providing a bridge for the migration of business management strategies to academe. At the same time, state appropriations, the lifeblood of public higher education during the Golden Age, began to drop as a proportion of public institutions’ operating revenue forcing them to rely on tuition, fees, and other revenue-generating activities to cover the shortfall. Between 1986 and 2000, the proportion of total revenue represented by state appropriations declined in all of the major public university and college systems. California, Texas, and New York all saw state appropriations decline from over 45% of total revenue to less than 33%, with significant decreases also occurring in Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin during this period. Rising tuition prices (and, as in California, the formal introduction of tuition for in-state students) placed similar recruiting pressures on public schools to those faced by private schools.

The shift to new sources of revenue increased the level of competition between schools and necessitated investment in an administrative group that could succeed in maximizing revenue not only by cutting costs but also by making the university an attractive space for private capital and donations. In order to achieve this, universities needed to make a concerted effort to define and manage their brand, which Kerr had already recognized in the mid-1960s as the central task of not just administrators but the university as a whole. Given its connections to the private sector, public sector, and the community, in addition to its existing connections within academe, the university:

is a name . . . [that] stands for a certain standard of performance, a certain degree of respect, a certain historical legacy, a characteristic quality of spirit. This is of the utmost importance to faculty and to students, to the government agencies and
Measuring brand performance introduced another element of market logic to higher education management, tied in this case to the annual university rankings offered by *U.S. News and World Report*, the *Princeton Review*, and *Forbes*, among others. The value of a university’s brand, its standard of performance and historical legacy to borrow Kerr’s terms, derives from its ability to add value to its graduates via the prestige attributed to the credential it awards. Thus, both Hollywood Upstairs Medical College and Harvard University offer a medical degree, but students of the latter institution realize significantly more value through their credential than Dr. Nick Riviera from *The Simpsons* might through the degree awarded by his alma mater. The rankings reflect this, positioning themselves explicitly as consumer guides, *U.S. News* noting that its rankings are specifically designed for “families concerned with finding the best academic value for their money” and stresses their usefulness as a shopping tool, allowing one to “compare at a glance” the desired schools and “discover unfamiliar schools with similar metrics . . . broaden[ing] your options” (“How U.S. News”). In this way, the rankings serve as a market mechanism that passes on information regarding price and value (here configured as return on investment) to the student-consumer (and his/her parent) while at the same time communicating consumer preferences to the institution.

These rankings draw their importance not just from their function as consumer guides, but also from their ability to serve as internal development goals for colleges and universities, conditioning institutions to operate within a much more unified framework in order to best compete for students. Using quasi-scientific (or, more accurately, quasi-econometric) methodologies, the rankings serve as a manifestation of “the idea around which the University
centers itself and through which it becomes comprehensible to the outside world” (Readings 22). For Bill Readings, this was the nebulous term “excellence”—which denotes not a particular quality or set of attributes, but instead a complete absence of qualities, a bland appeal to the good that serves as “the rhetorical arm most likely to gain general assent”—but may now have been superseded by “innovation” (23).cxlv Through their elaborate discussions of methodology, however, the rankings justify their existence by presenting their findings on higher education as a more (and perhaps the most) accurate way to understand universities because they are supposedly objective and scientific, rigorously reviewed and verified by multiple sources. That these findings are invariably couched in a financial rubric (namely, what is the best return on investment), the rankings reinforce that economics has become “the privileged language of reality” in higher education, with questions about a particular schools’ value or health “first and foremost a question of its economic situation” (Newfield Unmaking 169). Moving up in the rankings, then, and improving an institution’s prestige rely on first improving its financial standing. As institutions tie their identities to these rankings, they come to experience what Frank Donoghue calls “prestige envy,” an obsession with improving their place in the rankings despite their zero-sum nature: the rankings are largely static, with the same schools featured in roughly the same positions across publications and years.cxlv In addition, due to the free-floating referent at the heart of rankings and the proliferation of sub-rankings within the master list devoted to geographical region, religious affiliation, political climate, and other factors, virtually any school can declare itself a “top” college or university according to some metric, regardless of how tenuous the connection to actual educational concerns.cxlvii Despite
their flaws, rankings offer a tangible and empirical method of evaluating development and success at the institutional level and so provides support for the ongoing existence of administrators capable of dealing with those financial matters that will move the institution up in the rankings.

That faculty were largely absent from this process had much to do with new expectations about the nature of the faculty-university relationship and the massive growth of administrative personnel from the 1970s on. As discussed in Chapter 2, the postwar expansion of universities and influx of Cold War research dollars permitted faculty members to reimagine their relationship to the campus. Rather than academics bound to a particular school, they became independent professionals based out of certain schools that provided the necessary resources to maintain contact with their professional networks and the wider traffic of the discipline like telephones, fax machines, internet access, interlibrary loan, etc. However, administrators were undergoing their own process of professionalization that wedded them to campus operations in a much more direct way than the agreed upon, though not necessarily formalized, conventions of shared governance. In contrast to the independent professionals of the tenured, full-time faculty, administrators shed their status as “moonlighting academics” whose “short-term managerial endeavors did not distract them from their long-term academic commitments” to become “professional administrators who tend to view managements as an end in and of itself” and for whom “promoting teaching and research is less important than expanding their own administrative domains” (Ginsberg 1-2). As a result of this vested interest in campus operations, being the only avenue for the expansion of administrative powers and responsibilities, administrators were capable of advancing an “ever more internally consistent and cohesive” than the more fractured and fragmented forms of faculty and student culture that existed in the
In their view of higher education, “a general principle of administration replace[d] the dialectic of teaching and research, so that teaching and research, as aspects of professional life, [we]re subsumed under administration” (Readings 125). The shift from teaching to research as the central professional activity of the professor during the Cold War facilitated this, as did the transition from the emphasis on institutions’ regional identities to their national brand during the same period. As the research university assumed increasing importance in the higher education landscape, the new professional attitudes meant that “[t]eaching [was] less central than it once was . . . [and] research ha[d] become more important,” creating “a threefold class structure of what used to be ‘the faculty:’ those who only do research, those who only teach (and they are largely in an auxiliary role), and those who still do some of both” (Kerr 42-43). These divisions would only become more exacerbated in the 1980s and 1990s, weakening the ability of professors to act as a group in responding to increasing administrative reach and influence.

The key development to securing greater administrative control over the university, though, was the growth of administrative and support staff as a group in concert with the decline of tenured faculty numbers and tenure-track faculty positions. In the contemporary university, jobs like admissions officer, development officer, human resource manager, and counselor—designated “other professionals” by the federal government—have become “the largest group of noninstructional staff on campus . . . account[ing] for approximately 20 to 25 percent of on-campus jobs . . . At research institutions, professional staff even outnumbered full-time faculty” (Desrochers and Kirshstein 7). Indeed, between 1976 and 2001, the growth rate for other professionals (243.1%) far outstripped that for faculty (75.8%) and executive, administrative, and managerial (EAM) employees (50.1%). Perhaps even more important, though, is how that
growth has occurred. While 86.3% of the growth of other professionals (and 97.5% of the growth of EAMs) between 1976 and 2001 could be attributed to increases in the number of full-time employees, just 38.3% of faculty growth could be so attributed. As a result, the proportion of faculty who were full-time dropped from 68.6% to 55.5% during this period, while the proportion of other professionals and EAMs who were full-time remained stable, going from 85.1% to 85.8% and 95.8% to 96.4%, respectively. These numbers reflect “long-standing trends” in the composition of academic labour, where “[t]he shifting balance among these positions has played out steadily in favor of administrators” (Desrochers and Kirshstein 13). Concentrated on campus to a greater degree than faculty, many of whom had become “freeway flyers” teaching at multiple campuses to make ends meet, administrators were able to advance a consistent agenda supported by their increasing control over governance structures restricted to full-time employees.

English departments offer a useful lens to consider this process in part because their connection to freshman composition and the false understanding of them as money-losing ventures led to a much earlier (and more severe) push toward casuvalization than in other fields in the sciences and social sciences. At the same time, the fate of labour conditions in English Studies during this period reflects how the concept of a “job market” served as an ideological construct that supported the move toward administrative control. The rhetoric surrounding the job market and its operations stems from a “wildly inaccurate application to higher education working conditions of dimly remembered chestnuts from Econ 101” that functions as “a kind of accidental neoliberalism” (Bousquet How 19). Organized around a “supply” of recent PhDs and a “demand” of tenure-track positions available, the rhetoric employed by everyone from job seekers to the MLA ascribes an independent agency to the market that supports casuvalization
efforts. As part of the market retreat discussed in Chapter 2, the MLA and other professional organizations “see their responsibility as . . . providing information about the job market rather than . . . shaping it,” reinforcing the idea that “demand” is a virtually infallible concept in this system because it is produced by the market and so “supply” must be brought in line with it (Bousquet “Job Market”). In English, the demand has traditionally been for tenure-track jobs teaching literature. However, as those positions decreased as a proportion of overall jobs available and various kinds of writing positions (e.g., rhetoric/composition, technical writing, business writing, creative writing) became more common, demand has continued to refer to literature positions leading to dramatic claims about oversupply. Such claims are made in bad faith, though, as the demand has been deliberately distorted by the elimination of tenure lines and the dispersal of teaching responsibilities among graduate assistants and part-time faculty. Freshman composition still requires teachers but the market says there is no demand for full-time faculty members to teach it, a statement aided by the emphasis on research and the waning of junior faculty investment in shared governance, as discussed in Chapter 2. In line with MLA’s approach to the job market, tenured faculty have become managers almost by default as they attempt to help students navigate the market and ensure an appropriate supply of new PhDs rather than the current oversupply (Bousquet How 20). This reduced the possibility of cross-rank solidarity and undermined the ability to resist casualization initiatives as faculty themselves were supposed to manage the casualized workers.

The mantra that privatized forms and institutions are more effective than public ones, which were vilified as poorly managed compared to the lean, efficient corporate world, had widespread social and political purchase. Administrators who recognized the efficiency that could be produced through market operations (including tenured faculty who adopted the
managerial perspective of the rhetoric surrounding the job market) were positioned as “responsible” managers of higher education who could deliver a level of oversight that would eliminate the waste produced by Cold War-era largesse. That this oversight largely amounted to privatizing operations wherever possible and intervening to create quasi-markets or competitive spaces within the university where opening activities to the outside market was not possible did not cause concern among parents, students, and alumni, who saw tuition costs continue to rise at public institutions and so could assume an institution-wide privatization mandate. What pushback has emerged has come largely from those managed faculty members most vulnerable to the violence of the “market,” part-time and adjunct faculty and graduate students, without necessarily gaining support from the managerial factions of tenured faculty. Thus, administrators’ common vision for higher education, one that tended to fall in line with the market-oriented philosophies of the corporate world, trumped the several competing faculty voices as the dominant understanding of higher education, its purposes, and its future.

Adminification novels, then, depict a phenomenon that though new to contemporary academic fiction had deep roots in the labour conditions of the Golden Age university to which academic fiction defaulted. Through them, contemporary academic fiction puts to lie the assumption that the labour situation of the Golden Age university is the normal state of affairs for the university and that changes since the 1970s are merely a deviation from this, rather than constitutive of a new normal. These novels might still believe that education is an extra-economic public good, faculty power (in the form of tenure and self-governance) is an integral and intrinsic part of the university, and defence of academic freedom is the necessary response to a budget crisis, but they record an increasing disconnect between these beliefs and the contemporary academic labour situation. Indeed, if PC novels misidentify the ways that the
demonization of PC and affirmative action created space for the valorization of deference to the market over more interventionist approaches and theory novels reflect a false choice between embracing theory or traditional humanism that failed to challenge unquestioning acquiescence to market demands, adminification novels reveal how administrators reserved for themselves the right to proactively intervene in the marketized operations of the corporate university and assert control through neoliberal managerialism. Both PC novels and theory novels retain a model of the university with faculty at the centre, in line with labour relations in the Golden Age. However, by advancing a model of university labour relations that starts from the faculty’s displacement from centres of power and governance, adminification novels demonstrate how the assumptions that governed the narratives of earlier academic fiction cannot be sustained in the absence of faculty power. All three strands point to a “wearing away of the last vestiges of [the genre’s] idealism” during the 1990s, as “picture[s] of academic life began to darken and change,” reaching a “darkly apocalyptic tone” with the adjunct novels of the early twenty-first century (Showalter 87, 119, 100).

The move toward grappling with the effects of privatization and casualization and the implementation of austerity measures on higher education seems to me a key point in explaining this shift in tone, as the terms of being a former (or even current) academic—the population most responsible for the writing of academic novels—have become increasingly unpleasant. At the same time, the increased attention to administrators and part-time faculty that emerged in academic novels of the late 1990s is a belated acknowledgement of the need for this new understanding to serve as the reference for contemporary academic novels’ vision of academe. Adjunct novels, discussed in Chapter 4, emerge from this acknowledgement as an attempt to re-centre the faculty experience as the dominant conception of higher education by starting from the
disenfranchisement caused by casualization and the separation of non-tenure-track faculty from tenured faculty. Ultimately, adminification novels piggy back on the culture wars rhetoric of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but their larger, institutional focus (compared to theory novels) and foregrounded budget crises (as opposed to PC or affirmative action complaints) that make explicit the contentious relationship between campus, legislature, and the corporate world revises that rhetoric and shift its stakes. The novels make clear the tensions between faculty and students, “who were concerned primarily with the success of instruction and research, and then, just behind those, with public service,” and administrators, who sought, in the face of higher education’s “mild affront to market values,” to return “[t]he cultural front” to conservative control (Newfield *Unmaking* 68-69, 254). In so doing, they reveal the ways the culture wars attempted to resolve these tensions in favour of administrators and the neoliberalism that had come increasingly to define how social institutions like higher education were to be run.

**The Academic Devolution: Adminification in Moo and Straight Man**

Jane Smiley’s *Moo* (1995) is in many ways the apex of the new academic novel, examining not just the experiences of a professor (or even a group of professors) but the interrelations between the members of an entire institution, from food service workers to deans. In so doing, the novel illustrates the networks that radiate out from the contemporary campus to American society and to the world at large, such as the connection between Moo U and a plan to strip mine the largest remaining cloud forest in the world in Costa Rica that forms part of the novel’s plot. Even its depiction of faculty represents a much more diverse group than is typically found in academic novels, including Animal Science, Chemistry, Economics, Psychology, Spanish, and, memorably, Horticulture professors in addition to the expected English professors. *Moo*’s take on adminification comes out of this expanded scope, with its portrait of the university
in an era of declining state support, increasing levels of corporate partnerships, ongoing commodification of higher education, and continuing marginalisation of faculty highlighting the widespread influence of what might be called the administrative vision of higher education on all university operations. Crucially, this vision is not necessarily monolithic in Moo, but those challenges facing the university steadily push even those who would retain the form of the Golden Age university and its labour relations to accept a program of radical privatization and austerity measures that are antithetical to the assumptions undergirding and stated goals of higher education in the immediate postwar period. That Moo is set during the beginning of the culture wars’ peak proves key, as those calls for accountability found in PC and theory novels are equally successful at enforcing austerity and ensuring acceptance of privatization against the preservation of public higher education’s traditional mission.

While its panoramic nature could work within the form of the “classic” academic novel, sort of an updated version of Randall Jarrell’s Pictures from an Institution, Moo undermines the genre’s reliance on Golden Age-era labour relations and social attitudes toward higher education by demystifying the role of faculty and students in the university and identifying a budget crisis as the definitive crisis of the contemporary university, with social and existential dimensions beyond the expected financial ones. Where in the past, faculty and students served as the metaphorical heart and soul of the university and so are afforded special consideration in terms of their place in the institution, Moo offers a vision of students as customers and faculty as employees that highlights their inability to get inside university policy. Decisions are made by administrators and executives of which students are unaware and to whom faculty are largely invisible. The students and faculty respond to the changes in their environment and activities caused by these decisions, but they are no longer part of the designing or evaluating of them.
Similarly, the widespread acceptance of the financial health of an institution as a proxy for its overall health (including the quality of its educational content and methods of delivery of said content) means that budget crises like the one facing Moo U open the university up not just to financial restructuring but also to the redefinition of an institution’s purpose and the role of its members. Forensic accounting might identify underlying budgetary or financial issues and thus restore health to the institution, so its methods and goals must be extended to all aspects of university operations. That neoliberalism’s approach to knowledge and culture lends itself to such accounting made it such an effective organizational philosophy for those who sought to remake higher education according to accounting principles.

Appearing at a time of increasing frustration and despair for faculty and graduate students—after two decades, the growth rate (16.8%) and proportion of total growth (74.0%) for full-time faculty exceeded that of part-time faculty (10.6% and 26.0%, respectively) between 1986-1991, but collapsed to just 5.8% and 20.2% between 1991-1997—Moo was well-received commercially and critically. It appeared on the New York Times Bestseller List for thirteen weeks between April 9th and July 19th, 1995 (peaking at fifth place), was named a finalist for the 1995 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, and sold 120,000 copies in its first month (L. Adams D1). In an approving, front page review for the New York Times Book Review, Alison Lurie—herself the author of a well-known academic novel, The War Between the Tates (1974)—praised Moo for its avoidance of the clichéd “East and West Coast humanities departments” so common to academic novels (BR1). Similarly, Michiko Kakutani cited the power of the novel’s panoramic approach in her review for the New York Times, calling it a novel “less interested in social satire, as such, than in the simple spectacle of ordinary human beings succumbing to greed, power, hope, envy, and love,” decidedly rich fare for genre fiction (C19).
after its publication, *Moo* remains unique in terms of its range (although *Fight for Your Long Day* certainly borrows from its approach in describing life at multiple campuses) and continues to suggest fruitful paths to be explored by the academic novel. The hardscrabble existence of the faculty and other workers at Moo U reflects the moment at which the optimism generated by Bowen and Sosa’s report gave way to pessimism and even outright cynicism. Articles appearing in the mid-1990s about how “many students are enduring long job searches that end in unemployment or underemployment” and academia faced the prospect of a “second ‘lost generation,’” closed out of academia like the numerous graduates of the late 1970s” confirmed the fears of those who cautioned against buying into the idea of the 1990s as a new era of expansion in higher education (Dembner 1). Speaking to this moment, *Moo* helped to divorce the academic novel from the Golden Age and stretched its form to the widest possible dimensions to do so.

*Moo* tracks the events at Moo U, a large, Midwestern, land-grant institution, over the course of the 1989-1990 school year, following the responses of various groups to the announcement of a round of major budget cuts by the state’s governor. Speaking with the press, the governor, O. T. Early, outlines a nearly $200 million cuts package targeted at the core of the welfare state—“social service agencies, education, health care programs, and public works programs,” including $10 million from Moo U—all of which, he claims, belong to “‘a binge we can’t afford’” (Smiley 117, 118). Budget cuts were not rare in higher education by the mid-1990s, as state appropriations had fallen from accounting for 44.0% of the total revenue for public institutions in 1980-81 to 32.5% in 1995-96. Public higher education systems across the Midwest had seen cuts in line with the overall figures, with the proportion of their operating funds coming from state appropriations dropping by as much as 15.4% (Illinois) and 10.5%
(North Dakota). Nevertheless, Early’s proposed cuts accelerate an ongoing shift at Moo U away from its land grant roots and toward the contemporary corporate university, featuring a considerably different educational mission and an administrative vision that sees the budget crisis as licence to expand its privatization efforts. Though the Morrill Act of 1862 defines its mission as the “teach[ing] [of] such branches of learning as are related to agricultural and the mechanic arts . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life,” Moo U has considerable ambitions beyond this purview (Sanger 540). While a local farmer might consider Moo U “his university, founded under the Morrill Act to help him,” the university no longer features “classes in slaughtering and meat cutting . . . [which] were long removed to the purview of the junior college forty miles away, along with hotel cooking, barbering, auto mechanics, cosmetology, and everything else . . . considered respectable work” by the school’s intended enrollment base (Smiley 90, 6-7). Moo U’s administration sees the school as a contemporary university that “shamelessly promised everything to everyone, and charged so much that prospective students tended to believe the promises” (Smiley 407). Such expansion of ambition was characteristic of the university in the Golden Age; as Louis Menand points out, “[t]he academy swallowed up almost everything in American intellectual and cultural life between 1940 and 1980, and spit out very little” (“Demise” 214). At a moment in which simple expansion-by-addition proved more difficult, though, increased privatization offered a new avenue for growth that played to the logic of Early’s cuts, particularly its valorization of the business world as a necessary model for academe.

Both Governor Early’s rhetoric about education and Moo U’s attempted evolution highlight the extent to which neoliberal policies began reshaping American higher education in earnest in the 1990s. At the press conference where he announces his budget cuts, Early explains
his purpose in cutting such a large amount from the education budget by appealing to neoliberalism’s business ontology, claiming that “[e]ducation is an investment. The trouble is, they don’t run it like an investment over there, with the students as customers . . . Now they run it like welfare, but I’m telling you if they won’t turn it around themselves, we’ve got to turn it around for them. This administration believes strongly in education’” (Smiley 118). Early’s language here mirrors that used by executives like Lee Iacocca when taking charge of underperforming companies and is broadly interpreted by the school’s administrators as a mandate to lean out the university’s offerings and operations. The statement also serves as a useful repurposing of culture wars rhetoric (e.g., concern about the fate of education if left in the hands of leftist academics) to reinforce the need for a culture of accountability that will be forced to answer to financial standards first and foremost. Crucially, both moves offer a path by which Moo U can claim to fulfill its mission and appeal to sentiment about higher education without having to maintain costly commitments to racial and class integration or pure research. Calling higher education an investment suggests the standard platitudes about education as an investment in one’s future or the children as the future. As corporate dollars subsidized increasing amounts of university research, particularly in medicine and pharmaceuticals, but also in industrial science, information and communications technology, and biotechnology, education was, more than ever, an investment for those companies—not only in specific projects and their results (hopefully patentable products/technologies), but also in terms of recruiting and training new employees. Students who work in labs with professors working with these companies are ostensibly already working in line with the company’s R&D division (or might be the company’s R&D division, for all practical purposes) and are paying through their tuition and fees to be trained for their job. Similarly, the reference to “welfare” and the insistence that additional
oversight is required in order to bring down university costs appeals to attitudes that were prime motivators in the culture wars: higher education is too expensive because of faculty members who do little actual work and the money spent on higher education is wasted on programs like affirmative action that subsidize undeserving groups at the expense of the taxpayer.\textsuperscript{clvi}

Moo U had conveniently (though not coincidentally) already been evolving toward the model of the university implied by Early’s cuts and accompanying speech, abandoning less profitable “lines” while modernizing its traditional ties to a more vocational education than at a liberal arts college. In keeping with the transition to a “post-industrial society” forecasted throughout the 1970s, with middle- and working-class opportunities increasingly tied to the knowledge and service sectors, Moo U:

made serious noises to all sorts of constituencies: Students would find good jobs, the state would see a return on its educational investment, businesses could harvest enthusiastic and well-trained workers by the hundreds, theory and technology would break through limits as old as the human race (and some lucky person would get to patent the breakthroughs). (Smiley 407)

Return on educational investment is a key phrase, though, as it highlights how financial accountability measures come to influence educational content and practice. Low-level service jobs like haircutting or cosmetology were not exemplars of the knowledge economy that would supposedly deliver prosperity to all, so they must be abandoned. In this way, the resurgence of the use of higher education as a tool of division and stratification rather than integration changed what the “industrial classes” served by land grant institutions could expect. The ultimate goal of Early’s cuts is to force the university to “actively pursue” an increasingly important funding apparatus—“[a]ssociations of mutual interest between the university and the corporations”—in
order that “resources’ . . . could be ‘allocated’ elsewhere in state government when corporations
began picking up more of the tab for higher education” (Smiley 22-23). Instead of serving the
individual farmer, Moo U is to serve big agriculture as its public mission gives way to a
coopitation of a public resource in the name of private interests. Early’s language here echoes the
Bayh-Dole Act, which was intended to promote cooperation between universities and
corporations through a liberalisation of patent laws to allow schools to retain the title to research
products developed with federal money, and makes visible the confluence of state and market
that is at the heart of the neoliberal political project. In this scenario, public education
becomes a venue for students to be socialised into a world overdetermined by corporate interests
that are said to speak for the market and thus should guide policy in all areas.

Internally, the cuts resolve the conflict between the two main strands of administrative
thought at Moo U, leading to a push for privatization and austerity measures as a way both to
survive the financial shortfall caused by the cuts and finish the evolution toward the kind of
institution favoured by Early. The first strand of administrative thought, exemplified by the
provost, Ivar Harstad, might be called the moderate approach, emphasizing damage control in the
wake of the announced cuts and the preservation (to the extent that circumstances will allow) of
Moo U’s traditional identity and Golden Age labour relations. Recalling his own study at the
school, when academic life meant “angular men in glasses, crewcuts, and bowties . . .
everywhere, a benign army of uncles, who liked to point things out with the stems of their pipes”
rather than “a vast network of interlocking wishes, some of them modest, some of them
impossible,” Harstad regrets the current direction of Moo U (Smiley 406, 408). He has a clear
sense of what the cuts will cost the university, worrying about “Nuclear engineering . . .
Women’s Studies . . . Clothing Design and Fiber Science . . . Broadcast Journalism . . . [and]
Oceanography,” or programs that are low-enrollment and/or high-cost, while also offering little in the way of patentable or saleable materials for the university (Smiley 22). Nonetheless, he recognizes that the budget crisis is a challenge that the older form of the university to which his experiences belong is no longer equipped to meet. He can resist the push for privatization on philosophical grounds, but not in terms of financial prudence, and he is ultimately forced to acquiesce to the more radical vision of the other executives who serve as the school’s real power brokers. In this, Harstad’s manifests a kind of managerial “reflexive impotence” through which he “know[s] things are bad, but more than that . . . know[s] [he] can’t do anything about it” in a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” clearing the way for more aggressive approaches that promote action in the face of the cuts (Fisher CR 21). Harstad’s love for Moo U, and for higher education more generally, paralyzes him when the only choice is large-scale reform of its structures.

The group who advance the second administrative vision in the novel, however, have no such qualms and are able to have a positive attitude toward the process of remaking Moo U. It is not that these characters hate higher education—indeed, one of the chief proponents of this more radical administrative perspective fondly recalls her university years as “the high point of [her] life . . . a perfectly intact and entirely positive college experience” that belonged to the era of well-funded public higher education as defined by “the fifties Big Ten—parties, classes Greeks, football games, and nice clothes”—or that they want to destroy it, but their organizational philosophies cannot reconcile the universities additional responsibilities and alternative outcomes that made it an inefficient profit-generating machine (Smiley 243). Their worldview shapes their approach to the university and underscores the appeal of accounting and financial metrics as the preferred models and forms of evaluation: they “deal[] only in numbers” and can divorce the idea of cuts (which are a purely fiscal problem) from the university entirely,
remaining ignorant of “[w]hat the numbers would buy, whether copying machines or assistant
professors” so long as the budget balances (Smiley 22). Where Jacques Barzun could once
summarise the responsibility of university administrators as “seeing to it that the chalk is there,”
Moo U’s administrators are all too happy to accept cuts without worrying about the relationship
of that money to the presence of chalk (96). They have embraced technology transfer (“the
movement of products and processes from the university to the market”), knowing that those
naturally in Moo U’s catchment area are more likely to work for an agricultural conglomerate at
its facility than on the family farm going forward (Slaughter and Leslie 139). At the same time,
because their focus is on abstract accounting, rather than being rooted in concrete aspects like the
staff members who teach particular courses or the departmental photocopiers on which they rely,
they can support both privatization and cuts without feeling that they have taken anything away
from the university. Numbers on spreadsheets can be moved around and while those numbers
might not be the same to Women’s Studies, who could find their budget missing, they are the
same in the abstract logic of revenue and expenses. For this second group, the appropriate
response to the governor’s proposal is increased privatization supported by austerity measures
until the institution generates sufficient revenue to restore some services, suitably redesigned to
further the ends of the corporate university.

Remaking a public university requires consent from those who would be attending, but
governor Early and the school’s administrators have little selling to do. In general, the public is
unsympathetic to Moo U’s plight, a stance fueled in part by widespread outrage over culture
wars flashpoints like PC, multiculturalism, or deconstruction. For state residents, Moo U “ha[s]
pots of money” that it uses to support “highly paid faculty members in every department who . . .
taught Marxism” (Smiley 19). The state legislature is equally unsympathetic, believing that
“the faculty as a whole was determined to undermine the moral and commercial well-being of the state” (Smiley 19). The Cold War university may have had “pots of money”—Menand’s point about the university’s postwar expansion via absorption is salient, as that absorption was fueled by abundant funds for research and teaching—but by the mid-1990s, this was no longer true. Austerity like Moo U faces was much more likely than plenty, particularly given the push for greater accountability, and Marxism was far from orthodox in higher education, even before the collapse of the USSR, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the seeming triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. Thus, administrators are forced to abandon traditional approaches to the funding of public higher education. Early’s rhetoric resonates with those at the top of the institution because they are already speaking his language in many ways. Associate vice-president Bob Brown, for example, one of the university president’s chief advisors, is already in the “habit of referring to the students as ‘our customers’” (Smiley 22). Brown focuses his energies once the cuts have been announced on what might be called consumer re-education, reminding faculty that “our customers do not have a ‘right’ to any particular service in return for their dollar, though they may think they do” and advertising “a short, informal workshop on maintaining positive customer relations directed primarily toward secretarial personnel” (Smiley 122). He is perhaps the administrator furthest from Harstad’s moderate position, but the essential qualities of his view of the university are reinforced by two other major executives. Jack Parker, “federal grants specialist,” and Elaine Dobbs-Jellinek, “associate vice-president for development,” both focus on the “approaching, stroking, grooming, and teasing that . . . corporate contracts, or ‘grants,’ demanded,” and both wield considerable power in terms of deciding the direction of Moo U (Smiley 22). In order Parker and Dobbs-Jellinek to land such
contributions, though, they need to make the university the sound return on investment Early has promised and they in turn have promised to the public.

Favouring one model of the privatized university to drive return on investment, Dobbs-Jellinek’s solution to the budget crisis is to put Harstad in touch with an interested mega-donor, who attempts to rent the university for his own ends. In a chapter with the resonant title “The Provost Is Tempted,” Harstad meets with Arlen Martin, president of TransNationalAmerica Corporation, “worth a billion dollars,” and in theory the answer to the university’s prayers (Smiley 73). Certainly, Martin appears to fit almost to a tee the ideal saviour for the university that Harstad had dreamed of when the budget cuts were first rumoured—“some billionaire on his deathbed . . . longing for a respectable home for his wealth”—but Martin had previously been a donor to Moo U until an academic scandal caused their dissociation (Smiley 23). When his funding of an Animal Science professor’s research into Martin’s company’s practice of feeding chickens entrails and offal produced less than desirous results, Martin “assumed that the study would remain unpublished, and asserted himself to realize his assumption . . . attempt[ing] to destroy the reputation not only of the scientist who had received the grant, but also of the graduate student who had helped him and the journal who had published the results” (Smiley 75). Such “corporate meddling” has become more common as the scale of corporate involvement in academe has increased, with companies “manipulating manuscripts or suppressing unwelcome research to serve their commercial interests” (Washburn 75). That Harstad would even consider another association with Martin reflects a broader national trend, in which “university administrators . . . [who] had lost confidence in the stability of both state and federal funding” brought “new waves of wealthy potential donors onto campus and made their interests, viewpoints, and concerns central to the academic enterprise” (Newfield Unmaking 163-64).
Though Harstad ultimately rejects Martin’s offer, he recognizes that as Moo U must find alternative sources of funding capable of contributing significant dollar amounts, Martin (or someone like him) is in the university’s future.

Martin’s presence at Moo U and Dobbs-Jellinek’s willingness for the university to work with him again reveals the guiding ideology of the administrative vision of the corporate university. First, efficiency trumps all other concerns, a development characteristic of American neoliberalism. Martin is not just the efficient choice in that he is at the university, ready to put up dollars to support its operations. His proposal for funding the university is to cut out the middle man of technology transfer and simply rent the university as an annex for his company. Having pursued an aggressive acquisition schedule, TransNationalAmerica cannot afford “research and development . . . the physical plant aspects, and the personnel,” but the university has those resources readily available (Smiley 76). Reasoning with Harstad “[w]hy should I hire R and D people just to read what your R and D people already know?” he proposes to rent just those parts of the university in order to facilitate his company’s R&D operations. Such an arrangement orients university resources to corporate needs in a much more direct fashion and converts what had been passive assets into active ones that can be marketed as investment opportunities. These assets will then subsidize themselves and, in theory, fund their replacement should they prove useful as revenue generating tools. The trickle down effect of this ideology becomes clear following the cuts, when the English department discovers the extent it too must self-subsidize. A departmental memo explains that many services have been eliminated or turned into pay-only services, including:

1. Long-distance telephone calls concerning professional business.
2. Xeroxing, copying, or dittoing of any kind, even for departmental business.
3. Office supplies not used by the secretaries. THE SUPPLY CABINETS WILL BE LOCKED. DO NOT ASK FOR THE KEY.

4. Faculty or student computer time on the university mainframe.

5. Travel expenses of any kind. (Smiley 119)

In addition to these department specific austerity measures, there are university-wide policies, like a log-on fee for accessing campus computer services, an increased printing fee, and a cancellation of all current and future library acquisitions. If higher education is to be treated as an investment intended to generate maximum returns, then it makes little sense to provide for free the supplies and services that, due to their necessity to teaching and research activities, faculty members will pay to use or to have access to.

Martin’s offer also suggests the specific ways that privatization can compromise faculty autonomy, transforming it from an intrinsic feature of the contemporary university and cornerstone of academic freedom into a conditional element of employment dependent on corporate resources and current results and future prospects. Dobbs-Jellinek attempts to reassure Harstad that “we can rely on” Martin’s agreement “that any research funded by his group of companies must be done according to academic standards of disinterestedness,” Martin’s proposed arrangement makes such disinterestedness an impossibility: the faculty will be working for him and his funding is designed to produce results that are in line with his company’s needs, rather than any search for objective truth (Smiley 74). Indeed, the work that university scientists would do for him would likely be covered by nondisclosure agreements “to keep both the methods and the results of their work secret for a period of time,” a situation increasingly common among scientists working with corporations, who are “three times more likely to have delayed publication of their research for six months or more, and nearly two and a half times
more likely to have refused to share their information with other university scientists” (Washburn 74-75). Austerity measures like those described above only serve to reinforce this point. The more that faculty are required to pay for materials and operating expenses, the more likely they are to tailor their work to make investing in those materials and operating expenses an attractive proposition for external funders.

Here, the flipside of neoliberalism’s doctrine of efficiency becomes apparent, and its key management tactic appears: productivity is the most important measurement of efficiency and it can best be measured through financial considerations. Thus, faculty ideas about what constitutes productive work are often restricted to the question of “what is fundable?” Doing work that brings in large donations or investments looks good according to these productivity measures, as does companies successfully realizing on these investments. The problem with such arrangements for the institution and its mission, beyond the potential conflicts of interest, is the outsized influence of donors’ pet causes, as “private giving . . . is almost always restricted, and goes to targeted research, sports, trademark-building projects, and . . . other special interests,” rather than appearing in “sufficient supply to support core operations,” like teaching (Newfield Unmaking 192-93). Ironically, it is existing forms of faculty autonomy—namely, their ability to reach out to corporations through the university as potential research partners—that enables this to take place. Harstad can reject Martin, but “no faculty member need[s] Ivar’s permission to seek or accept a grant” (Smiley 146). In an era of permanent crisis and budget constraints, power follows the money and reinforces the central role of fundraisers like Dobbs-Jellinek and Parker and investors like Martin over and above those who focus on curricular needs/concerns. Despite his seeming benefaction, then, Martin represents a destabilising force on Moo U, with the institution forced to adapt to his reality rather than the other way around. For the most part, Moo
U’s senior executives agree with his vision, with the loss of any autonomy made up for by the expected increased access to private funding and opportunity to expand administrative purview.

Within this environment, the model for faculty power in *Moo* is the successful grant seeker who prospers during this time of draconian cutbacks through his or her relationship with outside sources of funding, which alleviates the burden of self-subsidisation facing many other faculty members. Where Henry Mulcahy in *The Groves of Academe* sees himself as too important to be fired because he is a “contributor to the *Nation* and the *Kenyon Review,* [a] Rhodes scholar, [and a] Guggenheim fellow,” Professor of Animal Science Dean Jellinek gains power and prestige through a “four-hundred-thousand-dollars-over-four-years grant from Western Egg and Milk” (Smiley 153). Knowing that “grant money . . . seemed to enjoy its own company,” Jellinek courts “seventeen companies . . . vying to fund [his] research into calf-free lactation” during the Fall semester (Smiley 129). Having missed out on being the first to develop an earlier breakthrough in his field, and frustrated that “‘now, forever, they’ll call it the Dichter technique’” rather than “‘the Jellinek technique,’” his new research is intended to be both financially lucrative and cutting edge (Smiley 54). However, demonstrating the priorities of academic capitalism in action, his interest in working with these corporations on his research has as much to do with securing adequate copyright or patent protection as it does with any need for funding. When the Jellinek technique for calf-free lactation is realized, Jellinek intends to profit alongside Western Egg and Milk.

The terms of his contract with Western Egg and Milk and the conditional nature of the protection they can afford him (along with their interest in him beyond the research he produces) only gradually becomes clear to Jellinek. Though when he accepts the grant he feels a “wedge of anxiety . . . [in] his soul” and notes privately that his own enthusiasm for the project (and his
confidence in its feasibility) has waned at precisely the moment when Western Egg and Milk begins to expect progress reports that will justify its investment in Jellinek’s research, he manages to outline a research project (Smiley 230-31). Unexpectedly, though, the company undergoes a financial reversal and withdraws all funding from Jellinek’s project. As he has contracted with Western Egg and Milk to work on calf-free lactation for their express interests, Jellinek cannot simply continuing research. The company seizes his work and the equipment he purchased with his grant, informing him that “[a]ll work pertaining to the calf-free lactation project . . . may be sold, patented, published, or utilized in any other way that the company sees fit,” but Jellinek is no longer free to work on the topic (Smiley 371). In making the deal that protects him from the budget cuts, Jellinek forfeits his academic and intellectual rights, stung by the same lure of patents and sales that he used to get the grant from Western Egg and Milk in the first place. Without a corporate benefactor, Jellinek loses his competitive edge in research and his claim to any sort of power on campus. The aura of importance that landed him a private table in the cafeteria has dissipated, dependent as it was on the dollar amount attached to his name, and given that he no longer has the rights to his own intellectual labour (there will be no Jellinek Technique for calf-free lactation), he cannot rely on academic prowess to sustain it, either.

Ultimately, Moo’s narrative suggests that an inexorability to the kind of privatization and austerity measures that are the favoured response to budget cuts. Certainly, they are presented by the characters in the novel as the only possible way to sustain Moo U’s ambitions. Whether or not those ambitions amount to an effective strategy for meeting those goals for mass public higher education that emerged during the postwar period proves less important than the opportunities they provide for transforming the university into an economic engine for corporations. What resistance exists is largely confined to administrators like Harstad and
administrative assistants and office staff who are financially independent from the university, like Harstad’s secretary Lorraine Walker, “a state civil service employee of long standing, an official in AFSCME [the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees], a fully vested member of her pension plan, and an owner of a six-unit apartment building near the campus that was entirely paid for and always rented” (Smiley 146). She has access to budget information, which she uses to promote projects she approves of (like improving library holdings) at the expense of those she does not (athletics), and as part of that rising class of “other professionals” who see to so many university operations, her authority and ability to accomplish tasks is widely recognised.

Faculty at Moo U lack this kind of security, though, and are conspicuously absent from any consultations on the university’s response to the budget cuts. At most, the faculty offer snide remarks attached to memos detailing the extent of the cuts in their departments. Were the faculty to protest, though, it is difficult to see what they could accomplish. Faculty power has always rested in operational aspects like the curriculum, rather than faculty members possessing any “significant formal power, either individually or collectively, over the institutions that employ them. . . . Budgets and personnel . . . are in principle subject to ‘higher’ review, and ultimate control remains where it has always been—with the administration, the lay trustees, and in some cases the legislature” (Jencks and Riesman 16). Faculty senates, for example, despite being a cornerstone of the idea of faculty governance tend to “have little power” and “are not particularly important decision-making bodies,” especially given their status as “‘dependent bodies’ granted power through the ‘grace’ of the administration” (Ginsberg 15-16). Even the strength in numbers formerly enjoyed by faculty as the largest group of professional and full-time employees has been eroded by the increasing number of part-time and adjunct faculty members,
both at Moo U and throughout higher education. When the budget cuts are announced, part-time faculty members at Moo U are fired en masse “because the university . . . couldn’t break individual contracts, but ‘a bloodbath is legal’” (Smiley 122). Much like the students who have been rebranded customers, faculty are now styled as employees, and in the corporate university they are not really managerial employees, despite what NLRB v. Yeshiva University might say. In this sense, adminification serves as a continuation and intensification of historical labour relations within higher education, further demonstrating that the conditions of the Golden Age were anomalous. The view that higher education should accommodate the needs of industry and consent to being run as a company was common in the early years of the twentieth century, as Frank Donoghue and others have pointed out. Despite the rather serious changes that had taken place by the time it appeared, though, Moo presents the university at the start of these shifts and a faculty only beginning to be displaced from the circles of campus power. The continued devolution of faculty power onto the administrative ranks and its larger consequences, though, become increasingly central concerns of academic novels at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

If Moo details the beginnings of adminification, then Russo’s Straight Man suggests through its sardonic portrait of West Central Pennsylvania University (WCPU) and the interim chair of English, William Henry Devereaux, Jr., the ways that adminification accelerated during the 1990s and the form it took at different kinds of institutions. Where Moo focuses on a public research university, Straight Man looks at a small, directional state school, and the difference in institution illustrates the malleability of the privatization and austerity tactics pursued during the 1990s. While it makes sense that Moo U would focus on corporate donors and subsidized research in the name of improved return on investment, WCPU cannot pursue a similar strategy.
It is not a research-intensive university and it offers no natural incentives for businesses to invest in its facilities and personnel. In many ways, WCPU is more suited to the role that Moo U has abandoned, the training of the industrial classes for practical labour (while providing a gloss of “culture” intended to identify the student/graduate as a member of the petty bourgeoisie rather than the working class), and so privatization focuses on that aspect of the school’s identity, attempting to mirror the operations of for-profit vocational colleges. Efficiency and productivity remain cornerstones of the ideology driving these changes, but those qualities can no longer be measured through the drawing of revenue from corporate investments and the profits accrued from research results. Instead, the “leaning out” of operations through casualization initiatives becomes the measure of efficiency and productivity, with the goal of reducing costs as much as possible and maximizing the amount of labour performed by any individual.

The faculty at WCPU are thoroughly disenfranchised by these developments, waiting to see how the university (as represented by the administration) acts upon them rather than having any means of actively directing the institution’s operations. Unable to become researchers affiliated with various corporations, the faculty at WCPU are forced to accept continual speed ups and a severely reduced role in institutional governance for stability, along with limited career mobility. What possibilities exist for them at WCPU are ultimately to be found in administrative roles, moving from department chair to dean and potentially further up the ranks. *Straight Man* also introduces a third career possibility, the long-term part-time or adjunct faculty member, who is typically waiting for a full-time job that never materializes. In so doing, *Straight Man* paves the way for post-2000 academic novels, which tend to focus on the treatment of part-time academic labour, as discussed in Chapter 4. As with *Moo*, the administrators attempting to oversee WCPU’s transition into some kind of public-for-profit hybrid are not malicious and do
not hate higher education or WCPU. Indeed, the motivation for the attempted transition is purely survival, stemming from a recognition of the limited options available to the institution given trends in higher education. That the transition ultimately fails to occur in *Straight Man* is not a condemnation of the project, but rather a recognition of both the limited revenue potential of such a transformation because of the unwieldy structures of public higher education compared to a straight for-profit institution and the inexorable move to this model across higher education, making such efforts at radical institutional change superfluous.

For all that its narrative suggests that tenured faculty have been diminished by the rise of administrators and the corporate university, *Straight Man* is a much more conventional academic novel than *Moo*, with a group of character types recognisable to readers of the genre and a spiritual kinship with novels like *Lucky Jim*, *A New Life*, or, later, *Dear Committee Members*. Though it was not the commercial success that was *Moo*, spending no time on the bestseller list, *Straight Man* was fairly well-reviewed. Tom De Haven, in the *New York Times* Book Review, called the novel ““the funniest serious novel I have read . . . since ‘Portnoy’s Complaint,’” while Jonathan Yardley, who had been critical of *Moo* for its failure to follow conventional models for academic fiction, praised *Straight Man* in the *Washington Post* for its depiction of “the [English] department’s internal chaos reach[ing] new heights, fueled by old rivalries and grievances among colleagues who have spent too much time in each other’s company and are too well acquainted with each other’s human shortcomings” (BR10; “Academic” X3). Though they identified its connection to the genre’s history as a strength, identifying Devereaux as “an intellectual for our time” the same way that Jim Dixon might be the model of an intellectual for the Angry Young Men, few reviewers noted the elements of *Straight Man* that most connect it to its times: the casualization of tenured employees and increasing prominence of adjunct and part-time faculty,
the perpetuation of a general air of crisis through the constant threat of budget cuts and financial
shortfalls, and the promotion of principles and methods derived from for-profit education at the
expense of WCPU’s traditional mission (Jacobs 833). Its conventional setpieces and characters—
the faculty meeting, the composition classroom, the bumbling department chair, the failed poet—
are set within an institution that is failing to make the transition to the corporate university and so
is in the process of winding down, as a general air of exhaustion and decrepitude hangs over the
campus and its buildings and facilities.

As with Moo, the culture wars figure in Straight Man only at the margins, but its
concerns mirror those found in PC novels like Perfect Agreement and Blue Angel and theory
novels like Small World and Book. Where the former novels channel their anxieties about
changes to the university and declining opportunities for academics within them into frustration
with or cynicism toward administrative structures like affirmative action or faculty codes of
conduct and the latter worry about the nature of professionalization in English to come given the
corporatization of higher education and the discipline’s need to negotiate a place within the new
system through the debate between theory and traditional humanism, Straight Man dispenses
with the secondary issues. The university (at all levels) is changing as a result of corporatization
and the shape of an academic career already looks different than it had for academics a
generation earlier. However, in part because it provides a greater focus on administrative power
at the end of the twentieth century and its role in remaking the university, Straight Man
demonstrates how the secondary issues were almost always preludes or entryways to these larger
attacks on higher education. Indeed, the developments that Straight Man documents were
partially spurred by the increased, largely negative attention focused on faculty members’ work
(and workloads) by figures like Bennett, Cheney, and Kimball, and also the calls for increased
accountability and parental and alumni involvement from D’Souza, Sykes, and other, during and following events like the PC wars.

Tracking responses to a possible budget cut during the final weeks of a spring semester at WCPU, *Straight Man* lacks *Moo*’s panoramic scope but still provides a fairly comprehensive view of the school’s day-to-day operations. Located in fictional Railton, PA—loosely modeled on Altoona, Pennsylvania and its branch campus of Pennsylvania State University where Russo taught between 1980-84—WCPU is not doing well among the “many empty, littered spaces” of Railton “that challenge[d] hope” for any kind of rejuvenation for the town (Bechtel-Wherry and Womack 42, 98; Russo 5). Like most public institutions in the mid-1990s, WCPU suffers from declining enrollment and state funding and decreasing full-time faculty growth. To survive these changes, WCPU has implemented general austerity measures through a series of incremental budget cuts. Paradoxically, though, because they have been staged so that “budget cuts are implemented, then at the last fiscal moment money is found and the budget—most of it—restored,” these cuts prove to be less a galvanizing than an enervating force among the faculty (Russo 9). The state of permanent emergency paralyses the faculty, who expect mass firings and so accept (mostly) without protest “more belt-tightening, more denied sabbaticals, an extension of the hiring freeze, [and] a reduced photocopy budget” (Russo 9). Thus, as rumours come to light of yet another, more severe, budget cut that will necessitate significant downsizing among the tenured faculty, the university’s CEO, Dickie Pope, unveils plans to remake WCPU along the lines of the growing for-profit sector, significantly reimagining WCPU’s mission and the faculty’s role in achieving that mission. Devereaux is a lame duck department chair—an interim appointee until the department hires a chair, he is widely regarded as being incapable of taking the role seriously enough to do anything—but nonetheless he is expected to register the
department’s displeasure with this plan. Here, though, Devereaux, like Ivar Hardstad in *Moo*, is tempted: he has already internalized much of the administrative worldview and realized that Pope’s plan would address several of the issues he has with WCPU. Devereaux ultimately rejects that plan, but not before reaffirming the coherence of administrative vision compared to that of the faculty.

That Devereaux must respond to the same rumours as everyone else despite being chair of the department reflects the continued demystification of faculty roles within the university. Much as faculty senates have been reduced to garbage cans, department chairs remain mere employees despite their quasi-managerial role. In order to present his department’s complaints to Pope, Devereaux must first confront him about the content of the rumours and find out if there is any truth to them, putting him at a disadvantage for developing any counter proposals or offering informed criticism of the planned response. Beyond the rumours, Devereaux goes to Pope to get information about his department’s budget for the coming academic year, wanting to know if he will have the necessary discretionary funds to rehire the adjunct professors needed to teach freshman composition. Pope brushes him off as the last link in an administrative chain—“‘You don’t have a budget because Jacob [Rose, Dean of Liberal Arts] doesn’t have his budget because I don’t have my budget all the way up to the chancellor, who doesn’t have a budget because the legislature is dragging its feet’”—forcing Devereaux to take matters into his own hands (Russo 160). Appearing on a local television news team’s broadcast wearing a Groucho Marx fake nose and glasses, Devereaux declares that “‘[s]tarting Monday, I kill a duck a day until I get a budget’” (Russo 115). The clip causes a brief stir as the kind of quirky news story broadcast by morning shows like *Good Morning, America* or the *Today Show* broadcast, and the image of Devereaux brandishing a frightened goose (which he has mistaken for a duck) goes national.
When his friend Billy Quigley, a long-time adjunct at WCPU, assures Devereaux that his crusade to secure a departmental budget (and thus to rehire Quigley) will be successful because the issue’s sudden national prominence will shame the school’s administration into action, Devereaux reminds him that “‘It doesn’t work that way . . . You can’t humiliate these people. Not really. You can embarrass them momentarily, but that’s about it’” (Russo 151). Despite his understandable frustration about the issue, Devereaux has little faith that his threat would be taken seriously or prompt any action because, as he explains to his students, “‘it was a comic, not a serious, threat. Because the man who threatened to kill a duck a day until he got a budget was wearing a fake nose and glasses’” (Russo 268). In short, Devereaux is in no position to issue threats; when he does, he must mitigate them by playing the fool. The faculty at WCPU are more likely to be embarrassed or shamed in the scenario, reduced to stunts to get attention and, even then, having little chance of advancing arguments that will hold weight with those who could do anything to improve the situation.

Devereaux is correct that his threat will have little effect on the issue, but Pope does use the situation to explain how he can either participate in his plan for WCPU or become a casualty of it. Due to the coming budget cuts, each campus within the statewide system must “‘reduce staff costs, across the curriculum, by twenty percent’” (Russo 160, 163). In response to the cuts, and in a shrewd financial move, Pope intends to launch an aggressive campaign to remake WCPU as an example of contemporary higher education, mimicking for-profits with their low costs and high profits margins. Citing demographic shifts, Pope considers inevitable his vision for WCPU, as “‘things are changing. Forces of nature, Hank, pure and simple. We’re fresh out of baby boomers. The colleges that survive the decade are going to be lean and mean. Efficient’” (Russo 163). Like Governor Early in Moo, Pope identifies management as the weak
link of the contemporary university, which requires intervention by someone who recognizes market forces. In approach, Pope is a quintessential American neoliberal, looking to improve WCPU’s ability to efficiently meet market demand by becoming more like the privatized form of higher education that was experiencing such tremendous growth in the 1990s, like University of Phoenix, DeVry University, ITT Technical Institute, and the schools operated by Corinthian Colleges. As Devereaux comes to realize based on Pope’s discussion with him, “[t]he whole university [system] is being reorganized, duplicate programs eliminated, the academic mission of each campus redefined. Technical careers will be the center of our particular campus” (Russo 246). There is a certain logic to this approach, particularly at a school like WCPU in an area like Railton, which likely draws students from a relatively narrow catchment area who are looking to gain access to the higher levels of the service industry now that manufacturing and skilled labour jobs have left the area. For-profits succeeded in part by targeting those who were destined to fill low-level service jobs, seems both prudent and potentially remunerative for WCPU to target these same groups. This also allows WCPU to continue to sell the narrative of increased access even if it is no longer increased access to positions in the professional-managerial class. Given the profits that should await WCPU’s reorganization, it is hard to imagine that Pope will have to do much in the way of justifying these changes, especially to a cash-starved state legislature.

While WCPU and other branch campuses like it may not be Morrill Act institutions like Moo U, they were intended to serve as instruments of a meritocratic society by advancing the interests of the burgeoning middle class, and this proposed reorganization actually jeopardizes that mission. A public school like WCPU, most likely a Bachelor’s Institution in the Carnegie Classification, had been designed to be “practical, low cost, skills oriented, and mainly
concerned with teaching,” preparing a new generation of the professional-managerial class to take control of the emerging knowledge economy (Lemann). Though this mission may always have been more theoretical than actually achieved, with the seeming affordability of public education masking the fact that “the best public universities have, since the 1970s, steadily accepted fewer and fewer poor students, increasing the educational gap between the haves and have-nots,” it has been the cornerstone of appeals for public support of mass higher education (Findeisen 293). While there are obvious differences between WCPU and the best public universities, even lower-tier institutions have not been entirely successful in proving accessible to students from the lowest income brackets. For-profits rushed in to fill these gaps in the 1990s, but they have if anything increased the educational gap further, as most students who attend them are “not even guarantee[d] . . . [to] do any college-level work; they can be stuck in remedial courses until they give up” (Ohmann “College” 6).\textsuperscript{clxxi} While WCPU and similar institutions should be looking to serve these same student populations, their adoption of for-profit methods in the hopes of increasing revenue and covering the decline in state funding that has beset public education endangers WCPU’s ability even to gesture toward this mission. Equally worrying, as Richard Ohmann points out, “nonprofit institutions were casualizing and deskill[ing] academic labor well before the proprietaries grabbed a significant share of enrollments in higher education” (Ohmann “College” 7).\textsuperscript{clxxii} With the rise in for-profit education and their ability to reduce costs not only through standardization, but also through using a much higher percentage (78% in 2001) of part-time faculty than do public or private, non-profit institutions (72% and 58.6%, respectively, in 2001), Pope’s plan carries with it a significant reduction in faculty autonomy that professors and departments are simply expected to accept (Snyder 2003). Thus, the proposed budget cuts, already targeted as they are at staff costs, become a tool for Pope to
initiate an extensive casualization effort that supersedes both tenure’s protections and WCPU’s historic mission through the rhetoric of financial necessity.

Pope has the force of seeming inevitability on his side, but he requires allies among the faculty who will endorse the ultimate effects of casualization (and, implicitly, adminification) as something that must be acquiesced to, regardless of any resultant disenfranchisement. Though Devereaux dislikes both Pope and his vision of WCPU and public higher education, he nonetheless believes the rhetoric of accountability circulating around higher education and sees casualization as a means to achieve some measure of it. Pope appeals to these attitudes when pitching to Devereaux, describing casualization as a meritocratic practice that will increase WCPU’s ability to fulfill its mission of affordable, high quality higher education. He asks Devereaux for “‘a set of criteria . . . [defining] who is indispensable to your department, so [the cuts] don’t compromise your mission,’” reasoning that the budget cuts offer a chance to “‘fashion the kind of department we could all be proud of’” (Russo 163, 164). As Devereaux has long felt that WCPU actively promotes mediocrity through its tenure system and its faculty union, the offer holds some appeal. Recognizing that at WCPU, “a tenured full professor . . . couldn’t be moved aside with a backhoe” regardless of any lack of accomplishment, he maintains (via a perverse devotion to Occam’s razor) that the faculty deserves casualization—if they deserved better treatment, they would be treated better, and they would deserve better only if they actually did something (Russo 105). Devereaux ultimately rejects Pope’s offer, deciding that despite the CEO’s assurance that WCPU knows “‘our good people,’” he “can’t come up with a single criterion, or even a cluster of two or three criteria, that would sacrifice the right people;” but his at least partial acceptance of the rationalization for getting rid of tenured faculty is a testament to the power and reach of the administrative agenda (Russo 163, 206).
Like Pope (and like the administrators in *Moo*), Devereaux adopts certain neoliberal tendencies when considering higher education: namely, a faith that competition is an essential and inherent motivating force which must not be limited or restricted in any way lest the working of an efficient market be compromised.\textsuperscript{clxxiii} In this sense, it is natural for him to view WCPU through the lens of the market, convinced of the school’s mediocrity (and that of its staff) because of its relatively frail financial health as much as by any shortcomings related to teaching. Part of this evaluation stems from WCPU’s inability to generate surplus value (in the form of conferred prestige) for its graduates or its employees. For example, because it actually hinders his ability to command any job offers once he is promoted to full professor, Devereaux considers tenure at WCPU to be equal in value to “being proclaimed the winner of a shit-eating contest” (Russo 27). This failure of prestige can be traced, in his view, to tenure’s function as protection from market-determined standards of accountability. Devereaux recognises that he has benefited from this fact—despite holding a position as a creative writing specialist for over two decades, he has produced only one novel—but he also sees it as incompatible with success or excellence. He tacitly endorses the centrality of competition and the regime of self-improvement (in the sense of always making the self a more valuable commodity) under neoliberalism even with his own (and the faculty’s) failure to work within this paradigm.\textsuperscript{clxxiv} Indeed, much of the infighting that plagues WCPU’s English department stems from the faculty members’ failures to meet the standard of faculty at elite institutions. Having failed to produce meaningful books, articles, novels, and poems, they have “chosen, wisely perhaps, to be angry with each other rather than with [them]selves. [They]’ve preferred not to face the distinct possibility that if [they]’d been made for better things, [they]’d have done those things” (Russo 133). Such an outlook lends
credence to Pope’s offer—indeed, it makes privatization and casualization initiatives seem necessary in order to keep WCPU’s door open.

Devereaux’s flirtation with Pope’s casualization plan demonstrates the inability of traditional forms of faculty governance to advance a similarly compelling vision of higher education after the Golden Age. Reflecting on the faculty’s inability to shame the administration into action on his department budget, Devereaux thinks of the annual donkey basketball game—in which “senior faculty . . . saddle up diaper-clad donkeys for the purpose of mocking sport, our institution of higher learning, the life of the mind, and themselves, the ship of dignity having sailed long ago”—and sees in it a perfect reflection of how WCPU has changed since he arrived on campus in the early 1970s (Russo 60). He has a similar sense of the ridiculous from other attempts to shame the administration, particularly those coming from the faculty union. WCPU’s faculty union representative, Herbert Schonberg, confronts Devereaux about his apparent complicity with the administration, demanding to know:

“What have we done that’s so wrong? Could you explain that to me, because I’d like to understand it. What’s wrong with decent pay raises every year? What’s wrong with demanding a decent standard of living? What’s wrong with good faith negotiation? What’s wrong with a little security in life? Do you really want those heartless bastards to run roughshod?” (Russo 192)

However, Schonberg’s question demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of Devereaux’s position on the response to the cuts and their potential appeal to faculty members. Privatisation, casualization, redefinition of the university’s mission, and other policies undertaken by those who understand higher education in market-based terms are specifically designed to run roughshod over faculty by appealing to those who endorse such “efficiency” operations. For
these groups, Schonberg’s appeal to security sounds like an acceptance (and protection) of mediocrity. Thus, faculty members like Schonberg, along with unions and the tenure system more broadly, are expensive obstacles to the kind of managed higher education that would work along the lines of large corporations, often held to be the most appropriate model for universities to aspire to. Pope’s rhetoric ties his initiatives directly to the rhetoric about accountability that was a central part of the culture wars, presenting casualization as a necessity for the institution if it is to discipline the faculty and make them more competitive and cost effective. To the extent that such rhetoric would likely carry significant weight with the legislature, Schonberg’s offer of security seems compromised, particularly given the general austerity measures that have been successful imposed on WCPU over the years.

Perhaps the clearest sign of the union’s failure to keep up with the changing labour conditions at WCPU and advance a competing vision of higher education is its denial of membership to adjunct faculty members. While this remains a not uncommon occurrence, it gives Devereaux a reason to dismiss their efforts out-of-hand, as they are equally complicit with cost-cutting measures that exploit faculty members without even Devereaux’s at least partial commitment to the administrative agenda to smooth over their hypocrisy. When the union bargains yearly raises, a decent standard of living, and security, they do not bargain the same for adjuncts. Indeed, their “good faith” negotiations “bargained the multi-tier system of academic labour into existence,” as “[s]ince 1970, the academy has become one of the most unionized sectors of the North American workforce,” but unions have been “inattentive to management’s stunningly successful installation of a casualized second tier of labor” (Bousquet How 15, 79). The result is not only an expansion in the ranks of adjuncts, as increasing amounts of cost-cutting are bargained into the union contract, squeezing out tenured positions, but also the extension of
the precarious existence of adjunct faculty to all faculty members, as tenured professors seem increasingly expensive and immobile for institutions like WCPU looking to undergo major restructuring. In this way, one of adminification’s chief goals (moving faculty outside the core of university operations by turning them into employees rather than partners in shared governance) can be achieved through the faculty’s own governance structures, creating a managed higher education from within. Thus, one of the main impediments to the widespread adoption of and conversion to for-profit practices, costly full-time faculty, is phased out and the exploitative part-time positions that accompany this system are positioned as fulfilling the faculty’s own desire to be more efficient, competitive, and accountable.

Given the faculty’s inability to amount any kind of serious or sustained resistance to adminification, then, and the seeming inevitability of further privatization and casualization, Straight Man’s only source of hope is the possibility of kinder, gentler administrators—adminification with a human face, so to speak—who will reconcile the romanticized vision of how higher education used to be during the Golden Age with its current, corporatized incarnation. As with Moo everything works out alright in the end—there is an eleventh-hour reprieve from the full extent of Pope’s vision, as he is fired when the budget cuts go through. WCPU does not immediately turn into a technical school determined to compete with the DeVrys and ITT Techs of the world, though there are cuts of tenured faculty in the English department (and, presumably, other departments). Pope’s replacement is Jacob Rose, formerly Dean of Liberal Arts, whose promotion seems just to Devereaux, as “a decent man of sound, thoughtful principles and education values . . . [gets] to see what he can do while he can still do it” (Russo 359-60). As Devereaux is slated to be one of the tenured faculty members let go, Rose attempts to save his job by offering him the now vacant deanship. Rose’s offer is explicitly
positioned as a lifeboat, a chance for security alongside his old friend (and real security, unlike that promised by the faculty union), but Devereaux cannot accept, realizing that while Rose and Pope might differ in the end on their vision for WCPU, their offers are the same: join us, or else; there is nothing left for the faculty to do. Devereaux instead accepts a part-time position at the campus and a part-time position at the high school through a program he and his wife, now the principal there, had proposed to “track bright, disadvantaged high school kids in and around Railton, starting in their sophomore year, and guarantee them tuition and books at the Railton Campus for as long as they kept their grades up” (Russo 381). These kinds of hybrid positions have become more common since the 1990s and they illustrate the influence of figures like Pope on not only WCPU, but higher education more generally. Even if they do not transform outright their institutions, the circulation of their ideas puts increasing pressure on campuses to find some way to evolve along those cost-cutting and revenue-maximizing lines. Straight Man closes with Devereaux publishing a nonfiction book, The Goose Slayer, that collects the satirical portraits of WCPU he had authored for the local newspaper. The gesture is misleading: despite his centrality to certain events on campus, it is difficult to imagine someone who, going forward, will exert less of an influence on WCPU’s direction than Devereaux.

Ultimately, the budget crisis in Straight Man and the proposed response to it demonstrate the changed environment for professors at the end of the twentieth century. The stratification of faculty and schools already underway in the 1960s has come to fruition, posing new challenges to those advocating for improved conditions for academic labour moving forward. Straight Man documents the devaluation of teaching as an activity, the shift of teaching labour onto part-time and contingent works, and the push for tenured faculty to identify with administrators has bolstered acceptance of acquiescence to admin-ification throughout higher education. For
example, though the need to find money to cover necessary sections of freshman composition is
a pressing concern for Devereaux, he is remarkably dismissive of the labour force whose
substandard wages he attempts to secure. Outside of Billy Quigley, one of Devereaux’s friends,
and his attractive daughter Meg, the part-time faculty at WCPU are characterised by Devereaux
as “exhausted ex-high school teachers with M.A.’s, recruited thirty years ago, when the campus
expanded” (Russo 206). This faceless, mediocre mass exists in a constant state of precariousness,
waiting every year to hear if their contracts will be renewed (which depends on how severely the
annual budget has been cut) while the tenured faculty, many of whom Devereaux explicitly notes
are bad teachers, have only recently begun to feel insecure in the gated community they share
outside of Railton proper.

Here, Straight Man offers a subtler re-definition of faculty and their responsibilities and
role in the university to that already discussed in Moo. In response to Pope’s query as to whether
or not he writes anymore, Devereaux tells the CEO to “see the margins of my student papers,” a
joke that superficially positions teaching as Devereaux’s real work while actually framing it as
one of many distractions facing tenured faculty (Russo 166). His attitude demonstrates the gap
between tenured faculty and part-time and adjunct faculty even at a university like WCPU where
the tenured faculty teach freshman composition and other introductory courses on a regular basis
(and thus should have a foundation from which to develop solidarity). In Devereaux and Pope’s
understanding, teaching is every bit the drain on productivity as “[t]he academic memo, the voice
message, the e-mail . . . [which] taken together are the cotton plugs that drown out the siren’s
song” (Russo 175) Far from teaching serving as an essential distinction from the managerial
identity these tasks suggest, then, teaching defines the terrain over which tenured faculty should
direct their managerial energies after recognising their affinity with administration rather than
with part-time faculty. Devereaux may not like Pope, but he has more discussion with him about the direction of the university and his department than he does with the other faculty members, despite his role as chair.

Devereaux’s comments to Pope about his own daily activities, the rampant rumour mongering about staff cuts that would reach into the tenured ranks, and the nightmarish austerity measures facing English professors in *Moo* all highlight the key function of adminification novels as registers of the ideology of academic labour. The academic novel, as discussed in the introduction, has thrived as a genre through its (often skewed or satiric) portrait of the daily activities of professors. Their frustrations and foibles, broadly as they might be sketched, have been representative of the profession at large as the protagonists have tended toward Everymen: ignorant deans, inattentive students, petty colleagues. Even where they have come into conflict with the administration over the direction of their school or of higher education more generally—as with the academic novels that opposed the introduction of professional schools in the 1920s and 1930s—these novels have started from the assumption that faculty members have a function that is inherently valued within higher education as an institution. They may not have been paid well and they may have had to fight for security from the whims of presidents and boards of directors who opposed their politics or religion (or lack thereof), but faculty were valuable as faculty. In *Moo* and *Straight Man*, faculty are another resource to be managed. Pope’s Faustian offer to Devereaux to pick those faculty members who should be declared expendable according to criteria that Devereaux can develop and that Pope will not gainsay offers him a choice not simply of which colleagues to fire but of what understanding he wishes to have of a university’s function. It is the culmination of a tendency to see the university as a servant of industry and its social concerns that has always existed alongside more humanistic ideas about the university, but...
that has grown in strength since the postwar expansion of higher education. To accept that Pope’s offer reflects the workings of the university is to accept the rhetoric of accountability attached both to the PC wars and to the struggles over literary theory’s place in the discipline while at the same time relinquishing any demands for a return to or continuation of the Golden Age. This position reinforces the strength of administrators within the university by underscoring their necessity—only their vision and agenda, based as it is on neoliberal managerialism, can provide a strategic plan for higher education and so it must be followed. Averting catastrophe, as both Moo U and WCPU do, cannot rescue that older vision of higher education.

As a less valued activity (in this conception of academe), the teaching of freshman composition and other introductory courses must be displaced onto the most peripheral workers, keeping down costs and redirecting attention to activities more in keeping with the administrative mission. As Bousquet memorably puts it, though, while this might seem to reduce costs without inflicting any damage on the educational mission (how difficult can it be to teach someone to write?), “cheap teaching is not a victimless crime” (How 41). This practice fundamentally compromises the educational mission and “profoundly degrades the undergraduate educational experience, producing such ‘efficiencies’ as a reduced variety of course offerings, reduced access to faculty doing active scholarship in their field, and the regular replacement of experienced professionals with students and avocational labor” (Bousquet How 43). All of this as tuition amounts (which, on average, increased by 103.8% between 1990-91 and 2013-14 at public, four-year colleges and universities) and debt levels (on average, students who graduated from public, four year, non-doctoral institutions, like WCPU, in 2011-12 borrowed 20.8% more to finance their students over the course of their undergraduate degree than those who graduated in 2003-2004) continue to skyrocket, even at affordable, “accessible”
public institutions (Snyder 2008, 2014). This gap between expectation and reality remains unspeakable while finance serves as the privileged language of explanation in higher education.

The shift in labour practices within this environment points to serious, long-term consequences that affect tenured, as well as part-time and adjunct, faculty. The displacement of devalued academic labour onto peripheral figures, far from causing any upsurge in fortunes for those tenured faculty complying with market demands, actually subsidises their exploitation. Where a more united faculty previously fought for across the board improvements to working conditions, salary, and benefits, the collapse of this unity has meant that “assistant and associate professors teach more, serve more, and publish more in return for lower compensation than any previous generation of faculty” (Bousquet How 41). The academic world is no longer any kind of ivory tower, cloistered from the worst of capitalism (if indeed it ever was), but is instead the bleeding edge of late capitalism, its workers subject to what Ivor Southwood calls “non-stop inertia.” This refers to the widespread phenomenon of periods of un- or underemployment interspersed with short-term or contract work (often self-subsidised), creating a situation in which labourers work to work. Enmeshed in a constant cycle of applying for positions, re-skilling or gaining new credentials, and polishing/curating one’s CV in the hopes of moving on to the next contract (or, increasingly less likely, a long-term or full-time position) before the current one disappears, these labourers face a curious mix of precariousness and mandatory flexibility. The enervating effects of this cycle, which are accompanied by a nervous energy that further precludes productivity, can be seen in Straight Man in the faculty’s circulation of rumours about cuts and their anxiety over their futures that they do not attempt to channel into any kind of meaningful action.
Higher education connects here with the growing “gig economy,” or the increasing tendency of Americans to work exclusively via “freelancing, contracting, temping or outsourcing,” rather than through formal employment (Scheiber A1). Increasingly, even professional and white collar jobs (like college professors, but also lawyers) are moving to these arrangements as the number of jobs performed by part-time workers on a freelance or contract basis “grew to 32 million from just over 20 million between 2001 and 2014, rising to almost 18 percent of all jobs” (Scheiber A1). Colleges and universities are tasked with preparing students for this gig economy in response to the desires of both corporations and students, both of whom see higher education as vocational preparation and training. Corporations are anxious to cut costs by reducing their need to train workers (who can learn on the job at no cost to the company via unpaid internships for credit) and students are looking to appeal to potential employers by self-subsidizing training costs through college tuition. At the same time, absent large-scale labour reform in the United States, academic labour will continue to be pulled in the direction of “flexible” positions, as the economy as a whole continues to shift in this direction. Indeed, the gig economy model has expanded to an ever larger number of industries in an attempt to meet “consumer preferences, which favor variety over specialization” and overcome the limit to cost-cutting for corporations dependent on “in-person service tasks,” which are resistant to the kind of automation available with “routine, codifiable job tasks” as in manufacturing and low-skilled labour (Autor and Dorn 1558-59).

The final and most serious consequence of this devaluation and displacement of teaching, though, is the continued erosion of possibilities for solidarity, a process that threatens to make the problems of privatization and casualization fade from mind where immediate conditions are tolerable (even if unpleasant or less than ideal). Graduate students, for example, are socialized
into this cycle—and taught to see it as normal, as the terms of the job, regardless of the strain such precariousness puts on one’s mental and emotional health, to say nothing of personal relationships—under the guise of “professionalism,” a process that begins ever earlier in one’s schooling via the extension of the designation “career” to formal education.\textsuperscript{clxxv} The upshot of this is to make acceptance of various precepts central to the neoliberalization of higher education (competition, unpaid labour, curating and marketing of the self) a precondition of survival in academe. Over the long term, though, a steadily disenfranchised, aging tenured faculty has created as its eventual replacement a corps of workers who never expect to be franchised and who find many of the structures with which they could argue for greater institutional presence have withered away.\textsuperscript{clxxvi} In addition, given that many (if not most) have their early employment positions (in grad school, as postdocs or visiting lecturers/instructors) on the periphery, they are likely to regard tenured faculty as an enemy for their perceived lack of action, further disrupting the chance for solidarity.\textsuperscript{clxxvii} As Lawrence Hanley points out, at the same time that “the number and kind of academic appointments have been proliferating,” questions have arisen as to “[w]hether and how ‘academic labor’ might encompass all these workers . . . [because] the whole idea of academic work has become much less straightforward and much more complicated” (2). Working for meaningful change comes to involve a near-impossible task of reconciling competing definitions of what change might look like when tensions over who does (and what counts as) valued work in academe collide with a loss of faculty control over governance (and the near total exclusion of the majority of faculty who are part-time or adjuncts from structures of governance).\textsuperscript{clxxviii}

Despite their rather dire content, then, novels of adminification offer a significant avenue for understanding how changes in academic labour conditions and cultural attitudes toward
higher education’s purpose and function are not simply arbitrary or natural occurrences but, like the existence of the Golden Age, were consciously and deliberately shaped. The narratives told by *Moo* and *Straight Man* highlight how policies that changed institutions of higher education materially and philosophically responded to specific cultural threads and interrelated economic developments. Thus, at the same time as the increased profile of Wall Street and the financial sector and the emphasis on developing a knowledge economy recalibrated popular understandings of what business meant in the 1980s and 1990s, the culture wars lent momentum and created popular support for the regulation or holding accountable of higher education according to the standards of this new business climate. Carefully seeded outrage about issues like multiculturalism, political correctness, and pornography made the casualization and privatization efforts documented in *Moo* and *Straight Man* — supposedly designed to curb rising tuition costs by trimming excess and promoting efficiency, though in actuality far less effective than increased public, state, and federal support for higher education would be — palatable because they appealed to a seemingly neutral, business-oriented approach.

By revealing the effects of these policies on faculty and students, though, *Moo* and *Straight Man* demonstrate that not only did these “business decisions” serve elite institutions and those already capable of affording higher education far more than they did the middle class or those groups who had previously been unable to bear the expenses of higher education, they also impoverished the experience of higher education. As characters like underpaid and precariously employed adjuncts begin to come to the fore and as the difficulties of providing faculties with the materials needed to instruct and keep up with their field become part of the fabric of narrating the lives of academics, these novels illustrate the deteriorating learning conditions that result from these policies. At the same time, through their redefinition of faculty
and students roles within higher education, novels of adminification make clear that those capable of contributing to the conversation on the direction of higher education are largely confined to administrative and managerial positions. The shift toward a consumer model means that the influence that can be exerted by parents and students takes place on terms already set by the administration. The appearance of novels of adminification concurrent with the PC novels and theory novels discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 is not a coincidence; reflecting the shift of higher education from its place as part of the public sphere to a consumer service, Moo and Straight Man document the consequences of the culture wars as part of (and within) larger political and economic shifts during the ascendancy of neoliberalism. They underscore how the culture wars functioned as “an economic war on the power and resources of the mass middle class,” and prove that reading the culture wars in academic novels also makes legible the changing material conditions of higher education at the end of the twentieth century (Newfield Unmaking 125).
Dwelling in the Ruins: Adjunct Novels and the Twilight of Higher Education

Energies directed exclusively toward University reform risk blinding us to the dimensions of the task that face us . . . the task of rethinking the categories that have governed intellectual life for over two hundred years.

- Bill Readings, The University in Ruins

My salary is abysmal. I have been forced to rely on food stamps and other welfare programs.

- The Just-In-Time Professor

On September 18th, 2013, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published “Death of an Adjunct,” an op-ed by Dan Kovalik, associate general counsel of the United Steelworkers. Covering the tragic final months of Margaret Mary Vojtko, an adjunct professor of French at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—which had already received attention for its contentious reaction to its adjunct faculty members’ attempt to unionize with the Steelworkers—Kovalik’s piece prompted outraged coverage from the Chronicle of Higher Education, Slate, and NPR, among others. In the months following Vojtko’s death, further stories of adjuncts like Mary-Faith Cerasoli, or the “Homeless Prof,” fueled a national debate on the issue, spurred by advocacy groups like the New Faculty Majority. That part-time employment in higher education officially constituted a crisis was reinforced by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce’s 2014 report The Just-In-Time Professor, which concludes based on testimony from adjuncts that “the contingent faculty trend appears to mirror trends in the general labor market toward a flexible, ‘just-in-time’ workforce, with lower compensation and unpredictable schedules for what were once considered middle-class jobs” (2). Over 800 adjuncts from across the country provided testimonials for the report, proving that while cases like those of Vojtko and Cerasoli might be especially tragic, they were hardly isolated.

Though almost all agreed that a discussion of the working conditions of part-time faculty (and their relationship to the quality of education on offer) was needed, some commentators called the sudden attention to adjuncts following Vojtko’s death disingenuous, a belated
recognition of an issue that many news outlets had apparently willfully ignored. As the popular blog Outside the Beltway derisively put it, 2014 was the year that the adjunct situation “reached the editorial board of the New York Times” (Joyner). But, while pithy, James Joyner’s point is inaccurate. The New York Times and Wall Street Journal had published several profiles of adjuncts and their working conditions as far back as the 1970s, and in the mid-to-late 1990s virtually every major newspaper—including the Times and WSJ, but also the Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, and Boston Globe—published articles on the increasing use of part-time faculty members and their exploitative working conditions.\textsuperscript{clxxiii} Indeed, the MLA-bashing articles published by the New York Times and Wall Street Journal that accompanied the backlash to theory in the 1980s and 1990s repeatedly referenced the issue alongside laments from conference goers about the poor state of the job market.\textsuperscript{clxxiv} Even George Will, arch-conservative, talked about the situation of part-time faculty in the 1990s in his nationally syndicated column, though his take was less than sympathetic.\textsuperscript{clxxv} This is to say nothing of the steady flow of publications on part-time faculty coming out of the AAUP and statements on the use of part-time faculty from professional organisations like the MLA, the NCTE, the American Historical Association, and the American Philosophical Association during this period.\textsuperscript{clxxvi} Profiles of adjunct life continued to appear at a steady trickle in both major newspapers and hip outlets like the Village Voice in the first years of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{clxxvii} As with most contemporary coverage in the wake of Vojtko’s death, these earlier articles focused on adjuncts’ low pay, lack of benefits and job security, and stressful schedules and commutes, while also positing the effects of these working conditions on student learning. National attention to the issue might only have been sparked following the sensational cases of Vojtko, Cerasoli, and
others, then, but coverage of the situation in major news outlets existed long before the beginning of this decade.

However, outside of radical publications like the *minnesota review*, *Social Text*, or *Workplace*, this earlier coverage largely ignored systemic analyses of the collapse of the academic job system and its connection to larger social and economic trends under late capitalism, such as the steady decline of the middle class, the paring back of the welfare state, and the broader shift toward contingent and part-time work in the economy as a whole. The figure of the adjunct is today a much more recognisable one with a legitimate cultural purchase, particularly as “recovery” from the 2008 financial crisis heralds a continued reduction in the financial horizons and employment prospects of the middle class and those who aspire to reach it, in the name of flexibility, competitiveness, and efficiency. With the appearance of Kovalik’s op-ed and the upsurge of national attention following it, academic labour joined a growing (and increasingly visible) discussion on the nature of contemporary work, income inequality, debt levels, and general precariousness. This is not to say that the adjunct is necessarily a sympathetic figure in the public consciousness, with lingering anti-intellectualism (fuelled in part by misconceptions about nine-hour work weeks and high salaries that are tied into complaints about the high cost of higher education today) preventing mass identification with part-time faculty members, but s/he is more widely understood than even a decade ago.

Kovalik’s piece offered a graphic, moving narrative that conveyed the points that part-time faculty and other academic activists and reformers had been making for some time, contributing to a trend where adjuncts testified to their poor working conditions and precarious existence on blogs and internet forums. Concurrent with this trend, academic novels in the twenty-first century expanded on the awareness of adjuncts that coloured the genre in the mid-to-
late 1990s by foregrounding adjuncts and part-time faculty members in novels like James Hynes’ *The Lecturer’s Tale* (2001) and Alex Kudera’s *Fight for Your Long Day* (2010). Taken together, these adjunct novels represent the most significant trend in academic fiction since the turn of the century, extending the revised understanding of higher education and its labour relations demonstrated by 1990s novels of adminification while also clarifying and re-situating the stakes of earlier culture wars novel for a post-9/11 (and post-2008) world. Where the PC novel, theory novel, and adminification novel all suggest (to greater or less degrees) that acquiescing to market demands and participating in accountability measures and privatization initiatives could forestall the worst effects of the corporatization of higher education, adjunct novels reject this as a convenient narrative for those doing the corporatizing. They represent the culture wars as having always been about the destruction of a form of mass public higher education that was not wholly governed by the market and so was capable of advancing ideas about equality, integration, and mobilization that challenged the status quo. In so doing, they take the form that the academic novel has assumed during the postwar period to its endpoint, positing moments in which the university that they had depicted can no longer exist and for-profit education becomes the form of the university to which they are tied. What is more, in a series of ironic reversals, the adjunct novel manages to take the traditional elements of academic fiction (such as its connection to the *bildungsroman* form or its generally comic tone and ending) and subvert them into narratives of failure that end without domestic bliss or freedom. A steadily mounting sense of precariousness had invaded academic novels during the 1990s, and adjunct novels represent its culmination in narratives of an academic world stripped of the securities (employment, academic freedom, institutional value) of tenure.
Much as with the depiction of administrators in adminification novels, though, portraits of part-time faculty members and insecure employment are not new to the academic novel, as critics of the genre like Heather Steffen have demonstrated.\textsuperscript{clxxviii} The adjunct novel’s emphasis on the commonplace nature of such positions and terms of employment challenges the genre’s basic set up. When adjuncts become main characters in academic novels, the relationship between professor and campus—the essential characteristic of academic fiction, according to John E. Kramer and Jeffrey Williams—can hardly be said to carry on in the mold of those works that foregrounded tenured (or tenurable) faculty members. Instead, even the weak links between professor and campus that governed the new professionalism documented by theory novels like \textit{Small World} have been abandoned alongside any vestiges of a professional identity that might offer some protection. Here, adjunct novels make clear the connection between contemporary academic fiction and other portraits of the declining horizons of middle class life as they depict “a new academic world, in which faculty no longer compose the core . . . and the academic world is no longer a path to middle-class security” (Williams “Unlucky”).\textsuperscript{clxxix} Where academic novels of the 1920s worried about the rise of professional schools and degrees (like education, business, and medicine) within the university and the potential dilution of the pursuit of the life of the mind, and academic novels of the 1950s wondered how to sustain rigorous humanistic inquiry in light of McCarthyism, academic novels of the 2000s (typified by adjunct novels) know that higher education is, through and through, a business, for which the life of the mind is a convenient fiction.\textsuperscript{cxc}

In their imagining of the day-to-day experiences of the professor in the corporatized, post-welfare state university, adjunct novels mark a particular moment in academic labour relations: the moment of higher education’s “Great Stratification.” A novel like Mary
McCarthy’s *The Groves of Academe* documents academic labour relations during the “Great Expansion” of the nascent Golden Age, when as Michael Bérubé colourfully puts it, academics earned tenure “if they could sign their names or prove they were carbon-based” (“Bear Market” 134). In contrast, adjunct novels show an academic world in which “the traditional idea of a community of scholars, all roughly equivalent” is replaced by “a distended pyramid, with a huge base of people whose primary job is teaching, often entry-level courses; a layer of specialists in particular fields and researchers who may hardly even teach above them; and a thin spire of administrators commanding the peak” (Williams “Great Stratification” B6). Thus, Henry Mulcahy, the protagonist of *The Groves of Academe*, represents the emerging faculty power of the 1960s and 1970s despite opening the novel by being fired from his position at Jocelyn College. As he is “the only Ph.D. in the Literature department” and possesses “fifteen years’ teaching experience,” Mulcahy is unwilling to settle for another year of unemployment or underemployment “teaching nights to illiterates” (McCarthy 13, 22). Self-assured of both his quality as a teacher and the relative scarcity of suitable replacements, Mulcahy resolves simply to keep his job, “having never intended to be fired” (McCarthy 16). Just a few decades later, though, deans could triumphantly declare “‘[i]t’s a buyer’s market’” as a way to dismiss the complaints of part-time faculty and the conditions for this kind of Bartleby-esque refusal had ceased to exist (Tierney WC22). Perhaps most damningly, protagonists in adjunct novels can only treat the concept of “the groves of academe” cynically or ironically. Nelson Humboldt and Cyrus Duffleman, the protagonists of *The Lecturer’s Tale* and *Fight for Your Long Day*, mostly abandon the sense of higher education as a larger social project, some grand and noble exemplar of the best of Western culture and civilization (i.e., exactly what figures like Bloom and Bennett claimed higher education had already abandoned), which excused or softened the potential
insecurity of scholarly life in earlier novels. Jettisoning these beliefs is painful, but they simply do not reflect the education system in which the protagonists find themselves and in which their contingent professional lives have taken a starring turn.

As the title of the House Committee’s report on adjunct faculty makes clear, the academic labour trends reflected in adjunct novels can best be understood within the rise of “just-in-time” capitalism, or the latest permutation of the globalized capitalism that emerged from the economic crises of the 1970s. Today, this is most recognisable in the continued rapid expansion of the gig economy—or the tendency toward multiple part-time, on-call jobs that has replaced the fixed forty-hour work week conducted during business hours at a single location—but these developments first became prominent in the 1980s. The trend toward casualization in academe, which began in the 1970s and accelerated throughout the 1980s and 1990s, then, belongs to a deliberate movement toward “vastly reduc[ed] labor costs” and “extensive flexibility for employers” through the creation of a contingent labour force (Serrin “Part-Time” A1). Indeed, the recovery from the Oil Shocks of the 1970s was largely driven by “the proliferation of low-wage employment,” which increased at “more than twice the rate of low-wage job creation . . . during the 1960’s and 1970’s,” and “the dramatic expansion of part-time employment . . . [which] grew twice as fast as full-time jobs, accounting for nearly 30 percent of net employment growth” during the first half of the 1980s (Bluestone and Harrison F3). This pattern would reappear during the recovery from the recession of the early 1990s, with dramatic upticks in part-time, low-wage work alongside wage stagnation and continued outsourcing and subcontracting.

Just-in-time capitalism (with its just-in-time workforce), then, is a general intensification of the conditions of post-Fordism, exacerbating the tendency toward feminized labour noted by
Hall, Donna Haraway, and others in the 1980s. Like feminized labour, just-in-time work is characterised by insecure employment, flexible skills or activities, and indefinite boundaries between work and leisure, as “work becomes a continuous way of life, rather than just something we do among other things . . . [and] [t]urning-off is no longer an available option” (Cederström and Fleming 13). These conditions represent the fulfillment of what David Harvey calls a “regime of flexible accumulation,” in which “the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transportation costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space” (Harvey 147). Within this new economic regime, the abandonment of Fordism’s mass production approach in favour of a “greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation, on marketing, packaging and design, on the ‘targeting’ of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture” has been a boon to neoliberalism’s promotion of “new identities associated with . . . the maximisation of individual choices through personal consumption” (Hall 24). In keeping with neoliberalism’s broader political project to remake the state and its apparatuses in line with neoliberal market fundamentalism, civic participation has been redefined as a form of “individual responsibility” that valorizes activities like “ethical consumption” of free/fair trade goods over and above larger actions against systemic abuse or exploitation of workers in the second and third worlds (Wacquant 72). To the extent that “just-in-time” can become a broader method of social organization, it undermines the ability for systematized actions that cannot easily be reabsorbed within regular market functions.

Higher education has not been immune to these shifts or their effects, as it has experienced changes in both its self-conception (redefined as a service to be purchased) and its relationship with students (repositioned as customers who must be catered to). Following the
logic of unconstrained personal consumption as the defining expression of civic life, higher education should provide the students *who are paying for this service* (a key point in the logic of neoliberalism) with largely unfettered free choice as to their consumption of education services. Those choices, in turn, are driven by what students (and parents, employers, etc.) understand to be the dictates of the market. Consequently, the educational mission of higher education should be driven by market and consumer demands (which, ideally, will be one and the same). The encroachment of administrative control over curricular matters—typically accomplished through “the study commission,” whose “makeup . . . is designed to dilute or diminish faculty influence”—represents one phase of this, as does the increasingly common partnerships of colleges and universities with corporations to promote “synergy” between education and industry and the predominance of internships and externships as the pinnacle or capstone of the curriculum (Ginsberg 10). Responding to shifting demands for customized or short-run goods and services proves difficult with a relatively permanent and highly specialized workforce (like tenured faculty members), though, and moves toward a more casual workforce in higher education (as discussed in the previous chapter) allow institutions greater flexibility to alter or customize their offerings as needed to entice new and repeat customer-students.

The increased pressure on higher education to adopt a just-in-time model cannot be understood outside of the rise of for-profit higher education in the 1990s and 2000s. Though 1945-1970 is typically cited as the major growth period in modern American higher education, there has been significant growth in terms of faculty, students, and institutions between 1970 and 2013. There were roughly 225% more faculty in 2013 than in 1970 and 180% more institutions; also, according to the US Census Bureau, 58.6% of the population age 25 and over had attended at least some higher education compared to 21.2% in 1970, with 39.9% of 18-24 year olds
enrolled in some form of higher education versus 25.7% in 1970. Those growth figures are misleading in that they are driven mostly by the creation of part-time (or the conversion of full-time positions into one or several part-time positions). Between 1970-2013, part-time positions accounted for 60.7% of faculty growth, and 64.6% of growth between 1991-2013.

For-profit education grew rapidly during these latter two decades: while accounting for just 16.5% of total faculty growth during this period, the number of faculty employed by for-profit institutions grew at an astounding 1,275.7% between 1991-2013, with public and private, not-for-profit institutions growing at a more modest 66.6% and 90.1%, respectively.
As a result, 8.3% of all faculty members were employed by for-profits in 2013, compared to just 1.1% in 1991. Enrollment trends showed similar results during the period (just 23.7% of total enrollment growth for for-profits, but a 619% growth rate compared to 30.4% and 41% for public and private, not-for-profit institutions) as 8.1% of all students were enrolled in a for-profit by 2013, compared to 1.6% in 1991. At the level of institutions, for-profits accounted for 96.4% of all new institutions of higher education during this period, as for-profits grew by 317.6%, compared to just 1.7% for public institutions and 0.8% for private, not-for-profit institutions.

The explosive growth of for-profit education between 1991 and 2013 put pressure on higher education from two directions. First, for-profit education encouraged casualization initiatives across the board, as for-profits are significantly more likely to hire part-time rather than full-time faculty than both public and private, not-for-profit institutions, with 79.8% of their faculty part-time in 2013, versus 47.1% at public institutions and 43.5% at private, not-for-profits. In a time of cash-strapped schools, that represents real savings, as for-profits spent just 45% and 31% on instruction costs per faculty member (and 54% and 22% per student) compared to public and private, not-for-profit institutions. At the same time, those reduced instruction costs accounted for just 24.1% of revenue from student tuition and fees, compared with 121.8% at public institutions and 82.7% at private, not-for-profits. Second, beyond this financial pressure, for-profit institutions were able to market themselves differently, focusing on concepts like flexibility in terms of course offerings, scheduling, and degree completion timelines that fit higher education into consumer expectations that had been conditioned by similar concepts throughout the economy. This not only allowed for-profit education to tap into the populations that were supposed to be served by mass public education but who had by and large failed to
enter these institutions in greater numbers (particularly, students from the lowest income brackets), but also challenged the concept of higher education presented by public and private, not-for-profit institutions. In order to compete with the methods and approaches of for-profits, both public and private, not-for-profit institutions were required to offer comparable levels of flexibility (within the constraints of their brands, which were tied to their versions of higher education’s goals and purpose) to student-consumers on the educational market.

For faculty, the end result of this push toward just-in-time higher education modeled after for-profits has been a continuous rolling back of the professional status of professors. Where once work at a university was a comfortable path to middle-class security, now the professionalization of new apprentices (graduate students) is largely wasted as they “labor[] at the only academic job they’ll ever have” (Bousquet *How* 21). In the decades following the Second World War, the professor was expected—no matter how bohemian s/he might be—to navigate “a genteel, manicured-lawn, middle-class life” (Williams “Posttheory” 27). By the twenty-first century, though, it had become necessary to point out that, “[e]xcept in very particular circumstances, the term ‘adjunct’ or ‘contingent’ names an undesirable appointment type. It doesn’t describe an undesirable person,” as the failures of academe were projected onto adjuncts and they could no longer plausibly identify with the middle class (Bousquet “Don’t Let”). Thus, the narratives told by adjunct novels link higher education into larger, systemic crises of capitalism, redefining both academic labour and academe’s purpose in terms of the reduced social and political horizons afforded by the neoliberal state. That both *The Lecturer’s Tale* and *Fight for Your Long Day* end with apocalyptic scenes of higher education’s destruction suggests the need for the academic novel to find some tie to a cultural imaginary that could reformulate the mission of mass higher education on the terrain of a post-2008 world and in
opposition to the corporatized vision of higher education that has largely replaced it today. While neither novel explicitly advances such a plan, they do serve as important sites of resistance in that they make it possible to see a waning (though co-existent with these new cultural dominants) conception of higher education’s supposed public mission that, while unable to combat the incursion of neoliberal capitalism, remains one of the few articulations of dissent open to academe.

“Now he floated above the deep carpeting like a ghost”: The Lecturer’s Tale and the Figure of the Invisible Adjunct

Throughout the upsurge of attention to their plight, adjuncts have attempted to overcome the dominant trope surrounding their employment: invisibility. While Vojtko and Cerasoli’s homelessness connects them to another population that is often considered invisible, adjuncts have long been portrayed (and have portrayed themselves) online, in the media, and in academic novels as invisible. This invisibility has been meant both literally—in the sense of being unseen by one’s colleagues and employers—and figuratively, related to presence and impact in governance situations and on the curriculum, the educational mission more broadly, and the public’s understanding of higher education’s goals and purpose. The idea that adjuncts make up an “invisible” population within the university has existed since at least the 1980s, though the publication of Judith M. Grappa and David W. Leslie’s The Invisible Faculty (1993) gave the term wider currency. The influential, though short-lived, blog The Invisible Adjunct solidified invisibility as one of the dominant tropes of contemporary academic labour relations, contrasting the experience of being “fully alive and fully visible” in the classroom where “[her] students see [her] and know [her]” with the “little ‘death’ that is not at all a death” she experiences “every time I feign a brisk cheerfulness as I explain to one of the secretaries in the office that I am So-
and—So who needs you to please unlock the door to Office Number XXX so that I can hold the weekly office hours for which I am not paid” (Invisible Adjunct “Ghosts”). Collections like Ghosts in the Classroom (2001), which collected firsthand accounts of adjunct labour conditions, helped to keep invisibility alive as a key part of analyses of academic labour relations in the twenty-first century.

Nelson Humboldt and Cyrus Duffleman both explicitly identify themselves, their labour, their itinerant work lives, and their part-time peers as invisible, contrasting this state with the public, highly visible performance of the work of tenured faculty and their permanent location on campus. It is through this tension between invisibility and visibility that adjunct novels connect their concerns to larger economic currents, as invisibility tends to align part-time faculty with lower-level service workers as opposed to professionals. In this sense, many adjunct and part-time faculty members occupy an uncertain class position and identity, like much of the former middle class. Though they continue to bear the signs of upward mobility (advanced degrees, professional jobs) and should be destined for economic security and social stability, their lives are increasingly fraught with insecurity, the promises of white-collar life proving illusory. Their contingent employment has translated into a more generalised contingency that limits their social and political participation. In turn, these limits are reflected back onto higher education in adjunct novels, raising questions about the purpose of the academic novel going forward. In The Lecturer’s Tale, the withdrawal of collegial behaviour from tenured faculty toward adjuncts serves as a way of normalizing and sustaining this invisibility.

The Lecturer’s Tale follows Humboldt, a “visiting adjunct lecturer on a semester-to-semester contract” at the prestigious University of the Midwest, as he first loses and then regains his job following a freak accident that severs his finger and gives him the power to manipulate
anyone whose skin he can touch with the reattached digit (7). Humboldt uses his power to ascend the ranks in Midwest’s English department before losing everything when a fire destroys school’s library, crippling its academic standing and leading to its sale to a for-profit educational consortium. Ultimately, though he has become that rarest of creatures, a visible adjunct, Humboldt finds something akin to occupational salvation in a fully-corporatized university, where contingency is formalized and the terms of employment and retention made both explicit and universal. Thus, through Humboldt’s career The Lecturer’s Tale explores the emergence of part-time faculty members as a significant portion of the academic workforce and the poor working conditions they face, which are exacerbated by their invisibility, Both of these points—the rising number of adjuncts and the abysmal working conditions—serve as shorthand for a more general crisis of the profession and of higher education as a whole. The deliberate failure on the part of tenured faculty to acknowledge adjuncts and their working conditions contributes to this crisis as they willfully ignore the significance of this issue and broader conversations about the changed conditions of academic labour and terms on which English studies must exist in the twenty-first century, much like the humanists and theorists in theory novels like Book.

In this sense, The Lecturer’s Tale inverts Straight Man: instead of a sharp-witted, tenured department chair at a failing public university coming to realize his disenfranchisement from university governance as his institution attempts to modernise along the lines of for-profit education, Hynes’ novel features a meek lecturer at an elite private university desperately attempting to gain entry to the exclusive world of full-time, tenured faculty membership despite his marginalization and disenfranchisement only to have the world collapse. Further, where Straight Man ended with WCPU receiving an eleventh-hour reprieve from Dickie Pope’s for-
profit revolution, *The Lecturer’s Tale* ends with an embrace of complete corporatization both because it improves the working conditions for most faculty members and, in the eyes of Humboldt, it makes no actual difference in terms of the education his students receive and its impact on their lives. Humboldt’s position might stem from the career dead end he finds himself in at the novel’s close—he is unlikely ever to move on to a full-time job at another university, and he accepts this fact as inevitable—but it makes some sense: what can an introductory literature class taught by an academic washout actually offer students, particularly given the vocational promises that for-profit education makes to them? *Straight Man* ends with the sense that the dream of mass public higher education as a vehicle for equality and a meritocratic society survives, however maimed or hobbled, through programs like the one that Devereaux and his wife initiate to provide access to higher education for disadvantaged students in the region. However, *The Lecturer’s Tale* foregrounds the question of “why access to cultural capital through the higher-educational system should be imagined as a necessary (or even strategic) precondition of social equality at all,” particularly as the same kind of students that Devereaux and his wife seek to help flock to the newly-corporatized Midwest University and its formerly elite students decamp (along with its tenured faculty) to other elite colleges and universities (Findeisen 294). This cynicism defines *The Lecturer’s Tale*’s understanding of higher education and its future, as Humboldt sees invisibility as both his and his students’ lot in life, a fact that access to higher education, possession of a college degree, or even employment as a college professor cannot alter in any meaningful way.

While *The Lecturer’s Tale* was not a commercial success like *Moo*, it enjoyed a fairly strong critical reception that championed the novel’s use of the satirical form common to earlier academic novels to address the culture wars and academic labour. Tobin Harshaw gave Hynes a
positive review in the *New York Times Book Review*, as did Michael Dirda in the *Washington Post* (“a dazzlingly entertaining novel”) and Elaine Showalter in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, who called the novel “hilarious [and] hardhitting,” praising Hynes for “writ[ing] so brilliantly, inventively, and lovingly about the sins of academe” (Dirda T15; Showalter “Academic Predators” B12-13). Most reviews focused on the novel’s breadth of allusions—“a Norton Anthology of a novel, a course in a book, covering all the literary material of an introductory survey in English literature”—as well as its sharp approach to literary theory and the culture wars, which are much more central to *The Lecturer’s Tale* than to *Moo* or *Straight Man* (Showalter “Academic Predators” B12). Hynes is capable of the same snide putdowns of theorists as are found in a novel like Robert Grudin’s *Book*, but his is not simply an anti-theory diatribe. Thus, on one hand, he offers a portrait of Marko Kraljević, “the department’s premier theorist . . . [who] had built his reputation on a series of impenetrably recondite essays, on topics ranging from the irreconcilable separation of consciousness from being, to the smell of his fingertips after pairing his nails” and also happens to be a Serbian war criminal responsible for acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing under Milošević, because “[t]here’s no law that says you can’t be a postmodernist and a war criminal” (Hynes 40, 306). On the other hand, he also demonstrates a familiarity with analytical categories and practices opened up by literary theory, not the least those related to the interrogation of identity and subjectivity afforded by queer theory and postcolonial theory.

Indeed, for all that it revels in the absurdities of contemporary cultural studies, like professors whose work consists of “fantasies of sex with famous canonical authors” or readings of Elvis films that were never made but that now could be made through digital technologies, *The Lecturer’s Tale* embeds its criticisms of theory within the shifts in academic labour that have
taken place during the past forty years (Hynes 82). The star theorists at Humboldt’s school are shown to have an intimate and specific relationship to his own contingent employment, which is more damning than their intellectual interests or scholarship. As Sharon O’Dair points out, “the star system structures—or partly structures—the academy, or at least English departments, because there are so few tenure track jobs,” with the stars able to exist because of the expansion of part-time faculty members’ and graduate students’ teaching loads (46). At the same time, the existence of stars like Kraljević “induce[s] graduate students to take a crack at stardom . . . and, therefore, allow us to staff all those sections of composition” (52). Thus the humour (and critique) in *The Lecturer’s Tale* stems less from “the return of what has been repressed in academe . . . the revenge of reading and teaching against theory,” as Showalter claims, than the return of the much more deeply repressed (to the point of invisibility) fate of the majority of faculty members in English Studies (“Academic Predators” B13). For the masses of contingent workers, like Humboldt, conflicts between and about theoretical camps are immaterial to their present situation. The novel’s “realiz[ation] that the culture wars of the 1980s and 90s were being fought not over the soul of society but over the hearts and minds of a bunch of moribund graduate students unlikely ever to find jobs in their chosen fields,” then, is less about “show[ing] to what extent any sense of good-naturedness in the groves of academe has dissipated since, say, David Lodge stopped writing his academic comedies of manners” and more an indication of the culture wars’ real stakes as a structural problem for higher education that transcends the more superficial conflicts over the canon (Harshaw BR30). Or, in a form more befitting the novel’s plot, it matters less what faculty and students are reading and how they are reading it than who has the security that allows them the time to read. The introduction of a part-time faculty member as a protagonist allows Hynes’ novel to foreground labour issues that informed earlier
culture wars novels but that had existed in the background, or as subtext for the seemingly more pressing concerns about the canon or declining academic standards because of affirmative action.

In many ways, The Lecturer’s Tale functions as a kind of ideal academic novel covering all phases of its protagonists’ intellectual formation and on into his experiences as a faculty at an elite university. Ironically, though, this set up actually serves to destabilize the novel’s form by supporting the portrait of a faculty member who daily experiences do not fill with those of the expected subject of academic fiction. Thus, though Humboldt’s life story conforms to a kind of stereotypical track for success as an English professor—from a childhood love of literature, through an undergraduate education at a small liberal arts college that provides him with a grounding in the methods of New Criticism, graduate training at a state school, and on to a postdoctoral fellowship at a prestigious private university—it is ultimately in service of a narrative of failure. In an echo of The Groves of Academe, The Lecturer’s Tale opens with Humboldt’s firing from the University of the Midwest, the end of a long descent from “a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship, at the rank of assistant professor, to teaching three sections of composition and one of study skills” (Hynes 7). Unlike the white male victim of PC novels, Humboldt is not presented as a man on the wrong side of history who entered academe a generation too late to be successful because of the declining fortunes of white males in academe (Hynes 27). Instead, what is exceptional about Humboldt’s fate is that a PhD with an abiding love of literature and teaching and with relatively progressive politics is no longer wanted in the more rarefied parts of academe. Indeed, Humboldt experiences great difficulty in finding any job at all, at any school., which is the real noteworthy point. To focus on his race (or gender) is to misread the situation when, as discussed in Chapter 1, minorities and females get more positions than they once did but white males remain the largest employment category in academe. The
value of *The Lecturer’s Tale*’s resistance to (or at least complication of) this race narrative is its insistence that the history of which Humboldt has fallen afoul has been deliberately constructed through specific policies that have allowed the adjunct crisis to happen without regard to who might be affected. Through a series of humorous (because of their seeming exaggeration and absurdity) comparisons between Humboldt’s life and those of his professors and his tenured colleagues at Midwest, *The Lecturer’s Tale* underscores the material changes that make the academe of the 2000s significant different from that of the 1960s, or even the 1990s. In so doing, Hynes’ novel both makes reports on actual conditions facing adjuncts today more tragic and disturbing (because they are not exaggerated) and captures the structural necessity of the invisible relationship between part-time and full-time faculty members.

It is the comparisons between the careers of Humboldt and his teachers that begin to outline this relationship, in part by revealing the very different kind of academe being built in the 1950s and 1960s versus that of the 1990s and 2000s. Humboldt’s undergraduate mentor, Professor Gallagher, embodies the rising fortunes of the professoriate in the immediate postwar era. Jobs were relatively plentiful, and the generation of academics tenured in the 1960s were assured of a “comfortable, contemplative life” (Hynes 25). For Gallagher, joining the professoriate is a means not only of professional, but also personal and material advancement. His academic career affords him an escape “from walking behind a plow into the world of ranch houses, station wagons, and color television” (Hynes 18). Since tenure, Gallagher has mostly failed to keep up with changing intellectual fashions and employment prospects. Having taught Humboldt prosody and encouraged him to adopt figures like Alfred Kazin and Lionel Trilling as models for his professional life, Gallagher sends Humboldt off to graduate school “at a smallish land grant school in north central Indiana” with the damning advice that “*[s]cholarship is a
meritocracy . . . A man’s worth is judged by the quality of his work, not by the pedigree of his doctorate”” (Hynes 18, 19). He promises Humboldt that graduate school will be the making of him, a way to assure him of a similarly comfortable life of the mind to which, given his temperament and zeal for literature, he is obviously suited.

Gallagher’s advice, and the path on which it sets Humboldt, proves disastrous for both cultural and structural reasons. Humboldt’s training and interests prove woefully out of step with the times, as he feels uncomfortable with both cutting edge theoretical work and conservative defenses of the canon from Homer to Eliot. Thus, where his colleagues “ditch[ed] their mediocre dissertations on Milton or Pound . . . [for] Doc Savage novels, the X-Men, or Star Trek: The Next Generation,” Humboldt writes on Conrad, “taking a measured position somewhat to the south of Alfred Kazin and a bit to the north of Edward Said . . . with just enough theory in it to give it some zest” (Hynes 26, 27). Similarly, contra Gallagher’s insistence on a professional meritocracy, Humboldt’s colleagues “resigned themselves to careers at party universities or sprawling suburban community colleges or small church schools in the middle of nowhere, where they’d teach five classes a semester for the rest of their lives” and eventually “peel[ed] off to lesser schools in Wyoming, Las Vegas, Long Island” (Hynes 26, 28). As David Collander and Daisy Zhou note in their study of the placement of English PhDs by the prestige of their graduate institutions, “[w]hile students in top programs might have a reasonable chance of getting tenure-track jobs at a national research university or national research liberal arts college, the chances for such placement are essentially nil for students graduating from lower-ranked programs” (141-42). Though this seems to put lie to the idea of a professional meritocracy, it does not count out a comfortable life. There is not necessarily any glamour in quietly spending a career teaching students at small regional colleges, but it does not preclude professional fulfillment.
However, in graduate school, Humboldt finds models of the new academic spending his or her days at these schools after coming from more prestigious graduate institutions, per Zhou and Collander. Rather than Gallagher’s quiet contentment, Humboldt’s graduate professors suggest “scorpions in a bottle fighting over diminishing resources” (Schaub). Seeing themselves as consigned to the academic wilderness in northern Indiana, they “only barely tolerat[e] their graduate students, who, if they had been any good, would have gone to the same graduate programs their professors had,” and spend their days “furiously writ[ing] articles and books and updat[ing] their CVs, desperate to trade up to a better school” (Hynes 20). For increasing numbers of junior faculty (along with under- or unemployed academics and even some graduate students), this represents their professional reality, despite many of them having “published and taught more just to get a job than most senior faculty had done to earn lifetime tenure thirty years [earlier]” (Bérubé “Bear Market” 134). Even Gallagher, in this context, has been transformed from comfortable purveyor of cultural capital into Wilson Blunt, Humboldt’s dissertation director, “a bald, heavy-lidded old man, perfectly round, the sole survivor of Sooey’s days as an ag college. He’d published one book on Longfellow forty years ago, devoting the rest of his career to instructing Indiana’s future county agricultural agents in the use of the semicolon and the subordinate clause” (Hynes 24). Blunt would be unlikely to keep up in contemporary academe, but his career, however unglamorous, represents a security that Humboldt and his five-course-a-semester peers can only envy.

This security has largely disappeared for Humboldt’s cohort because of the changing nature of higher education employment tied to, though distinct from, the decline in levels of state funding for higher education and parents’ and students’ shift to a more practical, investment oriented approach to attending college (part of the influence of for-profits on higher education).
The structure of higher education no longer supports careers like those of Gallagher and Blunt due to significant cultural shifts in the nature of the profession that revised the notion of a career in English studies and the expectation for faculty on the tenure track. Blunt’s career might seem dull, but it was an accepted path for those tenured in the immediate postwar period, when enrollment increases meant that “thousands and thousands of composition courses needed to be staffed” and those on the market “could choose among offers and did not have to publish” to get a job (O’Dair 51). By the 1990s, though, composition (along with creative writing and various forms of professional and technical writing) had developed a certain amount of autonomy, steadily increasing its share of the proportion of all tenure-track jobs on offer. At the same time, the continued ascendance of research rather than teaching as the primary activity of tenure-track faculty solidified a very specific definition of what it meant to work as a professor, one that increasingly failed to reach adjuncts, furthering their disenfranchisement. Higher education had been set on this path after the Civil War with the establishment of Johns Hopkins in 1876, the push for academic freedom to pursue original research and the first paid sabbaticals for research in the 1880s, the blossoming of graduate schools in the 1890s, and the founding of the AAU in 1900 (Veysey 174-75).

Teaching remained a cornerstone of public higher education through the Second World War, though, with relatively few faculty members in the humanities working exclusively (or even primarily) as researchers. By the 1960s with the emergence of the “multiversity” and the passing of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, increasing numbers of at least senior faculty members were beginning to teach fewer introductory classes and spend more time on research, but “[u]ntil World War II even senior scholars at leading universities did a good deal of what they defined as scut work: teaching small groups of lower-level students, reading papers
and examinations, and the like” (Jencks and Riesman 40). With support for scientific research booming during the escalation of the Cold War faculty in the humanities could now afford to support themselves primarily through their research activities (Williams “Theory Journal” 693). Increases in enrollment meant that colleges and universities could be more selective, “demanding higher academic aptitude and more proof of academic motivation from their entrants” (Jencks and Riesman 22). Concurrently, there occurred a “rapid decline in teaching loads for productive scholars, an increase in the ratio of graduate to undergraduate students at the institutions where scholars are concentrated, the gradual elimination of unscholarly undergraduates from these institutions, and the parallel elimination of unscholarly faculty” (Jencks and Riesman 15). Kraljević, for example, as a star faculty member at Midwest, “played a game of hide and seek with his graduate students (he taught no undergraduates), lecturing on whatever topic took his fancy at the moment. He refused to publish a syllabus . . . [and] never showed up for office hours” (Hynes 40). It is understood that Kraljević’s real work is to continue to publish and present at conferences, ensuring Midwest’s English department of a high profile. Whether or not his students ever manage to find him or get anything from his classes is beside the point.

Kraljević comes to supersede Gallagher or Blunt as the example of the successful academic, gaining a comfortable, contemplative life by demonstrating that the ability to be contemplative generates first-rate research. He is unlikely to mentor any students or nurture the budding interest in literature of a freshman, but faculty members have come to be evaluated “largely by asking other men with comparable training and interests what they thought of the work” or scholarship, rather than by their teaching abilities (Jencks and Riesman 237). Indeed, until relatively recently, teaching performances meant almost nothing for career advancement and prospects. Unsurprisingly, then, “[c]ollege instructors have become less and less preoccupied
with educating young people, more and more preoccupied with educating one another by doing scholarly research which advances their discipline,” a charge resurrected in the 1980s by Charles Sykes, William Bennet, Lynne Cheney, and others (Jencks and Riesman 13). The star system within English Studies is simply the most extreme iteration of this approach. Even if teaching is more valued today than before, the nature of faculty jobs has changed as the kind of prestige attached to one’s research reigns supreme. The job Blunt performs, for example, still exists—it remains a part of the cornerstone of mass public education and describes the majority of faculty jobs available at community colleges—but it no longer serves as the model for full-time employment for most who come through graduate school with its workforce displaced across countless part-time positions that are more cost effective. In this sense, despite ostensibly being colleagues, Humboldt and the tenured faculty at Midwest work different jobs, though Humboldt’s job makes it possible for the tenured faculty to exclude “scut work” from their own schedules.

Paradoxically, despite this emphasis on research and the importance (or even necessity) of holding the Ph.D. in order to have an academic career, it is precisely his Ph.D. that prevents Humboldt from establishing himself in academe. Though the director of the composition program at Midwest, who supervises a large number of part-time faculty members, points out to Humboldt that “you’ve got a doctorate . . . That means you have options that most of us don’t,” those options have all but disappeared for Humboldt (Hynes 65). Unable to produce much in the way of compelling research, Humboldt can only rely on his love of and affinity for teaching to attempt to sustain his career, a losing prospect. Humboldt is an example of what Bousquet terms the “waste product” of higher education: the production of new faculty members from the ranks of Ph.D.s graduating every year “has become secondary to [the] extraction of teaching labor
from nondegree persons, primarily graduate employees and former graduate employees now working as adjunct labor—as part-timers, full-time lecturers, postdocs, and so on” (Bousquet “Waste Product” 85). Academics like Humboldt do not have options within academe (and, frequently, outside academe), as by getting a PhD and failing to secure a full-time, tenure-track position after his post-doc, Humboldt is no longer a source of readily extractable, cheap labour, despite his willingness to be just that. Instead, Humboldt is part of “a potentially toxic blockage” of those with a PhD attempting to hold onto positions that the higher education job system requires be held by those “who have the terminal M.A. or the M.Phil., or who are ABD . . . [and] who have a well-paid partner or other means of support enabling them to teach for wages below the poverty line for an extended period of time without undue suffering,” as these people “can and do teach virtually forever” (Bousquet “Waste Product” 89, 88). To allow “scut work” like teaching freshman composition to once again define a career would undermine the illusion of the star system—that the deserving can escape this realm of exploitative labour and start a career devoted to research, free of the distracting and tedious work of teaching freshmen. Here, Humboldt’s lack of options because of a Ph.D. reinforces that one is an academic failure when one can no longer reasonably aspire to the star system.

To highlight the differences between those on and off the tenure track, The Lecturer’s Tale offers exaggerated portraits of the living conditions, clothing styles, and dining habits of tenured and part-time faculty members. In Humboldt’s case, his life is largely defined by what he does not have or cannot afford in comparison with Midwest’s tenured faculty. Where Humboldt, his wife, and their two daughters live in a small town house in “university married housing,” for which he remains eligible only while he remains employed at Midwest, Anthony Pessecane, the chair of the department, lives in a “Frank Lloyd Wright original that cantilever[s] out from the
side of the hill . . . overlooking the frozen lake” (Hynes 60, 7). While the tenured professors “live[ ] a Cheeveresque life of the mind circumscribed by the New York Times, the New York Review of Books, and National Public Radio,” Humboldt’s life of the mind is housed in “the cinder block basement of his town house . . . wedged into a space beside the hot water heater and across from the furnace” (Hynes 297, 32). He dreams of “mov[ing] out of university housing and rent[ing] a small house in town, with a yard and trees and separate bedrooms for the girls” but instead fears that he is “dragg[ing] them down to live in a trailer park, or worse” (Hynes 163, 61). While few (if any) faculty members in the country are capable of affording a Frank Lloyd Wright house, particularly academics who work in the humanities, the exaggeration helps to make tangible some of the common differences between full-time and part-time faculty, like pay levels and office space.

Similarly, The Lecturer’s Tale uses clothing and food to establish tangible, concrete differences between full-time and part-time faculty members that speak to larger truths or experiences of part-timers. In addition to his designer house, Pescecane dresses in designer clothing, wearing “an Armani suit, silk shirt, and paisley tie,” along with “handmade Italian shoes” and a “cashmere overcoat” (Hynes 48). In contrast, Humboldt’s one suit “had been sold several years ago to pay for diapers,” and he recognises that a nice dress shirt like Pescecane wears every day “cost[s] more than a week’s worth of groceries for [Humboldt’s] family” (Hynes 199, 200). When, using the department credit card, he finally purchases a new suit, the sight of it hanging on the back of Humboldt’s office door “look[s] . . . like a freeze-dried university professor—just add tenure” (Hynes 203). Though the comment is facetious, it speaks in some ways to a rather brutal truth: clothing, like that which Humboldt cannot afford, operates as something of a gatekeeping device. Not owning the kind of dress clothes that Pescecane
flaunts illustrates that Humboldt’s career has never advanced to the point where a professional wardrobe is anything but an aspirational luxury, but also that a familiarity with and taste for haute couture goes hand-in-hand with employment security and a certain level of achievement. Where Stanley Fish could once blithely reference “[f]lying down to Charlottesville [a]s just an ordinary piece of business in the life of many academics,” Pescecane (an analog for Fish in the novel) might say that shopping for and wearing Armani is a similarly ordinary piece of business for “many” academics, despite the relatively small number who are in a position to afford to do so (qtd. in Caesar “Phanton” 63). Much as with Fish’s remark, this conflates privilege and professional requirements and obscures a subtle way academics like Humboldt can be kept from getting on to the tenure track.

Food functions in much the same way as clothes in the novel, highlighting the ways that part-time faculty are kept out of the loop or prevented from advancing through decisions about food, while also pointing to the growing population of supposedly professional workers who require food stamps and other government existence in order to survive. At Midwest, the department’s elite are invited to a monthly luncheon “catered by Osterman’s, Hamilton Groves’ fashionable New York-style delicatessen . . . paid for by the university,” while Humboldt sits in his office fantasizing about a sandwich from Osterman’s over his lunch of “carrot sticks, raisins, a homemade brownie,” and a sandwich of “last night’s fishsticks between two slices of store-brand white bread smeared with cocktail sauce” (Hynes 75, 77). Even more telling, after being invited out to lunch by his former mentor, Morton Weissmann, Humboldt debates not going because “with tip he could easily spend ten dollars on lunch,” which he cannot afford (Hynes 108). Only at the end of the meal, after ordering “‘the Long Island duckling with balsamic vinaigrette . . . [and] baby red potatoes,’” does Weissmann reveal that the department will cover
the cost of lunch, patronizingly informing Humboldt that he “‘know[s] how it is to be a young married fellow. Every penny counts’” (Hynes 108, 117). Weissmann’s idea of a casual luncheon of duckling clashes with Humboldt’s usual experience of restaurant dining, as when he dines out with his family—a rarity made possible only when “his mother-in-law in Chicago sent them a check”—they eat at “some noisy, overlit, family steak house where they waited on a glacially slow line for gristly four-ounce ribeyes and a salad bar that tasted like government surplus” (Hynes 107). Conversely, when Humboldt’s rising fortunes allow him to treat himself to lunch at the upscale restaurant where he dined with Weissmann, he considers himself “the successful professor at his luncheon, if only for an hour” (Hynes 162). As with the new suit, food here has symbolic significance in addition to its material properties, signalling a level or advancement or achievement that invites additional moves up the ladder.

Though obviously exaggerated, Humboldt’s experience in the novel with clothing and dining habits clears space for discussions of the conditions facing part-timers, particularly the rising numbers of part-time faculty members on government assistance. As the House Committee on Education and the Workforce notes, this group “likely make[s] up the most highly educated and experienced workers on food stamps and other public assistance in the country” (26). According to a report in the Chronicle of Higher Education, “the percentage of graduate-degree holders who receive food stamps or some other aid more than doubled between 2007 and 2010 . . . . [as] the number of people with master's degrees who received food stamps and other aid climbed from 101,682 to 293,029, and the number of people with Ph.D.'s who received assistance rose from 9,776 to 33,655” (Patton). This mirrors a larger trend in the contemporary United States as citizens struggle to keep up and “[a] record number of people are depending on federally financed food assistance” (Patton). These are clearly not the conditions of a
comfortable, contemplative life, but they are also not necessarily visible problems, in part because adjuncts tend not to be present at luncheons—and so awkward encounters like Weissmann and Humboldt’s meal at Peregrine are avoided—but more so because of the geographic displacement of adjuncts from the campus and its environs.

At Midwest, part-time faculty are made invisible to the full-time faculty, housed on different floors and kept away from the full-time faculty by tacit agreement, their labour an unacknowledged necessity. Here, The Lecturer’s Tale’s complicated relationship with theory emerges, as the novel’s discussion of contingent labour relies on postcolonialist theories of the relationship between colonies and the metropole. Midwest’s English department is housed in Habour Hall, with tenured faculty on the top floor and adjuncts in the basement. Humboldt is luckier than most adjuncts as he shares an office on the third floor with a junior scholar coming up for tenure, Vita Deonne. A complete lack of office space is not uncommon—the Just-In-Time Professor, for example, features adjuncts who work out of their cars, surrounded by “[p]iles and piles of manilla folders,” and who “hold [their] obligatory ‘office hours’ in a bustling copy room”—and the part-time faculty members in the composition program at Midwest are confined to a bullpen in “a windowless underground bunker . . . sunk as a hideaway from nuclear war, with walls of reinforced concrete sixteen inches thick,” known colloquially as the “Bomb Shelter” (Just-In-Time 8, 10; Hynes 62). Looking for work after being let go, Humboldt goes to the Bomb Shelter to ask for a few sections of freshman composition and comes face to face with the literal manifestation of what Susan Miller characterizes as “the sad woman in the basement” who defines the usual composition teacher (121). For Humboldt, the scene is practically Dickensian—“lonely woman in their thirties and forties, their cubicles lined up like sewing
machines in a shirtwaist factory”—but it reflects a general truth about academic labour practices that females are significantly more likely to be part-time faculty members (Hynes 63).

The scene in the Bomb Shelter points as much to higher education’s place within globalized labour practices as it does to the Victorian workhouse Humboldt imagines. While piece work and contract work were characteristic of the garment industry at the turn of the twentieth century (and, it might reasonably be said, most contemporary academic positions), Harvey’s discussion of core and peripheral workers is a more apt description. Tenured faculty positions compose the core, those “[e]njoying greater job security, good promotion and reskilling prospects, and relatively generous pension, insurance, and other fringe benefit rights, this group is nevertheless expected to be adaptable, flexible, and if necessary geographically mobile” (Harvey 150). Part-time positions like Humboldt’s (and the women in the Bomb Shelter), on the other hand, are part of the periphery, or workers who “can quickly be taken on board and equally quickly and costlessly be laid off when times get bad” (Harvey 152). Despite the core’s existence being predicated on the efficient and cost effective performance of work by the periphery and management of its members, the tenured faculty at Midwest choose to be unaware of the Bomb Shelter and its workers. They callously refer to adjuncts as bargaining chips or a method of balancing the department’s budget should they bring in another star “‘worth fifteen or twenty composition instructors’” (Hynes 170). This language echoes that of the administrators in Moo when considering the budget cuts and demonstrates how this mindset is complicit with and an extension of adminification. Neoliberalism’s push to simplify the required knowledge needed to act in any situation to prices lends itself to such abstract equivalencies and suggests that acceptance of these principles means acceptance of the privatization agenda pursued by those managing the corporate university.
Throughout *The Lecturer’s Tale* Humboldt and other part-time faculty members are ignored or made to feel unwelcome in ways that make clear the conscious choices required of tenured faculty to maintain adjuncts’ invisibility. The use of standards of collegiality to manage relations between part-time and full-time faculty members is perhaps the most prominent instance of this. When Humboldt began at Midwest as a visiting assistant professor, “all the secretaries had known his name and laughed at his mild, self-deprecating jokes. Back then he had traded invitations to lunch with his colleagues while waiting to use the photocopier . . . [and] Morton Weissmann, his erstwhile mentor, had greeted him every day with a two-fisted handshake and a hearty, ‘How go the wars this morning, Nelson?’” (Hynes 5). Now at the end of his time as an adjunct there, the situation has reversed. In a mirror of the Invisible Adjunct’s description of her own invisibility, Humboldt discovers that:

> the secretaries peered at him warily, watching for the homicidal rage of a disgruntled postal worker. Now the copy machine and its good fellowship were off-limits to him, and he carried his lunch in a paper sack and ate alone in his office. Now he floated above the deep carpeting like a ghost. Colleagues he used to call by their first names . . . simply looked right through him, repressing a shudder at the sepulchral chill of failure trailing after him. (Hynes 5)

Losing the good fellowship of the copy machine is not simply a matter of losing people to laugh at his jokes or eat lunch with. It is a symbol that Humboldt, despite his integral function (and there is a way that, following Evan Watkins, one can see the teaching of freshman composition as the integral function of an English department), is not a member of the department. What is more, it reinforces the affective dimensions that have accompanied the emergence of neoliberalism as a reigning politico-economic paradigm, wherein failure to maximize one’s
market value in any aspect of life is shameful and must be treated as conscious “bad behaviour” on the part of individuals. The withdrawal of collegiality is calibrated by the market and Humboldt’s (and part-time faculty more generally) declining value on it.

This strategy of ignoring part-time faculty is a flawed method of addressing the implications of adminification discussed in the previous chapter—that faculty are no longer part of the governance structure of higher education as institutions have evolved away from prioritizing the educational mission in favour of adopting the business ontology of neoliberalism as their guiding principle. Recasting themselves in a managerial role, tenured faculty members attempt to sever the connection between mere employees like adjuncts—those peripheral workers subject to the whims of capital’s boom and bust cycles—and the “real” members of the department, whose intellectual work and administrative duties (like making sure that scut work has been adequately assigned away from tenured faculty) keep them a part of the management of university affairs. In addition to being banished from the copy room, Nelson has been exiled from the library because if spotted there by a tenured faculty member he “would feel obliged to make excuses, like a footman caught in the master’s study,” as there is no reason “why a man who taught four sections of composition needed to be in the research library at all” (Hynes 254).

Here, again, the prioritizing of research over teaching as the activity that defines the careers of full-time faculty allows this faulty distinction between tenured and part-time faculty members to be made, albeit in tautological fashion: the withdrawal of fellowship, lunch invitations, or casual encounters in the library stacks removes part-timers from the circuits by which ideas flow through a department because, as part-timers, they have no need of being privy to those conversations or they would be full-timers who contributed to them. Indeed, after interrupting Pescecane when the chair gets off an elevator while he sits in the lobby, Humboldt is lectured by
his officemate for speaking to and looking at a tenured faculty member. Beyond this point, being denied access to the copy machine has a real material cost to Humboldt, who is forced to make any copies he needs for class elsewhere, a situation in which many adjuncts find themselves. Here, the kind of austerity measures documented in *Moo* and *Straight Man* can be displaced onto part-time faculty in an attempt to preserve departmental resources for the work of full-time and tenured faculty members.

Though not an excuse for this withdrawal of collegiality, the structure of corporate higher education that has emerged since the 1980s makes this behaviour somewhat inevitable, if not necessary, in order to preserve aspects of the Golden Age (namely adequate time, support, and resources for faculty to pursue active intellectual agendas) in the wake of massive budget cuts. As Humboldt ascends the ranks at Midwest by using the power he gains from his accident, he begins to adopt the attitudes (and perks) of the tenured faculty. Regaining some of his visibility—“colleagues who had previously ignored him now acknowledged him, just barely, with a curt nod of the head”—Humboldt begins to see part-time faculty as invisible (Hynes 164). The director of the composition program, for example, whom he had begged for sections just weeks earlier he now ignores as she asks him to hold the elevator door for her. Similarly, when he eventually works his way up to acting undergraduate chair, he delegates all his teaching to his new teaching assistant, a graduate student who “conducted all his composition sections, assigned and graded all papers, held office hours, all on Nelson’s behalf—and without daily supervision, so long as she did not stray from Nelson’s syllabus” (Hynes 324). For Humboldt, this is “a pleasant arrangement all the way around” as it “free[s] him to pursue his research of James Hogg and attend to his administrative duties” without guilt, despite the “increasing gauntness in Gillian’s face whenever she came to report to him” (Hynes 324-25). As Victoria Victorinix, the
professor who initially fired Humboldt explains to him when he complains about how he had been treated before he began his ascent, “‘[i]t would never have occurred to me before’” to ask about a part-time faculty member’s wants or needs (Hynes 272). Having crossed over the other side, so to speak, and become a member of the fortunate class, Humboldt escapes the survivor’s guilt that can accompany landing such a job, falsely suggesting that the transition from part-time to full-time, tenure-track employment is a viable or likely path.

Unfortunately for Humboldt, his time at the top is brief. Midwest’s library burns down after the FBI and Interpol attempt to arrest Kraljević and get drawn into a firefight with the former war criminal. Having disrupted the school’s connection to research, and thus eliminating the conditions by which tenured faculty members can sustain a career (given its redefinition as pursuing research free from the constraints of teaching undergraduates), the fire prompts a mass evacuation, with “‘every professor and graduate student worth her salt . . . faxing her CV to every institution that still has a library. By midsummer there . . . [was] no one left in th[e] department except lecturers, adjuncts, and composition teachers. Mediocrities, in other words, and has-beens and flat-out losers’” (Hynes 368). In response, the governor “sold Midwest to the Harbridge Corporation, an international publishing conglomerate that was in the process of branding itself as ‘America’s One-Stop Educational Resource!,’” an obvious nod to Pearson’s ever growing educational publishing empire (Hynes 376). Harbridge changes the institutions name from the University of the Midwest to Midwestern and explicitly redefines its mission as selling a service to customers, “intend[ing] to market Midwestern as the place to come if you wanted to get college credit for reading Vogue and Car and Driver and watching Ally McBeal” (Hynes 380). The transition to a for-profit institution in some ways completes the projects initiated by the administrations in Moo and Straight Man, fully casualizing employment
(“everyone, including deans and department chairs, was hired on a year-to-year contract . . . with biannual performance reviews, based entirely on student evaluations”) and transferring governance completely to corporate management, removing even curriculum decisions from the faculty’s hands: “[t]he use of Harbridge’s books was ‘strongly encouraged,’ while the use of books by other publishers required written permission from the corporate office,” who also “issued new, ‘recommended’ syllabi for the undergraduate language arts curriculum” (Hynes 376, 380). Midwestern represents in this sense a version of what WCPU might have become had Dickie Pope’s plan come to fruition, though The Lecturer’s Tale is decidedly ambivalent about the meaning of this transition for education.

On a positive note, Midwestern’s new employment policies eliminate most of the conditions that adjuncts and other part-time faculty note tend to compromise their ability to perform their jobs effectively. Teaching loads are standardized (“five classes a semester, no exceptions”), terms of employment and retention are clearly outlined and uniformly enforced, and compensation is more equitable, as “[t]he corporate salary was actually better than the old university salary for comp teachers . . . and Harbridge, mirabile dictu, actually provided benefits, sick days, and vacation time” (Hynes 376). What is more, Midwestern achieves something of a more democratic scope with its student body than Midwest had, its students primarily drawn from “the kids who couldn’t have afforded it or met its entrance requirements before: inner-city black kids, Latino kids from farmworker families, poor white kids from dying industrial towns, divorced moms, downsized middle-managers, laid-off factory workers” (Hynes 384). In this sense, Midwestern fulfills something of the mandate of public higher education when it expanded after the Second World War and (in theory) offered college to populations who could not attend elite private institutions. More than simply offering an education, though, these
colleges were also tasked with “high quality on a mass scale”—that is, instead of stratifying higher education so that access to teaching informed by (and participating in) current work in the field was restricted to public and private research universities, public colleges and universities at all levels were to provide a roughly comparable education (Newfield 191). Attending school at Berkeley or Ann Arbor or Chapel Hill would come with a bump in quality and prestige because they were flagships of large public university systems, but going to school at Riverside, Dearborn, or Asheville was not to disbar one from attaining a quality education.

Reviewing Midwestern’s (and Harbridge’s) performance and influence on the educational landscape, though, the novel closes on a decidedly more ambivalent note. Humboldt realises that Midwestern, despite attracting students who on some level believe this promise (he notes that “they were both ill prepared and heartbreakingly expectant”), cannot fulfill this democratic function and has no intention of so doing (Hynes 385). Though he reassures himself that “[t]his was real teaching . . . introducing literature to those who had never seen it before in their lives,” Humboldt is aware that “the odds were very good that, even with a college education, most of the men and women before him would end up behind the counter in a convenience store, or in the grease pit of an auto repair shop, or, at best, in a little gray cubicle in some vast, fluorescent-lit office” (Hynes 385). Harbridge encourages its students to have narrow intellectual lives—its corporate motto reads “‘If We Don’t Teach It, You Don’t Need to Know It’”—and plays into a culture in which its students are “prepared . . . to be disappointed in themselves” but nonetheless feel a college degree from a place like Midwestern is necessary (Hynes 385, 376). Humboldt’s despair and cynicism is understandable given his academic career, as no part of it has suggested that academe exists to further its students’ lives, from its privileging of research over teaching to its failing to provide living wages and support to the
people most responsible for the teaching that is done. If Midwestern is the future, then the questions with which Humboldt closes his story seem to ask meta-questions for the genre of the academic novel: “[i]s this enough? . . . Is that all these kids need, is a book?”

Certainly, Hynes’ novel raises awareness of the working conditions of part-time faculty members (though Humboldt is well-off by comparison to most) and the interrelation of this with the divestment in higher education that has occurred since the 1970s to inevitably detrimental ends. However, narrativizing these facts and even connecting them to broader trends in capitalism, as The Lecturer’s Tale does, provides little in the way of resistance or alternatives. The novel’s ending leaves much implied and even opens up a reading of the total privatization on display as some utopian outcome, the chief neoliberal fantasy. Formal limits of the genre constrain The Lecturer’s Tale’s ability to provide a compelling counternarrative to privatization, and even incorporating elements of horror and gothic fiction are not enough to get beyond the traditional academic novel. The end suggests that academic fiction will have to be located within the landscape of for-profit higher education going forward, but it does not necessarily indicate the purpose of such narratives.

“Three floors of office space in a half-vacant high rise”: Fight for Your Long Day and the New Landscape of Higher Education

Almost a decade on from The Lecturer’s Tale, Kudera’s Fight for Your Long Day considers some of the same questions, working through the purpose of education, literature, and the American Dream in the national security state of the contemporary United States. In Fight for Your Long Day, the adjunct is the natural (and dominant) iteration of the professor, one who is comfortable existing on the university’s margins yet without whom the university cannot function. The novel offers a more accurate portrait (in some ways) of adjuncts in the 2000s, both
because its protagonist teaches at multiple institutions (and holds another job in addition to his teaching), which increases his invisibility, and because it presents the working conditions of adjuncts outside of an elite private institution, including a for-profit university, a public, comprehensive college, and a lower-tier private university. In it, Kudera re-centres the daily experience of the professor as the genre’s core, but through the figure of the adjunct, which ironically both exacerbates adjuncts’ invisibility and weakens the professoriate’s claim to power and influence within higher education. However, as the adjunct bears little similarity to what William Pannapacker calls the “inherently reactionary” images of the professor held by the public—“tweed, pipe-smoking dons or turtlenecked, bearded radicals with actual authority”—adjuncts lose visibility to the culture at large (“Considering”). At the same time, the structural necessity of part-time faculty members eases the path for administrators to charge that full-time faculty are not involved enough in academic affairs to warrant increased governance responsibilities. In this sense, Fight for Your Long Day is something like an inverted Moo: instead of the panoramic views of the connections and linkages that criss-cross campus, Kudera’s novel can never really penetrate the layers of its campuses to that degree because Duffleman is never truly inside them in the same way as the characters in Moo. While the fully corporatized future of the end of The Lecturer’s Tale had not come to pass by 2010, the conditions for adjuncts have not improved either, as casualization and privatization efforts continued apace and state funding for higher education had declined further. Universities are dying, Fight for Your Long Day argues, because within the conjuncture of the profit motive, chronic underfunding, and casualization, they can only offer an inferior version of what they once were that is hardly worth the mounting levels of debt students face, particularly given that the opportunities available to college graduates are now so limited.
As part of its updated presentation of adjunct life from *The Lecturer’s Tale, Fight for Your Long Day* moves away from overt references to the culture wars as they appeared in earlier novels. There are no explicit debates about literary theory and the canon in the novel, passed over in favour of an exploration of the relationship between the national-security state, higher education, and contemporary American society that illustrates the new permutations of the culture wars post-9/11 and confirms the stakes of the original battles of the 1980s and 1990s. Linking current trends in higher education with the national security state, much as the Golden Age of higher education was inextricably tied to the Cold War, *Fight for Your Long Day* expresses concern about a United States that was accelerating its “mov[ement] away from the social programs in health, employment, and retirement, as well as education, that were considered entitlements of the welfare state” (Williams “Post-Welfare” 198). If earlier academic novels dealt with the effects of a waning, but still easily recalled, vision of public life that challenged neoliberal assumptions about the market as political arena, social model, and cultural arbiter, Kudera’s novel illustrates how such a vision had largely receded from view following the second neoliberal revolution of New Labour in the UK and the new DNC of Gore, Clinton, et al. in the 1990s, both of which proved aggressive in their dismantling of the welfare state. As the new century opened with “culture warriors [in] control of all three branches of the federal government and the majority of the nation’s governorships and state legislatures . . . [possessing] the ability to frame major media discussions of economic and social issues,” the culture wars’ focus shifted away from teaching and research in the humanities to the production of knowledge more generally (usually from the sciences) that “challenged the conventional wisdom that underwrote major Republican constituencies such as the petroleum and defense industries . . . [and] right-wing Christian organizations” (Newfield 239, 242). Here, the consequences are made
clear of the funding cuts and privatization and casualization initiatives made possible in part by the public support generated by attacks on PC, deconstruction, and multiculturalism. A workforce much more likely to be compliant with the demands of academic capitalism to do its research (and to get a job in the first place) is unlikely to be able to afford to challenge conventional wisdom to the same degree. As Duffleman struggles through his long day and attempts to keep his jobs, the usurpation of mental energies that might otherwise spur him to act on the inequalities and frustrations that he constantly notes becomes clear.

The wider sweep of institutions covered in *Fight for Your Long Day* also helps to make clear the impact of the intensification of the structural trends reflected in *The Lecturer’s Tale*, namely the rise of for-profit higher education. Beyond the ongoing rise of for-profit higher education, though, *Fight for Your Long Day* also documents the effects of the continued precipitous decline of state funding for public higher education, with state appropriations accounting for just 19.5% of all revenues in 2010-11, compared to 31.9% in 2000-01 and 37.8% in 1990-91 (Snyder 1995; 2003; 2013). In Pennsylvania, the setting of *Fight for Your Long Day* (as of *Straight Man*), the situation was even more grim. In 2010-11, public institutions of higher education in Pennsylvania received just 10.8% of their revenue from state appropriations, down from 19.7% in 2000-01 and 26.1% in 1990-91 (Snyder 1995; 2003; 2013).

Perhaps the most significant effect of these trends is the widespread acceptance of the logic governing for-profit higher education, particularly with regards to its approach to curriculum planning. Developing out of neoliberalism’s business ontology, “the idea that corporate needs should largely determine the course of higher education” is no longer even controversial (Ohmann “College” 6). State governors in charge of some of the larger public higher education systems, like Scott Walker in Wisconsin and Rick Scott in Florida, have openly
endorsed this model, with Walker attempting to “chang[e] the century-old mission of the University of Wisconsin system—known as the ‘Wisconsin Idea’ and embedded in the state code—by removing words that commanded the university to ‘search for truth’ and ‘improve the human condition’ and replacing them with ‘meet the state’s workforce needs’” (Strauss). Similarly, standalone corporate universities, of which there are currently over 4,000, reinforce this idea through their very existence, as they “infer that existing undergraduate institutions fail to prepare their graduates for the workplace . . . [and] may well displace enrollment in existing graduate and continuing education programs” moving forward (Mintz). As this emphasis on job-training and meeting corporate demands has become more commonplace, commentators have used for-profits as the yardstick by which higher education (and particularly higher education going forward in the twenty-first century) is measured, arguing that “[a] well-run for-profit college could teach its nonprofit counterparts a thing or two about efficiency and innovation” and largely glossing over differences in mission, or the relationship between employment practices, academic freedom, and quality of education (Nocera 65).

In an era driven by a business climate that values “flexibility” and “innovation” above all else, rhetoric that praises for-profit education for these qualities and attempts to argue for greater accountability for non-profit higher education based on these criteria or further adaptation along these lines carries significant weight. Thus, in an effort to mimic the flexibility of for-profits, administrators who rely on “the market and . . . guesses as to what courses of study will lead students to the highest paying jobs” to decide on course offerings, staffing priorities, and funding exert increasing control over the curriculum, which has been, as mentioned earlier, a mainstay of faculty power (O’Malley 26). In general, this has meant a heavy emphasis on writing and skills classes for English departments, rather than electives based on research specialities, which had
already come under attack from conservatives during the culture wars for their esoteric or obscene subject matter. For readers of academic novels, the practical upshot of these changes is a fairly jarring break even between the world of those novels of adminification like *Moo* and *Straight Man*—which, for all their bleakness, still seemed to take place in institutions descended from the Golden Age—and Kudera’s novel, which punctures the myth that the American university was ever not corporate with its loosely-fictionalised version of the University of Pennsylvania, Ivy Green, slickly aspiring to be the Apple or Google campus rather than some gentlemanly ivory tower.\textsuperscript{ccxiv} Stanford’s increasingly cozy relationship with Google, which the *Stanford News* describes as “one of Silicon Valley's most mutually beneficial relationships between academia and industry” and where between 2001 and 2011 Google “has supported roughly 40 projects at Stanford in a wide variety of technology areas (Internet commerce, algorithms, social networking, mobile systems, and high-throughput computing and communications) and even social sciences, such as political science and Internet law,” provides a real-world model for just this kind of institution (Orenstein). If Duffleman’s long day takes place in an academic world that has been ravaged by capitalism, neither its presence nor its effects are necessarily new, just more prevalent.

Like *The Lecturer’s Tale*, *Fight for Your Long Day* relies heavily on exaggeration for comic effect and critique, though its occasional flights from reality can blunt the effectiveness of the argument immanent in its more straightforward moments, when it offers a convincing account of the struggle to negotiate the demands of teaching while dealing with low pay, lack of benefits, lengthy commutes, and insecure terms of employment. Though it was published by a small press (Atticus Books)—as opposed to Picador (*The Lecturer’s Tale*), Knopf (*Moo*), or Random House (*Straight Man*)—*Fight for Your Long Day* has developed something of a cult
following. I first heard about the novel, for example, from a colleague who adjuncts at a number of schools where copies of the novel had been quietly circulating from hand-to-hand as a kind of communal balm. Though it was not reviewed in the *New York Times*, the *Times Book Review*, or the *New York Review of Books*, most reviews of novel in places like the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Academe* were largely favourable, acknowledging the novel’s sly twist on other single-day narratives like *Ulysses* or *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and singling out for praise its focus on the plight of adjuncts. William Pannapacker, for example, describes the novel as “a realistic depiction of the life and psychology of an adjunct teacher” and a necessary corrective to those reactionary conceptions of the professor mentioned above (Pannapacker). Similarly, Isaac Sweeney praises the novel in his review for *Academe* for “doing more than complaining to air” and “hope[s] the novel is popular enough to make a big change” (44). Even in a slightly more mixed review, Jennifer Gaboury acknowledges that “Kundera captures the hollowing out of higher education” by “marking the toll that this system takes on adjuncts” (48). Though the novel is far from perfect, its obvious concern for not only adjuncts but also students and their prospects after receiving an education under current conditions excuse its occasionally absurdities and over-simplifications.

Removing some of the security or stability attached to Humboldt’s life in *The Lecturer’s Tale* allows Kudera to offer a darker, but more accurate, depiction of adjunct life. Unlike Humboldt, who teaches at only one school and on only one campus, lives in housing provided by the university and enjoys at least partial benefits, Duffleman teaches at four schools spread out across Philadelphia, rents a squalid studio apartment and has “commercial, catastrophic health coverage” that he could never actually afford to use rather than any kind of benefits from his jobs (Kudera 8). According to the results of a 2010 survey conducted by the Coalition on the
Academic Workforce, adjuncts tend toward Duffleman’s situation, rather than Humboldt’s, as “[m]ost part-time faculty respondents who had health benefits from any source received them from a source other than their academic employer . . . [and] only 22.6% indicated they had access to health benefits through their academic employer” (CAW 13). The Just-In-Time Professor offers similar testimony, noting that “the term ‘freeway flyer’ was an accurate descriptor for 89 percent of the respondents” (13). Despite never seeming all that firm, Humboldt’s career is on a much more secure path than Duffleman’s, and many part-time workers would identify his place at Midwest as a good job to be sought out. This reflects more the general revising downward of career expectations even as workers tend to invest more of themselves in their work than ever before. Such reduced expectations are at work across the labour force, not just academe, and would drive the identification of Humboldt’s job as a good more rather than being an actual endorsement of the terms of his employment or his working conditions. However, though Humboldt’s job might not look like those of his tenured colleagues, he still considers himself to be a professor, at least in an aspirational sense. The comfortable, contemplative life he strives for would not only assure him of gainful employment and membership in the intellectual community, but also spare him from the indignity of the working retirement to which Duffleman can look forward.

In contrast, Duffleman inhabits a much more brutal academic world than that of just ten years earlier, one which continues to redefine what counts as an academic career and rarely allows Duffleman the luxury of considering himself a professor, even in an aspirational sense. Rather than a kindly mentor like Gallagher to look to as a model for the later stages of one’s career, or even a faded former powerbroker like Weissmann, Duffleman has Emelia Lynn, “a round, tiny woman of sixty-seven or so,” who was killed “by a SEPTA bus on her way to
morning classes” as she “rush[ed] to be there on time for the students” (Kudera 145). His own financial situation makes strong odds that Duffleman will still be working as an adjunct at 67, assuming he can keep getting sections until then. Even with the income from his five jobs, “he lives paycheck to paycheck,” and barely manages that as “most of his course pay com[es] at the end of the month, or the end of the term” (Kudera 30, 170). Consequently, Duffleman works for minimum wage as a part-time security guard at the same school at which he teaches freshman composition, “appreciat[ing] the biweekly paycheck” he received as a security guard, which is “grocery money when he is conservative in his purchases” (Kudera 170). His limited income means that after rent, food, and other necessary expenses, he has little if any money to put toward savings, as credit card debt taxes his already meager income, though he “could pay little more than the fifteen percent interest when his larger checks arrived at the end of the month” (Kudera 220). Despite his unique disqualifications, Duffleman’s fate is shared by many other adjuncts, who report falling behind on bills and slipping into financial ruin while employed as part-time faculty members throughout *The Just-In-Time Professor*.

In addition to their economic differences, though, Humboldt and Duffleman do not share an understanding of their expected career path, or the one that is most likely given their current positions. Duffleman does not aspire to move up in the academic world, unlike Humboldt who longs to ascend the ladder—indeed, as a creative writer without a single publication and with a phony Ph.D. in comparative literature purchased from a street dealer of passports and other forged documents, Duffleman has little hope of landing a better job—in part because he already sees himself as only tangentially a part of it, a “pseudo-professor” and bystander who attempts primarily to stay out of the way and emerge unscathed at the end of the day, still with a job and the possibility of a contract renewal, as “[t]o get rehired remains an adjunct’s end in itself”
Rather than the more expansive, research-intensive definition of a career that Humboldt grapples with as he endlessly rewrites his unpublishable manuscript on James Hogg, Duffleman’s understanding of a career is confined to remaining employed. Though a majority of adjuncts consistently report wanting to become full-time, tenured professors (and to work according to that model of a career and its expectations), their lengthening careers off the tenure track and employed only part-time suggest that Duffleman’s view might be more accurate. The CAW survey results, for example, state that “[o]ver 80% of part-time faculty respondents reported having taught as a contingent faculty member for at least three years; over 55% taught in that role for six or more years, and over 30% for ten or more years” (9). Such figures make it clear that adjuncting has become a distinct career path with its own challenges and progressions (taking on additional sections, teaching at additional schools, or, if lucky, picking up longer-term contracts or preferred status/seniority that can alleviate some of the precariousness). Adjuncts’ invisibility, though, tends to preclude career counselling and most adjuncts lack formal, organized structures (like unions) that can provide guidance and protection, instead relying on informal social groups for support.

In addition to causing financial difficulties, the insecure nature of Duffleman’s employment leads him to remove himself from situations where he might achieve some ability to participate in governance structures and gain some control over his life. In part this is due to the invisibility of his exact role on campus and the terms of his employment. He knows, for example, that “[i]n the conservative-family scenario, he is seen as the exact same rich, liberal professor up at that state school the old man has imagined, growled about, and warned his kid against” by nature of teaching a class at a college (Kudera 9). This misidentification with tenured faculty continues among his students, who assume that his worklife resembles that of the
traditional college professor, or at least that of any other middle class professional. When he encounters a student in one of his freshman composition classes at an anti-war rally, Duffleman’s revelation that he is not there to attend the rally but “just on [his] way to work” puzzles the student, who “is unaware that Urban State alone is not responsible for his instructor’s wages” (Kudera 129). Similarly, when Duffleman talks with the child of two Ivy Green professors in a bookstore, he is forced to explain that as an adjunct he “‘just get[s] paid to teach the class. No tenure. No permanent job. Low pay. No benefits. No status’” (Kudera 190). His own hectic days and heavy teaching load mean that Duffleman is rarely able to connect with students beyond whatever interactions they have in the classroom. There is no time or room to correct their view of him and so little chance for them to learn of the conditions under which he (and probably a large number of the professors they encounter) labours and to mobilize around the issue. For his students, he is a professor, and whether he teaches one class or five classes, at one college or four, is of no relevance to them. He assigns a grade like any other professor whose class they take, and if freshman composition does not seem immediately relevant to their lives, then they suffer through his class until they are on to courses more in line with their future careers.

Duffleman labours under no such illusion, though, knowing that any similarities between his work and that of a tenured faculty member are superficial at best, and he is keen to avoid drawing attention to these differences or his awareness of them. He realises that unlike the tenured faculty member he is “a man with no job security who could easily be removed from the employment roles by not being rehired for the next quarter or semester. . . No union protects his interests; he is surrounded by students, tenured faculty, and administrators too busy with their own survival to see his point of view” (Kudera 68). Indeed, what little protection he can find stems from the fact that it is likely too “difficult to find a replacement” during the term given that
“most qualified adjuncts are already as booked as possible” (Kudera 67). To bolster this, and to avoid taking unnecessary chances, he chooses “to navigate the English Department . . . as an invisible man,” reasoning that this approach is least likely to offend the tenured faculty and put his job at risk (Kudera 49). Though one of his colleagues at the University of America, the University of Phoenix stand-in where he works as a tutor, is attempting to organize “a citywide labour union” for adjuncts that will “mandate a master’s degree as required for entrance to the union, and . . . boycott and picket any universities that replace [union adjuncts] with bachelor’s level teachers, or undergraduate TAs and tutors,” Duffleman listens politely to the pitch without offering to contribute to the cause or even join the union should it come to be (Kudera 143). He is self-conscious that to administrators and tenured faculty “the adjunct is a legal threat, because they are alienating his labor, stealing from him to pad their own superlative pay and benefits,” and joining the union would seem to play in to this fear (Kudera 60). Behind a tenured faculty member’s inquiry “‘[y]ou’re getting enough work, aren’t you?’,” he hears an implied rebuke to any response not in the affirmative: “there are men sleeping on the streets and working behind countertops so your situation is not so grave; your adjunctry, after all, is salary and decidedly a step above shift work” (Kudera 71). Despite knowing that a union would likely improve his lot, Duffleman considers “thinking in crass dollars” to be shameful, a sign of ingratitude for what he has, because he has internalized the insecurity of his employment (Kudera 57). Duffleman poses no threat to tenured faculty, no matter their fears, because he has come to believe he deserves his fate, as with Deveraux’s perverse application of Occam’s razor in Straight Man.

This internalization points to the significant amount of emotional labour required of adjuncts in the consumer service model of higher education, an issue largely absent from The Lecturer’s Tale. Duffleman considers displays of gratitude to be a necessary part of maintaining
his invisibility and the protection it offers, but he finds unbearable “allowing the tenured faculty
to see him as content, dumb, happy . . . working for scrub wages sans benefits” (Kudera 49).
Nevertheless, many adjuncts report the need to project similar attitudes in order to stay in the
good graces of those who would rehire them. Steve Street, a prominent academic labour activist
who adjuncted at several universities himself, suggests that adjuncts “are just too scared for
[their] jobs not to be happy,” as “inequity forces noncontingent faculty members to apologize for
it, try to justify it, or act as if it makes sense” and encountering adjuncts’ feigned happiness
absolves them of this responsibility (Street A36). Michael Shenefelt, an adjunct at Long Island
University, argues that such displays are necessary because of the redefinition of higher
education as a business selling a service with customers to please, as “[t]he public thinks it pays
to be instructed by [full-time faculty members], not [adjuncts]. And the essence of a liberal
education today is to be convinced that you got what you paid for” (A31). Such a performance,
which relies on “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily
display . . . that produces the proper state of mind in others,” exemplifies the kind of emotional
labour that has come to define professional work (and work in general) following the rise of
post-Fordist capitalism (Hochschild 7). In addition to projecting gratitude or happiness,
Duffleman is also required to “show he can handle his students, in all makes and models,
regardless of their irregular categories and conditions, be their illness mental, physical,
emotional, or socioeconomic” without showing any particular burden or emotional hardship
(Kudera 48). That Duffleman does in fact experience extreme stress when dealing with students
who suffer from psychological ailments becomes just another uncompensated aspect of his job
that he forces himself to undertake as one more method to guard against insecurity.
*Fight for Your Long Day* frames these issues in terms of specific institutional contexts that helped to create or explain the situation facing most part-time faculty members like Duffleman: the national security state and its transition away from Cold War-era attitudes of the broad utility of higher education to national defence and the increasing stratification of higher education alongside its seeming reduced effectiveness. Though the novel oversteps slightly in its discussion of the relationship between the national security state and higher education—a plot thread involving the assassination of the Under Secretary of Homeland Defense during a campus visit by a young veteran returning from Afghanistan whom Duffleman taught and became friendly with manages to be both improbable and unsympathetic to the real issue of veterans and their place in American society—it nonetheless makes several serious points. The Under Secretary is on campus to “dedicate Liberty Tech’s Institute for Homeland Security, the first structure built for their multibillion-dollar Graduate School of Defense Technology,” a partnership that illustrates how the post-9/11 university responds to its own Sputnik moment (Kudera 10). Liberty Tech advertises itself as “possessing ‘top-line hardware’ that of course opens ‘the doors to conquering the twenty-first century,’” but in actuality possesses out-of-date computer equipment and technology that pales next to what the massive endowment at an elite private university like Ivy Green can afford (Kudera 177). A partnership with the Department of Defense or Homeland Security offers one way to ensure that Liberty Tech can make good on its rhetoric. Since the 1950s, funding from the military has been an important revenue source for universities, as even “[s]ome work that seemed quite remote from weapons development nonetheless had military applications and received military funding,” which “encouraged faculty and universities to maintain their relationship with military agencies” (Newfield 242). Liberty
Tech’s choice here is hardly radical, then, but its very public nature reflects the terrain of the culture wars in the 2000s.

Those who agreed with the ramping up of American military endeavours in the Middle East in response to 9/11, and who felt that universities should support those campaigns and contribute to their success—through partnerships like Liberty Tech’s and also through the general tenor of instruction—revived charges of widespread anti-Americanism and moral relativism from the PC wars and earlier debates about multiculturalism and the canon. As a result, academic freedom came under fire, with “university-based attempts to debate anything about ‘the West’” coming to be labeled as “attacks on American values and a threat to national security” (Newfield 253). The downside of the kind of growth that involvement with defense projects enables stems in part from these developments in the culture wars, which continued to weaken public support for visions of the humanities that relied on a rationale based on non-market (or military) utility. Such attacks on academic freedom were part of a coordinated effort to combine the culture wars with “the Right’s political and economic agenda” and thereby secure for “Republicans . . . the same minority control over domestic politics and resources” they enjoyed over cultural politics after the culture wars (Newfield 253, 254). The impact on teaching and research that such partnerships with the defense industry and the military must inevitably have, combined with the reintroduction of a campus climate unsupportive or even hostile to the basic operations of instruction in the humanities, is a troubling development. That Liberty Tech (and other institutions that would consider such a partnership) would seem to be mortgaging their ability to deliver on their educational mission in exchange for additional funding that comes with significant strings attached is but one unfortunate consequence of reduced public support of higher education. Perhaps an even more unfortunate consequence is the lopsided
development produced by these sources of funding, as hiring additional faculty (or simply converting existing part-time faculty members to full-time faculty members) to teach in core courses and bolster the general education offerings is rarely deemed a matter of national security. Where the humanities are supported, it is often as skills-based courses or via approaches to the humanities that render entire disciplines adjuncts to the health sciences or to hard sciences with potential military applications. As traditional images of the professor—the black-turtleneck-clad Marxist, the shrill feminist, the PC enforcer—took another beating and enrollment growth created a demand for more sections of introductory writing and fewer humanities electives, the invisible adjunct remained the model employee for the university of the twenty-first century.

*Fight for Your Long Day*’s discussion of the intersections between national security and higher education are part of a larger argument about the failures of higher education in the early twenty-first century. Such concerns are hardly unique in the academic novel—indeed, almost every academic novel seems to have a moment in which it questions the entire enterprise of higher education—but Kudera’s novel builds on the ending of *The Lecturer’s Tale* and the nagging doubts of earlier culture wars novels like *Perfect Agreement* over the course of Duffleman’s long day. As he travels from one school to the next, Duffleman encounters wildly different student populations that are all being shortchanged because they are asked to accept a reduced chance to achieve their relatively modest goals. At his first stop, Urban State, he considers his students’ career goals during a lesson on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the motivation for voting in elections. He knows that they aspire “to gain entry to the professional class” and thereby avoid “spend[ing] [their] post-baccalaureate adulthood[s] up to ten hours a day and six days a week, for seven dollars an hour behind the counter ringing up the synthetic leather basketball for some eager, preadolescent consumer,” which has in the postwar period
been the allure of a college education: that one can join the ranks of the knowledge worker in the post-industrial society described by sociologists like Daniel Bell (Kudera 22). There are still monetary and career advantages to higher education, with a 2011 study from Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce estimating an average of 84% more in lifetime earnings for college graduates over high school graduates (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 1). The professional-managerial class (PMC) ostensibly produced through higher education, the bedrock of the meritocratic society that was supposed to emerge from the postwar welfare state, has been undercut by the assault on its enabling structures since the 1980s, and reproducing capitalist class relations through higher education comes to resemble producing more precarious, part-time, and underemployed individuals.

Over and over again, Duffleman observes students who seem to have little hope of capitalising on any kind of “college benefit,” but instead face an almost comic litany of obstacles to actually getting anything out of their education: no housing, lack of affordable food options, overstuffed classrooms, decaying infrastructure, and, to top it off, the looming spectre of debt and underemployment after pouring thousands of dollars into the school. Indeed, most of the students in Duffleman’s classes at Urban State, as at Liberty Tech and the University of America, are already caught up in “their teeter-totter existence of student debt and middling grades at a middle-tier, four-year university,” faced with the distinct possibility that “the inability to pay educational loans [will be] the only lasting sign of ever having attended college in the first place” (Kudera 28, 8). Urban State markets itself as a “state university that provides opportunities for nontraditional students,” but Duffleman questions whether its decision to place “a class of thirty in front of a guy paid for the course from the tuition’s share of just two” actually offers students an education that will enable them to have real opportunities (Kudera
Rather than being prepared for success and future opportunities, most of these students are learning from the “pedagogy of debt”—or “the realm of stress, worry, and pressure, reinforced with each monthly payment”—to take a limited view of their career choices and approach to civic life (Williams, “Debt Education”). Indeed, Duffleman’s students seem to have had a head start down this road, bypassing any of the supposed opportunities college will afford them. They are “overworked, tired, and tapped out . . . driv[ing] aged automobiles from distant, lower-tier, pale if not sickly suburbs . . . [and] appear[ing] more worn down that their teacher” (Kudera 23). Given the number of students attempting to work their way through college, up to 80% according to one estimate, many of whom are attempting to balance full-time hours at work with full-time attendance at school, this kind of burnout is unsurprising. Nonetheless, the experience of these students’ challenges both the supposed vocational justifications for higher education (because there are no job guarantees waiting with their diplomas) and the ethics of promoting higher education to students who expect it to remain a relatively straightforward pathway to middle class security and stability when that security has been steadily eroding for the last forty years.

Perhaps the most touching scene in the novel occurs during Duffleman’s tutoring session at the for-profit University of America, where he attempts to help a middle-aged woman pass an introductory composition class, which she sincerely believes will improve her lot in life, and prevent his own cynicism and despair from boiling over. Formerly Johnson College, a private school located in a “beautiful brownstone mansion,” University of America is now located in “three floors of office space in a half-vacant high rise” and charges its students a premium to attend “the Wal-Mart of higher education” (Kudera 132). Linda Jones, Duffleman’s tutee, is a hard-worker, diligently attending sessions with him in the writing centre for help with papers
for her English 101 class that she has taken multiple times—a common fate for students at for-profits, who become “stuck in remedial course until they give up” (Ohmann “College” 6). Her diligence seems unlikely to produce the desired result, though, as her teacher “assign[s] her essays and return[s] them without letter grades, but with goodwill in the form of detailed commentary . . . of everything wrong with the structure, organization, clarity, grammar, spelling, ideas, and diction,” and each week she and Duffleman go over her paper, correcting mistakes and hoping to turn in a draft worthy of a grade (Kudera 133). Jones’ paper gives some sense of what she wants out of her education, defining “her American Dream” as “my people . . . hav[ing] all the nice things, the niceties like a big house, TV, A/C, remote control DVD and stereo,” or generally a middle-class existence (Kudera 134) To achieve this, though, Duffleman knows that she needs more help than a tutor who works for nine dollars an hour is capable of providing, more help than even “an army of Dufflemans surviving by teaching six courses plus tutoring each term” can offer (Kudera 93). Nonetheless, Jones believes that Duffleman, and University of America in general, is helping her move toward that dream, going so far as to bring her husband to campus to meet “everybody from the administrators to teachers to tutors” (Kudera 137).

Duffleman still believes that “education is a good attainable by all, and thus should likewise be accessible and affordable,” but, like Humboldt at the end of The Lecturer’s Tale, as he surveys an institution turning into “a microcosmic parody of the entire world order,” he cannot help but wonder what he can offer in return for this “rip-off” that might tangibly improve his students’ lives (Kudera 257). Mostly, the reader is left hoping that Duffleman’s grim predictions do not come true, that the Linda Joneses of the world can in fact have if not “all the nice things” then at least some of them.
In a striking juxtaposition that highlights the increasingly stratified higher education system and sets in sharp relief the failures that Duffleman has seen during his long day, Duffleman’s final teaching job is at Ivy Green, a Penn stand-in that seems to exist in a separate universe from the other schools at which he has taught. Instead of the tired, overworked students he has encountered earlier in the day, Ivy Green students possess “a hearty confidence that comes from economic security. They come to campus complete with charge cards carrying huge limits; they can afford to do as they please and Mom and Dad will pick up the tab” (Kudera 164). Where other campuses suffer from “repeated instances of missing necessities,” like classrooms without “a flake of chalk” in them, Ivy Green offers amenities like private parking garages, hotels, and “strip malls selling overpriced goods” (Kudera 92, 153). Such an environment presents higher education less as an avenue to opportunities, and more as a continuation of opportunities already received. At Ivy Green, higher education truly is one among many services available to those students who can afford them. These students are unconcerned with the 84% lifetime increase in earnings that their degree should provide, but they are also far more likely to meet that benchmark than those struggling through their four years at Urban State and Liberty Tech. Duffleman does not belong to this world any more than do his non-Ivy Green students. When he encounters “the most prominent Melvillean in the mid-Atlantic region, the Amazon.com chair in the humanities, Professor Boethius Kenth” and a cadre of graduate students near the elevator in the building where he teaches his literature class, they “don’t recognize him as a colleague or as anyone at all. He feels like a ghost, slinking in for the second shift, the late-night adjunct game” (Kudera 156). Despite Kenth’s and his students’ lack of recognition of Duffleman, though, part-timers have come to the fore in private, non-profit institutions just as they have in their for-profit counterparts. In 1991, part-timers accounted for
36.1\% of the faculty at private, four-year institutions (Snyder 1995). By 2011, they had increased to 44.5\% of the faculty (Snyder 2013). The graduate students might hope to emulate Kenth, but even at Ivy Green, there is a good chance that their careers will resemble that of Duffleman’s—if they are to escape his fate, it is unlikely that any of them will become an Amazon.com chair in the humanities, as they are most likely to end up at schools like Urban State or Liberty Tech.

Despite its flaws, then, *Fight for Your Long Day* is a necessary addition to the canon of both adjunct novels and academic novels more generally because it accepts part-time employment as an endpoint (and, for about half of all academics *the* endpoint) of an academic career, building on *The Lecturer’s Tale*’s acknowledgement that such careers exist despite expectations about what an academic career might mean. Such an acceptance makes clear that any discussion of a resuscitation of higher education’s democratic function or role in the public sphere must start from, rather than merely considering incidentally, the conditions of part-time employment. To return briefly to the epigraphs for this chapter, adjunct novels make the problem of Readings’ evocative phrase “dwelling in the ruins” clear: such an arrangement presupposes the ability to do more than simply survive, a rather larger presupposition given the testimony in reports like *The Just-In-Time Professor* and the now familiar statistics on the working and living conditions of part-time faculty members. Readings positions tenure and full-time employment as the conditions from which change in academe will come (they are, in the terms of his analysis, his “alibis”), rather than recognizing the wholesale change that was already well underway by the time of his death in 1996. The part-time faculty member as majority faculty member is the point from which theorizing has to begin—and this requires a theory that takes into account an inability to pay for food, to pay one’s bills, or even to enter or continue on in academe—rather than being a point to theorize around. Neither Humboldt’s nor Duffleman’s struggles will be
resolved simply by moving beyond the categories for organizing information posited by the Enlightenment. A new episteme will not in and of itself pay Duffleman’s rent or provide food for Humboldt’s family. Nor will it ensure that Humboldt’s and Duffleman’s students experience a world of security, in the term’s non-militaristic sense. Indeed, Harbridge, the company that purchases Midwest at the end of *The Lecturer’s Tale*, seems to propose a new model for organizing information that transcends the limits of disciplines formed during the Enlightenment, but the reforms that result from it can hardly be said to really benefit higher education or whatever democratic, meritocratic mission with which it might be charged.

The value of adjunct novels, then, might be in the very cynicism with which they seem to regard higher education as a mission or ideal. If this mission cannot be articulated or enacted in such a way that it can address the struggles of part-time faculty, and if it cannot truthfully offer students a meaningful alternative to insecurity and reduced social, cultural, and political horizons, then it is difficult to grant higher education’s traditional mission any purchase or authority today. In this sense, adjunct novels propose that higher education address what the new academic novel that has emerged since the 1980s has acknowledged for some time: absent a hard and fast divide between academe and society, higher education has an increasingly urgent need to understand itself in order to argue for a place in society other than what a now outdated understanding of its purpose and function affords it. This means that faculty must regain (or in some cases, gain for the first time) control over not just the intellectual business of the university, but also its institutional business. If the academic novel has been one method by which higher education has come to understand itself (and to be understood by society in general) during the twentieth century, then it must similarly narrativize this institutional business. *Moo* has been perhaps the most successful attempt at producing this kind of novel, though such a novel need
not be encyclopedic like Smiley’s. Instead, it should put into perspective the subtle (one might say invisible) relationships between work in the admissions office and the teaching of freshman composition, for example, reinserting faculty and students into a space that they seem to have voided (or been expelled from) through a focus on revenue and fundraising. *The Lecturer’s Tale* and *Fight for Your Long Day* attempt, in their own ways, to reject econometric views of higher education and report the damage that such an approach has caused. More work to tease out these relationships, then, might create a narrative that could successfully counter the financial understanding of higher education that currently prevails.

To such a proposal, and to the existence of adjunct novels in general, one might respond with the steady stream of critics who charge that the academic novel has run out of steam and has no worth as either a form of diversionary entertainment or as a serious comment on academe. Jonathan Wolff, for example, writing in *The Guardian* in 2013, echoes both American and British critics since the 1980s when he laments how “the colours [of academic life] are more muted than they used to be,” in part because it is increasingly pessimistic (Wolff). Where once “universities were unregulated bubbles of excess, privilege and poison,” such an atmosphere could not survive “the cost-accounting era that developed in the mid-1980s,” strangling the genre’s comedic base (Wolff). Without this comic foundation the academic novel’s time has come, he argues, because “[w]hen stories about universities start appearing in the business pages, there is only one joke to tell and only Laurie Taylor can make it funny” (Wolff). In one sense, Wolff is correct: academic novels have become increasingly pessimistic and the comedy, where it is to be found, is much darker than at earlier moments in the genre’s history. This does not necessarily diminish the genre, though, and it certainly does not mean that there are no stories left to tell about academe. If capers and hijinks are no longer in fashion in academic fiction, and
if this is a serious concern that suggests larger issues with higher education, then an unfunny academic novel might offer a way of thinking about what would be necessary to restore the kind of higher education that concerns itself with capers and hijinks.

Neither *The Lecturer’s Tale* nor *Fight for Your Long Day* offer a solution to this problem, but they do present narratives that argue that academe’s muted colours are the result of deliberate choices advocated for during the cost-accounting era. When academic hijinks began to resemble the culture wars, there was little interest public interest in preserving the conditions that led to those hijinks. Instead, a relentless pitch to tone down academe’s eccentricities (along with much that allowed it to retain a purpose and function distinct from social whims) toned down its zanier characters, in part by eliminating their room to roam. Morris Zapp ranged across North America and Europe as a grand theorist. Hank Devereaux caused trouble in Railton, Pennsylvania as a cranky tenured professor. Cyrus Dufflmen just hopes to make his train on time. It is not difficult to see how this shifting cast of characters translates to reduced expectations about what higher education can accomplish. The future of the academic novel will not be the adjunct novel—already the trends and conditions that precipitated its rise have started to shift, particularly with regard to a largely un- or under-regulated for-profit sector—but the questions that these novels raise about the genre’s future and, by extension, the mission of higher education, make the future of the academic novel a matter of more than simply literary interest.

As one endpoint of both culture wars novels and academic novels, adjunct novels largely eschew the cultural/literary trappings of debates about PC’s role on campuses *viz.* multicultural curricula or poststructuralist approaches to reading literature. Instead, adjunct novels focus almost exclusively on the financial/institutional realities facing adjuncts. While this would seem to counter or reject the neoliberalism encountered across other examples of culture wars novels
by exposing the consequences of neoliberal policies on higher education, adjunct novels end up largely reinforcing that neoliberalism is the only option because nothing else is on offer. In this sense, adjunct novels serve as barometers for the understanding of higher education that existed on college and university campuses in the early-to-mid 2000s, before the 2008 financial crisis made challenging neoliberal hegemony seem a feasible project. *The Lecturer’s Tale* and *Fight for Your Long Day* are obvious extensions of the concerns of earlier academic novels, from *Perfect Agreement*’s fear of failing those for whom higher education is intended to serve as a bridge out of poverty and neglect, to *Small World*’s analysis of the then-nascent star system and its extreme form of academic winners and losers, and to *Straight Man*’s exploration of the uncertainty surrounding once automatic process of hiring staff to cover the requisite number of sections of freshman composition. To the extent that both are highly cynical with regard to the possibility of change, *The Lecturer’s Tale* and *Fight for Your Long Day* also document the success of the ideological dimensions of the culture wars captured by those earlier novels. That adjuncting can come to be recognized as an expected career path within academe (and that a tenure track career can only be understood within the context of the part-time labour on which it depends and which it does not acknowledge) demonstrates how the ideas about professionalization that were used to sell English Studies’ market retreat in the 1990s ultimately came to fruition and formalized a multi-tiered academic labour system. Similarly, concerns about academic standards and the ability to deliver the same level of education to first-generation and non-traditional college and university students that were said to underpin critical responses to affirmative action and other PC initiatives have become justifications for for-profit higher education as a more efficient delivery system for mass higher education despite its contribution to further stratifying access to college and university.
To understand the function of adjunct novels, then, it is crucial to return to the idea of ideology’s explanatory function. When Jameson and Žižek (via Lévi-Strauss and Lacan) speak of narrative attempts to resolve material crises symbolically, this is the natural function of ideology. Culture wars novels have had to resolve the tension between the desire for an idyllic form of academe—with plentiful, readily-available tenure track jobs and an institutional insistence on the primacy of literature and culture in the pre-literary theory and cultural studies sense of those terms, summed up by the common reading of Arnold’s “the best that has been thought and said” as a largely static tradition to be learned by rote, like scripture—and the current material realities of a highly corporatized, managed academe that is structured and governed according to neoliberal principles. The invention or framing of conflicts like the PC wars or the prominence of literary theory versus traditional humanism as the source of this tension by those who would advocate for neoliberalism’s insistence on the primacy of the market as an evaluative system, the value of competition as a driver of efficiency, and the impossibility of knowing the consequences of interventionist activities allowed them to frame neoliberalism as the guarantor of a return to this idyllic vision. This guarantee relied heavily on the adoption of the rhetoric of accountability by academe, which elevated financial metrics above all others as measures of success, satisfaction, institutional health, etc. and was introduced through appeals to academic standards, disciplinary beliefs, and ideas of professionalization. As discussed in Chapter 3, this bolstered an existing shift in power away from faculty and toward administrators, who could advance a coherent vision of neoliberal higher education in the face of an often divided and fragmented faculty. Adjunct novels, though, do not accept this guarantee because they demonstrate its non-existence. There is no return to the welfare state under neoliberalism despite its promises of increased efficiency and improved services and there is no return to the
Golden Age under neoliberal higher education. The ghost of the Golden Age, and the prospect of its return via an acceptance of neoliberal policies, has become the ideological explanation for the hegemonic status of neoliberalism despite its clearly damaging effects on higher education.

To the extent that the cynicism that pervades adjunct novels is characteristic of Fisher’s capitalist realism and suggests a numbing to the possibility of change, this ideological reversal proves successful. Academics and people who are sympathetic toward academics want to believe in the continued existence of the groves of academe, and neoliberal higher education can offer a version of that to a limited number. As new graduate students enter the profession and end up off the tenure track or redirected into “alt-ac” careers, the lack of ideological justification for the current system becomes clear: the idyllic vision in which they may have believed is simply no longer possible or no longer how things are. Since 2008, with increased attention and scrutiny on for-profit education, student debt levels, and the prevalence of adjunct faculty, there has been a movement away from cynicism regarding change. Professional organizations like the MLA have not necessarily abandoned neoliberal orthodoxy—in some ways, they have doubled down on their rhetoric about managing the job market and resolving its supply-and-demand problems—but there is open conversation within the discipline about change and new approaches to academic labour. The push for adjunct faculty and graduate student unionization (which has now extended to some undergraduate students via the movement to unionize NCAA student-athletes, as with the Northwestern University football team) represents a renewed attempt to gain some control over workplace conditions and so extend the possibility of institutional governance to those groups who have been reduced to mere employees by casualization and adminification. These changes have yet to be reflected in fiction, though, and this suggests the value of adjunct novels as a historical document. Caught between neoliberal policies at their most hegemonic and
the slow unraveling of their hegemony after 2008 (a process that continues even after the
retrenchment of 2016), adjunct novels testify to the need to rearticulate the dominant ideology of
higher education as a national institution as well as at the levels of individual institutions. The
experience of unprecedented student debt levels has created a generation of sceptics with regard
to the marketization of higher education, even if they do not realize its relationship to the “higher
education as commodity” mindset that likely drove their undergraduate degree experience.
Adjunct novels mark the moment in which the ideology of corporate higher education cedes its
explanatory function in favour of an insistence on the possibility of any alternative explanation
of the institution, its purpose, and its organization that could challenge its hegemony. Rather than
follow adjunct novels to their apocalyptic conclusions, then, this demonstrates the need to find in
those apocalyptic moments the seeds of emergent cultural attitudes and practices that might
become those alternatives. It is to this task that I will turn in the conclusion.
Conclusion:
Academic Time, or, How to Represent a New University

Why do some people, including myself, enjoy in certain novels, biographies, and historical works the representation of the “daily life” of an epoch, of a character? Why this curiosity about petty details: schedules, habits, meals, lodgings, clothing, etc.? - Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text

In the introduction to Faculty Towers (2005), her study of the academic novel, Elaine Showalter asserts that “academic novels are set in academic time, which is organized and compartmentalized according to various grids and calendars, vacations and rituals . . . both overloaded day to day and painfully drawn out and Beckettish year to year” (7-8). If, as critics like Showalter and Jeanne Marie Rose have suggested, the academic novel serves as a method of professional self-reflection, then these accounts of academic time are notable for what they leave out: those “ambient part[s]” that have tended to define the career of a professor without necessarily being identified as his or her job (Williams “An Academic Novel”). Professors deliver lectures, they research, they write and publish, but they also “sit[] on committees that decide course offerings or personnel decisions, writ[e] memos within their departments, vot[e] in faculty meetings, chat[] at the departmental coffee pot . . . grad[e] piles of papers, hold[ ] office hours, [and] do[] ‘service’ work” (Williams “Life” 129-30). For increasing numbers of academics, though, their academic time has followed a different set of rhythms than those that have characterized the academic novel. Part-time and adjunct faculty might never sit on a committee or even attend (let alone vote in) a faculty meeting. They will teach and grade piles of papers and some might have the luxury of having access to an office in which to hold their office hours, but they rarely have time to chat around the coffee pot. The overloaded portions of their days are often the result of transit challenges and the number of different institutions at which they must teach. They have exchanged the “peculiarly painful . . . longue durée” of the tenure
process for sharp bursts of anxiety surrounding the end of each semester or academic year as they wait to hear if their contract is being renewed (Showalter *Faculty* 9). The difference here is not simply the availability of what Evan Watkins calls “cultural work time,” the time, space, and other resources required to read, analyze, talk, write, and teach about cultural objects, which “divides a permanent labor force of faculty in English departments . . . from others in other social positions,” like part-time faculty (*Work* 3). There is also the agency (and social and institutional expectation) to participate in the activities that create, ensure, and dictate the terms of the time, space, and resources that make cultural work time available. To a certain extent, the ticking tenure clock that governs this form of academic time is also a measuring tool for the success and efficiency of producing the conditions for and taking advantage of cultural work time. For those without that space (and without the ability to create/secure it), different measurements of time have been imposed through alternative performance evaluation tools.

Academic time is not, then, the monolithic force that Showalter suggests, but it is the sense of time that she indicates that has tended to predominate in discussions about academic careers. The anxious, irregular rhythms to which other academic labourers work are rarely acknowledged, particularly within the relatively narrow framework for an academic career found in academic novels. There, Showalter’s sense of academic time is an invisible assumption, accepted without any question because of the lack of those hidden or unnoticed ambient tasks that often yoke teaching, research, and other professorial activities to the grids, calendars, and rituals that she mentions. Letters of recommendations, for example, have seasons, as do advising sessions, meetings to discuss course offerings, and so on. Part-time and adjunct faculty, though, have come to navigate these seasons stripped of their familiarity and comfort. Their status as the majority within the discipline (and within higher education as a whole) would already make
theirs a common experience of academic time in the twenty-first century, but the forces of
privatization and casualization that have been brought to bear on the corporate university in our
age of austerity have increasingly extended this experience to full-time faculty as well. This shift
in professional fortunes mirrors a shift in student life during the same period, which has become
increasingly fractured and fragmented and serves as another challenge to traditional conceptions
of academic time. Students are more likely to be working full-time and living at home while
attending university than ever before. They are still enmeshed in higher education, but their
experience of it is likely to be much more partial, despite the continued campus amenities arms
race.

These trends are part of their own longue durée of academic life, but they remain largely
absent from contemporary academic fiction. For example, campus sex comedy films—which
might be inclined to reflect some of the changes to student life as a way to appeal to their target
demographic—tend to ignore both the new kinds of campus amenities (there are nice facilities at
the schools on screen, but never of the obscene free-25-screen-multiplex variety) and the shift off
campus by students. Instead, these films rely on endlessly rehashed, debauched versions of the
campus life at Northeast and Midwest public universities in the 1950s: fraternity and sorority
houses, football, homecoming, etc. They are, in many ways, Animal House again and again, even
when explicitly describing why they cannot be the Animal House of their respective decade, as in
PCU (1994). Even the best-reviewed academic novel of the last half-decade, Julie Schumacher’s
Dear Committee Members (2014)—described as “hilarious,” “scabrously funny,” “cleverly
amusing,” “oddly soulful,” and “a witty, original cri de coeur over the oft-lamented decline of
the humanities”—only tangentially touches on recent trends in academic life, despite featuring
an English department actually taken over (a sociologist has been installed as department chair
due to all the bickering between the rest of the faculty in the department) and housed in a building that is falling apart (Clarke 30; “Editor’s Choice” 54; Atkinson C6; Mallon C10; Sacks C10). By and large, Schumacher’s novel is a funny take on the “last sane man in academe” trope, with a hero “like Hank Devereaux, in Richard Russo’s Straight Man, and the iconic Jim Dixon, in Lucky Jim” that turns the modern penchant for oversharing into a method of spleen-venting against all the petty bureaucratic annoyances of academic life as embodied by the letter of recommendation (Williams “An Academic Novel”). Jason T. Fitger, Schumacher’s protagonist, knows colleagues who are overworked and underpaid, who could use full-time rather than part-time work, and who feel marginalized by a university that fails to ascribe value to their position and activities. However, he himself is “senior and tenured” and no matter that he belongs to “a dying profession” or claims to love “our mission and our way of life . . . steeped with purpose and worth defending,” neither he nor the novel as a whole convey much insight into the contemporary academic realities they bemoan (Schumacher 105). Fitger can be misty eyed and sentimental when hearing about a recent PhD entering the profession or filled with rage at the “unconscionable act of piracy and grotesque, systemic abuse of vulnerable students” that is an MFA program that offers no funding or aid to its students, but he is unlikely to be out of a job even if his has been reduced to “fill[ing] [his] departmental hours casting words of praise into the bureaucratic abyss” (Schumacher 66, 9). He remains a man who enjoys nice work even within the context of an institution in the process of eliminating that work.

Given these shortcomings, it would be easy to condemn academic fiction (and the academic novel, in particular) as a genre at the end of its life, no longer able to depict academe as experienced by the majority of those in it. Certainly, calls along these lines for an end to the academic novel have been ongoing since the 1990s. Sally Dalton-Brown sums up the thrust
of this criticism by charging that “the academic really cannot find a realistic place in today’s world,” a crucial failing given the convergence of academic novels with “the fiction of the embattled white, middle American male . . . which dwells on the weight of middle-class jobs and life and which is an inheritor of the existentially suffering organization man of Revolutionary Road” (Dalton-Brown 599; Williams “Academic Novel” 571). Dear Committee Members and other novels like it might remain relevant, then, to the extent that they speak to the concerns of the embattled white, middle-American male. And while the tenured professor may not seem like an obvious emblem for this group, one’s reading of Dear Committee Members need not be excessively charitable to make its narrative fit. This is a tidy resolution to the question of relevance—as long as academic novels continue to document the failures and minor frustrations of the now precariously middle class with comic aplomb, they can continue indefinitely. It also confirms a criticism that has been levelled at the genre since at least the early 1960s: that it lacks the seriousness or social resonance to produce an example of truly great literature. 

If anything, though, such an approach to the genre underscores its irrelevance rather than highlights its enduring value, and I do not think that the standalone novel of academic life remains a particularly useful form. Indeed, it is likely to continue to give way to novels, such as Jonathan Franzen’s The Corrections or Junot Diaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007), that feature academic narratives as just one part of their depiction of the contemporary milieu given the trends in student life toward full-time work alongside full-time attendance in higher education, or cycles of full- and part-time attendance based on work demands. The adjunct novel, for example, despite providing a portrait of the university during the last years of the twentieth century and the first half-decade or so of the twenty-first does not seem like a long-term avenue for the academic novel. In addition to its apocalyptic nature, which limits its ability
to be broadly representative of academic reality, much of what the adjunct novel accomplishes has been accomplished equally well by blogs and testimonials by part-time faculty, and has now migrated to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Similarly, accounts of adjunct life have become something of a cliché (no matter their ongoing truth or necessity), replaced by “quit lit” and other genres of academic memoir/narrative. Though if Showalter is correct and academic novels are “rarely in synch with their decade of publication” tending instead to treat “the preceding decade’s issues, crises, and changes,” the first academic novels of the Obama years should begin appearing shortly, which will no doubt afford central place to adjunct faculty and for-profit colleges and universities if they are to document the past decade’s biggest scandals (Faculty 12-13).

This is not the only way to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the academic novel, though, and reading the genre in terms of the other longue durée mentioned above, wherein the ticking tenure clock is replaced by the ticking privatization clock or casualization clock, has the effect of connecting Dear Committee Members to a longer historical term and larger narrative. Such a reading would necessarily reject the turn toward the surface of works because “[t]he assumption that domination can only do its work when veiled . . . now has a nostalgic, even utopian ring to it,” seeing in that claim a misplaced emphasis on “only” (Best and Marcus 2). Here, Dear Committee offers a replay of the triumph of post-Fordism over Fordism, of managerialism over thought, of efficiency over rigour and creativity. What is more, such a reading deepens Fitger’s concerns about the “dying profession” beyond nostalgic pleas for the way things were or pious statements about the enduring value of culture and its shabby treatment in a time of philistinism. These statements now seem to point to a very real evaluation of the critical moment in which the residual culture of higher education—its place within and service to
the welfare state, along with its connection to much older ideas about education as “finishing” or preparation not solely (or even primarily) for one’s occupation, but for entry into the public realm with its attendant civic and social responsibilities—is no longer a lived experience of those working in and experiencing it. Indeed, this liminal moment accounts for the novel’s “antiprofessional attitude,” which fails to draw a distinction between good and bad incarnations of “organizational structures like professions and bureaucracies” (Williams “An Academic Novel”). The waning of these earlier understandings of higher education and their investment in the importance and effectiveness of good organizational structures like tenure (the paradigmatic example of the protection from the violence of the market that professions were supposed to grant) forces academics to regard them as ineffectual rather than continuing to view them as potential sites of resistance because of their absence or extreme reformation and reorientation in the new dominant culture of higher education.

If this explains the negative features of the work, it still fails to provide a more satisfactory explanation for its relevance in terms of a positive contribution. It seems paradoxical in a moment when “the drive to assess the performance of workers . . . [has] geared [work] towards the generation and massaging of representations rather than to the official goals of the work itself” as part of “[t]he proliferation of auditing culture in post Fordism,” but what could be more effective in stymying the activities of neoliberal managerialism than bureaucratic forms that serve values other than efficiency and productivity (Fisher CR 42, 50)? Fitger’s letters, with their continuous overexposure of his private life and flouting of earlier professional standards of conduct and behaviour for his own gratification, are not necessarily a manifestation of that phenomenon, but they open the question in important ways. If our current evaluative procedures are in fact inefficient, in that they rarely produce the kind of evaluative information demanded by
our current political and economic paradigm’s emphasis on accounting and the empirical, is the problem the procedures, or the systems they serve? Does evaluation remain the crucial task of a university, and if so, to what end? What is being evaluated? On what scale? According to whose values? As both the time to think about these questions and the positions who have agency to bring about change based on their answers disappear, being reabsorbed back into the ever-expanding administrative structure of higher education, the form of the corporate university and its view of higher education becomes ever more solid, changing or eliminating all activities that do not correspond to its intended purposes for the university.

Instead of Williams’ “post-theory generation,” who had to navigate the distance between their more precarious existence in the corporate university and their teachers’ experience during the postwar boom, a new generation emerges on the periphery of Dear Committee Members (as it began to in the novel’s most direct ancestor, Straight Man) for whom that distance has become a total separation. Their teachers are the post-theory generation: their models navigated the “new normal” of declining opportunities, funding, and institutional purchase while attempting to retain the institutional structures that were created during better times. The post-theory generation coped with an abnormal and hopefully anomalous situation that slowly revealed it was the situation to which they hoped to return that was anomalous. The new generation, their students, copes because coping is part of the standard activities of the professoriate. In this way, the “alt-ac novel,” such as James Hynes’ Kings of Infinite Space (2004) and Next (2010) or Sam Lipsyte’s The Ask (2011) might become increasingly important to the continuation of academic fiction. These novels register the increasingly “in-between” nature of academic work and life, with students vacillating between periods of un- and underemployment and continued study, graduates accepting a series of part-time and contract jobs (both teaching and administrative) in
the hopes of a more permanent position at the institution or anywhere else, and the university itself simply a recurring, occasional presence in their lives. Even the “Ph.D. turned taxi driver” might be refashioned in novels like these as the smart student (or part-time employee) fully monetizing his or her in-betweenness via companies like Uber and participating in the new gig economy. If the adjunct novel documents the breakdown of professional standards and procedures in the absence of the labour conditions that characterized the professor-as-professional, alt-ac novels help to define the ongoing evolution of the professor, from the tweeds and pipe of the comfortably middle-class professor of the 1950s and 1960s to the sport coat and jeans of the trendy cultural critic of the 1990s and on to the professor as gig. In theory, one need now only to wait for a Silicon Valley “disruptor” to radically shake up the higher education industry with his or her idea for a brick-and-mortar location that offers higher quality education by hiring teachers full-time and giving them funding for pedagogical and professional development.

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This longer view of the academic novel and its work has another unexpected benefit, finding new value in the present moment for the culture war novels I have discussed throughout. Re-reading these novels serves as a reminder that appeals to the chilling effect of political correctness or the tyranny of multiculturalism and diversity are not simply routine instances of anti-intellectualism or the usual discourse of right versus left presented in the vulgarized but ubiquitous tongue of the twenty-four hour news cycle. They are, as they have always been, statements of ruling class intent for the operations of capitalism, which works through hierarchy rather than equality and impulse rather than consideration. The sudden efflorescence of attacks on political correctness during the 2016 presidential election campaign—with Donald Trump assuming the role of George H. W. Bush 25 years earlier, declaring that political correctness
“has transformed our institutions of higher education from ones that fostered spirited debate to a place of extreme censorship, where students are silenced for the smallest of things”—demonstrates the importance of such manoeuvres to capitalism (qtd in Kolowich). As has been discussed and dissected *ad nauseam* in post-election recaps, the spectre of PC was not simply a case of the Republican candidate pandering to Fox News or dogwhistling to that population of voters who are openly racist. It was not even simply a populist move, the right thing to say for a candidate who openly disdained policy discussions until forced to give details (and, even then, was full of equivocations and evasions) when asked about his higher education policy. The resurgence of attacks on PC was all of these things, but it was most importantly a case of reality management, of the implied (re)construction of a reality to which so many voters (for Trump, for Gary Johnson, even for Hillary Clinton) longed to return, in part because they could not understand its disappearance. Trump’s great appeal, signalled by his “Make America Great Again” slogan, was libidinal more than anything and the attacks on PC were a clue to his team’s understanding of this phenomenon. As other conservatives found during the early 1990s, attacking PC also enabled Trump to target multiculturalism, diversity, affirmative action, and other policies and attitudes that insist—in the eyes of those who feel oppressed by these things—on the primacy of not seeming racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. over and above the suffering that its “victims” experience from narratives of supposed (and expected) privilege that they themselves have not enjoyed. Trump’s white nationalist populism is the politicization of “postcolonial melancholia,” Paul Gilroy’s term for “[t]he multilayered trauma—economic and cultural as well as political and psychological—involved in accepting the loss of the empire” (99). In this, it is a political movement tailor made to capture the anger of PC’s supposed victims.
and present that anger as a solution rather than a politically and socially impotent force of which PC thwarted the expression.

Recalling the “white male victim” narrative common to PC novels, those who claim to be most oppressed by PC (e.g., white male conservatives) see themselves as suffering from the loss of an empire (the imagined America of Reagan, and those imagined Americas that he himself helped to create during his eight years in office) that they did not choose to give up. Particularly jarring for this group has been the combined relinquishing of the freedom and moral authority to judge other groups from a position of certitude alongside the desire for the continued existence of that empire and the benefits it conferred. To the extent that these desires could be read as patriotism by neatly tying into a desire to see America be great again, PC’s supposed criticism of those who hold these views (and the views themselves) as inherently racist, xenophobic, and regressive was un-American, a symptom rather than a solution. As Mark Fisher explains, “the postcolonial melancholic . . . refuses to accept that change has happened at all. He incoherently holds on to the fantasy of omnipotence by experiencing change only as decline and failure, for which, naturally, the immigrant other must be blamed,” or, in the current context, those who have forced PC (and multiculturalism, affirmative action, etc.) on the United States and prevented it from exercising its omnipotence and greatness (Ghosts 24). Since 2008, there has been an upsurge in the number of people who have lost faith in capitalism’s ability not only to deliver what they desire, but also to continue creating those desires, even among those who would staunchly defend capitalism and scorn socialism, communism, and other political-economic paradigms. Given the importance of the continued production of new desires by capitalism to the social reproduction of the conditions of its existence, this represented something of a crisis that was weakening the thirty-year consensus that there is no alternative to capitalism.
The attacks on political correctness, which must be seen as inseparable from the rhetoric of Make America Great Again, are permission to believe in capitalism’s desire-producing (and, for the most fervent and/or wealthiest, desire-fulfilling) power. Desire freely again, the attacks promise, and allow desires to be created in you, without regard to their potentially racist or otherwise offensive nature. The novels I discuss in my dissertation make the emptiness of this gesture clear, as those who need help, who have remained beyond the reach of imperfect tools like affirmative action, are destined to stay outside, no matter the intensity of their desire to be great again. What is more, academic novels may even play some role in resisting the effects on higher education of this latest round of attacks.

The academic novel has virtually always been tied to the humanities, and in this moment, with threats to the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities and an administration openly hostile to the ideas of truth and rational discourse, there has been an increased urgency to calls for the renewal of the humanities as a bulwark against philistinism. The connection to the humanities has remained important to the new academic novel as, of the novels I discuss in this dissertation, only Moo lacks a protagonist who works in the humanities (and even then, several of the ensemble cast do work in the humanities). It is somewhat counterintuitive to suggest that these novels might help resist current attacks on higher education if the humanities are expected to play some role in that, as the dominant attitude toward the humanities in these novels is doubt in their continued efficacy produced by cynicism regarding their contemporary purpose. To the extent that the culture wars have made concepts like developing our ability to be empathetic, deepening our understanding of ourselves, expanding our mental horizons, and contextualizing local issues in terms of their global significance and vice versa suspect due to their easy connection to PC, multiculturalism, and
other conservative bugbears, these novels have found cynicism in the idea of the humanities as politically neutral. And as issues regarding the casualization of academic labour, mounting student debt, and the reduction of economic possibilities for the middle and lower classes have come to the fore in these novels, the traditional rewards of the humanities have begun to seem insufficient. The barista with an art history degree has replaced the taxi-driving Ph.D. as a national myth that reinforces the perils of a degree in the humanities in an era driven by data, quantifiable metrics, and cost-benefit analyses.

Despite their cynicism and doubt, though, these novels can prove useful because their sense of the humanities as insufficient for our current moment is not a call to abandon the humanities. Instead, they position a renewal of the humanities as part of a broader re-conception of new forms of social relations beyond both vulgar identity politics and unfettered competition. This is a particularly pressing task in a moment when the right has managed to take its caricatured understanding of postmodern relativism—which was originally a critique of the left for its supposed resistance to the truth—and use that same relativism as a political tool. Beyond the sensational falsehoods that characterize Fox News or Kellyanne Conway’s “alternative facts” lies a much broader appeal both to ambiguity and to anti-intellectualism that defangs attempts to make evaluative arguments against right-wing policies and positions. It is “elitist” to insist on facts, and every statement comes loaded with false equivalencies and equivocations that leave its meaning slippery enough to escape sustained interrogation. At the same time, the counter-position to this stance has often been the hyper-empiricism of analytics and real-time fact-checking, both of which tend to reinforce the discourse of accountability and efficiency that has become so prevalent under neoliberalism. In this atmosphere, framing the humanities either as some kind of watered down cosmopolitanism or as a toolkit for employability, which seem to be
the two most common tacks today, offers little of substance to distinguish the value of the humanities in the present moment from what their value has been assumed to be throughout the last century. The moments in these novels that inspire the greatest cynicism, then, in which the humanities seem to offer answers to the wrong questions or benefits that do not improve the lives of students are moments that identify issues that must be addressed should the humanities prove to have value for the current moment. Though the standalone academic novel seems likely to disappear (or at least become much less central to the genre) given the changing nature of higher education, academic fiction’s insular nature even given the much more expansive form of the new academic novel clears space for speculative approaches to the institution and the social relations it could serve.

In what remains possibly the definitive diagnosis of the postmodern condition, Fredric Jameson opens The Seeds of Time (1996) by noting that “[i]t seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations” (xii). Much attention has been given to that first clause, which was taken up by Žižek in the mid-2000s as well as forming one of the conceptual bases for Fisher’s Capitalist Realism, but I have always found the second clause the more provocative. Is the weakness the failure to imagine a convincing breakdown of late capitalism (one that would fill the psychological need for the continued existence of capitalism that prevents such an imagining from being simple or commonplace)? The ease with which we can imagine the deterioration of the earth? The replacements we have imagined for capitalism, most of which, per Jameson, tend to require us to relinquish the “compensatory desires and intoxications we have developed in order to make the present livable” (Valences 384)? If it is the latter point, then academic novels might prove useful in thinking past capitalism,
at least as it has manifested within the university since the 1970s. If the Golden Age university is dead (and novels like Dear Committee Members or Fight for Your Long Day suggest that it as the very least very close to dying), completely superseded by the corporate university, then there is no need or impetus to revive it. Dead, it might no longer fulfill whatever need in the cultural imaginary that it once did, and the academic novel (particularly at the formal level) might be pried away from justifications for its continued existence, lest the genre succumb completely to the nostalgia mode. Thus, the genre’s “project,” if its potential social significance can be described in these terms, is not one of reconstruction. Capitalism has used its greatest skill, its destructive energies, to raze the ground and ask for new justifications for higher education’s existence, new tasks for it to accomplish, new social relations for it to help to construct. To meet this challenge is to construct a new university.

I will end here, as one always should, with a utopian thought: the academic novel might assist in this task, as I have suggested, through formal innovations that escape the nostalgia mode. While this might seem counterintuitive—use a genre whose form tends to reflect the organizing principles of the university to envision a new set of organizing principles for a university that has yet to exist—contemporary examples of the genre point to this exact possibility. The mechanism for this innovation is those missing elements, the ambient aspects of professorial life, absent from so much of contemporary academic fiction. Projecting what those ambient elements might look like, what career they might contribute to and in what ways, could be a way of defining new forms of the professoriate, new relationships to the university and society at large, and new goals for higher education as a whole. As a method of illustrating one potential avenue, I will return briefly to Dear Committee Members and consider it as an illustration of Stanley Aronowitz’s idea of working in academe as “The Last Good Job in
America.” In the novel, Fitger’s lament for his dying profession and his irritation at such affronts to his professional dignity as the English department building, “with its intermittent water supply, semioperational light fixtures, mephitic odors, and corridors foggy with toxins,” stem from holding the aforementioned last good job (Schumacher 154). Aronowitz points out that college professors “control [their] paid work time” and, at the top of their pay scale in the humanities, earn slightly more “than an auto worker who puts in a sixty-hour week but less than a beginning associate in a large New York corporate law firm or a physician/specialist in a New York health maintenance organization” (205, 207). Fitger’s frustration throughout is the extent to which he has actually ceded that control or has had conditions impinge on him to the point that the control of his own paid work time ceases to matter. He estimates, for example, “hav[ing] penned more than 1,300 letters of recommendation” and has reached a point in his career where, in part due to “the university’s mindless adherence to bureaucratic demands,” he finds that his “own writing interests [him] less than it used to” (Schumacher 38; 136). What is left to him other than writing letters of recommendation, teaching and mentoring students, has also grown stale as Fitger “find[s] [him]self overwhelmed by the needs of [his] students—who seem to trust in an influence [he] no longer ha[s], and in a knowledge of which, increasingly, [he] [is] uncertain” (Schumacher 136). It is easy to regard Fitger’s earlier remarks about the noble work English professors perform as sarcastic, or at least cynical, in light of these statements.

However, Fitger’s apparently well-founded concerns about peer and student evaluation gone mad usefully illustrate the ways that what Christopher Newfield calls “Meritocracy I,” which treats higher education as a ranking and filing system that reinforces other methods of social control in the service of ruling class interests, has sped up along with everything else in the corporate university. Watkins perceptively points out in Work Time that the primary function
of an English department is the circulation of evaluations within and eventually outside the university, which will designate employment opportunities and other markers of social and economic mobility (6-7). As the non-service aspects of English departments have been slowly stripped away by the corporate university and professional writing courses of various stripes have become more prevalent in the course offerings, this ranking and evaluating function of the contemporary English department has become clearer and more pronounced. Here the issue facing Fitger in his “good job” becomes apparent: control of paid work time remains conditional to the whims of the system that governs all wage labour. In pithier terms, “there’s no immediately obvious reason . . . to think work in English only a reflection of our interests” (Watkins Work 1). As universities and the labourers and knowledge within them are put to new uses by neoliberal capitalism, pressure is put on the paid work time of full-time faculty in such a way as to negate that self-control faculty could previously exercise. The professor performs the functions required of him or her by capitalism, though ostensibly s/he retains the same level of control that has allowed the job to remain the last good job in America. Instead of the teaching and research (or creative writing, in Fitger’s case) through which the professor can exercise control of his/her work time, the evaluative tasks expand to fill all available time and to deform those other activities. So much of Fitger’s time involves requesting funding for students, asking for materials for the department, begging for tenure lines to be rehired, and pleading for the continued existence of the department. This is less engaging in academic capitalism and more attempting to survive having lost out in academic capitalism. Here, once again, the steady, secure form of academic time that Showalter describes collapses into the unsteady, precarious, anxious academic time of the adjunct and part-time faculty member. The latter becomes something like the default experience of academic time, even for those groups who formerly had been secure.
Rewriting Fitger’s tasks, then, offers a way of defining a new kind of academic time, one that does not structure actions according to grand schemes of evaluation and circulation. How might this change (or even eliminate) the letters that he writes? Primarily, it seems to me, they would change his authorial voice, removing some of the need for the antagonistic relationships he invariably sets up with the letters’ recipients and reintroducing the agency of the professor, rather than reducing him to humiliated supplicant as they do in the novel. Reduced antagonism and increased agency also suggests more effective bureaucratic structures in other areas of professional life for the professor. Imagining what those more effective structures might look like—along with how they might function and to what end—entails the definition of a new idea of the university, one whose presence, however ghostly, exists within its present form. In the end, I return to imagination. Can we overcome the negative thinking that characterizes our present moment and start to think positively and productively about the problems that we see in higher education? Can mass casualization, for example, lead to thoughts not simply about how best to unionize or protect existing full-time positions, or even how to create new full-time positions within the current system, all of which is simply reactive, but rather about what academic labour should be? The tendency toward idealism is high in such exercises, which is why starting with the ambient, bureaucratic tasks, the stuff that fills up and ultimately defines academic time as much as commencement ceremonies and exam periods, can inject a needed element of pragmatism to our thinking. We want to read and think, talk and write, and teach and support, so why not dedicate these tasks to creating conditions that allow us to do so more securely in the future? And if there is yet the need to remember how these tasks have come to be performed the way that they have and the missions that they served in universities of the past, the academic novel remains to help us find that out.
Notes

1 For a prime example of this argument, see James Sloan Allen’s “The Humanists Are Guilty of Betraying Humanism” for the Wall Street Journal, which faults academics for, among other things, an “infatuation with esoteric questions and cant [that] has turned the MLA convention into a circus of professional hokum,” “setting perverse standards of language and thought that become the norm for ambitious scholars, intimidated educators and unsuspecting students,” and “consistently favour[ing] student papers written in a turgid, intellectually inflated style over those written simply and lucidly, even when both contained the same ideas” (30).

2 Though claims that tenured professors did not teach (or at least did not teach freshman or core courses) were overstated—at Small Liberal Arts Colleges (SLACs) and other non-flagship institutions, few departments had the numbers to exempt faculty (tenured or otherwise) from teaching responsibilities—figures like Charles Sykes, William Bennett, and Lynne Cheney voiced versions of this argument that spoke to the negative public perception of professors. For Sykes, “[t]he story of the collapse of higher education is the story of the rise of the professoriate,” as professors have been able to justify “le[aving] the nation’s students in the care of an ill-trained, ill-paid, and bitter academic underclass” to engage in research “despite the fact that fewer than one in ten ever makes any significant contribution to the field” (4, 5). Bennett’s and Cheney’s arguments in their reports as NEH heads (To Reclaim a Legacy [1984] and Humanities in America [1988], respectively) are less aggressive, but hit the same basic points: professors have become overly specialized and spend too much time doing research that does not contribute to their actual function, the instruction of undergraduates via stimulating general education courses.

3 Kingsley Amis’ Lucky Jim is the archetypal example of this narrative, which Richard Fallis describes as “academic wishful thinking,” in which readers who work in academe “see his story as a fantasy of our unrealized selves” (71).

4 By academic novel, I mean a novel set primarily on a college or university campus that is focused on the actions of a professor in his/her capacity as a professor. I will use the term “college novels” to refer to novels primarily about students.

5 As Catherine Chaput points out, one way of measuring this interrelation of academic and corporate interests is through the changing composition of boards of regents during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as “corporations acquired a major interest over the administration of U.S. public universities” (326). Newfield’s Ivy and Industry is the most extensive study of this phenomenon, but see also Clyde Barrow’s Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928.

6 A notable early exception to this trend is Mitchell A. Wilson’s Live with Lightning (1949), which centres on a young atomic scientist who finds compromises to autonomy in both academe and industry.

7 “Neoliberal” and “neoliberalism” are, at this point, contentious terms, sometimes taken to have been reduced to epithets hurled at any and all political opponents, particularly by those on the left. My own use of the terms is an attempt to identify and delineate specific political and economic policies of a strictly defined lineage that have been influential in the United States since the 1970s and dominant as a socioeconomic paradigm since the 1980s. Of necessity, the definition and context I provide in this introduction for these terms is limited. For useful overviews of neoliberalism as a concept, reviewing the main schools of thought about its project, ends, and importance, see Stephanie Lee Mudge’s “What Is Neo-Liberalism?” and Loïc Wacquant’s “Three Steps Toward a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism.”

8 A brief overview of the concept of a “regime of accumulation,” can be found in Harvey 121-22.

9 The term “human capital” and its relationship to higher education were popularized by Gary S. Becker, an economist at the University of Chicago and a key figure in American neoliberalism. See for his discussion Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education (1964). Becker’s conception of the production of human capital as the function of the university survives in the debate about the value of higher education and the “return on investment” seen by college graduates. He notes that the original motivation for his own study was “estimate[ing] the money rate of return to college and high school education in the United States” (15). On the link of human capital theory to Cold War era goals, see Peter Fleming’s “What Is Human Capital?” for aon.
that this promise was underwritten by higher education’s ability to contribute to Cold War defense needs was something of an unavoidable condition. On Cold War funding and the expansion of the university, see Stuart W. Leslie’s *The Cold War and American Science* (1993), Rebecca S. Lowen’s *Creating the Cold War University* (1997), and R. C. Lewontin’s “The Cold War and the Transformation of the Academy” in *The Cold War and the University* (1998).

In their “Rationalities of Ignorance: On Financial Crisis and the Ambivalence of Neo-liberal Epistemology,” William Davies and Linsey McGoey demonstrate through an examination of both Austrian and Chicagoan neoliberalism how the former’s “political attack on the possibility of centralized knowledge,” which sought to “diffuse the authority of central planners to the relativism of the markets,” became the foundation for the latter’s “own variety of expert scientific authority” that elevated economics (and particularly that strain propounded by those at and associated with the University of Chicago) as the sole guarantor of economic efficiency through ever more complex forms of modelling and representation derived from neoclassical economic theories (67, 70-71). In practice, this meant that “all knowledge claims” were subjected to “an aggressive empiricism that demands the utmost clarity and scientificity,” defined as coherence with existing economic models, or natural extensions of those models (Davies and McGoey 70). See also Philip Mirowski’s *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, especially 68-83.

Though neoliberalism’s ascendance to hegemonic political and economic paradigm was swift in the 1970s, its rise has much earlier roots. Contrary to accounts that mark the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 as ground zero for neoliberalism, like that offered by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine*, neoliberalism’s rise began a good forty years earlier. The desire to “airbrush[] out many of the tangled prehistories” of neoliberalism prior to the 1970s obscures the activities of the Mont Pèlerin Society and the economists at the University of Chicago whose activities between the 1930s and 1960s are vital to understanding the inconsistent and often contradictory neoliberal program difficult (Peck 5). For an overview of these prehistories, see Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe’s *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (2009), David Miller’s “How Neoliberalism Got Where It Is: Elite Planning, Corporate Lobbying and the Release of the Free Market” in *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism* (2010), Peck’s *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (2010), and Daniel Stedman Jones’ *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (2012).

The massive expansion of student debt in the United States has proved one of the most effective forces for creating such habits. As Maurizio Lazzarato argues, following Michel Foucault, “the creditor-debtor relationship constitute specific relations of power that entail specific forms of production and control of subjectivity—a particular form of homo economicus, the ‘indebted man’” (*Making* 30). This relationship functions as a mostly invisible means of social control, as “[t]he debtor is ‘free,’ but his actions, his behavior, are confined to the limits defined by the debt he has entered into” (*Lazzarato Making* 31). As the debtor’s behaviours inevitably stem from the first action that has produced his or her subjectivity, accruing the debt, no direct control is required so long as the debtor’s subsequent actions will ultimately lead to repayment of the debt. For a sustained discussion of this phenomenon in relation to student debt and the American university, see Lazzarato’s *Governing by Debt* (2015), especially 61-90. On a global level, a similar phenomenon played out in the 1980s and 1990s via “the International Monetary Fund’s ‘Structural Adjustment Programs’ that ‘were imposed by the IMF, World Bank, and transnational finance capital on countries of the global periphery that had got into trouble servicing loans. The price of ‘rescheduling’ loan repayments was the enforcement of neoliberal economic policies, making inflation control and debt servicing the top priorities’” (Connell 25).


For an overview of this period as Golden Age, see Louis Menand’s *The Marketplace of Ideas*, especially 64-68. For a brief, contrasting view that draws out some of the limitations of this periodization, see Bennett Carpenter, Laura Goldblatt, Lenora Hanson, Karim Wissa, and Andrew Yale’s “Schol…Exodus?: Learning Within/Against/Beyond the Institution,” especially 155-57.

Marc Bousquet relates that “during the 1960s and 1970s, the values and expectations of higher education unionism . . . yoked the notions of ‘faculty,’ ‘tenure,’ ‘freedom of inquiry,’ and ‘workplace democracy’ to a previously unprecedented degree. Evan at the campuses where faculty feeling or the state legal climate did not favor...
unionism, the best defense against unionism by administrations was granting a large portion of the union agenda—
instituting such now-standard reforms as consistent tenure policy and written guarantees of academic freedom,
improved salaries and benefits, and securing greater faculty participation in decision making” (92-93).

“[c]ontrary to the contentions of the recent alarmist articles, the biggest increase in college costs have not been
confined to faculty salary raises or deferred maintenance. Rather, the major added expense has been in providing
new services and facilities to students” (32).

xiv As Newfield points out, this had something of the opposite effect, though, as covering costs with increased tuition
and fees created the sense that the public did not need to fund universities, given their high tuition and fees. Calling
this negative feedback loop the “tuition trap,” Newfield describes how attempts to reassure the public of the value of
public higher education despite cuts to funding and the institution’s ability to survive without public funding further
erode public desire to fund higher education (Unmaking 182).

xx Jennifer Washburn recounts how university-industry partnerships expanded, starting in the early 1970s when
President Nixon “call[ed] on the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies to foster industrial
innovation by ‘stimulating non-Federal investment in research and development’ and ‘improving the application of
research and development results,’” leading to “a series of experimental programs designed to foster university-
industry research partnerships” in 1973, and, in 1978, “the [NSF’s] more substantial University-Industry Cooperative
Research Projects Program” (57). These developments, concurrent with a rapidly declining rate of growth for federal
research funds in the sciences during the escalation of the Vietnam War and the first Oil Shock and the founding of
associations like the Business-Higher Education Forum to “repackage [the university] as a source of technological
innovation capable of enhancing U.S. economic competitiveness,” sought to encourage industry investment in
potentially high-return areas like biotechnology and computers (Washburn 59). With the passage of the Bayh-Dole
Act in 1980, which permitted private corporations to patent and profit from the results of research funded by federal
dollars while giving universities a share of royalties, university-industry partnerships exploded, as “universities have
seen more than a tenfold increase in the patents they generate, and industry funding for academic research has
expanded at an annual rate of 8.1 percent, rising to $2 billion in 2001” (Washburn 9).

xvi In their influential study of higher education, The Academic Revolution (1968), Christopher Jencks and David
Riesman observed that “large numbers of Ph.D.s now regard themselves almost as independent professionals like
doctors or lawyers, responsible primarily to themselves and their colleagues rather than their employers, and
committed to the advancement of knowledge rather than of any particular institution” (14).

xxii On this more competitive environment and its disfiguring effect on the professional identities of academics (and
graduate students), see Frank Donoghue’s The Last Professors, especially 24-54. A more enthusiastic take on
competition as the necessary solution to the problems facing acade (essentially contiguous with the direction of
neoliberal policies in the 1990s) can be found in Stephen M. Stigler’s “Competition and the Research University.”

xviii Clark Kerr, in his The Uses of the University, observed that in the “multiversity,” the institutional form taken by
the postwar public research university, “[t]eaching is less central than it once was for most faculty members;
research has become more important. This has given rise . . . to a threefold class structure of what used to be ‘the
faculty’: those who only do research, those who only teach (and they are largely in an auxiliary role), and those who
still do some of both” (42-43). Williams explains how this split has intensified in the post-welfare state university, as
“professional fame accrues almost entirely through ‘scholarly’ rather than pedagogical reputation. The overriding
professional criterion, which is structurally mandated and naturalized through tenure and promotion requirements, is
 . . . to develop a ‘national’ or ‘international reputation’ in research . . . formally recognized and regulated through
peer review, among other intra-professional devices” (“Name Recognition” 191-92).

xxiv Writing about changes in the medical profession, for example, Meei-Shia Chen diagnoses the devaluing of
public health initiatives in the United States, where “[i]nvestments in public health have declined from 3% to 0.9%,
and local health budgets and staffing are being slashed,” not as a problem stemming from insufficiently robust
professionalization, but rather as a consequence of “the implementation, since the early 1980s, of neoliberal policies
that call for privatization of the public sector, deregulation of the private capital and labor market, and reduction or
elimination of the welfare state” (467). Similarly, the New York Times reports on the practice of “‘de-equitization’”
at major law firms, whereby lawyers who had formerly been equity partners are moved into “nonequity or ‘service’
partner” roles, in which they “are not really partners, but employees, since they do not share the risks and rewards of
the firm’s practice. Service partners typically have no clients they can claim as their own and depend on rainmakers
to feed them” (Stewart B1). Such employment trends are increasing, even at the top of the profession, where “The
number of nonequity partners at the 200 largest law firms in the country has more than tripled to an average of 117

280
per firm in 2014 from an average of just 35 in 1999” (Olson “Law Firms” B1). The phenomenon is so widespread that “nonequity partners [now] make up slightly more than 40 percent of all partners at premier firms, up from 17 percent a decade and a half ago,” and equity partners account for just “22 percent of the 93,000 lawyers in the top 100 firms,” down from “35 percent in 1996” (Olson “Law Firms” B1).

For more on this history, see William Riley Parker’s “Where Do English Departments Come From?,” which traces the early history of the discipline and its professional status to its connection to rhetoric and the teaching of freshman composition, Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature*, especially 121–79, which traces the rise of literary criticism within the American university, and Elizabeth Wilson’s “A Short History of a Border War: Social Science, School Reform, and the Study of Literature,” which argues that literary studies developed its postwar research apparatus not in response to the sciences, but rather in response to the social sciences, which touted their methods as evidence of their rigour and scientific nature and thus managed to secure outside funding for their work.

Benjamin Ginsberg somewhat polemically points out that “over the past thirty years, administrative and staff growth has outstripped by a considerable margin virtually all other dimensions of the expansion of American higher education,” noting that the key area of growth has not necessarily come at the top, but through staff in administrative offices who “work for the administration and serve as its arms, legs, eyes, ears, and mouthpieces” (29, 25). This growth, he suggests, may stem in part from “[t]he increasing prevalence of nonfaculty administrators” who seek to “invent or take control of activities that would expand their influence and provide them with an opportunity to hire more subordinates and staffers” as a way to counter the entrenched power of the faculty (Ginsberg 37, 36).

Observing the evolution of the university from the medieval to the modern, Kerr notes that “[a]s the institution becomes larger, administration becomes more formalized and separated as a distinct function; as the institution becomes more complex, the role of administration becomes more central in integrating it; as it becomes more related to the once external world, the administration assumes the burdens of these relationships” (28). Given that “[p]rotection and enhancement of the prestige of the name [of the brand] are central to the multiversity,” administrative functions must necessarily assume greater importance and scope within the institution (Kerr 20). Barzun’s take largely mirrors Kerr’s, claiming that “administering in the American university is no longer the intramural and academic business it once was,” with full-time administrative positions required “to permit the university not only to discharge its multiplying obligations but also to defend the ‘main job’ against the onslaughts of the new society” (97). In a prescient move, Barzun goes on to endorse the creation and expansion of a “second layer” of administrative positions, “a more numerous and knowledgeable group of aides to the members of the [administrative] cabinet . . . Such assistants could subdivide (without partitioning) their principal’s domain, and could in his absence act with increasing responsibility on the many questions that recur and are subject to rules” (118).

The language in early coverage of alt-ac programs, which emerged during the ongoing job crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, makes this clear, particularly in the condescending tone taken toward those students who signed up for the programs (and, in so doing, had admitted their failing and committed to sin no more, as it were), even more than those who had not (who were simply hopeless). See, for example, the editorial “Taming the Bear Market,” Sonja Steptoe’s “Jobless Ph.D.s Turn In Their Blue Jeans for Gray Flannels, with University Help,” and Earl Gottschalk Jr.’s “Some Frustrated Humanities Ph.D.s Find Success After Being Retrained for Business” for the *Wall Street Journal* and Barbara Lovenheim’s “Ph.D.’s Look Beyond the Ivory Tower,” Elizabeth M. Fowler’s “Ph.D.’s Get Business Skills,” Fox Butterfield’s “Harvard Offers Cramming for a Corporate Future,” the editorial “N.Y.U. Was the Pioneer,” and Fred M. Hechinger’s “Job World Outside Academia” for the *New York Times*.

As Williams frames it, “[i]n most description and analysis, culture and society are expressed in an habitual past tense. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products,” so that “relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted . . . into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes” (R. Williams 128).

Fielder is, in fact, broadly dismissive of the genre as a whole in his piece, failing to identify a single good novel in the genre, a view echoed by Fredric I. Carpenter in his 1960 overview of the genre, “Fiction and the American College,” who claims that “there are no first-rate fictions describing life in any American (or British) university” (443).

Though Ellis’ and Eugenides’ novels might more accurately be considered college novels rather than academic novels, they mirror the trend of other high profile academic novels in highlighting the genre’s increased prominence and standing as well as its more worldly concerns.

This list ignores the British author David Lodge’s *Small World* (1984), probably the most widely-known academic novel of the last 40 years, along with his earlier *Changing Places* (1975) and later *Nice Work* (1988), all of which would rank among the classics of the genre. Other first-rate academic novels by British writers not discussed

xxxii Williams notes a similar increase in publication, with 70 academic novels appearing between 1990 and 2000 (“Academic Novel” 567).

xxxiv This view is echoed by Sarah Boxer in her “Satire in the Ivory Tower Gets Rough” for the *New York Times*, along with Showalter in *Faculty Towers*.

xxxv See Findeisen’s “Injuries of Class: Mass Education and the American Campus Novel” and “The One Place Where Money Makes No Difference”: The Campus Novel from *Stover at Yale* through *The Art of Fielding* for two examples of recent work in this direction.

xxxvi The *Atlantic*’s September, 2015 cover story “The Coddling of the American Mind,” with its knowing allusion to Allan Bloom, is perhaps the most detailed, akin to that publication’s extended excerpt from Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* in 1991 that helped kick off the first phase of the PC wars.

xxxvii Chait would follow up his *New York Magazine* piece with further reporting on PC throughout 2015 and 2016. See, for example, his “Can We Start Taking Political Correctness Seriously Now?,” “Obama on Political Correctness: ‘A Recipe for Dogmatism,’” and “Chicago and the Anti-Anti-P.C. Left.” For responses to Chait’s piece, see Alex Pareene’s “Punch-Drunk Jonathan Chait Takes On the Entire Internet” for *Gawker*, Joan Walsh’s “When ‘Political Correctness’ Hurts: Understanding the Micro-Aggressions that Trigger Jonathan Chait” for *Salon*, J. Bryan Lowder’s “What’s Wrong (and Right) in Jonathan Chait’s Anti-P.C. Screed” for *Slate*, Lindsay Bayerstein’s “‘New York’ Mag Writer Is Incorrect on Political Correctness” for the *New York Observer*, David Frum’s “Liberals and the Illiberal Left” for the *Atlantic*, and Erica Hellerstein’s “The Phony Debate About Political Correctness” for *ThinkProgress*. For further examples of this “return of PC” narrative, see Andrew Hartman’s “PC Isn’t Back. It Never Went Away” for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and Mick Hume’s “It’s worse than Jerry Seinfeld says: PC is undermining free speech, expression, liberties” for *Salon*.

xxxviii See, for an example of this argument, Moira Weigel’s “Political Correctness: How the Right Invented a Phantom Enemy” for the *Guardian*.

As with the negative response to trigger warnings and safe spaces, the condemnation of student protests spanned the political spectrum. See for example Conor Friedersdorf’s “The New Intolerance of Student Activism” in the Atlantic, Nicholas Kristof’s “Mizzou, Yale, and Free Speech” in the New York Times, the editorial “Bonfire of the Academy” and John H. McWhorter’s “Closed Minds on Campus” in the Wall Street Journal, and Laura Kipnis’ “My Title IX Inquisition” for the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Peter Schmidt’s “A Turning Point in the Campus Culture Wars? For Some, Trump Raises Hope” and Steve Kolowich’s “Fear and Loathing in the Campaign’s Wake” and “An Internet Troll Is Invited to Speak: What’s a College President to Do?” for the Chronicle of Higher Education, Jake New’s “Conservative, Libertarian Groups Propose Campus Free Speech Bill” for Inside Higher Ed, and Bret Stephens’ “Do We Still Want the West?” for the Wall Street Journal typify this coverage.

For a discussion on the origin and history of the phrase “political correctness,” see Ruth Perry’s “A Short History of the Term Politically Correct,” Richard Feldstein’s Political Correctness: A Response from the Cultural Left, especially 4-7, and Harold K. Bush, Jr.’s “A Brief History of PC, with Annotated Bibliography.”

Other large newspapers followed suit in their coverage: the Los Angeles Times showed a similar increase in use of the terms between 1990 (16 mentions) and 1991 (107), as did the Chicago Tribune (4 in 1990, 91 in 1991) and Boston Globe (9 in 1990, 77 in 1991), with the Wall Street Journal (10 in 1990, 33 in 1991) showing a smaller increase. What is more, these newspapers demonstrated sustained engagement with PC over the first half of the 1990s, with average uses between 1991 and 1995 of 155, 123, 78, and 50, respectively, compared to 12, 4, 3, and 4, respectively, between 1986 and 1990. A Google Ngram search of the terms reveals a similar trend more broadly, with a sharp increase in the terms’ prevalence beginning in about 1989 and peaking in 1997.

This animus toward the 1960s was not coincidental. Bennett and Bloom were both prominent members of the neocorporatist movement, and neocorporatives came out of the emergence of the New Left on American campuses in the 1960s. As Jim Neilson notes, “[m]ore than the bête noir of neocons, the New Left was their raison d’être” (66). That another prominent neocon, Roger Kimball, served as one of the leading figures in the second phase of the Right’s attack on PC helped to ensure that the 1960s remained firmly in the crosshairs throughout the PC debates.

Bennett’s arguments are repeated almost verbatim by Cheney, his successor, in her own NEH reports: Humanities in America (1988) and Tyrannical Machines (1990). Interestingly, both Bennett and Cheney discuss the collapse of the academic job market in the humanities along with the rise of adjunct labour and the exploitation of graduate student labour, largely before these issues became common topics of analysis on the left, though neither provides an appropriate systemic framework from which to understand these issues as symptoms of a much wider crisis (that of the transition to post-Fordism) and its specific manifestation within higher education.

What this refocused curriculum might look like is suggested by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.’s Cultural Literacy (1987), which includes an appendix featuring a list of texts, phrases, concepts, and people that the culturally literate should be familiar with, or, as Hirsch puts it, “the network of information that all competent readers possess” (2).

Indeed, as Jon Wiener wrote in The Nation, key neocorporative figures like Midge Decter were ready to give up on attacking the Left’s presence in academe from outside the university, leaving the fight “to the insiders, to conservative professors who can criticize radical scholarship in the name of upholding standards and defending the university from the intrusion of politics” (“Why the Right” 724). Even with the success of someone like Allan Bloom on the horizon, though, Decter’s approach faced substantial obstacles: “[v]irtually no one” read conservative academic journals nor attended conservative academic conferences in the early 1980s (Wiener “Why the Right” 726).

For example, in his widely cited article “It’s Speech, Not Sex, The Deans Ban Now,” Alan Charles Kors claimed that “‘[h]arassment policies’ at a growing number of universities have used the real need to protect students and employees from sexual and racial abuse as a partisan pretext for, to borrow a favorite radical term, ‘privileging’ one particular ideological agenda, and for controlling speech deemed offensive by those designated as victims of American society (including those ‘victims’ about to receive Ivy League degrees!’)’ (A16). Similarly, Peter Shaw, an early member of the NAS, recounted in a profile of the group that “‘Scholarship and teaching had come to be dominated by leftist political ideology. . . . There was an atmosphere of intolerance and intimidation when it came to ideas such as ours, in favor of a more traditional, humanistically inclined kind of teaching that wasn’t based on politics. People were afraid to declare themselves in opposition to new trends lest they be labeled reactionary, sexist, or racist’” (Weisberg 36).

Beyond articles like Finn’s “The Campus: ‘An Island of Repression in a Sea of Freedom’” and Kors’ “It’s Speech, Not Sex, The Deans Ban Now,” this shift in the attack on PC can be noted in the increasing profile of the NAS as a legitimate scholarly association (in a way that earlier conservative higher education watchdogs like
Accuracy in Academia. See for example John Elson’s “Academics in Opposition,” Carolyn J. Mooney’s “Conservative Scholars Call for a Movement to ‘Reclaim’ Academe” and “Academic Group Fighting the Politically Correct Left Gains Momentum,” Patrick Houston’s “He Wants to Pull the Plug on PC,” Martin Anderson’s *Impostors in the Temple* (1992), especially 156-57, and Barry R. Gross’ “The University and the Media: Apologia Pro Vita Sua with a Defense of Rationality.” More critical histories of the organization can be found in Diamond’s “The Funding of the NAS” and “Managing the Anti-PC Industry” and Jacob Wiesberg’s “NAS: Who Are These Guys, Anyway?”. See also the relatively wide circulation of articles by Balch and his NAS co-founder Herbert London, like “The Tenured Left.”

1 The most comprehensive overviews of this media strategy can be found in Ellen Messer-Davidow’s “Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education,” Sara Diamond’s “Managing the Anti-PC Industry” and “The Funding of the NAS,” and Jim Neilson’s “The Great PC Scare: Tyrannies of the Left, Rhetoric of the Right.”

2 As Michael Bérubé highlights, in the early 1990s “[t]he number of responsible generalist forums for recent academic work ha[d] been steadily dwindling for about a quarter-century” (*Public Access* 59). At the same time, journalists in major publications were willing to go along with antiquated portraits of the humanities and their mission and to protect those portraits as the “true” form of humanistic enquiry when prompted to do so during the PC Wars because “[t]he mainstream media have always been suspicious of academia . . . ridiculing [academics’] jargon-filled writings . . . and attacking their cushy jobs at elite universities” (Wilson 24). Lacking direct experience of academe, journalists tended to rely on “information delivered through the pipeline of conservative newspapers and organizations dedicated to the spreading stories of political correctness,” a pipeline that was years (and millions of dollars) in the making, and the left had little in the way of structural or financial resources to combat these sources and their campaign of misinformation (Wilson 24; Neilson 64-65).

3 For example, the February 18, 1991 issue of *The New Republic* dedicated itself to a coverage of the intertwining between race and PC on campuses across the country, prompted by Dinesh D’Souza’s thesis on the “new racism” facing American universities and featuring an article by him on the problems of affirmative action and higher education admission practices.

4 The reference to Marxism was particularly important as the attacks on PC often appeared in the guise of “language used during the Cold War against an apparently expansionist nuclear superpower . . . redeployed against . . . members of traditionally powerless American social groups whose grievances the author admits as valid” (Newfield “What Was” 119).

5 These stories, along with a half-dozen others formed the basis of a PC repertoire that writers wishing to attack what they saw as its absurdities or failings could dip into as needed. As Richard Bernstein points out, their value was that “every outrage perpetuated in the name of the battle against racism and sexism [wa]s used to discredit the entire battle, rather than seen as an isolated instance of slippage, of excessive zeal in a good cause . . . reveal[ing] an essential element’ of PC to the public and ensuring clear and comprehensive transmission of ideological and political talking points (Bernstein *Dictatorship* 97).

6 For an in-depth analysis of PC’s role in this process, see Feldstein, especially 31-37.

7 The two most prominent examples of this are Woodward’s ringing endorsement of D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* in the *New York Review of Books*, “Freedom and the Universities” and Genovese’s review of the same in *The New Republic*, which he praised as a blow against “a new McCarthyism in some ways more effective and vicious than the old” (30). Woodward would attempt something of a retraction of his review, acknowledging that the book’s “moderation in tone and style may put readers off guard for its occasional stretching of evidence and logic to score a point. When I first wrote on the book I accepted its purely factual statements as true . . . Unfortunately, the book turned out to contain some serious and irresponsible factual errors” (29). For his part, Schlesinger’s *The Disuniting of America* (1992) is probably the most sustained and vicious attack on multiculturalism and Afrocentrism to be found outside of the pages of *The New Criterion*, peddling the same line as Will about cultural disintegration, one that ultimately goes back to Bennett and Bloom.

8 Indeed, Michael Bérubé notes in his commentary on the PC wars that the presence of a 12,000 word excerpt from D’Souza’s book in the *Atlantic* as one of the defining moments of “the shrinkage and ‘dumbing-down’ of the literary public sphere” (*Public 72*).

9 For these accounts, see respectively David Beers’ “What Happened at SUNY,” Linda Brodkey and Shelli Fowler’s “What Happened to English 306,” Raoul V. Mowatt’s “What Revolution at Stanford?,” Nina King’s “What Happened at Duke,” and Alice Jardine’s “Illiberal Reporting.” Other refutations of these incidents can be found in Michael Bérubé’s “Public Image Limited: Political Correctness and the Media’s Big Lie,” Diamond’s “Managing the Anti-PC Industry,” and throughout John K. Wilson’s *The Myth of Political Correctness*. 


One of the results of this silencing of alternative perspectives was that responses to the right’s charges were often made by people who, while nominally affiliated with the left because of their academic specialisation, tended to be more sympathetic to the right on political issues. For example, Stanley Fish was often presented as a ringleader of PC in publications like *Newsweek* and *Time* and was tasked with defending PC from the right’s charges, though he himself notes that his “qualifications for this assignment are so slight as to be nonexistent . . . [as] I have come out on the ‘right’ end of the spectrum every time” in politically-charged debates about literary theory and Critical Legal Studies (53).

Lauter’s “Political Correctness and the Attack on American Colleges,” Jeffrey Williams’ introduction to *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, and Messer-Davidow all cover this economic transition. Newfield’s “What Was ‘Political Correctness’? Race, the Right, and Managerial Democracy in the Humanities” places PC within the context of anti-communism in the twentieth century. Tom Lewis’ “‘Political Correctness’: A Class Issue” explains PC’s role in the run-up to the Gulf War, as well as outlining the extent to which it participates in a larger war on women, minorities, and the working class.

David Mamet’s *Oleanna* (1992/1994 film) is another significant example of a noted figure in the American cultural scene addressing sexual harassment in universities.

*Koons and Kikes* is a clever allusion to the activities of the *Dartmouth Review*, which was known to have published racist cartoons, anti-Semitic commentary, and excerpts from *Mein Kampf*. Similarly, like the *Dartmouth Review, Koons and Kikes* “received full backing from right-wing corporations and law firms” (Reed 14). The practice of funding right-wing student organisations and newspapers was a crucial part of the right’s strategy during the PC wars. The *Dartmouth Review*, probably the most prominent example, was bankrolled by the Madison Center for Education Affairs, which was itself supported by “Coors, Mobil, Smith-Richardson, Earhart, Scaife, and Olin” (Diamond “Funding” 89). The Madison Center, formerly the Institute for Education Affairs, was “the force behind a crop of sixty provocative tabloids published on fifty-seven campuses” that served as recruiting beds for pro-right media like the *Wall Street Journal and Forbes* and propagandists for the attacks on education and public policy the right had been pursuing since the 1980s (Diamond “Funding” 89). The connection of *Koons and Kikes* with apartheid sentiment is apt as one of the *Dartmouth Review’s* most notorious stunts involved “staffers [earing] down shanties built by the college’s anti-apartheid groups” (Diamond “Funding” 89-90). For more on the linkages between right-wing businesses, think tanks, and student groups, see Messer-Davidow.

Reed was also denied tenure at Berkeley in 1977, and though in a 1978 interview on the topic he attempts to distance himself from “black-confrontation politics” he nonetheless asserts that “I’m not so simplistic as to believe that it was merely racism. But I think if you get forty whites in a room, there’s going to be some racism, racist element” (Ewing 112, 113). His comment that “[a]ny black person who isn’t a slave . . . is considered tempermental” suggests the kinds of deformations that emerge from the racial and gendered expectations of higher education (Ewing 113).

This might be more a reflection of Reed’s well-known antipathy toward feminism (at least in its academic form), which he sees as hostile towards black males to an unreasonable degree while allowing white males a pass on misogynistic behaviour, than a concerted attack on PC in publications like *Newsweek* and *Time* and was tasked with defending PC from the right’s charges, though he himself notes that his “qualifications for this assignment are so slight as to be nonexistent . . . [as] I have come out on the ‘right’ end of the spectrum every time” in politically-charged debates about literary theory and Critical Legal Studies (53).

Critical reception of the novel strikes a similar note, tending to praise its dark humour as “[o]utrageous and provocative,” but noting that its “cumulative effect is less than devastating,” especially when it “lapses into [a] kind of artless agitprop” (Brown X6).

As Slavoj Žižek points out, the problem with tolerance is its total avoidance of any kind of meaningful encounter with difference or the Other. A politics of tolerance claims that “the Other is just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this other is not really other” (Žižek *Violence* 41). Indeed, tolerance becomes simply another manifestation of the obsession with “free choice” in an ever-expanding marketplace which underlies life under neoliberal capitalism: any culture can be tolerated as long as it is presented within a market that will determine its worth based on demands from consumers of lifestyles for that culture.

Development admits are students from wealthy alumni and/or potential donor families who are targeted because they can pay full tuition and will likely secure a new avenue of funding for the institution if they are admitted (Newfield 179).

For examples of a stronger counter to the undue influence of major donors, see the recent response by universities like Syracuse University and Wake Forest University to proposed offers of support from the Koch brothers, along with the website *UnKoch My Campus*. Kris Hundley’s report on Koch oversight of hiring decisions at Florida State University for the *Tampa Bay Times*, “Billionaire’s role in hiring decisions at Florida State
University raises questions” and Dave Levinthal’s report for the Atlantic “Spreading the Free Market Gospel” provide useful overview of the ideological force that can be wielded by major donors.

lxix Joan Wallach Scott highlights this danger in her own account of a possible multiculturalism. Noting that attempts to implement multiculturalism within higher education “take into account the existence of different populations with different needs and interests . . . none of them registers the fact that difference is not simply a state of separate being but a hierarchically constructed relationship” (J. Scott 121). The end result is “an essentialism that denies the historicity of processes of differentiation,” and that is as divisive as the liberal pluralism it attempts to replace (J. Scott 121).

lxix These numbers would have seemed even more drastic given that there was actually a small increase in the proportion of full-time faculty between 1989 and 1991. The increase in the number of part-time faculty between 1991 and 1993 was actually almost 79,000.

lxix Other writers to note the similarities between The Human Stain and the life of Broyard include Janet Maslin, in a review of Broyard’s daughter’s family history for the New York Times, Charles Taylor in a review of the novel for Salon, and Touré, in a discussion of passing fiction for the New York Times. Brent Staples’ review of the film adaptation of The Human Stain draws the most parallels, though, claiming that Broyard “seemed to see his life through Mr. Roth’s work” and attributing some plot points, like protagonist Coleman Silk’s dismissal for an allegedly racist remark, to Broyard’s habits, as the critic “scandalized liberal Manhattan friends like Harold Brodkey by making virulent comments about black people” (Staples WK12).

lxx In his review of the novel, Jay Parini takes these claims one step further, arguing that the “very premise of the . . . novel is absurd,” reliant on “hackneyed notion[s], long past [their] sell-by date,” and that the novel’s treatment of PC is “silly . . . trite and dull” (B12).

lxx It is perhaps more accurate to note, as does Michael Bérubé that there were significantly fewer opportunities for a certain kind of job. Certainly, one potential factor in Sternum’s success is the rise of rhetoric and composition, which, as a discipline and by proportion of advertised jobs, has been the most in demand specialisation since at least the late 1980s. In 1987, 20% of all job ads in the JIL sought it (British literature was the next most in demand, with 15% of job ads), a trend that continues today, as rhetoric and composition was the largest category in the 2013-14 JIL, accounting for just under a quarter of all advertised jobs (Huber et al. 414; MLA “Report on JIL” 23). In part, this has to do with structural factors from outside the university. As Evan Watkins notes, keeping with “the now familiar model of economic change from high volume, mass produced, standardized goods [i.e. Fordism] to high value, flexibly specialized goods and services [i.e. post-Fordism],” the value of an English department has been reconceived “in terms of a wide array of relatively specialized services to very different audiences,” of which writing instruction is most in demand (266).

lxx Mark Fisher has termed this phenomenon, which he sees as a specific aspect of neoliberal ideology, “reflexive impotence,” a situation in which managers and workers alike “know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can’t do anything about it,” which proves to be “a self-fulfilling prophecy” (21).

lxxv This point ignores the fact that “overproduction” is inaccurate and misleading. If teaching were based on degree holders rather than graduate students and part-time faculty, then there would be a massive undersupply of teachers, a point that the Final Report acknowledges: “even if the teaching loads of tenured or tenure-track professors were drastically raised . . . and such instructors were to assume primary responsibility for composition programs, most of the departments that make heavy use of part-timers could not even offer all the lower-division courses needed, let alone continue to meet the needs of their majors and graduate students” (S. Gilbert et al. 31).

lxxvi The basic narrative of the sexual harassment novel follows the actual experience of victims of sexual harassment on college campuses in a certain respect. Its validation of the white male victim and its attribution of any wrongdoing by the male to the repressive forces of PC resemble the general result of bringing forward a sexual harassment claim. For a woman who does this, “[h]er motives are questioned, her experience is suspect, and there may be no recognition that she has brought forward a legitimate problem. Often, she becomes the problem” (Dziech and Weiner xxviii).

lxxv For an overview of this idea of “sexual correctness,” see Sarah Crichton’s 1993 article “Sexual Correctness: Has it Gone too Far?” in Newsweek.

lxxvii Roiphe’s book The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus (1993), became “its own cottage industry” in the months following its publication (Estrich BR1). Her claims that concern about sexual violence of all sorts simply “advertised[ed] a mood” and “len[ite] urgency, authority to a broader critique of culture” rather than campaigning against an actual, physical threat to women proved as seductive for anti-feminists as it did contentious for feminists (“Date Rape’s” A26). Pundits like George Will were quick to back Roiphe—Will himself praised her for “cast[ing] a cool eye on the claims and logic of some women who consider their victimhood compounded by any
Minority enrollments show a similar increase in this period, from just over 15% of the student population in 1976 to over 27% in 1999 (and 61% of total student enrollment growth), though the increase was slightly smaller at four-year institutions (14% to 22%) and larger at two-year institutions (20% to 29%) (Snyder and Dillow 366; Snyder 2001).

Other significant examples of critical views on freshman orientation include Kors’ widely cited 1989 piece “It’s Speech, Not Sex, the Deans Ban Now” for the Wall Street Journal, Bernstein’s Dictatorship of Virtue, and Mervyn Rothstein’s “More than Dances and Picnics Greet Freshmen” and Abby Goodnough’s “From AIDS to Volleyball, It’s Time for Freshman Orientation,” both of which appeared in the New York Times.

For similar assessments, see also Jonathan Levi’s “Politically Incorrect” in the Los Angeles Times, Gabriella Stern’s “School for Scandal” in the Wall Street Journal, and Christopher Lehmann-Haupt’s “The Professor’s Still a Prof, but the Showgirl’s a Student” and Lorna Sage’s “Pictures from a Politically Correct Institution,” both of which appeared in the New York Times.

The idea that speech and conduct codes are simply a sign of the times was a contentious point, particularly amongst conservatives, and their liberal allies, who saw such codes in any form as a violation of the First Amendment. For these groups, the supposed inevitability of speech codes meant that “college administrators’ notions of their duty are today . . . profoundly muddled by the politicized paranoia now reigning on campuses” (“Swarthmore’s” A8). Perhaps more importantly, though, this sense of kowtowing to sociocultural pressures suggested a lack of “demonstrated need, rather than merely a perceived occasion for” sexual harassment codes, according to the right (Silverglade A18).

The idea, along with the idea that PC relies on kangaroo courts, show trials, and forced confessions, like a totalitarian regime is advanced at great length (though with little merit) by Bernstein in his Dictatorship of Virtue, especially chapter 4. See also Kors’ The Shadow University (1999), especially “The Water Buffalo Affair,” and Scott Gottlieb’s “A Mockery of Justice on Campus” in the Wall Street Journal, along with the editorials “Buffaloed at Penn” and “The Penn File: An Update” from the same paper.

Reviewers tended to agree with Swenson’s assessment of the situation. For example, Stern suggests that that Swenson is “a pitiful but not overly self-pitying clown” whose actions, while “unquestionably risky and foolish in light of the web that wily Angela seems to be spinning . . . hardly constitute sexual harassment. But try telling that to the politically correct college inquisitors” (W10).

Raymond Williams describes hegemony as “a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It those constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in mot area of their lives” (110).

Fisher’s idea of “capitalist realism” is an obvious example of this system, as it systematically declares impossible all thoughts or actions that do not contribute to the perpetuation of the current capitalist system because of their supposed impracticability.

Such a process was inevitable, as “[a] lived hegemony is always a process . . . it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance . . . [but] has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified . . . [by] isolate[ing] such alternatives and opposition . . . [in order to] control or transform or even incorporate them” (R. Williams 112-113).

James B. Stewart’s Den of Thieves (1992), for example, covered the rise and downfall of Mike Milken, Ivan Boesky, Martin Siegel, and Dennis Levine and appeared on the bestseller list alongside Paglia’s Sex, Art, and American Culture. Similarly, Oliver Stone’s Wall Street (1987), Tom Wolfe’s Bonfire of the Vanities (1987) and Bret Easton Ellis’ American Psycho (1991), made depictions of the excesses of Wall Street in the 1980s a cultural touchstone.


That this assumption rested on a deliberate misidentification of the professoriate’s class position (and blocked what should have been an emerging class consciousness that could resist the market-oriented reform of the university) is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.
William Davies and Linsey McGoey’s “Rationalities of Ignorance: On Financial Crisis and the Ambivalence of Neo-liberal Epistemology” provides an excellent overview of the neoliberal politics of knowledge, particularly in regards to the distinctions that have emerged between contemporary Austrian and Chicagoan schools of neoliberalism. See also Mirowski’s Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste, 27-88, for an authoritative account of neoliberalism’s approach to knowledge as key to its wider political project.

Tracing parallel developments in England, Robert Young argued in 1982 that “the 1960s and 70s could be described as the decades of the discovery and pursuit of theory” (“Post-Structuralism” 6). Throughout the 1970s, though, theory lost its intellectual hold because “[i]mplicit in [theory’s project] was the idea that one would in time discover or produce some kind of Final Theory . . . before which literature would at last lay down its arms and yield up its enigmatic secrets” (“Post-Structuralism” 6). By the 1980s, though, with “this belief in the possibility of a transcendent model and metalanguage . . . crumbling,” for many “it became clear that language could never produce an objective discourse upon itself” and theory’s project would have to shift, if not be abandoned outright (“Post-Structuralism” 6).

A convenient example of this shift comes from a survey conducted by the journal New Literary History in 1983. Asking participants to respond to questions about “the teaching and writing of literary theory at the present time,” the survey revealed that though the participants might regard the teaching of theory as lacking in completeness or rigour, they at least expected that such a class would be taught (and, more importantly, should be taught as competently as any survey or major author course), a significant development from even a decade prior (“Literary Theory” 411).

It would, in some senses, be more proper to trace this slide from “theory” to “deconstruction” not to Derrida but to de Man, the representative (along with his colleagues at Yale) of deconstruction in the United States, explaining something of the decisive force both of his death and the revelation of his early writing in narratives of the end of theory (Williams “Death” 19-21; Nealon 1267-69).

Structuralism faced a similar, though slightly less protracted, period of “dying” in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the work of Derrida took hold and thinkers like Barthes and Foucault broke with their earlier, structuralist positions. For an overview of this transition, see Robert J. C. Young’s Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory (1996), especially chapter 3, “Poststructuralism—The Improper Name.”

David Lehman was at the forefront of this push to use the de Man scandal as a final condemnation of deconstruction. In addition to his Signs of the Times (1991), which covered the de Man scandal, Lehman wrote a May 24, 1992 article about de Man for the New York Times, “Paul de Man: The Plot Thickens,” that appeared on the front page of the Book Review section and introduced new allegations about the scholar’s checkered past. Early in 1991, Michiko Kakutani, the influential book critic for the Times, published a favourable review of Lehman’s book, calling it a “lucid and fiercely intelligent study of the disturbing implications of deconstruction” (“Pro-Nazi” C15), a view largely echoed by Malcolm Bradbury in his own favourable review for the same paper. This was in addition to extensive coverage of the scandal—already somewhat exceptional given its principle subject was a literary critic, no matter how influential he may have been—including a December 1st, 1987 front page editorial in the New York Times, “Yale Scholar Wrote for Pro-Nazi Newspaper,” a July 17, 1988 follow up by Richard Bernstein, and a lengthy profile of de Man and the scandal by James Atlas in the August 28, 1988 Sunday Magazine. Hilton Kramer wrote a glowing review of Signs of the Times for the Wall Street Journal in February, 1991, calling it “[v]ividly written, thoroughly researched, even-tempered and readable” and hoping that it would “effectively explain this catastrophic development to nonacademic readers,” including parents, alumni, and legislators (“De Man” A7). In addition to a lengthy overview of the scandal in May, 1988 by Scott Heller, the Chronicle ran an excerpt from Lehman’s book in April, 1991. That the scandal became the public association with deconstruction can be seen in the New York Times’ obituary for Derrida, which devoted a significant amount of space to recapping the scandal and criticizing Derrida’s attempted defence of his friend, implying that it was the pivotal moment in the French philosopher’s 40+ year career.

Announcing the end of theory remained a hot topic throughout the rest of the decade and into the next. Martin McQuillan, Graeme Macdonald, Robin Purves, and Stephen Thompson edited Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism in 1999, for example, which featured contributions from big names like Christopher Norris, Geoffrey Bennington, Catherine Belsey, and Hélène Cixous. Similarly, Judith Butler (one of the, if not the, biggest academostars in the 1990s), John Guillory, and Kendall Thomas edited What’s Left of Theory in 2000, which also included contributions from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (another of the biggest academostars), Michael Bérubé, and Jonathan Culler. Valentine Cunningham’s Reading After Theory was published in 2002 and explicitly identified its moment as the post-theory era, while Colin Davis’ After Postructuralism and Terry Eagleton’s After Theory, whose earlier work had done much to usher in the institutionalization of theory, both appeared in 2003. Raja Tilottama and
Michael J. O’Driscoll’s collection After Poststructuralism: Writing the Intellectual History of Theory from 2002, not only conflates poststructuralism and theory, but suggests that theory will have no new developments and is to be treated as a historical item.

Even postcolonial studies and queer studies had seen pioneering work by figures like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, respectively, by the early 1980s. Translations of some French feminists only began appearing in the mid-1980s, but feminist literary criticism was already well-established in American universities by the dawn of the 1980s.

As Elizabeth Wilson argues, “literary criticism has long opposed itself to the practical work of social reform,” with professors rarely interpreting their “responsibility . . . to uphold ‘standards’ and defend ‘civilization’ . . . to mean concrete interventions in particular circumstances” (711). However, after long seeing the social sciences as “intellectual rivals for the study of human culture and behavior,” critics were forced to develop new institutional and professional attitudes to reclaim some ground within the university, particularly given the lack of external, private funding available to English (Wilson 712, 728). Ultimately, this helped to secure the triumph of criticism (and especially the New Criticism) over philology. See also Graff’s Professing Literature on this development, especially chapters 8-10.

For a discussion of the photographs included in Campbell’s piece and their importance to the development of the academostar, see Shumway “The Star System in Literary Studies,” 181-84.

Between 1969 and 1971, according to the MLA, there was a 23% decline in the number of hires in English (Orr 1186). Using job advertisements as a proxy for hires, which is obviously inexact but serves for a rough estimate, this collapse was of the same level as that seen in 2008 during the global financial crisis. See, for more details on the collapse in 2010, “Many More Ph.D.’s, Fewer Faculty Openings Lead to a ‘Buyer’s Market’ in Academe” in the January 12, 1970 edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education.


These slightly offset rises and peaks make sense: an increase in BAs awarded would increase the pool for potential PhDs, but it would be at least 5 years between an initial increase in BAs awarded that one would expect to find an increase in PhDs awarded, as the new graduates worked their way through graduate school.

Bérubé’s The Employment of English nicely triangulates these various positions and puts them in dialogue with other institutional concerns like enrollment levels, employment trends, casualization, and other non-pedagogical matters that shaped these debates. See especially “Cultural Studies and Cultural Capital.”

The concept of the “posttheory generation” was coined by Jeffrey J. Williams in the early 1990s. For an overview of its characteristics, see his “The Posttheory Generation” in Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy.

For an overview of the flaws in Bowen and Sosa’s study and its deleterious effect on the discipline, see Marc Bousquet’s How the University Works, 17-18. See also Lynne Cheney’s “The Phantom PhD Gap,” in which the then-NEH head rejects several of Bowen and Sosa’s assumptions and reveals that the projected shortages of PhDs are unlikely to occur. A more sympathetic reading of the report’s failures and the motivations behind its incorrect assumptions can be found in Leonard Cassuto’s RIP, William G. Bowen—and the Bowen Report, Too” for the Chronicle of Higher Education.

On the Sokal Hoax, see Janny Scott’s “Postmodern Gravity Deconstructed, Slyly,” Edward Rothstein’s “When Wry Hits Your Pi from a Real Sneaky Guy,” and Stephen G. Bloom and James L. Wunsch’s “Prof Talk” in the New York Times, Kimball’s “A Painful Sting within the Academic Hive” for the Wall Street Journal, and Bruce V. Lewenstein’s “Science and Society: The Continuing Value of Reasoned Debate” and Liz McMillen’s “The Science Wars” for the Chronicle of Higher Education. Sokal’s revelation of the hoax was published in Lingua Franca as “A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies.” For defenses of Social Text and responses to Sokal, see Stanley Fish’s “Professor Sokal’s Bad Joke” in the New York Times and the article “Mystery Science Theater” in Lingua Franca. On the breakup of the star faculty in Duke’s English department, see David Jaffe’s “The Department that Fell to Earth” in Lingua Franca and Janny Scott’s “Discord Turns Academe’s Hot Team Cold,” which appeared on the front page of the New York Times. As Jaffe recalls, “his editors had sent him on a hatchet job,” describing the motivation for commissioning the piece as “‘to just demolish this place. They thought that the things that were going on at Duke were so precious and narcissistic: they just did not respect those people’” (qtd. in Hensley).
In a more cynical register, for example, Japanese by Spring’s protagonist, Benjamin “Chappie” Puttbutt, declares that criticism is “the growth industry of the eighties and nineties,” for which no conviction is required to “share in some of the profits,” as “[e]ven a New Critic like himself” has simply to “string together some quotes from Benjamin, Barthes, Foucault, and Lacan” (Reed 49).

cxvi This situation, which had begun in the 1960s and accelerated with advances in office and telecommunications technologies allowed administrators to increase their power and reach, as discussed in Chapter 3.

cxvii For a cogent discussion of conferences, travel, and the ways that the two have become both integral to professional identities in English Studies and one of the venues through which part-time and non-tenure-track faculty have been de-professionalized over the last three decades, see Caesar’s “Phantom Narratives: Travel, Jobs, and the Next Generation.”

cxviii In an interview with Elaine Showalter, Lodge reveals that Small World’s inspiration came in part from the novelty . . . [of] get[ting] in a jet and fly[ing] around the other side of the world and meet[ing] to discuss things with your colleagues,” which in actuality translated to “all these scholars converging from all over the world and meeting in the . . . [p]ub and making arrangements to go jogging” (10).

Emerging, in part, from Japanese management practices at firms like Toyota, Total Quality Management, as outlined by W. Edward Deming, begins from the premise that “quality is achieved by improvement of the process” and so uses intense surveillance and statistical analyses of production processes to reduce errors and waste that limit output and value (12).

Tim Spurgin suggests that “the golden age of the Times Magazine academic-megastar profiles was the period from 1986 to about 1994” (228).

In a less approving register, Toril Moi skewers this phenomenon in her putdown of Helene Cixous in Sexual/Textual Politics, quipping of her ermine coat: “[e]rmine as emancipation: it is odd that the women of the Third World have been so ludicrously slow to take up Cixous’ sartorial strategy” (124).

As Williams notes in his “The Great Stratification,” this mirrors the fate of the professions more broadly, as “[t]he idea of the professional usually evokes a generic image . . . but now we have a much more variegated system of alpha and beta practitioners. And rather than the ideal of being independent and roughly equivalent to their peers, most professionals now work in hierarchical bureaucratic structures” (find page number)

cxviii Caesar’s infamous essay “On Teaching at a Second-Rate University,” originally appearing in the South Atlantic Quarterly, describes the situation of faculty at a university that “has no reputation at all” and that, for lack of any available language or frame of reference, is described and understood solely in terms of first-rate institutions, despite their fundamental incompatibility (450).

The resonances with the Grail mythology throughout Small World, as Kingfisher (the Fisher King) is restored to his position as the undisputed leader of literary criticism and overcomes his long struggle with impotence at the novel’s close, have been thoroughly discussed by critics. See, for example Rüdiger Ahrens’ “Satirical Norm and Narrative Technique in the Modern University Novel: David Lodge’s Changing Places and Small World” and Beatrice Seligardi’s “Retracing the Dynamics of ‘University Fiction’: Formula and Hybridization in David Lodge’s ‘Campus Trilogy.’”

Stephan Schryer suggests that the novel is “an academic novel without academic politics,” unlike earlier examples of the genre like The Groves of Academe, A New Life, or Pnin, in which “ivory tower academia was a world apart, an enclosed and self-referential system” (177, 175).

Ballard’s *Crash,* and Don DeLillo’s *White Noise,* and Peter Knight’s “DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity” in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo.*

cxvi As Schryer notes in his discussion of *White Noise,* in its depiction of a university “too open to its cultural outside . . . [the novel] marks a fundamental shift within the tradition of campus fiction” (175). For a discussion of the history of the new academic novel and its characteristics, see the Introduction, X-X.

cxvii As Randall Fuller notes, *White Noise* “is in many ways a compendium of cultural studies approaches,” wherein “the techniques and insights of cultural studies help DeLillo offer a nuance analysis and interpretation of contemporary American culture” despite the novel’s satirical takes on the discipline’s objects and methodology (19-20).

cxviii For a detailed exploration of this concept, see Berardi’s *The Soul at Work,* especially 74-105.

cxix See also Everett C. Hughes’ “Professions,” Bernard Barber’s “Some Problems in the Sociology of the Professions,” Andrew Abbott’s “Status and Status Strain in the Professions,” Eliot Freidson’s “The Reorganization of the Professions by Regulation,” Michael D. Bayles’ “Professional Power and Self-Regulation,” and Mark S. Frankel’s “Professional Codes: Why, How, and with What Impact?” for discussions of the traditional features of the professions.

cxx For a useful synopsis of this project, see Stuart Hall’s “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities.”

cxxi Indeed, the *Wall Street Journal* attempted to drum up parental concern about the teaching of popular culture as a legitimate subject on college campuses. See Eugene Carlson’s “That Tuition Check May Pay for a Course about Rock ‘n’ Roll” and Philip Chalk’s “Tales from the College Reading Room” for examples of this kind of article.

cxxii At public, four-year institutions, tuition and fees also rose by 25.5% between 1980-81 and 1985-86 from $2,312.64 to $2,903.24 in constant 2015 dollars, and had risen by 47.1% by decade’s end to $3,402.34 (Snyder 2013).

cxxiii Tuition and fees of $14,000 would be equivalent to just under $31,000 in constant 2015 dollars, about average for such an institution in 2015 according to the NCES.

cxxiv Roger Kimball makes just such a move in criticizing the scholarship of David Halperin in a report on the 1992 MLA Convention. Describing Halperin’s scholarship as “grotesque,” Kimball claims that much of what “Prof. Halperin had to say about sex that afternoon cannot be printed in a family newspaper” (“Heterotextuality” A6). Kimball concludes by “wonder[ing] if the parents of MIT students think they are getting value for their money” given that “[t]uition at MIT is $18,000 a year” and Halperin’s “students at MIT regularly receive his unedited reflections on this and other subjects in his classes” (“Heterotextuality” A6).

cxxv See, for example, Charles Sykes’ *ProfScam* (1987), which defines this scam as (in part) a dereliction of teaching duties *en masse* by faculty in favour of arcane research, leaving the teaching to “an ill-trained, ill-paid, and bitter academic underclass” (5). What teaching is done by the actual faculty, he claims, centres on this research rather than the expected, traditional, and useful curricula of days gone by (Sykes 5). Kimball and D’Souza would make similar claims in their *Tenured Radicals* (1990) and *Illicit Education* (1991), respectively. See also the rebuttal offered to these claims by Cary Nelson and Bérubé in their introduction to *Higher Education Under Fire* (1995), in which they point out that “to fuel general indignation at cushy faculty working conditions, these complaints begin by citing teaching loads of one or two courses per year, which are typical of the experimental sciences but not of the humanities, social sciences, or nonexperimental sciences (like math), whose faculty at research universities generally teach at least four courses a year. All too often, the indignation generated by teaching loads in the experimental sciences is then transferred to (if not indeed blamed on) research produced in the humanities . . . This ignorance then extends legislators, parents, and alumni, very few of whom are informed about discipline-based teaching loads” (10).

cxxvi By populist anti-theory, I mean something like Hilton Kramer denouncing deconstruction’s nihilism and affording its popularity “a central place in the current educational debacle” in the *Wall Street Journal,* counting primarily on the force of his outrage and the apparent lack of common sense that characterizes deconstructive approaches to cultural analysis to carry his argument (Kramer “de Man” A7). Bennett, Bloom, Hirsch, Kimball, D’Souza, and Richard Bernstein would all fall under this heading in their books and reportage.

cxxvii The number of anti-theory publications is vast. The most complete overview can be found in Daphne Patai and William H. Corral’s anthology *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent.* Other useful sources on anti-theory include David Lehman’s *Signs of the Times,* John M. Ellis’ *Literature Lost,* and the collection *What’s Happened to the Humanities?*, edited by Alvin Kernan. Though not necessarily anti-theory writings, the critical accounts of theory provided by William E. Cain’s *The Crisis of Criticism,* Bové’s *Intellectuals in Power,* and James J.
Sosnoski’s *Token Professionals and Master Critics* are useful as a way to understand the concerns of anti-theory and its manifestations on the left.

cxxxii John L’Heureux’s *The Handmaid of Desire* (1996) follows a similar plot, with similar consequences, and is in some ways even more blunt about the priority of institutional politics over actual intellectual concerns in the battles between theorists and traditionalists, but it less successfully suggests the shape of populist anti-theory.


cxxxv For an overview of this development, see Jeffrey Williams’ “The New Belletrism,” Scott Heller’s “Experience and Expertise Meet in New Brand of Scholarship” in the May 6, 1992 edition of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and (in a slightly more sarcastic register) Adam Begley’s “The I’s Have It: Duke’s ‘Moi’ Critics Expose Themselves” for *Lingua Franca*.

cxxxvi Russell Jacoby makes just this argument, maintaining that where previously English Studies’ “importance reside[d] partly in . . . [its] openness to an educated reader,” the language of theory represented a misplaced attempt by critics “to yoke their endeavours more closely to science” and justify the seriousness of their work through a similarly forbidding technical language (Jacoby 166-167). However, this approach more commonly has the effect of “pulling rank, [and] showing the unaccredited to the door” (Jacoby 167).

cxxxvii The language they use of a justified exercise of authority and a necessary corrective or set of directives being applied to teaching and scholarship mirrors that of some academostars during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in a mini-profile included in a report on the 1991 MLA conference, Andrew Ross claimed “I teach in the Ivy League in order to have direct access to the minds of the children of the ruling class” (Matthews 58).

cxxxviii Edson’s charge here is slightly unfair, in that many theorists were also reputed to be excellent, charismatic teachers, including Derrida. In its glowing obituary for de Man, for example, the *New York Times* foregrounded his success as a teacher above all else. Former students described his classes as “at once exhilarating and exhausting,” and “his reputation as a teacher grew, to the point where it was his name on a course, not the subject, that became the draw” (Chira 26).

cxxxix A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) and J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) are probably more prominent than *Straight Man* in a global perspective, having won the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1990 and 1999, respectively, and *Disgrace*’s protagonist even shares some of the characteristics of the faculty under discussion here, but few other American academic novels can match the name recognition of *Moo* and *Straight Man*.

**cxl** The “Golden Age” encompasses the first part of the postwar period, from roughly 1945-1975, though there is some debate about its end point. See John R. Thelin’s *A History of Higher Education*, especially Chapter 7 “Gilt by Association: Higher Education’s ‘Golden Age,’ 1945-1970,” for a discussion of this designation.

cxlii On concerns about outsourcing as a threat to both skilled and unskilled American labour, see Steven E. Prokesch’s “U.S. Companies Weed Out Many Operations,” John Holusha’s “Job Security at Top of U.A.W. Agenda,” the editorial “Outsourcing to the Hilt,” and Keith Bradsher’s “Skilled Workers Watch their Jobs Migrate Overseas” and “Need to Cut Costs? Order Out” for the *New York Times*.


cxliv As Kevin Carey points out, at public institutions the combination of increasing in-state tuition and recruiting of out-of-state students results in “the creeping privatization of elite public universities that have historically provided an accessible route to jobs in academia, business and government. One of the most important paths to upward mobility, open on a meritocratic basis to people from all economic classes, is narrowing” (A3).

cxlv There is perhaps no better sign of this than the rush to change from a college to a university, which offers the chance “to improve [the school’s] competitive position vis-à-vis neighboring institutions with similar course
offerings that already call themselves universities” and to lobby for “donors and corporations [who] will give money and grants more readily to a university than to a college” (Lively A33).

cxiv On this new referent, see Jeffrey J. Williams’ “The Innovation Agenda” for Inside Higher Ed, and “Innovation for What? The Politics of Inequality in Higher Education” for Dissent.

cxlv See Donoghue’s The Last Professors, especially chapter 5 “Prestige and Prestige Envy,” for a fuller account of the system of university rankings and the workings of prestige envy among institutions and administrators.

cxvi Coverage of recent cases of ranking manipulation specific to the U.S. News & World Report rankings can be found in Richard Pérez-Peña and Daniel E. Slotnik’s “Gaming the College Rankings,” Scott Jaschik’s “Can You Verify That?,” and Doug Lederman’s “‘Manipulating,’ Er, Influencing ‘U.S. News.’”

cxviii For example, in addition to its “Best 379 Colleges” list, the 2015 edition of the Princeton Review also offers 8 other “Best” lists, 18 lists based on “academics/administration,” 6 lists based on “demographics,” 8 lists based on “extracurriculars,” 4 lists based on “politics,” 10 lists based on “quality of life,” 5 lists based on “schools by type,” 7 lists based on “social scene,” and 4 lists based on “town life.”

cxix This attitude continues to hold true today, especially at research universities where “[f]aculty members . . . work for their disciplines. If you want to advance in your career, your stature within your discipline is far more determinative than your status within your university. A faculty member at a research university will self-identify by discipline, not by university: ‘I’m an economist,’ not ‘I work for the University of Alabama’” (Lemann).

c Richard Chait, professor of education at Harvard, claims that “the full-time, tenured faculty member is about as representative of higher education today as Ozzie and Harriet are of American society” (Berger D21).

c In a profile for the New York Times of several academic novels published at the end of the twentieth and start of the twenty-first centuries, including The Human Stain and Moo, Sarah Boxer advances a similar argument, wondering about their “bitterness” as they “stake[] out rougher territory, something more tragic” (B9).

ciii In a negative review of the novel for the Washington Post, Jonathan Yardley criticizes Moo’s move away from satire in the tradition of Amis, Lodge, and Bradbury, placing the novel “in the tradition of The Groves of Academe and, most particularly, Pictures from an Institution” but maintaining that it fails to live up to these earlier, classic examples because Smiley “lacks malice” to make her targets feel any sort of sting (“Wallowing” X3).

cxii Gene I. Maeroff, for example, noted in 1985 that “[a]fter a decade of so little growth on college faculties that newly minted Ph.D.’s ended up driving taxis and clerking in bookstores, an era of expansion is approaching,” though he tempered his optimism by warning that those “intending to become professors will discover that the profession they enter will differ from the stable, ivy-towered world of their predecessors. Not only will many of them find the former promise of guaranteed lifetime positions missing, but the terms and conditions attached to their employment will also give a new meaning to what it means to be a faculty member” (“Changing World” ES1). Similarly, in 1986 Lester Jackson decried claims of an impending shortage, arguing that “reincarnations of bureaucrats past, carrying armloads of dollars, are eager to lead a new generation of talent down the garden path of tragic waste and exploitation” (30).

cxiv As a 1987 profile of Kansas State University in the Wall Street Journal makes clear, many land grant schools were demonstrating similar ambitions, providing an academic home for “something far more complex than the ‘hip boots and hog jowls’ stereotype a spokesman fears outsiders may conjure up. In fact, you can find almost anything here, from an entomologist who serves fried insects—tasty, he says—to a geologist busily mapping Ganymede, Jupiter’s largest moon” (Farney 1). The results were not always met with approval, though, as institutions like Kansas State were held to be “adjuncts to agribusiness corporations” that “[we]re too wrapped up in high-tech, high-production agriculture to worry much about smaller, marginal farmers struggling to hang on” (Farney 1).

c The cost of tuition at public schools has increased a great deal, though not quite to the extent of private institutions. In 1964-65, in-state tuition and fees for a four-year, public university averaged $2,287.34 in constant 2015 dollars, but by 1989-90 averaged $3,904.98 in constant 2015 dollars, a 70.7% increase. For comparison, four-year, private universities’ average in-state tuition and fees increased by 99.5% (from $9,955.31 to $19,856.89 in constant 2015 dollars) over the same period (Simon and Grant 1971; Snyder 1995). This gap is decreasing, though, as in-state tuition discounts are reduced or disappear and public colleges and universities focus on recruiting out-of-state students who pay a higher tuition than in-state students (Carey A3). In 2015, average in-state tuition and fees at 4-year, public institutions was $8,543, a 118.8% increase over 1989-90, though out-of-state tuition and fees was $23,523. Conversely, average tuition and fees at 4-year, private institutions was $26,740, a 34.7% increase over 1989-90.


The public’s belief about the university’s finances reflects what Newfield calls the “tuition trap,” in which an increased reliance on tuition dollars and private sources of funding “erode[s] support for the public, ‘general fund’ base for public higher education” (Unmaking 180). By raising tuition, a school “implies it does not actually depend on public funding, since it has the private resource of higher tuition at its fingertips” and so contributes to support for further reduction of public funding for higher education (Newfield Unmaking 182).

In general, it is more accurate to describe academia since the early 1990s as suffering from “‘neoliberal bias,’ dispensing with the liberal policies of the post-World War II years, when higher education flourished under the auspices of strong state and federal support” in favour of the stance that “public services should be privatized and put on a market basis” (Williams “Liberal Bias”). By left melancholy, Brown means a crisis on the left in which “we suffer with the sense of not only a lost movement but a lost historical moment; not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence, but a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits” (22). As a result, the left becomes a conservative force, “more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure” (Brown 26).

This practice continues to occur with research funded through corporations, though perhaps not quite to these extremes. In “BP, Corporate R&D, and the University,” Russ Lea relates how BP approached faculty members at the University of South Alabama following the Gulf Coast oil spill in 2010, but the contracts for consulting work “clearly stated that the faculty member could continue to do his or her research—as long as it did not conflict with the work conducted for BP,” with the definition of what would constitute a conflict kept deliberately nebulous (20). At the same time, the BP contracts attempted to enforce a three-year publication ban on the research the faculty members did, ensuring that “any new scientific findings that could potentially help the Gulf would be ‘locked up’” (Lea 21).

For example, Allen Lee Sessoms, president of Queens College in New York, asserted in 1997 profile, that “private fund raising is the only way to assure continued high quality. The state is not going to restore all the money it has cut, no matter what faculty members want to think” (Strosnider “Public-College” A33). Facing a serious budget crisis, Sessoms “suggest[ed] mining two resources that his college’s fund raisers have historically ignored: the alumni and New York corporations” (Strosnider “Public-College” A31).

Martin’s proposal touches on a sensitive spot for public institutions of higher education, as spending of physical plant operations and general maintenance was on a downward trend. In 1980-81, plant operations and maintenance had accounted for 8.7% of total expenditures, but by 1990-91 they accounted for just 7.2% and by 2000-01 they would account for just 6.4% of expenditures (Snyder 2003). Donald Kennedy traces this to the end of the Cold War and a dramatic decline in federal support for research, as “support for buildings and major instrumentation was drastically curtailed in order to conserve funding for direct program support” (130). As a result, American higher education faced a “gradually developing, and now chronic, deterioration of institutional infrastructure” at the dawn of the 1990s (Kennedy 130). A donor like Martin, with a vested interest in maintaining this infrastructure looks like a solution to a potentially intractable problem.

These cutbacks are fairly typical of austerity programs in higher education. In a 1976 profile of SUNY-Stony Brook that discusses austerity measures there, Ari L. Goldman notes that “office supplies are harder to come by these days and some teachers have had to buy their own stencils and paper. Some graduate students who teach have been selling for a nickel each the mimeographed sheets of supplemental reading that they once passed out free to their classes” (LI15).
Discussing one of the most influential forms of contemporary university management, Robert Birnbaum’s “cybernetic systems” model, Bousquet notes the importance to administrators of the “strategic deployment of faculty committees and faculty institution as the ‘garbage cans’ of governance” (How 74). For Birnbaum, such garbage cans undermine faculty power by virtue of being “highly visible . . . confer[ring] status on those participating” while remaining “instrumentally unimportant to the institution” (qtd in Bousquet How 74).

See 3-10 in Donoghue’s The Last Professors for an overview of such arguments by Andrew Carnegie, Clarence F. Birdseye, and Frederick Winslow Taylor.

In Pennsylvania, enrollment at public institutions of higher education declined by 1.2% between 1990 and 2000, with most of the decline coming in the middle of the decade, and state appropriations fell from accounting for 29.7% of all funding for public colleges and university in 1985-86 to 22.1% in 1995-96 (Snyder 1988, 2013). This mirrored more general trends across the United States. Though between 1986-1991 the enrollment rate for public colleges and universities (16.4%) was at its highest level since 1971-76, this was bracketed by the two lowest enrollment growth rates of the postwar period for public institutions: 0.7% between 1981-86 and -1.7% between 1991-96 (Snyder 2012). Across public higher education, faculty growth was up between 1991-97, but this was only superficially good news: of the 113,652 new faculty positions at public institutions during this time, 97,277 (or 85.6%) were part-time (Snyder 2012).

Profiles of the University of Phoenix and Strayer University, for example, reveal just how big the business of for-profit education was by the mid-1990s. In 1997, the Apollo Group, parent company of the University of Phoenix, reported a profit of $21.4 million, achieved in part by focusing on a specific niche market—“working-adult students”—and also by ruthlessly cutting costs associated with traditional schools by relying on “an army of 4,500 adjunct faculty members” and redefining the understanding of a campus: “there are no quadrangles, no dormitories, no ivy-covered library. On the campus here, classes are held in a pair of glass-and-red-brick office buildings. The library consists entirely of journals and articles accessible on-line—no books” (Strosnider “Aggressive” A32). Strayer followed a similar path—targeting adults who work full-time but who want to change careers or update their credentials—to financial success, with the price of its shares more than quadrupling between 1996 and 2001, from $10 to $46, and its new financial executives describing opening a new campus as “‘a great business . . . [with] positive cash flow, and it’s not capital intensive’” (Knight E1).

These changes were particularly notable in terms of the number of for-profit schools opening during the 1990s. While they accounted for less than 2% of all institutions of higher education in 1976-77, for-profits represented almost 10% of all institutions in 1990-91 and almost 19% in 2000-01, as the number of for-profits more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 (Snyder 2012).

This path matches that of many universities trumpeted as examples of the new university of the 1990s that would succeed in the globalized education marketplace by focusing on career and continuing education for older students. Regis University, for example, was hailed on the front page of the Wall Street Journal for embracing the idea of education as a service industry, using focus groups and consultation with local businesses to revamp the curriculum, and “start[ing] a franchising business, offering its successful adult-education program to other schools in the hope of creating significant new revenue streams” (Charlier A1). Several other schools, like Eckerd College, were similarly praised for their entrepreneurial initiatives. Eckerd, part of “the vanguard of the movement to attract nontraditional students,” won recognition for its use of an on-campus retirement home and for-profit business and leadership classes to “subsidize its core liberal-arts educational operations” (Bulkeley B1).

According to research by David H. Autor and David Dorn, “[t]hough among the least educated and lowest paid categories of employment, the share of U.S. labor hours in service occupations grew by 30 percent between 1980 and 2005 after having been flat or declining in the three prior decades” (1555). This shift would already be well underway by the time of Straight Man’s publication, as “[a]fter a contraction of employment in both service and non-service occupations in the 1970s, employment in service occupations rose consistently and with growing velocity in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s” (Autor and Dorn 1558).

On the lack of actual college-level education at for-profits, see Brenna Ryan’s “Learner’s and a Teacher, For Profit” in Radical Teacher, Hollister K. Petreaus’ “For-Profit Colleges, Vulnerable G.I.’s” in the New York Times, and Christopher R. Beha’s “Leveling the Field; What I Learned From For-Profit Education” in Harper’s.

In a profile of Californian community colleges from 1977, Emily Abel complains that “the institutions that claim to function as the democratizing agents in higher education are in fact run like profit-oriented business: they maintain a small staff of full-time workers and, when business demands increase, hire supplementary part-time workers who can be paid at a lower rate and who can be dismissed at will” (qtd. in Ohmann “College” 7-8).

As Milton Friedman wrote, defining the difference between neoliberalism and the classical economic liberalism of the nineteenth century, “in place of the nineteenth century understanding that laissez-faire” would best direct
society and individual activities, “neoliberalism proposes that it is competition that will lead the way” (qtd in Peck 3).

c lxix In their analysis of neoliberalism, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval identify its novel feature as “the molding whereby individuals are rendered more capable of tolerating the new conditions created for them—and this even though they help to make these conditions increasingly harsh and abiding through their own conduct . . . by producing ‘enterprising subjects’ who in turn will reproduce, and reinforce competitive relations between themselves” (“New Way”).

c lxvi See, for example, Ann Carrns’ article on “The Essential T.A.” for the New York Times, which features advice for potential graduate students on “[g]etting on the T.A. track”—the pun on tenure track clearly fully intended (A10).

c lxv The aging of tenured faculty, already a problem, has increased since the early 1990s, when the law mandating retirement at 70 was repealed. Audrey Williams June points out that “the number of professors ages 65 and up has more than doubled between 2000 and 2011” and higher education has seen an indefinite delaying of the “impending mass exodus of baby-boomer professors” that has been forecast since the 1990s (“Graying”).

c lxvii As Keith Hoeller points out, national unions that ostensibly work to guarantee faculty rights are “completely dominated by full-time faculty, who in most cases are [part-time faculty members] immediate supervisors” (WK16). As a result, “[t]he conflict of interest in having supervisors collectively bargain for their employees is so great that neither new leadership nor a new focus on part-time issues will solve these problems. No one can better represent part-timers than the part-timers themselves;” hence the rise of adjunct and part-time faculty unions (Hoeller WK16).

c lxvi On the exclusion of part-time faculty from governance structures, see Joe Berry and Elizabeth Hoffman’s “Including Contingent Faculty in Governance.”

c lxix One of the main components of this new business climate was the “shareholder’s revolt” of 1980s, when “[f]inance theorists increasingly demanded that firms dump 1970s-style social goals, union-style employee protections, and anything else that distracted them from the maximization of profit and shareholder wealth” (Newfield Unmaking 127).

c lxix Indeed, in most respects, these decisions seem to have opened up those most worried about college costs to increasingly extreme financial exploitation from predatory student loan companies that operate on a for-profit basis within a larger debt economy centred to neoliberalism.

c lxxi In early June, 2012, Duquesne University had suggested it would “work[] amicably . . . ‘with the McAnulty part-time adjuncts should they choose to unionize’” (Basu “Steeling”). By mid-June, though, Duquesne had changed course, contesting the adjuncts’ attempts to unionize on the grounds that it violated the school’s Catholic identity by opening it up to policies (such as relate to reproductive rights and health insurance) contrary to its “‘Catholic identity [which] is at the core of who we are and everything we do as an institution’” (Basu “Too Catholic”). For more coverage of Duquesne’s response to unionization efforts prior to the Vojtko issue, see Kaustuv Basu’s “Steeling for Battle” and “Too Catholic to Unionize?” for Inside Higher Ed, Mark Oppenheimer’s “For Duquesne Professors, a Union Fight That Transcends Religion,” Bill Schackner’s “NLRB approves Duquesne University union election” and “Colleges are hiring more adjunct professors” in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Rebecca Burns’ “University Tries to Nip Professors’ Union in the Bud,” and the Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice June 18, 2012 statement of support for Duquesne’s adjuncts. For responses to Kovalik’s initial piece on Vojtko, see Lindsay Ellis’ “An Adjunct’s Death Becomes a Rallying Cry for Many in Academe” for the Chronicle of Higher Education, Colleen Flaherty’s “#iammargaretmary” for Inside Higher Education, Rick Perlstein’s “An Adjunct Tragedy” for The Nation, Claudio Sanchez’s “The Sad Death of an Adjunct Professor Sparks a Labor Debate” for NPR, and L. V. Anderson’s “Death of a Professor” for Slate. The Chronicle of Higher Education would name Vojtko one of its newsmakers for 2013, describing her story as “a larger-than-life symbol of the struggles faced by faculty members who try to eke out a living by teaching off the tenure track” (June “Symbol”).

c lxxi Cerasoli, an adjunct professor of Spanish and Italian at Mercy Community College and Nassau Community College, “spend[s] some nights sleeping in her car, shower[s] at college athletic centers and appl[i]es for food stamps and other government benefits” (Kilgannon MB4). her plight was covered by the New York Times in Corey Kilgannon’s “Without Tenure or a Home,” PBS in Simone Pathe’s “Homeless Professor Protests Conditions of Adjuncts,” and The Atlantic in Elizabeth Segrand’s “The Adjunct Revolt: How Poor Professors Are Fighting Back.”

York Times and John E. Cooney’s “The Gypsy Scholars” and R. Taeza Pierce’s “‘Gypsy’ Faculty Stirs Debate at U.S. Colleges” for the Wall Street Journal. For examples of such coverage in the 1990s, see Abby Goodnough’s “Army of Adjuncts Seeks to Organize on State College Campuses” and Joseph Berger’s “After Her Ph.D., the Scavenger’s Life” in the New York Times; Tony Horwitz’s front-page article “Young Professors Find Life in Academia Isn’t What It Used To Be” in the Wall Street Journal; the editorial “Adjunct Faculty: Overworked, Underpaid” in the Washington Post; Ron Grossman and Charles Leroux’s “Part-Timers Are the Cheap Labor of U.S. Colleges,” Julie Deardorff’s “Adjunct Professors Decry 2nd Class Pay,” and Tammie Bob’s “Degrees of Difficulty” in the Chicago Tribune; and Beth Daley’s “Colleges Using Freeway Faculty to Hold Down Costs” in the Boston Globe.

cxci See, for example, Stevens, Fiske’s “Onomastics’ Big Names at Meeting on Language,” the editorial “Scholars Seeking Jobs in Languages,” and Matthews for the New York Times.

cxcii Will’s columns “The Education Bubble” and “PhD Plenty” explicitly address the situation, though they badly misread its consequences. Despite mentioning that “There are a million PhDs without academic employment, and some are in academia only as ‘freeway flyers,’ driving between adjunct appointments on several campuses, paid perhaps $1,000 per course, with no benefits or faculty prerogatives,” Will can only conclude that, in an example of “the entitlement mentality,” complaints about academic employment conditions are only resentment, the attitude of children who “become quite cross when urged to consider alternatives to academic employment” (C7; B7).

cxxiii The MLA issued its “Final Report of the Committee on Professional Employment” in 1997 and had already issued a “Statement on the Use of Part-Time and Full-Time Adjunct Faculty Members” in 1994. Similarly, the NCTE issued a “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” in 1989, which covered issues related to the use and employment of part-time faculty. The American Historical Association’s “Guidelines for the Employment of Part-Time and Temporary Faculty in History” was approved and issued in 1998. The American Philosophical Association’s “Statement on Non-Tenure Track Faculty,” issued in 1994, is absurdly limited, but its “Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Priorities and Problems of the APA” from 1999 covers this issue in greater depth.

cxxiv Anya Kamenetz’s “Wanted: Really Smart Suckers” in the Village Voice, for example, covered the increasing reliance on adjunct labour and their poor working conditions in the context of graduate student strikes and provided a rundown of early adjunct “celebrities” like the Invisible Adjunct.

cxxv An overview of these situations in academic fiction of the first part of the twentieth century, see Steffen’s dissertation Academic Labor in an Age of Change: Criticism of the U.S. University, 1890-1930.

cxxvi In addition to these adjunct novels, there exists a parallel genre of what might be called “alt-ac novels,” including Hynes’ Kings of Infinite Space (2004) and Next (2010) and John McNally’s After the Workshop (2010). For more on these novels, see the conclusion.

cxxviii As Williams has pointed out, in its various guises the “life of the mind” is almost always a convenient fiction, as “there is frequently a disparity between the image of professionalism that we project to validate our work and the actual work that most of us do in universities,” particularly those at “less than elite universities” (“Life” 130).

cxxix Or, as George Levine infamously put it, “when I got my degree from the University of Minnesota, almost all my colleagues, no matter how dumb they were, got at least three job offers” (43).

cxxx As Desrochers and Kirshstein point out, “[u]nlke many other sectors of the economy hit hard by the 2008 recession, higher education continued to add new workers” (4). As opposed to the contraction that characterised much of the 1980s and 1990s, “[t]otal employment [in higher education] rose by more than 25 percent between 2000 and 2012, expanding faster than the previous decade (16 percent)” (Desrochers and Kirshstein 4).


On this phenomenon and the continued emergence of a contingent economy in the 1990s, see Peter T. Kilborn’s “New Jobs Lack the Old Security In a Time of ‘Disposable Workers,’” John Rather’s “Rail Strike Underlines
Indeed, Harraway’s celebrated “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Twenty-First Century” has at its core a cogent theorizing of feminized labour in relation to the expansion in telecommunications technology seen during the last third of the twentieth century.


Crary describes this as an “environment that has the semblance of a social world, but it is actually a non-social model of machinic performance and a suspension of living” (9).

Hayek himself, in his initial address to the Mont Pélérin Society, the neoliberal think tank that united the various strands of neoliberalism in a collective attempt to advance their influence on political, economic, and social policy during the middle part of the twentieth century, noted that neoliberalism is “a political philosophy” and as such “can never be based exclusively on economics, or expressed mainly in economic terms,” despite its major influence in economic circles (qtd. in Mirowski 434).

During this same period, growth in administrative and managerial positions has been almost exclusively through full-time positions. This is partially due to the contemporary capitalism’s increased need for bureaucracy, despite its rhetoric of efficiency, as “new kinds of bureaucracy—aims and objectives, ‘outcomes,’ ‘mission statements’—have proliferated . . . [and] the drive to assess the performance of workers and to measure forms of labor which, by their nature, are resistant to quantification, has inevitably required additional layers of management and bureaucracy” (Fisher 40, 42).

One possible factor in this sudden increase in enrollment with for-profits is a change in the number granting degrees as opposed to simply certificates. This shift has been significant, as “only 10 percent of the institutions offered associate, bachelor’s, or professional degrees in 1990, [but] half do so today. Further, more than 90 percent of students at for-profit institutions are now enrolled in degree programs” (Wilson).

Indeed, since funding for the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty stopped in 2003, “the large and growing majority employed in contingent positions is rendered largely invisible, both as individuals on the campuses where they work and collectively in the ongoing policy discussions of higher education” (CAW 1).

For example, Eugene Arden’s 1989 article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* “How to Help Adjunct Professors, Academe’s Invisible People” explicitly identifies them as such.

*Maddie’s Tale* is Hynes’ second foray into academe following his story collection *Publish and Perish* (1997), whose first story “Queen of the Jungle” also focused on a part-time faculty member facing an ignominious end to his career,

The value of this latter point becomes clear in Kali Tal’s “‘It’s a Beastly Rough Crowd I Run With’: Theory and the ‘New University,’” in which she discusses her dismissal from an “experimental nontenure college of the University of Arizona” (95). Noting that prior to her dismissal “[t]here had, in fact, been no warning. Neither the provost . . . nor the director of the academic house within which I worked had ever given me either oral or written notice that there was a problem with the performance of my duties,” Tal discovers that the provost “was not required to provide a reason for [her] nonrenewal,” a fact she was unaware of because she had “never seen the terms and conditions under which I was hired” (95). Though faculty at this college had “been promised an opportunity to take part in drafting the terms and conditions of faculty employment . . . somehow neither the opportunity nor the terms ever actually materialized” (96).

This point is not restricted to faculty members. It is increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to work one’s way through college: where, in the 1960s, “a student could work fifteen hours a week at minimum wage during school and forty hours during the summer and pay his or her public university education . . . Now, one would have to work fifty two hours a week all year long” (Williams “Pedagogy 124-25). As a result, most students are working hours that are not conducive to having time and energy for intellectual work, as “[a]bout 50 percent of all undergraduates work an average of twenty-five hours per week. The remaining 30 percent work full-time, more than full-time, or at multiple jobs approximating the equivalent of full-time, averaging thirty-nine hours a week” (Bousquet *How 150*).

Jeanne Marie Rose, in her article “Managing Writing: Composition in the Academic Novel,” points out that “[f]or many aspiring professional, a career in composition still represents a fate worse than leaving the profession” because of “composition’s relationship to contingent labor” (56-57). At the same time, this “image . . . denies composition status as a research discipline,” lacking “its own subject matter or pedagogical goals” (Rose 60, 61).
In 2001, males accounted for almost 60% of all faculty positions, whites for roughly 85% of all faculty positions (not counting those held by non-resident aliens or those who failed to disclose their race/ethnicity, who accounted for 6.6% of all faculty positions), and white males for almost 60% of all faculty positions held by whites (Snyder 2003).

For a detailed discussion of this development, see Laurence R. Veysey’s *The Emergence of the American University*, especially 158-79.

As the Invisible Adjunct persuasively argues, the idea of directly transferable skills—or a ready supply of non-academic suitors for PhDs—is false and damaging: “[i]f you have the brains/talent/stubbornness or whatever” to get a PhD, “then you surely have the brains/talents/stubbornness or whatever to pursue any number of other careers in the big, wide world beyond the academy. . . . [A] more useful (and infinitely less painful) mode of preparation would involve skipping the academy altogether . . . and moving directly into the relevant nonacademic field” (“Ph.D. as Preparation”).

Housing has played an important role in coverage of the adjunct situation. For example, the most resonant part of Vojtko’s story when it was published proved to be the details of her winter spending nights working in a twenty-four hour restaurant and days sleeping in her office. The concept of a homeless professor seems wrong, like an oxymoron, but Vojtko seems lucky to have had the office to sleep in (until she was fired for doing just that)—Cerasoli slept in her car in part because none of her employers offered adjunct faculty office space. While homelessness is not typical for adjuncts, it extends beyond these sensational cases, with several adjuncts mentioning losing their homes or being perilously close to doing so in the *Just-In-Time Professor*.

In the decade between 1992 and 2003, the total number of female faculty members increased from 61.2% the number of male faculty members to 74% of male faculty members. However, total full-time female faculty members remained at 62.2% the number of their male peers (a significant increase from 1992), but total part-time female faculty members were almost equal in number (92.1%) of their male peers (Snyder 2013).

For example, in a surprisingly approving piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, for-profits are applauded for “mov[ing] quickly, adding new programs to match careers that are on the rise and getting rid of others that are on the decline . . . [while] [t]raditional campuses, by contrast, are run not only by administrators but by powerful faculty committees that must approve most academic changes—a process that can take months, if not years” (Wilson).

For a useful discussion of the role that “innovation” plays as a guiding concept in higher education planning and organization, as well as the initiatives for which it often serves as coded language, see Williams’ “The Innovation Agenda.”

As Williams argues, the university “has consistently negotiated with business, particularly from the late nineteenth century on, in the training it has offered its students, in the mission it has promised its constituents, in the practical use of the knowledge it has produced, and in the sources of its funding” (“Post-Welfare” 190).

Reviews in places like *Academe* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, appearing two or three years after the novel was published, consistently mention how the novel “continues to attract a following among adjuncts and full-time faculty members concerned about the state of the professoriate” (“Considering” Pannapacker).

Joseph A. Domino concurs, highlighting the novel’s indictment of “the grave socio-economic injustices of a corrupt academic system” without becoming “a preachy manifesto” (184). He concludes by noting that “the general public needs in on [the novel], for one, the parents paying skyrocketing tuition costs, because they should know where the money is going” (Domino 185).

The CAW survey contradicts this information, however. With a much larger sample size reporting, CAW notes that “[m]ost [adjuncts] do not fit the prevalent stereotype of the ‘freeway flyer’—the part-time faculty member piecing together a full-time load by teaching at multiple institutions . . . Part-time faculty members teaching multiple courses at multiple institutions constituted 22.1% of the part-time faculty members who reported on the courses they taught in fall 2010” (9).

Supplementing income with other, non-academic jobs is common, according to adjunct testimony for *The Just-In-Time Professor*. One adjunct recounted “s[elling] my plasma on Tuesdays and Thursdays,” and another “deliver[s] pizzas” in addition to teaching, though this adjunct worried that “I lose the respect of my students when they see me delivering pizzas!” (8, 15).

For a discussion of real world examples of such deals and their consequences, see Newfield’s *Unmaking the Public University* 241-45 and Washburn’s *University Inc.* 1-24.

This is one of the key pitches by which universities extract work from undergraduates: “give us, our vendors, and our employment 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” (Bousquet *How* 148).
The PMC refers to those “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations,” including professionals, managers, technicians, etc. (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 12).

Bouquet quotes statistics that reveal that “only 20 percent of undergraduates do not work at all. About 50 percent of all undergraduates work an average of twenty-five hours per week. The remaining 30 percent work full-time, more than full-time, or at multiple jobs approximating the equivalent of full-time, averaging thirty-nine hours a week” (How 150).

Purchasing established schools that are struggling financially and turning them into for-profits is common practice in the industry. It is regarded as a cost-cutting measure, as it allows the schools to “take over their regional accreditation,” essential for “attract[ing] students and . . . qualify[ing] for government loans” immediately, without enduring the lengthy and expensive accreditation process (Ohmann “College” 6).

According to Sallie Mae’s How America Pays for College reports, in 2011 approximately 44% of college students surveyed lived at home in order to save money on college. As of 2016, Sallie Mae reports 49% of college students surveyed lived at home for the same reason. This mirrors larger trends among 18-34 year olds, according to a 2016 Pew Research Center Report, as “for the first time in more than 130 years, adults ages 18 to 34 were slightly more likely to be living in their parents’ home than they were to be living with a spouse or partner in their own household” (Fry). Based on data from 2014, 32.1% of 18-34 year olds lived with their parents while 31.6% lived with a spouse or partner (Fry).

Coverage of this arms race describes modern campuses as “four-year getaway[s],” with particular attention paid to attractions like the University of Missouri’s “93,000-square-foot indoor beach club . . . replete with lazy river, whirlpools, waterfalls and waiters” (Newlon; B. McCarthy). See also Courtney Rubin’s “Making a Splash on Campus” for the New York Times and Kellie Woodhouse’s “Lazy Rivers and Student Debt” for Inside Higher Ed.

See, for examples, Adam Begley’s “The Decline of the Campus Novel” for Lingua Franca and J. Bottum’s “The End of the Academic Novel” for the Weekly Standard.

Benjamin De Mott’s “How to Write a College Novel,” for example, from 1962, despairs of the genre for its failure to “produce[] a believable prof” but sees the campus as a potentially useful setting for narratives that “yield a good deal in the way of human truth” if authors of academic novels could “believe[] in the possibility that complication can exist even on a campus . . . far enough to win out over the stereotypes” (245, 250). Similarly, John O. Lyons’ framing of the genre’s history as a failure to produce a “Fielding, Flaubert, [or] Tolstoy” indicates a similar desire for the academic novel to develop its serious side (xv).

On quit lit, or the subgenre of personal essay in which the author details his or her reasons for leaving academe, with considerable scorn for institutions of higher education and their backwards customs and policies which are held as constraining thought, creativity, etc., see Rebecca Schuman’s “‘I Quit Academia,’ An Important, Growing Subgenre of American Essays” for Slate, Sydni Dunn’s “Why So Many Academics Quit and Tell” for the Chronicle of Higher Education’s Vitae website, Colleen Flaherty’s “Public Good-byes” and John Warner’s “To ‘Quite Lit’ or Not To ‘Quit Lit.’ What Was the Question?” for Inside Higher Ed, Megan Garber’s “The Rise of ‘Quit Lit’” for the Atlantic, and James Nikopoulos’ “It’s Just a Job, Right?” for the Chronicle of Higher Education. See also, for an early analysis of the content of quit lit, the Vitae article “When We Talk About When We Talk About Quitting.” Quit lit is not exclusive to adjuncts—professors on the tenure track (and, in some cases, with tenure) and grad students are also contributing to the genre.

As with many such statements today, this is only half a joke. For example, a recent mathematical study suggested that larger vehicles carrying at least ten passengers who agreed to ride-sharing via services like Uber or Lyft could fulfill the majority of New York City’s transit needs. Somewhat predictably, when the website Mashable reported on this, readers were quick to point out that the study had described the function of a bus.

Fredric Jameson defines this as a form of pastiche that foregrounds the lack of a “unique private world and style to express” in contemporary culture, with modernism’s provocation to innovation (especially in terms of form) replaced by “a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (CT 7). This problem is connected to the collapse of historicity in postmodernism, in which the retreat to past forms denuded of their historical sense (replaced by the suggestion of an earlier time period and its cultural meaning) demonstrates an inability “to focus our own present, as though we had become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience” (Jameson CT 9).

See Newfield’s Unmaking the University, especially 92-106, for an overview of Meritocracy I, its history, and its conflict with Meritocracy II as a key factor in the culture wars.
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