THE IVORY SHTETL: THE UNIVERSITY AND THE POSTWAR JEWISH IMAGINATION

by

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The Ivory Shtetl: The University and the Postwar Jewish Imagination

Abstract

by

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This dissertation explores representations of university spaces in the work of several Jewish American artists and identifies an amalgamation of Arnoldian liberal humanism and Jewish American narrative art. Most critical accounts of Jewish American fiction identify the genre as a historical body of work that attempts to document the sociological reality of a particular ethnic experience. However, in the work of the Marx Brothers, Bernard Malamud, Lionel Trilling, Philip Roth, and the Coen Brothers, I identify an aesthetic value system that more closely resembles the cultural philosophy of Matthew Arnold than that of social realism. In the landscapes of these writers' and filmmakers' campus narratives, a battle between Arnoldian liberal humanism and the discursive machinery of political, social, and economic forces is waged. The artistic result of this conflict finds the artist weaving the ideologically driven, marginalizing discourses of politics and economics into the represented aesthetic, cultural object, thereby moving "Culture" from the margins back to the center in these educational landscapes.
Introduction

“How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies. Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.”

— Lamentations 1:1-3 (King James Version)

“And the eye travels down to Oxford’s towers.

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil’s book—
Come, let me read the oft-read tale again!
    The story of the Oxford scholar poor,
    Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,
    Who, tired of knocking at preferment’s door,
    One summer-morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the gipsy-lore,
    And roam’d the world with that wild brotherhood,
    And came, as most men deem’d, to little good,
    But came to Oxford and his friends no more.”


“Well I thought my razor was dull until I heard his speech. And that reminds me of a story that’s so dirty, I’m ashamed to think of it myself.”

— Groucho Marx
Perched outside the Cleveland Museum of Art, the imposing specter of Rodin’s *Thinker* stares solemnly down, as if pondering, not the Gates of Hell, but the fate of the city. This familiar nude, one of the last casts that Rodin himself supervised, is immediately recognizable. The furrowed brow, deeply set eyes, back ripped with muscle, and the huge hand upon which his head rests are all ingrained in Western culture. This particular cast of the famous statue however is unique. This thinker’s feet and the base he once sat upon are gone, and in their place, the statue fans out into the plume left by a bomb’s explosion.

On March 24, 1970, an explosive device was placed at the base of the statue, and its detonation, though aimed at the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, instead toppled Rodin’s masterwork from its pedestal, projecting the shrapnel of its bottom half into the night. The perpetrators of this act of political vandalism were never identified, though Cleveland Police suspected a local cell of the Weather Underground in the attack. Nonetheless, the museum faced a dilemma regarding how to proceed. Its three options were to “1) obtain and display a replacement cast; 2) repair the sculpture by welding on newly-cast sections to replace the areas that were damaged; 3) mount and display the damaged sculpture” (clevelandart.org). Ultimately, the museum chose the third option, “largely because it preserved what was left of Rodin’s original work and because the damaged sculpture would bear vivid witness to a period of political unrest in the United States during the Vietnam War” (clevelandart.org). By responding to the tragedy in the way it did, the museum chose to take Rodin’s timeless masterpiece out of its hallowed halls outside time and place and literally bring it outside, into history.
This act does not, however, diminish the cultural aura of *The Thinker*. The statue has not become simply an object of political propaganda. Instead, the museum’s action rescued Culture from its attempted obliteration. By resolutely restoring the statue to its previous position with the damage intact, the museum ultimately re-asserted its centrality to contemporary *culture*, not contemporary *politics*. The Weather Underground’s political agenda now ironically supports the cultural centrality of the object it tried to destroy. The political damage that initially overwhelmed and de-centered the statue, was subsumed into Rodin’s vision by this defiant act of representation, bringing the immediacies of counter-culture politics into the poet’s contemplation of Hell. In short, the museum’s strategy served to enrich the original cultural object, not to marginalize it. To *The Thinker*’s initial task of pondering Dante’s *Inferno* is added the duty to consider the postwar political violence that attempted to topple him.

The story of Cleveland’s *Thinker*, effectively encapsulates the concerns of this project. The chapters that follow explore how a particular body of fiction represents another cultural institution seemingly left in ruins by the social, economic, and political stresses of modernity, the University. As the Cleveland Museum of Art did with the Weather Underground’s violence against art, the writers in this study ultimately re-centralize culture by the very act of representing its supposed destruction. By incorporating the economic, political, and social forces that have eroded the centrality of liberal humanism into their representations of the modern university, writers like Bernard Malamud, Lionel Trilling, and Philip Roth have created a space of humanistic contemplation out of the “violence” that has obliterated those spaces. In short, and to use Matthew Arnold’s terms, the works I explore create “Culture” out of “Anarchy.”
Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century English poet and critic, best represents the liberal humanism at the center of this project. Arnold’s advocacy of a prominent role for what he termed “Culture” in the public and educational spheres mirrors the rhetorical stances of the works this dissertation will explore. In short, Arnold argued that detached, humanistic meditation upon art and culture had a public value that not only preserved the best of the past, but also provided moral and ethical guidance for a free, democratic society. Arnold resolutely defended this ideal against what he called “machinery,” which, for him, was what economic and political pragmatism ultimately represented – mere instruments without a higher purpose or moral guidance. For Arnold, the English preoccupation with politics, business (or even abstract notions of “freedom”) as ends in, and of, themselves ultimately signaled an intellectual and moral degeneration. Modes of study and contemplation detached from the immediacy of these machinations were, for Arnold, the solution to this moral dilemma. Arnold perhaps most famously articulates this ethical distance in his poem “Dover Beach,” which famously ends with the speaker observing how “ignorant armies clash by night” from a window on a “darkling plain,” safely removed from the endless fray.

The Jewish perspective of the works I explore is not a particularly religious one. Rather, it is situated in the social and intellectual milieu of the great Jewish American novelists of the postwar period. American letters of that era were famously dominated by figures like Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, Norman Mailer, and Joseph Heller, to name just a few. These writers energized American fiction with their specifically Jewish cultural perspective. This perspective was not simply religious, however. It was also informed by the linguistic influence of Yiddish and the social
influence of radical political activity. This blending of art, culture, and politics is perhaps best embodied by the New York Intellectuals, a group that included Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, Daniel Bell, and Nathan Glazer, and was associated with magazines like *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*. It is this culturally engaged Jewish experience that most closely resembles the Jewishness that interests me here.

The act of fusing Matthew Arnold and Jewish American fiction into a single literary partnership seems at first so counterintuitive it might be thought absurd. After all, it was Arnold who, in *Culture and Anarchy* drew stark lines between hellenism, which for him represented liberated, rational thought and appreciation of culture, and hebraism. For Arnold, the Jewish worldview envisioned culture exclusively through the lens of religion, making rational thought and genteel humanism impossible. This presumed trait manifested, for Arnold, in the Christian institutions of England as well, contributing to the disintegration of “Culture,” and thereby leading to the rise of intellectual “Anarchy.”

Arnold’s understanding of the Jewish intellect was, of course, derived from a deep misunderstanding of Jewish religious and literary traditions. An excellent piece of scholarship that illustrates the inadequacy of Arnold’s thinking on this matter is Ezra Cappell’s 2007 monograph *American Talmud: The Cultural Work of Jewish American Fiction*. By reading the fiction of Jewish writing, ranging from the modernist Henry Roth to the contemporary Rebecca Goldstein, through the lens of Talmudic religious traditions, Cappell argues that American Jewish writers have all along been contributing to Jewish rabbinical traditions of Biblical commentary. While Arnold might argue that this proves his point as it limits literary production to the boundaries imposed by religion, Cappell demonstrates through his analysis that just the opposite trajectory occurs. Jewish writers
are, in fact, applying their inherited cultural traditions to their full literary, critical, and cultural engagement with modernity. Cappell presents a model in which Jewish religious traditions work hand in hand with liberal humanistic endeavors. In other words, according to Cappell’s narrative, Jewish writers undertake precisely the kind of cultural activity that Arnold prizes, but they do so by infusing that activity with their particular cultural energies. Far from creating an insular space of intellectual activity, Jewish traditions fully merge with broader cultural activity and create an invigorated new space. The *American Talmud* is, in this way, a kind of conceptual model for the *Ivory Shtetl* that I argue for.

The collection of epigraphs above, in which Arnold is sandwiched between two wildly distinct Jewish texts, effectively encapsulates how what Joshua L. Miller calls a “Hebraic Americanist Arnoldianism” (264) works in this project. The allusion to the destroyed city mourned in the opening lines of Lamentations in the Hebrew Bible performs two functions. First, the lamentation serves as a metaphor for the classical university in ruins in the postwar period in America. This metaphor closely associates the quotation with Bill Readings’ important 1994 study *The University in Ruins*. Readings’ book, in many ways, initiated a long, ongoing conversation about the function of the university in contemporary society as well as the role of the humanities in the university. The analysis Readings provides of the transition from the classical university to what he calls the “post-historical” university establishes much of the framework through which I will explore the position of Arnoldian liberal humanism in the universities of this study. From that perspective, the lamentation’s focus on the city’s besieged state and the particulars of Jerusalem’s removal from her lofty seat should become familiar to this
project’s readers. There is a romantic notion of the city’s prominence that the term “widow” implies, and the manner with which Arnoldian ideals of liberal humanistic education manifests in the novels of this study reveals a similar romanticism. In addition, the observation that the ruined city has “become tributary” anticipates the economic forces that, according to Readings, have “ruined” the postwar American university.

On a literal level, the lamentation also anticipates the role that cities play in this project. The highly urbanized nature of the Jewish American worldview plays an important role in how the authors of this study represent campus spaces. As I will show in each chapter, the city, even in its absence as in the case of Malamud’s *A New Life*, is a kind of fountainhead for the intellectual life. Just as Jerusalem epitomized Hebrew identity for the Lamenter, Jewish identity in this study is strongly identified with large, urban areas, particularly New York.

The selection from Matthew Arnold’s “The Scholar Gypsy” also illustrates an important element of the fiction of this study. Sitting in a pastoral setting outside the ivory towers of Oxford, the poem’s narrator resolves to “read the oft-read tale again.” These lines centralize reading as not simply a pleasurable act, though that is certainly true, but also the act of entering a space in which to contemplate life in all its richness. In other words, the poem not only recounts the story of the lost Oxford scholar, it also meditates on the cultural object that contains the story, Glanvil’s book. Indeed, metafiction as an expression of Arnoldian values plays a central role in my reading of the fiction in this study. Also significant for my reading is the spatial positioning of the action in this poem: outside Oxford’s towers. Both the narrator and the subject of his contemplation, the scholar gypsy, undertake their educations outside the campus, with the
scho
g
er gypsy coming to Oxford, “no more.” This establishes the university campus as
yet another object to be contemplated, a task each of the novels we will consider
vigorously undertakes.

Finally, as we will see shortly, Groucho’s lines from the Marx Brothers’ film
*Horse Feathers* articulate the transgressive, yet Arnoldian nature of the Jewish invasion
of the ivory tower. Groucho’s insistence upon unsettling the traditional customs and
practices of the liberal arts college obviously predicts the irreverence of Philip Roth, but
it also harkens back to Matthew Arnold’s values. As Roth would do with gusto in
*Portnoy’s Complaint*, his undermining of institutional logic, by making a dirty joke out of
a ceremonial speech, undermines the pretensions of Readings’ “historical university,” and
centralizes the cultural object, his performance, instead. Groucho’s eradication of the
gentility of the liberal arts college follows the example set by both Arnold’s narrator and
the Scholar Gypsy himself and it points toward a general tendency in the fiction we will
consider. In short, as Arnold does himself in his famous poem, the Jewish writers I
explore remove the Arnoldian ideal of Culture from the pragmatic, institutional structures
of the university in order to save it from the social forces that would undermine it within
the ivory tower.

In summary, *The Ivory Shtetl: The University and the Postwar Jewish
Imagination*, explores representations of university spaces in the fiction of Bernard
Malamud, Lionel Trilling, and Philip Roth. However, my project rejects the impulse to
focus on the sociological real, unlike most studies of campus narrative. Most literary
scholarship about this genre assumes a sociological perspective that understands them to
reflect political and economic conditions. Likewise, projects that consider Jews and
education tend to focus on sociological issues of assimilation. My project, by contrast, concentrates on a group of novels that re-construct the university in a particular way. *The Ivory Shtetl* refers to a blending of Arnoldian cultural values with the Jewish American experience. These terms evoke dichotomous images; one a privileged space of liberal education and the other a provincial, ethnic cultural space. I argue that the campus fiction of these authors is an amalgamation of the ideologies inherent in these two landscapes, and it opens up a space in which to contemplate the complexity of the American university from outside its walls. These authors’ urban, multi-lingual perspectives, along with their educational backgrounds, offer them a unique insider/outsider position from which they construct alternative campus spaces from the heteroglossia of political, economic, and liberal humanistic discourses. In these fictional forms, these authors effectively restructure the “ruined” postwar university, centralizing culture by creating distinct artistic spaces in which liberal humanistic principles now organize economic and political discourse.

**Horse Feathers: Jew as Gypsy, Viewer as Scholar**

An instructive précis of the amalgamation of Arnoldian notions of “Culture” and the Jewish American experience is the 1932 Marx Brothers film, *Horse Feathers*. The film follows the four Marx Brothers, Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and Zeppo, as they take over the administration of tiny Huxley College. The plot essentially juxtaposes Huxley’s desire to win a football game against its archrival next to the four Marx Brothers’ hyper-sexualized wooing of “The College Widow,” the lovely Connie Bailey. Though the film is from an era that predates the fiction of this study at large, it effectively summarizes the tensions, contradictions, and artistic approaches of the novels in question. In particular,
the film, like the fiction of this study, works to undermine the political, cultural, and economic assumptions of a liberal arts institution and in doing so, turns that social landscape into a cultural, artistic space in which Arnoldian contemplation, like the kind the speaker in “The Scholar Gypsy” undertakes, can take place. In short, the Marx Brothers turn an ethically degraded college campus into a stage that offers an alternative sort of education. By watching the show, we, as the Scholar-Gypsy did by forsaking Oxford for the gypsies, gain privileged access to “the secret of their art.”

The film opens with establishing shots that securely locate the scene on the campus of an idyllic (though modern) liberal arts college, moving from a still that prominently features a clock tower to a sign that reads “Huxley College,” a name that like, the clock tower itself, evokes the imagery of the classical liberal arts college. This pastoral imagery soon reveals itself to be a façade, however. The significance of the name Huxley for our study cannot be overstated, particularly when paired with the name of Huxley’s football rival - Darwin College.

Thomas Huxley was, of course, an early champion of Charles Darwin’s theories on the origins of species. The names of the two colleges, therefore, represent a pun situating the activity of the colleges, which is almost entirely the maintenance of their football programs, as a pantomime of the notion of survival of the fittest. The close association with scientific discovery, as opposed to humanistic principles, therefore represents one remove from Arnold’s ideal. To further make this point, one must only note that Thomas Huxley and Matthew Arnold participated in a vigorous nineteenth-century public debate about the role of the humanities in literature. Lionel Trilling, whom I discuss in chapter three, summarizes Huxley’s argument as follows: “(Huxley) had said that literature
should, and inevitably would, step down from its pre-eminent place in education, that science and not ‘culture’ must supply the knowledge which is necessary for an age committed to rational truth and material practicality” (“The Leavis-Snow Controversy” 146). In other words, Huxley (though the men admired one another) was the anti-Arnold. The name “Huxley College” therefore belies the Arnoldian pretenses of the institution’s public presentation. In this social milieu, it is hyperbolically Jewish Groucho, Chico, and, as I will argue, particularly Harpo, that wave the Arnoldian banner at Huxley.

From this ideological position, the film immediately works to centralize art and it uses Groucho’s Jewishness to do so. The film opens at a college convocation in which the outgoing president (whose glasses and exaggerated sideburns make him a cartoonish double for Thomas Huxley himself) officially cedes power to the college’s new leader, Quincy Adams Wagstaff (Groucho Marx). The camera repeatedly frames the proceedings so as to emphasize the stage. Beginning with an extreme long shot that encompasses both the auditorium audience and the stage and cutting to a long shot of the speaker and the faculty seated behind him, the shots emphasize the performative aspect of the proceedings. When Groucho finally takes the stage, he invigorates that performance with his “secret art.”

One of the most identifiable qualities of the Marx Brothers’ humor is its subversion of logic and it is this very quality that I argue associates it with the Arnoldian. Just as Arnold argued against education exclusively adopting the logic of what Trilling terms “material practicality,” Groucho’s introduction upends the logic of T.H Huxley’s institutional namesake. What he replaces it with, however, is not pure chaos, but rather an intricately crafted performance with identifiable form. It is this form, I argue, that
salvages the Arnoldian from the ruins of material practicality. In fact, those ruins provide the material for Arnoldian form and this same quality drives the fiction of this study.

With a pronounced pause between uttering the names “Quincy Adams,” and “Wagstaff,” the outgoing president emphasizes the ideological sea change about to overwhelm Huxley. Where “Quincy Adams” has a WASPish gentility that one might associate with the institution, “Wagstaff” does not. Instead, it sounds like the punch line of a dirty joke and this is exactly where Groucho begins. Upon the utterance of the name Wagstaff, the camera cuts to Groucho in the corner of the stage, shaving. This motif is repeated in the opening sequence and is a good illustration of the form with which Groucho replaces the existing institutional logic. Groucho brandishing a razor in front of the student body is a direct assault upon the aesthetic of Huxley College. Each of the faculty members on stage wears some exaggerated form of facial hair or another. By contrast, Groucho’s painted-on mustache and razor is direct parody. The joke is developed in the first line of Groucho’s speech to the student body, “Well I thought my razor was dull until I heard his speech. And that reminds me of a story that’s so dirty, I’m ashamed to think of it myself.” The non-sequitur that follows the first line demonstrates the classic Marx Brother subversion of institutional logic, but the first line, regarding Groucho’s razor, carries the initial visual joke, that of Groucho shaving on stage, into the next part of the sequence.

The centrality of the Jew in the American University is of primary importance to this project. Whether it is Bernard Malamud’s Jews carrying on liberal humanistic traditions or Philip Roth’s characters wearing Jewish identity as a mask in order to legitimize their academic pretensions, one consistent theme in this study is the
organization of liberal education around Jewish figures. Groucho’s opening number, “I’m Against It,” demonstrates this hierarchical inversion. Narratively, the song and dance is a response to the outgoing president’s statement that the trustees have suggestions for the new President Wagstaff. The song therefore becomes a form of resistance to the reigning institutional logic, as Groucho sings, “…whatever it is…I’m against it!” Most important however, is the fact that Groucho’s act of rebellion does not take the form of political rhetoric. Instead, the ideology of Groucho’s resistance is crystalized in performance.

It is through the centralization of artistic performance that the Marx Brothers are able to subvert Huxley’s machinery of practicality. Groucho’s song begins with the auditorium observing in stunned silence. At the beginning of his performance, Groucho competes for spatial centrality with the outgoing president, who sits in the middle of the trustees and faculty — and therefore in the center of the stage, intensely engaged in a large book. Groucho sings and dances around the stage, as if attempting to wrest centrality from the former president. Suddenly Zeppo (playing Groucho’s son, a student at Huxley) joins the song, warning them not to cross his father. At this point, as if prompted by student opinion, the faculty members rise, leaving the former president sitting alone, still reading, and join Groucho’s performance as chorus-line dancers. Having engaged the trustees and faculty in his show, Groucho proceeds to circumnavigate the group, yanking on each man’s cartoonish facial hair, inciting them to chase him around the stage. The chase is also carefully orchestrated, however, with the faculty wagging their fingers and following Groucho in a tightly wound counter-clockwise circle, in other words reversing the direction of the clock in the idyllic tower of Huxley. The counter-clockwise direction of the circle works as another means of
subverting Huxley’s institutional logic as it indicates a new direction for the institution, this time prompted by a hyperbolic representation of a Jew. Finally, Groucho leaves the circle, jumping onto a table around which the line revolves. The sequence ends with the faculty dancing around its new leader, and the former president nowhere in sight. Groucho has successfully centralized himself in the institution and he wields that power by telling his new underlings, “Alright scram boys, I’ll meet you in the barbershop.” The choreography of the number therefore advances the political mission of Groucho’s wrestling centrality from the former regime even as it continues the beard joke initiated at the sequence’s opening. Overall, this sequence represents the method by which these Jewish writers rescue the Arnoldian from the ruins of the University — not through engaging in polemical, political debates, but rather by denying the logic of those debates and subsuming them into artistic forms. The fiction of this study, like Horse Feathers, makes us all readers of the tale of the Scholar Gypsy.

**The University in Ruins and De-Centralizing the Jeremiad**

The representation of higher education that typifies the humanistic, cultural ideal from which many of the authors in this study begin is what Bill Readings calls the “historical university” in *The University in Ruins*. The “historical” university is, essentially, one in which the institution acts as a means of carrying and providing culture to its students who are not constructed as mere economic consumers, but as subjects of a kind of rite of passage. Implied in the term are ideas of ethics, citizenship, and familiarity with national cultural traditions. This is an idealistic iteration of a university education and one in which the liberal arts play a powerful role. Familiarity with texts of cultural production provides the student with access to mainstream society, both in terms of
economic success as well as cultural conversationality. This model of education seeks as its goal a kind of cultural coherence that leads to a definable national identity. Readings traces this idea of the university back to the German model as conceived by people like Humboldt and Schiller. This idea originated as Germany was forming into a modern nation-state and the “Historical” university was designed to develop quality citizens for the nation. According to Readings, it was the Germans who introduced the concept of “bildung,” or the “process of the development of moral character that situates beauty as an intermediate step between the chaos of nature and the strict and arbitrary structures of pure reason” (63). This “development of moral character” is what, in fact, drives the narrative of the typical bildungsroman, or education novel, and the historical university once perceived it as its mission. This idea maintained currency through the Cold War, when, according to Readings, the United States sought to differentiate itself and the moral character of its citizens from the Soviets.

Readings claims, however, that we have now entered the time of the “Post-Historical University” (119). With the rise of global capitalism, the Historical University no longer holds sway and the university’s mission has shifted. No longer is its goal the development of citizens, but instead, the training of workers. The needs of a global capitalist system require specialized, interchangeable workers, not whole citizens of any particular national identity. Furthermore, this fragmentation applies not only to citizens, but to the university itself, which, according to Readings, finds itself in a fragmented state of existence, isolated from its historical function, that of acculturation.

For Readings, a humanistic program of study is now generally more difficult to justify in the globalized marketplace. Readings recalls how, in the past, English
professors could justify their work more easily because their work tied in nicely with the idea that the University was there to create well-rounded citizens of the nation-state. Shakespeare became for the British, “the lost origin of authentic community to be rebuilt by means of rational communication between national subjects” (79). In other words, the study of a national literature became important to very formation of a national identity. An early affinity to this ideal in Jewish literature might be seen in Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917). The notion of a national literature’s ability to form a social, political, and economic identity brings to mind Levinsky’s intense study of Dickens and how he felt that endeavor brought him closer to a westernized cultural identity. There is, even at this literary moment, however, an indication that this kind of activity does not easily reconcile with the immediate concerns of the economic as Levinsky’s reading habits cause his business to suffer and he is forced to choose one endeavor or the other. This in many ways predicts Readings’ account of the demise of the historical notion of the university when he argues that university administrators are not interested in citizenship, an antiquated, genteel notion that does not meet the immediate needs of the economic hegemony.

This is the space that I wish to focus on in this project. My interest lies in how writers of the late century represent this “post-historical” university. There is, in the body of work I focus on here, an uneasy view of the university as a carrier of an idealized culture in the Readings’ post-historical era. I am, however, less concerned with the sociological real than I am in aesthetic representations of the socio-political-economic forces at work in the formation of the American university.
One of the central texts in any discussion of the American university is Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), and its relationship to Readings’ book is instructive in identifying the approach of this project. A magnificently divisive text, Bloom’s book has been embraced by the political right and loathed by the left. The book’s perceived graces/sins are grounded in its identification of ideological notions of multiculturalism, diversity, and cultural relativism as defining factors in the decline of higher education in America. Readings references Bloom’s book with little regard, calling it a book with “deep pull,” but nonetheless “ill-considered” (55). Nevertheless, Readings identifies one aspect of the book as laudable, writing that, “Bloom’s conservative jeremiad at least recognizes that the autonomy of knowledge as an end in itself is threatened, because there is no longer a subject that might incarnate this principle” (7). Here, Readings sees Bloom’s analysis of the university’s historical moment as at least accurate. *The University in Ruins*, however, rejects the ideological presuppositions upon which Bloom’s book is grounded, particularly its rejection of cultural diversity as unquestioned social ideal.

To paraphrase Marc Antony, I wish to bury Bloom, not to praise him. My eulogy, however, is not completely critical. As Readings does, I identify elements of *The Closing of the American Mind* as useful to this project. His rejection of multicultural politics in liberal education, though perhaps unkind in its articulation, correctly identifies those concerns as forms of discourse that centralize the immediate, the political, and the pragmatic. In other words, reading novels with social goals in mind is to subject the narratives to pragmatic ends and this stands opposed to Arnold’s intellectual ideal. Lionel Trilling offers an insightful iteration of this position in the introduction to his collection
of essays *The Liberal Imagination*, which I consider in chapter three, and Bernard Malamud dramatizes the tension between art and political activism in his 1971 novel *The Tenants*, a subject I broach in chapter one.

Nonetheless, Bloom’s book, by way of its jeremiad nature, ultimately participates in the very kind of destructive discourse it seeks to correct. The conversation the book began distracts its readers from the humanizing study of literature Bloom laments. In the end, it almost entirely subsumes the cultural ideology it idolizes into a political discourse that it identifies as hostile to that ideology. I use the term “almost” intentionally, however. In his conclusion, Bloom writes:

> These are the shadows cast by the peaks of the university over the entering undergraduate. Together they represent what the university has to say about man and his education, and they do not project a coherent image. The differences and the indifferences are too great. It is difficult to imagine that there is either the wherewithal or the energy within the university to constitute or reconstitute the idea of an educated human being and establish a liberal education again.

However, the contemplation of this scene is in itself a proper philosophic activity (380).

The reference to the university’s physical space, the shadows of its peaks, offers the kind of object that the fiction considered in this study does seek to contemplate. Bloom’s assertion that the contemplation of this space constitutes “a proper philosophic activity” recalls Arnold’s meditation on Glanvil’s book and indeed the approach I take to the
novels of this study. Furthermore, it also, perhaps ironically, anticipates Readings’ own solution to the humanistic dilemma posed by the post-historical university.

Readings rejects nostalgic calls to return to the structures and values of “the historical university” that centralize culture, which for him is a term that is “dereferentialized,” that is without reference to any tangible object or idea. Instead, his proposal is to use the “ruins” of the university to incite a programmatic dedication to “thought.” The “referentialized” status of this term may well be just as murky, but for Readings it involves a contemplation of university space that is similar to the one Bloom proposes at the end of *The Closing of the American Mind*. Rather than lamenting the ruins, we should, like the Romantics, appreciate and contemplate them aesthetically. Despite Readings’ discomfort with the term, this renders the space into a *cultural* object of contemplation. Readings himself alludes to this when he writes of man’s relationship with ruins and with ruins’ simultaneous relationship with art:

That which he cannot live he apprehends aesthetically, thus performing a secondary synthesis both of the tradition (as object of aesthetic appreciation) and of his own subjectivity (as subject of that act of appreciation). Art redeems a fractured and merely technical life; a unified life than can no longer be lived is resynthesized as art (170).

The act of redemption that Readings alludes to could not be phrased in a more Arnoldian fashion. Art’s role in the recovery of a “merely technical life” could be drawn directly from *Culture and Anarchy*. In this way, this study actively participates in Readings’ “university of Thought” and Bloom’s “proper philosophic activity” as it reflects upon the aesthetic redemption of a destroyed institutional liberal humanism.
University Landscapes: Real and Imagined

Much of the contemplation of this study then focuses upon represented university landscapes. Again, however, I wish to de-emphasize the sociological real, which like Bloom’s and Readings’ books, tend to orient the discussion around the political and social. This project instead seeks to underline how artistic creation re-organizes university space in a way that re-centralizes the Arnoldian ideology of culture. From this perspective, it is a stylistic intervention in a recent historicist conversation surrounding the relationships among intellectuals, academe, and cultural production.

Mark McGurl’s recent monograph *The Program Era* (2009) is a groundbreaking study of the role that the Iowa-style creative writing program has had in systematizing fiction-writing in the postwar era, thereby helping to establish the aesthetic of the era’s fiction. McGurl demonstrates how changing notions of literary value and technique are codified by their programmatic implementation in an era of the proliferation of creative writing programs. Though McGurl’s project is more sociologically oriented than this one, the theoretical framework he establishes helps locate the origin of the Jewish-Arnoldian aesthetic I argue for in the project and it does so by identifying an important relationship between the production of fiction and the site of higher education. The rise of the creative writing program, according to McGurl’s narrative, coincides with a pedagogical instillation and distribution of principles of technique. For example, early on, in writers like Flannery O’Connor, McGurl identifies the evidence of instruction in Jamesian notions of storytelling in American fiction. The broad acceptance and application of
mantras like “show don’t tell,” was in large part accomplished through writers’ increasing institutional training in creative writing programs. McGurl’s book covers much historical territory and even incorporates postmodernism into his Foucauldian system. One argument along these lines that has particular interest for me is his claim that even Philip Roth’s most un-Jamesian work (*Portnoy’s Complaint*) has a strong formal lineage, a point I consider at length in chapter 4.

McGurl’s broad history includes a study of “phonocentrism,” or institutional instruction in discovering the writer’s individual voice. This anachronistic notion, that the institution teaches the individual how to be so, has broad implications for the marriage of the minority voice and a broadly accepted, formal artistic aesthetic. McGurl offers the example of Native American writing and particularly N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, a novel written while Momaday was a student, to illustrate how marriages like these are arranged. Resisting the negative reaction of some Indian critics to Momaday’s novel, which claimed that Indian art could not be produced in non-Indian art forms, like written narrative, McGurl responds by suggesting that Indian art could be nothing more or less than “art produced by Indians” (240). In other words, Momaday’s pedagogical instruction does not intrude upon his Indian-ness, but rather is subsumed into it. As McGurl puts it, “rather than being contaminated by modernism, Indian art now includes modernism as one of its elements, much as the buffalo hunting culture of the Plains Indians included horses (a European import) at its core and is rarely considered less authentic for having done so” (240). This logic permeates my own study of the Jewish internalization of Matthew Arnoldianism, a process that similarly took place on campuses like City College, as I show in chapter 1.
Drawing somewhat closer to the territory of this project is Stephen Schryer’s *Fantasies of the New Class* (2011). Schryer’s book explores how particular writers, including Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, Mary McCarthy, and Don DeLillo, infuse their fiction with New Class intellectual values, a mid-century vision of a professional class that would reject the institutionalization of liberal ideals and instead subtly distribute their ideals throughout the culture, changing it from within. Schryer reads the fiction of what he calls “New Class Fantasy” alongside “consensus sociology,” that is sociology that directly affects public policy, exemplified for Schryer by the work of Talcott Parsons. In this forceful, immediate form of sociology, Schryer sees a foil for the New Class Professionals who rejected the simplified, pragmatic directness of its mission. In other words, this class of humanized professionals saw the reduction of liberal ideals into policy initiatives as intellectually deadening.

My project explores an ideological conflict similar to the one Schryer confronts, though I have focused my attention on intellectuals who occupy the collegiate campus of the postwar era. This project and Schryer’s have, however, the same figure at the core of their explorations, Lionel Trilling. For Schryer, Trilling best represents the intellectual approach that typified New Class Fantasy and his reading of Trilling’s novel *The Middle of the Journey*, shows it to be an extended warning against attaching liberal values to the star of public policy. Trilling, according to Schryer:

thus established the basic pattern followed by many of the writers described in the chapters in this book. He envisioned intellectuals abandoning their technocratic pretensions toward social reform in favor of a different, humanistic model of cultural education oriented toward the
educated middle class. According to this model, the intellectual embodies a greater critical intelligence and social authority than ever before. However, this critical intelligence has a mysterious, indirect impact on the society around it. Rather than building institutions, the intellectual improves the culture, driving the expanding new class to adopt more complicated patterns of thinking associated with the practice of professionalism itself (6).

Trilling’s intellectual project, in other words, is explicitly the lynchpin of Schryer’s argument as it is for mine. What is left implicit in the above description of that project, however, is the fingerprint of Matthew Arnold, an intellectual heritage central to my argument.

The above description of Trilling’s vision also points to another repeated motif in this study: institutional failure. Schryer argues that new class ideology resisted “building institutions.” Indeed, in each of the narratives I focus on, the attempt to crystalize liberal humanism into an institutional structure fails, resulting in a technocratic mill focused on “skills,” (A New Life), or, at best, a politically vicious simulacrum of liberal education (The Human Stain). The work of the fiction I explore here is to liberate liberal humanism from its subservience to these spaces of social, political, and economic activity. Just as Groucho Marx does in Horse Feathers, this fiction works the very site of “technocratic pretensions” into the show and offers the reader a landscape of ruins to romantically ponder.
Harpo Marx as Gypsy Scholar

In chapter 3, I examine Lionel Trilling’s short story “Notes on a Departure.” In this narrative, Trilling imagines an exaggerated image of Jewishness that isolates his unnamed protagonist from the petty, immediate concerns of his small town college life and thereby permits him to leave the comforts of that life and pursue the life of the mind. The mute, “red haired comedian” that Trilling conjures is a demonic figure abhorrent to the social hegemony of the protagonist’s Midwestern neighbors. Even to the protagonist, the comedian is off-putting yet, in the end, he incorporates that image into his own identity, claiming not simply Jewishness, but a Jewishness that keeps the world, and its concerns, at bay. In this way, Trilling’s comedian is a subversive figure who undermines existing institutional logic and subsequently becomes a fountainhead of creative, intellectual energy. The protagonist’s embrace of this figure recalls Arnold’s Gypsy Scholar who . . .

One summer-morn forsook
His friends, and went to learn the
gypsy-lore

When quizzed by his former college friends about “his way of life,” the Scholar reports that the gypsies . . .

His mates, had arts to rule as they
desired
The workings of men’s brains,
And they can bind them to what
thoughts they will

Trilling tellingly offers a recognizable model for this demonic, Jewish consciousness, Harpo Marx.

Indeed, it is, in many ways, around Harpo (as a character named Pinky) that the creative energies of Horse Feathers are organized. I have argued that the film privileges
performance in that it does not inject comedy into the liberal arts campus as much as weaves the liberal arts college into performance, thereby centralizing art. Groucho’s opening song and dance illustrates this aesthetic. But as much as that performance inverts the logic of Huxley College, Harpo undermines the assumptions of institutions at large. As subversive as Groucho’s opening performance is, it pales in comparison to the maniacal anarchy of Harpo in the scene in the President’s office in which he joyfully burns entire shelves of books. Overjoyed by the heat generated when he tosses a single book in the fireplace, Harpo grins demonically toward the camera and returns to the shelf. His intentional gaze at the camera incorporates the viewer into his activity, putting us in the same position as the speaker in “The Scholar Gypsy,” who through Glanvil’s text, admires the institutional subversion of the rogue scholar. This subversion comes to full fruition the next time the film cuts back to Harpo. Shot with a low camera angle, nearly half the frame is filled by a pile of books, while to the right of picture, the fire roars, transgressing the boundaries of the fireplace as it rises to the ceiling. In the center is demonic Harpo, armed with a giant pitchfork, shoveling books by the dozen into the fire. Trilling’s demonic comedian is at work destroying institutional higher education. The low camera angle, along with the scale of both the fire and the books being burned, offers a vision of anarchic madness against which Groucho’s song of subversion appears contrite. Harpo, denied the power of speech, nonetheless forcibly wrenches institutional structures into his creative volcano.

In fact, each scene in which Harpo appears forces both the institution and the viewer to adjust to his performance. In the scene at the local speakeasy, Harpo maniacally and magically upends the literal machinery of the institution, successfully winning money
from slot machines as well as pay-telephones. At the end of the film, his transformation of a garbage wagon into an impromptu Roman chariot provides the vehicle for Huxley’s football victory over Darwin. In short, Harpo, more than any other character in the film, subsumes existing practices, whether cultural or institutional into his creative project.

On the surface, this demonic imagery seems to be the very embodiment of the “anarchy” against which Arnold opposes virtuous “culture.” A closer examination of the film, however, reveals that this maniacal “red haired” comedian’s destructive energies actually clear the way for the construction of Arnold’s precious culture. The film’s plot is essentially an excuse for the four Marx Brothers’ extended wooing of Connie Bailey, the so-called college widow. The centerpiece of the film is the song “Everyone Says I Love You,” which is spread throughout the film in four lyrical renditions performed by each Marx Brother for Connie Bailey. The first iteration of the song finds Zeppo, ever the straight man, singing a standardly romantic version to Connie as she lies in bed eating breakfast. This somewhat sappy scene demonstrates rather conventional Hollywood romantic tropes, which constitute another kind of institutional logic. It is Harpo who pulls the film away from these clichés. In essence, Harpo Marx’s destructive “anarchy” serves to deny Horse Feathers the opportunity to participate in contemporary fashion and immediate concerns. As I will argue, in place of that logic, he centralizes the film around a startlingly classic romanticism, creating an object of “culture” in the Arnoldian sense.

Zeppo’s rendition is essentially interrupted when the film cuts to the mute Harpo, who sits on the street whistling the tune as he feeds a horse its grain. This cut essentially marks a point at which the film parodies the very scene it has just shown, as Zeppo’s feeding of Connie is rendered into Harpo feeding a horse. True to form, Harpo’s presence
brings chaos into yet another conventional situation as his romantic breakfast with his
horse causes a traffic-jam that denies other drivers the ability to travel. More importantly,
however, the cut to Harpo and his irreverent parody of the film’s central formal motif
indicates his assumed ownership of the artistic performance. With this destructive
appropriation, Harpo offers his own rendition and creates an artistic performance that
embodies Arnoldian notions of high culture.

After Zeppo’s introduction of “Everyone Says I Love You,” there are three
renditions left. Zeppo’s original has been shown by Harpo to be a parody of standard
romantic film tropes. The lyrics of Chico’s version play upon his exaggerated immigrant
persona, and Groucho’s version exemplifies the sexual cynicism that typifies his double
entendre-laden humor. Harpo’s curious, full rendition of the song, however, by nature of
its very seriousness, seems puzzling. How can this demonic comedian provide the most
sincere version of the song around which the film is organized?

The scene begins with Harpo, standing in a courtyard, whistling up at Connie’s
bedroom window. After getting her attention, he blows her a kiss and runs to his harp,
which sits near a fountain in the courtyard. The romanticism of the staging and mise-en-
scène in this sequence recalls Romeo and Juliet more than Harpo’s horse-feeding episode
and his performance follows the logic of that literary tradition. Framed in a long shot that
encompasses the full scale of both musician and instrument, Harpo becomes one with his
harp. The film then cuts to a medium shot that emphasizes his face and hands as he
concentrates on his performance. Unlike Chico’s performance, during which he
repeatedly makes eye contact with Connie, openly flirting with her as he plays piano and
sings, Harpo never removes his attention from his harp. The performance begins with
Harpo establishing the now-familiar melody while framed in the same medium shot. As he makes the transition to more individualized variations on the melody, however, the film cuts to an angle in which Harpo is seen through the strings he sincerely plucks. This transition has the effect of causing the demonic agent of chaos to “disappear” into his performance. Indeed, at this moment, the film interjects itself into Harpo’s performance, as it takes over the melody of the song with non-diegetic music. Harpo’s role in the performance then shifts to one of adding color and variation to the music. It is at this point in the song that his rather stunning virtuosity on the instrument becomes apparent.

The scene ends with Harpo finishing, politely standing to face Connie, and accepting her blown kiss. The romance depicted, though its grounding in artistic performance, demonstrates the kind of cultural values “The Scholar Gypsy” idealizes.

This rendition of “Everyone Says I Love You,” along with the context in which it is given, demonstrates the centrality of art and performance in *Horse Feathers*. It also provides a model for how to consider the way fiction in this study conflates Arnoldian notions of culture with the Jewish experience, two epistemological experiences that seem to have little in common. The madness of Harpo provides the kind of creative destruction that allows the artist to create a space of romantic reflection out of the ruins. Trilling’s reference to the mute comedian indicates that the great American Arnold himself sensed the connection between the creative powers of his ethnicity and the intellectual project of liberal humanism.

This project ultimately seeks to identify and explore the formal mechanisms by which some Jewish American fiction salvages Arnoldian educational ideals from the ruins. Chapter one approaches Bernard Malamud’s 1971 novel *The Tenants* as a
metaphor for the kind of ruins that Bill Readings calls us to consider. The novel, though not literally on a campus of higher education, essentially represents that space in microcosm and even exemplifies the kind of creative writing instruction McGurl details in *The Program Era*. In doing so, it offers us a template through which to consider the other novels in this project. The explicit detail with which Malamud represents the ruined tenement elucidates the close relationship between rhetoric and space, a consistent theme in the fiction of this study. The story, about a Jewish novelist fending off both sexual and artistic competition from a militant black writer even as they both struggle against the economic pressures placed on the building by the money-driven landlord, exemplifies the social, political, and economic forces against which the “historical” university of liberal humanism is pitted. I argue that Malamud’s novel, though usually read as hopeless in its depiction of the death of liberal humanism, actually works to create the kind of contemplative ruin through which Readings hopes to restore “Thought” to higher education. By examining Malamud’s manipulation of language through Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia, I argue that the novel subtly restores the Arnoldian through its subversion of rhetorical and linguistic modes normally destructive to liberal humanism.

Chapter two moves the concepts and approaches provided by *The Tenants*’ metaphor onto a literal college campus. Examining Malamud’s 1961 novel *A New Life*, this chapter explores a collegiate landscape that is, as Arnold might say, besotted by business. It depicts a postwar university motivated entirely by the local economic concerns of a provincial small town in the Pacific Northwest. In this way, the university is not the city on a hill projecting out to the community a set of values organized by big-c Culture. Rather, it simply works to reflect back at the town its pre-existing ideals, though
those values are oriented not toward pondering the complexities of living the good life, but rather the simplicities of its brand of consumerism. Like the book Malamud would write a decade later, the novel is ostensibly hopeless for the project of liberal humanistic education, yet, like The Tenants, through close attention to its form, we can see how the novel recentralizes Arnoldian reflection by weaving the destruction wrought by consumerism into a manicured, humanizing ruin.

Having reflected on how the Hebraic Americanist Arnoldian project functions in Jewish campus narratives, chapter three explores the criticism and fiction of its preeminent evangelist, Lionel Trilling. Both the large body of Trilling’s critical output and his fiction work to deny the centrality of pragmatic technocratic immediacy. Finding the essence of Trilling’s theory of culture and its relationship to a dedication to style in his critical intervention in a public debate between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow, I uncover those cultural values in a short campus story, “Notes On a Departure.” This brief story, I argue, crystalizes the amalgamation of Matthew Arnold and Jewishness. In short it defines Miller’s notion of Hebraic Americanist Arnoldianism. When the story’s unnamed protagonist’s Arnoldian values force him to leave his quiet, genteel life at a provincial college town, he draws upon and exploits his Jewishness to accomplish this. In short, Jewishness provides for this scholar the critical distance necessary to enact the Arnoldian, allowing him to become a Scholar Gypsy himself.

Finally, chapter 4 traces this seemingly odd ideological and literary marriage into the postmodern era. Philip Roth’s The Human Stain offers an extended meditation on how fiction accomplishes the cultural work of the Ivory Shtetl. Roth’s relentless (and career spanning) dedication to metafiction constantly works to centralize the cultural
object in the reader’s hand, the physical book, over any social or political context. This ultimately locates the powers of humanism not in institutions, but rather in the cultural object in hand. By focusing this metafiction upon a seemingly ideal college campus where one would fully expect the Arnoldian to find a good institutional home, Roth’s fictive ideational project ultimately denies the authority of even this kind of institution to adequately house meditative liberal humanism. As the Marx Brothers did with Huxley College, Roth instead moves into the ivory tower and destroys it in order to use its remains to create art. In the end, *The Human Stain*’s massive *de*-construction project purposefully razes the liberal arts college in order to offer lamentations over its ruins.
Chapter 1

Bernard Malamud’s *The Tenants*: The City and the Dialogic University

…because, for the creation of a master-work of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment . . .

— Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”

The powerful “moment” under consideration here begins when Jewish immigrants first encountered higher education in America. The resulting synthesis of ethnicity and cultural ideology produced a unique body of literature that to this day casts a long, complicated shadow over American letters. In an introduction to his edited volume *Jewish-American Stories*, Irving Howe categorizes Jewish American fiction as not primarily an ethnic, but rather a regional literature (3). Citing the canon’s overwhelming fixation on Jewish immigrant, urban neighborhoods, Howe adds “it comes to us as an outburst of literary consciousness resulting from an encounter between an immigrant group and the host culture of America.” The encounter between this urban, ghettoized population and the “host culture” took place to a great degree, of course, in institutions of higher education. In these spaces, Jewish immigrants and their descendants sought access to America’s social and economic institutions. Many of them, including Howe himself, remained in their urban environments, entering New York’s City College (CCNY) with these aspirations. For this generation, the city was never very distant from the aspirational educational ideals they held. Whereas Howe’s claim minimizes ethnicity when discussing this body of creative work, it implicitly cements the relationship between the city and higher learning for the American Jew.

In Abraham Cahan’s seminal immigrant narrative, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, City College symbolized the newly arrived greenhorn’s cultural aspirations and was
therefore both temple and Promised Land. Yet, in the end, like Moses, he finds himself stranded just outside its idealized borders, able to see his precious Canaan, but unable to enter. Still, like twentieth-century Joshuas, the children of the early Jewish immigrants did gain access to Levinsky’s dream and that same City College was a key institution in this process. Yet despite this success in America’s institutions of higher learning, the American system of higher education eventually became an object of intense scrutiny for many Jewish novelists whose fiction was often critical of the institution’s development.

One of those Jewish CCNY students was Bernard Malamud, who graduated from the institution in 1936 and, in his fiction, emphasizes the difficulty that liberal humanistic ideas of education encounter in competing with hostile social and economic systems. Malamud’s fiction frequently explores the form and function of education, both idealizing it as Levinsky does, and recognizing its marginalized status. However, where Levinsky found his higher education to be incompatible with economic pressures to produce placed upon him by America, Malamud’s characters often find themselves caught between desire for humanistic learning and desire for the individualistic consumption of economic production. In this chapter, I will argue that through both the prosaic construction of spaces and the juxtaposition of social languages, Malamud addresses a decentralization of liberal humanist values, philosophically rooted in Matthew Arnold’s criticism, in the postwar university. Ultimately, in Malamud’s representations of “ruined” university spaces, he formally re-centers marginalized Arnoldian notions of Culture as the university’s animating principle through the introduction and crafting of adversarial social heteroglossia into a unitary literary language.
“A Summer’s Reading”

An early example of Malamud’s interest in education is the 1956 short story “A Summer’s Reading.” The narrative wrestles with questions about the purpose of education and, as if taking its cue from Howe’s observation, it locates the site of that education squarely in an urban environment, which becomes a text in its own right. In many ways, this story predicts Malamud’s 1971 novel *The Tenants*, which, as we will see, also conflates urban and educational spaces.

“A Summer’s Reading” follows a young man named George Stoyonovich as he seeks purpose and fulfillment in his isolated immigrant neighborhood. George, a high school dropout, finds himself to be the object of his neighborhood’s collective pride when he tells Mr. Cattanzara, an older member of George’s working class neighborhood, that he has been reading a list of 100 books to “pick up my education” (169). Though this is a lie (George mainly piddles his days away around the house, sometimes reading magazines), the news electrifies both the neighborhood and his family, who even begin giving George extra spending money. For a time, George basks in this notoriety, but eventually becomes ashamed of himself and goes to the library. The story ends with George counting off a hundred books and sitting down to finally read.

The story continually works to stress the physicality of the space of George’s education. Each space George inhabits presents a kind of text to be read. In the beginning of the narrative, at the apex of his restlessness and discontent, George is mainly in his room reading trashy novels and his sister’s popular magazines. At the story’s end, he literally runs from his house and into the library, a space “where he hadn’t been in years”
(173). This statement implies that George’s absence from the traditional and symbolic place of learning was the root cause of his discontent and longing. The narrative therefore suggests that it is only through the disciplined endeavor of liberal education that the subject is enriched and finds real fulfillment. This is implied when George’s sister essentially pays him (the rich sum of a dollar a week) because of her belief in his fictitious reading program, making the metaphor of personal enrichment literal.

If George’s home represents his immobility while the library signifies spiritual freedom, there is one other physical space in the narrative: George’s neighborhood. The first sentence of the story immediately associates George with the physical space he inhabits: we are told that he is “a neighborhood boy” (167). This association intricately links him to the city in which he lives. The urban environment is both ubiquitous and inescapable for George Stoyonovich. His only refuge comes by way of the park in which he sits at night sometimes, though even this natural environment is marked as a public, urban space. We are told that the park is “darkly lit,” with “benches and trees and an iron railing, giving it a feeling of privacy” (168). The trees, in this sentence are literally surrounded by benches and an iron railing, associating the tiny park as not separate from, but part of, the city George inhabits. Outside of the library, George is either a boy trapped in his room, or a flaneur surveying the urban space of his neighborhood.

The City Street as Liminal Space

George’s neighborhood, in fact, represents a kind of liminal space, between home and library, which is itself a text that competes with George’s ambitious reading agenda. In exploring the term “liminality,” Victor Turner examines Zambia’s Ndembu tribe’s rituals for the passing into manhood and full tribal citizenship. In observing the
characteristics of liminal figures in Ndembu society, Turner notes that “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions” (95). The liminal figure is, in other words, visibly marked by his or her status. These symbols, Turner asserts, often link the liminal being with wilderness, wombs, and invisibility (95). Having passed through the phase, however, the subject achieves statues in the community. Turner offers a list of binary oppositions achieved by the liminal experience. These include items like “absence of property/property,” “absence of status/status,” and “foolishness/sagacity” (106). This final binary is particularly relevant to George’s liminal state in “A Summer’s Reading” as it directly addresses his education.

Applying Turner’s metaphors to “A Summer’s Reading” finds George occupying a liminal state as he wanders the city as a neophyte. Turner writes, “Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites may be represented as possessing nothing” (95). Throughout the story, George seems to be subject to a rite of passage (as any bildungsroman requires), and this ritual finds him isolated from both the economic and social activity of his community. Indeed we are told that although George has “needs with the neighborhood girls,” he has “no money to spend” (167). Without this spending money, George is, in many ways, peripheral to his community. He is left home alone during the day as his father and sister work and he wanders the streets at night, attempting to avoid contact with the people he comes across. George’s economic and social isolation is further developed as he recalls his employment history. We are told
“He thought of the jobs he had had since he had quit school - delivery boy, stock clerk, runner, lately working in a factory - and he was dissatisfied with all of them” (168). This mini-narrative illustrates George’s liminal position in the community. The listed jobs all indicate a certain lack of stasis normally associated with established members of a community: George left school; he was a delivery boy, with that job’s implied mobility; a stock clerk moves products around; a runner naturally runs; and working at a factory implies seeing the products of your labor pass by on the production line. George’s life is one of constant flux. Until he makes his final run for the library, George is not quite a full citizen and he occupies a liminal space that is both physical and social. Since he is nearly twenty, he is not still a boy, but until he passes through this liminal stage, he is not a man either. This element of George’s life reflects, in some ways, the aspirational feature of the urban Jew’s life that Howe alludes to above; his liminality in his urban environment indicates the space of the “encounter between an immigrant group and the host culture of America.” The drama of the story is built upon the resolution of George’s encounter, and his ultimate decision to choose a liberal humanistic life articulates the value system that, in the novels we will explore, Malamud will later place into conflict with larger socio-political ideologies.

George’s status as a liminal man-child is best illustrated by his interactions with Mr. Cattanzara, the narrative’s “change-maker.” Cattanzara works for the IRT in a change booth, a menial task that indeed indicates a low social position, but Cattanzara’s job also provides the narrative with a metaphor for his transformational role in George’s life.
George first encounters Cattanzara while walking the streets of his neighborhood at night, attempting to avoid contact with other people. Building up to this encounter, George’s liminal position is illustrated. We are told that, upon seeing people he knew, he walked past because “nobody recognized each other” (168). Encounters like this concretize his isolation and later, we are informed that George “wanted people to like and respect him” (168). In other words, George longs to be an acknowledged member of the community, but as long as he occupies his marginal position, he walks alone, unrecognized.

Upon meeting Mr. Cattanzara in the street, however, George takes the first steps in his journey to the library and full American citizenship. When Cattanzara asks George what he’s doing with his summer, George invents a story that he is not working but instead reading 100 books from a list he found in the library. Lying about this upsets George, but we are told that he does this because “he wanted Mr. Cattanzara to respect him” (169). The lie indeed produces the desired effect. George soon finds himself no longer isolated in the community. Cattanzara has spread the word about George’s attempt at citizenship through literacy. From out of nowhere, the shoemaker congratulates George and calls him a “good boy” (170). Note how this phrasing differs from George’s previous epithet, “neighborhood boy.” This shift indicates movement within the liminal space between childhood and manhood that characterizes George’s position in the narrative. The “good” boy, though still a boy, would seem to be making more progress through the liminal stage toward manhood than the “neighborhood” boy. This progress is also recognized by his family members, who begin to financially support George in his educational efforts.
When George’s lie is discovered, however, he loses the social capital he had been accumulating with his community. His sister, who had been giving George extra money to reward his efforts, withdraws her support, abandoning him and essentially banishing him back into his liminal state. Cattanzara too shows his disappointment with George. In an act that is both loving and damning, Cattanzara gives George a nickel and tells him to buy himself a lemon ice, just as he used to when George was a little boy. Understanding the implications of the act, George refuses, telling Cattanzara “It’s not that time anymore, Mr. Cattanzara,” “I am a big guy now” (172). Cattanzara’s reply silences George: “No you ain’t.” When it becomes clear to the old change maker that George has not been reading anything and is making no move to get out of the liminal stage represented by the neighborhood, he implores him, “George, don’t do what I did” (172), and leaves George once again alone and unattached to the community. It is shortly after this encounter that George makes his final run from his room, through the neighborhood, and toward the library, finally escaping his maddening man-child identity.

Malamud, Liberal Education, and Space

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that the education represented in this story is higher education and, furthermore, a liberal humanistic education rooted in Arnoldian ideas. One of the first pieces of information we learn about George’s education is that he had dropped out of high school. Later, when George first lies to Cattanzara about his activities, he distinguishes what he is doing from secondary education. Justifying his invented activities to Cattanzara, George says he is reading because “it would help me in my education. I don't mean the kind they give you in high school. I want to know different things than they learn there, if you know what I mean” (169). First
of all, George himself makes a clear distinction between a high school education and the kind of enriching higher education that he claims to be seeking. What is important about that distinction is that one implies a systematic means of inculcating pragmatic information while the other suggests a personal quest for self-development. This dichotomy, as we will see in great detail in *A New Life* in chapter two, can be said to be the ideological tension that animates that novel. In fact, this short story in many ways serves as a primer for the themes and tensions that acquire Malamud’s fuller attention in the two educational novels this project will explore.

All told, “A Summer’s Reading” illustrates a vision of liberal education that Malamud re-visits frequently in his fiction. One of the goals of this study will be to examine the relationship between the educational space and the urban spaces in which the educational process takes place, as this relationship provides a vital link between the Jewish experience and the ideology of Matthew Arnold. This relationship is inherent in George’s liminality. The uneducated person is a liminal being trapped in a “space” that sociologically defines him. George, uneducated as he is, is a “neighborhood boy.” His identity is defined by a physical place inhabited by the city’s marginalized workers, like Cattanzara and George’s family. Important is the fact that George is not the only liminal figure in his neighborhood. Almost everyone is without full status and trapped in the neighborhood in which they live. This is illustrated by the general isolation of the citizens of the neighborhood. It is as if this urban space houses those who are not able to become full citizens of the city at large, but rather servants of those who do possess full membership. The collective marginality of the inhabitants of George’s neighborhood is the primary reason for George’s elevated social status when the neighbors believe that he
is undertaking a project of self-education. For the group, George’s endeavors are a source of pride, and they hope that his individual success will redeem them all. After George is found out, when Cattanzara tells George not to do what he did, the older man illustrates his own inability to pass successfully through the liminal phase; his subsequent child-like demeanor (George is often unsure of whether Cattanzara is drunk when they meet and Cattanzara often wears a child-like grin) further bears this out, associating him with the liminal state in which George is trapped.

Cattanzara’s case provides us with a particularly illuminating example of how Malamud conflates educational and urban space in his fiction. This formal feature of Malamud’s writing will greatly inform my reading of *The Tenants*, and so it is worth elaborating on a bit here. When George first meets the change maker in the narrative, we are told that each night, Cattanzara sits on his building’s stoop, reading the *New York Times* from cover to cover. As the old man does this each evening, his wife can be seen leaning out of their window “gazing into the street” (169). Later, on another night, the scene is described again and we are told that Cattanzara’s wife seems to “read the paper along with him” (171). These scenes illustrate how, for the Cattanzaras, the city itself is a kind of textual object of study (or educational space), much like the hundred library books that George finally sits in front of in the story’s conclusion. The primary difference lies in the perspective of the “reader.” Cattanzara, a menial employee of the city, is bound to the perspective of the street, where he reads the *Times* in that very street. This reading material however also inscribes upon Cattanzara the ability to expand George’s horizons. *The New York Times* is much more than a local paper as it brings a national and even global perspective into the streets in which Cattanzara is trapped. His ability to read that
particular paper from cover to cover reveals a talent and ambition that distinguishes him from his neighbors.

Cattanzara’s wife is more bound to her domain, the feminized domestic space of their apartment (similar to the one George strives to escape from, and in so doing make the leap from child to man). It is from this perspective that she “reads” the text available to her, which is the street itself. The Cattanzaras’ perspectives are contrasted with George’s as he sits with his books in the library. These texts provide George with a perspective that is removed from his neighborhood. Indeed the protagonists of both *A New Life* and *The Tenants*, the Malamud novels we will explore, either implicitly or explicitly argue for social distance between community and educational space (town and gown, if you will). Just as this short story conflates living and educational spaces, each of the two novels we will explore elaborate on this same spatial elision, as do Trilling and Roth in their fiction. The reason this becomes important is that without this perspective-granting space, shielding the Arnoldian space from atomized community values, Malamud’s universities are subjected to political and economic forces that conspire to alienate Arnoldian “Culture” from its formerly central position. It becomes the task of fiction to re-centralize it.

In the case of “A Summer’s Reading,” for both George and Cattanzara, the subject looks to texts and spaces of education that define their perspectives on the world. George has rejected the systematic high school education that would only prepare him for life as a menial worker in his neighborhood. By the story’s end at least, he has found a potential escape from the liminal space of his neighborhood in the library, with its far-reaching perspective on the world. Mrs. Cattanzara, at the other extreme, is unable to escape the
feminized domestic space of the apartment and can only gaze upon her immediate, urban
text, perhaps reading the paper from a distance, over her husband’s shoulder, who
symbolically mediates the content for her. Cattanzara, though aware of an outside world
as evidenced by his reading of the *Times*, himself occupies that space of perpetual
liminality, the street. We never see him in the apartment, but we also never see him
outside the neighborhood - he exists only in the streets. The fact that his chosen text is the
Gray Lady reveals his awareness of a world outside the neighborhood, but his continued
occupation of that neighborhood illustrates the limits of his options. When he implores
George to not make the same mistake he did, the often-drunk change maker speaks from
the positions of both insight and disappointment. He sees a world outside the
neighborhood, but can have no access to it. His wish is for George to make the escape he
was either unwilling or unable to make. Furthermore, humanistic, liberal education is the
means for this escape from the liminal stage. All told, “A Summer’s Reading” provides
an illuminating perspective on how Malamud conflates landscape (in this case an urban
one) and educational spaces.

As debilitating as the neighborhood and street are in this story, however, they at
least constitute a public space in which a community can live a shared experience. As we
will see in Malamud’s campus novels, economic forces that work to privatize these
public spaces also conspire against Malamud’s Arnoldian value system.

**The Privatization of Public Space**

The Cattanzara family is not alone in viewing the city as a kind of textual space. In
her book *The Cultures of Cities*, sociologist Sharon Zukin recalls the Jewish Philadelphia
neighborhood of her childhood and her recollections offer an illuminating perspective on
the ethnic neighborhood of “A Summer’s Reading.” The neighborhood of shopkeepers and delicatessens that Zukin describes in an essay called “A Child’s Cartography” closely resembles the starkly ethnic space of George Stoyonovich and the Cattanzaras. Perhaps pointing toward George’s habitual wandering, both even prominently figure shoe stores, with Cattanzara living adjacent to one and Zukin fondly recalling the shoes purchased for her at her neighborhood’s local cobbler. Furthermore, just as Cattanzara seems to have enough perspective to realize the neighborhood’s position in the city, and world, at large (probably through his daily reading of the *New York Times*), Zukin recalls that “as intimate as we were with our local shopping street, we knew it was at the bottom of a cultural and geographical hierarchy” (193). Likewise, George’s neighborhood houses people like Cattanzara, who serve the larger city in a change-booth at the IRT, but are otherwise kept isolated from the rest of the city. This explains Cattanzara’s drinking and his implicit wish for George to escape the neighborhood, and locates the source of this sense of marginalization in cultural power. Cattanzara reads the paper daily, so he is aware of both the city and his place in it.

There is, however, an important distinction between Cattanzara’s and Zukin’s readings of ethnic neighborhoods. Cattanzara and George see the cultural specificity encoded in their urban landscape as a kind of prison keeping them apart from the cultural and economic possibilities in the rest of the city and world. In the case of her study of ethnic shopping areas, Zukin’s main concern is the replacement of the cultural distinction inherent in the landscape of ethnic neighborhoods with shopping spaces that cater to the “dominant commercial culture” (*The Cultures of Cities* 193). In fact, Zukin’s larger project explores the role that “culture” plays in the reshaping of urban landscapes. She
asserts that political and economic forces in cities use narrowly defined notions of culture not as a superstructure (in traditional Marxist terminology), but rather as a base upon which urban economies are built. Zukin claims that this cultural capitalization has resulted in the commodification of public space, essentially privatizing and homogenizing (for private economic interests) urban spaces that were once public and more organically heterogeneous.

Zukin uses the Bryant Park Business Improvement District (BID) in New York City as a model for this process (The Cultures of Cities 33). The Bryant Park BID is an organization funded by private business surrounding the park that takes over security and maintenance operations from the municipality of New York. The BID thus privately operates the public park and has shaped it into a particular vision of an arts district in order to attract a specific type of tourist, the cultural tourist, thus homogenizing the space’s population. The ultimate effect of this process is not simply making the park more “upscale” and attractive, but also the exclusion of citizens who may undermine the homogeneity of the park from what is technically a public space. In the diegesis of “A Summer’s Reading,” George’s liberating education would theoretically qualify him as someone able to access these public spaces of culture, but without the cultural “capital” that education may provide, uneducated, working-class citizens are groups excluded by this re-mapping of public space. In other words, George’s education has two meanings: it is, to him and Cattanzara, a liberating process of individual enrichment that ultimately makes him a whole person and legitimized member of the polity, while in consumerist society, it is a commodity that provides cultural capital to spend. To Zukin, Bryant Park demonstrates how culture is commodified and used to develop formerly public space into
a vision that represents the concerns of private enterprises that are empowered by legislative forces that encourage the privatization of the space.

It is perhaps coincidence, but I find it worth mentioning that in her recollection of the shopping landscape of her Philadelphia childhood, Zukin places the library in the neighborhoods outside her ethnic enclave, nearer the top of the “cultural and geographic hierarchy” (193). Just as the library symbolizes for George an escape from the restricted worldview of his neighborhood, Zukin also, at least symbolically, finds it as such. Both represent the library as a space both outside and inside the neighborhood. In her account, the library is located in an urban landscape that has been developed with the power of commercial culture in mind. The notion that the space of education is geographically tied to urban spaces that reflect the values of commercial culture, as opposed to the culture of liberal education, becomes important to my reading of *The Tenants*. In Zukin’s neighborhood, the library is geographically proximate to banks, supermarkets, and other commercial institutions. This proximity metaphorically equates the cultural capital implicit in liberal education with commercial interests. In short, the *public* library is placed in a commercial space of *private* enterprise. The space of education then becomes like Bryant Park in New York City: a supposedly non-commercial public good that has been converted into a cultural commodity that serves an economic imperative. Zukin subtly hints at this function in her reading of Philadelphia shopping neighborhoods and “A Summer’s Reading” is perhaps even more understated in its representation of this relationship. Conversely, in *The Tenants*, the proximity of commercial and educational spaces is exaggerated to the point at which the space of the institution of higher education is completely conflated with both commercial and residential spaces.
The Tenants

Malamud’s 1971 novel, tells the story of Harry Lesser, a Jewish American novelist attempting to finish his third book in a tenement building set for demolition by the building’s owner, a man named Levenspiel. The landlord has successfully persuaded the rest of his tenants to leave, but Lesser, taking advantage of New York City rent control laws (which can perhaps be seen as a metaphor for tenure in my reading of the novel), is asserting his legal right to stay. As long as Lesser pays his rent, Levenspiel cannot force him to leave. As the novel progresses, Levenspiel tries everything from coercion to bribery, but Lesser insists on finishing his book (that he has been writing for nine years) where he started it.

Lesser’s battle has two fronts, however. In addition to the constant intrusions by Levenspiel, the nearly vacant building has attracted a squatter who is another prospective author, a militant black writer named Willie Spearmint. At first, Lesser and Spearmint’s relationship is one of camaraderie and mutual interest. Harry helps Willie hide from Levenspiel, the two party together, and Harry even tries to help Willie write his novel. As the narrative progresses, however, the relationship between the two writers deteriorates and the novel becomes a pessimistic allegory of the incompatibility of the Jewish and Black world views.

In addition, the tenement is a space of multiple meanings for the novel’s three main ideological figures. For Harry Lesser, since it has traditionally been the space of his work and prior artistic success, it represents a last bastion of liberal education, a vestigial space in which Arnoldian ideals of art and life flourish, despite the disastrous state of the facility, making it essential that he finish his novel there. For Spearmint, it is a liminal
space in which he can take advantage of the building’s isolation from his black, urban reality while still maintaining a home in that world. In other words, the tenement gives him access (through Lesser’s tutelage) to the cultural mechanisms of the mainstream literary world while he maintains the distinctiveness of his black identity. Spearmint wants the cultural advantages of Lesser’s world of literature and art, but harbors no desire to adapt to that world, seeking instead to establish a distinct world of black power. This is, as we will see, the ultimate point of contention between the two men. Finally, for Levenspiel, the space is a piece of private property that represents potential profit. His goal for the space is to maximize its value by tearing down the smaller, older family residence and replacing it with a larger one that will house high-value shops along with spacious luxury flats. The novel’s drama is built upon the three-way competition for the right to define the space. Ultimately, I will argue that the novel’s artistic-formal resolution of the conflicting world views it represents constitutes a centralization of liberal humanist values even as it didactically prophesies the demise of those values.

_The Tenants_ dichotomizes the black and Jewish literary experiences, and critics have long commented on the novel’s engagement with late sixties racial tensions. Most have situated the book as a work of disillusionment. Iska Alter describes the book as that of “a disillusioned American idealist driven to apocalyptic rage by disappointment” (158). Indeed, the book’s ending finds little hope for either reconciliation or the re-establishment of a civil society. As the novel’s two main characters destroy each other with ax and knife, Levenspiel comes across the scene and cries “mercy” 93 times. The disappointment Alter alludes to can be traced to the falling out between two of America’s major minority groups, Jews and Blacks, once allies in the Civil Rights Movement.  

5
Despite the engagement with contemporary history in this novel, critics have long considered Malamud’s work allegorical, surreal, and even magical, and this sentiment has colored critical reaction to *The Tenants*. In an essay called “Writing American Fiction,” Philip Roth castigates Malamud for not engaging with the contemporary world. Roth maintains that Malamud’s fiction instead presents characters who “live in a timeless depression and a placeless Lower East Side” (*RMAO* 127). Certainly this is true of a story like “A Summer’s Reading.” The specificity of that short story’s setting is unencumbered by the demands of social realism, as it instead engages more with timeless ideals than social justice. The muted praise for Malamud in this essay turns into aggressive scorn in Roth’s essay “Imagining Jews” (*RMAO*). Reducing Malamud’s detachment and moral allegory to “evangelistic simplifications” (231), Roth rather cruelly dismisses Malamud’s engagement with the contemporary Jewish experience as irrelevant. In a 1976 essay about *The Tenants*, Steven G. Kellman ultimately proclaims the novel unsuccessful as it fails to “compose the unresolved tensions of contemporary society” and fix the novel’s “relationship to life” (466). First, I take strong exception to these assertions and, in fact, I claim that through Malamud’s close attention to linguistic detail, he does indeed “compose” social tensions. In fact, I argue that the novel’s main strength is its resolution of conflicting ideologies, but it accomplishes this not rhetorically or didactically, as Kellman apparently wishes, but rather through its engagement with social heteroglossia. Kellman’s main complaint is that the novel “commits a startling omission of sin” (459). This pun refers to the insignificant role that Vietnam plays in the novel, garnering only a passing, coded reference from Lesser. Kellman seems to demand his authors make obligatory reference to the hot-button issue of the decade in order to prove social
relevance, offering Norman Mailer, and his book *Why Are We in Viet Nam?* as a more worthy alternative.⁶ Malamud’s neglect to actively participate in ongoing, contemporary political discourse leads Kellman to conclude that he has “doubts about locating Malamud in the company of such social realists as Dos Passos, Farrell, and Steinbeck” (459). Kellman’s conclusions about Malamud’s peers may be indeed accurate, but what he fails to recognize is that this is precisely the point. Malamud’s style intentionally seeks to break from the demands of social realism. In fact, this is a larger tendency of the Ivory Shtetl that I will repeatedly return to, particularly in my reading of Lionel Trilling, whose seminal work *The Liberal Imagination* actively eviscerates arguments, and critical value systems, like Kellman’s.

I, like Trilling, argue that these critics too readily dismiss the social engagement that is artistically and stylistically encoded in *The Tenants*. My claim is that the engagement with politics is inherent in the novel, but decentralized in favor of artistic form. Their insistence on “realism” is, in reality, a demand that the novel engage with contemporary grand narratives surrounding the American experience.⁷ This call for the “view from above,” however, obscures the novel’s fastidious engagement with language and with a very real cityscape. Elisa New argues that Malamud, in fact, incorporates a filmic perspective in the novel and, in essence, “flattens” the represented space. New’s argument rests on the assertion that Jewish writers traditionally internalize city space and essentially see the city “as spatialization of meditative activity, or simulacrum of mental inquiry itself” (428). In other words, for New, Jewish writers equate the city with intellectual activity, a private, internal activity that, to her, “deepens” the perspective of the city. Conversely for New, black art (specifically black filmmakers), flattens the city
space, making it into a kind of stage on which communal experience is emphasized. New argues that *The Tenants* is important as it attempts to replicate both of these representational modes. In this way, it participates in a similar kind of representational work as *Horse Feathers*, making all the world a stage.

Malamud’s representation of urban space and ideologically-loaded language in the novel does in fact reveal a rich engagement with the contemporary world (Vietnam or no). In claiming this, however, I do not wish to dismiss Roth’s observations about Malamud’s fiction. He is entirely correct that Malamud’s fiction is “timeless,” that is, outside of historical specificity. He also makes a canny observation that Malamud’s stories are typically set in American translations of the old world shtetl. Alfred Kazin makes a similar observation, writing that of his contemporary Jewish novelists, “…Bernard Malamud seems to me the most unnecessarily tempted by symbolism” (204). I would, in fact, like to build on these notions in this and later chapters as this tendency makes Malamud central to the construction of the “Ivory Shtetl.” For now, however, I argue that Malamud’s seeming detachment from the contemporary situation is itself one of the concerns of the novel, and this is richly encoded in the physical and metaphorical representation of the city.

In order to understand how Malamud artistically engages with the social world, it is important to first recognize how he constructs the urban landscape. Literary studies of urban fiction typically hinge on the urban landscape being recognizably real. In her book *City Codes*, Hana Wirth-Nesher writes that she is “concerned with the representation of the city in the modern novel, with the way in which a locale that exists in the ‘real city,’ where it already serves as a cultural text, functions as a problematic site for the novel’s
main concerns” (9). Indeed, *The Tenants*’ main concerns are essentially constructed out of the cityscape and they manifest themselves as physical and social pressures that threaten Lesser’s ideological worldview. The formal categories of urban fictive representations that Wirth-Nesher employs in her study are the natural, built, human, and verbal environments. For Wirth-Nesher, these elements come together to complicate Modernist fiction’s uses of urban landscapes. In the case of *The Tenants*, Malamud indeed constructs his cityscape from these environments as well, particularly emphasizing the built, the human, and the verbal environments. In Malamud’s pessimistic narrative, Lesser’s building is crumbling under the pressure of external economic and cultural forces. Each of these elements finds embodiment in Wirth-Nesher’s paradigm: the tenement is part of the built environment; Levenspiel and Willie Spearmint each represent a certain diversity in the human environment; and the verbal environment is constructed from Lesser’s formally-trained-novelist’s style, Levenspiel’s Yiddish-inflected English and Spearmint’s Black Nationalism-inspired speech. Both Levenspiel and Spearmint participate in the novel’s attack on Lesser’s life of art, with the condemned tenement standing as a metaphor for the writer’s disappearing sanctuary from hostile economic and cultural forces.

The built environment of *The Tenants* is foregrounded early on and the ruined tenement practically establishes itself as a character in the narrative. The novel begins with Lesser looking at himself in a mirror as he sits down to write. Unlike even Cattanzara’s wife who at least looked out the window, Lesser looks only to himself. Clearly, this situates Lesser as an isolated, detached artist concerned only with his art. He refuses to abandon his tenement as he believes that his novel must be finished in the place
it began. The fact that the rest of the building has been vacated only gives the writer greater sanctuary for his art to come to life. Ironically, however, Lesser’s hyper-isolation seems to not assist, but inhibit his progress on the book. It is as if the vacated building has completely removed Lesser’s art from life, making it a pointless, endless endeavor. In this way, the novel indeed exemplifies the detachment that Roth describes of Malamud’s work, and also predicts the complaints against Arnoldian detachment by later New Left intellectuals (as we will see in Cornell West’s criticism of Lionel Trilling in chapter 3).

The protagonist lives in a new world version of an old world shtetl where he is quartered off from the rest of modern society. As he sits to write, the novel describes the writer and his modern shtetl: “This forsaken house. This happy unhappy Lesser having to write” (3). Lesser’s forsaken apartment implies the lonely isolation of his existence and the ordering of the words “happy” and “unhappy” suggests that the writer’s isolated position in society gives him satisfaction as he, like Arnold, embraces detached isolation.

The novel, however, refuses to allow Lesser his happy unhappy solitude and works to force him out of his life of aestheticism and to engage with the forces that threaten that life. Throughout the novel, he is haunted by his urban surroundings. This fact argues strongly against the critical assertion that Malamud’s work is disengaged from the social condition. New York City provides the novel with more than a setting. From the outset, the city both inspires and menaces happy unhappy Lesser.

Early in the novel we are told “One drizzly morning, Harry, stuck for a transition between scenes, was standing at the window trying to draw up an idea out of the street, the city, the human race, when he saw Levenspiel drive up in front of the pockmarked gray house across the street and park his Oldsmobile at the curb” (34). Here we see that
the fiction writer does, at times, exhibit engagement with conditions of social realism through the city itself. Note the progression of Harry’s consciousness. The scene begins with his attention focused on his manuscript. This is where the novel begins and, according to Malamud’s social realism critics is where the writer remains mired. Lesser, however, is not so detached from the city. He next goes to the window, a “view from above” that gives him (admittedly detached) access to first the street, then the city, then the human race. First, this is an example of the filmic narrative quality of the novel that New describes. The visual perspective in these lines mirror a “zooming out” perspective from a film and help the reader gain insight into Lesser’s perspective. Next, and most importantly, the progression of these “shots” ultimately links the writer’s work to the human race. He is, in fact, not detached from it after all; he simply engages with the social condition as it is mediated through the landscape of the city. In this way, Lesser is a kind of stand in for Malamud, the author writing Lesser’s tale. Malamud, like his fictional creation, engages with social, ideological conditions through a focused engagement with both the urban condition and the built, the human, and especially the verbal environments of that landscape, and both men weave that reality into the fabric of their fiction.

Furthermore, the novel itself firmly grounds the narrative in a real urban setting by locating Lesser’s apartment specifically at 31st and 3rd in New York’s East Side. By placing the action of the novel in a real place, the narrative not only gains verisimilitude for its diegesis, it also engages with real social issues. Levenspiel’s desire to tear down his four-story apartment building and replace it (with the assistance of a Metropolitan Life loan) with a “modern six-story apartment building, five floors of big-room flats over
a line of nice stores” (15) reflects the economic and social reality of an era defined by urban renewal.

**Bakhtin, Heteroglossia and Cultural Atomization**

The verbal environment plays at least as large a role as built environments in the *The Tenants*’ narrative and this has far-reaching implications for the rest of this chapter as well. In fact, the verbal world constructed by Malamud in this novel serves, in many ways, as a template for understanding how the Jewish academic novel engages with a changed academic landscape in the postwar period. Mikhail Bakhtin’s exploration of heteroglossia in his essay, “Discourse in the Novel” provides an instructive model by which to understand how the diversity of languages in *The Tenants* undergirds the novel’s didactic position about the diminishing role of culture and learning in the postwar university.

Bakhtin famously opens his essay by striving to establish a unity between form and ideology in what he calls “verbal art” (259). For him, the novel is distinctively powerful in that its representation of multifarious languages necessarily reflects class ideology and social stratification. For this reason, when the novel brings a diversity of languages, dialects, or professional discourses into its narrative, it simultaneously brings with them the ideological positions they represent and it brings those ideologies into conflict in the narrative. In other words, for Bakhtin, ideology is contained within the form of the novel. In Bakhtin’s use of the term, “language,” is broadly construed, or as he puts it, “We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion” (271). This broadening of the term conveniently allows us to see how Lesser and Spearmint’s conflict embodies
larger, competing ideologies in how each man speaks; the very way they construct their sentences reveals an identifiable world view.

For Bakhtin, there is a constant tension in the social world between “centripetal” forces that seek to centralize language and “centrifugal” forces that work in the opposite direction. Bakhtin establishes the relationship between these two forces as follows:

… the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a ‘unitary language,’ operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also — and for us this is the essential point— into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth. From this point of view, literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages — and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others) (272).

In short, there can never be a resolution of the conflict between diversity and unity. As centripetal forces (like the novel, for instance) craft the diversity of heteroglot languages into unitary languages, those newly centralized forms themselves eventually stratify. This sifting, centrifugal process spins out linguistic forms that soon become distinct and recognizable in their own right. In the case of novelistic prose, the stratification incarnates as genre. The campus novel is then a genre, created from a diversity of ideologically-loaded languages, that, in turn, assumes a (typically low) position in that strata of literary genres. From this perspective, it might be said that Lesser’s tutelage can
be seen as an attempt to control the ideology of Spearmint’s language, by incorporating it into his idealized “unitary” literary form. *The Tenants* indeed does this by creating an artistic unity out of its diverse languages, but in doing, so it creates a literary “language” that itself enters the centrifugal space of linguistic heteroglossia. For Bakhtin, the competition between centripetal and centrifugal forces are two sides of the same coin and the constant struggle between diversity and unity is where the novel derives its rich ability to formally accommodate ideology. Bakhtin, in this way, theorizes the Arnoldian notion of literature as “criticism of life.”

Bakhtin accounts for several ways in which heteroglossia can enter a novel. One is through authorial narration and he uses an example from Dickens to illustrate this process. Citing a descriptive passage from *Little Dorrit*, Bakhtin notes how some of the language stylistically parodies highbrow, British ceremonial speech (303). This, for Bakhtin, is the language of a particular profession and class entering the author’s speech in what he calls “concealed form,” which is to say that it is without direct reference to the original source of that dialect, in this case Queen’s Speech. The effect of this is to highlight the ideology inherent in that speech by juxtaposing it against other discourses (be they linguistic, or professional, or what have you) with other implied worldviews.

*The Tenants* introduces heteroglossia through authorial speech in a similar manner and this is evident from the novel’s beginning:

Levenspiel wants him out of the building so he can demolish it and put up another but Levenspiel he holds by the balls. The building was rent-controlled, and from the District Rent Office — they knew him well — Harry had learned he was a statutory tenant with certain useful rights. The
others had accepted the landlord’s payoff but Lesser stayed on and would for a time so he could finish his book where it was born. Not sentiment, he lived on habit; it saves time. Letting go of Levenspiel’s frozen nuts he raced home in the snow.

Home is where my book is (3-4).

This passage accomplishes two things. First, on a strictly expository level, it provides the context in which the narrative develops. This narration provides back-story, motivation, and character development in just a few lines. Second, and more important, it establishes each of the ideological positions that compete for dominance in the novel and it accomplishes this through the “concealed” introduction of heteroglot language.

*The Tenants* draws on at least three distinctive ideological voices in crafting its narrative: the first, Lesser’s liberal humanism is ideologically positioned against each of the other two, Spearmint’s Black Nationalism, and Levenspiel’s market-driven world view (which are also positioned against one another as well). Each of these languages finds its way into this passage. Take, for example, the phrase “Levenspiel he holds by the balls.” Though describing Lesser’s position in the story, it makes use of a colloquial vulgarity more closely aligned with Spearmint’s street language. In addition, the grammatical structure of the sentence is characterized by its distinct Yiddish syntax, a manner of speaking that Levenspiel himself, as a Jewish immigrant, employs. Here, this single phrase is loaded with heteroglot languages that the novel coalesces into a unitary literary voice.

Bakhtin also accounts for heteroglossia entering the novel through the direct speech of various characters and indeed this is also evident in *The Tenants*. Levenspiel and
Lesser’s conflicting world views are evident in the speech they employ in their conversation early in the novel:

“What’s a make-believe novel, Lesser, against all my woes and miseries that I have explained to you?”

“This isn’t just any novel we’re talking about. It has the potential of being a minor masterpiece. It exemplifies my best ideas as an artist as well as what life has gradually taught me. When you read it, Levenspiel, even you will love me. It will help you understand and endure your life as the writing of it has helped me sustain mine.”

For Christ’s sake, what are you writing, the Holy Bible?” (18).

The disagreement between the men is clear on just the level of story. Levenspiel wants to replace his building so that he can earn more money for his family, while Lesser wishes to stay and complete his novel where he began it. Neither man values the other’s position more than his own and their stalemate provides a portion of the novel’s tension. Closely observing the nature of the language each man employs, however, reveals how the novel creates a space in which to submit divergent ideologies to the centripetal force of a unitary literary language. Bringing heteroglot discourses into conflict to craft a literary object also brings their inherent ideologies into the artistic form, making them support the art, not, as Kellman would have it, the other way around.

Levenspiel relies on language that rises out of his immigrant experience. It is Yiddish-inflected grammatically, and its references are limited to his own family and the Holy Scriptures. Lesser, on the other hand frames his argument within the ideology and linguistic conventions of his liberal humanism. His college education, and his acceptance
of that worldview, undergirds everything he says here. A phrase like “minor masterpiece” could be culled from almost any literary anthology in any college English course, as could the assertion that it “exemplifies my best ideas as an artist.” The difference is, however, that Lesser has applied this language to himself and has used the linguistic practices of that value system to craft his own identity. Likewise, his assurances to Levenspiel that all the trouble will be worthwhile in the end because the “masterpiece” will help him “endure your life as the writing of it has helped me sustain mine” also betrays cultural assumptions that Lesser imposes upon Levenspiel and this phrase parrots a standard defense of the humanizing and enriching role that literature plays in society. Lesser’s view is, in effect, that which Schryer describes in his exploration of New Class Fantasy and that which Trilling implicitly espoused in the greater part of his body of work. It also reveals a common New Left complaint against Arnoldian sentiments; its elitism. Lesser’s language reveals a condescension toward the uneducated Levenspiel and Levenspiel’s reveals a rather philistine rejection of the value of art in the human experience. In short, Lesser lives in, and speaks for, the world of liberal humanism, while Levenspiel speaks from an ideological position in which the bottom line trumps all.

What makes *The Tenants* distinctive, however, is that Lesser’s liberal humanism also comes into conflict with the worldview of another writer and this conflict is also waged linguistically. The novel is filled with moments in which Lesser and Spearmint debate about art and whether Lesser’s liberal humanist value system is designed to keep black people subservient in the social strata. For example, after Spearmint offers an extended critique of white people’s inability and unwillingness to understand the black experience, the men have the following exchange:
“How can you understand it Lesser, if your brain is white?”

“So is your brain white. But if the experience is about being human and moves me then you’ve made it my experience. You created it for me. You can deny universality, Willie, but you can’t abolish it.”

“Being human is shit. It don’t give you any privileges, it never gave us any.”

“If we’re talking about art, form demands its rights, or there’s no order and maybe no meaning. What else there isn’t I think you know.”

“Art can kiss my juicy ass. You want to know what’s really art? I am art. Willie Spearmint, black man. My form is myself.”

They faced each other, their eyes reflecting their images, Willie fuming, Lesser cursing himself for having lost the morning (68).

The rhetorical arguments the men make here speak for themselves. One stands for an Old Left version of integration while the other values a Black Nationalist vision of cultural distinction over subsumption. The nature of their rhetorical debate is interesting here because the men are, in a sense, arguing over apples and oranges; Willie is arguing politics while Lesser argues art. This is of course the dividing line between the men and the source of their conflict. Lesser denies the conjunction between art and politics while Spearmint insists upon it. Even though the men have Levenspiel as a shared enemy, this disagreement ultimately fractures their alliance and leads to each man’s doom.

In addition to the rhetoric employed here, however, the language itself warrants some attention as it reveals how the novel ultimately corrals these heteroglot ideological positions within one textual space. Lesser’s liberal humanist arguments are contained in a
unitary literary linguistic style. Grammatically sound, articulate, and confidently using terms like “universality” reveals a dedication to the value system he gives voice to. His frustration with the argument is completely internalized and not given linguistic presence in the conversation. He silently curses himself instead of Willie. Spearmint, on the other hand, as he gives voice to the radical ideology he aspires to, peppers his speech with curses and street-level language, “Art can kiss my juicy ass,” for example. In a sense, Willie is acting out his ideology linguistically. If he is art and he is form then of course his anger should manifest itself publicly. Lesser, on the other hand, holds a viewpoint that art is an external object, distinct from politics and atomistic culture, that potentially makes internal, personal experience universal. His language, through self-editing, reflects this viewpoint. By leaving his “cursing” out of his language, and relying on what might be called “standard English,” Lesser creates a space for universal understanding — or he attempts to at least. This is how he approaches art and this is how he vocalizes his rhetorical positions.

The way in which Malamud incorporates heteroglossia in *The Tenants* illustrates how ideological conflict is reconciled in the novel. Through this formal mechanism, irreconcilable voices that in the actual world portent doom for Lesser’s brand of liberal humanism are reconciled again as an artistic creation to be studied and pondered over. In short, just as Lesser hopes his novel will eventually comfort Levenspiel more than potential short-term profits, Malamud’s novel seems to offer him and the reader the opportunity to re-centralize culture and art by incorporating the socio-economic forces that have de-centralized it in the postwar university.

*The Tenants as Institutional Higher Education*
Ultimately, I argue that *The Tenants* acts as a kind of allegory for the diminished position of higher education in American society. Lesser, as the last tenant of an outdated building, acts as the last tenured professor and seeks to maintain single-handedly its position as a space in which art and learning are housed. The novel presents Lesser’s battle as having two fronts, one economic and one cultural. With regards to the novel’s presentation of conflicting economic ideologies, it is, I believe, significant that the building’s owner wishes to tear down the residential space and replace it with a structure that will be built upon commercial property. Just as Zukin’s analysis of Bryant Park reveals how economic imperatives ultimately transform public space, Lesser sees the imminent destruction of his flat as an attack on traditional neighborhood values. Lesser laments the changing condition of his neighborhood:

... there was a rumor around that the skinny house of the right, ten thin stories from the 1880’s (Mark Twain lived there?) with a wrought-iron banistered stoop and abandoned Italian cellar restaurant, as touched for next. Beyond that an old red-brick public school, three stories high, vintage of 1903, the curled numerals set like a cameo high on the window-smashed facade, also marked for disappearance. In New York who needs an atom bomb? If you walked away from a place they tore it down (5).

Of course, Lesser refuses to walk away from his home until his novel is finished, taking advantage of municipal laws that, like tenure, constrain pure market capitalism. As we will see, this plot point situates the space as one in which humanistic, liberal learning thrives. Early in the novel the building is described for us and we are told that it is “Lesser’s pleasure dome, he gave it spirit” (4). The term “pleasure dome” perhaps sounds
hedonistic, but in the context of the novel it actually acts as a reference to Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Kahn,” situating Lesser’s world view in the humanistic traditions of western literature and particularly with reference to a poem that is both “about” poetry and foreshadows elements of the novel’s plot. The fact that Lesser provides the building “spirit” further suggests a humanizing function for the writer — much the same as the traditional humanities perform in an institution of liberal education. His description of the neighboring buildings also associate them with spaces of education. One is rumored to have housed Mark Twain and the other transcends metaphor and was literally a public school. In both cases, the buildings are described in a loving manner, paying attention to the intricacies of their architecture — the “wrought-iron banistered stoop” and “the curled numerals set like a cameo.” (The distillation of these spaces’ humanistic value into a fabricated object of beauty is a theme that recurs throughout this project). In all three cases, the destruction of this hallowed architecture seems to equate to the destruction of the ideals housed in the structures. Levenspiel’s plan to replace the old building with a newer, commercial one then becomes an allegory for the replacement of a space dedicated to humanizing liberal education (like George Stoyanovich’s) with a pragmatic, economically driven institution.

The other front in the battle for Lesser’s beloved home is not economic, but cultural and this confrontation also eventually works to establish the tenement’s disintegrating function as a space of liberal, humanistic education. The relationship between the black and Jewish writers ultimately suggests a certain incompatibility between the humanistic traditions evangelized by Lesser and the social activism implicit in his black counterpart’s work. While Willie Spearmint’s Black Nationalism provides an
uncomfortable presence in Malamud’s metaphorical university, Lesser nonetheless makes an effort to welcome the outsider, though the novel’s conclusion finds the writers hopelessly engaged in a violent, mutually destructive act. The resulting professional (as well as personal) relationship between the uneasy colleagues eventually reproduces mechanisms of power that mediate between social and cultural classes.

From the outset, Spearmint and Lesser are described as nearly polar opposites. One is black and one is white. One aesthetically values the authenticity of the sociological black experience while one values an artistic formalism strongly reminiscent of the New Criticism. The dichotomy between the two men is even encoded in their artistic relationships to the city space. Lesser works secluded from the urban landscape, only referencing the city when in particular need of inspiration. In a passage typical of Lesser’s work habits, we are told that he “entered his three-windowed study, raised the cracked green shade without looking into the street and arranged himself at his desk” (11). Our first glimpse of Spearmint, conversely, finds him typing at a discarded kitchen table, “facing the wintry windows” (24). This spatial positioning reflects the worldviews of the two writers with one writing while facing the urban reality and the other seeking isolation from it. Furthermore, the novel codes that urban environment as threatening to Lesser. While Spearmint simply faces “wintry windows,” the novel informs us that the environment is much harsher for Lesser, whose apartment is barely able to shield him from the cold. We are told “on this winter morning when the rusty radiator knocked like a hearty guest but gave off feeble warmth, yesterday’s snow standing seven stiff inches on the white street, through which indigenous soot seeped . . .” (3).
Despite the ideological incompatibility that the novel implies in its construction of the two writers, however, Lesser does attempt to help Spearmint write his book. The writers’ relationship then solidifies the tenement’s function as a metaphor for the university. Lesser, in giving the space “spirit” assumes a professorial position in the relationship as he attempts to incorporate Spearmint into his conception of the institution. In this way, their professional relationship recalls Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the field of restricted production.

**Pierre Bourdieu and Markets of Symbolic Goods**

Bourdieu, in his essay “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” separates cultural production into two fields, restricted and large-scale. The field of large-scale production is, for Bourdieu, comprised of cultural products intended for mass audiences who are, themselves, mainly simple consumers of those products. By contrast, the field of restricted production produces cultural goods that are somewhat isolated from economic concerns. Their value lies more in their symbolic value than their commercial value. Bourdieu maintains that producers of restricted field products intend their productions for other creators, not simply consumers. For Bourdieu, educational institutions are vital in building and maintaining the markets for these fields of restricted production. They consecrate worthy productions and train both consumers and future producers of those productions. In other words, the educational system institutionalizes art by first defining what quality is and then training audiences of future producers in how to recognize that quality by teaching them how to properly read or view it. In this way, the consecrated work maintains and perpetuates its restricted market somewhat outside financial interest by emphasizing its symbolic value of distinction.
Clearly Lesser understands himself to be the building’s consecrator. Upon their first meeting, when Willie asks Lesser, “Man…can’t you see me writing on my book?” Lesser immediately replies “I’m a writer myself” (26). Spearmint shows no sign of being impressed with Lesser’s credentials, but Lesser keeps pushing the issue. Upon his exit, Harry states “Sorry I interrupted you. Better be getting back to my own work now—on my third novel” (29). Spearmint again makes no note of Harry’s professional acumen, so on his way out, Lesser extends Spearmint an invitation to “knock on my door if you have to, should you need something — eraser, pencil, whatever” (29).

Though Spearmint is initially unimpressed, it is ultimately Lesser’s symbolic ownership of the instruments of writing that lure Willie into his “school.” The first step in Spearmint’s tutelage is his bringing his typewriter to Lesser for safe-keeping after he finishes his day’s work. By asking Lesser to caretake his own writing implement, he symbolically hands over some measure of control of the process. Spearmint, however, maintains ultimate control over his work by refusing to allow Harry to hold his manuscript as well (31). This is a portent of the contentious struggle for control that will ensue in the relationship between the two men. It is however during this meeting that Willie becomes attracted to Lesser’s position as a man of letters. As he looks around Lesser’s apartment, the scene is described: “‘Man, oh man.’ Willie gazed around in envious pleasure at the shelves crammed with books, books on their backs, magazines, some small objects of art” (32). At this point, Willie invites himself over to party with Lesser sometime, clearly taken with the literary life the third-time novelist displays in his apartment. Lesser, also finds the potential relationship intriguing, and agrees. For Lesser, however, the relationship between the two writers has the appeal of exoticism. His final
thought as Willie leaves is that he hopes he brings girls with him as “He had never slept with a black girl” (33). This thought illustrates the inherently colonial nature of Lesser’s intentions. For him, the institution of higher learning and art, metaphorized in the dilapidated tenement building is an unchanging ideal that, when it invites new participants in, must normalize them to its standards. Lesser’s desire to sleep with a black girl mirrors his desire to dominate Willie’s literary production and to mold it into a form that is acceptable to his institution. Likewise, Willie, who carries a deep-seated hatred of white people, maintains a dominating sexual relationship with a white girl and this relationship similarly recalls his aggressive racial attitudes. Stepping out of the novel’s storyworld, Malamud himself partakes in this alchemic process of co-opting diverse languages and crafting them into a unitary whole. His strategy, however, is to reconcile the irreconcilable value systems of Lesser and Spearmint into the work called *The Tenants*, which incorporates anti-humanistic rhetoric into a new humanistic art-object.

As the novel progresses, Lesser’s position as tastemaker illustrates Bourdieu’s paradigms about the power of educational institutions in fields of restricted production, in this case, serious literature. Bourdieu writes, “By defending the sphere of legitimate culture against competing, schismatic or heretical messages, which may provoke radical demands and heterodox practices among various publics, the system of conservation and cultural consecration fulfills a function homologous to that of the church” (25). In Lesser’s school, he indeed fulfills ministerial functions as he professes to Willie what makes quality literature. Spearmint notes this himself as he tells Harry, “You talk and you act like some priest or fuckn rabbi. Why do you take writing so serious?” (81). Spearmint’s argument is clear in both the form and content of his words. His aggression
is pointed towards both Lesser’s ethnicity and profession. Lesser is not simply a rabbi, or “teacher,” he is a “fuckn” rabbi, which associates Lesser’s instruction with aggression. In addition, Spearmint’s disparagement of the craft of writing is formulated with non-standard grammar — rhetoric and form converge in Willie’s language.

Furthermore, Spearmint’s literature of black power violates Lesser’s lofty ideals about literature, making it potentially heretical to Harry’s field. The drama of the Lesser-Spearmint relationship is essentially a dramatization of the disciplining system that Bourdieu writes about. Lesser, the last man standing in his precious house of fiction, seeks to incorporate the work of an outsider into that institution. In order to do so, the outsider must be disciplined, or made into a proper reader/producer of his restricted field. Again, stepping out of the book’s narrative, didactically, Malamud tells a tale in which Lesser’s efforts fail, but the telling of that tale accomplishes what Lesser cannot.

The primary subject of conflict between the two writers has to do with the universality of Lesser’s conception of literature. Lesser the formalist prizes it and rejects Willie’s individualized style. This is first symbolized in their initial meeting, when Lesser detects a tangible smell that he attributes to Willie’s manuscript (26). Later, after Spearmint asks Lesser to read and evaluate his manuscript, the two have words over Lesser’s critique of Willie’s technique. Spearmint strives to write the black experience and insists on a sociological purpose. Revolution is his goal. Acknowledging Willie’s innate talent, Lesser insists that he needs to pay attention to form in order to reach a “universal” reader. In Bourdieu’s framework, Lesser’s “universal” reader is the ideal reader that Lesser’s constructed Arnoldian institution seeks to create in order to perpetuate a market for that institution’s cultural product. Harry tells him “You can’t turn
black experience to literature just by writing it down” (68). Seeking to encourage Willie to formalize his writing, Lesser emphasizes the importance of reaching the white reader as well as the black — in other words, Lesser himself. Lesser tells Willie, “if the experience is about being human and moves me then you’ve made it my experience. You created it for me. You can deny universality, Willie, but you can’t abolish it” (68). Spearmint, however, resists acknowledging his perceived enemy is also his reader and he therefore initially rejects Lesser’s pedagogical demands.

Bourdieu’s system, though self-perpetuating, is not closed. First, it acknowledges the competition for the right to consecrate and therefore train future producers with un-institutionalized groups vying with the educational system for that right. Bourdieu mentions groups like author societies and literary circles, but politically motivated artistic movements like Willie’s might also function in this way. Second, just as Lesser seeks to “discipline” Spearmint into the dominant practices of his institution, the system co-opts non-canonical works into its restricted field. In these ways, literary canons adjust to make room for newer productions. Despite this permeability, however, the system is powerfully self-enclosed and requires some degree of disciplining for an outsider to enter. McGurl’s The Program Era explores this sociological process in great detail. Later in the novel, Willie attempts to submit to the discipline of Lesser’s “institution;” however with the ultimate goal of using the rhetorical structures of that institution in order to take it over.

Bourdieu insists that the restricted field’s insistence upon form allies it in some ways with middlebrow, bourgeoise culture (31). Mainstream ideology will allow the artist his position of intellectual power, but “in return, the artist is expected to avoid
serious matters, namely social and political questions” (31). This is ultimately the hurdle that Willie must jump if his work is to be disseminated to a large audience through the publishing industry. Willie acknowledges that his book is dangerous both to the institutions of consecration and the public at large when he complains about his lack of success publishing it. He tells Lesser “I tried ten of those rat-brained Jews and they all turned it down for a lot of horseshit reasons, because they are afraid of what the book says” (69). Realizing that he must eventually come to grips with form, Willie goes to the library, checks out one of Lesser’s books, and finds it surprisingly good. He tells Lesser “What I am thinking about after reading your book — both of them — is I understand a little different now some of those ideas you were preaching about form and that jazz, and which way it gives proportion to the writing” (75). Willie’s newly-found respect for art is not, however, of Lesser’s art-for-art’s-sake variety. He offers a caveat, saying “Art is O.K. When it helps you to say what you got to, but I don’t want to turn into a halfass white writer or an ass-kissing Neegro who imitates ofays because he is ashamed or afraid to be black. I write black because I am black and what I got to say means something different to black people than it does to whites, if you dig” (75). In other words, universal art and education is not the ultimate goal for Willie and his work. His willingness to be co-opted into Lesser’s system of restricted education has its limitations and Spearmint sees his education as an evil necessary to ultimately bring the institutions of white power down. He emphatically states “Lesser, I want to know what you know and add on to that what I know because I am black. And if that means I have to learn something from whitey to do it better as a black man, then I will for that purpose only” (76 italics original). Spearmint wishes not to gain access to the larger, American culture, but rather
maintain his distinctiveness from that culture as he fights to displace it. Ironically, however, by employing artistic form as his weaponry, the revolutionary accesses the very culture he wishes to destroy, another example of the political act being subsumed into the artistic product.

Willie tells Harry “we are the rising people of the future, and if the whites try to hold us down it ain’t no secret we might have to cut your throats. You have had your day and now we are gonna have ours” (76). The violence of this imagery is juxtaposed against the fact that Willie Spearmint has, by this time, chosen a new name for himself, Bill Spear, which simultaneously evokes violent weaponry and William Shakespeare. Just as Willie has decided to adopt “white” formal writing techniques in order to undermine existing power structures, his new name is a simultaneous act of adoption and rebellion. Spearmint’s new name finds a distinct space between the name he was born with and the name of the dominant culture’s most iconic writer. This mirrors Willie’s subversive submission to the educational institution of which Lesser is the symbolic caretaker. His unwillingness to grow into full membership in that institution and the large society it serves contrasts him with both Lesser and Malamud’s idealized vision of liberal education. Malamud’s incorporation of heteroglossia in his narrative, however, does, ironically enough, incorporate Willie’s voice (into a unitary literary language).

In much the same way that Malamud incorporates heteroglossia into The Tenants in concealed form through the authorial voice, the narrative also works to coalesce distinct characters as well. Lesser and Spearmint are clearly doppelgangers for one another, but I submit that Spearmint and Levenspiel are also doubled. In the description of the city’s cold environment, we see evidence that both economic and cultural pressures
conspire against Lesser’s pure artistic vision. Spearmint makes no complaint about the harsh conditions of the city and even engages them in his writing stance. This, in some ways, associates the black writer with that harsh social and physical environment, which illustrates the sociological bent of Spearmint’s work. In fact, at one point, Spearmint even appears in Lesser’s flat with ice covering his goatee (34), a detail that works to conflate the man with the harsh environment. Lesser, on the other hand, experiences the cold and the snow outside as not simply “wintry”, it is “seven stiff inches.”9 In like manner, it is the economic pressure placed on Lesser by Levenspiel that denies him full shelter from this environment. Because Levenspiel wants Lesser to leave the building, he simply provides Lesser with the legal minimum in terms of residential service. The heat is therefore on, but barely, and Lesser has no control over it. Here the text’s imagery associates both Spearmint and Levenspiel with a harsh landscape that encroaches upon Lesser’s pleasure dome.

The association of Spearmint, with his cultural perspective, and Levenspiel with his economic one, is clear from the beginning of the novel. At the novel’s opening, as Lesser wakes from his sleep, he recalls pieces of a troubling dream, thinking to himself “here’s this stranger I meet on the stairs. ‘Who you looking for, brother?’ ‘Who you callin brother, mother?’ Exit intruder. Yesterday’s prowler or already today’s? Levenspiel in disguise? A thug he’s hired to burn or blow up the joint?” (2). Though Lesser has yet to meet Spearmint, his looming presence still haunts the isolated writer and his troubled dreams conceive the black writer as an agent of Levenspiel. When Lesser finally does hear Willie typing in the abandoned apartment down the hall he wonders “Had Levenspiel set up a spy office here, CIA sub-headquarters for tuning in on Harry Lesser
engaged in writing a subversive novel?” (24). Still later, upon their first meeting, Lesser asks if Levenspiel has allowed the black writer to use the building (27). Though Lesser’s conspiratorial fantasies are proven to be untrue, the fact remains that the two figures who encroach upon his sanctuary are frequently linked in the novel. I argue that this indicates a recognition on Malamud’s part that the erosion of the spaces that housed traditional humanistic scholarship was not simply the result of cultural or economic shifts, but of a combination of both.

*The University in Ruins*

George Stoyonovich eventually walked out of his shtetl-like neighborhood into the library in order to gain full citizenship in society. Harry Lesser’s attempt to institutionalize George’s humanizing, liberal process of becoming in a metaphorical university space reveals a difficulty in the systematic maintenance of those ideals. Bourdieu’s analysis of fields of production illustrates the fact that cultural production is inseparable from the systems that make it possible. Bourdieu writes, “Few works do not bear within them the imprint of the system of positions in relation to which their originality is defined; few works do not contain indications of the manner in which the author conceived the novelty of his undertaking or of what, in his own eyes, distinguished it from his contemporaries and competitors” (21). In other words, the bureaucratic institutional structures of production fields are literally written into works produced in those fields and, as with any bureaucracy, markets eventually overwhelm the ideals upon which the institution was founded.

Harry Lesser’s house of liberal education is then a pessimistic allegory for institutional humanistic education in late twentieth-century America. Published in 1971
in the wake of both economic changes, of the kind Zukin’s sociology describes, and counter-cultural revolution, the novel narrates a two-front assault on idealistic institutions of higher learning. Humanistic ideals of a citizenry cultivated through universal liberal education teeter under the weight of economic pressures and cultural fragmentation. The novel ends with Lesser and Spearmint attacking each other with, respectively, ax and knife, leaving Levenspiel to mourn over the aftermath. Ultimately, the novel finds no salvation from economic pressures for the university in replacing assimilationist orthodoxies with a new multi-cultural orthodoxy. The cultural and economic problems of the city are essentially identical to those in the Ivory Shtetl. Levenspiel, the profit-driven private landowner ultimately cries “mercy” over both men as Malamud’s dark allegory novel ends. The picture that Malamud paints is, quite literally, what might be called a University in Ruins.

Readings, as we have seen, also examines the traditional humanities difficulties in the wake of the canon wars. With the decline of the nation-state and the subsequent loss of prestige and viability of the humanities, a tempting alternative to traditional humanities departments is to place everything under the umbrella of “Cultural Studies.” Readings maintains that this, though it seems to be a pragmatic move to ensure viability in the new University, is a deceptive solution because it does not address the problem of the loss of the University’s social, cultural mission. In fact, Readings maintains that the rise of Cultural Studies can be seen as an “admission that there is nothing to be said about culture” (90). His reasoning is based upon some of the very claims of the proponents of Cultural Studies, namely that Cultural Studies, in effect, encompasses all of humanities and, indeed, everything. This argument can be used to include every conceivable cultural
artifact in the all-inclusive “Cultural Studies” curricula. Readings reasons that if something, in this case culture, is everything, it has nothing to which it can refer. This “dereferentialization” (Readings 118) is key to Readings complaint. As he states it: “if culture is everything, then the invocation of culture cannot have redemptive force, cannot lend meaning (unity and direction) to symbolic life” (99). Therefore, for Readings, claiming “culture” as our guiding principle is worthless. The ubiquity of culture renders it center-less and therefore unable to act as a guide, since no one aspect of culture can be differentiated from another.

One main problem that seems to crop up with the rise of Cultural Studies, in the terms of Readings’ argument, is that it may unwittingly play into the hands of the consumerism that is part of the identity problem that the modern University faces. If all the humanities indeed become, as John Guillory suggests, “an integrated program of study” (The Critical Tradition 1598), then it would seem that the study of the humanities would begin to resemble a trip to the supermarket. No one item is really any more important than any other potential item, it’s simply a matter of what seems most enticing to the shopper. Without a clear purpose driving one’s study, the student is free to pick and choose without direction.

Readings’ analysis of the modern university illuminates the pessimism of Malamud’s novel and draws cultural and economic paradigm shifts into a single narrative: one that threatens to displace the Arnoldian “historical” university. Just as Readings’ account of how the humanities position became diminished focuses on both economic and cultural shifts, Malamud’s novel also conflates the two seemingly distinct forces and renders universal humanistic education powerless in the face of their assault.
The Jewishness of this Arnoldianism has its roots in the American higher education system. The lost ideal that Malamud laments can be traced to his education at City College in New York City. The student body of CCNY was so predominantly Jewish that, as Marianne Rachel Sanua notes, it was pejoratively referred to as “Circumcised Citizens of New York” (42). Sherry Gorelick, in her book *City College and the Jewish Poor* describes the role that the institution played in educating the poor, Jewish immigrant populations of the city’s Lower East Side. Abraham Cahan’s fictional David Levinsky describes the institution as his temple and indeed it did provide a gateway into the American mainstream for the city’s Jewish minority. Gorelick describes the institution’s assimilationist curriculum:

This Western elite culture dominated the curriculum at CCNY. It permeated course content and faculty scholarship. It violated the realities of Jewish workers and ghetto life. It ignored the vibrant Yiddish socialist culture that was flowering among poets, journalists, artists, and workers at the turn of the century. Jewish students commuting between these two cultural worlds subjected themselves to a world of business assumptions and Anglo Saxon dominance. Social mobility through the institutions which promulgated such a culture was not simply a series of agile leaps up an abstract ‘social ladder.’ It required some form of confrontation with a dominant, alien, but seemingly all-embracing way of life” (134).

Norman Podhoretz, another graduate of CCNY recalls, “To our minds, this culture we were studying . . . Was not the creation or the possession of a particular group of people; it was a repository of the universal” (qtd in Gorelick).
Podhoretz’s rhetoric in many ways parallels Harry Lesser’s as he attempts to bring Willie Spearmint into the dominant culture, particularly his use of the term “universal.” It also suggests Readings’ account of the loss of cultural capital for the humanities. Malamud’s own educational experience seems to have instilled an ideal of humanistic education that serves to bring the subject into the dominant culture. Philip Davis’s biography of Malamud, *A Writer’s Life*, illuminates the discipline of the City College experience. Davis quotes Professor of Rhetoric Earle Palmer’s evaluation of Malamud, which indicated that Malamud had done “superior work”, showing ‘original power, versatility and good taste’ and ‘the bearings of a gentleman’” (39). This evaluation indicates the powerful assimilationist demands the institution placed on its students, with the end goal being full gentlemanhood. Davis goes on to recount how one of Malamud’s writing teachers would invite students to take flowery prose “straightaway to the toilet” (40). This stern pedagogy not only shaped Malamud’s own disciplined writing style, it also informs the vision of restricted field production portrayed in *The Tenants*.

A survey of the English department course bulletins in the City College library archives offers some insight into the shifting conception of the institutional study of literature in society. The 1941 bulletin offers this preface to their course offerings:

The Department supervises the study of the English language as literature, as philology, and as composition. These divisions are specialized for the better cultivation of the whole subject; the aim is to provide a variety of opportunities by which the student may make of himself an informed, skillful, and thus civilized reader and writer.
The courses that follow this introduction are basic composition and grammar classes and literary offerings with names like “The Age of Dryden,” “The Age of Swift and Pope,” and “The Age of Johnson.” More important, however is the rhetoric of the introduction to the bulletin. The terms “whole subject” and “civilized reader” evoke both Bourdieu’s field of restricted production and Readings’ account of the “historical” university. And it is, of course, noteworthy that this study of Western Culture is “supervised” by the department, just as Lesser seeks to supervise the production of Willie’s fiction. In both cases, the study of literature is a centralized, top-down process.

By contrast the 1971 bulletin (the year The Tenants was published) has virtually no introductory material establishing department philosophy, save for the brief statement, “These courses are designed to develop an appreciation of literature and to provide a basis for further literary study.” The shift away from a normalizing program goal toward one favoring individual study is unmistakable. Also important to note is the changed nature of course offerings. Gone are the “Age of” courses of 30 years prior. Instead, courses titled “The Writer’s Response to His Culture” and “The Writer and The City” are offered. Clearly these courses are responses to the changing social world and it is no accident that they are brought into the curriculum after the campus unrest of the late 1960’s. The revised curriculum also indicates, however, a shift in the humanities relationship to American culture. No longer cultivating students through a pre-conceived, normalizing cultivation of the whole subject, the curriculum in now in the position of responding to culture, not guiding it. This is the changed social landscape that de-humanizes the university for Bernard Malamud. The early century CCNY student exemplified by Irving Howe and allegorized by Malamud’s Harry Lesser eschewed part
of their Jewish distinctiveness in order to assimilate into the hegemonic institutional power represented and perpetuated by CCNY. Spearmint refuses to make the same concessions and this brings about the end of universal education in *The Tenants.*

However, the account of that demise, *The Tenants,* reverses the damage done to liberal humanism, ultimately working the erosion of the historical university into a new, living portrait of it.
Chapter 2

*A New Life*: The Ruined University and the Jewish Conscience

That’s Easchester we’re coming to. The college is over there to the southwest. That tall building just over those trees is Chem Engineering. That one is the new Ag building. You can’t see Humanities Hall, where we hang out, but it’s in that direction there.
— Bernard Malamud, *A New Life*

The American Jew is central to our understanding of Readings’ historical university and indeed represents in many ways a saving remnant of that institution. Malamud is a particularly important figure in understanding the Jew’s relationship to American culture in this way. Recalling Lesser’s insistence upon universality over cultural specificity, Evelyn Avery writes, “In an age that prizes diversity, Bernard Malamud’s voice is uniquely universal” (xi). Certainly the influence that City College had on the intellectual development of so many Jewish American writers and intellectuals cannot be underestimated in this regard. Jewish intellectuals from both the left and the right found their training ground at CCNY. The centrality of Arnoldian educational ideals to the American Jewish fiction I refer to as the Ivory Shtetl is evident throughout *The Tenants*. For instance, Willie Spearmint himself frequently conflates the “white” institutional power that he opposes and Jewishness. Spearmint’s final words to Lesser as they attack one another are “Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater” (211). Lesser’s response is “Anti-semitic Ape.” I argue that this scene situates the Jew, not simply the white man, as the last man standing guard over the historical university as Lesser’s Jewishness is yet again foregrounded.
This is not to argue, however, that Jewish writers like Malamud lament that society has lost contact with a pure, idyllic past. Iska Alter notes that “Malamud has illustrated in the course of his novels and short stories that history has proven the American dream to be corrupt and the possession of Eden illusory, that race and sex lead to war rather than harmony, that the artist’s power to discipline chaos is negligible, while the attempt to do so is often self-destructive” (155). Alter’s reading of Malamud’s career certainly applies to the narrative of The Tenants, and my claim is simply that Malamud and the Jewish intellectual are uniquely positioned to provide perspective on the disappointment of the failure of the liberal education project. Malamud himself considered the universality of the Jewish experience in America, writing “With the values of the Jew it is possible to judge and affirm the values of the American; with the values of the American it is possible to judge and affirm the values of the Jew” (Talking Horse 185). For Malamud, who famously stated that “all men are Jews,” the specificity of the Jewish experience in America makes it quintessentially American. In an age of diversity and multiculturalism, cultural fragmentation can sometimes make it difficult to see a whole. This dissertation will argue that this particular Jewish American fiction is an ethnic body of work that in many ways denies the primacy of ethnicity. This perhaps explains Irving Howe’s insistence that Jewish American fiction is best defined as regional, not ethnic. It may then be said that Jewish American fiction is the most American of fiction as it both formally and didactically considers both the individual and the individual’s relationship with the greater whole.

Some evidence for this position might be also found in the fact that non-Jewish writers also frequently position the Jew as representative of humanistic liberal education.
One prime example of this is Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, which features a group of Jewish transplants from New York as the main actors in College-on-the-Hill’s humanities programs. DeLillo’s book parodies higher education by representing it as engulfed by larger consumerist forces that reduce the American social landscape to a meaningless blur, or white noise. The Jewish academic figures in DeLillo’s text spend their intellectual efforts on theorizing Elvis Presley and “reading” cereal boxes, having themselves been consumed by an institution of higher learning that, despite its ironic name, no longer resides on a hill setting a higher standard for the culture. Instead, the university in DeLillo’s landscape simply reflects back at the culture it’s own crass consumerism, and serves as yet another commercial product through which subjects construct their identity.

Just as DeLillo and others embody the liberal humanistic tradition in the figure of the Jew, and situate that figure on college campuses, Malamud himself confronted the issue of the academic centrality of the Jew in his own campus novel, 1961’s *A New Life*. Unlike *The Tenants*, which I have argued metaphorizes liberal education by locating its action in the midst of urban blight, *A New Life*, written a decade earlier, literalizes the metaphor and grounds its tragi-comic narrative on a college campus.

Jonathan Lethem, in his introduction to a 2004 edition of the novel, notes that it is perhaps Malamud’s least Jewish book and that it “plays at being secular,” with the word “Jew” being mentioned just once, near the end of the novel, suggesting that Jewishness is a “red herring” (x-xi). Sy Levin’s unarticulated Jewishness, however, constantly bubbles just beneath the novel’s surface and provides the narrative with an ethnic minority, heteroglot language against which to juxtapose the dominant languages of its pastoral,
small Western town. In this way, the novel’s fictional campus becomes the site of a linguistic and cultural conflict in which ideologies about the role of higher education in society do battle. These hostilities are not only played out in the linguistic realm, where the worldviews of the novel’s characters come into verbal conflict with one another, they are also written into the very landscape of the novel, physically inscribed in the topography, the architecture, and the geographic location of the campus and the small town in which it is housed. In this conflict, Levin’s Eastern Jewishness, with all of its ethnic distinction, represents Arnoldian ideals about education, the individual, and society and that position is pitted against educational ideals that foreground economic pragmatism (or what Daniel Bell refers to in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* as “functional rationality”) and middlebrow cultural values.

*A New Life* follows the misadventures of New Yorker Seymour Levin and his ill-fated effort to re-make himself in a mythical American West. Levin, as we are told in the novel’s opening line, is “formerly a drunkard” (3) and is, at the novel’s beginning, in the middle of an attempt to rebuild his crumbled life and is seeking to do so by building a career as an academic. The novel begins with Levin arriving at the town of Easchester in the state of “Cascadia,” a fictional western state (modeled on Oregon, where Malamud himself once taught), to begin his new job as an English teacher at Cascadia College. Levin’s fantasies about living the life of the mind, however, are quickly dashed when he learns that Cascadia College has no Liberal Arts presence to speak of and, in fact, serves the state by providing training in science and agriculture. The Liberal Arts program, we soon find out, has been extracted from Cascadia College and housed at its sister campus, Cascadia University at Gettysburg (26). The only English classes Levin will be able to
teach, he learns, are basic composition classes. This disappointment brings Levin into frequent conflict with his new colleagues and as the narrative unfolds, he finds himself haunted by and assuming the place of a former “radical” departmental troublemaker, Leo Duffy, whose own ideological conflicts with the Cascadian academic culture predict Levin’s.  

His departmental conflicts are just part of Levin’s troubles in Easchester, however. In addition to his professional disappointment, Levin’s personal life in the West also suffers, as he is unable to connect with his surroundings either personally or geographically. His few relationships, sexual or otherwise, fail to develop. On the sexual front, he fails to consummate an attempted affair with Avis Fliss, a departmental colleague and has a brief fling with a young student, Nadalee Hammerstad. His Platonic relationships also fail to develop as his overtures to literature professors Bucket and Fabrikant are rejected. The only personal connection Levin makes is with Pauline Gilley, the wife of Gerald Gilley, one of Levin’s colleagues and the man who took a chance and brought him to Cascadia. His affair with Mrs. Gilley ultimately brings about the end of his time at Cascadia and the novel ends with Levin and Pauline Gilley leaving Cascadia with her children for yet another “new life.”

*A New Life* has received relatively little critical attention since its publication in 1961 and perhaps this is due to the fact that it more obviously belongs to the genres of the campus novel and the Western (as exemplified by Leslie Fiedler’s essay “Malamud’s Travesty Western”), and less obviously to the canon of Jewish American literature, unlike the bulk of Malamud’s work. The novel’s association with the genre of the campus novel in particular seems to underwhelm critics from the outset. For example, one critic
writes, “A New Life is a college novel and has all the shortcomings of that limited form” (Abramson 57). This limited perspective obfuscates the social and political contexts of the novel by its insistence upon positivistic, formal requirements for “quality.” For instance Abramson goes on to complain about the novel’s pacing and inconsistency of tone, and passes summative judgments about where the novel ranks in Malamud’s oeuvre in terms of “artistic quality.” This critical approach betrays a blind spot to the formal-artistic possibilities inherent in representing the campus space.

Sanford Pinsker, for example, in noting that the novel “transcends the quotidian details of its time and place, but also its status as an academic novel” (88), goes on to credit the novel’s artistic success with its presentation of how the humanities has become the victim of assault from “within English departments,” (99) a claim that harkens to Readings analysis of the ruined university. Pinsker, recognizing his own academic experiences in Malamud’s novel, also recognizes the socio-political strata that Malamud crafts into his art-object and he understands the artistic achievement in creating narrative order from that chaos. Frances Barasch, building from this sentiment, even goes on to identify A New Life as a kind of predecessor to two lines of academic fiction that would follow in the coming decade, psychological novels about professors (like Herzog) and campus novels where intellectual issues lead to campus riots (29). My own assertion is, of course, that Malamud himself explored that particular sub-genre in The Tenants.

In her monograph The Good Man’s Dilemma Iska Alter situates A New Life as an example of the literary exploration of the “failure of the west as Eden,” and her reading of the novel explores it in this broadly metaphorical sense. Alter’s reading of the name Malamud gives to his Western university provides a useful beginning point for
addressing the role of space in the novel. Alter points out that the fictional “Easchester,” by omitting the letter “t” establishes itself as decidedly not “East,” the region of the country from which Levin hails (30). Another result of this omission, as Alter notes, is the subsequent association of the community’s lifestyle with the variations of the term “ease.” Finally, Alter traces the meaning of the term “Chester” to the Latin term, “castra,” which means “fortress.” According to Alter, the qualities inherent in the community’s name “describes, in fact, what the town really is, armed against the complexities of the world beyond Cascadia” (30). Indeed, this community seems constructed for the very purpose of sheltering its citizens from social, political, and economic realities that challenge its citizens to engage with the larger American community. Eastern politics and cultural ideas are simply not welcome, as they require the citizens of Easchester to acknowledge an inherently complex worldview that they do not wish to see. As we will see, however, in spite of the disunity that the novel’s narrative describes, the heteroglossia inherent in Levin’s presence in this gated community ultimately makes the novel cohere as an aesthetic art-object outside the diegesis of the storyworld. Alter’s study of the town’s name provides us with a means to see how that willful ideological blindness is spatialized and made physically manifest in Malamud’s novel.

Ultimately however, Alter’s insistence upon reading Malamud metaphorically undermines the role that space and place play in the novel. Alter argues against John Lyons’ notion that A New Life is best categorized as an example of the academic novel as “argument” in his own study The College Novel in America (60). For her, Malamud’s intention was “deeper” than Lyons acknowledges. She argues that “For Malamud, in the last analysis, the best that can be said of the myth of the West as paradise, as redemptive
geography, is that such a myth exists; the worst, that it is destructive” (61). In other words, Alter maintains that Malamud locates a broad mediation on the Western narrative inside the facade of an academic novel, which is for her more of a method of delivery than an organizing genre. I, however, dispute this approach to the novel. Particularly when placed in juxtaposition against *The Tenants, A New Life*'s concern with the vitality of liberal education in redeeming society cannot be overlooked. Levin is not simply looking for an “Eden” in which to reside. He is primarily looking for a career in which he can participate in an Arnoldian life of the mind. That Cascadia is the location of that career move is, from Levin’s perspective, incidental. Had he been offered a chance to teach English in New Hampshire, that is where he would have gone; the allure of the West is secondary to the professional opportunity. In short, I approach this text from the opposite perspective to Alter; the novel does not masquerade as a campus novel in order to deliver a polemic about the failure of the Western mythos. Instead, Malamud parodies elements of the Western in his exploration of the degradation of liberal education in the pragmatism of the postwar educational moment.

**Geography, Landscape, and Ideology in A New Life**

Important to this study is the fact that both of the genres with which the novel is most frequently associated, the campus novel and the Western, bring to the foreground the role that geographic spaces play in defining the ideological tensions in the narrative. One space, the landscape of the West, illuminates Levin’s Eastern alienness, while the other, the land-grant/ag school campus insinuates itself as setting in which Levin’s Arnoldian ideas about education come into conflict with crass commercial and cultural ideologies.
The novel’s opening lines illustrate how it uses landscape not only as a setting for the plot to unfold in, but also as literary device to initiate ideological conflict and as a canvas upon which to inscribe that conflict:

S. Levin, formerly a drunkard, after a long and tiring transcontinental journey, got off the train at Marathon, Cascadia, toward evening of the last Sunday in August, 1950. Bearded, fatigued, lonely, Levin set down a valise and suitcase and looked around in a strange land for welcome. The small station area — like dozens he had seen en route — after a moment’s activity, was as good as deserted, and Levin after searching around here and there, in disappointment was considering calling a taxi, when a man and woman in sports clothes appeared at the station. They stared at Levin — the man almost in alarm, the woman more mildly — and he gazed at them. As he grasped his bags and moved towards them they hurried to him. The man, in his forties, tall, energetic, with a rich head of red hair, strode forward with his hand outstretched (3).

This opening paragraph essentially reproduces in miniature everything the reader will encounter in the novel. Levin’s alienation and the awkward relationships to come are clearly present here. Levin’s character is not simply narrated here; it is defined by its juxtaposition against both Cascadian characters and the Cascadian landscape, which I argue are nearly indistinguishable.

The first striking feature of this passage is the rendering of Levin’s first name as a simple initial, “S.” This is our introduction to the novel’s protagonist and it simultaneously conveys two impressions of his character. First, the initializing of his first
name literally renders it incomplete, a state that matches Levin’s personality as the novel opens; he is after all searching for a “new life.”

Second, the truncation carries with it an innate and ridiculous pomposity, as if Levin has constructed the persona of a great literary critic for himself and is attempting to forcefully embody it in his person. Furthermore, the pseudonym seems an uncomfortable fit. Though the novel’s narrator introduces Levin by this name, it does not seem to be a gesture of respect, but rather an indicator of the desperation in Levin’s attempt to construct a New Life for himself. The narrator’s invocation of “S. Levin” is both followed by the phrase “formerly a drunkard,” and points toward the novel’s first spoken dialogue, when Gilley and Levin introduce themselves to one another. Greeting Levin, Gilley states “I’m Dr. Gilley” (3). Though phrased as a greeting, the statement also serves a competitive function in that it marks Gilley as Levin’s superior by rank and title. This establishes a class structure in which Levin finds himself immediately (and hopelessly) jockeying for position. Armed with only a Master’s degree and therefore unable to compete in rank, Levin rather pathetically introduces himself as “S. Levin” as if to confer an aristocratic dignity upon himself. It is the desperation of this act that the narrator parodies in the introduction of Levin at the novel’s open and this parody is emphasizes as from the immediate moment of this introduction on, Levin is referred to simply as “Levin.”

The cultural and professional gulf that Levin confronts throughout the novel (illustrated in these opening lines) is intricately expressed in both spatial and geographic terms. Levin’s clumsily arrogant self-introduction is a good example of this: “‘S. Levin,’ Levin said, removing his black fedora, his teeth visible through his beard. ‘From the
East’” (4). Levin’s second utterance establishes the relationship that geographic space plays in his alienation in Cascadia. Being from “the East” carries with it ideological and cultural implications for Levin that he is never able to overcome. His Eastern perspective never comes to terms with that of his new Western home and this cultural and ideological gap is spatialized in the novel. This passage also undermines Lethem’s assertion that Jewishness plays no real role in the novel. Levin’s “Easternness” is exaggerated by his physical description. The fact that his black fedora and beard comprise the totality of his physical description suggest that his Jewishness is put on display as spectacle for the unsuspecting Westerners, who greet his first appearance with “alarm” (3). Here the cultural gap is embodied by Levin’s Jewishness and expressed in spatial terms.

These two elements of Levin’s character, his Jewishness and his Eastern perspective, are interconnected in the text, both thematically and textually and they are central to the overall concerns of this project. Along with Levin’s “Easternness” comes an worldview that prioritizes intellectual activity and the primacy of culture in its ideology of higher education. I argue that his Jewishness, coded and subtle as it may be, is a vital part of this ideological position, just as it is in *The Tenants*, when Willie Spearmint explicitly conflates the traditional power structures he struggles against with Jewishness, and in *White Noise* where DeLillo represents humanistic scholarly activity as Jewish. In addition, as in *The Tenants, A New Life* places this (Jewish) worldview in direct competition with cultural and economic ideologies that seek to de-centralize culture in their constructions of the University. Furthermore, this power struggle is played out not only at the linguistic level, but at the level of physical landscape as well.
The decentralized role that the humanities and the liberal arts play in Easchester is written into the very landscape of the town. Upon being picked up by the Gilleys, Levin is told that a trip to campus will wait until tomorrow and is instead given a tour of the small town:

That’s Easchester we’re coming to. The college is over there to the southwest. That tall building just over those trees is Chem Engineering. That one is the new Ag building. You can’t see Humanities Hall, where we hang out, but it’s in that direction there (6).

Levin’s view of the campus is compromised in several ways here, both physically and ideologically and this conflation of ontological and epistemological concerns reveals the extensive role that space plays in Malamud’s exploration of the ideological conflict waged in the postwar university.

Initially, Gilley pulls rank and refuses Levin a tour of campus, a move which he is powerless to resist (thought the tour eventually happens). Next, the limited perspective he does receive is obscured by the small town of Easchester, with its own provincial architecture and natural landscape limiting Levin’s vision of the place of his New Life. Finally, we must remember that Levin’s ideological perspective orients him toward a liberal arts inspired vision of higher education. As if to challenge this ideology, the only portions of campus that he is able to fix his Eastern, Jewish gaze upon are buildings dedicated to engineering and agriculture, expressions of Cascadia’s pragmatic Western ideological perspective. Levin “can’t see Humanities Hall.” This geographical description of the physical campus’s physical construction is buoyed by the formal construction of Malamud’s sentences. The two spaces dedicated to science and technology are
augmented with adjectives; Chemical Engineering is “tall,” and Agriculture is “new.” In addition to the fact that Humanities Hall is denied presence, it is also denied descriptive terminology that might distinguish it from its academic cousins. The qualities of the technological spaces also indicate their priority within the dominant ideology. Chemical Engineer’s height propels it into the sight of the surrounding town and makes it omnipresent. The Agriculture building’s newness implies that it represents current policy trends that derive from economic and cultural priorities.

Finally, the hierarchy of the various disciplinary buildings is also indicated by the terminological affection afforded each space. The terms “Chem Engineering” and “Ag” carry with them the informal easiness of pet names whereas no such term of endearment is used for the invisible “Humanities Hall.” That space’s low hierarchical position is exaggerated in the generic quality of its very name. This marginalization is further extended to the very work done in that forgettable building as Gilley describes it as the place “where we hang out.” The towering achievements of the “tall” and “new” technological spaces render the humanities both invisible and insignificant.

It is, of course, fitting that Engineering and Agriculture take such architectural and social priority in Cascadia. The campus is designed to reflect the educational ideology of the region’s residents and these are the occupations that these citizens of the West value. We must remember, after all, that Levin’s (and our) first view of the campus is physically made through the town’s landscape. In other words, Easchester’s dominant ideology is vital in our understanding of its campus. This is no “college-on-the-hill” that radiates a cultural ideology out to the surrounding community. This university is more like a mirror that reflects the town’s principles and values back at it, and therefore is a microcosmic
image of the town, embodying Easchester’s ideologies in its architecture and academic culture. We cannot see Cascadia College except from the perspective of Easchester.

Since Easchester’s perspective is central in understanding the ideological orientation of the campus, it is worth paying attention to the small town’s geography and architecture. Instead of a campus tour, Levin is, as we have seen, treated to a tour of Easchester, which is described as follows:

They were driving through downtown, and were, before he could get much of an impression, out of it and into a residential section of lovely tree-lined streets and attractive wooden houses. The many old trees and multitudes of green leaves excited Levin pleasantly. In a few minutes they had arrived in front of a two-story frame house, painted an agreeable brown, with a slender white birch on the lawn, its lacy branches moving in the summer breeze. What surprised Levin was the curb-strip planted thick with flowers the whole length of the house, asters, marigolds, chrysanthemums, he guessed; in his valise was a copy of Western Birds, Trees and Flowers, a fat volume recently purchased (6).

To begin with, Levin’s recent purchase of Western Birds, Trees and Flowers indicates an insistence upon the vitality of landscape. Levin clearly wishes to assimilate into his New Life and his possession of this text demonstrates a belief that mastering the landscape is tantamount to forging one’s place in it. Also, as an Eastern intellectual, Levin’s approach towards gaining this mastery is an academic one and his immediate application of his book-acquired knowledge in assigning the proper names to the flowers in front of the Gilley residence best represents his attempt at acculturation. At any rate, what is clear
here is the significance of landscape and place in creating meaning, both for Levin and
for the novel as well.

Just as this passage’s focus on landscape reveals a great deal about Levin’s
fledgling relationship with his new town, the above description of Easchester’s
geography orients the reader to the dominant ideology of the community. The downtown
area, in the passage in which it is introduced, is described in only enough detail to
indicate that it leaves no impression on Levin. This has two ideological implications.
First, Levin, having just come from New York City, views Easchester from his cultural
perspective, which causes him to see the small Western town in juxtaposition against the
great Eastern metropolis. His inability to gain an impression of his new home therefore
reveals an inherent conflict of cultural expectations, and this conflict is written directly
into the Easchester landscape, and is a precursor to the competitive tensions that the
novel stages and crafts into a heteroglossic art-object. As we have seen in The Tenants
and will continue to see in A New Life, this poetic/formal resolution of conflicting
ideological perspectives or “voices,” distinguishes Malamud’s representations of the
tensions centered around and focused on higher education.

The second ideological implication of this description of Easchester’s
conspicuously absent downtown is that it is rendered in stark contrast against the relative
detail provided about the community’s residential areas. Just as Humanities Hall is
described in generic terms that provide it neither character nor substance, the Easchester
downtown is left indistinct. Also like the earlier description of the campus, in which
Agriculture and Chemical Engineering receive the lion’s share of linguistic attention,
much more loving detail is provided to forgotten downtown’s sibling, the town’s residential areas.

The first mention of the residential section provides two nouns upon which to focus attention: its streets and its houses. Both of these nouns are provided two adjectives each to praise their attributes, the streets being “lovely” and “tree-lined,” and the houses both “attractive” and “wooden.” Furthermore, each noun/adjective set follows the same descriptive pattern. Each phrase begins with an adjective that indicates a metaphysical state of beauty, followed by an adjective that physically describes the noun that follows. The sense that this pattern gives is that Easchester’s residential areas are physically embodied ideas of Platonic beauty, taken right from the ideal world of forms and made manifest in a pastoral West. What is more, the adjectives of physical description (“tree-lined” and “wooden”), each serve to associate the built environment of the town’s residences with a major element of the natural environment of the region, the forests, further emphasizing the cultural distinction between Cascadia and man-made New York.

The descriptive distinction between not-worth-mentioning downtown and the Platonic-ideal of Easchester’s residential area is so stark that it borders on satire, which emphasizes the town’s culture. In short, Easchester emphasizes the private realm over the public. With most of the novel’s descriptive resources in the service of Easchester’s private residences, the town’s public space is all but forgotten. This distribution of prosaic capital reinforces for the reader the dominant ideology that dictates not only the geography and architecture of the town, but also that of the college. The fact that downtown leaves Levin without impression implies that the community’s economic and cultural resources (both tied to the land) have not been used to forge a noteworthy public
space. Instead, the natural resources of the Cascadian landscape, symbolized in its forests, have been invested into individualized private residences. This allocation once again recalls Sharon Zukin’s exploration of the privatization of public spaces in New York City in that it demonstrates a shift in priorities from those of a broadly conceived public to those of private, individual concerns. A key distinction between Bryant Park and Easchester, however, is that the Cascadian community has not attempted to construct the formerly public space into any kind of cultural commodity. In other words, there is no BID operating with private capital in downtown in order to create a cultural destination and attract tourists. On the contrary, this public space is left vacant and all of the work of cultural commodification is applied to the community’s private residences. The end result of this mindset is a quiet, dull private life for the residents of Easchester in which culture is not shared and general, but privatized and individual. This, of course, has severe ramifications for the viability of Levin’s Arnoldian notions of common culture and citizenship.

At this point, I wish to emphasize the fact that Humanities Hall and downtown Easchester occupy identical positions in their larger geographic environments. As we have seen already, each is positioned both narratively and textually as subordinate to other competing entities, and in each case similar grammatical structures and narrative emphasis relegate these spaces to comparatively low hierarchical positions. The ultimate effect of this is to equate public urban space with a tradition of liberal education that also assumes a public, shared nature. Recall Eliza New’s argument that for the Jewish writer, intellectual activity takes place upon the urban canvas. This is essentially what I have argued that The Tenants accomplishes by its conflation of urban space and humanistic
education. *A New Life*, though geographically maintaining some distinction between the two spaces, links them by locating them in identical hierarchical positions. The two are inseparable. The dominant ideology of the community, which prioritizes private concerns over public ones, imposes itself upon Cascadia College, which, in turn, must follow suit and de-centralize liberal humanistic, public culture from its mission and replace it with pragmatic economic concerns that are of immediate, local use. The architectural and structural fate of downtown, subject to the community emphasis on the private, is the same fate that Humanities Hall suffers.

**Heteroglossia in A New Life**

In *A New Life*, as we have seen, Malamud inscribes cultural conflict into the landscapes and architecture of the novel’s places, forcing his characters to confront the ideological space between them. This narrative strategy not only provides setting for the story, it also works hand-in-hand with the multifarious languages present in the novel, rendering the two formal elements inseparable. In other words, the novel’s characters are hierarchically positioned in the physical spaces they occupy. This hierarchy subsequently determines social interactions in which the players linguistically perform the ideological positions they hold. The result is numerous languages coming into conflict with one another. Whether it is professional, cultural, or political ways of speaking, the spaces of *A New Life* are filled with languages that give voice to the diverse and competitive ideologies that do battle over the role of higher education in Postwar American society.

As I have written, one of the claims I wish to make in this project is that, though this novel (along with the others we shall consider) rhetorically rails against the marginalization of liberal higher education (which as Readings and others claim,
prioritizes culture in the University’s mission), the formal ways in which it represents this marginalization actually re-centralizes culture in its representation of university space. Simply put, in the novel’s diegesis, the traditional liberal arts are physically and ideologically marginalized. However, Malamud’s rendering of the ideological tensions manifest in the physical and verbal landscapes of the university results in a cultural production (the book titled *A New Life*) that stylistically reconciles the multifarious professional and political languages and makes them cohere around that cultural product, thus rescuing culture from its marginal position in spite of its grim outlook for Arnoldian ideals of education in the Postwar political, cultural, and economic landscape. In Bakhtinian terms, the novel’s greatest achievement is most prominently defined by its ability to craft order from linguistic chaos, or unify social heteroglossia. Malamud’s early campus novel, like *The Tenants* would a decade later, indeed draws its stylistic energy from the competitive languages it represents, and it is through that style that the novel demonstrates the centrality of culture on the university campus and in life.

Levin’s experience in Easchester provides a multitude of opportunities to observe the heteroglossia in *A New Life*. His interactions with the English Department chair, Professor Fairchild, for example, offer numerous examples of the linguistic manifestations of the cultural conflict Levin wages. Fairchild’s reduction of the liberal arts mission into the business-like methods of his basic composition courses provides a starkly articulated ideology against which Levin can stand (though not firmly). His proud proclamation that “We’re pretty much service oriented. Our school, for example, is called The Liberal Arts Service Division” (39), illustrates his vision of what the Liberal Arts are for. From Fairchild’s perspective, the Liberal Arts are best put to pragmatic use; in the
case of Cascadia College, they are only important so far as they are provide a kind of skill that students can make use of in their professional lives. Fairchild flatly states, “Our main function, as I always tell everyone we employ here is to satisfy the needs of the professional schools on the campus with respect to written communication” (40). These services are inexorably linked to the local economy, as Fairchild defends his position in coldly pragmatic terms:

Ours is a land economy based on forestry — the Douglas fir and ponderosa pine for the most part; and agriculture — grains, grasses, flowers and some fruit. Our fishing industry is important too. We need foresters, farmers, engineers, agronomists, fish-and-game people, and every sort of extension agent. We need them — let’s be frank — more than we need English majors. You can’t fell a tree, run a four-land highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry (40).

Fairchild’s rhetoric recalls that of industry propaganda and his willingness (even eagerness) to subject the traditions of the Liberal Arts to those sets of values establishes a kind of class hierarchy that rewards functional rationality over intellectual, ethical, and emotional development.

Fairchild’s language gives shape to the principles of an ideology that Levin opposes and that belief-system is physically embodied in the form of Fairchild’s textbook, *The Elements of Grammar*. This book is religiously adopted by the department in deference to the paternalistic Fairchild and is affectionately called simply *The Elements*. This basic grammar book, along with its accompanying workbooks, basically comprise the curriculum of the English Department at Cascadia College. The text also serves a
symbolic function in Malamud’s novel. Here, the traditional, formal mechanism for the perpetuation of humanistic study, the book, is co-opted by a ideology that values economic development and transformed into a vehicle to promote that vision. Malamud’s task in crafting *A New Life* is to turn the tables on that relationship.

As we have seen, Levin and Gilley’s introduction demonstrates how culture and hierarchy work their way into linguistic exchange in the novel. Furthermore, that initial exchange also establishes how place both works with language in establishing hierarchy as well as providing an arena in which the conflict may occur. A later exchange between Levin and Gilley is revealing in two ways: first, it further demonstrates the intricate link between language competition and space, and second, it identifies the key distinction between the men as being their respective positions regarding art and culture. This act of appropriation predicts how Levin’s worldview is subsumed by the dominant ideologies of Easchester and Cascadia College and this subsumption is best illustrated by Levin’s linguistic competition with Gilley.

The scene opens when Gilley shows Levin the night sky and attempts to orient him geographically:

Levin went outside with him and almost cried out. In the amazing night air he smelled the forest. Imagine getting this for nothing. He drew in a deep wavering breath as he gazed at the stars splashed over the immense dark sky.

“There’s your Big Dipper,” Gilley was saying, “and that’s the North Star. That way is Seattle, British Columbia, Alaska, and then the North Pole.”
“North,” said Levin, with a throb in his throat. “What profound mystery. You go north till there are no men. Imagine the silence, the cold, the insult to the human heart.”

“You’re a bit of a poet, Sy. The other way is San Francisco, and if you’re interested, L.A” (22-23).

The obvious feature of this exchange is Gilley’s curt and comical rejection of Levin’s heartfelt poetic soul, but the manner in which this moment is constructed is at least as important in fully understanding the nature of the gulf between the men. The “submerged” tension between the men, to use Bakhtin’s terminology, “surfaces” and is made manifest in each man’s linguistic reaction to the Cascadian landscape. To begin with, the tone and tenor of Levin’s poetic interlude is adopted by the narrator who opens the passage with an awe-inspired description of the night sky that matches Levin’s. Like the earlier descriptions of Easchester’s residential areas and Campus’s technical buildings, the nouns representing this scene are augmented with rather elaborate adjectives that heap praise on the sight. Thus, the night air is “amazing,” Levin’s breath, taking this air in, is “deep” and “wavering,” and the sky is both “immense,” and “dark.” The poetry of Levin’s response is written into his very perception of the landscape.

It is then at this moment that Gilley’s cold, unimaginative voice collides with Levin’s reverie. His interjection of “There’s your Big Dipper,” reveals a world-view in which mystery and awe is of little interest. Instead, Gilley’s first response to the scene is to classify, name, and put the wonder-filled objects to pragmatic use. For Gilley, the constellation has no visceral effect, but is rather the means to an end. By referring to it as “your” Big Dipper, Gilley implies a kind of ownership that Levin can capitalize upon for
a pragmatic purpose, which is to locate himself in the geography of the Pacific Northwest. The famous constellation leads one to the North Star, by which one can orient oneself to the location of places like Seattle.

Levin’s poetic soliloquy can therefore be seen as a kind of competitive response to Gilley’s cold pragmatism. From this perspective, poetry fits the description of a heteroglot language that represents an ideology that resists the languages of competing ideologies. Furthermore, it is not simply the poetry of Levin’s language that reveals the make-up of his ideology; it is also the content of his words. When Levin shudders at a landscape devoid of human beings, it is clear that his ideological perspective is one that values keeping company with a larger society of individuals. In Levin’s case, he seeks community as an integral part of his New Life. His desire is to recreate himself as a scholar and enter a community constructed around the life of the mind, and it is this value-system that brings about the conflict in Levin’s project. This worldview presumes a public kind of culture in which individuals cohere around engagement with large, metaphysical ideas and concepts. As we have already seen, Easchester’s dominant ideology is one constructed around the private realm, not the public, so communal values, particularly ones built around traditions of liberal education and ideology, are marginalized, as is Levin.

The inconsistency between Levin’s language and value system with that of greater Easchester is demonstrated in Gilley’s response to his heartfelt reaction to the landscape. Pausing to note that Levin is “a bit of a poet,” he immediately returns to his geography lesson. This response repeats the pattern of the first part of the conversation, with Gilley’s contribution to the conversation serving to draw the exchange from the metaphysical
back to the physical twice. First, Gilley reduces the emotional awe Levin experiences to a means to understanding local geography, then he reduces Levin’s poetic response to his emotions back to that same set of physical concerns. Even his acknowledgement of Levin’s poetic nature contains more a sense of classification than admiration. The immediacy of his return to geography emphasizes this. Furthermore, the fact that the conversation ends on Gilley’s volley indicates that Levin, as well as the liberal arts, are proclaimed the losers in the linguistic struggle of ideologies.

The novel goes to great lengths to underscore the subordination of literature and the ascendancy of composition in Cascadia, and it uses this stratification to construct order from the complex social heteroglossia surrounding academic discourse in the postwar era. Because this linguistic conflict informs so much of the novel’s style, it is useful to explore the way in which literature’s marginalization is represented. We have already seen how the point is made geographically by Humanities Hall’s physical marginalization at the novel’s beginning. In addition to this, the novel frequently frames its discussions of literature from within the perspectives of the dominant cultural ideologies of Cascadia and Easchester. Bakhtin, emphasizing the important role that heteroglossia plays in defining the Novel, concludes, “speech diversity and language stratification still serve as the basis for style in the novel” (315). The diversity of speech in *A New Life* is mainly located in the professional discourses of the novel and it is through this diversity that, as Bakhtin indicates, Levin’s and Gilley’s conflicting languages stratify them into hierarchical position. The result of this stratification is that Levin (and his liberal-humanist worldview and language) are made marginal, outside the social sphere of Easchester and Cascadia.
The low social position that Levin’s liberal education belief-system forces him to occupy in Easchester is evident when Gilley, upon telling him that he will be relegated to teaching strictly composition, states, “…if you stay on here comp is what you’ll be teaching till you get your doctorate — that’s your union card if you want to stay in college teaching. After that you’ll be given a lit class or two” (21). Far from Levin’s dreams of a life in the liberal arts, even the discussion about teaching literature is reduced to the cold, pragmatic language of economics and business. At Cascadia College, a Ph.D. is less a marker of an intellectual accomplishment or enshrinement into an academic tradition than it is a technicality necessary for professional advancement. The linguistic conflation of the terminal degree (a traditional marker of achievement in the humanities) with the term “union card” indicates a domination of the discourse surrounding higher education by pragmatic economic forces. Here we see the very language and vocabulary of Levin’s values being subsumed into a discourse that is dominated by the cold values of Western capitalism.

The exchange that follows further associates Cascadia College’s vision of higher education with Easchester’s dominant ideology that values private concerns over public spaces and subsequently further swallows the professional language of the humanities, while putting it to its own use.

“I had hoped to teach literature,” Levin sighed.

“I personally prefer teaching comp to lit. More satisfaction, I’ve found. You can just see these kids improving their writing from one term to the next, and even from one paper to the next. It isn’t easy to notice much of a development of literary taste in a year.”
“I suppose not—”

“We feel we make progress in composition. Morale his high, everybody works together — a nice bunch. You should see how we function getting finals out of the way and grades in. No problem children, if you know what I mean.”

Levin nodded (21).

In the ideological battle waged though these men’s language, Levin is once again beaten down. Each response he makes to Gilley’s business-like rhetoric is more diminished than the last until he is left literally speechless in the face of Gilley’s arguments, leaving him only nodding in affirmation of his defeat. For his part, Gilley here employs the language of corporate middle-management in his battle with Levin’s humanism. The “satisfaction” that he references with regard to tracking student progress is analogous to a businessperson’s attention to measurable indicators of efficiency. To make matters worse for Levin, this emphasis on measurable results extends from the student body and their grasp of basic composition to the instructors at Cascadia College. The “progress” that Gilley reports about their department’s success refers to the efficiency with which the faculty get “finals out of the way and grades in.” This task more closely resembles office worker drudgery than the life of the mind that Levin envisions for himself. In all, Gilley’s application of terms like “development” and “progress” to the field of higher education underscores the close connection between Easchester’s economic interests and the kind of education Cascadia College provides its students. This ideology is juxtaposed against Levin’s liberal humanism (which is embedded in his discourse) and it is this collision of
languages that drives the tragicomic narrative and gives shape to the novel’s discursive style.

**Social Heteroglossia in A New Life**

The politics inherent in how Levin and Gilley communicate represent, of course, a slice of the social situation in the Postwar period. In fact, it may be said that each man in this dialogue serves as little more than a mouthpiece for the assumed orthodoxies that they represent. The positions that Levin and Gilley linguistically occupy in this novel refer directly to the situation that higher education found itself in during the transitional, postwar period that Bill Readings recounts in *The University in Ruins*. As we have seen, Readings’ account of the displacement of Culture (in Arnold’s sense of the term) as the University’s primary social function finds it replaced by economic and, later, political imperatives. In *The Tenants*, these forces were embodied in a city-based landlord and a black nationalist. In *A New Life*, Cascadia College’s educational program is geared toward a larger, yet still local economy, and as we shall see, the middlebrow culture it supports. In both cases, culture, in the Arnoldian sense of the term, is de-prioritized in Malamud’s “universities.” Furthermore, the case for each of these replacements for culture is made by contrasting them against a traditional conception of the liberal arts.

Malamud himself experienced this socio-political landscape first hand, of course. His experiences teaching composition at Oregon State through the 1950s provide some of the professional detail that *A New Life* mines for its narrative. Philip Davis’ 2007 biography of Malamud recounts in some detail how Malamud took advantage of the postwar emphasis on higher education (particularly with regard to returning troops from World War II) and was able to land a job teaching composition in Oregon with only his
M.A. (74-75). This establishes the larger socio-political landscape in which Malamud’s story is entrenched. Davis goes on to identify true-life people and situations from Malamud’s life in Corvalis, Oregon with their fictional fictionalized counterparts in Malamud’s novel (164-181). The material that Malamud extracts from his real experiences represents, of course, a selection of the multifarious languages from academic life in Oregon and the conflicting ideological strata implicit in those languages.

His critique of that institution is formed by the social and linguistic representation of these voices, not simply giving his own ideas a platform to express themselves in isolation in the narrative. Davis remarks about how Malamud’s wife, Ann, had complained that his “liberal ideas about freedom and humanity and idealism and love were hardly new or original, but were almost clichés” (165). This observation also quite devastatingly describes Levin’s vocalizations of his philosophies when in conversation with Gilley. What rescues Malamud’s novel from being simply a naive polemic, however, is the formal-artistic method he uses to fuse that simplistic liberal world-view with its adversarial voices. Davis writes, “Now Malamud had formal counter-moves: he could create situations in which there was no one thought but a series of overlapping, undercutting, interrelating thoughts that created a richly mixed density” (165-166). The “density” that Davis refers to here is, I argue, another term for what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. What it accomplishes in this case is to allow A New Life to transcend the realm of politically motivated rhetorical polemicism and create a centralized space in which culture reconciles ideological extremes.

Levin and Gilley’s debate about the role of the university is drawn directly out of a larger social discourse about the topic. During a discussion about how Cascadia College
lost its liberal arts program, Gilley feels no sadness over this loss and, in fact, defends it stating,

You might keep in mind that education for an agrarian society, which is what we are — is basically a ‘how to work’ education. And if you’ve been keeping up on your reading on the subject, more and more liberal arts colleges in America are going for more and more vocational subjects (29).

Here Gilley is essentially defending the re-organization of the university around pragmatic imperatives for economic development by linking Cascadia College’s mission to a “how to work” program. Furthermore, Gilley’s assertion that “more and more liberal arts colleges” are following this path momentarily directs the reader’s attention outside the diegesis of the novel and toward a social reality which saw conflicting ideas about the role of the university, and specifically liberal education, in society. The postwar landscape that Readings describes in our world is reproduced, in miniature, in Malamud’s novel.

What Malamud subsequently does with the social heteroglossia that fills the postwar landscape is, as we have seen, organize it by crafting the multifarious voices into the narrative of his campus novel. As Gilley explains to Levin the larger socio-political forces at work in the relocation of Cascadia College’s liberal arts program to its sister school, Cascadia University at Gettysburg, we are given an example of how Malamud shapes dissonant voices into prose art.

“There was talk — as I’ve many times heard the story — of removing us to the Gettysburg campus, but then they decided to settle for certain punitive measures, which in this case were nothing less than
cutting out our upper-level courses in the liberal arts, which people here thought weren’t so important anyway, so we’d be two absolutely different institutions and theoretically uncompetitive. To make it look fair, and at the insistence of some of our boys in the legislature and two or three influential lumbermen in town, they had to part with their upper-level science courses. Now the dirty part of the deal was that during World War II they got all their science back on the ground that it served the national interest, while we never did get back the liberal arts—“

“A dirty shame.” Levin was on his feet again. “The liberal arts—as you know—since ancient times—have affirmed our rights and liberties. Socrates—“

“That’s how these things go. It’s best to be philosophical about it.”

(27).

First of all, Gilley’s account of the situation reflects the political environment of the time. The original terms of the agreement crumble under the auspices of “national interest.” That science serves those interests and the liberal arts do not reveals the nature of the class stratification that Malamud is reproducing in his novel. Levin, for his part mouths, almost by rote, the standard arguments in favor of the liberal arts, attempting in his rhetoric to re-ascribe their value to that of the “national interest,” as he mentions abstractions like “rights” and “liberties.” We see here that the conflicting value systems also conflict linguistically, with Gilley choosing direct words that refer to concrete events and Levin relying on abstract principles. Inherent in this difference is each man’s
worldview; Gilley values easily calculated results, while Levin prizes the quiet contemplation of abstract ideas.

What is more crucial to this study, however, is how Malamud brings the dissonant voices together. As Levin begins to quote Socrates, he is interrupted by Gilley who chides him that it is “best to be philosophical about it.” First of all, the power struggle between the men and their worldviews is once again acted out here, with Gilley once again claiming victory. More importantly, however, he does so by usurping the very language that Levin employs. Levin is being philosophical in the most literal sense, by quoting Socrates, the great philosopher. Gilley’s appropriation of the term then is a kind of political act. In fact, it recalls Willie Spearmint’s pronouncement that he will adopt the “white man’s” means of crafting fiction in order to use it to bring down his institutions. In *A New Life* the artifice of liberal arts institutional structures is repeatedly used to house and give voice to an ideology that, in essence, opposes the liberal arts’ value systems. Malamud’s main achievement here is to define the social stratification of these conflicting languages by manipulating the individual voices in a cohesive structure. This structure, built wholly from a diversity of language, makes order out of chaos and the end result is an art-object that has re-centralized the culture that is otherwise marginalized in the social stratification of the postwar period.

Malamud’s artistic construction of prose out of social incoherence recalls Bakhtin’s theory of social discourses in novelistic prose. Bakhtin describes what happens when what he terms “social heteroglossia,” that is, the diversity of languages in real life, makes its way into the novel as it does in *A New Life*. The process that Bakhtin describes illuminates how Malamud’s representation of linguistic interplay works to restore the
centrality of culture. In opposing prose fiction and poetry, Bakhtin argues that poetry constructs wholly inter-dependent worlds in which words experience no external pressure. Its ability to fully define the worlds it represents frees its language from the opposition of competing languages (278). Prose fiction, however, does not have this luxury and this, for Bakhtin is what distinguishes it from all other kinds of artistic expression. Explaining the social pressure inherent in the novel, Bakhtin writes,

For the writer of artistic prose, on the contrary, the object reveals first of all precisely the socially heteroglot multiplicity of is names, definitions and value judgments. Instead of the virginal fullness and inexhaustibility of the object itself, the prose writer confronts a multitude of routes, roads and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness (278).

In other words, the constraints of real social diversity, particularly the languages that the novelist must reproduce in his or her work, force the writer to craft some new order from pre-existing chaos. The writer of prose must counteract the centrifugal forces of language that demand incoherence with an opposing centripetal force that imposes artistic order out of chaos, or as Bakhtin puts it,

The prose artist elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding objects into an image that has finished contours, an image completely shot through with dialogized overtones; he creates artistically calculated nuances on all the fundamental voices and tones of this heteroglossia (278-279).

The “image” that results from this process is what concerns us here. Just as in the case of Cleveland’s demolished “Thinker,” it is through this image that the dissonance of social
heteroglossia becomes harmonious and it is this harmony, in the form of prose art, that re-centralizes culture in the ideological struggle over its place in the modern university. In *A New Life*, the Arnoldian educational ideal is hopelessly outmatched. Yet in Malamud’s crafting of incompatible value systems into a coherent cultural production, that ideal ultimately finds redemption and offers the possibility for the kind of ethical and moral training that is absent in Easchester but that Arnold ascribes to his ideal institution.

**Conclusion: The Middlebrow, Democracy, and the Historical University**

It is an ironic turn of events that Cascadia College should have lost its liberal arts programs in a process both crassly political and coldly pragmatic, for what remains of the institution functions in that very same manner. Gilley describes for Levin the behind-the-scenes wrangling of competing alumni from both Cascadia and Gettysburg that saw envy, spite, and politics decide the institutional fate of the liberal arts in Cascadia. At the novel’s climax, the English Department has its own political election — to enshrine a new Chair — that demonstrates these very qualities; back-biting, loyalty-testing, and closed-door-plotting. By novel’s end, the reader is inclined to think that the long-ago removal of the humanities from this institution affirms the validity of Levin’s Arnoldian values. In his heartfelt, if naive, defenses of liberal arts, Levin repeatedly invokes terms like the human spirit, Democracy and leadership, and ideas. These abstract notions of moral character and the good society are precisely what Cascadia College lacks, despite Gilley’s claims that Cascadia has “just as good leadership here as you people have in the East” (29). The very pettiness that stifles the intellectual and moral life of the community is embodied in Cascadia’s own political strife and narrow concern with economic functional rationality.
As the narrative progresses, the notions of leadership and the ideal function of the institution of higher education in society are developed, leading to the representation of a professional debate about class distinction. At one point Levin, finally standing up to Gilley, states, “sometimes the college has to lead the community” (287). This is, of course, what has not happened. As we have seen throughout the novel, the college does everything it can to respond to community tastes, be they political, economic, or social. This is evident from the geography of the two spaces to the rhetoric employed to justify the university. To Levin, the university’s consistent practice of reflecting the will of its local community is little more than ineffectual pandering, while to Gilley and his cohort, it is merely community service. The key difference between these viewpoints is that Levin’s centralizes a cultural commitment to ideals that transcend local, popular sentiments, and this creates what is essentially a class distinction, not unlike the kind Bourdieu describes in “The Market of Symbolic Goods.” Gilley’s worldview, on the other hand, prioritizes a social structure that denies the validity of class distinction.

In short, Gilley and Levin’s professional conflict can be boiled down to a disagreement about the nature of Democracy. For Levin, it implies an ethical and moral public responsibility based on intellectual discipline. It is for this reason that in his debates with Gilley, he attempts to cite philosophers like Socrates to give his arguments moral force. For Gilley and the people of Easchester, conversely, Democracy is a rather “small-d” enterprise. In their view, democracy means little more than class equality and any kind of imposition upon that ethic represents an attack on big-d Democracy. This is evident from the beginning, when Gilley tells Levin that his “first name is Gerald and you already know Pauline’s. People aren’t too formal out this way. One of the things you’ll
notice about the West is its democracy” (5). For Gilley and Easchester, Democracy, it seems, has less to do with ideals of good governance and more to do with establishing a social space in which distinctions of class are muted. Unfortunately for Levin, his humanistic ideas about education necessarily impinge upon this community’s formal standards as his liberal humanism necessarily ranks citizens according to intellectual capacity.

This implicit aspect of the ideological distance between the two men is made explicit in their conversation about Gilley’s decision to remove a particular Hemingway short story “Ten Indians,” from the department curriculum in the face of complaints from a student and her father. Levin insists that Gilley should have resisted the pressure on the grounds of academic integrity and asked the complainers to leave. Gilley responds, “The townspeople are just as good as we are, Sy” (225). This clearly demonstrates the kind of “democracy” that Cascadia College is built to perpetuate; it is one that denies the existence of social or intellectual strata and insists on the rights of the private individual at the expense of a concept of a public good. In a manner similar to Easchester’s communal identity being rooted in its private residences and not its public spaces, Cascadia’s curriculum is guided by the notion that any student has the individual right to ignore elements of its program that imposes upon them a requirement to submit themselves to external, public intellectual standards. Gilley defends this decision by remarking how sensitive young students are, to which Levin remarks, “Maybe she doesn’t belong in college” (226). This statement’s elitism is a clear violation of the West’s “democracy,” as it implies intellectual and emotional standards of admission to the college. As if quoting a state legal statute, Gilley immediately responds, “Any
Cascadia high school graduate is by law eligible to enter Cascadia College” (226). The region’s middlebrow values are essentially codified into law, rendering the university incapable of fulfilling the mission of Readings’ “historical university.” I use the term “middlebrow” in the sense employed by Leslie Fiedler. In his 1955 essay “The Middle Against Both Ends,” Fiedler explores the role that comics play in American culture as a means of indictment against the loathed “middlebrow,” a consumer-driven middle class mentality. Fiedler’s essay finds a commonality between the “low brow” medium and the productions of “highbrow” modernist culture; both serve to torment the middlebrow, by revealing class distinctions that the middlebrow ideologically ignores. Fiedler’s observation about comic books then draws another philosophical link between the Marx Brothers and Malamud. Both, in their ways, sought to artistically upend the middlebrow.

Once again, A New Life’s distillation of social heteroglossia into novelistic prose inscribes the ideological conflicts upon the landscape. As Levin first becomes acclimated to his new life, his office signifies his entry into the world of respectability and professionalism. Malamud describes Levin’s professional life as it is organized around his office space in some detail:

Between classes he appreciated his private office — his — the first he had ever had, an unbeatable institution for someone who lived much alone. During two daily office hours Levin saw his students and “counselors” — ten, whose programs and performance he had to keep an eye on — did what he could for them, and sent them on their way. Once his hours were over he kept his door shut and graded papers, or read, a privilege during
the working day. Yet when someone knocked, his impulse was to hide the book (97).

Here we see Levin initially seduced by the West’s private form of democracy. The early comfort that the private space brings, however, already contains a warning of the cultural conflict to come. His impulse to hide his reading of books from his colleagues indicates an internal tension stemming from the fact that Levin is attempting to live in two incompatible worlds simultaneously.

As the narrative unfolds, Levin takes a more sociological view of his surroundings that both distances him from the community and allows him the perspective to develop his later, bolder critiques of Gilley and his community’s values. For example, the egalitarian ideology of the community is imbedded in their social interactions, which are again constructed by and within the spaces they inhabit:

His colleagues, gathered for coffee, were amiable people, sociable, unpretentious, several well-educated but no one eager to show it. On a dark day one might be momentarily invisible against the wall. Every man, no matter his rank, was ever man’s assumed equal, very relaxing. Competitiveness, if it existed, was hidden: no visible back-biting or in-fighting, promotions came when they came and nothing could be done about it. No jackdaws crowed, though Bullock’s wit produced a mild vaudeville, a Californian among Westerners. Despite their degrees or progress toward degrees, their pipes and casualness, the professors looked like the Rotarians downtown with cheaper suits. But they wore their clothes without self-consciousness, and those whose haircuts were the
work of wives with Sears Roebuck clippers, were proud of it. Saving money was a serious entertainment (98).

These descriptions give physical form to the community’s abstract notion of democracy, voiced by Gilley at the novel’s open. The lack of pretension, the unwillingness to demonstrate education, and the insistence upon equality show Levin’s colleagues’ assent to the social ideology of Easchester. Likewise, the casualness of dress is remarked upon only to show its consistency with that of the townsfolk. The distance between town and gown is completely elided in the office space of Cascadia College.

This happily middlebrow culture of course has political, as well as social, ramifications. As if mimicking the stereotypical corporate office, the Cascadia professors socialize with light conversation in the coffee room:

During the fall the men in the coffee room talked about flying saucers, five percenters, TV, Ben Hogan’s golf comeback last June, hunting, fishing, their army experiences, and the graduate school ratrace. There was talk about the weather; they congratulated themselves on its mildness. Although books were mentioned they were rarely discussed, and Levin continued to confide his thoughts of what he had read to his notebook. At ten and three, when Professor Fairchild appeared in the coffee room, there was standing room only. The old man, his cup in hand — he never seemed to drink — discoursed humorously on politics. His subject usually was creeping socialism, where it crept, the tyranny of the New Deal, which Easchester had four times voted against, and the evils of federal aid to education. No one questioned his argument or contradicted his facts. Even
after he left, controversy did not begin. If there was a mild discussion it ended in agreement. The men or the times? Levin wondered (100).

The conversations could, of course, be held in any office environment and that is precisely the point of Levin’s observation. The university here is not a beacon on a hill, but a reproduction of middlebrow, consumerist ideologies and it serves to perpetuate those viewpoints. What is notable in this passage, is the rather easy conflation of middlebrow entertainment and political ideology. The intellectual softness of the men’s lives is narratively equated with a lack of informed debate among the polity. As Levin silently observes, “democracy,” if one accepts Levin’s definition of it, crumbles underneath the weightlessness of the West’s middlebrow culture.

Though written a decade apart and set in wildly different locations, The Tenants and A New Life have a great deal in common and indeed can be seen as bookends. A New Life is both in form and function a campus novel and I have argued that The Tenants is as well, though in a metaphorical sense. Both novels also reveal intimate and yet complicated relationships between “town and gown.” In my reading of The Tenants, the two are fused into a single physical structure that makes the inter-relationship between community and university inescapable. Though A New Life does not explicitly conflate the two spaces in the same way, it does draw them together so closely that one’s dependence upon the other is clear. Also, both novels use their landscapes as expressions of social heteroglossia and both foreground the role that distinct voices play in their narratives. In addition, both of these novels present a grim picture of the livelihood of the historical, culturally centered university. The landscapes they portray are both ideologically and physically hostile to the liberal arts tradition and taken didactically, the
novels assume a prophetic perspective on the landscape of higher education. However, these novels cannot be simply read for their arguments. Their formal construction plays a vital role in their representation of Arnoldian education in the postwar period.

As *A New Life* concludes, Levin leaves Easchester with Gilley’s wife, Pauline, and Gilley’s children, leaving Gilley to the easy, predictable comforts of his institution, but symbolically removing the heart and soul of his life, leaving him alone, with only the barren institution. With this move, of course, Levin finally begins his “new life,” having both rejected and been rejected by the university and its political and social structures. He also leaves Cascadia College and Easchester a bit emptier and colder in his wake. If the loss of the liberal arts began the process of making Cascadia into a soul-less, hollow degree factory, Levin symbolically finishes the job by removing family, in some sense, the future, from the institution. Levin abandons the institution and takes with him its remaining culture.

In this way, the novel’s narrative mirrors the formal claims I am making about both *A New Life* and *The Tenants*. In both novels, Malamud rhetorically argues that the historical, culturally-centered university is in ruins in the postwar period, destroyed by both economic and political imperatives. However, these novels are, in fact, far from Jeremiad prophesies about the end of civilization. In crafting these narratives from the social heteroglossia of Readings’ ruins, Malamud, in Bakhtin’s words, “elevates the social heteroglossia surrounding [these] objects into an image that has finished contours.” Culture is created from the ruins. In other words, though outside the strictures of the posthistorical university, through the crafting of an art-object from the social heteroglossia, culture again is centralized, rescued from its marginal position within that
institution, and it is the creation and study of that culture that brings meaning to life, just as Lesser and Levin have claimed all along.
Chapter 3

Lionel Trilling and the Substance of Style

(He could not confuse this town with the university towns of legend, growing forever mossier, receiving and sending out again bright and chosen youth while it remained unchanged and serene: this was something different.)

— Lionel Trilling - “Notes on a Departure,” (parentheses original)

The liberal humanism that permeates Bernard Malamud’s work is perhaps best embodied by Lionel Trilling. The impressionistically articulated Arnoldian ideas of education, citizenship, and tradition in Malamud are clearly defined in Trilling’s work as a public intellectual in the Twentieth Century. It was Trilling, after all, who wrote his dissertation on Arnold, published that dissertation, and then set about translating Arnold’s cultural ideas for the mid-century American context. That context was, for Trilling, significantly defined by its antipathy toward liberal humanism. In the introduction to his 1949 edited volume, The Portable Matthew Arnold, Trilling opens with the proclamation, “Of the literary men of the great English nineteenth century there are few who have stayed quite so fresh, so immediate, and so relevant as Matthew Arnold” (1). Arnold’s freshness was probably less interesting to Trilling than his relevancy to the postwar American cultural moment. In particular, Trilling was enthralled with the humanistic tradition that Arnold “consciously undertook to continue and transmit” (3). Arnold, for Trilling, represented precisely the kind of temperament through which sound critical judgments could be made about literature and its relationship to culture and is, therefore, a model for Trilling’s American moment.

Trilling himself faced that moment with a severe, meticulous emphasis on style. The cultural environment for which Arnold provided guidance was, as Malamud’s fiction has shown, characterized by indifference, if not animosity, to the humanistic tradition
Trilling admired. He readily admits that this tradition occupied a diminished role in postwar America. Trilling notes that if Arnold’s importance is in his role in the, “continuation and transmission of a great tradition, still we must see that our intellectual and emotional temper is now anything but cordial to humanism” (7-8). This “emotional temper” (in the form of expressed language) is the material that Malamud drew upon for his fictionalized campus narratives and in doing so, stylistically resolved the conflict by subsuming politics into culture. While it is true that Trilling, as a cultural and literary critic, primarily saw Arnold’s method as a kind of cultural antidote for the American political malaise, his rhetorical style ultimately rescued his criticism from succumbing to the cultural and political failings that it raged against. Trilling’s prose style allowed him to directly engage in political conflicts without centralizing politics. Through his critical attention to, and disciplined implementation of, style, Trilling re-asserted the centrality of culture.

Perhaps because of Trilling’s immense status as a cultural critic, however, his fiction, with the exception of his novel *The Middle of the Journey*, has received comparatively little critical attention. Ironically (from the perspective of this study), Trilling’s fiction is typically subsumed into reflections on his political and cultural criticism. For instance, David Seed’s excellent essay on *The Middle of the Journey* is less a literary study than a rhetorical analysis of the cultural-political environment that Trilling recreates in his novel. Seed argues that Trilling’s novel represents a political act both of looking back and pointing forward. Seed calls it “a revisionist novel implicitly playing off the awareness of one decade against the willful blindness of an earlier one” (119), and claims that Trilling’s discomfort with the Columbia student protests “was only
following the logical implications of his own novel” (127). For Seed and most critics, Trilling’s fiction represents little more than thought experiments based on the ideas he struggles with in his critical work. Indeed it is difficult to read *Middle of the Journey*, a novel about an academic’s moral decision to distance himself from the immediacies and vulgarities of partisan politics, without thinking about the essays in *The Liberal Imagination*. Likewise, Trilling’s first published short story, *Impediments*, does, as Morris Dickstein suggests in his foreword to *Lionel Trilling and the Critics*, predict the subterranean struggle between Trilling and his Jewishness that would follow him his entire career (xviii). 14 Indeed, this chapter also draws Trilling’s criticism and fiction into a single conversation about Jewish liberal humanism, though I take a more formal approach to Trilling’s work than do most critics, as it is in the formal structures of his fiction (as well as his criticism) that the literary space of Arnoldianism is to be found in the texts of this study. In order to clarify my position, it is perhaps useful to survey the landscape of criticism about the Great Critic.

Generally speaking, critical assessments of Trilling’s work (both his criticism and his fiction) tend to fall into one of three broad categories. First are historical/nostalgic studies that seek to demonstrate his importance, explain the cultural conditions that brought about his decline in stature, and/or attempt to rehabilitate his critical reputation. Mark Krupnick’s book *Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism* perhaps best represents this approach. 15 Krupnick’s study, by fusing biography, literary analysis, and cultural criticism, places Trilling’s life and criticism in the context of both the New York Intellectuals and Columbia University’s liberal humanism and traces the difficulties the modern, academically institutional, intellectual landscape pose for Trilling’s brand of
cultural criticism. Some of the great achievements of Krupnick’s book are his close readings of Trilling’s fiction in a chapter entitled “Fiction as Criticism” (77). Krupnick writes “as a critic . . . Trilling has the virtues of a novelist. Conversely, despite his limitations as a writer of fiction, that fiction remains valuable as criticism” (79). Here Krupnick further articulates the close relationship that critics see between Trilling’s fiction and his criticism and his close readings of “Of This Time, Of That Place,” “The Other Margaret,” “The Lesson and the Secret,” and The Middle of the Journey provide the model by which I read another story, “Notes on a Departure.”

As to be expected, in the years after Trilling’s death in 1975, an array of remembrances was published. In addition, and in contrast, to the loving tributes, stands the second category of Trilling criticism, what may be thought of as patricidal reconsiderations. Beginning in the 1960s and continuing until today, Left intellectuals who primarily identify with the New Left find much in Trilling to dislike, as he can be made to represent a generation unwilling to accept many New Left propositions. A particularly representative example of this position can be seen in Cornel West’s essay “Lionel Trilling: Godfather of Neo-Conservatism” (1986). West’s well-reasoned account of Trilling’s entrenchment in the ideologies of his specific cultural moment fairly observes his strengths and weaknesses as a critic. For example, West notes that Trilling downplayed formal analysis in his criticism, leading to what he terms “loose readings of literary texts” (399). In place of this textual authority, West locates Trilling’s “authority and influence over his audience” in his “rhetorical strategies and the confident posture in his writings” (399). It is, for West, this immateriality in Trilling, in tandem with Trilling’s Arnoldianism, that divorces his work from social and political activism, which West sees
as the mission of liberal humanism. In essence, Trilling for West becomes a “dead-end” (402), unable and unwilling to engage with “labor, feminist, ecological, gay, lesbian, elderly, Latino, Native American and Black freedom struggles for revolutionary democracy and social freedom” (403). Furthermore, West also complains that Trilling’s intellectual project is a similar dead end and that “those who have tried to cling” to his ideas “remain too elitist on cultural issues and, unlike Trilling, are often blinded by a sentimental attachment to and hence relatively uncritical of the state of Israel” (402). Critics like West embrace the immediacy of political action, both domestic and international, that Trilling rejects and therefore, these critics find in Trilling a symbol which they must resist. 17

Finally, the third category of critical approaches to Trilling, a kind of historicism, is a variant of the new sociology of literature. Michael Clune, in his monograph *American Literature and the Free Market 1945-2000*, identifies two strands within this body of criticism. The first, drawing more closely on Pierre Bourdieu than the second, “takes literature to be a distinctive object of the study of society” (10). This approach, though it does ascribe to literature a position of importance, ultimately subordinates literary objects to the role of symptomatic expressions of society, thus treating cultural texts as utilitarian instruments with immediate social and political value and, in this way, no more distinctive than the study of architecture or even cereal boxes. This would be, of course, anathema to Trilling’s Arnoldian project of centralizing culture against politics. The second type of critic that Clune identifies therefore fits more closely into Trilling’s own mold. Clune describes the second critic as one who “think that the study of literature furnishes distinctive ways of studying society” (10). The distinction here is subtle, but
important. This variation of the sociology of literature centralizes cultural texts as distinct, valuable objects in their own right. Though still intimately connected to, and arising from, social conditions, this form of criticism frees literature from its utilitarian role and centralizes it, making the study of cultural texts a distinctively important means of social engagement, not simply Yet Another Object through which to accomplish this. This quality therefore closely associates such criticism with Trilling’s own project. For example, one can clearly hear echoes of Trilling’s critique of liberalism’s love of literary social realism in “Reality in America” in this contemporary literary approach. For Trilling, the study of literature opens a distinct space in which to engage with society; it is not simply a means to that end. In this way, this variant of what Clune calls the new sociology of literature can be seen as a translation of Trilling’s own project for a new cultural moment, much in the same way that Trilling translated Arnold for mid-century America.

Perhaps because Trilling’s project has become polarizing among the intellectuals in his wake, this third critical approach has been the least applied to Trilling’s work. Acolytes from both the right and left, finding much to cherish in the tradition Trilling represents, have sought to claim him, while detractors have, with the perspective of time, attempted to cast suspicion upon his intellectual accomplishments. Either of these approaches seems to subvert the values that Trilling himself championed. There have, however, been a few notable critical interventions that apply a Trillingesque approach to Trilling.

One early example was published shortly after Trilling’s death. Robert Boyers’ short book *Lionel Trilling: Negative Capability and the Wisdom of Avoidance* (1977)
reads Trilling’s criticism and fiction as a distinct literary space that is “crucial to an understanding of Trilling and of the impact he has had on our time” (4). Boyers’ method recalls in many ways Trilling’s own. Reading Trilling’s work again, his aim is to “slow down a little the easy movement of Trilling’s thought, to discover just how he managed to pass from one point to another without seeming to worry very much about connections that were apt to strike some readers as tenuous indeed” (4). One might very well imagine Cornell West as one of those suspicious readers in need of convincing, but Boyers’ real target is Trilling himself and the perspective his work provides for reflecting on his cultural moment. Boyers “slows” Trilling down by applying close readings of his work and uncovering structural features that underly what West might call Trilling’s “rhetoric.” A good example is his reading of “Of This Time, Of That Place” in conjunction with Trilling’s commentary on the story from *The Experience of Literature*. Boyers takes exception to Trilling’s claims of tragedy for the story. His analysis of the story’s cathartic function, for example, undermines Trilling’s claims of tragedy (17). Instead, Boyers notes that the reader engages the text “with some sense of having undergone a tutelary experience” (19). Boyers identifies, therefore, a unity in Trilling’s fiction and his pedagogical criticism, and this feature isolates an important element of the postwar academic moment, particularly with regard to the novel of ideas. This approach to Trilling’s work more closely approximates my project’s goals than either the polemics of affirmation or rejection.

This type of pure literary approach to Trilling and his work has, however, been relatively rare until quite recently, when Trilling has again become a subject of interest for critics. Perhaps this is due to the familial resemblance between his project and the
new sociology of literature. Recently, Joshua L. Miller and Stephen Schryer have each published monographs in which Trilling plays a significant role. Miller, in his book *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual Modernism*, juxtaposes Trilling with Henry Roth to explore Jewish writers’ claims to the English language and the various translation projects they undertook. Trilling, Miller claims, undertook a project of “Hebraic Americanist Arnoldianism” (264). In other words, Trilling translated divergent experiences, Jewish, American, and high culture, into a era-defining project. Miller, in reading Trilling, does not distinguish between his work and his stature in the cultural moment. He writes “through his analyses of modernist literary stylistics, Trilling elaborates dialectically dissenting and self-critical positions that he would himself assume: antiliberal liberal, Victorian modernist, and Arnoldian Jew” (264). My project is particularly invested in Trilling’s conflation of Arnoldianism and Jewishness, and Miller’s notion of Trilling as an “Arnoldian Jew,” as we will see, closely approximates my formulation of “The Ivory Shtetl.”

If Miller’s book situates Trilling as an Arnoldian Jew, then Schryer’s monograph, *Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post-World War II American Fiction*, establishes him, as I do, as figurehead for an inherent Arnoldianism in some postwar American fiction. Schryer uncovers in American fiction an intellectual ideology, what he calls “new class fantasy,” which “envisioned intellectuals abandoning their technocratic pretensions toward social reform in favor of a different, humanistic model of cultural education oriented toward the educated middle class” (6). Schryer’s term and its definition gives form to Trilling’s intended audience (redressing a complaint
that critics like West levy against Trilling), and his study situates Trilling, the American heir to Arnold, as the symbol of the ideology.

My study of Trilling follows these approaches. Miller usefully articulates the link between Trilling’s ethnicity and ideology and Schryer locates him at the spiritual center of an aesthetic movement. My project also makes these claims for Trilling, but seeks to discover the manifestation of these characteristics in the formal structures of his writing. It is in these forms, I argue, that Trilling constructs the Arnoldian “Ivory Shtetl” from the social and political milieu of his cultural moment.

**Leavis v. Snow, Style, and the “Cultural Mode of Thought.”**

As we have seen, Trilling’s critical and creative work demonstrates a remarkable and disciplined consistency. The influence of Arnoldian cultural ideas permeates his writing. Whether it be in a novel about paranoid Communist intellectuals, an analysis of *Huckleberry Finn*’s language, or a critique of “the Liberal imagination” in postwar America, the connection between literature and politics (broadly construed) is clear, just as it was with Arnold’s own criticism. For Trilling, literature provides a space in which society’s complexity could be duly considered with a thoughtful seriousness that is impossible in the realms of politics and economics, where there exist pragmatic pressures to quickly arrive at conclusions and decisive courses of action.

Trilling’s own fiction, like that of all the authors considered in this study, makes frequent use of university spaces as stages for the struggle between culture and American ideologies that seek its marginalization. However, no thorough treatment of Trilling’s creative work can neglect his work as a cultural critic since he himself, like Arnold before him, liberally argues that literature, culture, and politics, are intimately related. His essay
“The Leavis-Snow Controversy,” anthologized in Beyond Culture, provides a useful window into the stylistic means by which Trilling reconciles politics and art and subsequently centralizes culture, even in overtly political discourse.

The 1962 essay stands as an intervention in the testy critical exchange between C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis with regards to Snow’s The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution. Snow’s piece famously argued that science had become more valuable to society than the humanities. Subsequently, Snow shows particular scorn for literature’s position of preeminence in university education. For Snow, the culture of science provided a clearer avenue for peace between the West and the Soviet Union, as Scientists had the advantage of empirical observation and fact to guide them, while literature remained mired in a culture based on whimsy, opinion, and devotion to ideas that were not fact-based, but emotional. For this reason, literature was more likely to lead to destructive political debates while, conversely, scientists from all geopolitical backgrounds would be able to come to consensus of scientific “culture,” outside the narrow interests or demands or their individual nation-states. In other words, scientists from the West and the Soviet Union would be able to do what politics and literature could not.

Snow’s essay was presented as the 1959 Rede Lecture at Cambridge University and Leavis’s response was the occasion for Downing College’s 1962 Richmond Lecture, “The Significance of C.P. Snow.” Notable for its vicious, indignant tone, Leavis’s essay was the springboard for a series of editorial interventions in the debate, each taking on the polemical, politicized tones of Snow and Leavis. As Trilling himself puts it, “The early discussions of The Two Cultures were of a substantive kind, but the concerns which now
agitrate the English in response to Dr. Leavis’s attack have scarcely anything to do with literature and science, or with education, or with social hope. These matters have now been made a mere subordinate element in what amounts to a scandal over a breach of manners” (148). Trilling’s essay appeared in the pages of *Commentary* later that same year, and his contribution to the debate is remarkable for both its parental scolding of Leavis’ tone and the meticulous way it removes the conversation from the realm of politics to that of culture. In short, through both didactic and stylistic means, Trilling’s essay revitalizes the humanistic critic’s moral claims as the proper arena for cultural and political debate.

The argument of “The Leavis-Snow Controversy” is that the manner of intellectual discourse is of no less importance than its subject. Trilling, while agreeing with Leavis on the weakness of Snow’s argument, nonetheless aims his criticism toward both men with regard to the *rhetorical* stances they assume. For Trilling, worse than the implications of Snow’s argument, are the ramifications of sectarian intellectual debate. His essay illuminates the destructiveness of partisanship as much as it does the quality of Snow’s original argument. The insightfulness of Trilling’s essay lies then not simply in its didactic position, but also its form. In this way, the essay participates in the same cultural practice that I have argued Malamud demonstrates in his campus fiction. Both writers centralize culture through form. Through the construction of his intervention in what essentially amounts to doctrinaire politics, Trilling not only argues against the substance of Snow’s claims, but also demonstrates a better way to *make* arguments against anti-humanism.
The structure of the essay also works to draw the conversation out of the realm of the immediate concerns of partisanship and refocus the reader’s attention toward the cultural implications of atomized discourse. The essay has three enumerated sections, each performing specific rhetorical tasks. Unsurprisingly, Trilling, in the first, invokes Matthew Arnold to guide his intervention, noting that Arnold, like Snow, also gave a Rede lecture (1882) on the relationship between literature and science. Trilling immediately establishes Snow’s lecture as a continuation of the controversy Arnold intervened in some 80 years prior. Trilling writes, “Sir Charles did not mention his great predecessor in the lectureship, although his own discourse was exactly on Arnold’s subject and took a line exactly the opposite of Arnold’s” (*BC* 146). There is a sense of implication in this observation. Trilling suggests, subtly, that had Snow extended his attention beyond the immediate, he might have found that his argument was not original and had, in fact, been repudiated by “his great predecessor.” In this way, Trilling demonstrates the intellectual danger of a strict focus on the immediate. Trilling also notes that Leavis too is guilty of omitting Arnold’s lecture from his response, even though his “admiration of Arnold is well known” (146), implicating both partisan positions as intellectual failures (in this exchange at least). This rhetorical strategy frees Trilling from the necessity of engaging in the particulars of the testy debate between the two eminent scholars. For Trilling, the terms of their debate are long-established and redundant. Instead, he re-centers the debate on the substance of style in political discourse. In other words, Trilling transfigures Leavis and Snow’s discursive foregrounding of partisanship into the object of interest.
The second section of Trilling’s essay juxtaposes Leavis’ and Snow’s lectures and demonstrates the failings of both, the distraction generated by their adversarial stances. Of the tone of Leavis’ essay, Trilling writes, “It is a bad tone, an impermissible tone. It is bad in a personal sense because it is cruel — it manifestly intends to wound. It is bad intellectually because by its use Dr. Leavis has diverted attention, his own included, from the matter he sought to illuminate” (150). This statement gives stark clarity to the relationship between content and form. Leavis’ formal approach, one of personal attack, undermines his critical capacity. By diverting attention away from the subject matter with vulgarity and partisanship, the essay is intellectually “bad.” In short, Leavis’ has de-humanized humanism.

This inhumane ethical position is, ironically, the accusation Snow aims at the humanities. Leavis therefore undermines his own argument, and simultaneously strengthens Snow’s, by his intervention’s style. His arguments for the humanities are mired in what Trilling will call the “cultural mode of thought.” In other words, his rhetorical style is insular and culturally bound, precisely what humanism is supposed to guard against. Trilling therefore provides a corrective as he offers his own account of Snow’s essay. He removes himself as far as possible from the cultural mode of thought and demonstrates a re-humanized critique of the lecture’s flaws.

First, as if to draw attention to his rejection of Leavis’ strategy of personal attack, Trilling refers to Snow almost exclusively as “Sir Charles.” This polite avoidance of polemical rhetorical strategies clears the way for his critique of the essay to focus its rhetorical, ethical, and intellectual problems. A prominent example of Trilling’s Arnoldian approach is his focus on an interchangeability in Snow’s prose of the terms
“literature,” and “traditional culture,” (156) with “traditional culture” standing in for either literary culture or governmental and social institutions. For Trilling, the loose application of these terms suggests that Snow believes that literature and literary culture has long guided economic and political policy. Trilling rhetorically asks, “Can we possibly take this to be so?” (157).

Of course the answer is “no,” but the question calls much of the essay’s intellectual and ethical claims into doubt. Snow’s argument is mired in a particular cultural perspective that just happens to be the opposite of Leavis’. His claims against humanism are partisan and unreflective as is Leavis’ response to Snow. The third section of Trilling’s essay elaborates on that partisanship. It is here that Trilling returns to Arnold as a guide to the Leavis-Snow debate’s cultural failings, shifting the usage of the term “culture” back to Arnold’s conception of it. Toward the essay’s conclusion, Trilling claims that the failing lies in the fact that Leavis and Snow “set too much store by the idea of culture as a category of thought” (173). By this Trilling means to say that each man assumes an adversarial position rooted in opposing “cultures” that narrow their perspectives to the range and scope of those cultures’ perspectives. Leavis defends the partisan concerns of the humanists and Snow, those of the scientists. This myopia undermines the intellectual quality of discourse and in the end weakens the polity. Trilling is saddened by this state and reflects “there is cause for surprise and regret that it should be Sir Charles Snow and Dr. Leavis who have jointly demonstrated how far the cultural mode of thought can go in excess and distortion” (177). It is this “excess and distortion” that both Snow and Leavis attribute to their ideological opponents. Snow’s essay in particular finds the humanities to be inadequate to prevent it, as Trilling
observes: “it is, in fact, nothing less than an indictment of literature on social and moral grounds. It represents literature as constituting a danger to the national well-being, and most especially when it is overtly a criticism of life” (151-152).

Trilling’s critique of the Snow essay, however, maintains a detached, respectful critical tone, rooted in the Arnoldian tradition, that demonstrates humanism’s role in guiding culture, in direct opposition to both Snow’s claims and Leavis’ practice. That he accomplishes this through both didacticism and form illustrates the ethical and rhetorical power of centralizing culture. Trilling elevates himself above the cultural politics of the debate even as he employs that political rhetoric to centralize humanistic inquiry. Destructive intellectual discourse has a de-humanizing cultural impact. Trilling, by shifting the focus of Leavis-Snow from the particulars of the debate to that of its cultural impact, re-humanizes intellectual discourse.

**Trilling’s Campus Fiction: “Presenting” and “Being”**

In “The Leavis-Snow Controversy,” we have seen Lionel Trilling ground his rhetorical-cultural intervention in Matthew Arnold’s criticism. What is perhaps an overlooked element of this rhetorical strategy, however, is the primacy of place. Trilling coyly notes that both Snow’s and Arnold’s lectures took place at the same location, drawing an almost metaphysical link between space and ideology. Trilling almost assumes that Snow’s occupation of Arnold’s lectern should have bestowed upon him the wisdom and manner of his “great predecessor.” In the story world of Trilling’s essay, Snow’s obliviousness to the richness of the space he occupied seems to have doomed his project. Trilling demonstrates, in “The Leavis-Snow Controversy,” how liberal humanistic ideology might be reconstructed from partisan bickering. Dispassionate tone
and meticulous formal analysis provide a foundation from which productive intellectual activity might be constructed. Similarly, the protagonists of his campus fiction assume detached, pensive stances above the cultural partisanship of their educational environments in order to restore Arnoldian culture to a central position.

This connection between place and intellectual activity also frequently manifests in Trilling’s fiction. In fact, Trilling’s campuses are often indistinguishable from their living environments, whether urban or rural. Furthermore, Trilling, as we have seen Malamud do, also constructs these landscapes from ideological tensions. The characters of his campus-oriented fiction hold diverse ideological positions and thereby occupy what Trilling might call distinct environments, even while, like Arnold and Snow, residing in the same space. This chapter argues that the craft of Trilling’s fiction manifests his liberal humanistic ideas, and that by observing how these fictional campuses are constructed and theorized by Trilling’s protagonists, we can understand how they re-center those Arnoldian values.

Trilling himself provides a window into his creative process by including his most famous short story, “Of This Time, Of That Place,” in his classroom anthology The Experience of Literature. Each of the anthology’s selections is followed by Trilling’s own commentary on the piece. After making somewhat awkward apologies for the “immodest” act of including a piece of his own in the book, Trilling goes on to explain that doing so allows him to “suggest the relation that exists between the actual facts of a writer’s experience and the process of his imagination” (781). This relationship is, of course, of primary importance to this study as the “actual facts” of the twentieth-century American university are the material from which these Ivory Shtetl fictions are crafted.
The larger argument that I make is that certain Jewish writers observe a situation in which traditional liberal values of education are made marginal in the actual world and remedy that scenario in their fictional campus spaces. Trilling’s background information about the genesis of this story therefore introduces an opportunity to parse the relationship between fact and fiction.

The story is about a young poet named Howe who is a teacher at a small, country college, and follows Howe’s relationships with two students over one academic year. One student, Tertan, while of brilliant mind, proves himself to be mad, and the other, Blackburn, is shown to be manipulative, egotistical, and intellectually underwhelming. In his commentary, Trilling reveals that both characters are based quite closely on real students and that the student who was the model for Tertan inspired the story. Trilling shares that his idea for the story “would present the sad irony of a passionate devotion to the intellectual life maintained by a person of deranged mind” (782). “Present,” in Trilling’s usage refers to the story’s main point, the fictional equivalent of its argument. This description of the engagement between fiction and reality is instructive in a “behind the curtain” sort of way. It is at this point, however, that Trilling moves beyond this mere curiosity, and makes a vital contribution to our understanding of this particular brand of campus fiction. The story’s “argument” is tempered by its “style.”

After describing what the story is essentially “about,” he rhetorically asks “but what was the story to be” (782 italics original). Here, Trilling concerns himself with the structural elements of the story that give shape to the presentation of its idea. Trilling narrates how the idea came to him to include the Blackburn character as well to offer a kind of threat to Howe and give him a more believable humanity. It is for this same
reason that Trilling “set the scene in a country college where the smallness and tightness of the community would make a newcomer more conscious of the judgments that were being passed on him” (783). In other words a particular kind of campus space was constructed in order to offer resistance to the protagonist’s worldview. As we will see later, this spatial tension drives the plot of the short story, “Notes on a Departure,” but for now we focus on the crucial role that space plays in the “being” of Trilling’s campus fiction.

Trilling next illustrates the manner in which instrumental “argument” is minimized in favor of the story’s style. Trilling relates that the appropriateness of his juxtaposition of the two characters in that campus space both “delighted” him and “filled (him) with apprehension” (783). The apprehension arose from his fear that readers might take from the story a simple moral: “that there are kinds of insanity that society does not accept and kinds of insanity that society does accept” (783). Trilling’s fear of readers’ arriving at these kinds of simplistic conclusions is that if the narrative was easily dealt with and pragmatically applied (in other words, instrumental) it is just as easily settled and forgotten. 20

It is at this point that Trilling makes a most remarkable claim. He writes that “it occurred to me that if my readers did understand the juxtaposition of the two students in this way, it would prove a great advantage. For the story would seem to them to say one thing when actually it was saying another” (783). Did Trilling really want to trick his readers? Hardly. He understood that readers, presented with this juxtaposition, would be tempted to claim that Blackburn was really the mad one and that the story was a criticism of instrumental, pragmatic higher education, and that Tertan was actually a
misunderstood genius. This, of course, is not so, and Tertan really is mad, soon to be sent
to an institution. The power Trilling intended for the story is manifested in its ability to
challenge “the reader to reconcile two dissimilar modes of judgment with each other”
(784). In other words, “Of This Time, Of That Place” constructs a fictional space in
which the reader can engage with the “reality” of the campus on a higher level than mere
argument, allowing them to simultaneously entertain opposing worldviews without
having to come to a pragmatic decision about course of action. By divulging how the
story draws on reality to create a unique space, Trilling shows how its meaning is not in
its argument, but in its style. To read the story for its moral or “takeaway,” is to miss the
story’s actual function. The reading of the story engages the reader in an Arnoldian space
of liberal humanist contemplation. In a similar manner, we will see that even though
Trilling’s fiction (like that of the other Ivory Shtetl writers I examine) narrates the demise
of Arnoldian values, it actually participates in the perpetuation of those values through
style. 21

“Notes on a Departure:” The Ancient Jew Versus the Unceasing Vortex of Youth

For Trilling, the primary sin committed by Leavis and Snow was essentially a
breach of manners. It is also the expression of this concern that opens Trilling’s short
story “Notes on a Departure.” The story begins “He saw from the way his visitor was
slowly drawing in his long legs with careful and polite unconcern that the boy thought it
time to go. He therefore made his own talk tentative and intermittent so that the visit
could be terminated with ease and unabruptness” (38). In this scenario, two characters,
one a student and the other his teacher, are acutely aware of the social norms of their
particular rhetorical situation. Their non-verbal communication adheres to standards of
respect that contribute to the politeness of the conversation, just as Trilling had wished for Leavis and Snow. In this way, style is elevated to equal status with content.

This brief story in its very construction works to foreground thought, rather than facts, and in this way adheres to Trilling’s rejection of political immediacy in “The Leavis-Snow Controversy.” With very little in the way of plot, the story is constructed around its unnamed protagonist’s thoughts about leaving his position at a college in a small, pastoral town. The story is therefore not only about, but a demonstration of, the kind of reflection Trilling calls for in his work as an essayist.

In the story, an unnamed, Jewish English teacher at a unnamed college in a similarly unnamed small town has decided to leave his position and return home to the city. He has a short conversation with a student, McAllister, in which goodbyes are shared, then reflects on the boy’s impact on his life in the town. He then bids farewell to a girl, Enid, with whom he had a somewhat romantic relationship and reflects on her role in his life. Finally, the teacher reflects on being a Jew and how that biological fact served to give him safe intellectual distance from the bourgeoisie concerns of his pleasant, likable neighbors. At this point, the story ends.

The thinness of the narrative’s plot places internalized intellection into the fore as the teacher’s thoughts about his relationship to the town are the story’s primary subjects. Even the story’s two named characters are little more than manifestations of the professor’s intellectual observations about his life in this alien environment. For instance, when reflecting on his relationship with Enid and the increasing pressure he felt to think of her as more than a symbolic aspect of his relationship to the town, the teacher reflects, “no symbol can long exist merely as the indication of one thing; it begins to take on
meanings for itself and begins to have powers beyond the power of the thing it represents” (49). In the teacher’s case, both Enid and McAllister serve as symbols for his experience in his alien intellectual habitat.

The formal mechanism by which Trilling links the characters to the teacher’s experience warrants close examination as it constructs a matrix in which the individual, the town, and the college adumbrate the community’s intellectual and moral life. In each case, the encounters lead to first a meditation on the town, then the intellectual life of his department at the college. In this way, the named characters are little more than windows into the intellectual life of the town and subsequently the college.

McAllister, first described as “A tall, handsome boy, who spoke with a sweet, unconscious courtesy and a nursery stammer” (40), represents what is both dull and, for the teacher, dangerously endearing about the town. The teacher likes the boy and is entertained by his life’s story. He is, however, rather dull intellectually and this contradiction is the story’s primary conflict. The teacher holds high, Arnoldian ideals of the intellectual life and is put off by the endearing simplicity of the town’s people as they represent a temptation to shirk his values and dissolve into the idyllic, pleasant, yet intellectually dull community. The story repeatedly notes how the town makes the teacher “feel old.” The teacher constantly reflects on how the town’s simplicity imposes upon him a premature wisdom and ancient-ness. This subjective position essentially equates the teacher with Arnold’s “best that has thought and said” and it is his self-juxtaposition against the town’s moral life that imposes this status upon him. His status as symbol for the teacher’s Arnoldian dilemma is elaborated on as we are told “Most certainly McAllister was not a person. And because the teacher felt that he himself was a
person or that it was his duty to become one, there grew up between teacher and students a shyness that was not hostile but which was, indeed rather a friendly salute” (40). Here, we see the teacher impose cultural distance between himself and his intellectual charge and this distance applies to the town as well.

The conversation with the student is immediately followed by a proclamation that “the town had been like McAllister. It had deceived by an appearance of simple dullness” (41). In this way, the boy simply embodies the town’s abstract nature. However, we are told that “where McAllister’s unreality had generated a shyness, the town, stronger than McAllister, had generated by its unreality a stronger emotion, fear” (41). In this way, McAllister, being less than a person, serves a précis for the teacher’s observations about the town, with the town generating an even stronger sense of alienation from the Arnoldian.

With this observation, the narrator explains the similar alienation the teacher felt when his department became infatuated with Remy de Gourmont, and he had struggled to understand their enthusiasm (42). The order of these observations and memories implicates the college in the intellectual and moral state of the town and its dull citizens. This movement, from the individual, to the community, to the intellectual community also recalls Trilling’s moral argument in “The Leavis-Snow Controversy.” In the essay, Snow’s intellectual failure is intricately tied to an inadequacy in the community (represented by Snow and Leavis together). Finally, this corruption manifests in the intellectual community as evidenced by Trilling’s observation of the pettiness of the criticism sparked by the Leavis-Snow debate. Trilling’s didactic plea for ethical intellection in that case is rendered into fiction in this story. In both instances, however,
the intellectual life is larger than the individual and weakness at that level spills into other institutional realms. In this sense, the individual has a “moral obligation to be intelligent,” a favorite phrase of Trilling’s (Weiseltier). In order to meet those obligations, the teacher (or Leavis, Snow, and Everyone Else) must maintain emotional distance from the concerns of the immediate, which can lead one to stray into pettiness and politics. As we will see, the teacher attains that emotional distance by assuming a persona, or, more properly, a style of living.

The teacher’s interaction with Enid demonstrates a similar pattern of focus (individual, town, department), but whereas the McAllister scenario illustrates his alienation, the sexual overtones of the Enid section symbolizes the depths of the scholar’s temptation to give into the town and its simple pleasures. In addition, the teacher’s reflection on this sexual relationship demonstrates how Trilling’s critical ideas of manner and style embody themselves in his fiction.

At one point, the teacher sits on a hill looking down on the town, recalling a day-long date with Enid, which included her attending an academic seminar with him in which he impressed the room with his intellectual prowess. We are told:

Her scent still clung in his nostrils. Her crisp, indubitably beautiful face, too crisp and sharply outlined to be likened to a flower and which was therefore like a wrought cup, as it caught the moonlight and laughed, was clear to him. He was gently glad for all the kisses, his arms were grateful for her slenderness, and he could feel burning intermittently the spot on his neck that she had kissed. A good class, a good argument, caresses returned: and he felt a sort of strength, a definiteness of place in the world.
Yet she was not what he wanted, it was all an odd little religious pantomime that he had devised, and a diversion and dissipation of feeling and strength. And he felt the old sense of sin, simple: a duty undone, the morning wasted, and for all the success of his argument he knew that he did not know enough Kant (50).

The stylistic development of this passage essentially performs the critical ethic Trilling argues for in the Leavis-Snow essay by demonstrating how the quiet reflection of the humanist critic serves as an avenue for arriving at political decisions, not the other way around. The teacher’s cultural prejudices (his urban, ethnic background being opposed to the town’s midwestern WASPishness) certainly play a role in his decision to leave the community, but only after a careful, close critical “reading” of what the community has to offer does he reject it. His “argument” therefore does not arise from Leavis and Snow’s “cultural mode of thought,” but rather from the detached perspective of the humanist whose sensitivity to “style” informs his “politics.”

The physical setting of the teacher’s meditation encapsulates the story’s theme. The teacher sits on a hill above the community, giving him both physical and metaphorical distance from the immediacy of its concerns and subsequently provides perspective from which to reflect on its nature. Established in his detached stillness, the humanist reflects on Enid as if she were a poem. The description of the girl uses multiple senses to construct an artistic image of her that attempts to capture and preserve what is beautiful about her. The language of her description even makes use of poetic structures, composing similes and using alliteration in phrases like “gently glad.” In short, his decision to reject this life is made through a literary consideration of its merits, with the
A scholar coming to the conclusion that the town offered his intellectual, sexual, and communal needs a comfortable place to take root if he so wished: “A good class, a good argument, caresses returned: and he felt a sort of strength, a definiteness of place in the world.”

In the end, however, it is this very “definiteness” that the teacher rejects, with the realization that “she was not what he wanted.” Instead, the teacher chooses a life of uncertainty and intellectual struggle. 22 Having considered the merits of life with Enid (just as Trilling fairly considered the merits of Snow’s argument), the teacher places the values of the town in juxtaposition against the values his urban, Jewish perspective instilled in him. At this moment Trilling conflates that Jewish distinctiveness with Arnoldian ideals. His temptation to succumb to the town’s easiness is equated with “sin,” and “religious pantomime.” This imagery draws upon his newly embraced Jewish identity and is immediately connected to mastery of Kant, an Arnoldian pursuit if ever there was one.

Trilling’s meditation on the indistinguishability of the town’s intellectual, sexual, and communal realms calls attention to his spiritual association of Jewishness with Arnoldian intellectualism. Trilling ascribes an ancient distinctiveness to both. The first time the word “Jew” is used is both abrupt and reactionary. We are told that at one point “he had felt that the town was going to make him do things he must not do. It sought to include him in a life into which he must not go. To prevent this he had made use of a hitherto useless fact. He had said, ‘I am a Jew,’ and immediately he was free. He had felt himself the embodiment of an antique and separate race — and consecrated?” (43). We see here that the teacher’s Jewishness is a defense, a kind of self-imposed exile, which
protects him from his ethical temptations. In this sense, it is merely a convenience, a “hitherto useless fact.” The story, however, refuses its supposed arbitrariness. The antiquity of his race that marks the teacher as separate is also ascribed to the Arnoldian educational ideal that the teacher represents. Furthermore, that ideal is juxtaposed against the town through its Jew-like antiquity. Most important for this study, however, is the stylistic means by which Trilling (quite literally) centralizes the Arnoldian university in his argument.

The teacher’s critical eye provides the following meditation about the distance between his values and those of the town:

Yet early in his acquaintance with the town, even before he had been intimidated into age, he thought he perceived in it, despite its youth, a spot of death. The town, he learned to see, would ever gyrate in an unceasing vortex of youth. (He could not confuse this town with the university towns of legend, growing forever mossier, receiving and sending out again bright and chosen youth while it remained unchanged and serene: this was something different.) It would have no direction save round about itself, and it would whirl, slowly or swiftly, and in the center of the vortex would be the hollow, the spot of death which he had sensed (44).

The teacher fancies that the town “would ever gyrate into an unceasing vortex of youth.” This curious observation, while making use of the same poetics with which he later describes Enid, also provides the term that distinguishes him from the town; age. He is old (because of his newly-claimed Jewishness) and the town is forever young. Age in this case, however, is not literal. The teacher notes at the story’s opening that he is merely
two years older than his student, McAllister (39). Rather, the term here is used in the epochal sense and the metaphor Trilling uses here essentially equates the teacher’s Jewishness with the educational institution he idealizes, those “of legend.” Both serve to provide him with liberating critical distance from the university and its town. The ancientness of his ethnicity is contrasted with the youth of the town’s citizens, and the legendary quality of the mossy university town stands juxtaposed against the immediate reality of this one. Trilling creates a heroic literary space to oppose the immediate reality of this story’s tepid university and the life it supports. In this way, Trilling’s story begins construction on “The Ivory Shtetl.” Here is an explicit conflation of the Jewish American experience with Arnoldianism and Trilling’s description of the “university towns of legend,” constructs a literary space to house these newly-conjoined worldviews.

The means by which this space is constructed is worth noting as it works to center the literary space around the Arnoldian in the confrontation and to subsequently marginalize the immediate and the transitory. The teacher is not ancient; he merely represents a time of antiquity. Conversely, the town represents the immediate and the modern. The imagery with which this immediacy is represented is that of the “vortex.” This symbol ascribes to the university town a culturally disengaged self-absorption. That the vortex is one of “youth” suggests is concern only with the new and immediate, not with the best that has been thought and said. The “spot of death” that the teacher detects at the center of this vortex is then a limitation in perspective. The town will chase their pleasant frivolity to its end, never affecting, or being affected by, the largeness and complication of “culture,” in Arnold’s application of the term.
The opposing image, that of the university towns of legend, is marked by comparative stillness and age. The immediate town is the proverbial rolling stone that is not still enough to grow “forever mossier.” The legendary town, conversely, is distinguished by a stillness that gives it this aesthetic quality. Here, as in Malamud, is another case in which the ideology of the educational space inscribes itself upon that space’s physical attributes. The reflective stillness of the Arnoldian university town inscribes itself, in the form of vegetation, upon its architecture. The solidity of this institution, as it remains “unchanged and serene,” is opposed against the fluidity of McAllister’s unnamed town. That unchanging firmness gives the institution a position from which it can receive and send out its students, whereas the immediate town neither receives nor sends out. This distinction establishes a centeredness that subjects the individual to the standards of the legendary institution. In this way, individual progress toward authenticity is made possible. The critical problems with Cultural Studies that Readings’ exposes are not an issue in this legendary campus. The teacher, distancing himself from the town’s vortex, envisions himself as part of the tradition of this legendary institution. This perspective is how that he knows that even though his arguments have impressed his “youthful” colleagues, he himself knows that he hasn’t read enough Kant.

Finally, the literary space, the “Ivory Shtetl,” that Trilling constructs in this story centralizes this marginal Arnoldian perspective both didactically and formally. By rendering the town a vortex of death, the teacher clearly rejects it and its ideology. The story bears this out; it is, after all, called “Notes on a Departure,” and is largely a catalogue of reasons for his leaving. In addition, the story ends with the teacher sitting
down to write something “with the probability of failure on his pencil” (56-57). Despite this fear and anxiety, the story concludes by reflecting that it is also “the best moment of his life” (57). In short, on the argumentative level, the story prizes the seriousness of Arnoldianism (despite its uncertainties) over the predictability and pleasures of the immediate. The literary space Trilling molds, however, is not fabricated as simple argument, which would be to succumb to culture as a “mode of thought.”

Instead the space is constructed as art, which gives its form priority. In the center of the unnamed town’s vortex is death. However, Trilling offers an alternative center, the legendary Arnoldian university town. The duel description cited above exhibits a distinct textual quirk, the parenthetical bracketing of the town of legend. This bracket literally centers the immediate vortex around the unchanging bastion of Arnoldian culture. By interrupting the description of the vortex-town, Trilling essentially subsumes it into his description of the Arnoldian. Therefore, while on first glance, the paragraph’s subject matter is the town the teacher is leaving, that authority is compromised by the bracketed, almost unseen, presence of the Arnoldian. Seen from this perspective, the paragraph actually turns out to be about the teacher’s Arnoldian ideals. In addition, the parentheses symbolize the teacher’s wish to keep those ideals from being subsumed into the vortex of the immediate. In this way, the parentheses almost serve as mossy walls themselves. This paragraph’s formal features essentially illustrate how Trilling creates an Arnoldian space of education in the story as a whole. Ostensibly, the narrative focuses on the town, seemingly centralizing its manifest ideologies. The manner by which Trilling constructs the literary space, however, destabilizes the position of the town’s ideology. The subject matter is the unnamed town of the vortex, but the approach is mossy, serene.
Arnoldianism. In short, as in Trilling’s paternal scolding of Leavis and Snow, the substance of this story is its style and form.

**Conclusion: Arnold and the Rabbis**

It is my contention that Trilling, along with the other authors I examine in this study, crafts a distinctive variation of the American campus novel. Arnoldianism is part of what defines this sub-genre, but that ideology by itself can also be identified in many campus narratives. Schryer identifies it in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, for example, finding Arnoldian frustrations in DeLillo’s nightmarish portrait of the postmodern university. What distinguishes the narratives of this study is a particular blending of Arnoldianism with identifiable expressions of the Jewish American experience. Trilling, therefore, might be made to stand as the epitome of what I call “The Ivory Shtetl.”

One can find in Trilling’s body of work many instances of his conflating Arnold and Jewishness, not the least of which is his fiction, as we have already seen. One particularly stark example of this integration is an essay called “Wordsworth and the Rabbis,” collected in *The Opposing Self.* In this essay, Trilling uses the occasion of the centennial of Wordsworth’s physical death to reflect on the passing of his reputation in 1950. Finding in the great poet something akin to a religious worldview, specifically, “his concern for the life of humbleness and quiet, his search for peace, his sense of the burdens of this life, those which are inherent in the flesh and spirit of man” (119), Trilling sees a spirit of quiet, humble contemplation that stands at odds with what he might have called the “vortex” of postwar American life. The quality that Trilling identifies in
Wordsworth is, at its core, an Arnoldian one. But for Trilling, it is also Jewish. His rationalization for this claim is the parallels he finds between Wordsworth’s worldview and that inherent in a traditional Jewish text, the *Pirke Aboth*, a text that Trilling describes as “a collection of maxims…some of them very fine and some of them very dull, which praise the life of study and give advice on how to live it” (124). Indeed, the parallel Trilling argues for is compelling and his argument both substantiates Joshua L. Miller’s application of the term “Hebraic Americanist Arnoldianism” and establishes much of the ideological landscape of this study as well.

The essay in question is, for one thing, a rare example of Trilling’s public persona claiming Jewishness for itself; as explicitly as Dickstein does for Trilling in his preface to *Lionel Trilling and the Critics*. Trilling recalls his boyhood study of Jewish texts and in doing so foregrounds his ethnicity. Also worth noting, however, is that his public identification with Jewishness occurs in a liberal humanistic context. Noting how this text, which argues for “study as both its means and its end” (125), captivated him more than other liturgical works, Trilling writes that “it seemed more humane, and the Fathers had a curious substantiality” (124). In another context, Trilling might just as well be arguing for the value of James over Dreiser, but it is of Judaism that he writes here, and this Judaic approach recalls Clune’s articulation of the Trillingesque strain of the new sociology of literature. The significance of this parallel for this study is the close relationship Trilling establishes between Arnoldianism and the Jewish experience. When Trilling flatly states that “the quality in Wordsworth that now makes him unacceptable is a Judaic quality” (123), he essentially composes the opening lines of the Ivory Shtetl manifesto. In translating Arnold for the postwar period, authors like Trilling mixed his
Victorian, liberal humanist intellectual DNA with aspects of the American Jewish experience. In doing so they forged, in their campus fiction, an ethical and intellectual position from which to rescue the term “culture” from the petty, technocratic function the liberal imagination reduced it to, and reinvigorate its ethical, Arnoldian value.
Chapter 4

Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*: From Athene to Athena

“Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either. And nothing passes just because nothing lasts.”

— Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (52).

“Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

— Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach”

Just as Malamud’s *The Tenants* used the drama of the conflict between black and Jew to represent the precarious position of liberal humanism, so too does Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain*. Roth takes a different approach than Malamud, however. Debra Shostak notes that Roth’s novel represents the competitive ethnic relationship “not between individuals but within one subject” (154). Unlike Malamud’s novel, which distributes the ethnic conflict between Lesser and Spearmint, Roth collapses it into a singular figure, Coleman Silk. This is but one example of how Roth’s novel breaks down existing hierarchies and epistemological distinctions. Silk’s indeterminate ethnicity therefore highlights the far more postmodern approach that distinguishes Roth from Malamud, and it is in this postmodernism that Roth’s Arnoldian liberal humanism is located. Therefore, Roth orients us in exploring how the Ivory Shtetl carries on past the Jamesian age.
The counterintuitive epigraph above, taken from *The Human Stain*, epitomizes the novel’s central conflict. Its protagonist is an African-American professor of Classics who has passed his entire career as a Jew. Upon his death, the truth of his ethnicity emerges, giving particular meaning to the quotation’s latter sentence. In other words, Coleman’s death brings about the end of his “passing.” However, just as the novel’s plot emphasizes the easy deceptiveness of appearance, its formal construction also requires close scrutiny. The epigraph indeed mourns the deaths of Coleman and his lover, Faunia Farley, but they also hint at Coleman’s secret; even his “passing” has multiple meanings. But the multiplicity of meaning extends beyond Coleman Silk in this novel. I argue that the melancholia of these lines also refers to the “passing” (in a similarly multifarious sense) of Arnoldian liberal humanism in the liberal arts college. The quoted selection from Arnold’s “Dover Beach” illustrates an ethic of intellectual distance not simply from nature, but also from the political and social immediate. This indeed describes the position the novel’s narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, occupies, and his artistic account of the passing of both Coleman and Arnoldianism serves as the very redemption of what is seemingly lost.

In the conclusion to *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom writes, “It is difficult to imagine that there is either the wherewithal or the energy within the university to constitute or reconstitute the idea of an educated human being and establish a liberal education again” (380). Bloom’s famously divisive polemic about the state of liberal education in America praises the virtues of a classical education that closely resembles the Arnoldian ideals Trilling espoused in the middle of the last century. It also concludes with a dire outlook for those ideals. In spite of Bloom’s pessimism for the Arnoldian
project in the postwar era, however, liberal arts colleges still exist in America. Furthermore, the landscapes of many of these institutions recall Trilling’s mossy university space of legend, seemingly crystalizing Arnoldian notions of education in the very architecture of the campus. On such campuses Sy Levin’s ideological dilemma is seemingly solved, and “Humanities Hall” is not hidden from view, diminished in the presence of one version or another of the “Ag building.” Likewise, in these institutions, Levin would not necessarily be forced to teach only grammar and basic composition. Here, literature is not only taught, it often occupies a privileged position. Does this mean then that Trilling’s liberal humanism has won out? Does the Arnoldianism encoded in such universities’ mossy campuses invigorate institutional intellectual activity? The novel that perhaps best engages with such questions is *The Human Stain*. Roth’s narrative not only persistently denies the capacity of surface meaning to signify, it revels in that incapacity. This chapter will argue that Roth’s 2000 novel ultimately denies the liberal arts aesthetic the authority to define liberal humanism, subsuming that authority instead into the fiction-making process itself.

**Introduction**

_The Human Stain_ narrates the life and death of Coleman Silk, an aging professor of Classics at an idyllic, Berkshire mountain institution called Athena College. The story opens by recalling the scandal that ultimately resulted in Silk’s exit from the college. Midway through the semester, Silk inquired about two never-present students “Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?” (6). Unfortunately for Silk, the students in question were African-American and his comment was taken to be racist, creating a storm of controversy that led to the legendary professor’s resignation.
Unbeknownst to anyone else however, including his own wife, Iris, and their children, Silk himself is an African-American who has passed as a Jew his entire career. His exit from the college community does not end his conflicts however, as he begins an affair with a 30-something, illiterate cleaning woman, Faunia Farley. This affair provokes an indignant reaction from his politically correct former colleagues at Athena and a violent one from Faunia’s unstable ex-husband, the Vietnam-scarred Les Farley, who may have been responsible for the deaths of Coleman and Faunia in what is officially ruled a single-car accident. Silk’s story is conveyed (and significantly created) by his neighbor, the now-elderly author Nathan Zuckerman, Roth’s frequent fictional avatar. The novel is as much a chronicle of Zuckerman’s creative process as it is Silk’s secret lives and the fictional author uses classical imagery (particularly the myth of Oedipus) to attach a mythological grandiosity to Silk’s tragedy.

Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award, the novel was well-received by critics who readily identified its position as the third book in Roth’s unofficial “American Trilogy,” following American Pastoral and I Married A Communist. Taken together, the three books examine various cultural contexts in twentieth-century American history and explore how those historical moments inscribe themselves upon the personal lives of Americans. As I have done with the other authors in this study, however, I seek to avoid reading the novel through a strictly sociological lens, as I argue this diminishes the novel’s capacity to peer beyond the mere machinery of life. Whereas critics like Anthony Hutchison announce their intentions to argue for “reading Silk through the prism of the Clinton image as well as the Clinton years” (137), I maintain that this approach ignores the capacity of the novel to inspire contemplation beyond that immediate political
purpose. David Brauner perhaps puts it best when he writes, “The task of the Roth critic should no longer be to defend the embattled author but rather to recognise and examine the ambiguities, ambivalences and paradoxes that make Roth’s fiction demand and amply repay repeated readings” (7). This task requires a formal approach that understands Roth’s fiction to be just that, fiction, not simply a sociological expression of political reality.

One element of *The Human Stain* that critics have considered is the narrative’s deep investment in classical myth. Not only is Coleman a professor of Classics (at Athena College at that), his story has intimate connections to that of Oedipus. Geoffrey Bakewell provides an early account of the novel’s debt to Sophoclean narrative structure, finding in Coleman a figure based on Sophocles’ tragic king. Ansu Louis and Gurumurthy Neelakantan trace a dual connection with the Oedipus myth by identifying both Freud’s and Nietzsche’s interpretation of Sophocles’ play in *The Human Stain*, arguing that Roth’s novel associates more closely with Nietzsche’s Dionysian reading. Gustavo Canales extends the novels classicism to its relationships to *The Iliad* and Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus*. I argue that this clear preoccupation with classical texts represents an important element in the novel’s reconciliation of Arnoldian ideology and Jewish perspective within the modern liberal arts college.

Elaine B. Safer, in her recent monograph *Mocking the Age*, persuasively argues that the tragedy *The Human Stain* masks itself with is actually best understood as a variety of Jewish comedy, in the tradition of Lenny Bruce (1). Safer also identifies Roth’s increasing experimentation with postmodern metafiction as crucial in understanding not only this novel but all of Roth’s later fiction, from *The Ghost Writer* on. 23 Derek Parker
Royal also identifies “a more postmodern lens” as a more useful way of looking at Roth’s fiction, particularly the intertextuality that permeates Roth’s fiction (24). Royal’s lens subsequently provides the means to reconcile the mythological with the comic, and ultimately he argues that Roth’s intertextuality helps “to show us how we structure our texts, how we construct our truths, and how we formulate our identities” (33). Safer’s and Royal’s analyses identify the aspect of Roth’s fiction that drives my own interest here. As Safer and Royal imply, the questions raised by Roth’s emphasis on metafiction draw our attention to the vital role that fiction plays in our understanding of our world. In this way, The Human Stain’s representation of the liberal arts campus becomes a space in which to consider higher education and liberal humanism in a hostile cultural environment.

From the beginning of his long career, Philip Roth has used the college campus as a canvas for his fiction. Ohio State and Rutgers provide a social backdrop against which Goodbye, Columbus (1959) sets its youthful romance. Roth’s first full-length novel Letting Go (1962) is also a full-fledged campus novel that explores love and art in the social milieu of the Iowa creative writing program. The fascination with campus-oriented intellectual space has, in fact, continued throughout Roth’s career, as evident by the setting of his 2008 novel Indignation which uses the fictional Winesburg College (an Oberlin-like campus in Ohio - with a name that draws upon the American fiction of Sherwood Anderson) to explore the social atmosphere of the Korean War era.

Higher education is most central, however, in Roth’s Nathan Zuckerman works. In many respects, the nine books that comprise the Zuckerman saga are founded on Zuckerman’s post-secondary education. From the beginning, in The Ghost Writer, Zuckerman portrays his education at the University of Chicago (Roth’s own graduate
institution) as the genesis of his familial alienation. Of particular importance in this
alienation is his education’s emphasis on Aristotelian poetics as a source of his artistic
freedom and domestic trouble, an influence that Zuckerman references frequently in
novels that feature his story.  

There is, however, another significant institution of higher education featured in
the Zuckerman narratives: Athene/Athena college. First introduced in *The Ghost Writer*,
and known as *Athene College*, the small liberal arts college is central to Roth’s complex
representation of university space. The college, in its dual incarnations, is a kind of polar
opposite to itself, with even its spelling changed as it is re-invented in *The Human Stain*.
Though Roth’s motive for the revision in spelling is unclear, I will use the distinction in
this chapter to trace a gap between Arnoldian architectural aesthetics and the institutional
values housed in that architecture. This distinction is partially legible in comparing the
relative ancientness of the two spellings. *Athene*’s more idiosyncratic spelling implicitly
associates it with a distancing ancientness not unlike Trilling’s Jew. *Athena*, on the other
hand, by merit of its relative commonality is a more immediate articulation of the same
term. In short, it is more accessible, and this accessibility makes it a more marketable
product. It is this kind of immediateness that serves to dissociate Athena from the
Arnoldian ideal, in comparison to Athene.

**Athene College**

What Trilling mythologizes as the mossy university space of legend is given a
name in *The Ghost Writer*: Athene College. The institution, as it exists in this iteration,
also subtly recalls the isolated position Arnold chooses for his speaker in “Dover Beach.”
It is here that E.I. Lonoff, Roth’s avatar for Bernard Malamud, instills in his students the
gentility of humanistic tradition with the cultural distance the college provides. Lonoff is represented as a meticulous, moral crafter of fiction who lives an isolated, serene life the Massachusetts countryside. This life, devoted almost entirely to fiction, is, to Zuckerman, both a romantic ideal and a claustrophobic prison. Though Lonoff, in some ways, lives out the Arnoldian ideal, living the isolated life that one might imagine the speaker of “Dover Beach” desiring, he also requires some connection with the outside world and this is the function Athene performs for him. Zuckerman notes the social relief the institution provides Lonoff:

Of course, to his great good fortune, there was Athene College. He spoke with devotion of the students in the two classes that he taught there. The little Stockbridge school had made a place for him on the faculty some twenty years before the rest of the academic world suddenly became interested, and for that he would always be grateful. But in truth, after so many years of teaching these bright and lively young women, both he and they, he found, had begun to repeat themselves a little (13).

The institution, as summarized here, represents an outlet through which Lonoff might bring his Arnoldian “criticism of life” to a public audience. His teaching, in essence, communicates his detached, aloof way of life to a younger generation, thereby ensuring its perpetuation. Also implied in this description, however, is the modern complaint with Arnoldianism; a stagnation of the type that Cornell West associates with Lionel Trilling. Lonoff’s observation that the process has become repetitive is an acknowledgement of its limitations.
Also significant in *The Ghost Writer’s* representation of the institution is the lack of architectural detail. The institution has almost no physical presence in the novel. Beyond the fact that Lonoff teaches two classes (suggesting classrooms), we are only told that it provides an external routine for the writer. Lonoff tells Zuckerman, “This way, at least two afternoons a week I have to stop, no questions asked. Besides, going to the college is the high point of my week. I carry a briefcase. I wear a hat. I nod hello to people on the stairway. I use a public toilet. Ask Hope I come home reeling from the pandemonium” (13-14). So the college is a place that Lonoff dresses to go to twice a week, it has a stairway, and it has a toilet. These spare details hardly locate the institution’s Arnoldian values in its architecture. This reticence with regard to the institution’s physicality, however, does not undermine the liberal humanism of the college, but emphasizes it in fact. Athene’s lack of physical embodiment performs a different function than the obscuring of Humanities Hall in *A New Life*. Where that representation establishes the humanities place in an institutional hierarchy, Athene’s obscurity serves to disassociate it from the concerns of the immediate and the utilitarian and emphasize its philosophical function, teaching “bright and lively young women” (19). This bestows on Athene Trilling’s (and Arnold’s) prized contemplative distance. It, like Lonoff’s country home, occupies a position, as on a darkling plain, distant from a world besotted with commerce and existing almost exclusively in the world of ideas, the space of pandemonium Lonoff jokes about.

**Athena College**

In addition to its revised spelling, Athena College also takes physical form in *The Human Stain*, while simultaneously undergoing a radical revision of its dominant
ideology. No longer a genteel women’s liberal arts college that exists almost in the abstract, the institution dons a classical appearance worthy of its mossy, legendary name. Yet, like Coleman’s own lifelong act of passing, Athena’s appearance is also seductively deceptive. Zuckerman, narrating Coleman’s life-story, describes the campus through Silk’s eyes as he returns to the campus two years after his exile:

They were on their way to lunch, passing within sight of North Hall, the ivied, beautifully weathered colonial brick building where, for over a decade, Coleman Silk, as faculty dean, had occupied the office across from the president’s suite. The college’s architectural marker, the six-sided clock tower of North Hall, topped by the spire that was topped by the flag — and that, from down in Athena proper, could be seen the way the massive European cathedrals are discerned from the approaching roadways by those repairing for the cathedral town — was tolling noon as he sat on a bench shadowed by the quadrangle’s most famously age-gnarled oak (153).

The details of Athena, as communicated by Zuckerman, evoke the aesthetics of the classic liberal arts college. The presence of ivy on colonial brick buildings conjures collegiate imagery that, in its very romanticism associates the architecture with the timelessness of Arnoldian traditions. The modifying description of those brick buildings being “beautifully weathered,” however indicates a premeditated, manicured intentionality. Granted, the weathering of the building’s facade associates the institution with a tradition that bears physical evidence of its passage though time, ostensibly indicating that the buildings of Athena house a tradition as ancient as Trilling’s Jew.
However, the judgment that the building’s weathering is also beautiful works to over-emphasize the aesthetic of the architecture in relation to its ideological function. In this way, the surface of Athena, more than its intellectual traditions, becomes a commodity upon which to trade. This quality of Athena’s aesthetic is also apparent at the end of the above passage, where the campus’s ancient oak is “famously age-gnarled.” Like America’s most photographed barn in *White Noise*, the tree is a simulacrum that more resembles a tourist attraction than a natural marker of intellectual tradition. In both cases, the simple existence of classical, ancient aesthetic is subsumed by the marketability of that visual quality.

Zuckerman himself provides a framework through which to consider Athena’s aesthetic. Narrating Silk’s thoughts as he observes some students, Zuckerman tells us “It was these very summer students he saw first when he reached the crest of the hill and emerged from behind the old astronomy building onto the sun-speckled main quadrangle, more *kitschily* collegiate-looking at that moment than even on the cover of the Athena catalog” (152 italics added). The fact that the campus is “collegiate-looking” is telling enough, but the application of the adverb “kitschily” is a clear attempt at dissociating Athena’s aesthetics from Arnoldian notions of culture. The term “kitsch” was, of course, popularized by Clement Greenberg in his landmark essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” and Greenberg’s claims in this essay seem to color Zuckerman’s perception of the Athena campus in light of its ex-communication of Coleman Silk.

The descriptive modifiers that Zuckerman employs in his portrait of Athena (*beautifully* weathered, *famously* age-gnarled) suggest an institutional concern with consumer markets that trades upon the romantic imagery of Arnoldian educational
culture. This priority closely resembles Greenberg’s account of kitsch. Greenberg, arguing that the avant-garde serves as cultural resistance to the degrading influences of consumer commodity culture, narrates the development of kitsch, writing “To fill the demand of the new market a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide” (10). If one agrees to understand “genuine culture” to resemble the Arnoldian ideals of the Lionel Trillings of the world, then kitsch serves as a cheap substitute for those values, taking on their appearance while rejecting their centrality. Greenberg goes on, suggesting, “Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations” (10). This damning description efficiently makes explicit what is implicit in Zuckerman’s description of the Athena campus. Athena, as an “academicized simulacra” of Athene, has commodified culture in much the same way that Zukin describes in her account of the Bryant Park BID. The “mechanical” and formulaic nature of kitsch, as defined by Greenberg, is fleshed out by Zuckerman’s undermining modifiers, “beautifully” and “famously.” They imply the mechanical transactionalism Greenberg warns against. In short, Athena’s ancient, classical appearance is a mask for immediate economic and political priorities. Zuckerman’s narrative intervenes by weaving the kitsch into the very fabric of the avant-garde.

Sincerity, Authenticity, and the Ascendancy of Literature
Roth’s complex narrative assumes Clement Greenberg’s ethical distinction between avant-garde and kitsch even as it challenges some of Lionel Trilling’s assumptions about American culture and the place of literature. Trilling’s last major critical statement, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, offers a theory of culture within which to distinguish Athene and Athena, and also one with which *The Human Stain* takes some exception.

Originally presented at the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures in 1969, *Sincerity and Authenticity* attempts to “observe the moral life in process of revising itself” (1) by tracing a shift from the notion of the social value of “sincerity” to that of “authenticity.” Sincerity, in Trilling’s estimation, essentially requires the individual to internalize the social roles he or she occupies. Thus, to be sincere is to honestly accept and adopt the identity society requires of the individual. Authenticity, on the other hand, is the opposite. This way of thinking requires the individual to discover his or her “true” internal self and authentically live that out in spite of social conditions or demands. Trilling, as usual, locates his cultural critique in literature, articulating sincerity through the worldview of nineteenth-century English novelists, who, he writes, “would all of them appear to be in agreement that the person who accepts his class situation, whatever it may be, as a given and necessary condition of his life will be sincere beyond question. He will be sincere and authentic, sincere *because* authentic” (114-115). Authenticity as a dominant ideological expression prioritizes adversarial modes of thought. In his review of Trilling’s book, Peter Berger equates authenticity with New Left radicalism, writing “In the ideology of many New Left intellectuals, authenticity and insurrection have been equated. The ‘true self’ creates itself in the act of violent rebellion against the bourgeois
order outside and the latter’s ‘repressive’ correlates within” (83). The implicit rebellion that Berger teases out of Trilling’s study is immediately recognizable in Athena College, just as Athene roughly correlates with Trilling’s sincerity. Athena, as portrayed by Zuckerman, is immersed in a New Left political environment against which Silk rages. As we will see, however, Athena (and its political environment) is largely a creation of Coleman Silk. Silk’s entire life is an act of self-creation and struggle against external pressures. However, his (and subsequently Athena’s) adoption of the stance of authenticity brings part of Trilling’s argument into question.

Trilling focuses much of his analysis upon literary history and, in the American scene, he finds little social resistance for the self. Citing Emerson, whom Trilling states “had no doubt that sincerity was the defining quality of the English character” (112), Trilling argues that British culture, with its great traditions and complex history, constituted a full-bodied presence against which the self must measure itself. This is the root of English sincerity. By contrast, Trilling argued that American culture offered little resistance for the self, making sincerity an alien notion. Drawing on American literary history, Trilling writes, “James Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne, Henry James, all in one way or another said that American society was, in James’s phrase, ‘thinly composed’, lacking the thick, coarse actuality which the novelist, as he existed in their day, needed for the practice of his craft. It did not offer him the palpable material, the *stuff*, out of which novels were made” (113).

Roth’s novel, however, provides a useful rebuttal to Trilling’s connection between the “thinness” of American culture and the rise of “authenticity.” Coleman’s acts of self-creation are not in the face of a thin culture. Quite to the contrary, Coleman’s self-created
identity is buttressed against a thick and complicated cultural heritage. Trilling’s summation of historical American literary sentiments may be accurate, but Roth’s fiction challenges those notions in late-century America. As we will see, Zuckerman, in the life and death of Coleman Silk, certainly finds enough “stuff” out of which to make a novel.

*Sincerity and Authenticity* ultimately calls into question the viability of the novel as a mode of cultural expression, but Roth’s meta-fiction directly works to salvage the form.  

Trilling notes the old-fashioned nature of storytelling (135), and remarks that “It is the exceptional novelist today who would say of himself, as Henry James did, that he ‘loved the story as story’, by which James meant the story apart from any overt ideational intention it might have, simply as, like any primitive tale, it brings into play what he called ‘the blessed faculty of wonder’. Already in James’s day, narration as a means by which the reader was held spellbound, as the old phrase put it, had come under suspicion” (134). Trilling here finds little hope for literature’s continued social and cultural relevance as an inert cultural product in which the reader might be immersed. What Trilling sees rising up in place of the traditional novel of no “overt ideational intention” is a kind of institutionalization of the avant-garde, or the popularization (through academicization) of the adversary culture. It is at this point that Trilling’s complaint coincides with that of Clement Greenberg, with both targeting an academic variety of kitsch. *The Human Stain’s* metafictional (or ideational, if you will) intervention serves to resolve the marginalization of high culture by re-centralizing it as the very concern of the narrative.

Trilling rhetorically asks of the age of authenticity, “By what right, we are now inclined to ask, does the narrator exercise authority over that other person, let alone over
the reader: by what right does he arrange the confusion between the two and presume to have counsel to give?” (135). This is, of course, the question that any storyteller must grapple with, and any reader must account for in choosing to read. Roth’s Zuckerman novels have particularly engaged the question directly. The prioritization of authenticity, however, with its destruction of the hierarchy that forces the reader to submit to the story, complicates Arnoldian/Jamesian aesthetics. Trilling writes, “The tale is not told by an idiot but by an rational consciousness which perceives in things the processes that are their reason and which derives from this perception a principle of conduct, a way of living among things. Can we, in this day and age, submit to a mode of explanation so primitive, so flagrantly Aristotelean?” (136). As if a premeditated response to this question, Zuckerman, as we have seen, proudly flies the Aristotelean banner.

The nine Zuckerman books generally fall into two categories: the first four feature Zuckerman as main character and protagonist, while the final four see him as narrating, authorial conscience, telling the tales of others. The middle novel in this cycle, *The Counterlife*, is a meta-fictional tour-de-force which offers separate narratives in competition with one-another and even characters who are aware of their positions in the narratives. The novel then reveals itself to be about the process by which the storyteller makes stories (criticism, in Arnoldian terms) out of the “stuff” of life. It therefore serves as a transition in the Zuckerman narrative arc. In short, we first see Zuckerman’s life as a storyteller, then Zuckerman’s stories as life. The Arnoldian (as well as Aristotelean) ethic behind this inward focus situates the Zuckerman books as an extended attempt to rescue Jamesian fiction, and Arnoldian culture, from the fate Trilling feared for it.
As an example of how Zuckerman pursues Trilling’s Arnoldian values, one need only look at the beginning pages of *The Human Stain*. In a manner reminiscent of Trilling’s cultural criticism, which drew its cultural conclusions out of readings of literature and its relation to society, Zuckerman begins his novel by describing Coleman Silk’s situation at Athena, then immediately situating that story within the context of the simultaneous Clinton-Lewinsky scandal of 1998. In short, Coleman’s individual story is constructed as a space in which to contemplate the social moment. It is a criticism of life, and the explicit foregrounding of Zuckerman’s creative process represents an attempt to re-invigorate an Arnoldianism abandoned by a corrupted liberal arts institution.

**The Human Stain and Landscape as Canvas**

Just as Roth’s work problematizes some of Trilling’s critical premises, the figure of Coleman Silk can be seen as a kind of revision of the teacher in Trilling’s “Notes on a Departure.” Both figures find themselves invigorated by the city. Trilling’s unnamed teacher hails from New York and his alienation in his adopted college-town home can be traced to his removal from the intellectual stimuli of that urban environment. His decision to return to the city is, then a “sincere” attempt to immerse himself in that intellectually “authentic” environment. Silk, conversely, moves to the city after his father dies and there finds the freedom to invent himself as a being distinct from the ethnicity and culture imposed upon him by Newark. After this act of re-invention, he, unlike Trilling’s teacher, chooses to stay in small-town Athena and, in doing so, he re-constructs its landscape in his own image, invigorating it with the creative energies of New York.

The backstory Zuckerman provides for Silk reveals that his Jewish identity was fully inscribed by New York City. Having left Howard University for the Navy after his
father’s death, Silk essentially rejected the reification of his blackness that Howard would have provided. His military service is his first prolonged effort to disguise his ethnic heritage and that project is fully engaged when Silk enrolls in NYU as a student of Classics. Zuckerman informs us that Silk “wanted to live in Greenwich Village far more than to go to NYU, wanted to be a poet or a playwright far more than to study for a degree, but the best way he could think to pursue his goals without having to get a job to support himself was by cashing in on the GI Bill” (110). First of all, this observation reveals that, as we saw in Malamud’s “A Summer’s Reading,” the city itself is an intellectual space and its energies empower its students in ways that institutional education cannot. Just as important here, however, is the utilitarian streak Silk’s plan betrays. Both NYU and Classical Studies are means to other ends, not Arnoldian ends-in-themselves, as Trilling argues for in “Wordsworth and the Rabbis.” Silk’s real career is that of an artist whose medium is himself. The Classics for Coleman Silk are a raw material employed in his artwork. This calculated pragmatism, as we will see, informs the Arnoldian aesthetic of Athena College later in Silk’s life.

The city’s creative capacity allows Silk to immerse himself in his claimed Jewishness. Between his relationships with his two white lovers, first Steena, then his wife, Iris, Coleman briefly dates an African American girl named Ellie Magee. Ellie has an intuition into Coleman’s true ethnicity and Silk, for a time, finds a refreshing freedom from his secret with her (though he later chooses the self-determination of keeping that secret and marries the Jewish Iris). At one point, Ellie takes Silk through town and shows him others who, like him, are passing:
One evening she takes him around to a tiny Bleecker Street jewelry shop where the white guy who owns it makes beautiful things out of enamel. Just shopping the street, out looking, but when they leave she tells Coleman that the guy is black. ‘You’re wrong,’ Coleman tells her, ‘he can’t be.’ ‘Don’t tell me that I’m wrong’—she laughs—‘you’re blind.’

Another night, near midnight, she takes him to a bar on Hudson Street where painters congregate to drink. ‘See that one? The smoothie?’ she says in a soft voice, inclining her head toward a good-looking white guy in his mid-twenties charming all the girls at the bar. ‘Him,’ she says. ‘No,’ says Coleman, who’s the one laughing now. ‘You’re in Greenwich Village, Coleman Silk, the four freest square miles in America. There’s one on every other block. You’re so vain, you thought you’d dreamed it up yourself’(134-135).

In this passage, the urban landscape is essential to the self-determined path Coleman and the others choose. The passing of these characters is intimately related to the streets that give them the capacity to pass. Bleecker and Hudson Streets are specifically named as if to mythologize the Village’s power to bestow creative agency upon its residents. The energy of the urban space is essentially the same that Trilling’s teacher is drawn back to. The primary distinction is that Silk is not a native of this environment, but an outsider who acquires the urban vitality and then draws upon it as an implement of his self-creative engineering project, a project that eventually burst out of Silk’s own body, transforms Athena College, and finally spills out into the Athena streets.
Even Silk’s decision to pass as a Jew is engineered in a calculated, leverage-conscience manner. Silk’s ambiguous looks could also pass as Middle Eastern, we are told:

…but as this was a moment when Jewish self-infatuation was at a postwar pinnacle among the Washington Square intellectual avant-garde, when the aggrandizing appetite driving their Jewish mental audacity was beginning to look to be uncontrollable and an aura of cultural significance emanated as much from their jokes and their family anecdotes, from their laughter and their clowning and their wise-cracks and their arguments — even from their insults — as from Commentary, Midstream, and the Partisan Review, who was he not to go along for the ride…? (131).

Once again, we see that Coleman Silk’s individual story is bound up with a larger cultural moment. Unlike the “spooks” incident, however, this time Silk profits from his sociological reality. The American Jewish ascendancy that Silk (through Zuckerman) identifies is the same one that Lionel Trilling and his American Arnoldianism participated in, and it is through this mechanism that Silk’s intellectual capacity for Greek and Latin allows him access to the genteel landscape of Athena College. The utilitarianism of Silk’s project, however, distinguishes his career from Trilling’s.

At the former Athene, however, Silk nonetheless acquires a Trillingesque status. Furthermore, his tenure as the college Dean had brought to the campus a “revolution of quality” (83) that subsequently re-designed the landscape of the town. Recall the description that reveals that the college’s clock tower, “from down in Athena proper, could be seen the way the massive European cathedrals are discerned from the
approaching roadways by those repairing for the cathedral town” (153). This imagery recalls the ideological basis for institutions of liberal education. Arnold himself, seeing this education as a social replacement for the lost hegemony of the Church, hoped that the ideals of these campuses would radiate out and organize the polity around the best that had been thought and said. Clearly Athena College performs a similar social function for its community giving it the aesthetic of Trilling’s mossy university space of legend. The polity of the town, however, reflects a baseness at the heart of Athena College, in spite of its appearance.

During Coleman’s return to Athena, sitting on a bench at a public park, he overhears a conversation between young Athena faculty members about the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. The political conversation he witnesses, however, transgresses the ideology of our image of a public-square-conversation in Plato’s School of Athens. The opening lines of the conversation shock the reader with their baseness: “If Clinton had fucked her in the ass, she might have shut her mouth. Bill Clinton is not the man they say he is. Had he turned her over in the Oval Office and fucked her in the ass, none of this would have happened” (146). The extended conversation that follows continues in this vein and reflects a debased public rhetorical practice. The participants in the conversation draw, like Trilling, larger cultural conclusions from the details of the scandal, but the means by which they do it subvert Trilling’s stylistic standards. The dialogue is then a debased imitation of Trilling’s Arnoldianism. In fact, it recalls many of Trilling’s complaints about the tone and tenor of the extended Leavis-Snow debate that Trilling attempted to intervene in. Most important, however, is the fact that these faculty members represent Silk’s “revolution of quality.” Silk even laments the fact that they were not
around to defend him during his own scandal, as he admires the baseness of their rhetoric and thinks it a useful antidote to the political correctness that drove his downfall (151).

In fact, the oppositional, cultural mode of thought, to again use Trilling’s phrase, physically manifests in Silk’s Athena. This is most clear when Coleman begins “climbing the hill to the campus” at the town’s Civil War monument (152). The symbolism of this landmark appropriately represents the former campus leader’s position as he returns to his former dwelling place. The Oedipal narrative that Zuckerman uses to construct Silk’s narrative dictates that Silk is, like Oedipus, the now-banished former hero of the community and the inscription of the space with a monument to the Civil War reflects Coleman’s own position.

Given the influence that the college has upon the town, Coleman Silk’s own influence upon the college is of primary interest. The liberal humanism he wears is, like his ethnicity, a facade that masks not Trilling’s notion of sincerity, but rather the individualized quest for his own self-defined “authenticity.” Ross Posnock more pointedly describes Silk’s position as being “trapped in the antinomy of radical individualism” (27). Ultimately, this makes him culpable for the debasement of the town’s rhetoric and the adversarial nature of its landscape. It is, therefore, instructive to articulate once again a distinction between Silk and Lionel Trilling. Trilling’s obstinate, urban Arnoldianism made him an influential critic and teacher. Silk’s urbanized liberal humanism, though aesthetically similar, masks a calculating, utilitarian core. The pragmatism that Silk’s academic facade obscures is only legible, however, if we observe that Silk’s main contribution to Athena’s intellectual community is not as a teacher or a critic, but as an administrator.
Administration, Kitsch, and Avant-Garde

Zuckerman tells us that had the spooks scandal not occurred, “there would have been the institution of the Coleman Silk Lecture Series, there would have been a classical studies chair established in his name, and perhaps — given his importance to the twentieth-century revitalization of the place — the humanities building or even North Hall, the college’s landmark, would have been renamed in his honor after his death” (6). In other words, Silk would have been immortalized in the intellectual, pedagogical, and architectural landscapes of Athena College. As we have seen, however, Coleman Silk had by the time of the scandal already imposed his self-created identity upon each of these elements of Athena.

Had the college memorialized Silk in its academic landscape, it would have been ironically appropriate, however. Just as Silk himself lived a lifelong masquerade, the academic memorialization would have masked Silk’s true contribution to the campus, iron-fisted, calculating administration. Zuckerman admits as much when he informs us that Silk the teacher was “an outgoing, sharp-witted, forcefully smooth big-city charmer, something of a warrior, something of an operator, hardly the prototypical pedantic professor of Latin and Greek” (4). Therefore, the institutional memory of Silk the Trillingsque teacher/scholar would have been a facade, like Athena’s kitchily collegiate appearance. Both constructions being market-driven versions of the Arnoldian structures they imitate. Coleman’s contribution to the campus was not the maintenance of the Classical tradition as a professor, but rather the professionalization of the faculty as the college Dean of Faculty.
Zuckerman mythologizes Silk’s tenure as Dean and in doing so he draws attention to the instrumentalism that defines him and the institution he created in his image. In other words, Zuckerman establishes the cultural and political environment that undermines Athena’s Arnoldian claims even as he recentralizes the classical in constructing Silk’s story out of that cultural milieu. Zuckerman’s narrative of Silk’s career works to mythologize him in the classical tradition, portraying him as a kind of modern Achilles/Oedipus. The immediacies of the political environment are not the story, but rather provide the materials from which the story is constructed.

*The Human Stain* demonstrates the long-established Zuckerman craft of fiction. Zuckerman’s Aristotelian method embodies the Arnoldian vision of literature as a criticism of life. The novel ends with Zuckerman watching Les Farley ice-fishing on a frozen lake. The image of this lone figure on the ice encapsulates, for Zuckerman, the human experience and he proclaims, “There it was, if not the whole story, the whole picture” (361). The image of the disturbed Farley’s lonely isolation, attempting to pull fish from a frozen pond, says more about the human experience than the facts of Farley’s life ever could. For Zuckerman, the representation of the artistic image is more true than reality. This both recalls Aristotle’s notion that poetry is a higher thing than history and Arnold’s vision of fiction as criticism of life. In this worldview, the immediate is less important than what it can represent, as this is where the truth lays. Thus, through his chronic myth-making, Zuckerman marginalizes the anti-Arnoldian forces at work in the transition from Athene to Athena by making those forces subservient to the cultural product that is the book in hand.
First, Zuckerman inscribes a liminality upon the very position of faculty administrator, both a perfectly appropriate metaphor for Silk’s life and an unsettled state of being that invites dramatization. He writes, “Now, even ordinary deans, I am told, serving as they do in a no man’s land between the faculty and the higher administration, invariably make enemies” (7). This introduction to Silk’s career is “if not the whole story, the whole picture.” First, by implication, we gather that Silk is no “ordinary dean,” a fact that inscribes a heroic grandiosity upon him. Second, the emphasis on Silk’s liminality provides some distance from his social milieu, making his story distinct. Also, that liminality leads to his having enemies and sets the stage for extended confrontation with Delphine Roux and Athena College, as well as associating him with brave Achilles. Finally, Zuckerman’s account slyly provides him, as narrator, a critical distance similar to Arnold’s speaker looking down on the ignorant armies clashing by night. When he adds the qualifier “I am told” to his statement about college deans, he distances himself from the social and political machinery of the events he describes, clearly establishing him as first a hearer, then later a storyteller, and not partisan participant. This distance, in turn, serves to emphasize the act of storytelling in the very story being told, centralizing the cultural product over the political and social particularities out of which the story is crafted.

With this narrative perspective, Zuckerman locates Silk’s Classical heroism in his administrative savvy. As Zuckerman tells it:

As dean, and with the full support of an ambitious new president,

Coleman had taken an antiquated, backwater, Sleepy Hollowish college
and, not without steamrolling, put an end to the place as a gentlemen’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 (5).

The heroism of this description is compelling. Silk seems so wronged by Delphine Roux’s Athena that it is easy to assume that she fundamentally changed Coleman’s institution in such a way that he was unjustly expelled. Critics of the novel have even adopted this view of Athena. Gustavo Canales, for example, assumes that Athena “used to be an institution that pursued academic excellence when it was run by Coleman Silk” (120). However, the laurels bestowed upon Silk above are so exaggerated it invites suspicion. First, one does not come away with the feeling that E.I. Lonoff’s Athene was a Sleepy Hollowish backwater or that Lonoff was among an old-guard collection of deadwood, yet this is what Zuckerman would have us believe in this book’s representation of the institution — the facts have changed to better suit the story, it seems. Given this, the imagery with which Zuckerman describes pre-Silk Athena seems engineered to bolster Silk’s accomplishments.

Those accomplishments themselves also invite scrutiny as Silk’s academic prowess is described using the language of business. Just as Malamud conflated the university’s heteroglot languages in *A New Life*, Zuckerman encases the academic inside the corporate here. Terms like “aggressively,” “recruiting,” and “revolutionizing,” particularly when combined with Silk’s presidential support, associate Silk with the professional discourse of corporate middle-management far more than the contemplative, purposeful inaction of Matthew Arnold. He is, as Zuckerman states, liminal, being caught between faculty and higher administration, implementing the will of the latter. The
repeated usage of the term “ambitious” makes this relationship clear, and it indicates the mechanistic nature of Silk’s Athena, even as it operates under the cultural guise of Athene. The term originally springs from the new college president and his agenda. Through Silk’s implementation of “aggressive” business policies, the quality of ambition is then realized in the institution’s younger faculty members, whom Silk hired out of graduate programs like “Johns Hopkins and Yale and Cornell” (9). This is the genesis of Silk’s “revolution of quality” (9), and this conflation of corporate machinery and academic professionalism ushered out faculty members who no longer regularly published. Zuckerman summarizes Silk’s Athena: “In short, he brought in competition, and he made the place competitive, which, as an early enemy noted, ‘is what Jews do’” (9).

Silk’s academic credentials are then, like appearances throughout the novel, misleading. Ultimately his treatment by the Athena faculty in the wake of the Spooks scandal is a reflection of the kind of institution he created himself. Its aggressive, business-like, result-oriented, practices ultimately doom Coleman during his scandal. In the market-driven environment he helped to establish, charges of racism, spurious or not, are institutionally volatile and damaging. Therefore, the political correctness that ushered out the Coleman Silk era are intricately related to the Silk-imposed transition from Athene to Athena.

**Athena and the Academy of Superstition**

Silk’s “revolution of quality,” as we have seen, brings with it a disintegration in the classical and Arnoldian values that the institution purports to curate in the beauty of its collegiate kitsch. This disintegration manifests not only in the unofficial banter
between faculty members, but also in the institution’s official discourse. At the height of his feud with his former employer, Silk begins work on an academic tell-all diatribe against the institution. Building his file for the project, Silk collects documents related to his case. Bringing one of these documents to Zuckerman’s attention, a letter penned by Delphine Roux, Silk expresses not just moral indignation, but also intellectual disgust with the writing:

Let me read from this document. Listen to this. Filed by a colleague of mine supporting Tracy Cummings as someone we should not be to harsh or too quick to judge, certainly not someone we should turn away and reject. Tracy we must nurture, Tracy we must understand — we have to know, this scholar tells us, ‘where Tracy’s coming from.’ Let me read you the last sentences. ‘Tracy is from a rather difficult background, in that she separated from her immediate family in tenth grade and lived with relatives. As a result, she was not particularly good at dealing with the realities of a situation. This defect I admit. But she is ready, willing, and able to change her approach to living. What I have seen coming to birth in her during these last weeks is a realization of the seriousness of her avoidance of reality.’ Sentences composed by one Delphine Roux, chairman of Languages and Literature, who teaches, among other things, a course in French classicism. *A realization of the seriousness of her avoidance of reality.* Ah, enough. Enough. This is sickening. This is just too sickening’ (18).
Roux’s prose is not that of a humanities scholar, but a technocrat. Silk himself emphasizes the rather poor sentence construction Roux employs at one point in her letter, expressing his disgust with her repetitious “of.” In addition, the letter exhibits informal colloquialisms, “where Tracy’s coming from,” clichés like “ready, willing, and able,” and awkward grandiosity in phrases like “What I have seen coming to birth in her.” In short, this kind of prose resembles the kind of writing that higher education should strive to improve upon, not institutionally perpetuate.

This is the state of intellectual discourse at Athena, however. The quality of Roux’s prose is subservient to its political intent. In this way, the institution again belies its classical liberal arts appearance and instead disguises utilitarian, political discourse as intellectual activity. Matthew Arnold, and Trilling after him, championed culture as an antidote to the debasing tendencies of pragmatic focus on the immediate. Recall in The Ghost Writer, E.I. Lonoff’s obsessive “turning around sentences” (12). This slow, very un-immediate approach to cultural production epitomized Athene. Athena, keeping with the appearances of Athene’s traditions, keenly disguises its utilitarianism as Culture, and in the traditions of Greek tragedy, Coleman Silk himself initiated that transition.

A vivid example of Coleman’s “scholarship” is available in the account of his relationship with his first white lover, Steena. Early in their fiery courtship, before Steena finds out that Coleman is black and leaves him, she writes him a love poem, which she leaves for Silk to find:

He has a body.
He has a beautiful body —
the muscles on the backs of his legs and the back of his neck.

Also he is bright and brash.
He’s four years older,
but sometimes I feel he is younger.
He is sweet, still, and romantic, 
though he says he is not romantic.

I am almost dangerous for this man.

How much can I tell
of what I see in him?
I wonder what he does
after he swallows me whole.

Steena’s romantic ode to her infatuation with her new lover speaks to her youth. At age 18, and a transplant from Minnesota to New York City, she is naive, inexperienced, but nonetheless sincere (in Trilling’s sense of the term). She is aware of her genre, the sonnet, but her poem falls short of realizing its form completely. For example, where the traditional sonnet has 14 lines, Steena’s ends with just 13.

Silk, as an advanced humanistic intellectual fully trained in poetry and art, might have focused on this kind of reading of the poem, but he does not. Instead, his attention is strictly focused on the term “neck,” which he initially mis-reads as “negro” (112). This mistake reveals a self-absorption that destroys his appreciation of the poem. We are told that Silk, “kept reading, faster even than before, but the words formed themselves into no combination that made sense. His negro WHAT?” (112). In short, Silk’s analysis of the poem is so intertwined with his own secret, that he is unable even to consider it to be a creative endeavor. The questions he asks himself of the poem beg for comprehensive, unambiguous answers: “But what then did this mean?”; “What was so ambiguous about what she saw in him?”; “If she’d written ‘tell from’ instead of ‘tell of,’ would that have made her meaning clearer? Or would that have made it less clear?” (113). The answers to these kind of questions are precisely what Trilling actively sought to obscure for his readers, and indeed the desire for this level of clarity in art seems to undermine Arnold’s contemplative distance. Furthermore, it is Coleman’s habitual insincerity, his obsessive
self-interest that leads to this vulgarity. We are told that, “Each time he tried to penetrate her meaning, it slipped away. After two frantic minutes on his feet in the hallway, all he could be sure of was his fear” (114). His consumption of Steena’s poem is clearly associated with phallic domination (his attempts to “penetrate her meaning”) and this activity arises from his fear of losing his secret.

Silk’s approach to reading subjugates culture to self interest in a manner similar to Delphine Roux’s manner of composition, then, and the implication is that Silk’s massive project of injecting himself into Athena’s institutional DNA is the cause. Delphine Roux’s writing, in fact, comes to embody the deceptiveness of Athena’s cultural project.

The novel’s opening section is entitled “Everyone Knows.” These words are derived from an anonymous letter Silk receives after his resignation from Athena (38). The note is meant as a threat to expose Silk’s affair with Faunia Farley and is composed as follows:

Everyone knows you’re sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age.

Silk recognizes the handwriting of the note as that of Delphine Roux and employs a lawyer and a handwriting expert to verify the fact. In addition to providing the material for the novel’s first section, the anonymous threat is reproduced twice in exactly the same form in the novel. This emphasis, not only on the letter itself, but also upon its form, indicates its importance to the novel’s larger thematic concerns, not simply its role in forwarding its plot.

As presented, the lines resemble and indeed function as a poem. In fact, Zuckerman alludes to this function when he states “While I held the letter in my hand and
as carefully as I could — and as Coleman would have me do — appraised the choice of words and their linear deployment as if they’d been composed not by Delphine Roux but by Emily Dickinson . . .” (39-40). In fact, as if it were by Dickinson, the note works as a poem on a much more sophisticated level than did Steena’s love sonnet. Unlike Steena’s poem, Roux’s poem employs enjambment, with each line ending on an unfinished thought, creating an anticipation for the lines that follow. The poem’s first line “Everyone knows you’re” therefore ends with the reader possibly anticipating the revelation of Silk’s racial secret, only to surprise by turning the reader’s attention to Silk’s sexual relationship. Likewise the second to last line leaves the reader in suspense as to the precise manner the woman in question is “half” of Silk; intelligence, age, economic class . . .

All told, there is a formal, poetic sophistication to the Roux poem that gives it the appearance of culture. This appearance, however, like all others in the novel, is deception. At the heart of Roux’s poem is not the quiet contemplation of life at Dover Beach, but rather goal-oriented politics. In short, “Everyone Knows” is not contemplating the scene of ignorant armies clashing by night, but rather taking part in the battle. Conversely, Roth’s novel, by weaving this political deception into the fabric of his own Arnoldian contemplation reverses the ontological assumptions of Roux’s poem and re-situates culture as primary.

Zuckerman then serves as a kind of mouthpiece, not for Roth’s biography, but for his literary theory. In his conversation with Silk about the anonymous letter, he constantly attempts to situate the political struggle in a cultural context, relating the immediate politics to literature and culture. Responding to Silk’s question, “Who capable
of rational thought sends anyone an anonymous letter?” (42), Zuckerman replies, “Maybe it’s a French thing . . .Isn’t there a lot of it in Balzac? In Stendhal? Aren’t there anonymous letters in *The Red and the Black*?” The distinction between Zuckerman and Silk is evident in this conversation. Whereas Silk focuses on the immediate and the political, Zuckerman finds the world best comprehended through the distant contemplation of culture. In other words, for Silk, the best way to deal with Roux is by hiring an attorney. For Zuckerman she is best understood by returning to Balzac.

Zuckerman ultimately situates Silk’s own story inside a mythological context and he argues for that approach in understanding Roux as well. Zuckerman offers Silk the following soliloquy:

> Look, for some reason everything you do must have ruthlessness as its explanation, and everything Delphine Roux does must have virtue as its explanation. Isn’t mythology full of giants and monsters and snakes? By defining you as a monster, she defines herself as a heroine. This is her slaying of the monster. This is her revenge for your preying on the powerless. She’s giving the whole thing mythological status” (42).

The giving of mythological status is indeed what Zuckerman himself attempts to do in composing *The Human Stain* and here he attempts to isolate that as Roux’s motivation as well. Silk, however, will have none of it, and is ultimately unwilling to grant Roux the capacity for Arnoldian culture-making. Reporting Silk’s response, Zuckerman informs us:

> From the smile indulgently offered me, I saw that I wasn’t making much headway by spinning off, even jokingly, a pre-Homeric interpretation of
the anonymous indictment. “You can’t find in mythmaking,” he told me, “an explanation for her mental processes. She hasn’t the imaginative resources for mythmaking. Her métier is the stories that the peasants tell to account for their misery. The evil eye. The casting of spells. I’ve cast a spell over Faunia. Her métier is folktale full of witches and wizards” (42-43).

In a fascinating development, Roth, in his representation of the full picture, seems to side with Silk over Zuckerman in this dispute. While Zuckerman does indeed mythologize Silk’s conflict, Roth has, by this time, fully demonstrated that his fictional avatar indeed has “the imaginative resources for mythmaking.” Therefore, his equating of Silk with Oedipus and the framing of the novel with dialogue from Sophocles account of that tale is consistent with Zuckerman’s imaginative resources. Roux, mired in the political moment of the immediate does not have this capacity.

Silk’s odd designation of her “métier” as superstition bears some consideration at this point. Assuming that Silk is more correct than Zuckerman in his evaluation of Roux, the form of her “poem,” in Zuckerman’s words, its “linear deployment,” indicates that Zuckerman applies Silk’s theory in his very representation of Roux’s lines, which, recall, we only see as mediated through Zuckerman. Consider the shape of the lines:

Everyone knows you’re sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age.
The pronounced triangular image uncannily resembles an ancient superstitious incantation meant to ward off evil, the Abracadabra.

In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Daniel Defoe writes of how frightened peasants used the symbol as a defense against the plague. Defoe, recalling the superstition that flourished at the time, writes that its blame:

> lay chiefly in the people deceived . . . And this was in wearing charms, philtres, exorcisms, amulets, and I know not what preparations, to fortify the body with them against the plague; as if the plague was not the hand of God, but a kind of possession of an evil spirit, and that it was to be kept off with crossings, signs of the zodiac, papers tied up with so many knots, and certain words or figures written on them, as particularly the word Abracadabra, formed in triangle or pyramid… (35).

Not only does the shape of Roux’s poem recall the Abracadabra, its intent does as well. Both serve as rites of purification. This is precisely the question with which the novel begins, with its epigraph of Oedipus asking “What is the rite of purification?” In essence, then, Roux’s poem replaces a poetic form of purification, classical tragedy, with a kind of utilitarian quackery. Zuckerman locates the rite in cultural representation, whereas Roux relies on a superstitious fear Silk claims cannot be found in mythmaking. One vision of
this rite establishes a space of cultural contemplation while the other represents a misguided, utilitarian method of warding off evil. The pronounced wedge-shape of both images parallels the purpose of each. Like wedges, both are meant to impose distance between the transgressive figure and the community.

Zuckerman’s imposition of this superstitious imagery on “Everyone Knows” essentially adopts Silk’s view of Roux and imposes it upon her discourse. This has two effects. First the utilitarianism of Roux’s discourse is ridiculed as simple peasant superstition and placed in relief against a noble form of classical culture. Second, and most important for this study, Zuckerman’s ironic distillation of Roux’s discourse represents the imposition of artistic control upon a political situation. In other words, Zuckerman’s cultural product, *The Human Stain*, imposes a classical structure upon political discourse, taking control of and ultimately reversing Roux’s project of supplanting culture in the new Athena.

**“Waging Culture,” From Spooks to The Human Stain**

It is ultimately in the metafictional quality of *The Human Stain* that we can find the space in which Arnold’s beloved culture finds centrality. Just as Royal argues for the centrality of Roth’s intertextuality, Debra Shostak identifies that quality as vital in Roth’s fiction. Shostak writes that “Roth’s strategy allows him from book to book and even within a single book to take up a variety of perspectives on the issues that engross him, at times in clear opposition to one another and other times along a continuum. He gives full voice to each perspective, which may appear literally in dialogue, in the monologue of a single character or narrator or displaced into action or narrative form” (6). Shostak’s analysis recalls Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia in the novel (in fact she goes on to
explicitly identify Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism in Roth), but it also speaks to the Arnoldian ideal. With a variety of perspectives simultaneously under consideration, the easy answers that Trilling detested are not possible. Instead, Roth’s narrative creates a space in which life can be fully contemplated in all its complexity. The Human Stain is, therefore, primarily concerned with the vitality of fiction.

The novel is in many ways about the struggle and the need to create narrative. At the start of the story, Silk entreats Nathan Zuckerman to use his skills as a novelist to help write about the injustice Coleman suffered. Silk’s plan is to publish a non-fiction, tell-all diatribe called Spooks. Silk’s book never gets beyond the first draft, but one can imagine the finished product participating in the long tradition of Jeremiads warning against the degradation of higher education at the hands of this or that socio-political cause. Certainly Spooks would have railed against the primacy of so-called politically correct positions on race and class, a cultural climate Zuckerman refers to as “the ecstasy of sanctimony” (2) in the novel’s opening. Therefore, the failure of Silk’s jeremiad, and the success of Zuckerman’s fiction, emphasizes the Arnoldian value of artistic, not political resolution.

There is an artfulness in Zuckerman’s phrase that is lost in Silk’s angry ranting, however. The poetic quality of the phrase captures a deeper truth than Silk’s complaints can hope to do. Ross Posnock offers a fittingly poetic soliloquy to Roth’s descriptive prowess that illustrates its power to contemplate the multiplicity of life: “One of the stylistic signatures of his mimesis is exorbitant detail, as if he is seized — ‘couldn’t stop’ himself — by the rhapsody of turning or tuning language to a taut pitch of seemingly limitless reach and precision . . . In its rigorous level of craftsmanship, Roth’s achieved
verisimilitude permits the teeming blur of the everyday to crystallize into the particular” (229-230). The “craftsmanship” of Roth’s work is indeed the subject of The Human Stain, and the value of that craftsmanship echoes Matthew Arnold. Zuckerman’s words are removed enough from the immediacies of Silk’s situation that they also transcend that specific event and capture something about the national mania surrounding Bill Clinton’s sexual relations with That Woman, Monica Lewinsky. Silk himself comes to this conclusion when he announces his giving up the project upon reading his own first draft. Silk tells Zuckerman “I read it and it’s shit and I’m over it. I can’t do what the pros do. Writing about myself, I can’t maneuver the creative remove. Page after page, it is still the raw thing. It’s a parody of the self-justifying memoir. The hopelessness of explanation” (19). Here Silk acknowledges the necessity of style in appropriately representing human drama, just as we have seen in his analysis of Roux’s prose. Furthermore, he centralizes contemplative distance, what he calls “the creative remove,” in the process. Zuckerman, as we have seen, carefully maintains that remove and this allows him to reify Matthew Arnold’s ideology of Culture.

Where Delphine’ Roux’s “poetry” merely masquerades as such in order to pursue political ends, Zuckerman’s narrative of Coleman Silk’s life inverts that approach. His book instead masquerades as an extended complaint against the cultural and political pettiness of modern academe. In reality, those forces simply serve as the material from which the writer, the creator of culture, contemplates the complexity of life from a distance.

The novel’s opening pages are, if not the whole story, then the whole picture, of Zuckerman’s accomplishment. The narrative begins with Zuckerman describing Silk’s
affair with Faunia Farley. After a page of this, the narrative focus outwardly expands to contextualize Coleman’s story within the American cultural landscape during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. After two pages or so of this prototypical Rothian rant, we learn about Coleman’s professional career. This part of the narrative is framed by an image of Silk teaching *The Iliad* and espousing the cultural merits of Achilles’ wrath. This is ultimately the social context in which Silk’s story is best experienced. The effect of these shifts in scale is to ultimately subsume the immediate, the mechanistic, and the political into the cultural product. David Brauner argues that in Roth’s “American Trilogy,” “history is incorporated into a realist, anti-pastoral discourse” (179). Indeed, Silk’s narrative is only briefly eclipsed by the political landscape of the Clinton years. Immediately upon its establishment, this context, the personal, the social, and the political, is pulled into an adaptation of the story that, according to Silk, Western culture begins with (4).

If *The Human Stain* begins with Troy, then perhaps our consideration of it should end there as well. The Greeks, of course, famously won victory with the aid of a fabricated, wooden horse. Inside that horse were a band of Greek soldiers whom the Trojans unwittingly brought into their city to bring about its destruction. Ironically, this provides a powerful metaphor for Delphine Roux’s rhetorical strategy. Her political aggression is hidden inside what seems to be a cultural object, a poem. Like the Greek horse, its aesthetics were merely a disguise for its political intent. To further the irony, Virgil describes the horse as being built by “Pallas’ divine craft,” associating the craft with Pallas Athene, goddess of art and craft. Zuckerman’s solution to this aggression is not a simple as countering it with a political counter-attack, though it appears as though
he does. On the contrary, Zuckerman’s narrative is something like an inverted Trojan Horse, hiding the object of culture in the disguise of a military squadron bent on waging war. What it deceptively wages, however, is Culture. By doing so, Zuckerman essentially reconstructs Athene from the ashes of Athena.
Conclusion

I heard there was a secret chord,
that David played and it pleased the LORD.
But you don’t really care for music do you?

It goes like this,
the fourth,
the fifth,
the minor fall,
the major lift.

The baffled king composing Hallelujah
Hallelujah

— Leonard Cohen, “Hallelujah”

Leonard Cohen’s ubiquitous pop song casts a long shadow over American popular music. The song, with its haunting melody and introspective lyrics, is a mainstay of the dramatic television montage sequence. It has also become a widely covered tune, with a multitude of singers using its minor falls and major lifts to showcase soulful, highly trained singing voices. This quality of the idiosyncratic star-vehicle also mirrors how art functions in the fiction explored in this study. The opening lyric of the song, reproduced above, centralizes form in its very content. The melody actually performs the content described in the lyric, prioritizing the formal expression of art over the communication of any argument in the song. In this way, the song undertakes the same approach to art that, say, The Human Stain and “The Scholar Gypsy” does.

Another impressive achievement of the song is its mining of Jewish culture for material that, through its ubiquity, invigorates the culture at-large with the specificity of the Jewish experience. Mixing narrative moments from the lives of Biblical figures like King David and Samson with the generic conventions of the love song, Cohen’s song draws upon his specific ethnic heritage to animate his contribution to American (and
world) culture. This conflation of the immediate experiences and concerns of ethnic specificity with the eternal concerns of big-c Culture directly refutes the dichotomy Arnold imposes between hebraism and hellenism. It is, in fact, through the Jewish experience that form and Arnoldian liberal humanism are preserved in Cohen’s masterpiece. Clearly, the artistic tendencies of the Jewish fiction I have explored have carried forth into a culture that has long left Malamud and Trilling (though perhaps not Roth) behind.

Irving Howe once famously claimed that Jewish American fiction was essentially over (*Jewish-American Stories*). He based this analysis upon the sociological transition away from the urban centers that incubated its eventual ascendancy. Time has clearly proven Howe wrong as Jewish American fiction has, like Jews themselves, adapted and thrived in and through a multitude of cultural, political, sociological, and artistic realities. The widespread diversity of this body of work, in fact, necessitates a qualifying statement on my part. I have chosen as my focus in this study a small sampling of writers to explore. For me, the fiction of Malamud, Trilling, and Roth that I have explored here works together to illustrate the representational and ideological mechanisms of a broader body of work that extends across the Jewish American oeuvre. In other words, I have chosen to plumb the depths of this literary approach rather than the breadth of its implementation. One can see Trilling’s Hebraic Americanist Arnoldianism, what I call the Ivory Shtetl, in much other fiction, whether it be Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Saul Bellow, in works like *Humboldt’s Gift* or particularly *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, or even in Leslie Fiedler’s *The Last Jew in America*. In short, American Jewish
fiction has a long history of engagement with Arnoldian ideals, and those values have come to help shape the aesthetic of the genre, from its beginnings up until today.

Just as with Irving Howe’s claim that Jewish American fiction is finished, we must at this point also re-evaluate his assertion that this body of work is less ethnic than regional. Howe’s claim is based upon the prevalence of the urban, Yiddish-speaking experience in Jewish American fiction that, for him, gave the body of work its distinctiveness. In recent years, however, the urban space has given way to the suburban in Jewish fiction, and still this body of work is very much alive in American fiction. Authors like Rebecca Goldstein, Allegra Goodman, Michael Chabon, and, more subtly, Jonathan Lethem continue to mine the Jewish American experience for literary material and, though the suburban replaces the urban as the intellectual fountainhead for this generation of writers, campus fiction is still a mainstay. Goldstein’s Mazel, for example, is a generational tale of academics and artists in the suburbs whose work has morphed from the theatrical, to the academic humanities, to mathematics. Likewise, Lethem’s novel As She Climbed Across the Table, is a postmodern campus novel akin to DeLillo’s White Noise, in which humanistic study is disastrously subsumed into quantum physics, with soul-searing ramifications.

The 2009 film A Serious Man, by Joel and Ethan Coen, provides a window into how the Ivory Shtetl functions in the new post-urban Jewish reality, and, as it turns out, very little has changed. The film, on its surface, seems to be a postmodern dark comedy that works to deny certainty, logic, and truth. Given the emphasis that the narrative places upon imposing chaos on its characters and institutions, it would seem that the film also ultimately denies the possibility of Arnoldian Culture finding a foothold from which to
humanize the polity. In reality, however, just as the Marx Brothers subversively humanized Huxley College, the Cohen Brothers smuggle culture inside the Trojan Horse of their anarchic black comedy.

*A Serious Man* follows Jewish physics professor Larry Gopnik over a few chaotic days of his life. Up for tenure, Larry finds himself under pressure to accept or repel what may or may not be a bribe from a failing student all the while dealing with a pending separation and divorce from his wife who wishes to marry family acquaintance Sy Abelman (the film’s “serious man”) instead. In addition to these stresses, Larry’s children are spoiled, ungrateful products of the consumer-driven suburban life the family leads, and his brother, the mathematically brilliant, but socially inept Arthur finds himself in increasing legal trouble. To make matters worse, Larry’s repeated attempts to find answers and solace from the spiritual leaders of his temple are either thwarted or unsatisfactory, leaving him hopelessly lost by film’s end.

One notable element of the film is the predominance of Jews within it. Set in a 1960’s Minnesota suburb, the film renders that space almost entirely Jewish in fact, with both town and gown dominated by the Chosen. The housing development the Gopniks live in has only one gentile, Larry’s hostile, racist neighbor. Larry’s colleagues at the university are Jewish, while the only student featured in the film is a Korean student named Clive. In this film, Jews dominate the private domain in addition to their control over the university. In short, this is a Jewish storyworld.

There are, however, two major exceptions to the Jewish power on display in the film and they offer the viewer the possibility of coming away from the film with the kind of lesson or moral takeaway that Trilling abhorred. The first is the police force.
Larry’s brother Arthur runs into trouble with the law, first for gambling then later for committing homosexual acts, the officers who arrive at the Gopnik residence are gentile, not Jew. In fact, their non-Jewishness is played for laughs as they arrive while the Gopnks are sitting Shiva for the late Sy Ableman when the officers knock. The policemen’s comic, befuddled confusion over both the term and the practice signifies a cultural gap, one of the few in the largely Jewish diegesis. The goyish officers extreme non-Jewishness participates in a motif the film establishes regarding the relationship between Jew and gentile. They, along with Larry’s racist neighbor as well as Clive, the Korean student whose attempted bribe offers a potential compromise to Larry’s promotion, are all threats to the bliss of the Jewish suburb. This leads the viewer to see these characters as a collective representation of the external dangers Jews face even in the most tranquil, secure setting. In other words, they offer the viewer material to derive a lesson from the film. That lesson seemingly manifests in the film’s final image before cutting to black, a menacing tornado bearing down on the children of the Hebrew school, who watch paralyzed as the storm closes in. The notion that Jews, no matter how seemingly secure they are, are in constant danger from outside threats offers itself as a tantalizing lesson to be learned, a political or cultural position to be applied to the viewer’s life or worldview. I argue, however, that to eat of that enticing fruit is to succumb to the reductionism the film’s form works against.

I derive this reading of the film from the presence of the film’s other major non-Jewish character, Russell Krauss, the title character of the film’s micro-tale “The Goy’s Teeth.” This story, which amounts to little more than an anecdote in the larger film, occupies a central position in understanding the ethical position the film assumes. The
story, narrated by Rabbi Nachter when Larry comes to seek answers to the problems in
his life, serves the same kind of function as that of the fiction of this study. Namely, it
 crafts a storyspace that prioritizes the telling of the story over the usefulness of the
information conveyed in that tale. That distinction marks the site of the conflict in the
film. On one side, there is Rabbi Nachtner, who insists on the story’s instructive power
residing in the mystery imbedded in its form, while opposed stands Larry, who demands
pragmatic instruction from the story.

Larry’s insistence upon irreducible fact and clear direction has been well
established by this point in the film, and his career as a physics professor is strongly
implicated in this facet of his character. Recalling the Cascadia campus in A New Life, the
unnamed university for which Larry works is completely devoid of represented
humanistic endeavor. The only images we see of the college are Larry’s office and the
physics lecture hall; here there is not even a Humanities Hall to marginalize. Even the
endeavor that most resembles humanistic abstraction is rendered through mathematical
equations; the lesson that Larry attempts to convey to his students is Schrödinger's
paradox. The capacity to negotiate uncertainty, complication, and variousness that
Trilling prized as an essential part of liberal humanism’s cultural value is, in this model
usurped by mathematical proofs. Yet, this is the nearest the campus space comes to
undertaking humanistic activity and even this meager accomplishment is done by using
an allegory of a dead cat to illustrate Schrödinger's famous thought experiment. Larry’s
use of story has pragmatic ends in mind. Even at this early stage of the film, he demands
that the story provide practical instruction.
Ultimately, the film indicts this utilitarian approach to story. Larry’s trouble with Clive is rooted in Larry’s (mis)use of narrative here. When Clive complains to Larry that he did not deserve an F on the mid-term, he cites the fact that he understood the story of the dead cat. Larry’s response is that the story wasn’t the point of the exam, but rather just a way to clarify the principles behind the math. Larry tells Clive, “The stories I give you in class are just illustrative. They’re like fables, say, to help give you a picture. I mean . . . Even I don’t understand the dead cat.” It is, in fact, Larry’s inability to “understand” narratives that ultimately renders him helpless to deal with his life’s difficulties. Larry’s attempt to make story subservient to quantifiable, pragmatic fact here fails his student, Clive. In the end, it denies Larry himself the ability to cope.

In the absence of a humanistic presence in A Serious Man’s university landscape, the Arnoldian work is once again left to Jews. Rabbi Nachtner, in an attempt to help Larry find his way out his malaise, offers a magical story to ponder. As he does with Schrödinger’s dead cat, however, Larry expects and demands that the story point to definable action to be derived. In the end, however, salvation is not achieved through a roadmap, but rather mysterious wonder and the contemplation of art.

That art is the telling of the story of “The Goy’s Teeth,” both by Rabbi Nachtner and the Cohen Brothers. When Larry quizzes Rabbi Nachtner about whether God is speaking to him through signs, he asks direct questions like, “Is HaShem trying to tell me that Sy Abelman is me, or that we are all one or something?” Deflecting the directness of Larry’s questions, the Rabbi does not answer, but rather asks him if he knows Dr. Lee Sussman, a dentist associated with their temple. When Larry responds affirmatively, the Rabbi asks if he ever told him the story of the Goy’s Teeth. “What Goy?” is Larry’s
typically reductionist response, and Nachtner proceeds to tell the story of Sussman’s strange experience with one of his patients, a gentile named Russell Krauss. When Sussman is inspecting a cast for a dental appliance for Krauss, he notices the presence of Hebrew letters engraved on the insides of the Goy’s incisors. The Hebrew letters spelled out, when translated into English, “Help me, save me.” Astonished, Sussman calls Krauss back into the office to see if the engravings were really on the teeth. They were. This event starts Sussman on an existential crisis as he struggles to understand what God is telling him to do, and renders the dentist unable to eat, sleep, or function normally. First, he attempts to find a pragmatic solution, interpreting the letters as a direct message of instruction from God. Translating the Hebrew letters into corresponding numbers, Sussman finds that they form the phone number for a local grocery store, to which Sussman travels only to find that it is simply a grocery store. There is no answer in the rational world to satisfy Sussman. Exhausted in his search for answers, Sussman, like Larry, goes to see the Rabbi Nachtner and asks, “What does it mean, Rabbi? Is it a sign from HaShem, ‘help me?’ I Sussman should be doing something to help this goy? Doing what? The teeth don’t say. Or maybe I’m supposed to help people generally, lead a more righteous life. Is the answer in Kabbalah, or Torah? Or is there even a question? Tell me Rabbi, what can such a sign mean?"

This is where the Rabbi ends the story, pointedly leaving the hanging question unanswered. Larry of course is astonished by this omission and demands to know what he told Sussman, to which the Rabbi responds with credulity, “is it relevant?” The Rabbi’s approach here demonstrates a commitment to Arnoldian values that prize the contemplative mystery of art, and a simultaneous rejection of the demands of utilitarian
Finally, however, he gives in and relays his response to Sussman: “Look, the teeth, we don’t know. A sign from HaShem? Don’t know. Helping others? Couldn’t hurt.” The simple wisdom the Rabbi derives from the story is more than a comically anticlimactic moment, however. It reveals an assumption about narrative that closely corresponds to those of Trilling’s new class professionals, namely that, if cultivated, the study of literature and art has a mysterious, humanizing effect on the reader that, without the assistance (or interference) of instrumentalist institutions, permeates society with robust, engaged liberal ideals.

The storyline of “The Goy’s Teeth” reflects a deep connection between Arnoldian and Jewish values of art and narrative. However, the filmic telling of the tale provides a microcosm of the manner in which the film creates meaning and where it locates salvation in a chaotic world of terrifying confusion, and it does so by establishing a particular relationship between story, storyteller, and listener. The anecdote is formally set apart from the rest of the narrative and constructed as a self-enclosed mini-film with a diegesis that is separate from, even as it still exists in, *A Serious Man*’s primary storyworld. This complex relationship offers “The Goy’s Teeth” as a contemplative object that is outside Larry’s experience but also one that is available for him to access. In this way, the construction of the tale occupies the Aristotelian position that Trilling argues has lost sway in the age of authenticity. It is an external authority to which Larry must submit himself. It is not the duty of the story to reach down to Larry and solve his problems for him. This would be to submit the story to the purposes of utilitarian reason. Rather, it is Larry’s duty to aspire to the story on its terms and thereby remove himself from his problems. This process also minimizes the gravitational pull of Larry’s
immediate social, political, and cultural situation. This is a most Arnoldian view of
culture, and in the film this view is equated with Jewish cultural and religious practice, a
connection reminiscent of the one Trilling makes in “Wordsworth and the Rabbis.”
Nachtner says as much when he rebukes Larry for demanding answers from God
(referred to in the sequence by the casual usage “HaShem”). Nachtner scolds Larry,
telling him, “HaShem doesn’t owe us the answer. HaShem doesn’t owe us anything. The
obligation runs the other way.” Larry’s “obligation” as a listener is, in this case, to admire
the story for the questions it raises, not the answers it provides, and the Cohen Brothers’
construction of the film makes similar demands upon their viewer.

“The Goy’s Teeth” raises its questions through the artful construction of narrative,
not through the instrumental devices of logic or polemic. This construction is initiated by
establishing the story’s distinctness from the film’s larger diegesis. To begin with, the
sequence is literally partitioned off from the rest of the film with a title screen reading
“The Second Rabbi.” This title then cuts to an overhead, medium shot of Larry slumped
in a chair in the Rabbi’s office. The angle of the shot imposes a prayerful, subservient
posture upon Larry and this gives visual authority to the Rabbi in the sequence. The fact
that Nachtner uses that authority to communicate an answerless story illustrates the
importance the film places upon the open contemplation of story as moral and ethical
device.

The distinction between the telling of the “The Goy’s Teeth” and the storyworld
of Larry’s immediate troubles is first indicated through the composition of the shots in
the parallel diegeses. As Larry is offering his questions and the Rabbi listens, the scene is
composed of conventional cross-cutting between level medium shots of the two men.
Once the story begins, however, the shots of the men are closeups with strictly canted angles, stressing the pedagogically disorienting function the story is meant to perform upon its listener. In other words, the story the Rabbi tells is meant to shake Larry from his concerns and force him to contemplate the unanswerable mysteries it draws his attention to. This requires a degree of removal for both Larry and the viewer of *A Serious Man*, a narrative distance that the camera angles contribute to.

Larry is never completely removed from the story the Rabbi tells, however, only placed in a subservient position relative to it, offering him access to its wisdom if he so desires. In this way, the mini-film’s function in *A Serious Man* mirrors that of Glanvil’s story in “The Scholar Gypsy.” In the poem, the speaker poetically retells Glanvil’s tale for the moral edification of the reader of the poem. In other words, to read Arnold’s poem is to assume a position of respectful distance from the story in order to benefit from gypsy wisdom. Arnold reconstructs that wisdom through poetic form. The story of the goy’s mysterious teeth and Larry’s position as hearer represents a similar relationship, and this relationship is also conveyed through the formal construction, the telling of the tale.

The formal connection between the independent narrative of “The Goy’s Teeth” and the larger diegesis of *A Serious Man* is evident in the editing in of the canted reaction shots as indicated above. The artistic-formal connection between Larry’s world and that of the magical goy runs deeper, however. The sequence works to formally conflate the tale with its very telling. We, the viewers of *A Serious Man*, never hear Sussman’s own voice, only Nachtner’s narration of it. The story begins with the visually asynchronous paraphrase of Sussman by the Rabbi, meaning that the Rabbi’s words do not match the
Sussman’s lip movements. At the end of the tale, however, when Nachtner recalls Sussman sitting in the very seat Larry sits in, the two come into perfect synchronization. The first effect this synchronicity has is to bring Larry directly into confrontation with Nachtner’s story. This is a clear point when the diegeses of the two storyworlds collapse and it offers Larry an opportunity to engage the Rabbi’s tale. Sussman’s words take on an (if you will pardon the expression) immediacy – though not a utilitarianism – that brings them directly before Larry to consider.

Second, the synchronization of Sussman’s story with Nachtner’s account prioritizes the very telling of the story as the remedy for Larry’s ills. This is initially implicit in Nachtnner’s reluctance to offer resolution and further emphasized by the sound editing in the sequence. Nachtnner’s narration becomes perfectly synchronous with Sussman’s lip movements at the point when Sussman is asking questions similar to Larry’s. This implies that Larry is in Sussman’s position and indeed they are as we see Sussman sitting in the very chair Larry occupies. That Nachtner attempts to end his story with the questions Sussman asks emphasizes the recuperative power of considering the complexity of life through art (this fantastic story), de-emphasizing Larry’s search for verifiable answers. Nachtner’s telling of the story, and the film’s formal construction of it then becomes the remedy, not because it provides answers, but because it raises questions.

Larry, however, refuses to let the Rabbi end here, and this is the moment in the film when Larry’s quest for peace becomes hopeless. Nachtner, initially puzzled as to how his advice to Sussman is “relevant” to Larry, upon prodding, tells Larry the advice he gave to Sussman, that we can’t know the how or why or what, but that helping people,
“couldn’t hurt.” The conveying of this advice is located in the diegesis of “The Goy’s Teeth” and Sussman’s reaction to it is one of joyful relief. He is later shown going about his life in peaceful, happy manner. The film however cuts from Sussman’s elated reaction (in “The Goy’s Teeth”) to that of Larry, who, though seated in the same seat, looks confused and disappointed. This reaction essentially seals his fate and Sussman’s happy ending, based on his acceptance of the mystery that confronted him, is ultimately unavailable to Larry. This conclusion is also evident in the camera’s angle, which is no longer canted, but level again. The disorienting work of the story is finished; Sussman is saved and his return to normalcy is happy, while Larry’s is anything but.

In the end, the tale of Sussman’s goy and the formal mechanics of its telling work together to provide Larry an opportunity to find his way out of his existential dilemma. As with the fiction I have explored in this study, the centrality of the art object is essential to its ethical function. This is true even in the diegesis of “The Goy’s Teeth,” as Sussman only sees the mysterious Hebrew letters in a fabrication of the teeth. His initial examination of Krauss’s real mouth revealed nothing to him. The redemptive mystery manifests itself in the object crafted to represent the real, not the real itself. Nachtner himself, the teller of the tale, submits to the primacy of the story he tells by narrating himself into it, adding phrases like “Nachtner says…” to the account he shares with Larry, subsuming himself into the tale he tells as if he were Nathan Zuckerman. This, in the end, is the essential function of the Ivory Shtetl. Both within the story and in its conveyance, the centralizing of art provides redemptive opportunity.

In “A Summer’s Reading,” when Cattanzara asks George what books he is reading, George evades the question, simply saying that he once, “got a list of books in
the library” (169) that he is reading, and that seems to satisfy the change maker. To Cattanzara, the act of reading the books on that list, whatever they might have been, was the whole point. That was George’s salvation. At the end of the story, George sits down in the library with a hundred books that he has finally counted off and begins to read. I, the reader of George’s story, want to ask, as Cattanzara did, what they were. *What* books were going to give George life? *How* would they do so? Might they do the same for *me*? Malamud, like George, is reticent with the details, leaving me to imagine them for myself. A good strategy. Still, I have always wondered and, when I am in a library or bookstore, I sometimes think about what hundred books I might someday sit down with. A question with no answer. The path to redemption.
Perhaps because of the sociological milieu described by Mark McGurl, in his recent landmark book *The Program Era*, in which universities have increasingly come to house creative writing instruction, the publishing of campus novels has exploded in the postwar era. A genre of fiction with a substantial publishing history and readership, it has therefore inspired several dedicated studies, some of which are dedicated to Jewish American fiction. Bernard Sherman’s 1969 monograph *The Invention of the Jew* essentially survey’s the century’s Jewish American education narratives. As a survey, Sherman’s book has value in its scope, but that very scope limits the depth of Sherman’s readings as it forces the broad range of texts into large categories like “First Generation,” “Second Generation,” and “Third Generation.” The works primary limitation is that the fiction of figures such as Bellow, Malamud, and Roth does not neatly fit into these generic categories. Other works have studied the academic novel in general. Kenneth Womack’s 2005 monograph, *Postwar Academic Fiction: Satire, Ethics, Community*, focuses the genre through the lens of ethical criticism to chart the discontent of academics in the fiction of authors themselves disillusioned by the institution of higher education. More recently, Elaine Showalter’s book *Faculty Towers*, also analyzes not strictly the Jewish novel, but the postwar academic novel in general. Showalter’s subtitle is “The Academic Novel and Its Discontents,” and this further articulates the prevalence of academic satire in the genre. Coining the term “Professorromane,” Showalter, a college professor herself, takes a decade by decade look at the professoriate through the fiction about the institution. In short, her monograph is a kind of social history of the academy.

Much has been written about Jews and education in America. Irving Howe, in *World of Our Fathers*, for example, details how Jewish immigrants valued, sought out, and sacrificed for educational opportunities in the early part of the century. This fact is keenly illustrated in fiction (and non-fiction) of the time, from Anzia Yezierska, Mary Antin, and Abraham Cahan, to name just a few. Each of these authors detail the importance of education to the assimilation of immigrant Jews and the cultural and financial opportunities that education provided the immigrant, and as the century progressed, Jewish writers have continued to explore the role of higher education in Jewish American life. Another more recent book, Jerome Karabel’s massive history *The Chosen*, offers a vast narrative of admission practices at three Ivy League colleges, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Karabel’s highly detailed book traces how practices of exclusivity have over the course of the 20th century shifted from those that reify WASP privilege to more open multicultural ideologies of inclusion.

Raymond Williams correctly claims that “culture” is one of the most complicated words in the English language, with many usages over a very long time. My use of the term here, and throughout this project, is directed at Matthew Arnold’s usage of the term. For Arnold, Culture is an ambiguous term that denotes not simply products of high art and literature, but also an ethical and moral vision of citizenship and intellectual integrity. His arguments for the primacy of big-c Culture (most famously with Thomas Huxley) are in defense of a vision of a civilized polity able to both govern wisely and be governed respectfully. Huxley ironically finds a place of prominence in *Horse Feathers* as we will see.
It should be noted that although Turner prefers the term “communitas” to “community,” I use the latter in this discussion. Turner finds communitas to be less strictly associated with physical place and therefore more supple than the common term “community.” This point is well-taken and I find Turner’s distinction compelling. For that very reason, I use the term that Turner discards. For the purpose of this discussion, community better describes the topic I explore since physical spaces, or as Turner phrases them, “area(s) of common living” (96), are foregrounded.

For fuller, sociological accounts of this divorce, see Harold Cruse’s *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* and Irving Howe’s *World of Our Fathers*. For a literary exploration of this sometimes explosive relationship, see Emily Budick’s *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation*.

Coincidentally, in “Imagining Jews,” Roth also provides Mailer as a counterpoint to Malamud, contrasting *The White Negro* to Malamud’s *The Assistant*.

This is particularly true of Kellman’s essay. Roth’s issues with Malamud are largely formal, which will be addressed throughout this study.

Early in their relationship, Lesser and Willie have a debate about the appropriateness of Harry’s affection for Bessie Smith. Spearmint is suspicious of white interest in black art and Harry insists that Smith’s work moves him. This conflict is symbolized in Lesser’s desire to sleep with a black girl (which he eventually does).

The overtly sexual description of the snow, equating it with the erect male organ, also symbolizes an aspect of the power struggle between the two men, who become sexual competitors, each sexually “colonizing” members of the opposite race.

Elaine Showalter remarks that Duffy represents the novel’s main innovation: “the wicked double in the form of the former faculty member whose office the new man inherits” (44). Showalter identifies this generic character throughout later academic fiction.

Sam Girgus takes powerful exception to Fiedler’s criticism of the novel. Fiedler, criticized the novel for its focus on Levin’s identification with the “Liberal Tradition.” He saw the novel as a lost opportunity to be the first Jewish anti-Western (i.e. *Blazing Saddles*). Girgus, on the other hand applauds the direction Malamud chose. Girgus writes, “a major force behind his qualities as a schlemiel-victim is the intensity of his beliefs and his unswerving sincerity. He is a victim and a schlemiel because he cares” (30).

This detail is further elaborated upon in Suzanne Clarke’s essay “Bernard Malamud in Oregon.”
This incompatibility has come, in many ways, to define Trilling and his legacy. Steven Weiland, in his essay, “Looking For Lionel Trilling in All the Wrong Places: Or, Becoming a Land Grant Jew,” focuses on Trilling’s professional antiquity. The essay is an academic autobiography that reflects on the place for Trilling’s humanism in the American land grant university. In addition, the essay participates in a tradition of claiming Jewishness for Trilling. Recalling a late speech Trilling made at Purdue University, Weiland notes “We do not know how Trilling's Purdue audience responded to his lecture. I suspect that there was recognition that his intellectual program, far from being the cornerstone of higher education, had become a form of silent resistance to what the university meant to those who found in the land grant mission only enough interest in ideas (generally scientific ones) to make them serviceable in the marketplace.” This position of “silent resistance” essentially describes Trilling’s project in the same terms I employ.

*Impediments*, first published in the *Menorah Journal* is a slice-of-college-life story which dramatizes the discomfort its unnamed narrator has with a fellow Jewish student named Hettner. Hettner, for the story’s protagonist is, though brilliant, entirely too Jewish. Trilling elaborates on this character in “Notes On a Departure,” imagining the existence of a Harpo Marx-like “red haired comedian” as a stand-in for Jewishness. As a result, in “Impediments,” the protagonist purposefully alienates Hettner by ignoring him until, insulted, Hettner leaves him alone. Dickstein, Trilling’s former student, cunningly sees this as emblematic of Trilling’s own desire to subsume his Jewish identity into his liberal humanist professional persona.

Mark Shechner’s essay “Mark Krupnick and Lionel Trilling: Anxiety and Influence” is a moving account of Krupnick’s status as an intellectual heir to Trilling. Krupnick, who died in 2003 of Lou Gehrig’s Disease, was Trilling’s “belated talmid” (148), or great student, according to Schechner.

Other critics who take the historical/nostalgic approach include Stephen L. Tanner in his retrospective monograph *Lionel Trilling* (1988), Thomas Bender in his essay “Lionel Trilling and American Culture” (1990), and Leon Wieseltier, who, in the introduction to his edited collection *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, claims that “the unavailability of Lionel Trilling’s essays was a scandal.” Very recently (2011) there has been yet another of these reclamation projects, Adam Kirsch’s *Why Trilling Matters*, in which Kirsch deftly posits Trilling as an antidote to the current crisis of morale in the humanities. In addition, the aforementioned piece by Dickstein also falls into this category as it is a personal recollection of Trilling by a former student. In addition to the insight Dickstein provides regarding Trilling’s personality, he also pushes for Trilling’s Jewishness as a vital (if unspoken) component of his personal and professional life. This becomes particularly important for this study as this chapter later shows.

Other critics take a similar position against Trilling, some without West’s nuanced analysis. For example, T.H. Adamowski’s essay “Demoralizing Liberalism: Lionel Trilling, Leslie Fiedler, and Norman Mailer” also finds neo-Conservative roots in
Trilling’s criticism of mid-century liberalism and blames these Jewish cultural critics for undermining the Left’s cultural authority. To Adamowski, Trilling is partially to blame for modern politicians’ inability to run for office while identifying as “liberal.” Another recent essay, by Jeff Solomon, parleys a brief, anecdotal encounter between the Trillings and Truman Capote into a polemic about homophobia in mid-century cultural criticism. Each of these approaches occupies a partisan political position in their critique of Trilling, imposing upon his mid-century Arnoldianism judgments arrived at by the hegemonic cultural norms of the twenty-first century academy.

18 Trilling offers, for comparison, Arnold’s respectful admiration of his intellectual adversary, T.H. Huxley. Trilling’s summary of the terms of their debate both establishes the Leavis-Snow controversy as redundant and demonstrates the inferiority of their ethical positions.

19 Though I do not deal with it at length here, Trilling’s sole novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, is worth mentioning with regard to landscape and place. Its protagonist, John Laskell, is a scholar of public housing, giving him (and through him, Trilling) an insight that is grounded in physical landscape. This perspective is called into question by the novel, however. Schryer, in his monograph, argues that Laskell’s rejection of his political friends represents a move away from the technocratic kind of liberalism that Trilling argues against in *The Liberal Imagination* and is inherent in his job as a liberal sociological theorist of public housing.

20 This reasoning closely resembles Trilling’s arguments against the liberal appreciation of realism and its simultaneous rejection of, say, Henry James in the essays collected in *The Liberal Imagination*.

21 For a fascinating subversion of Trilling’s reading of his own story, see Robert Boyers’ *Lionel Trilling: Negative Capability and the Wisdom of Avoidance*. Boyer’s reading of the story against Trilling’s commentary on pages 7-19 illuminate a fascinating paradox in “Of This Time, Of That Place.”

22 This life of uncertainty might be theorized as “negative capability.” Robert Boyers, in his short book *Lionel Trilling: Negative Capability and the Wisdom of Avoidance*, provides a compelling study of how Keats’ cryptic notion of negative capability impacted Trilling. One particularly instructive analysis Boyers provides is his close reading of Trilling’s own essay on Keats (46). By examining Trilling’s understanding of Keats’ term, and placing that understanding into conversation with his writings on Henry James, Boyers argues that Trilling establishes for himself a middle-ground between the two. Boyers writes that Trilling “took them into himself and made their ideas and ways of looking at the world his own” (47). I argue for this same form of synthesis in Trilling, but with Arnold and Jewishness standing in for Keats and James.

23 Pia Masiero’s recent book *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books* applies an extended reading of this kind specifically on the Zuckerman narratives. Masiero identifies *The
Human Stain as a singular moment in Roth’s career; when he deliberately began thinking of his career “in terms of voices and masks” (2). For Masiero, this identifies an explicit interest in the craft and value of fiction itself. Ross Posnock makes a similar claim for Roth’s career-consciousness, writing, “I take seriously Roth’s sense of his oeuvre as one vast text with each book to be read within and against the larger whole” (21). In contrast, David Gooblar has recently claimed that, “even some of the best critical work on Roth has tended to overlook the ways in which Roth’s career frustrates most attempts at imposing unity” (4). Gooblar’s monograph instead divides Roth’s career into “major phases,” each of which demonstrate distinct concerns from the others.

24 See Gabrielle Seeley and Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky for an extended investigation into the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter on The Human Stain. Timothy Parrish performs a similar reading of The Human Stain and its indebtedness to Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (as well Roth’s admiration and debt to Ellison).

25 I have, elsewhere, argued that the neo-Aristotelian poetics of Chicago School critics like R.S. Crane influenced Roth’s poetics in the formal construction of his Zuckerman books. The Chicagoans labeled the competing school of New Critics as Platonists standing in opposition to their Aristotelianism, and Roth uses similar dichotomous language in distinguishing Zuckerman from his Jewish culture in Newark, New Jersey.

26 Lonoff’s dedication to “sincerity” might be seen in his response to Nathan’s flippant individualism in The Ghost Writer. When Zuckerman confesses to Lonoff that he would have difficulty teaching at Athene because “I don’t think I could keep my wits about me, teaching at a school with such beautiful and gifted and fetching girls,” Lonoff, flatly replies “Then you shouldn’t do it” (19).

27 Interestingly, or perhaps ironically, Roth has recently gone public with statements doubting the future of not only the novel, but reading as a cultural practice.

28 What Trilling labels as Jamesian here also bears resemblance to Arnoldian notions of literature as “criticism of life.”

29 The final Zuckerman narrative, Exit Ghost, is a bit of an exception to this paradigm as it tells the story of the storyteller’s disappearance.
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