Categorical names such as “The English Novel,” “The Modern American Novel,” and “American Literature” often turn up in catalogs as titles of college courses, and we know from them pretty much what to expect. They also have standing in critical discourse, along with allied terms unlikely to serve as course titles: “good writing,” “great literature,” “serious fiction,” “literature” itself. The awareness has grown in recent years that such concepts pose problems, even though we use them with easy enough comprehension when we talk or write to others who share our cultural matrix.

Lately, critics like Raymond Williams have been reminding us that the categories change over time (just as “literature” used to mean all printed books but has come to mean only some poems, plays, novels, etc.) and that at any given moment categories embody complex social relations and a continuing historical process. That process deeply invests all terms with value: since not everyone’s values are the same, the negotiating of such concepts is, among other things, a struggle for dominance—whether between adults and the young, professors and their students, one class and another, or men and women. We don’t usually notice the power or the conflict, except when some previously weak or silent group seeks a share of the power: for example, when, in the 1960s, American blacks and their supporters insisted that black literature be

The first and second sections of this paper (“Reading and the Book Market” and “The Next Stage”) appeared in different form as “The Social Definition of Literature,” in Paul Hernadi, ed., What is Literature? (Bloomington, Ind., 1978). I extend my appreciation to Indiana University Press for permission to reprint these two sections.
included in school and college curricula, or when they openly challenged the candidacy of William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* for inclusion in some eventual canon. But the gradual firming up of concepts like, say, postwar American fiction is always a contest for cultural hegemony, even if in our society it is often muted—carried on behind the scenes or in the seemingly neutral marketplace.

Not only do the concepts change, in both intension and extension, but the process of their formation also changes. The English, who had power to do so, admitted *Great Expectations* to the canon by means very different from those used to admit the *Canterbury Tales* by earlier generations of tastemakers. Again, the process may differ from genre to genre even in a particular time and place. For instance, profit and the book market are relatively unimportant in deciding what will be considered modern American poetry, by contrast with their function in defining modern American fiction. As a result, in order to work toward a serviceable theory of canon-formation, it is necessary to look at a variety of these processes and at how they impinge on one another.

Here, I attempt to sketch out one of them, the process by which novels written by Americans from about 1960 to 1975 have been sifted and assessed, so that a modest number of them retain the kind of attention and respect that eventually makes them eligible for canonical status. I am going to argue that the emergence of these novels has been a process saturated with class values and interests, a process inseparable from the broader struggle for position and power in our society, from the institutions that mediate that struggle, as well as from legitimation of and challenges to the social order. I will then try to be more specific about the representation of those values and interests in the fiction itself.

**Reading and the Book Market**

People read books silently, and often in isolation, but reading is nonetheless a social act. As one study concludes:

Book reading in adult life is sustained . . . by interpersonal situations which minimize the individual's isolation from others. To persist over the years, the act of book reading must be incorporated . . . into a social context. Reading a book becomes meaningful when, after completion, it is shared with others. . . . Social integration . . . sustains a persistent engagement with books. Social isolation, in contrast, is likely to lead to the abandonment of books.
Simone Beserman found, in her study of best-sellers around 1970, that frequent reading of books correlated highly with social interaction—in particular, with the desire to rise in society. Upwardly mobile second- and third-generation Americans were heavy readers of best-sellers.4

As you would expect, given the way reading is embedded in and reinforced by social relations, networks of friends and family also contributed in determining which books would be widely read. In her survey, Beserman found that 58 percent of those who read a particular best-seller did so upon recommendation of a friend or relative. Who were these people, so crucial to a book’s success? Beserman found that they were of better-than-average education (most had finished college), relatively well-to-do, many of them professionals, in middle life, upwardly mobile, living near New York or oriented, especially through the New York Times, to New York cultural life.

These people were responsive to novels where they discovered the values in which they believed or where they found needed moral guidance when shaken in their own beliefs. Saul Bellow’s remark, “What Americans want to learn from their writers is how to live,” finds support in Philip H. Ennis’ study, Adult Book Reading in the United States.5 Ennis determined that three of the main interests people carried into their reading were a “search for personal meaning, for some kind of map to the moral landscape”; a need to “reinforce or to celebrate beliefs already held, or, when shaken by events, to provide support in some personal crisis”; and a wish to keep up “with the book talk of friends and neighbors.”6

The values and beliefs of a small group of people played a disproportionate role in deciding what novels would be widely read in the United States. (Toward the end of this essay, I will turn to those values in some detail.) To underscore their influence, consider two other facts about the book market. First, if a novel did not become a best-seller within three or four weeks of publication, it was quite unlikely to reach a large readership later on. In the 1960s, only a very few books that were slow starters eventually became best-sellers (in paperback, not hardback). I know of three: Catch-22, Call It Sleep, and I Never Promised You a Rose Garden, to which we may add the early novels of Vonnegut, which were not published in hard covers, and—if we count its 1970s revival in connection with the film—One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. To look at the process the other way around, once a new book did make the New York Times best-seller list, many other people bought it (and store managers around the country stocked it) because it was a best-seller. The process was cumulative. So the early buyers of hardcover books exercised a crucial role in selecting the books that the rest of the country’s readers would buy.

Second, best-sellerdom was much more important than suggested by the figures for hardbound sales through bookstores. Love Story, for instance, the leading best-seller (in all forms) of the decade sold only
450,000 hardback copies in bookstores but over 700,000 through book clubs, 2,500,000 through the Reader's Digest, 6,500,000 in the Ladies' Home Journal, and over 9,000,000 in paperback—not to mention library circulation or the millions of people who saw the film. Books were adopted by clubs, paperback publishers, film producers, and so forth, in large part because they were best-sellers or because those investing in subsidiary rights thought them likely to become best-sellers. As Victor Navasky rather wryly said:

Publishers got out of the business of selling hardcover books ten or fifteen years ago. The idea now is to publish hardcover books so that they can be reviewed or promoted on television in order to sell paperback rights, movie rights, book club rights, comic book rights, serialization rights, international satellite rights, Barbie doll rights, etc.\(^7\)

The phenomenon of the hardbound best-seller had only modest economic and cultural significance in itself but great significance in triggering reproduction and consumption of the story in other forms.

A small group of relatively homogeneous readers, then, had a great deal of influence at this preliminary stage. But of course these people did not make their decisions freely among the thousands of novels completed each year. They chose among the smaller number actually published. This fact points to an important role in canon-formation for literary agents and for editors at the major houses, who belong to the same social stratum as the buyers of hardbound books, and who—as profitability in publishing came to hinge more and more on the achievement of best-sellerdom for a few books—increasingly earned their keep by spotting (and pushing) novels that looked like best-sellers. Here we have a nearly closed circle of marketing and consumption, the simultaneous exploitation and creation of taste, familiar to anyone who has examined marketplace culture under monopoly capitalism.

But it is clear, influential readers chose not among all novels published but among the few that came to their attention in an urgent or attractive way. How did that happen? As a gesture toward the kind of answer that question requires, I will consider the extraordinary role of the New York Times. The New York Times Book Review had about a million and a half readers, several times the audience of any other literary periodical. Among them were most bookstore managers, deciding what to stock, and librarians, deciding what to buy, not to mention the well-to-do, well-educated east-coasters who led in establishing hardback best-sellers. The single most important boost a novel could get was a prominent review in the Sunday New York Times—better a favorable one than an unfavorable one, but better an unfavorable one than none at all.
Ads complemented the reviews, or perhaps the word is “inundated”: two-thirds of the space in the Times Book Review went to ads. According to Richard Kostelanetz, most publishers spent more than half their advertising budgets for space in that journal. They often placed ads in such a way as to reinforce a good Times review or offset a bad one with favorable quotations from reviews in other periodicals. And of course reviews and ads were further reinforced by the Times best-seller list itself, for the reason already mentioned. Apparently, the publishers’ faith in the Times was not misplaced. Beserman asked early readers of Love Story where they had heard of the book. Most read it on recommendation of another person; Beserman then spoke to that person, and so on back to the beginning of the chain of verbal endorsements. At the original source, in more than half the instances, she found the Times. (This in spite of the quite unusual impact, for that time, of Segal’s appearance on the “Today” show the day of publication—Barbara Walters said the book made her cry all night; Harper was immediately swamped with orders—and of the novel’s appearance in the Ladies’ Home Journal just before book publication.)

The influence of the Times Book Review led publicity departments to direct much of their prepublication effort toward persuading the Book Review’s editors that a particular novel was important. It is hard to estimate the power of this suasion, but one thing can be measured: the correlation between advertising in the Book Review and being reviewed there. A 1968 study concluded, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the largest advertisers got disproportionately large amounts of review space. Among the large advertisers were, for instance:

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And the smaller ones:

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<td>Lippincott</td>
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<td>Harvard</td>
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During the same year Random House (including Knopf and Pantheon) had nearly three times as many books mentioned in the feature “New and Recommended” as Doubleday or Harper, both of which published as many books as the Random House group.

To summarize: a small group of book buyers formed a screen through which novels passed on their way to commercial success; a handful of
agents and editors picked the novels that would compete for the notice of those buyers; and a tight network of advertisers and reviewers, organized around the *New York Times Book Review*, selected from these a few to be recognized as compelling, important, "talked-about."

**The Next Stage**

So far I have been speaking of a process that led to a mass readership for a few books each year. But most of these were never regarded as serious literature and did not live long in popularity or memory. Books like *Love Story*, *The Godfather*, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and the novels of Susann, Robbins, Wouk, Wallace, and Uris would run a predictable course. They had large hardback sales for a few months, tapering off to a trickle in a year or so. Meanwhile, they were reprinted in paper covers and enjoyed two or three years of popularity (often stoked by a film version). After that they disappeared or remained in print to be bought in smaller numbers by, for instance, newly won fans of Wallace who wanted to go back and read his earlier books. There was a similar pattern for mysteries, science fiction, and other specialized genres.

But a few novels survived and continued (in paper covers) to attract buyers and readers for a longer time, and they still do. Why? To answer that the best novels survive is to beg the question. Excellence is a constantly changing, socially chosen value. Who attributed it to only some novels, and how? I hope now to hint at the way such a judgment took shape.

First, one more word about the *New York Times Book Review*. I have argued that it led in developing a broad audience for fiction. It also began, I believe, the process of distinguishing between ephemeral popular novels and those to be taken seriously over a longer period of time. There was a marked difference in impact between, say, Martin Levin's favorable but mildly condescending (and brief) review of *Love Story* and the kind of front-page review by an Alfred Kazin or an Irving Howe that asked readers to regard a new novel as literature, and that so often helped give the stamp of highbrow approval to books by Bellow, Malamud, Updike, Roth, Doctorow, and so forth. Cultural leaders read the *Times Book Review* too: not only professors but (according to Julie Hoover and Charles Kadushin) 75 percent of our elite intellectuals. By reaching these circles, a major *Times* review could help put a novel on the cultural agenda and insure that other journals would have to take it seriously.

Among those others, a few carried special weight in forming cultural judgments. In a survey of leading intellectuals, just eight journals—the *New York Review of Books*, the *New Republic*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New Yorker*, *Commentary*, *Saturday Review*, *Partisan Review*, and *Harpers*—received almost half the participants' "votes" in response to various questions about influence and importance. In effect, these periodicals were both
a communication network among the influentials (where they reviewed one another's books) and an avenue of access to a wider cultural leadership. The elite, writing in these journals, largely determined which books would be seriously debated and which ones permanently valued, as well as what ideas were kept alive, circulated, discussed. Kadushin and his colleagues concluded, from their studies of our intellectual elite and influential journals, that the "top intellectual journals constitute the American equivalent of an Oxbridge establishment, and have served as one of the main gatekeepers for new talent and new ideas." A novel had to win at least the divided approval of these arbiters in order to remain in the universe of cultural discourse, once past the notoriety of best-sellerdom. The career of Love Story is a good example of failure to do so. After some initial favorable reviews (and enormous publicity on television and other media), the intellectuals began cutting it down to size. In the elite journals, it was either panned or ignored. Styron and the rest of the National Book Award fiction panel threatened to quit if it were not removed from the list of candidates. And who will read it tomorrow, except on an excursion into the archives of mass culture?

In talking about the New York Times Book Review, I suggested a close alliance between reviewing and profit, literary and monetary values. The example of the New York Review of Books shows that a similar alliance can exist on the higher ramparts of literary culture. This journal, far and away the most influential among intellectuals (in answer to Kadushin's questions, it was mentioned almost twice as often as the New Republic, its nearest competitor), was founded by Jason Epstein, a vice-president of Random House, and coedited by his wife, Barbara Epstein. It may be more than coincidental that in 1968 almost one-fourth of the books granted full reviews in the New York Review were published by Random House (again, including Knopf and Pantheon)—more than the combined total of books from Viking, Grove, Holt, Harper, Houghton Mifflin, Oxford, Doubleday, Macmillan, and Harvard so honored; or that in the same year one-fourth of the reviewers had books in print with Random House and that a third of those were reviewing other Random House books, mainly favorably; or that over a five-year period more than half the regular reviewers (ten or more appearances) were Random House authors. This is not to deny the intellectual strength of the New York Review—only to suggest that it sometimes deployed that strength in ways consistent with the financial interest of Random House. One need not subscribe to conspiracy theories in order to see, almost everywhere one looks in the milieu of publishing and reviewing, linkages of fellowship and common interest. Together these networks make up a cultural establishment, inseparable from the market, both influencing and influenced by it.

If a novel was certified in the court of the prestigious journals, it was likely to draw the attention of academic critics in more specialized
and academic journals like Contemporary Literature and by this route make its way into college curricula, where the very context—course title, academic setting, methodology—gave it de facto recognition as literature. This final step was all but necessary: the college classroom and its counterpart, the academic journal, have become in our society the final arbiters of literary merit, and even of survival. It is hard to think of a novel more than twenty-five years old, aside from specialist fiction and Gone with the Wind, that still commands a large readership outside of school and college.

I am suggesting that novels moved toward a canonical position only if they attained both large sales (usually, but not always, concentrated enough to place them among the best-sellers for a while) and the right kind of critical attention. On the one side, this hypothesis conflicts with the one most vigorously advanced by Leslie A. Fiedler—that intellectuals are, in the long run, outvoted by the sorts of readers who keep liking Gone with the Wind. On the other side, it collides with the hopes or expectations of critics such as Kostelanetz and Jerome Klinkowitz, who promote an avant-garde fiction called post-modernist, post-contemporary, antinovel, or whatever.

Clearly, I need an independent measure of precanonical status, or my argument closes into a circle. Unfortunately, I don’t have a very good one: in part, because it is still too early to settle the issue, but also because I have not yet finished the inquiry I intend. But let me offer two scraps of pertinent information. First, the editors of Wilson Quarterly polled forty-four professors of American literature (in 1977 or 1978, apparently), asking them to rank in order the ten “most important” novels published in the United States after World War II. The editors printed a list of the twenty-one novels rated highest in this survey; eleven of them were published in or after 1960. In rank-order, they are Catch-22, Gravity’s Rainbow, Herzog, An American Dream, The Sotweed Factor, Second Skin, Portnoy’s Complaint, The Armies of the Night, V, Rabbit Run, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. All easily meet the criterion of attention from intellectuals. (Again, it doesn’t matter that Norman Podhoretz hates Updike’s novels, so long as he takes them seriously enough to argue with his peers about them.) As for broad readership, all of the novels except Second Skin and perhaps The Sotweed Factor have sold over half a million copies—and one may be sure that many of those sales occurred through adoption in college courses.

My second cast of the net is much broader. Contemporary Literary Criticism abstracts commentary on recent world literature, mainly by American professors and intellectuals. Its coverage includes critical books, respected academic journals, taste-forming magazines, quarterlies, and little magazines. It claims to excerpt from criticism of “work by well-known creative writers,” “writers of considerable public interest,” who are alive or who died after 1 January 1960. So it constitutes a sampling of the interests of those who set literary standards, and it monitors the
intermediate stage in canon-formation. During the ten years and twenty-two volumes of its publication, up through 1982, it has run four or more entries (maximum, nine; and the average entry includes excerpts from four or five critical sources) for forty-eight American novelists of the period in question:24

Auchincloss  Elkin  Piercy
Baldwin    Gaddis  Plath
Barth      Gardner  Porter
Barthelme  Gass    Pynchon
Bellow    Hawkes  Rechy
Berger    Heller  Reed
Bradbury  Higgins  Roth
Brautigan  Jong   Salinger
Burroughs  Kesey  Selby
Capote    R. MacDonald  Sorrentino
Cheever   Mailer  Styron
Condon    Malamud  Theroux
de Vries   McCarthy  Updike
Dickey    McMurtry  Vidal
Didion    Oates   Vonnegut
Doctorow  Percy  Walker

Most of these meet my two criteria. All but a few (Bradbury, Condon, MacDonald, perhaps Auchincloss and Higgins) have received ample consideration by influential critics. Yet most novelists promoted by post-contemporary advocates such as Klinkowitz (Sloan, Coover, Wurlitzer, Katz, Federman, Sukenick, etc.) are missing, while the list includes only a few writers who have had elite approval but small readerships (Elkin, Hawkes, Sorrentino, maybe two or three others). In fact, at least thirty-one of these novelists published one book or more between 1960 and 1975 that was a best-seller in hard or paper covers.25 On the other hand, the list excludes the overwhelming majority of the writers who regularly produced large best-sellers: Puzo, Susann, Wouk, West, Robbins, Wallace, Michener, Krantz, Forsyth, Chrichton, and so on and on. I conclude that both the Contemporary Literary Criticism selection and the Wilson Quarterly survey give modest support to my thesis. Canon-formation during this period took place in the interaction between large audiences and gatekeeper intellectuals.

**Class and the Canon**

To return to the main theme, then: I have drawn a sketch of the course a novel had to run, in order to lodge itself in our culture as
precanonical—as “literature,” at least for the moment. It was selected, in
turn, by an agent, an editor, a publicity department, a review editor
(especially the one at the Sunday New York Times), the New York met-
ropolitan book buyers whose patronage was necessary to commercial
success, critics writing for gatekeeper intellectual journals, academic critics,
and college teachers. Obviously, the sequence was not rigid, and some
might on occasion be omitted entirely (as I have indicated with respect
to Catch-22 and One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest). But one would expect
the pattern to have become more regular through this period, as publishing
was increasingly drawn into the sphere of monopoly capital (with RCA
acquiring Random House; ITT, Howard Sams; Time, Inc., Little, Brown;
CBS, Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Xerox, Ginn; and so on throughout
almost the whole industry). For monopoly capital changed this industry
much as it has changed the automobile and the toothpaste industries:
by placing much greater emphasis on planned marketing and predictability
of profits.36

This shift brought publishing into the same arena as many other
cultural processes. In fact, the absorption of culture began almost as soon
as monopoly capitalism itself, with the emergence of the advertising
industry (crucial to planned marketing) in the 1880s and 1890s, and
simultaneously with mass-circulation magazines as the main vehicle of
national brand advertising.27 With some variations, cinema, radio, music,
sport, newspapers, television, and many lesser forms have followed this
path, with books among the last to do so. The change has transformed
our culture and the ways we participate in it. It demands rethinking, not
only of bourgeois ideas about culture but of central Marxian oppositions
like base and superstructure, production and reproduction.28 Culture
cannot, without straining, be understood as a reflex of basic economic
activity, when culture is itself a core industry and a major source of
capital accumulation. Nor can we bracket culture as reproduction, when
it is inseparable from the making and selling of commodities. We have
at present a relatively new and rapidly changing cultural process that
calls for new and flexible ways of thinking about culture.

My account may, however, have made it sound as if in one respect
nothing has changed. Under monopoly capital, even more than when
Marx and Engels wrote The German Ideology, the “class which has the
means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time
over the means of mental production.” But does it still follow that, “thereby,
generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental
production are subject to” the ruling class?29 The theory can explain
contemporary reality only with an expanded and enriched understanding
of “control” and “subject to.” For although our ruling class owns the
media and controls them formally, it does not now exercise direct control
over their content—does not now use them in the instrumental and
ideological way that Marx and Engels identified 140 years ago. Mobil
“idea ads” are the exception, not the rule.

To return to the instance at hand: neither the major stockholders of ITT and Xerox and RCA nor their boards of directors played a significant role in deciding which novels of the 1960s and early 1970s would gain acceptance as literature, and they certainly established no house rules—printing only those books that would advance their outlook on the world. (If they had done so, how could they have allowed, e.g., the Pantheon division of Random House virtually to enlist in the New Left?) They exercised control over publishing in the usual abstract way: they sought a good return on investment and cared little whether it came from a novel by Bellow or by Krantz, or for that matter from novels or computer chips. And very few of the historical actors who did make critical decisions about fiction were members of the haute bourgeoisie. Was class then irrelevant to the early shaping of a canon of fiction? Alternatively, did the working class make its own culture in this sphere?

My argument points toward a conclusion different from both of these, one that still turns upon class but not just upon the two great traditional classes. Intuitively, one can see that literary agents, editors, publicity people, reviewers, buyers of hardbound novels, taste-making intellectuals, critics, professors, most of the students who took literary courses, and, in fact, the writers of the novels themselves, all had social affinities. They went to the same colleges, married one another, lived in the same neighborhoods, talked about the same movies, had to work for their livings (but worked with their minds more than with their hands), and earned pretty good incomes. I hold that they belonged to a common class, one that itself emerged and grew up only with monopoly capitalism. Following Barbara and John Ehrenreich, I call it the Professional-Managerial class. I characterize it by the affinities just mentioned; by its conflicted relation to the ruling class (intellectuals managed that class’ affairs and many of its institutions, and they derived benefits from this position, but they also strove for autonomy and for a somewhat different vision of the future); by its equally mixed relation to the working class (it dominated, supervised, taught, and planned for them, but even in doing so it also served and augmented capital); and by its own marginal position with respect to capital (its members didn’t have the wealth to sit back and clip coupons, but they had ready access to credit and most could choose—at least at an early stage in their careers—between working for themselves and selling their labor power to others).

People in the Professional-Managerial class shared one relation to the bourgeoisie and another to the working class: they had many common social experiences and acted out similar styles of life. I hold that they also had—with of course many complexities and much variation—a common understanding of the world and their place in it. In the remainder
of this essay, I will look at some of the values, beliefs, and interests that constituted that class perspective, by considering the novels given cultural currency by those class members who produced, marketed, read, interpreted, and taught fiction. My claim is that the needs and values of the Professional-Managerial class permeate the general form of these novels, as well as their categories of understanding and their means of representation.

For my examples I will draw upon such works as Franny and Zooey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, The Bell Jar, Herzog, Portnoy's Complaint, and Updike's Rabbit series. But what I say of these books is true of many other novels from the postwar period that have as yet a chance of becoming canonical. To glance ahead for a moment: these novels told stories of people trying to live a decent life in contemporary social settings, people represented as analogous to "us," rather than as "cases" to be examined and understood from a clinical distance, as in an older realistic convention. They are unhappy people, who move toward happiness, at least a bit, by the ends of their stories.

A premise of this fiction—nothing new to American literature but particularly salient in this period—is that individual consciousness, not the social or historical field, is the locus of significant happening. In passing, note that on the level of style this premise authorizes variety, the pursuit of a unique and personal voice. But on the levels of conceptualization and story, the premise of individual autonomy has an opposite effect: it gives these fictions a common problem and drives their material into narratives which, seen from the middle distance, look very similar. I am going to suggest that much precanonical fiction of this period expresses, in Williams' term, a particular structure of feeling, that that structure of feeling was a common one for the class in question, and that novelists explored its contours before it was articulated in books of social commentary like Philip Slater's Pursuit of Loneliness (1970) and Charles Reich's Greening of America (1970), or in films like The Graduate, and certainly, before that structure of feeling informed a broad social movement or entered conversational cliché, in phrases like "a sick society," "the establishment," and "the system." (More avant-garde writers, outside the circuit of best-sellers, had given it earlier expression: the "Beats," Mailer in Advertisements for Myself, Barth in The End of the Road, etc.)

This structure of feeling gathered and strengthened during the postwar period. It became rather intense by the early 1960s. After 1965 it exploded into the wider cultural and political arena, when black rebellions, the student movement, the antiwar movement, and later the women's movement made it clear, right there in the headlines and on television, that not everyone considered ours an age of only "happy problems."

In retrospect it is easy to understand some of the forces that generated this consciousness. To chart the connection, I will take a broad and speculative look at the historical experience of the class that endowed
fiction with value and suggest how that experience shaped that class' concerns and needs, before I turn at greater length to the fiction that its members wrote, published, read, and preserved.

Like everyone in the society, people in the Professional-Managerial class lived through a time when the United States was enjoying the spoils of World War II. It altogether dominated the "free world" for two decades, militarily, politically, and economically. Its power sufficed to give it dominance among its allies and to prevent defections from the capitalist sphere, though the "loss" of China and Cuba gave cause for worried vigilance. Its products and its capital flowed freely through most parts of the world (its very money was the currency of capitalism after the Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks agreements). U.S. values also flowed freely, borne by advertising, television shows, and the Reader's Digest more than by propaganda. The confidence one would expect to find in the metropolis of such an empire strengthened the feeling of righteousness that came from having defeated one set of enemies in war and having held at bay another set in peace. Both the war and the cold war fostered a chauvinistic and morally polarized conception of the world. They were totalitarian monsters; we were an open society of free citizens pursuing a way of life superior to any other, past or present.

Furthermore, that way of life generated a material prosperity that was historically unprecedented and that increased from one year to the next. The pent-up buying power of the war period (never before or since has the broad working class had so much money in the bank) eased the conversion from war production to production for consumers by providing capitalists with an enormous and secure domestic market, and they responded with rapid investment and a flow of old and new products. Affluence, like victory in war, made people confident that they and their society were doing things right.

On top of that, social conflict became muted. Inequality remained as pronounced as it had been before, but no more so, and the working class participated in the steady growth of total product.37 Though workers could not see any narrowing of the divide between themselves and higher classes, the postwar generation did experience an absolute gain, both from year to year and by comparison with the 1930s; and many perceived this gain as a softening of class lines. The sense of economic well-being that results from such an experience of history promoted allegiance to the social order, as did the tightening bonds between unions and management, amounting to a truce in class conflict within the assumptions of the welfare state. Cold war propaganda helped make it possible—especially for those who managed the new arrangements and lived in suburbs—to see our society as a harmonious collaboration.

Developments in business additionally gave support to this image of harmony. There was a rapid growth and sophistication of advertising, which not only sold products but continued to shape people into masses,
for the purpose of selling those products and advancing a whole way of life whose cornerstones were the suburban home, the family, and the automobile. Leisure and social life became more private, drained of class feeling and even of the feeling of interdependence.

Politics seemed nearly irrelevant to such a life. Moreover, the boundaries of respectable political debate steadily closed in through the 1950s. On one side, socialism was pushed off the agenda by union leaders almost as vigorously as by Truman, McCarthy, the blacklists, and the FBI. On the other side, businessmen gradually abandoned the tough old capitalist principles of laissez-faire and espoused a more benign program of cooperation with labor and government. The spectrum of discussable ideas reached only from corporate liberalism to welfare-state liberalism; no wonder some thought they were witnessing the end of ideology.38

Consider the experience of the class that creates the canon of fiction in such an environment. Not only were its numbers and its prosperity growing rapidly along with its institutions but every public voice seemed to be saying to intellectuals, professionals, technical elites, and managers: “History is over, though progress continues. There is no more poverty. Everyone is middle class. The State is a friendly power, capable of smoothing out the abrasions of the economic system, solving its problems one by one through legislation that itself is the product of your ideas and values. You have brought a neutral and a humane rationality to the supervision of public life (exemplified beautifully by that parade of Harvard intellectuals to Washington in 1961). Politics is for experts, not ideologues. You are, therefore, the favored people, the peacemakers, the technicians of an intelligent society, justly rewarded with quick promotions, respect, and adequate incomes. So carry forward this valued social mission, which in no way conflicts with individual achievement. Enjoy your prestige and comforts. Fulfill yourselves on the terrain of private life.”

But because the economic underpinnings of this consciousness were of course not unchanging and free of conflict, because material interdependence was an ever more pervasive fact, whether perceived or not, because society cannot be wished away, because freedom on such terms is an illusion—for all these reasons, the individual pursuit of happiness continued to be a problem. Yet myth, ideology, and experience assured the Professional-Managerial class that no real barriers would prevent personal satisfaction, so it was easy to nourish the suspicion that any perceived lack was one's own fault. If unhappy, one must be personally maladjusted, perhaps even neurotic. I am suggesting that for the people who wrote, read, promoted, and preserved fiction, social contradictions were easily displaced into images of personal illness.

The Illness Story

This fiction of illness locates the experience of personal crisis somewhere in the passage from youth to maturity. This is easy to understand.
Within the configuration of social forces I have described, maturity is equated with independence, in fact with a kind of invulnerability to the intrusion of social tension, an invulnerability to society itself. But even though one may push social conflict and historical process out of sight, one cannot really cease to be social: at a minimum, social roles are indissoluble from selfhood. To put the contradiction another way: the ideal calls for a self that is complete, integral, unique; but in actual living one must be something and somebody, and definitions of “somebody” already exist in a complete array provided by that very social and economic system that one has wished to transcend. Society comes back at the individual as a hostile force, threatening to diminish or annihilate one’s “real” self. Furthermore, society has the power to label one as sick, if one is unable to make the transition into a suitable combination of adult roles. So the representation of malaise and neurosis in the favored novels of the period incorporates an ambiguity, sometimes explicit and sometimes latent: I seem to be crazy, but again, possibly it’s society that’s crazy. The balance tips sometimes toward one construction of the ambiguity, sometimes toward the other, but the polarity is always there. 

It will be convenient to take The Bell Jar (first published obscurely in Britain in 1963 but an American best-seller after its 1971 publication here) as a paradigm. Esther Greenwood’s achievements are supposed to make her the “envy” of everyone, but as she puts it, “all the little successes I’d totted up so happily at college fizzled to nothing outside the slick marble and plate-glass fronts along Madison Avenue.” In those windows, she cannot see the self she wants to be. An insistent imagery of alien reflections in mirrors, of frightening photographs, of makeup and clothes that conceal the self, of fade-outs and disappearances and false identities makes it clear that Esther is unwilling to equate the person she feels herself to be with the person presented to the world in these various guises. “I knew something was wrong with me that summer,” she thinks (p. 2). Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks calls Esther’s malaise “negative narcissism”—a helpful diagnosis, though it obscures the way social roles and power relations translate into personal illness. 

Esther is on the threshold of maturity. A transition will be forced upon her, but a transition to what? Nothing so simple as winning all the prizes at school. Her summer in New York is a trial run for her in one possible adult role, that of “career girl,” and she feels desperately estranged. She puts on a series of acts that humiliate and confuse her and ends by casting her New York wardrobe into the night, “like a loved one’s ashes,” from the sunroof of her hotel (p. 124). She is holding rites for a possible grown-up identity prepared for her by her past, her gender, and her society. 

It is not the only one, of course. The main alternative role that awaits her adult self is that of wife and mother. She can make womanhood itself her identity, as womanhood is constituted by her society and her class. Yet she feels both inadequate to and oppressed by this possibility—marriage
would make her “numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state” (p. 94). Through the course of the story she systematically attempts or witnesses the main activities linked to this role and finds them at best distasteful, at worst ruinous. Courtship: a cold ritual with Constantin, a humiliating deception with Buddy, a brutal assault with Marco. Sex: detached from feeling, whether in Buddy’s clinical version or Irwin’s suave one. Birth: appropriated by men, their institutions, their technique. Motherhood: Dodo Conway and her “paraphernalia of suburban childhood” leave Esther musing, “Children make me sick” (pp. 130, 131).

Other roles exist, some presented in the very explicit image of the fig tree, with “a wonderful future” (p. 84) at the end of every branch, and Esther starving because to choose one future is to renounce all the others. The identities available to her are destructive, confining, partly because identities are, partly because of the extra divisions that gender adds to the division of labor, partly because Esther is endowed with the class ideal of being unbounded and autonomous. Casting about for solace, she remembers the time when she was “purely happy” (p. 82)—up to age nine. Skiing joyously, she thinks of herself as aiming back through her past at an image of both purity and happiness, “the white sweet baby cradled in its mother’s belly” (p. 108). But in present life she can gesture toward purity, toward exemption from adult being, only through madness and a suicide attempt. Her female psychiatrist may guide her back to a hesitant reentry into the social world, but since that world presented her with the impasse that made her mad in the first place, the end of the novel resolves its crisis at best only tentatively.

With a few mutations, Salinger tells the same story in *Franny and Zooey*. Franny Glass’ neurosis has patently social origins: the class snobbery and male privilege of Lane Coutell, who represents one future for her; and the appropriation of art and knowledge for competitive self-advancement by the professors and poets and theater people, who represent another. Like Esther, Franny seeks a purity that she cannot envisage in adult life as given by class and gender. Like Esther, she tries to annihilate her social self, not literally but through the spiritual discipline of the Jesus prayer, through the “way of the pilgrim” and its denial of all discriminations between social classes—just as her brother Buddy would have us unlearn the “illusory differences, between boys and girls.” And like Esther, Franny returns to sanity and—we are to expect—the untransformed social world, where she will be able to go on toward her adult role of actress, healed through Zooey’s agency and through the image of the Fat Lady who is Christ who is all of us: a perfect symbol for the refusal to take society as real.

These novels tell a version of the story of the postwar period, a story firmly established earlier in one of the two securely canonical works of the 1950s, *The Catcher in the Rye*. But not much of the acclaimed fiction from 1960 to 1975 is literally about adolescent rites of passage. To make
my claim more adequate, I need to posit one transformation of the story: the person hanging onto childhood as the only defense against capitalist and patriarchal social relations is most often a man or woman already implanted in an adult role but only masquerading as a productive and well-adjusted member of society. In other words, the rite of passage marked by illness and movement toward recovery may be, and usually is, an adult crisis, of the sort popularized later by Gail Sheehy in *Passages*.

As an example, consider Alexander Portnoy, who, at 33, is the assistant commissioner of human opportunity for the city of New York; but he feels like a fraud—he cannot love; he cannot act or feel grown-up toward his parents. As he puts it: “A Jewish man with parents alive is a fifteen-year-old boy, and will remain a fifteen-year-old boy till they die!” Masturbation is an apt image of his arrested growth, for it joins pleasure to internalized parental disapproval, fixes it on objects (liver, an apple, his sister’s underwear) rather than people, and detaches sex from any social function. Why this refusal of adult participation? For one answer, think of the few idealized images Alex retains from childhood of the adult life that might await him: the Turkish bath, for instance, or the men playing baseball. Significantly, these are scenes “without *goyim* and women” (p. 49) and exempt from the pressure toward competitive individual achievement. I suggest that in this, one of the most politically sophisticated fictions of the period, it is rather explicit that “maturity” entails acceptance of distorted social relations: male supremacy, class domination represented as rule by the gentiles (“These people are the *Americans*, Doctor” [p. 145]), and the compensatory drive to best others in school, sport, moral righteousness, public recognition. Even Alex, talking wildly from the analyst’s couch, can see beyond the peculiarities of his own parents and Weequahic culture to broad social configurations that make growing up a betrayal of integrity.

We can read this story over and over in the precanonical novels: a man (occasionally a woman) is doing pretty well by external measures; yet somehow the tension between his aspirations and his quotidian social existence grows unbearable. He stops doing what people expect of him and enters a period of disorientation and disreputable experiment. Bellow’s paradigmatic hero, Moses Herzog, thinks, “If I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me,” and his students realize that in their class on Romanticism “they would see and hear odd things.” This is the condition of Bellow’s heroes, from Eugene Henderson through Charlie Citrine. Updike tells the story too—three times so far in the *Rabbit* novels alone—though his character is no would-be hero of the intellect. Running, space flight, a plane trip to the Caribbean image Harry Angstrom’s three excursions into adventurous abnormality, breaking the “stale peace” of marriage, paternity, and work.

Even those precanonical novels that depart from a realistic convention tend to thematize bad social relations as the illness of ordinary people.
A car dealer loses his bearings in Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*, a housewife, in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, a businessman, in Heller’s *Something Happened*. An established classic of the period, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, takes the problematic to its logical extreme, where normality is submission to totalitarian madness and those who don’t fit are shut up in a lunatic asylum. And the same total inversion of socially defined sanity and madness appears, though less thoroughly developed, in the few acclaimed novels that locate their exploration of American social reality in an earlier time: Heller’s *Catch-22*, Porter’s *Ship of Fools*, McCarthy’s *The Group*, Doctorow’s *Ragtime*, even Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (published just after the end of my period).

Let me now sketch in a few other lineaments of this story. Against the threat that the project of happy selfhood may shatter into the fragmentations of capitalist production (the division of labor) and reproduction (the family as a separate sphere of consolation and fulfillment), most of these novels offer at least a glimpse of a more integral way of being. Plath gives us those images of childhood happiness and of skiing back to the perfect moment of conception. Roth has Portnoy remember not only the prehistoric world of the Turkish bath but those temporary idylls of oceanic love with his mother. Herzog finds sustenance in images of his childhood family, as does Harry Angstrom—especially the recurring one of himself protecting his sister Mim as they go sledding. Salinger’s idealization of childhood needs no commentary. Even McMurphy and Chief Bromden recall times when life was simple and spontaneous. Almost always, these visions of a better way point us toward the past, and most often toward an individual childhood past when the self was engulfed in familial love and society stood at a distance, unperceived.

Such visions of wholeness linger in memory and animate desire, but they collide with the main experiences of adult life. I’ll mention three such experiences, beginning with work. Most often, it is a scam: Pynchon, Vonnegut, and Updike, for example, locate it in car lots and salesrooms, where one needs a measure of cynicism to peddle the American dream on wheels. Salinger’s *Zooey* deplors the fake world of television work. Plath gives us the hype of the woman’s magazine, Heller, the mutual- and self-deception of the corporate headquarters. Kesey and Pynchon render brief, nightmarish visions of factory and corporation. Occasionally there are images of nonalienating work, but: Rabbit loses his rather satisfying job as a linotypist (this old-fashioned work disappears entirely, with automation); Moses Herzog can’t get back to his great book; Esther Greenwood has no idea how to become the poet she imagines; Kilgore Trout is indeed a writer, but he is ignored and savagely lonely; Alexander Portnoy’s city bureaucracy defeats the humane purposes his work is supposed to achieve; Chief Bromden knows that a big dam has made salmon fishing all but impossible. Only Salinger, in what strikes me as a sleight of hand, manages to retrieve a sense of wholeness in work, taking
it quite out of the system of commodity relations through the spiritual device of the Fat Lady.

The experience of sexuality, no more than of work, can offer a reintegration of the self. When these authors take advantage of the new freedom to represent sexual encounters, what they disclose is remarkable for its botched eroticism. Esther Greenwood sees male genitals as turkey parts; she hemorrhages uncontrollably when she discards her virginity. Dotty Renfrew, of The Group, fails to get her diaphragm in, watches with horror as it rolls across the floor of the clinic, and later undergoes a clinical deflowering. For Portnoy, sex emerges from the bathroom only to take shape as exploitative orgies with the “Monkey” and an attempted rape in Israel. Rabbit Angstrom’s fantasies barely take him past impotence with his young housemate Jill. And Vonnegut aptly expresses the objectification of sex by providing us with the penis measurements of his male characters and drawings of girls’ underpants and a “wide open beaver.” Only Kesey offers an uncritical fantasy of the erotic, and his liberated ladies are compliant whores while his proper women are “ball cutters.” In virtually none of these novels is there an arena of erotic playfulness uncontaminated by bad social relations, in which one might recover a childlike unity of body and spirit.

Finally, the experience of objects—of the socially produced physical world—runs from the banal to the terrifying. Characters live among and by commodities but experience commodities as antagonistic, destructive to one’s individuality, vulgar and homogenized, or full of factitious variety. Characteristic scenes in these novels are Rabbit’s drab homes, organized around the TV set; Herzog’s farmhouse filled with things that don’t work; the cultural hodgepodge of Pynchon’s Fangoso Lagoons; the paraphernalia of beauty and fashion in The Bell Jar. At a monstrous extreme are Kesey’s sterile ward with its hellish machinery and Vonnegut’s plastic river. Only Salinger’s Zooey is truly at home with commodities, and then only in the sanctified retreat of the Glass apartment, where bought objects have become saturated with love and memory. For most of these writers, the things produced by cooperative human labor are as alienated as the labor itself and the mechanics of reproduction.

Through the story of mental disorientation or derangement, then, these novels transform deep social contradictions into a dynamic of personal crisis, a sense of there being no comfortable place in the world for the private self. These books are narratives of illness.

I want now to touch on the form of the story they tell about it. We might see that story as a version of the comic plot, with society itself as the tyrannical older generation; but these stories do not point toward a new society built around the values of the young or to the marriage feast that solemnizes it. They end, at best, in mere recovery—in the achievement of personal equilibrium vis-à-vis the same untransformed external world. Not all the central figures become whole again, but the movement into
illness and toward recovery is the basic story on which the novels play variations.

What are the means of recovery? I think the medical theme asserts itself in the plethora of healers who figure in these stories. Some, of course, are bad therapists, like those who misunderstand or bully Esther Greenwood before the good Dr. Nolan assumes charge of her welfare, or like the timid hacks manipulated by Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Some are shadowy Germanic stereotypes like Dr. Hilarius in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the silent listener Spielvogel in *Portnoy’s Complaint*. Almost never does the professional healer effect a cure, and the same holds true for the many self-appointed counselors and prophets who proffer guidance or wisdom. There are the innumerable “reality instructors”: those who bedevil Bellow’s heroes with well-intentioned or self-serving advice; Rabbit’s young educators in new thought, Skeeter and Jill; Kilgore Trout, the unintentional wise man whose book pushes Dwayne Hoover off the deep end; the kooks and true believers who confuse and eventually desert Oedipa Maas.

Yet the central characters of these novels do not heal themselves: if they recover at all, it is with the help of someone who takes on the role of therapist but who does so out of love and personal commitment. Zooey is the archetype here, marshaling all his Glass family wit, backed by his mother’s chicken soup, his brothers’ anthology of wise sayings, and the saintly presence of the dead Seymour. Contemptuous of psychiatrists, he is able to be one for Franny on her couch because he has the techniques that love and family provide. Likewise, Willie Herzog, just by caring and being there, helps Moses back to sanity—as does Rabbit’s sister Mim, by offering him the simple revelation that “people want to be nice.” And of course Randle Patrick McMurphy becomes Christ to the men on the ward, choosing his own death, in effect, to restore their health and autonomy.

But if I am right in this analysis, the ministrations of these healers should not produce altogether convincing resolutions. If these novels thematize social contradictions as personal neurosis, one would expect any recovery to be a problem, for individual cures cannot address the causes of the illness. At best, they can produce a kind of adjustment. And indeed, some of the novels acknowledge this impasse. Vonnegut, whose story never really departs from the social, offers no hope for his individual creations, only for the whole human race in a distant future through the somewhat magical agency of more “humane ideas.” None of the four possible solutions to Oedipa Maas’ puzzle will afford her much personal repose. Roth leaves Alex Portnoy on the couch, ready only to begin his therapy under the tutelage of the dubious Spielvogel.

And where the hero does return to health, a strange diminution usually occurs, signaling, I think, a disengagement from the issues that generated the story in the first place. Chief Bromden heads off to see
how some men from his tribe have managed to go on spearing salmon on the spillway of the new dam, carrying on the old ways in a pre-industrial pocket that the “Combine” has overlooked. Esther Greenwood steps into a room filled with eyes that will judge her sane; her triumph is simply that she can face them. Franny Glass is able, finally, to sleep. Herzog, also lying on a couch, in an isolated farmhouse in the Berkshires, knows he has recovered because he has “no messages for anyone.” Harry Angstrom and his wife Janice, provisionally reunited, curl up together in a motel-room bed and, like Franny, fall asleep. Nothing has changed “out there,” but our heroes are now “O.K.?”

In this essay I have barely outlined an intricate social process and a sizable body of fiction. I have ignored vital distinctions: for instance, I have said nothing about the value attributed to these works by different fractions of their readership. Obviously, young people and older people experience class and history differently and have different literary tastes. The same holds even more strongly for men and women. Neither have I spoken of changes in the form and tone of the illness story through fifteen years of rather turbulent history. I have omitted consideration of the balance between explicit and implicit—or even unconscious—criticism in the novels; an analysis that equates Kesey’s fiction and Plath’s clearly needs refinement. And of course I have neglected even to mention many novels that may come to reside in the canon.

What I hope to have accomplished, nonetheless, is to have given concrete enough form to the following powerful yet vague ideas about culture and value so that they may be criticized and perhaps developed.47 (1) A canon—a shared understanding of what literature is worth preserving—takes shape through a troubled historical process. (2) It emerges through specific institutions and practices, not in some historically invariant way. (3) These institutions are likely to have a rather well-defined class base. (4) Although the ruling ideas and myths may indeed be, in every age, the ideas and myths of the ruling class, the ruling class in advanced capitalist societies does not advance its ideas directly through its control of the means of mental production. Rather, a subordinate but influential class shapes culture in ways that express its own interests and experience and that sometimes turn on ruling-class values rather critically—yet in a nonrevolutionary period end up confirming root elements of the dominant ideology, such as the premise of individualism. I hope, in short, to have given a usable and attackable account of the hegemonic process and to have added content to the claim that aesthetic value arises from class conflict.

2. I make no large claims for my boundaries. They mark off, crudely, the time when publishing had become part of big business but before subsidiary rights had completely overshadowed hardbound novel publishing. My boundaries also mark the time when people born to one side or the other of 1930 attained cultural dominance and could most strongly advance their reading of the postwar experience. And these years roughly enclose the rise and decline of 1960s movements as well as economic boom and the U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. Anyhow, things have changed since 1975, both in the great world and in fiction publishing; accordingly I will use the past tense when describing the process of canon-formation, even though many of my generalizations still hold true.

I will speak of "precanonical" novels, meaning those that are active candidates for inclusion, not those that will in fact be canonical at some later time.


Surprisingly, neither this audience nor the ways it integrated novel reading into its social existence seem all that different from their counterparts in early eighteenth-century England, as described, for example, in chap. 2 of Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley, 1957), or in "The Debate Over Art and Popular Culture: English Eighteenth Century as a Case Study," by Leo Lowenthal (with Marjorie Fiske), in Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture, and Society (Palo Alto, Calif., 1968).


6. Philip H. Ennis, Adult Book Reading in the United States, National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago, 1965), p. 25. Other main needs were (1) "escape," which also implies a relationship between reading a book and the rest of one's social life (what one is escaping from), and (2) information, which I suspect is a need less often fulfilled by novels now than in the time of Defoe and Richardson. My appreciation is extended to Ennis, who is my colleague, for lots of help when I was first considering these issues.


8. See Richard Kostelanetz, The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America (New York, 1974), p. 207. Kostelanetz's estimate was confirmed by some of Beserman's interviews. Allan Green, who handled advertising for a number of publishers, including Viking, told her in 1971 that on the average, 50 to 60 percent of the budget went to the New York Times Book Review and another 10 to 20 percent to the daily New York Times. M. Stuart Harris, head of publicity at Harper, said he ordinarily channeled 90 percent into the Times at the outset, though once a book's success was assured, he distributed advertising more broadly (see Beserman, "Le Best-seller," p. 120).


11. For instance, the Sunday New York Times assigned only four of the novels that would become 1965's ten best-sellers to literary intellectuals: Julian Moynihan reviewed Bellow's Herzog; George P. Elliott, LeCarre's The Looking Glass War; Marcus Cunliffe, Stone's Those Who Love; and Peter Buitenhuis, Wouk's Don't Stop the Carnival. Only Moynihan wrote a thoroughly respectful and enthusiastic review; it was full of words and phrases like "masterpiece," "new and perennial," "great characters," "beautiful fluidity." Perhaps more important, he drew parallels both to contemporaries like Malamud, Salinger, Mailer, and Philip Roth, and to earlier writers like Joyce and Henry Roth, with the intention of putting Bellow in their company. The review all but says, "this one belongs in the canon." Elliott invoked Greene and Chandler, Cunliffe alluded to Graves and Wilder, but they used these
comparisons in one way or another to demote LeCarre and Stone. Buitenhuis' review was
dissmissive; his en passant allusion was to the Marx Brothers. (I extend thanks to my student
assistant, Pierce Tyler, for surveying reviews and digging up such information.)
12. See Julie Hoover and Charles Kadushin, "Influential Intellectual Journals: A Very
13. See Kadushin, Hoover, and Monique Tichy, "How and Where to Find the Intellectual
Elite in the United States," Public Opinion Quarterly (Spring 1971): 1–18. For the method
used to identify an intellectual elite, see Kadushin, "Who Are the Elite Intellectuals?," Public
Interest (Fall 1972): 109–25.
14. Like the Sunday New York Times, many of these journals singled out Herzog in the
fall of 1964. The New Yorker gave it a lead review by Brendan Gill. V. S. Pritchett covered
it for the New York Review of Books, in the only review of a 1965 best-seller devoted to just
one book. The New Republic gave a lead review to Irving Howe, and the Saturday Review,
to Granville Hicks. Only Pritchett was less than enthusiastic.
16. See ibid., p. 9.
17. See Kostelanetz, The End of Intelligent Writing, pp. 107–8, based on Smith, "The
18. See, for instance, Leslie A. Fiedler, The Inadvertent Epic: From "Uncle Tom's Cabin"
to "Roots" (New York, 1979). Though I have not seen it yet, I gather Fiedler's What Was
Literature?: Class Culture and Mass Society (New York, 1982) argues again for the primacy
of people over professors.
19. As Jerome Klinkowitz states in his preface: "For even the well and intelligently
read, 'contemporary American fiction' suggests Ken Kesey, Joseph Heller, John Barth,
and Thomas Pynchon at best—and at worst Updike, Roth, Bellow, and Malamud." He
contends that such a list misses "the direction which fiction will take, and is taking, as the
future unfolds before us" (Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American
Fiction, 2d ed. [Urbana, Ill., 1980], p. ix).
20. Since this study is work in progress, I will be especially grateful for criticism, leads,
and methodological suggestions.
21. Twenty-six of the forty-four responded. The survey accompanies an article by
Melvin J. Friedman, "To 'Make It New': The American Novel since 1945," Wilson Quarterly
(Winter 1978): 136–37. I don't know how the professors were selected or who they were,
but I might note that almost every novel on this list was written by a white male with an
elite educational background.
22. John Hawkes is the outstanding example of a novelist whose work has consistently
impressed critics and professors, without ever appealing to a wider audience. Should any
of us be around to witness the outcome, it will be interesting to see if any of his books has
a place in the canon forty or fifty years from now.
23. It also excerpts reviews from a very few middlebrow journals like Time and Newsweek.
24. I omit novelists still alive in 1960, but whose possibly canonical work belongs to
an earlier time—Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Hemingway, etc. I include those of an older generation
(Porter, McCarthy) who did not publish a precanonical novel until the 1960s. I exclude
novelists of foreign origin (Asimov, Kosinski, Nabokov) and writers mainly known for their
poetry, plays, or criticism, unless (as with Dickey and Plath) they also produced a precanonical
novel during this period.
25. I got this count by surveying the hardback and paperback best-seller lists in the
New York Times from 1969 through 1975 and by checking the annual summaries in Alice
Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke, Eighty Years of Best Sellers, 1895–1975 (New York,
1977) for the rest of the 1960s. When I find time and patience to plow through the Times
for that decade, my count will probably go up by a few.
26. For an account of this process that attributes it more to industrialism than to
capitalism, see John Kenneth Galbraith, The New Industrial State (Boston, 1967). I prefer


32. Every term of this characterization is a problem, and the whole subject vexed beyond apparent usefulness. (The debate over the Ehrenreichs' proposal in *Between Labor and Capital* should satisfy anyone on this point, as it applies to Marxists.) There is not even agreement whether the people I refer to constitute a class, a subclass, a stratum, a contradictory location in the class structure, etc. For myself, I don't care which concept the reader prefers, so long as in this context we agree on what group we are talking about and agree that it has acted as a recognizable group. If the reader feels more at ease with the concept, from mainstream sociology and everyday talk, of the "upper middle class," that's all right too, though such a reader will, if he or she accepts my argument here, have to challenge the whole framework of theory from which that concept derives. Methodologically, I join the Ehrenreichs in holding that the point is not to "define" classes in some ahistorical way and that a notion of class is validated or invalidated by its power in theory, empirical explanation, and political practice. Hence I do not mean to be appropriating a preexisting definition of class in this essay and "applying" it to a particular situation and problem. Rather, I intend my argument and my evidence to help develop a more adequate picture of the way class has worked and works in the social process.

33. I am under no illusion that this study itself can stand apart from the canon-formation process; I am participating in that process, as I describe it. There is no help for that. I would insist, though, that my immediate purpose is not to tip the scales in favor of some novels and against others. My tally of precanonical novels includes some that I like very much indeed, some that I can't abide, and—in a fine gesture of impartiality—some that I haven't read. I do, of course, wish to influence the process in a broader way by calling attention to its narrow social base and to the parochial outlook it has produced.

34. Thus the precanonical novels display styles as various as those of Vonnegut, Malamud, and Brautigan; and some novelists, like Updike, get high marks from the gatekeepers specifically for their styles.

35. Williams has used this concept since writing *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York, 1958). Its most exact theoretical formulation is in his *Marxism and Literature* (New York, 1977).

36. It was fascinating, after twenty-five years, to reread the essay from which I remembered this phrase, Herbert Gold's "The Age of Happy Problems" (written 1956; rpt. in a book of the same title, New York, 1962). Gold offers a very precise early sampling of this consciousness.

37. For instance, the poorest 40 percent of families in the country received 16.8 percent of the income in 1947 and 16.9 percent in 1960, while the percentage going to...
the richest 5 percent went from 17.2 percent to 16.8 percent. The top 1 percent owned 23.3 percent of the nation's wealth in 1945 and 27.4 percent in 1962. These figures come from tables compiled by Frank Ackerman and Andrew Zimbalist, "Capitalism and Inequality in the United States," in Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas E. Weisskopf, eds., The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978), pp. 298 and 301.

38. Godfrey Hodgson calls this outlook "liberal conservatism." See his excellent discussion in chap. 4, America in Our Time (New York, 1976). On p. 76 Hodgson enumerates six points of the ideological consensus which are very close to the analysis I give here.

39. That is, people relied on others, through the intermediary of the market, for more and more goods and services. In an ordinary day's "consuming," each of us depends on the past and present labor of hundreds of millions of workers worldwide. But of course this is easy to forget, since that loaf of bread magically appears on the store shelf and the only labor we see is that of the checker and the bagger.

40. Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar (New York, 1971), p. 2; all further references to this work will be included parenthetically in the text.


42. J. D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey (Boston, 1961), p. 67. The two stories, which add up to a sort of novel, appeared earlier in the New Yorker. The Glass kids were already culture heroes for the reader of this fiction; people stood in line outside of bookstores on publication day to buy the book.

43. The other securely canonical work of the 1950s, Invisible Man, not only exhibits the characteristic inversion of sanity and insanity but comprehends racism itself within the illness story and the adolescent rite of passage.

44. Philip Roth, Portnoy's Complaint (New York, 1969), p. 111; all further references to this work will be included parenthetically in the text.


47. These ideas derive from Antonio Gramsci, through the later work of Williams and people connected to the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham and to Screen magazine. E.g., Dick Hebidge, whose Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London and New York, 1979) is a fine study in this vein. Todd Gitlin has advanced the theory and analysis of hegemony farthest in the U.S. See esp. his The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left (Berkeley, 1980).