THE AMERICAN NOVEL AFTER IDEOLOGY 1961–2001

Laurie A. Rodrigues

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For Wayne, Langston and my Great Mentors.

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Introduction: Ideology and American Literary Studies, 1950s–2000

Literary interpretation can be as difficult to teach as it can be to perform. To begin with, not all literary texts seem to cry out for interpretation: regardless of genre, some literatures (and in particular, the contemporary) may appear straightforward, transparent. By the same token, however, the temptation to procure answers concerning a text's *meaning* (with which interpretation inevitably teases) can drive readers' impulses to "short-circuit," as Fredric Jameson puts it, a text's obscurity with abstract thought; and this, of course, allots rather limited clarity to the text in question.[1] For all its trickiness, literary interpretation implicitly directs readers' attention to *history*: that is, the place of the text within a particular scope, the text as an artifact in-itself, its writer's personal history, and so on.[2] However, particularly in America following the Second World War, this issue of *history* (along with its alluring fellow, *interpretation*) becomes tricky business, as well: During and after the Cold War, the rise of mass cultures, the Civil Rights Movement, actions for indigenous sovereignty, and acknowledgments of intersectionality altered the image and concept of American history, both domestically and abroad. The variety of distinct experiences revealed in these diverse portions of recent American history reveal the difficulty inherent to imagining that history as *either* cohesive or harmonious. And yet, simultaneous with the social and political (not to speak of cultural) variety associated with the post-Second World War age in America, there reverberated an uncanny, para-cultural consensus. That consensus aggressively (if counterintuitively) asserted an *accord* intrinsic to the Cold War and post–Cold War years in America. Thus, the proverbial *plot* of American literary interpretation

thickens—particularly in light of the various ways this historical moment has itself been interpreted.

The urge to interpret *or* to determine that a text does not need interpretation are both revealing and important historical impulses. When critics or scholars historically encounter a particular text as facile, or middlebrow, and thus determine it is not (worthy of, or) in need of interpretation (as critics considered of J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*), today's scholars of American literatures and cultures should pause; a similar awkward moment will arise when some of those same critics (and several others) dismiss certain other novels as opaque or *difficult* (as was the case with Carlene Hatcher Polite's *The Flagellants* (*c*. 1967).[3] This deprives the texts in question of concerted engagement with the critical and historical contexts of their emergence. Today's readers of American literatures might be reminded of a prescient point, made by Rita Felski, about American studies: In *Beyond Critique*, Felski notes that it is difficult to "dodge the bullet of the accusation that [critics and scholars] are shoring up the very ideology of American exceptionalism they [claim to] call into question."[4] Dismissals or refusals to potentially enrich certain texts (or methodologies) via interpretation reveal readers' generalized *suspicions* toward the American novels they encounter (or, at the very least, *certain* American novels they encounter); in turn, this misplaced suspicion reveals exchanges between literature and the humanistic, critical disciplines that are (problematically, if not compellingly) inseparable from their ideological milieux. Embedded within critical and scholarly dismissals are important sign-posts illuminating details that concern the moment of a text's publication, its writer's critical (if sometimes inarticulate) impulses, and matrices of norms surrounding art and literary value that have systematically (and historically) excluded certain styles, modes of discourse, and characterizations from the canonical, or traditional (and therefore, pedagogically disseminated), *contemporary American* literary milieu.

In contemporary, scholarly pursuits of interpretation via *close reading*, for instance, works of literature, are often historicized or encountered and read as formal, historical objects in and of themselves. And many compelling debates, particularly on Cold War and post–Cold War American novels, have been borne of readers' historicizations of texts; from this approach, valuable debates

around canonization, literary value, and narrative experimentation have been generated. However, formalist approaches of this ilk share a tendency to flatten the cultural and social variety inherent to particular turning points, peculiarities, and crises that may be found within broader, historical moments. Conventional historicization elides deep analyses of novels' aesthetic complexities, as well as the socio-cultural fluxes and movements toward which aesthetics have been argued to gesture (consider the work of Esther Leslie, for instance). In this way, formalist and/or historicist approaches to American Cold War and post–Cold War novels may (paradoxically) foreclose broadened historical insights that are generated *within* these cultural productions. In addition to Felski, Susan Sontag and Frederic Jameson have also explored this point.[5] That is to say, if one follows certain rules (or modes, such as historicism) of interpretation, one's readings lend oneself to specific (presumably favorable) analytical outcomes; and while following such rules may succeed in extracting elements from texts that showcase a writer's artistry or profundity (e.g., exceptionalism), as Sontag teaches, they ultimately operate to render the text (perhaps disingenuously) *familiar*—and thus, delimited.[6] In this way (recalling Felski's issues with *critique*), indiscriminate decoding of disparate works of art with a single interpretive matrix may generate a troubling resonance, or equivalency, where such may not actually exist (by the same token, this also relates to why certain texts may have been excluded from specific discussions within American literary studies).

By contrast, in this study, I apply to the problem of interpretation a commentary on the conditions of that problem, itself. Reaching beyond conventional historicization, I historicize the specific postwar moments in which novels were published and initially received, adding new dimension to literary considerations of the postwar years' shifting social and cultural values. By offering readings that are rigorously interdisciplinary (i.e., exploratory, but *not* suspicious), this approach expands readers' experiences of the texts I engage, as well as understandings of the texts' embeddedness in specific, important historical narratives. And while the novels I string together in *American Novel after Ideology* are, indeed, intentionally disparate (popular, experimental, conceptual, and academic), my readings and the interpretive matrices from which I draw are *also* disparate; from this formal cacophony,

I bring out uncanny resonances among diverse novels published during America's Cold War and post–Cold War periods, from 1961 to 2000.

An important, common element connecting the precarious moments in which these dissimilar novels were published is their emergence amid various, dominant discourses of national cohesion and progress, found both in American literary studies and in sociological debates: Within historical, philosophical, and sociological fields, the years following the close of the Second World War have been described by many as "the end of ideology"; and subsequently, the post–Cold War age has been dubbed, first by Francis Fukuyama, the "end of history." These descriptions comprise historical signposts that make provocative, if paradoxical, claims concerning the definitive "ends"—or, as I define them, transformations and qualitative changes—of ideology. Claims of ideology's "end" in the postwar years were first popularized by sociologist Daniel Bell. According to Bell, socially supported totalizing systems of comprehensive reality, or ideologies (e.g., Marxism, socialism, communism), ended with the allied triumph in the Second World War. Bell made this argument in various forms, in discussions on various topics, in articles published across the 1950s and in his 1960 collection *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties.* Bell's claim, along with Francis Fukuyama's assertion of "the end of history," offers compelling historical narratives with resonances in society and, I argue, American culture, that is, as representations of historical progress and political consensus, or (ironically) ideological representations in and of themselves. After all, claims such as Bell's (and Fukuyama's, explored in Chapter 3) comprise performative denials of ideology's inability to ever fully draw to a close; while, paradoxically, they also reiterate the idea that ending (or, transforming) is simply what all ideologies eventually do, classically defined ideologies typically forecast their own end(s).

While the works of Bell and Fukuyama (along with the topic of ideology, more generally) are rarely engaged in twentieth-century American literary scholarship, their definitive assertions concerning the American postwar condition (i.e., a shared situation, or an objective position, to which various creative responses irrupted) directly contradict the cultural variety that *also* hallmarks the Cold War and post–Cold War years. Cultural and critical

innovations including mass media and its respondent, McLuhanism; the Black Arts Movement (BAM); stylistic innovations in Native American literatures, reclamations of ancient and modern myth, literary histories; and the early-21st century's engagements with intersectionality, encompass but a few of the ways novels published in American after 1960 have artfully challenged satisfied postures, like those of Bell and Fukuyama, that insist on the unity or completeness of American society and culture.

Bell's assertions reflected the country's relative economic success in the first decades following the war; or, his assertions reflected a strident, associated *claim* concerning the supposed achievement of general affluence across America. Bell's exceptionalist argument, maintained alongside other neoconservative figures of the 1960s onward, claimed that given the precipitant excess within American life following the Second World War the country's "people of plenty" were not concerned with either class-related or economic issues—but rather, if anything, with issues of "status."[7] Perhaps surprisingly, Bell's and others' presumptions of positive economic change precipitating negative cultural and social consequences *were also* echoed in contemporaneous literary debates. These claimed the proverbial death of the American *novel*—apparently, alongside Bell's "end" of ideology. In *Partisan Review*, for instance, literary critic Lionel Trilling claimed of the novel in America: "It has been of all literary forms the most devoted to the celebration and investigation of the human will; and the will of our society is dying of its own excess."[8] Trilling's comment reminds readers that, awash in (presumed) general prosperity, Americans' concerns for principled self-preservation, and their capacities for (not to mention the necessity of) prioritizing among desires, have atrophied to damning cultural effect. Of course, neither the claim of ideology's demise nor that of America's abundance encapsulates fully developed views of the totality of postwar American economic or political structures. Importantly, economic "excess" was not general among all people living in America (whether fictional or actual) following the Second World War. Furthermore, sociologists since the 1960s have noted the notion of "status politics," resulting from economic change, as problematic insofar as it overlooks the instrumental significance of status in issues such as the desegregation of schools and the religious question of the 1960 presidential election.

Nevertheless, the excess perceived by Bell, Trilling, and others did not only come in economic forms—rather, in light of the American novel's purported decline in readership, the "excess" indicated by Trilling and echoed by his contemporaries was likely related to the expansion of technology and new, more accessible forms of entertainment beyond reading. I further develop this claim in Chapter 1. The novel's audience was disappearing and without these readers, such arguments generally ran, the form's moral and aesthetic values were likewise dissolving into discursive chaos. The alleged mid-twentieth-century *death of the American novel* encompasses a collection of generally anti-populist claims, asserting the cultural degradation of American literature as a result of: on the one hand, a boom in popular and ephemeral publications (e.g., women's magazines, mass-market paperback fiction, self-help literature) and on the other, the sudden, technologically driven omnipresence of mass culture in American life—which of course includes mass-produced, popular, and ephemeral publications.

Commenting on the encroaching superficiality of mass culture, writer, and critic, Mary McCarthy pointed out a problem, similar to Trilling's, with contemporaneous American novels: characters reflecting modern images of womanhood were few and far-between, she asserted, seemingly having not been updated since the pre-war heydays of John Dos Passos and William Faulkner.[9] McCarthy's denunciation obliquely references the popularity in the 1950s and 1960s of sociological and managerial studies, including John Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* (1941) and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956); such studies charted sweeping changes in American social structures that were a result of the wartime and postwar growth of corporate economic centrality in the United States. However, McCarthy contended, despite these great (if alleged) changes to private and public American lives, contemporary literary characters drawn from American life barely resembled these changes. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the 1950s' and 60s' soaring production rates for mass-market paperbacks, to many cultural and literary commentators of the day, the American novel's slow but apparently inevitable death was a troubling sign of more sweeping, cultural, and even social issues afoot. Some critical strains implicated the American *mass* as potential crucible for the germs of fascism, calling to mind the European *crowds* and *mobs* of the

wartime years. However, along with Trilling, McCarthy's complaints miss the uncanny preoccupations with social, political, and historical spheres emerging in fiction writers' transformed iterations of the novel during the early 1960s and onward.

McCarthy's comments in particular presume that the alternative historical theories offered by Burnham, the descriptions of capital-driven conformity described in Whyte's work (without an alternative in sight), and so on in fact comprise accurate models of contemporary American lives that would *also* be compelling to read in fictionalized form. Moreover, and perhaps more troubling, McCarthy's comment also presumes that, within models like those of Burnham and Whyte, an artistic critique or satirical rendering could or would not be generated; Burnham's, Whyte's, and others' images of social progress or change, McCarthy seems to suggest, ought simply to be *faithfully* (or, realistically) reproduced in contemporary American literatures. Along with Trilling, McCarthy's complaints thus read as an aesthetic (if not desubliminized) stand against economic and social changes that were actually taking place in America—changes, in fact, which *directly challenged* cohesive, unified images of American life, work, and society. While critics' and scholar's mid-century complaints against the American novel seem to plead for a new voice, their pleas carry the hidden premise that this voice should coincide with a limited critical lexicon—that is, a voice already-defined (so, not new at all), to follow Trilling and McCarthy's logic.

While political, managerial, and sociological discourses made multilateral assertions of consensus concerning the "end of ideology" during the years following the Second World War, expressions in novels of the Cold War and post–Cold War years jangled with the discontinuities inherent to these attitudes. Dominant modes and methods of interpretation widely applied at the time, however, were unable to access these expressions. Many postwar cultural critics and influencers—within and beyond the field of literature—supported systematic (if paradoxical) denials like Bell's and Trilling's (though more implicit) of deep-level changes in American culture *and* power relations "after ideology." As a result, I claim, many timely narrative innovations were unevenly comprehended, and much less often appreciated. Against claims like Trilling's, writers of novels published after 1960 did, indeed, offer readers

ample innovations in voice, character, and form. Beginning with J. D. Salinger's critically despised *Franny and Zooey* (1961), a composite novel published within a year of Bell's *End of Ideology*, I dig into the tension between literary taste and innovation in the age "after ideology" by examining the form's various engagements with this paradoxical assertion.

In Chapter 1, I open a renewed discussion around Salinger's text, examining how *Franny and Zooey* presents an unexpected, feminist commentary on the individual effects of mass cultural images and representations of women. Salinger's composite novel, I claim, refracts dominant sociological theories of the 1950s (such as Bell's), whose deliberations on society "after ideology" omit women's experiences. In "Franny," Salinger depicts Franny Glass as protagonist-in-crisis via carefully curated clichés drawn from various media such as fashion, epistolary, and popular film. This collection of clichés guides readers' interpretations of the text's central cliché: Franny's crisis, which comes to a head in the text's first section and is protracted as a breakdown through the remainder of the composite text. Through Bell's ideas on generational divides (e.g., between Franny and her brothers) among postwar youth; in combination with analyses by Alva Myrdal, Viola Klein, and Betty Friedan on women's lack of personal, social, and professional options; and Marshall McLuhan's reflections on mass culture's social effects vis-à-vis the "cultural cliché": I read the remainder of *Franny and Zooey* as reflecting the blind spots inherent to post-ideological discourses that construct feminine identity and maturity along a spectrum of clichés.[10] Through its host of resonances with representations of women "after ideology," *Franny and Zooey* illustrates the ways outdated social norms and troubling mass cultural frameworks formulate women's options concerning professional and personal success. *Franny and Zooey* highlights the (unwittingly) comic distortions and blind spots inherent to depictions of modern leading ladies, like Franny Glass.

However incisive or surprisingly sensitive *Franny and Zooey* may seem to twenty-first-century readers in Chapter 1, Salinger's contemporaries regarded the book as extensive, clumsy, and arguably cult-like in its subject matter. In fact, a 2001 article by Janet Malcolm ("Justice for J. D. Salinger") specifically focuses on the critical onslaught received by Salinger's later fiction, like *Franny and Zooey*.[11] In this piece, Malcolm notes: "I don't know of any other case

where literary characters have aroused such animosity, and where a writer of fiction has been so severely censured for [apparently] failing to understand the offensiveness of his creations." In fact, Malcolm points out, the ire of several critics may well have "set forth the terms on which Salinger would be relegated to the margins of literature."[12] Alfred Kazin, Joan Didion, and Mary McCarthy along with Leslie Fielder, John Updike, and other titans of literary criticism and discourse negatively responded to *Franny and Zooey,* registering marked annoyance with the Glass family characters in particular.[13]

Interestingly, while few directly critiqued the character of Franny or her "little nervous breakdown" to many of Salinger's contemporaries, the Glass family stories generally comprised an extensive creative indulgence, lowering the degree of artistic accomplishment that this work could achieve. Some of *Franny and Zooey*'s reviewers even read Salinger's text as one of many middlebrow novels that were ultimately "too paltry to create a literary tradition" that could compete with either the greatness of the previous generation's literature *or* the growing presence of mass cultures, like television.[14] Indeed, in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Leslie Fielder refers to Salinger's fiction, particularly his then-recent work toward *Franny and Zooey,* as "middlebrow."[15] As a result, *Franny and Zooey* fell out of favor for years, but the text did not go without voluminous academic engagements. Yet, for the wealth of critical viewpoints and interpretive treatments of *Franny and Zooey* that have emerged since its publication in 1961, few scholars of Salinger have honed in on his depiction of Franny Glass, whose ladies room breakdown motors the text's action and (what it possesses of) plot.

Chapter 1's exploration of Franny Glass and her clichéd, critically overlooked nervous breakdown thus begins to reveal uncanny, discursive continuities (or really, omissions) among several influential fields of the postwar years, including sociology, literary criticism, and advertising. Thus, Salinger's contemporaries' rejection of *Franny and Zooey* by way of its supposed, aesthetic resonances with middlebrow (or, popular, mass-marketed) literatures reveals a troubling blindness to the cultural importance of clichés to processes of identity-formation for women at this same time—as well as what this cultural importance might indicate. By extension, this blindness systematically avoids confronting women's experiences in the postwar age (or, "after ideology") as

potentially diverse from those of American men of any generation. Combined with women's limited ontological options after ideology, these elisions essentially amount to a systemic erasure of the existence and operations of power relations (particularly via gender relations) at this time.

This move may call to mind the New Critical principle of self-contained literary critique, or solely examining the formal elements of a text; according to this principle, any social, political, or historical factors that bear on a text's creative inception, the context of its publication, or find reference in its content, are beyond the jurisdiction of literary scholarship. And interestingly, by the time complainants against the American novel's demise began publishing their concerns in the *New Republic*, *Partisan Review*, and elsewhere, the New Criticism had already been methodologically normalized: that is, widely taught in top American universities. Given the New Criticism's methodological standardization well before the mid-1960s, as well as its (and other contemporaneous discourses') systematic blindness to power relations, it is therefore perhaps unsurprising to twenty-first-century readers that, through the 1960s, the field's most well-known literary critics could generate but scant constructive responses to, or critical engagements with, certain, apparently opaque, long-form works of literary fiction—including the impetuously toned *Franny and Zooey* and Carlene Hatcher Polite's experimental first novel *The Flagellants*. Like Daniel Bell's claims of ideology's definitive "end," mid-century complaints concerning the American novel's death and the New Criticism's omission of contextual and intertextual considerations from literary scholarship should, to twenty-first-century readers, appear limiting.

Indeed, the New Critics' methodology is ill-equipped for critically engaging (beyond description) representations of unsettling power relations. Furthermore, like Bell's definition of ideology and its end, claims concerning the novel's end presume that the American novel itself is a finished, definitive aesthetic that can be neither improved upon nor changed; similarly, as Bell's theories would have it, "ideology" also comprises finished and productive, socially supported systems that (due to their presumed "exhaustion" via repeated failures) simply ended with the close of the Second World War. The trouble, then, with Bell's mid-century claims as well as those within literature, is that they proceed from limited perspectives of, on the one hand, American

society and, on the other, literature. This would not be an issue were it not clear that these limited perspectives cannot (or will not) engage with the cultural codes and principles that survived "the end of ideology" and were adapted in mass culture, the social sciences, and nationalist discourses, that is, codes and ideological formulations that retain power relations, despite efforts to ignore them. This shortfall, I claim, is precisely what post-1960 American novels aesthetically demonstrate. According to Salinger, Carlene Hatcher Polite, Leslie Marmon Silko, Philip Roth, and the numerous discussions and texts with which their creations intersect, the period at the end of ideology is a time of partial, interested viewpoints that are no less ideological than, for instance, the New Criticism, Marxism, or Daniel Bell's critiques thereof.

In Chapter 2, I extend *Franny and Zooey*'s discussion of American women's limited prospects by taking up a nuanced novel by BAM-era writer Carlene Hatcher Polite. Like *Franny and Zooey*, *The Flagellants*' forced conjunctions of partially dissolved ideological formulations distort its narrative and (perhaps ironically) curtail its capacity for plot development and resolution—or, *progress* and *consensus*. Concurrent with McLuhan and Friedan's critiques of cliché's predominance in American conceptions of women "after ideology," women of color writers explored ways black women were hemmed in by their position at the interstices of race, class, and gender discourses (all of which are ideological). This would be studied for decades following the 1960s, through projects of literary recovery and black feminisms' academic consolidation during the 1980s, which I also discuss in Chapter 2. However, *The Flagellants* pushes upon the critical values, stylistic elements, and purported functions of American and African American literatures, while the novel also anticipates (and prophetically critiques) potentially problematic aesthetics that would be developed by black women writers later, particularly in the 1970s.

Before womanism and other women of color feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s, Polite's *The Flagellants* questioned the urban, masculinist culture espoused by the BAM, particularly the notion of a naturalized revolutionary subject that excluded black women. Her novel notes the ways black nationalist discourses absorbed American mass culture's often racist discourses on black families and gender relations, as in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's contemporaneous, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* (1965), to cite one example.[16] Polite's

Flagellants also satirizes expectations pertaining to realist characterizations in black literature. For instance, the novel may present naturalist settings—a dingy apartment, a street corner, the local bar—but it draws on non-realist traditions of parody, surrealism, and the distortions of American culture itself, which rely on interpretations of African American culture. Moreover, Polite populates her novel with stubbornly static, projective characters, making obvious their inculcation and inscription by ideological processes, and thereby intentionally compromising readers' abilities to encounter them as figures imbued with affirmative agency. Polite's main characters, Ideal and Jimson, are black New York City transplants who, in the context of their crumbling romance, torment each other in the present with traumatic allegories and concepts from their respective pasts. Their dysfunctional relationship is mediated by Polite's biased narrator, driving readers to sadly wonder if there will be any escape for either party, from their poverty, themselves, *or* each other.

It therefore may not surprise readers that Polite's first novel, which received critical acclaim in France (where it was first published in 1966), was all but ignored (according to surviving reviews) in both area-specific and general American literary journals; and it was largely denigrated by mainstream (i.e., then, the most widely read) reviewers. This is all likely, at least in part, due to the problematic fact *The Flagellants*' American release was in 1967, at the height of the BAM.[17] Only a handful of reviews were written in the States, but the similitude among their points of praise and critique for *The Flagellants* is uncanny: American reviewers seemed to appreciate the depth with which Polite expresses her protagonists' respective agonies. In a review for *The American Scholar*, Roger Ebert compared Polite to Richard Wright, claiming, with the publication of *The Flagellants*, that "there is now a novel that throughout its length remains at [a] pitch of endurance and despair" comparable to Wright's *Black Boy* (1945).[18] Nora Sayre, on the other hand, extended her praise of the novel's moving affectivity beyond racialized agony. The sincerity and immediacy of Jimson and Ideal's painful relationship, Sayre wrote in *The Nation*, are effective because they are constituted by "agonies that are uniquely Negro" and "torments which can afflict lovers of any color."[19] Mainstream readers praised Polite's ability to render human emotion into the tumultuous story of a poor American couple's failing marriage.

Yet, while emotional impact was praised as the novel's greatest asset, the same reviewers *also* articulated a greater, more general dissatisfaction with *The Flagellants*, as well as with Polite's abilities as a writer. Polite's prose style, along with her mode of characterization, was repeatedly critiqued as the novel's greatest flaws. Elsewhere in the review cited above, Sayre refers to Polite as "careless of characterization." Frederic Raphael, author of the novel's most negative review, expounds upon this complaint; in his piece, he distastefully comments on Polite's inattention to character development—as well as to all "standardized methods of Creative Writing." As the narrative tone vacillates, according to Raphael, between "whimsy" and "two-fisted rant," Polite betrays her stylistic uncertainty. Thus, the novel demonstrates the author's difficulties with expression and intention—that is, Raphael asserts, Polite did not seem to know her "ideal audience." Ebert comments similarly, linking Polite's "strange" writing style to the difficulties he faced in reading her two protagonists: "Jimson and Ideal speak by turns in elevated language, in jargon, in gutter idiom, in poetic incantation, and in obscenity."[20] Ebert notes that the narrative's frequent tonal shifts place too much emphasis upon the characters' "masochism." Polite's unsettlingly self-aware characters "watch their own lives deteriorate"—and this, for Ebert, too closely resembles "the flagellants of classic pornography." The result, as Raphael points out, is a "smoke screen of words," behind which the protagonists' "fire" is neutralized by Polite's convoluted and inconsistent prose style.

Although scholarship engaging BAM literature and art has been undertaken by more recent scholars such as Aldon Nielsen, James Edward Smethurst, and Cynthia Young, and works by BAM-era women writers have enjoyed attention by current researchers like Madhu Dubey, Polite's socially oriented, non-realist novel has nevertheless fallen to the margins of discussions emerging around the representations and interpretations of 1960s black nationalisms and their interactions/intersections with American cultures.[21] Polite's first novel has virtually disappeared from American literary history, unable to leave its mark on readers' understandings of the context of its publication. While critics in Polite's own time may have found discomfort in reading *The Flagellants*' often dysfunctional, one-dimensional characters, in Chapter 2, I clarify that the text's difficulty for readers likely did not lie in what it depicts, but in the

challenge that it presents to interpreting its ideological position via Polite's characters. Against conventions and reader expectations, in *The Flagellants*, characters become devices that allow the novel to represent ideology's transfer of distorting, oppressive values as (not only destructive forces against black solidarity, but also) complex dynamics of consent and misogynoir; by normalizing the characters' dysfunction through consistent, disorienting narrative strategies (e.g., extended flashbacks, fantasy, fugue states), Polite's *The Flagellants* questions several of the mid-Cold War years' ironically ideological responses to the purported end of ideology.[22]

Salinger's and Polite's novels may appear to have little other than the decade of their publication in common. However, despite their clear representational distinctions along lines of race and privilege, the experiences of both Salinger's and Polite's main characters are uncannily similar: that is, their worlds are constituted by structures, laws, and forces that are beyond their control. Moreover, via their respective struggles to attain agency over their lives, Franny, Ideal (and Jimson, though differently) are contentious characterizations: that is, each aesthetically suitable to, but discursively problematic within, the contexts of their respective worlds. Their separately "high strung and willful nature[s]" (as Polite's narrator puts it) seem to critique the value of obedience (e.g., "bowing" for Ideal and "good sportsmanship" for Franny), which implicitly underwrites their existences as women.[23] These dispositions fly in the face of the 1960s' "spirit of capitalism"—that is, social actors' productive and uncritical cooperation with various laws, structures, and forces that are beyond their own control.[24]

This important mis-match in *Franny and Zooey* and *The Flagellants* reveals the characters' troubling self-awareness (coupled with intermittent denial) that she is but a surrogate for narratives that already exist: in the case of Franny, gendered clichés; and for Ideal, the same clichéd expectations, in addition to intersectional racial stereotypes and other complications. For Franny, the sole alternative to conventional, biologically determined destinies (or Zooey's "low-grade spiritual counsel") is the distracting allure of perpetual prayer via her deceased brother's copy of *The Way of the Pilgrim*. As for Ideal, alternatives to her "substandard life" lie in her vivid reminiscences and workday flirtations. In both cases, the alternatives offered by these worlds either are defined by

others (e.g., brother Zooey, partner Jimson) or merely serve as distractions from the realities of the characters' circumstances (e.g., raccoon coats, the Jesus Prayer, Ideal's fantasies). This is precisely why neither Polite's Ideal nor Salinger's Franny experiences growth or much self-assertion in their respective narratives. Importantly, these narratives end in stalemates suited to their irreconcilable conflicts; at the ends of their stories, Franny and Ideal are left to contemplate and nevertheless bear their unbearable circumstances, leaving readers only to hope for a better future—in their fictional worlds, as well as in actuality.

Interestingly, during the decade of *Franny and Zooey*'s and *The Flagellants*' publication, literary critics and intellectuals such as Kazin, Trilling, McCarthy, many New Critics, and others decrying the death of long-form American literature did not necessarily count themselves among Daniel Bell's conceptual or political supporters (nor, surely, vice versa). However, these perceived opponents' claims concerning the ends of ideology and the American novel nevertheless converge and participate in establishing a broader, intellectual status quo during the initial decades following the Second World War. This trans-partisan wave constituted a critical push-back, in various idioms, against postwar forms of populism, however loosely defined: for neoconservatives, largely social movements, and protests; for many on the left, mass culture. This shift in American critical attitudes, in many ways, reflects intellectuals' shift in critical focus: from the powers behind economics (or, capitalism) during wartime, to the cultural values associated with capitalism's productivity (and, in some cases, those products themselves), after the war. It may therefore not surprise readers that Daniel Bell, John Burnham, and several other preeminent intellectuals of this status quo were former scholars of Marxist theory, as well as its political supporters prior to the conclusion of the Second World War; however, given the insights of the war's end, rather than "endorsing a system of total terror," as Sidney Hook put it in *Partisan Review*, intellectuals of this trans-partisan status quo operated in the interest of "*critically* supporting our own imperfect democratic culture with all its promises and dangers."[25]

However, this brand of critique, more often than not, would operate to indignantly expose presumably ideological impulses residing at the heart of, for instance, moral values and ideals (which often attend social movements,