TIRANA: A NOVEL
by
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(Under the Direction of Reginald McKnight)

ABSTRACT

Tirana: A Novel is an academic satire set on a small college campus in northwestern Georgia and in the town and county that surround the college. The events of the novel unfold primarily during the spring semester of 2020, but the opening chapters contain flashbacks to the fall semester of 2019, and the novel closes with a 2021 epilogue. Through parallel plotlines, the narrative follows the fortunes and misfortunes of two protagonists, Associate Professor Jeremy Shull and Assistant Professor Amelia Brenner, both of whom teach in the Department of English at Tirana College. In addition to satirizing professorial hubris, the politicization of academia, and the institution of tenure, the novel examines issues of classism, job insecurity, and social-media addiction that are not exclusive to academia. *Tirana* combines satire with absurdist and dystopian elements, the latter thematic strongly influenced by Evgeny Zamiatin's *We* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. This dystopian tone is elevated by the emergence of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020, which is incorporated into the narrative. *Tirana* can also be read as a contemporary version of the marriage plot, and as such pays homage to the novels of Jane Austen.

INDEX WORDS: Academic Satire, Novel, Academia, Tenure, Classism, Social Media, Marriage Plot, COVID-19

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION: THE ACADEMIC NOVEL

In 1889, Henry James was invited to speak to fledgling novelists enrolled at the Deerfield Summer School, in Deerfield, Massachusetts. He declined the invitation but sent a letter to the school's director that contained the following advice for the students:

> What I should say to the nymphs and swains who propose to converse about [novel writing] under the great trees at Deerfield is, "Oh, do something from your point of view; an ounce of example is worth a ton of generalities; do something with the great art and the great form; do something with life. Any point of view is interesting that is a direct impression of life. You each have an impression colored by your individual conditions—make that into a picture, a picture framed by your own personal wisdom, your glimpse of the American world. The field is vast for freedom, for study, for observation, for satire, for truth." (qtd. in *Theory of Fiction* 94)

Although I am much older than the students whom James addresses in his letter, I find his advice inspirational and take his tenet of "freedom" to heart, particularly as enshrined in the constitutional right of freedom of expression.[1] My own individual "glimpse of the American world" will be expressed in my creative dissertation, a satirical academic novel titled *Tirana*, set on a small college campus in northwestern Georgia in 2019 and 2020.

Tirana is not a work of realism. It is a satire that often verges on the absurd and sometimes veers into the dystopian. It has a distinct moralistic element, with the aim of bringing academic politicization, elitism, authoritarianism, and hypocrisy into stark focus. It is not my

[1] UGA's Freedom of Expression Policy states, "No rights are more highly regarded at the University of Georgia than the First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and expression, and the right to assemble peaceably. Such opportunities must be provided on an equal basis and adhere to the basic principle of the University's being neutral to the content and viewpoint of any expression" ("UGA Freedom of Expression Policy").

intention to offer detailed characterizations of a wide variety of people working within academia. Rather, academic characters, other than my protagonists, are generally presented in a negative light and are contrasted with kind, hard-working, down-to-earth characters outside of academia. This mode of characterization is deliberate. As Northrop Frye writes,

> The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act ..... Hence satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy. ..... Two things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack. (224)

While some elements of historical reality are included in the narrative, such as the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, incongruities and preposterous circumstances abound. This novel is not meant to be read as an accurate, in-depth analysis of the day-to-day functioning of academic departments nor of the current status off tenure, but as broad satire melded with dual romantic plotlines.

The target audience or "ideal reader" for this novel most likely falls within the moderate to conservative segment of the socio-political spectrum and will, I believe, recognize and relate to many of the novel's situations and characters. T.H.M Gellar-Goad states,

> For satire more than other literary modes and genres, the ideal reader must be savvy, must be shrewd at guessing hidden meanings and intention. Many members of an audience will not live up to the high standards of the ideal reader, however, and these not-so-ideal readers are the source of the principal risks[2] of satire – at the same time as they are a source of humor for the satirist and ideal reader alike. (35)

[2] Gellar-Goad writes that these risks include "the possibility of a negative, hostile reaction from an audience, the wider public, or authority figures" (36).

With this ideal reader in mind, I have chosen to forgo the suggestion made by some previous reviewers of my manuscript that I should mention specific political figures or movements by name; I believe that such references are not only unnecessary, but can become annoying to readers, who enjoy making connections on their own. For example, my character Victor Rich's bumper stickers -- *Not my President, Smash the State, and Dissent is Patriotic* -- are clearly references to Donald Trump and his administration; the "savvy" reader understands this and knows that the real-life equivalents of Victor Rich removed stickers of this kind as soon as the 2020 election was over and went on to denounce and seek to punish anyone who expressed similar sentiments in regards to President Biden. These connections do not need to be spelled out for the ideal reader of my novel, and it is my hope that we, reader and author, can share a laugh at hypocrisies of this nature.

On the other hand, an example of the "not-so-ideal" reader of *Tirana* would be a literary critic wont to employ the word "problematic," an allegation that was made in regards to my manuscript by one early reviewer. For my ideal reader, as well as for myself, the mere use of that word in its modern-day, academic iteration[3] is "a source of humor," to use Gellar-Goad's phrase, as I attempt to convey in a scene in my novel in which the male protagonist is chastised for using a "problematic" Lacanian lens in his research. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times,* Meghan Daum describes "problematic" as a "weasel word" and a "rallying cry for sanctimonious posturing," while Patrick Taylor, a student journalist at Colgate University, writes, "In academic

[3] "Problematic" has not always been used in this present-day sense by scholars of literature. Erich Auerbach, for example, in his seminal work *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*), argues that being "*problematisch*" is a defining characteristic of literary realism. As is the case in contemporary English, the word *problematisch* has two definitions in German: "1. schwierig, voller Probleme; 2. fraglich, zweifelhaft" ("Problematisch"), which translate as 1. difficult, full of problems; 2. questionable, doubtful. Throughout *Mimesis,* Auerbach uses the word in accordance with the first definition.

and political circles, 'problematic' is used interchangeably with terms such as 'racist,' 'sexist' and 'homophobic.' All of these words carry huge stigmas. Accusations of racism, for example, are treated very seriously, and rightfully so. Those who are accused of it will generally want to respond with forceful rebuttals." *Tirana* is, to a large extent, such a rebuttal.

Athenian Satire and the Academy:

The origins of the modern university lie in Plato's Academy, established circa 387 BC on the outskirts of Athens and named after the olive grove in which the school was located, *Akademia*. A few years after founding the Academy, Plato began writing his *Symposium*, which is dated to approximately 385-360 BC and demonstrates that infighting among philosophers, mathematicians, playwrights, and poets – in other words, those who now tend to work in universities and are categorized under the umbrella term "academics" -- is by no means a recent development. In the *Symposium,* Plato describes a banquet that features speeches on the nature of Eros, or Love, in its many forms. The last of the speakers is Socrates, who deftly dismantles the arguments and theories put forth by the other attendees, including those of his nemesis Aristophanes. Plato seems to have intended the *Symposium* to be, at least in part, a response to Aristophanes's *The Clouds*, which portrays Socrates as an arrogant sophist utterly removed from reality. Some scholars believe the play may have contributed to the charges brought against Socrates of impiety and corruption of Athenian youth, charges that ultimately led to his execution by forced suicide. This belief is supported by a line in the *Apology*; Plato has Socrates say, "And hardest of all, I do not know and cannot tell the names of my accusers; unless in the chance case of a Comic poet," which is generally thought to be a reference to Aristophanes.

In the succinctly titled article "Did Comedy Kill Socrates?," Stephen Halliwell examines both sides of the argument against Aristophanes. Halliwell notes that in addition to the pointed allusions made by Plato against Aristophanes, critics of the playwright might call attention to the unflattering portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds* and the fact that the main character, Strepsiades, a dissatisfied parent of a student in Socrates's school (named "The Thinking Institute" by Aristophanes), burns the school down at the end of the play. "Isn't that proof of the work's populist appeal to anti-intellectual sentiment?" Halliwell imagines readers asking. He responds,

> No, it isn't. It is a piece of pantomime theatre (the text proves, for one thing, that Socrates and his pupils do escape), and its dramatic significance only emerges when we read the whole play and take the measure of the Athenian bumpkin, Strepsiades, who perpetrates the arson. Strepsiades is himself mocked remorselessly for ignorance and stupidity at least as much as Socrates is caricatured for hyper-intellectualism.

Defenders of Aristophanes, meanwhile, might claim that the labeling of comics – or for that matter of anyone who publicly dissents from the orthodoxy of the Academy -- as anti-intellectuals, bigots, and even murderers, is nothing more than an underhanded attempt at censorship, not to mention evidence of extremely fragile egos and lack of a sense of humor. Halliwell writes, "The history of comedy, both inside and outside the theatre, is littered with attempts to curb or prohibit the power of mockery and satire. Even in classical Athens, the culture that had given comedy a prestigious place in its public festivals, there were intermittent concerns about how far the city could tolerate ridicule of its democratic institutions and policies."

At a 2014 scholarly conference (or symposium, if you will) on the core texts of liberal arts pedagogy, political scientist Geoffrey Vaughan presented a paper in which he calls *The*

Clouds "the urtext of the genre" (3) of the academic novel (also known as the "campus novel" or the "university novel"). He writes:

> Aristophanes' *Clouds* is the finest parody of the finest philosopher and teacher. Socrates changed the course of intellectual history, and today's colleges and universities, for all their flaws, owe everything to what he and his students did. But we also harbor a great deal of foolishness that deserves to be laughed at and corrected, and so we owe Aristophanes a debt as well. (6)

Vaughan argues that while most academic foibles and pretensions fall into this fairly innocuous category of "foolishness," there is one professorial dereliction of duty that is no laughing matter: disdain for the subject one teaches. In *The Clouds*, Aristophanes depicts Socrates as not genuinely invested in the search for truth, but rather as willing to misuse rhetoric to achieve whatever conclusions and outcomes most benefit him. Vaughan finds a similar lack of investment portrayed in Kingsley Amis's 1954 *Lucky Jim*, perhaps the best-known example of the academic novel, in which the protagonist Jim Dixon, a lecturer in medieval history, asks, "Haven't you noticed how we all specialize in what we hate most?" (33-4). Vaughan writes:

> This is Amis's finest contribution and his most limited. It is limited because it applies to only a subset of academics. Not all fall into this. It is fine because it identifies the very problem with the modern Academy that can be addressed through a study of *The Clouds* . . . Too many academics hate their specialty, whether it is the English professor who does not teach literature or the historian who cares more for present fancies than about anything that might have happened in the past. (6)

Although well over two thousand years have passed since the first performance of *The Clouds*,

the link between comedic writing as a genre and academia as subject matter appears to remain strong and fruitful.

The Female Gaze:

In *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*, Elaine Showalter situates the roots of the academic novel in Victorian fiction, in the portrayals of professors, clerics, and various self-styled intellectuals. Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, she writes, "is the great ur-narrative of academic politics, even if it is about the bickering of provincial Anglican clergy over preferment and evangelical reform" (5), while the "supreme academic fiction remains *Middlemarch* (1872), and Eliot's Mr. Casaubon is the most haunting spectre of the academic as grim pedagogue, the scholar as the spirit of all that is sterile, cold, and dark" (5). In American fiction, Showalter sees Willa Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House* as a direct descendent of *Middlemarch*: "Cather too writes about the midlife crisis of a male academic, Godfrey St. Peter, burned-out although he is only fifty-two" (60).

It is not surprising that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, academic characters in novels were all male, as women were almost entirely absent from the academy and from scholarship. Nonetheless, I find it interesting that the creators of Casaubon and Godfrey St. Peter were both female authors, thus unburdened by the male ego and, one could argue, more likely to offer objective descriptions of male academics than male authors would. This objectivity is particularly effective in comparing academic characters to other male characters through a female protagonist's eyes. In the beginning of *Middlemarch*, for example, Dorothea Brooke worries about the possible negative effects on Casaubon of having to listen to the far-from-intellectual utterances of other men at a dinner party to which he has been invited:

> She wondered how a man like Mr. Casaubon would support such triviality. His manners, she thought, were very dignified; the set of his iron-gray hair and his deep eye-sockets made him resemble the portrait of Locke. He had the spare form and the pale complexion which became a student; as different as possible from the blooming Englishman of the red-whiskered type represented by Sir James Chettam. (13)

Similarly, in my novel, I have my female protagonist, Assistant Professor Amelia Brenner, apply what I call a "female gaze" to her male colleagues and compare them to their non-academic brethren. This female-male theme and imagery play an important role in furthering the plot of *Tirana* (which is, to a large extent, a marriage plot, as discussed below) and in the characterization of Amelia.

There are, no doubt, many examples to counter the argument of female authors being more likely to explore the spectrum of male physicality. In the novels of D. H. Lawrence, for instance, muscular lower-class men are often contrasted with weak, effete upper-class men. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the most obvious (and, frankly, silly) example of this Lawrencian thematic; the female protagonist's husband, the baronet Sir Clifford Chatterley, is paralyzed from the waist down, while her lover, the gamekeeper Oliver Mellors, has "quivering" (169) muscles, "violent muscles" (171), and "muscular flesh" (209). Similarly over-blown descriptions of rural male characters appear in much of Lawrence's work, a tendency Stella Gibbons brilliantly satirizes in her 1932 novel *Cold Comfort Farm*. The character Seth Starkadder, for example, is viewed through the eyes of the female protagonist as follows: "His young man's limbs, sleek in their dark male pride, seemed to disdain the covering offered them by the brief shorts and striped jersey. His body might have been naked, like his full, muscled throat, which rose, round and

proud as the male organ of a flower, from the neck of his sweater" (70). In developing my male characters, I certainly want to avoid descriptions of this nature.

My own purpose in employing the female gaze in *Tirana* is as a satirical allusion to the phenomenon, much studied within academia, of the "male gaze." The term was coined by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (808). In *Tirana*, I in no way intend to argue against the existence of the male gaze, nor to deny that it has, in many ways, caused harm to women. Rather, I push back against the notion that within heterosexual relationships, this superficial manner of looking at the opposite sex is an exclusively male behavior; contrary to some academic theories, there are, in fact, women who look at men the same way. Thus, I'm hoping to turn the camera lens, to use Mulvey's cinematic frame of reference, back onto the male "gazer." In addition, the female gaze in my novel is a way to satirize the overuse of certain concepts associated with gender within contemporary academia. In my opinion, this overuse has led to many of these concepts becoming clichés, rendering them unconducive to serious academic discourse: the "male gaze," "toxic masculinity," and "heteronormativity" are a few examples that make their way into my novel.

The Post-WWII Academic Novel:

Although Showalter finds the origins of the academic novel in Victorian fiction, she notes that the most rapid growth of the genre was in response to the massive influx of students into colleges and universities after World War II, both in Britain and the United States (11). Two of

the best-known academic novels from the 1950s are Mary McCarthy's 1952 *The Groves of Academe*, set in a small American college, and the above-mentioned *Lucky Jim*, set in a provincial university in England. Both of these novels exemplify a key element of the post-war academic novel, namely its association with humor and satire. The seminal place held by *Lucky Jim* in this tradition cannot be overstated. As David Lodge writes in his introduction to the 1992 edition of Amis's novel, "My own novels of university life, and those of Malcolm Bradbury, Howard Jacobson, Andrew Davies et al., are deeply indebted to [*Lucky Jim*'s] example. . . . Amis drew an immortal portrait of the absent-mindedness, vanity, eccentricity and practical incompetence that academic institutions seem to tolerate and even to encourage in their senior staff" (viii).

There are a few notable exceptions to the connection between satire and the academic novel, such as John Williams's 1965 *Stoner*, which tells the somber tale of a professor of English, William Stoner, whose marriage and career both fail, but who is borne forward by stoicism and a profound love of literature. *Stoner* was largely ignored upon publication but has seen a revival of fortunes since Morris Dickstein, in a 2017 essay for the *New York Times*, wrote, "John Williams's 'Stoner' is something rarer than a great novel — it is a perfect novel, so well told and beautifully written, so deeply moving, that it takes your breath away." (In 2018, Charles J. Shields incorporated Dickstein's words into the title of a biography of Williams: *The Man Who Wrote the Perfect Novel.*) In his essay, Dickstein compares *Stoner* to the above-referenced *The Professor's House* by Willa Cather, writing,

> Since academic novels usually focus on the nasty rivalries and inflated egos of their characters, they have served as vehicles for broad satire, not serious themes. One great exception is Willa Cather's 1925 novel, "The Professor's House." Cather used the

> traditional calling of a scholar and the atrophy of his marriage to convey her own growing alienation from the modern world. Her novel has only one successor, another book that invokes the life of learning as a rebuke to the wasteful wars and cheap compromises of the wider world.

That one successor, in Dickstein's view, is *Stoner.* While one could point to J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) or Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) as other examples of serious, non-satirical academic novels, Dickstein's observation that the genre has evolved to be, by and large, satirical in nature is accurate.

The reason that most post-war academic novels have been satires is directly related to their subject matter, argues Jay Parini: "The academy has long been a magnet for pomposity, and the satirist's sharp eye can prick the appropriate balloons. Ideally, of course, satire is serious criticism as well, and one comes away from a novel like *Lucky Jim* with an enlarged sense of life. The campus becomes a microcosm, a place where humanity plays out its obsessions and discovers what makes life bearable." One of the best-known authors of satirical academic novels is David Lodge, whose *Campus Trilogy* consists of *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses (*1975), *Small World: An Academic Romance* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1988). Lodge explains why academia offers such fertile ground for satire: "The high ideals of the university as an institution -- the pursuit of knowledge and truth -- are set against the actual behaviour and motivations of the people who work in them, who are only human and subject to the same ignoble desires and selfish ambitions as anybody else. The contrast is perhaps more ironic, more marked, than it would be in any other professional milieu" (qtd. in Edemariam 153).

One area of academia, in particular, has traditionally been a focus for novelists: the English department. (*Lucky Jim* is a prominent exception, Jim Dixon being a lecturer in

History.) Obviously, most creative writers who work and study within academia do so in English departments, so naturally, that is where they get much of their material. However, declining enrollment in English as a major has meant fewer students and, consequently, fewer teaching positions, which in turn could be one of the reasons for a noticeable decrease in academic satires in the last twenty years or so. Another possibility could be market saturation, i.e., too many novels in the 1990s and prior about male English professors and their marital and career woes; a third possibility, posited by Andrew Kay, is that English departments have simply become too beleaguered to satirize. In a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* titled and subtitled "The Joke's Over: Academics are too scared to laugh," Kay writes that one of the reasons for the dwindling of the academic novel is "the precipitate decline of English departments, their tumble from being the academy's House Lannister 25 years ago — a dignified dynasty — to its House Greyjoy, a frozen island outpost. The fact is that academic satires almost invariably took place in English departments."

Kay argues that English was a glamorous subject for study at the apex of high theory in the 1990s, creating outsized egos and intrigue, and thus making English departments excellent settings for academic satire. "When English declined, though," Kay continues, "academic satire dwindled with it." The situation is now so dire, that satire would simply be cruel:

> Academics aren't laughing anymore; they're despondent, angry, afraid.....Meanwhile, right-wing politicians and writers have exploited the waning fortunes of high theory in order to poison the electorate against higher education. ..... For satirists to make fun of English or any other humanistic discipline, then, would mean aligning themselves with this current of hostility, and with the larger wave of anti-intellectualism now coursing through the country.

Clearly, I disagree with Kay. One flaw in his argument, as I see it, is that he assumes that all novelists are writing *for* English professors and other academics, with whom they share some kind of bond of "intellectualism," and that novelists care whether or not professors are laughing – we don't. Rather, our audience consists of people who, simply put, love to read fiction. They appreciate well-told stories, engaging characters, suspense, passion, humor, and so much more that novelists toil for years trying to achieve. Professors of English, on the other hand, often seem to view novels, novellas, and short stories as nothing more than specimens for analysis in their articles and books. William M. Chase sees, herein, one of the major reasons for the decline of English departments:

> What are the causes for this decline? There are several, but at the root is the failure of departments of English across the country to champion, with passion, the books they teach and to make a strong case to undergraduates that the knowledge of those books and the tradition in which they exist is a human good in and of itself. What departments have done instead is dismember the curriculum, drift away from the notion that historical chronology is important, and substitute for the books themselves a scattered array of secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture). In so doing, they have distanced themselves from the young people interested in good books.

A second part of Kay's argument that I disagree with is his claim that writers who choose to satirize English departments in the current political climate are somehow "aligning themselves with this current of hostility" against academia. In recent years, academics haven't needed "right-wing politicians and writers . . . to poison the electorate against higher education" – they have done an excellent job on their own of alienating a large portion of the populace: *how* they

have done so is one of the major themes I hope to illustrate in *Tirana*. Kay's framing of any hostility towards academia as "anti-intellectualism" points to the very elitism and classism that I believe have been major causes of said hostility and that are virtually crying out to be satirized.

Group Psychology and Insularity:

The "us vs. *them*" group mentality illustrated by Kay's argument is one of the key features of modern-day academia that I explore in my novel. Both of my protagonists (the aforementioned female protagonist Amelia Brenner, and the male protagonist Jeremy Shull) feel themselves to be outsiders within a very group-oriented department, but each navigates this tricky terrain in different ways. I find much inspiration in novels that succeed in bringing this subtle interplay to the fore. In *The Age of Innocence,* for example, Edith Wharton depicts the upper echelons of New York society closing ranks around Newland Archer as he tries to escape his marriage. Wharton meticulously describes the social milieu that Archer is first delighted to be a part of, but which then attempts to control him. Her use of detail offers an excellent model for other novelists. Unlike Wharton, though, I plan eventually to let my protagonists break free of their confines.

In an academic environment, the psychology of the group often involves students. In Muriel Spark's best-known novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, a charismatic teacher in a girls' school holds extraordinary sway over a group of girls collectively known as "the Brodie set":

> Miss Brodie had already selected her favourites, or rather those whom she could trust; or rather those whose parents she could trust not to lodge complaints about the more advanced and seditious aspects of her educational policy, these parents being either

> too enlightened to complain or too unenlightened, or too awed by their good fortune in getting their girls' education at endowed rates, or too trusting to question the value of what their daughters were learning at this school of sound reputation. (39)

Miss Brodie continually tells her group that they are the "crème de la crème" and states, "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" (16). Although the educational levels portrayed are what we in the United States would call middle and high school, the group dynamic provides an interesting parallel to the cohorts of graduate students that form around certain professors in my novel.

Like Spark, Donna Tartt examines the dark side of group psychology and charismatic academic figures in her 1992 novel *The Secret History*, in which a group of arrogant undergraduate students at an elite New England liberal arts college congregate around an equally arrogant professor of Classics. In a recreation of an ancient bacchanalia, encouraged by the professor, they murder a farmer; they then kill a fellow student who has threatened to expose the murder. In excusing the murder of the farmer to themselves, one of the group says, "I mean, this man was not *Voltaire* we killed. But still. It's a shame. I feel bad about it" (186). At the end of the novel, the narrator, a middle-class student from the suburbs of California named Richard, reflects on how he had been invited into the group by a wealthy, upper-class student: "Maybe he'd divined in me – correctly – this cowardice, this hideous pack instinct which would enable me to fall into step without question" (458). Sherry R. Truffin connects the group dynamic to power politics and insularity, writing that " Richard is empowered through absorption into an insular 'pack' that causes him to become increasingly detached from reality and from himself throughout the novel" (169). The Classics professor's power over his students, Truffin writes, comes from "charm, charisma, refinement, and ancient learning..... his teaching inspires his

students, including the restless middle-class protagonist, with visions of ancient power" (173). This correlation between the mentality of the group and themes of power, elitism, and insularity also feature prominently in *Tirana.*

Social Media:

A relatively new, but extremely important influence on group psychology is social media. Since I am an older student who has taken up her studies again after decades away from academia, I have a perspective shaped by time. The dramatic changes wrought by social media on the professoriate have made a strong impression on me, an impression I attempt to convey in my dissertation. I believe that social media has reinforced and compounded group pressures within many university departments, cloistering those who work there even further than was already the case. Dave Eggers gives a chilling portrayal of the influence of ubiquitous technology and social media on the individual human being in his 2013 novel *The Circle*, which also takes place on a "campus," albeit one of a different nature – the campus of a tech giant in Silicon Valley. On this campus, everyone is mandated to participate in the digital life of the community with mottoes such as "Secrets are Lies," "Privacy is Theft," and "Sharing is Caring." This last phrase is explained at a campus assembly by the protagonist Mae Holland, a new employee, who begins her job with skepticism but eventually comes to believe in the righteousness of the company's mission:

> I think it's simple. If you care about your fellow human beings, you share what you know with them. You share what you see. You give them anything you can. If you care about their plight, their suffering, their curiosity, their right to learn and know anything the world contains, you share with them. You share what you have and what you see and

what you know. To me, the logic there is undeniable. (304)

In the eight years since the publication of *The Circle*, the reach of social media has become even more pervasive, as has the pressure to participate in it.

Mae's words exemplify one particular growing trend in American academic discourse that I also attempt to highlight in *Tirana*, namely the public shaming of individuals who hold beliefs that differ from prevailing academic views, as well as of those who choose not to voice their beliefs at all. When Mae says, "If you care about your fellow human beings, you share what you know with them," the implication is that if you *don't* share, you don't care. Contemporary versions of this strategy of trying to instill feelings of guilt include slogans like "Silence is violence" or "Silence is complicity," as well as the insistence that if an individual is not actively "anti" a given ideology, he or she must be "pro." Public shaming was, of course, one of the hallmarks of Mao's Cultural Revolution in China during the 1960s and 1970s, and Eggers clearly finds it concerning, as do I, that this practice appears to be gaining adherents in the West.

Eggers very recently published, in November 2021, a sequel to *The Circle* titled *The Every,* in which Mae Holland has become CEO of the tech giant. In *The Every*, Eggers presents a new protagonist, Delaney, for Mae is now the *antagonist*. In the opening pages of the novel, Delaney has the following experience with the technology-driven version of public shaming, known as "shamming":

> . . . on the way to campus, Delaney had been shammed. On the subway platform, she'd dropped a wrapper, and before she could pick it up, an older woman with a phone had filmed the crime. Like a growing majority of tech innovations, the invention and proliferation of Samaritan, an app standard on Everyphones, was driven by a mixture of

> benign utopianism and pseudofascist behavioral compliance. A million shams – a bastard mash of *Samaritan* and *shame* – were posted each day. (9)

Mae's initial support for and ultimate implementation of public shaming over the course of Eggers's two novels has led me to speculate on possible meanings behind her name. I have considered that it might be a play on Mao, for the reasons noted above. I've also thought that the full name, Mae Holland, might be a reference to May Welland in Wharton's *Age of Innocence*, who at the beginning of the novel appears to embody the innocence referenced in the title, but who at the end shows herself to be manipulative and controlling. As Peter Betjemann writes, "the dramatic denouement reveals that May Welland, the apparent icon of sincerity, has hardly been blind to her husband's discontent and has relied on her family to monitor and manage his involvement with the Countess Olenska" (569). Similarly, Mae Holland seems innocent at the beginning of *The Circle*, yet develops a fixation with power and surveillance by the end of the novel; in *The Every*, she then attempts, by all means available, to enforce her authoritarian ideas. The chief antagonist in my novel shares these traits and tactics.

In *Tirana*, I focus almost exclusively on one contemporary social media platform, Twitter, which is currently the most popular among academics, journalists, and media personalities. I am not, nor have I ever been, on any social media platform, so before I began my research for *Tirana*, I was unfamiliar with the level of vitriol on that particular site, which can turn seemingly normal people into vile trolls. Unfortunately, as I discovered, that includes many professors. Those readers of my novel who are *not* on Twitter will think that I am exaggerating the oftentimes pathological behavior of its academic users; I assure you, I am not. While the previously discussed desire to belong to a group and be accepted by one's peers, as well as the accompanying team-building practice of publicly shaming said group's ideological opponents,

are likely among the motivations for academics to take to Twitter, another reason appears to be that they are in the clutches of some form of compulsion or addiction. As psychologist Judson Brewer writes,

> From a psychological standpoint, Twitter taps into our natural reward-based learning processes: trigger, behavior, reward.....We have an idea or think of something funny (trigger), tweet it out (behavior), and receive likes and retweets (reward). This learning process causes a dopamine rush in reward centers of the brain..... The more we do this, the more this behavior gets reinforced. ..... our brains are now learning a new habit loop of survival: we can even track our own "relevance" by the number of impressions, tweets, and followers we have.

If the assertion by Andrew Kay quoted above that professors of English are now "despondent, angry, afraid" is correct, it would make sense for these professors to turn to Twitter to shore up their diminished feelings of self-worth and to vent their rage at those they blame for their depression and despair.

Dystopian Fiction:

Regardless of the underlying causes of this recent explosion of activity on academic Twitter, the effect of so much discourse taking place on computer screens, in bursts of 280 characters or less, has a distinctly dystopian quality that has infused my own novel. Reading through initial drafts of the novel, I realized that the tweets, bumper stickers, yard signs, and protest signs generated and displayed by today's highly politicized professoriate, as well as the many labels and "lenses" used in research (see, for example, the gender terminology mentioned above) are reminiscent of the slogans, mottoes, and hypnopaedic suggestions in Aldous Huxley's

Brave New World and that they illustrate the importance of language in controlling people and maintaining power. As June Deery writes, "the psychological programmers of the New World State know that repetition, simple concepts, and obvious linguistic effects greatly help in implanting self-evident beliefs in the modern brain. Huxley is here interested not only in the ways in which language controls thought but also how language replaces thought" (199). In *Brave New World*, Huxley writes of Helmholtz Watson: "By profession he was a lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering (Department of Writing) and in the intervals of his educational activities, a working Emotional Engineer. He wrote regularly for *The Hourly Radio*, composed feely scenarios, and had the happiest knack for slogans and hypnopaedic rhymes" (57). I was so struck by how Huxley's words prophesize what I see as taking place in modern academia – specifically in the humanities, and even more precisely in English departments – that I chose the first sentence of this quote as the epigraph for my novel.

Huxley's novel also illustrates the insularity of a social group that separates itself from others and views those beyond its own limited sphere of existence as "absolute savages" (89). When Lenina Crowne and Bernard Marx arrive for a tour of the Savage Reservation, the Warden describes some of the outdated habits of the savages. Huxley writes the Warden's speech as a series of phrases broken up by ellipses:

> . . . our inspectors occasionally visit . . . otherwise, no communication whatever with the civilized world . . . still preserve their repulsive habits and customs . . . marriage, if you know that is my dear young lady; families . . . no conditioning . . . monstrous superstitions . . . Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship . . . extinct languages, such as Zuñi and Spanish and Athapascan . . . pumas, porcupines and other ferocious animals . . . infectious diseases . . . priests . . . venomous lizards . . . (89).

Within the World State itself, groups are also separated into a class hierarchy, based on genetically and chemically engineered intellect. The castes range from the allegedly highly intelligent Alphas at the top, to the Epsilons, mentally stunted by lack of oxygen during in-vitro gestation, at the bottom.

In Huxley's depictions of the World State, the Savage Reservation, and the divide between them, many writers and scholars have seen the direct influence of Evgeny Zamiatin's novel *We*, first published in English in 1924. George Orwell, for example, wrote in a review of Zamiatin's work, "The first thing anyone would notice about *We* is the fact -- never pointed out, I believe -- that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* must be partly derived from it. Both books deal with the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against a rationalised, mechanised, painless world, and both stories are supposed to take place about six hundred years hence." Huxley always denied that he had read Zamiatin's novel, but the similarities are striking. The setting of *We* is the One State, which is surrounded by and separated from the rest of the world by a glass wall, called the Green Wall, because the plants on the other side have grown to cover the glass entirely. Inhabitants of the One State are known by numbers instead of names. The novel's protagonist is D-503, an engineer assigned to work on the construction of the INTEGRAL, a spaceship intended to conquer other planets and spread One State's dominance throughout the universe. D-503 keeps a journal that he hopes to send to space on the INTEGRAL's maiden voyage. In one journal entry, D-503, who is very loyal to the One State, writes, "The human being stopped being a primitive human only when we built the Green Wall, when with this Wall we'd isolated our mechanistic, perfected world – from the irrational, ugly world of trees, birds, animals" (54). However, despite his beliefs in the righteousness of the One State and its mission, D-503 suffers from depression; to him, this is a sign that he is mentally ill. When he sees a

creature with yellow eyes through a tear in the flora covering the glass of the wall, he thinks, "But what if he, yellow-eyes – in his absurd, filthy piles of leaves, in his uncalculated life's—happier than us? . . . What absurdity . . . Maybe happier than me – yes; but I'm only an exception, I'm sick" (54-55).

Like Orwell, Kurt Vonnegut saw a direct link between *Brave New World* and *We.* In a 1973 interview with *Playboy* magazine, he said that while writing his first novel, *Player Piano* (published in 1952), "I cheerfully ripped off the plot of *Brave New World*, whose plot had been cheerfully ripped off from Eugene Zamiatin's *We*" (qtd. in Freese, 125-26). Similar to the situations portrayed in *Brave New World* and *We*, *Player Piano* depicts a social group separated from the rest of society by education and profession. Vonnegut's novel opens:

> Ilium, New York, is divided into three parts.
>
> In the northwest are the managers and engineers and civil servants and a few professional people; in the northeast are the machines; and in the south, across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all of the people live.
>
> If the bridge across the Iroquois were dynamited, few daily routines would be disturbed. Not many people on either side have reasons other than curiosity for crossing. (1)

In this society, "Everyone's I.Q., as measured by the National Standard General Classification Test, was on public record – in Ilium, at the police station" (77). Peter Freese compares the system in Vonnegut's novel not only to *Brave New World*, but also to Orwell's division of society into the Inner Party, the Outer Party, and the Proles in *1984*. Freese argues that in *Player Piano*, "all children with a lower I.Q. are reduced to the roles of Huxley's Gammas, Deltas, and

Epsilons or Orwell's Proles, since, with very few exceptions, all simpler jobs are done by machines" (128).

Tenure:

One way in which present-day academia has separated itself from life beyond university campuses is the tenure system; very few people in other sectors of the economy have guaranteed employment. Tenure also creates hierarchies within departments, between the tenured and non-tenured, as well as between tenure-track assistant professors and non-tenure-track lecturers and instructors. Tenure is an important theme in my novel, and I discuss it from three different viewpoints: one is the perspective of Jeremy Shull, who as an associate professor already has tenure; the second perspective is that of Amelia Brenner, who is an assistant professor on the tenure track, and the third viewpoint is that of Isabelle, a graduate student. I hope that the non-academic readers for whom I am writing will be intrigued by how I lay out the "academic assembly line," as I refer to the tenure process in *Tirana*, as well as by my depiction of tenure as a metaphorical prison, an inescapable situation, illustrated by my characterization of Jeremy Shull. As someone who is by nature restless and has pursued a number of different careers in four different countries, I find it both terrifying and fascinating to think about doing the same job year in, year out, oftentimes in the same building, over the course of decades. Contemplating this state of being has made me feel quite sympathetic towards Jeremy; I've learned that quitting a tenured job is, both psychologically and economically, very difficult. Two years after Andrew Kay's article cited above, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (which seems to be a very depressing publication), featured an article titled and subtitled "Tenured, Trapped, and Miserable in the Humanities: Why are so many tenured professors unhappy with their jobs yet

unable to change careers?" The author of the article, William Pannapacker, lists the results of a survey he conducted, in which he asked professors, "What makes it so hard to leave academe?" I include the complete results of the survey below, along with Pannapacker's comments, as they have been consequential in formulating the plot of *Tirana*, as well as in the characterization of both of my protagonists:

- **More than 20 percent chose the sunk-cost problem: "I've invested so much."** You spend perhaps a decade in graduate school, probably accumulate substantial debt, and lose all those years that could have been spent gaining more transferable job-related skills and experience.
- **Almost 25 percent chose the "It's my identity" option.** In many ways higher education is a total culture — some would say it's a cult — and leaving it, especially after the many years and personal sacrifices it takes to earn a doctorate, can involve a substantial reframing of your sense of self. "Who am I, if I am not an academic?"
- **The largest number of responses, nearly 45 percent, selected "What else can I do?"** In other words, the process of becoming an academic typically involves narrowing one's options rather than broadening them. I do not mean that the work itself must be limiting. In my case, I grew from being a specialist into a generalist and have held a series of leadership roles that could rival any of my generational peers who went into the corporate world. The challenge, for me, among others in my profession, was imagining that we could be valued outside of the academy.
- **Perhaps the most-telling response: Not even 10 percent said they stay in academe because "My work matters."** What does it mean that such a small percentage of its practitioners feel that way about their work — especially in the humanities, where passionate engagement, not to say love, are exalted as the *sine qua non* of the profession?

(Pannapacker, *The Chronicle of Higher Education)*

For Jeremy, the third response is the most significant, as it is for forty-five percent of the respondents to Pannapacker's survey, and discovering that he can, in fact, have a new career is a key plot development in *Tirana.*

Amelia, in contrast to Jeremy's motivation for remaining in academia, is seeking tenure because she genuinely loves literature. However, like so many recent PhD graduates who teach at the instructor level, in adjunct positions, she is finding that tenure-track options have become rare. Thus, when she gets an assistant professorship at Tirana College, she will go to great lengths not to lose the opportunity. The investment factor, cited by twenty percent of respondents to Pannapacker's survey, has evidently been a problem for PhD students in the United States for quite some time. As early as 1975, David Lodge wrote in *Changing Places*,

> In America, it is not too difficult to obtain a bachelor's degree.....It is at the postgraduate level that the pressure really begins, when the student is burnished and tempered in a series of gruelling courses and rigorous assessments until he is deemed worthy to receive the accolade of the PhD. By now he has invested so much time and money in the process that any career other than an academic one has become unthinkable, and anything less than success in it unbearable. (10)

This pressure is discussed by Showalter, who writes, "The confrontations of tenure competition haven't really received their psychological due in academic fiction, although being turned down for tenure is one of the most stressful and traumatic events of a professional life" (9). Reading about these aspects of the tenure track has been eye-opening; the realization of the pressures faced by PhD candidates who are much younger than myself and at the beginnings of their careers has informed my characterization of both Amelia and several of the graduate-student characters in *Tirana*, particularly Isabelle, who becomes the target of bullying and ostracization

within the graduate program of the English department. In my novel, I wish to take up Showalter's challenge of giving this torturous situation its "psychological due" in Amelia and Isabelle's plotlines.

Plot and Narration:

In addition to the plotlines involving academia in *Tirana,* large portions of my narrative will take place outside the confines of the college campus and will include characters who have nothing to do with academia. In this decision, I have been very much influenced by the work of Alison Lurie, the author of numerous academic novels. In the 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Foreign Affairs*, for example, professor of English Vinnie Miner and her younger colleague Fred Turner travel to London on a research trip. Both end up having affairs, Vinnie with a tourist from Texas and Fred with a British actress, and the introduction of these two non-academic characters adds a great deal of depth and complexity to the novel. And while the academic characters of Lurie's *The War Between the Tates* (1974) stay closer to the university than do those in *Foreign Affairs*, academia is not the main concern of the novel, but rather the deterioration of the marriage between Erica and Brian Tate. In my novel, too, the development and examination of romantic relationships will be integral to the plot.

Moreover, at the chapter-to-chapter level, I also model my plot structure on that found in much of Lurie's work; in an interview, Lurie stated that she likes "to have at least two stories going at once because they play off each other" (qtd. in Costa 36). What Richard Costa calls the "double plot" (36) found in many of Lurie's novels will feature in *Tirana* as well. This narrative strategy involves having chapters alternate between Jeremy Shull and Amelia Brenner's plotlines. The third-person narrative voice is adapted to each character as the plot progresses.

The opening paragraph of *Tirana* is an omniscient bird's-eye view of the state of Georgia on New Year's Eve of 2019, which zooms in to focus on Jeremy in the next paragraph. However, for the duration of the first chapter, the narration remains fairly distanced, thereby including Jeremy himself in the satirical lens; in the remainder of Jeremy's chapters, though, that distance is diminished. The second chapter, the beginning of Amelia's plotline, is told in a much more restricted, or "limited" third-person point of view than the first chapter, thus reinforcing the "female gaze" discussed above.

The plot of *Tirana* is not just a dual plot, it is a dual *marriage* plot. My reasoning for this was straightforward: I wanted to try something new (new for *me* as a writer, definitely *not* new for literature). As someone who is divorced and less than enthusiastic about the institution of marriage, I have tended to focus on the *dissolution* of relationships in my previous work, and as a novelist, I've always had the following passage from E. M. Forster's discussion of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* in my thoughts:

> Goldsmith is of course a lightweight, but most novels do fail [at the end] – there is this disastrous standstill while logic takes over the command from flesh and blood. If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude. Death and marriage are almost his only connection between his characters and his plot. . . the writer, poor fellow, must be allowed to finish up somehow, he has his living to get like anyone else, so no wonder that nothing is heard but hammering and screwing. (95-96)

Fortunately, I managed to banish Forster's words from my mind, and I did so in a very pleasant manner: I reread three of Jane Austen's novels – *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* – in quick succession and recognized that, while they do all end in matrimonial bliss, none of

Austen's main female characters are willing to marry someone they do not truly love. Thus, I decided to rechristen the marriage plot as the *love* plot and have, honestly, enjoyed writing these romantic storylines more than my fairly cynical divorce plots of the past.

The narrative arcs of both my protagonists take them beyond the social circles of the college. Broadening my cast of characters to include those outside academia will allow me to examine the interesting thematic often referred to as "town vs. gown," as developed, for example, in Richard Russo's only academic novel, *Straight Man*. Russo's oeuvre, which includes *Nobody's Fool* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Empire Falls,* is renowned for his vivid and compassionate portrayal of the inhabitants of small towns. As Kathleen Drowne explains, "The element of Richard Russo's work perhaps most often noted by critics is his genuine and abiding affection for the ordinary, small-town, working-class characters who populate his fiction. These characters are often down-at-the-heels, unemployed or underemployed, beset by familial and economic pressures, and saddled with histories of making bad decisions" (11-12). I would like to follow Russo's lead in my own novel by portraying characters who live in the small town in which my fictional college is set, as well as from the rural areas surrounding the town. And, as my novel takes place in the South, in a college where most professors are from northern states, regional and cultural issues will most certainly be raised. However, I want to avoid the perpetuation of southern stereotypes, which has been a common phenomenon in literature about the South. Duane Carr writes,

> The poorest of working-class whites of both town and country have long been degraded in southern literature. Tapped "sand hillers," "tackies," "hillbillies," "wool hats," "tar heels," "clay eaters," "dirt eaters," "peckerwoods," "lintheads," and more recently, "trailer park trash" and "rednecks," they have been most often depicted, from William

> Byrd in the eighteenth century to Cormac McCarthy in our own, as simple-minded, shiftless, lazy and violent—a subspecies to be detested and ridiculed or, on rare occasion, to feel sorry for. (3)

While we southerners know that these caricatures are not representative of the real people in our communities, of our families and friends, I have found that such stereotypes still exist in the minds of many academics. Part of my dual plot will lead my two protagonists to confront these biases.

Another way in which I plan to incorporate into my plot the differences between the lives of academics and those of people who work outside the campus environment is to contrast what Showalter calls "academic time" (6) with, for want of a better phrase, regular time. Showalter writes, "Novels about professors are set in academic time, which is organized and compartmentalized according to various grids and calendars, vacations and rituals" (7). These timetables range from daily class schedules to the span of many years that separate longed for sabbaticals. However, as Showalter notes, "the most common temporal metaphor for academic life is that of the four seasons .....For academics, autumn is the beginning" (9-10). Thus, many campus novels begin on (or right before) the first day of classes of the fall semester. Malcolm Bradbury's 1975 novel *The History Man*, for example, opens with the following sentence: "Now it is the autumn again; the people are all coming back" (1). In the first chapter of *The Shakespeare Requirement* (2017), Julie Schumacher shows her protagonist, Professor Jay Fitger (first encountered in Schumacher's 2015 epistolary academic novel *Dear Committee Members*) as he rummages under his desk trying to get his office equipment to work: "The semester—including his own freshman class on 'The Literature of the Apocalypse'—would begin in four days" (3). Assistant Professor Eph Russell is introduced in Scott Johnston's 2019 *Campusland*

as follows: “School years had a dependable rhythm, one Eph always found comforting. This was his favorite time, September—the anticipation, the excitement of reconnecting after summer break” (3). Finally, the *spirit* of the fall semester can remain even after separation from the academy, as indicated by the title of Seymour Epstein’s 1987 novel *September Faces*; the events of the novel are set in motion when newly retired professor Dan Singer moves to the shore in September and encounters a former student. My own novel opens on New Year’s Eve, a device I use in the hopes of distinguishing, as indicated above, between academic life and that of the town and surrounding areas. The repetitive temporal framework within which my protagonists operate is only one of many boundaries that keep them insulated from outside forces and which they will need to cross in order to widen their initially very narrow scope of existence.

There is one seemingly minor subplot in *Tirana*, touched upon in the novel only a handful of times, which to me, the author, is the most important theme of the entire work. Amelia is a Christian, but she feels compelled to hide her faith in order to avoid angry confrontations with the rest of the faculty, many of whom are what Albert Einstein called “fanatical atheists”; Einstein’s biographer, Walter Isaacson, puts the phrase in context:

> “There are people who say there is no God,” [Einstein] told a friend. “But what makes me really angry is that they quote me for support of such views.” And unlike Sigmund Freud or Bertrand Russell or George Bernard Shaw, Einstein never felt the urge to denigrate those who believed in God . . . In fact, Einstein tended to be more critical of debunkers, who seemed to lack humility or a sense of awe, than of the faithful. “The fanatical atheists,” he wrote in a letter, “are like slaves who are still feeling the weight of their chains which they have thrown off after hard struggle. They are creatures who – in

their grudge against traditional religion as the 'opium of the masses' -- cannot hear the music of the spheres." (389-90)

Amelia's attempts to conceal her faith come with a significant emotional and psychological toll; her inner struggle reaches its breaking point in Chapter Ten of *Tirana*, when during a faculty meeting, her colleagues voice their disdain for a recently deceased professor, whom they accuse of having been a secret Evangelical Christian. Recalling Jesus's words in the New Testament that "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (*The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Matthew 10:33), she feels compelled to come to the professor's defense and explain the idea of Christian salvation, thereby bringing upon herself the ridicule and scorn of the rest of the faculty.

In satirizing atheism, as well as authoritarianism, I have drawn inspiration from Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, which was not published until 1967, but was written sometime between 1928 and the author's death in 1940, under Stalin's regime. During Bulgakov's lifetime, writers in the Soviet Union worked under the oppressive control of the monolithic Union of Soviet Writers; membership in the union was required of all writers, and all literary works produced in the country underwent rigorous censorship to ensure they complied with the political line of the CPSU (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). Needless to say, a satire of atheists would not only not have been published, it would have put its author's life at risk.

While I do not fear for my life, I do feel that I have taken a professional risk in writing *Tirana* and in submitting it as my dissertation. In contemporary academia, anyone not on the "progressive" end of the political spectrum (if there are even any such people, other than myself, left in teaching positions in American universities) is forced to practice self-censorship on a daily

basis if they hope to have even the slightest chance of pursuing an academic career. I truly worry for the future of American education if this trend continues. If I am blessed enough to see *Tirana: A Novel* published, and if it offers solace and strength to even one person struggling against academic authoritarianism and censorship (which includes self-censorship and compelled speech), I will feel satisfied that my labors have not been in vain. In closing, I do wish to note that my novel is in no way a *roman à clef*. To quote David Lodge's disclaimer at the beginning of *Changing Places*, "Although some of the locations and public events portrayed in this novel bear a certain resemblance to actual locations and events, the characters, considered either as individuals or a members of institutions, are entirely imaginary" (6).

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Tirana: a novel

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