PHILIP ROTH AS MORAL ARTIST AT MID-CAREER

by

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Abstract

As a serious young man in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, Philip Roth believed writing fiction was an exalted calling with a high moral purpose. He was a committed social realist with a Lionel-Trilling-like ethics of fiction and a grand, unrealized ambition to write about public life. Then, fifteen years into his career, he wrote *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), a rollicking extravaganza of scurrilous comic invention and exaggerated grievance. Revelling in wildness and transgression, he found a voice that galvanized his talent as nothing before had done. Yet he still seemed to feel bound by his old ethical commitments. This was not the artistic breakthrough he had been hoping for. My paper considers how Roth works at reconciling his deep-seated sense of moral responsibility as a writer with his inescapable talent for imaginative recklessness in three novels, each of which marks a turning point in the middle of his career, *Portnoy*, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), and *The Counterlife* (1986). I take this moral/aesthetic problem to be an important preoccupation of Roth's and make that preoccupation the basis for readings of the novels. In doing so, I try to show that his ethics and aesthetics are much deeply entangled than is usually acknowledged. In *Portnoy* he does all he can to contain Alex Portnoy's rampaging monologue inside a morally proper narrative frame. With *The Ghost Writer*, he eschews his old ethics of fiction and makes a complex declaration of aestheticism by appropriating Anne Frank's life story and voice to his pointedly reckless fiction. The Israel chapters of *The Counterlife* are a watershed in his career. In them, he puts his aesthetic wildness to work for his moral probity, while opening his fiction up to the public scene. He presents a dialogical, non-normative moral fiction investigating the question of Israeli settlement on the West Bank by imaginatively projecting himself into a range of ethically engaged Israeli subject positions and having the characters he invents debate the controversy in variations on his characteristic voice. In the mid-eighties as in the early sixties, Roth's objective as a moral writer is the "expansion of moral consciousness."

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In memory of Anthony Munday (1560? - 1633)

This paper is divided in five parts...

INTRODUCTION

Roth's Complaint

> **Portnoy's Complaint** (pôrt´-noiz kəm-plānt) *n.* [after Alexander Portnoy (1933-)] A disorder in which strongly-felt altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature. Spielvogel says: 'Acts of exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, autoeroticism and oral coitus are plentiful; as a consequence of the patient's "morality," however, neither fantasy nor act issues in genuine sexual gratification [...] (Spielvogel, O. "The Puzzled Penis," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, Vol. XXIV, p. 909)
>
> Epigraph to *Portnoy's Complaint*

Fifteen years into his literary career, in 1969, the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* marked an explosive development in Philip Roth's fiction. The restrained style, evident moral seriousness, and social realism of his first books had given way to virtuosic wildness, delight in transgression, and outlandish comedy. *Portnoy*, a novel in the genre of the Jewish joke, consisting almost entirely of a fervid psychoanalytic monologue by the morally conflicted exhibitionist, voyeur, fetishist, onanist, and oral coitus enthusiast whose condition is pathologized in its epigraph, won Roth fame as a comic writer of prodigious talent and notoriety as an emerging generation's laureate of sexual depravity. "Alas," he would write a few years later, "it wasn't exactly what I had in mind" ("Imagining Jews" 215). Before writing *Portnoy*, he had been the very model of a serious young literary man of the fifties, a devotee of the *Partisan Review* and disciple of Henry James who wrote fiction that was realistic and moral in the sense that Lionel Trilling would have understood those categories. Were he ever to know fame, he then imagined, it would be like the fame of Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* (216)—Aschenbach, who "earned... the gratitude of a younger generation by showing it a path to moral fortitude" (11). His great regret about contemporary American fiction, his own fiction included, was that the scale at which it engaged moral questions was too small. The concerns on which it brought moral imagination to bear were all but exclusively private, because, he supposed, public life had grown so strange and unruly as to seem unreal and (it follows, for a committed realist) unimaginable. He seems never to have lost his sense that fiction writing ought to be a moral activity and engage as wide a world as possible. However, the apparently amoral mischief-making of *Portnoy*, a novel whose subject matter is as private as that of any sexual obsessive's analytic session, galvanized his talent as nothing before had done, arguably bringing him to the height of his powers as an artist. After so many years of discipline in pursuit of probity, he succeeded at last in summoning the voice that would distinguish him as a writer by indulging in imaginative recklessness.

This development creates for Roth a kind of Portnoy's Complaint: the reckless impulse that animates *Portnoy* is at odds with the moral imperative by which he feels bound as a writer. I will consider how he works at reconciling that impulse with that imperative in three pivotal novels from the middle of his career: *Portnoy*, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), and *The Counterlife* (1986). In all three, he is preoccupied with the Jewish twentieth century and questions of identity and ethics arising from it—among them, what it is to be good, a Jew, a good Jew, a good writer, or a good Jewish writer when the context or subject is the Holocaust or Israel, and whether to be any of those things. I will follow that thematic thread through the novels, focusing my attention on the Israel chapter of *Portnoy*, the Anne Frank chapter of *The Ghost Writer*, and the Israel and El Al chapters of *The Counterlife*. I am concerned with Roth's treatment of the theme not in itself but as an index to his engagement with the aesthetic/moral problem raised above. My contention is that after suspending the responsibility his early ethics of fiction would have him assume in *Portnoy* and eschewing it in *The Ghost Writer*, all in service of his rampaging talent, he comes to write both with inspired wildness and moral probity in *The Counterlife*, a novel about modern public life whose art is equal to its strangeness and unruliness.

Before I begin to argue that contention, I will take a few pages to describe in more detail the young Roth's literary-ethical commitments and the wild tendency in his writing that draws him astray from them.

Roth sets out his ethics of fiction in two essays adapted from speeches he delivered in the early sixties. His fiction from that time is consistent with the position he develops in them. Both speeches were occasioned by the reception of his first book, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (1959). Shortly after it won him the National Book Award for 1960, he was given a high-profile speaking slot at a Stanford symposium, to which he contributed a speech he would publish as "Writing American Fiction." After several years of persistent attacks on the book by fellow Jews who could not abide his writing stories about unsavoury or "unrepresentative" Jewish characters for a largely gentile audience, in 1962 and 1963 he appeared at several Jewish institutions and offered a defence of his work that became "Writing About Jews." Read together, the two essays present an understanding of the possibilities and value of fiction that is very much of a moment—the moment of the New York Intellectuals, of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*—but that strains against some of its orthodoxies.

In "Writing about Jews," Roth addresses Jewish critics who tak *Goodbye, Columbus* to be a betrayal.[1] These critics have, variously, denounced him for making a spectacle for gentile readers of Jews behaving badly, confirming ugly stereotypes these readers may hold when he could be educating them about the goodness and normality of most Jews or about the contributions exemplary Jews have made to society; called him a "self-hating Jew"; accused him of anti-Semitism;

and “argue[d] or impl[ied] that the sufferings of the Jews throughout history, culminating in the murder of six million by the Nazis, have made certain criticisms of Jewish life [which they take him to be making] insulting and trivial” (149-150). He begins by pointing out that his critics are the ones who judge certain of his characters or their actions to be disreputable or immoral and that any generalization about Jews or Jewish life they draw from those judgments are likewise their own. What’s salient, he goes on to argue, is not that he would judge his characters differently than they do, though very often he would, but that they, the moralists, are in the business of making judgments about what happens in stories, whereas he, the serious fiction writer, is not. Good writers and readers of fiction “cease for a while to be upright citizens” and attend to what is “beyond simple moral categorizing” in writing or reading (151). Rather than condemning Roth’s adulterous businessman Epstein, they derive pleasure and value from experiencing and coming to understand something of his moral condition. “This expansion of moral consciousness,” Roth contends, “this exploration of moral fantasy, is of considerable value to a man and to society” (151). He is making a moral argument for a kind of realism. It all but goes without saying for him that an fiction writer’s moral fantasies are valuable to the extent that they imagine real possibilities as real people would experience them. The basic question answered by worthy fiction is, “What do people think?” (156). A serious writer’s basic responsibility is to answer it truthfully.

That serious writer must also avoid considering the question, “What will people think?” (156). Roth rejects out of hand any objection that his characters are not “representative” Jews or that he fails to give “a balanced portrayal of Jews as we know them” (154-56). The demands of representative characterization and balanced portrayal divert a writer’s attention from people to categories, change his activity from presentation to judgment, and turn what might have been morally valuable fiction into moralizing. “Epstein,” Roth writes, “is called ‘Epstein’ because Epstein, not the Jews, is the subject" (155). If, "out of bigotry, ignorance, malice, or even innocence," anti-Semites feel their hatred stoked or see their prejudices confirmed by one of his stories, he cannot be held accountable for their misreading (162-63). His work may be susceptible to anti-Semitic misreading, but that does not make him an anti-Semite or a self-hating Jew. Serious writers write for serious readers. To argue that they should do otherwise in writing about Jewish life in order to help improve the public image of Jews or prevent danger posed by bigoted readers is to misunderstand their vocation, to massively overstate the potential impact of a work of literature and, in most instances, to rationalize discomfort with art one does not understand. To invoke the Holocaust in service of such an argument is to make "an insult to the dead" (165).

The terms and tone of Roth's defence of fiction recall Trilling, particularly his seminal 1948 essay "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in which he argues for the value of "the free play of the [novelist's] moral imagination" to individual readers and to society (222). For Trilling, the novel "is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of a man's soul" (212). By "manners," he means the unarticulated intentions and assumptions that underlie mores, beliefs, values, and the like at a particular position and moment in a given society and its history. What he finds valuable in the novel is, then, a kind of "moral fantasy" that imagines in full particularity cases of the sorts of things about which social generalizations are often made. This is Roth's position, more or less.[2]

Though it seems likely Roth drew on Trilling's criticism in working out how to defend *Goodbye, Columbus*, I can find nothing to confirm that he did. It does, however, seem fair to say that his thinking about fiction is of the same moment. He has frequently cited the magazine with which Trilling is most closely associated, the *Partisan Review*, as a formative influence.[3] Along with some ideas about fiction, he seems to have taken from it, and, more broadly, from the group that included nearly all of its most notable contributors, the New York Intellectuals, a certain seriousness and sense of vocation. He writes in a 1973 self-interview:

> In my twenties, I imagined fiction to be something like a religious calling, and literature a kind of sacrament, a sense of things I have had reason to modify since. Such elevated notions aren't (or weren't, back then) that uncommon in vain young writers; that dovetailed nicely in my case with a penchant for ethical striving that I had absorbed as a Jewish child, and with the salvationist literary ethos in which I had been introduced to high art in the fifties. ("On *The Great American Novel*" 79-80)

Probably more than any of his theorizing does, this attitude characterizes his early approach to writing fiction.

It seems also to underlie his disappointment with what he takes to be the inability of American fiction writers, himself included, to write well about public life in the heyday of such unbelievable figures as Richard Nixon and Charles Van Doren. This is the subject of "Writing American Fiction." The American scene, as he sees it, has grown so bizarre and chaotic as to seem alien to sensible obervers. "The fixes, the scandals, the insanity, the idiocy, the piety, the lies, the noise"—like Edmund Wilson, when he reads the news, he does not feel he belongs to the country being described (121). "What is particularly tough about the times," he argues, "is writing about them, as a serious novelist or storyteller" (124). If serious writing must be realistic, how to write about what seems unreal? The difficulty is how to "make *credible* much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's meagre imagination" (120).

Roth does a survey of contemporary American literature and finds that the only writers taking public life as their subject are the hacks writing best-sellers and Broadway plays, who posit easy solutions to intractable problems as a way of making happy endings. Better writers are doing other things. Norman Mailer has "become an actor in the cultural drama" and all but stopped writing imaginatively about it (124-25). The beat poets refuse to take matters seriously. J.D. Salinger and Ralph Ellison turn away from the wider world, having their heroes withdraw from society.

Bernard Malamud's stories and novels take place in an imaginary world, as does Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*. Even when Bellow sets his fiction in the real world, his subject is not the world but the self. This must be because the self, unlike the world in its present state, is something he can be sure is real and that he knows.

Although in it Roth only discusses other writers' work, the essay is implicitly an apology for his own inability, or failure, to write fiction about public life. (He tries to do it at a couple of points in *Goodbye, Columbus*—the scenes between Neil Klugman and the Gauguin-loving African-American boy in the title novella, for example, and the final-page turn to make the baseball story "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song He Sings" a parable about McCarthyism—but not very often or, it seems fair to say, very well.) Though he attends carefully to the social contexts of his stories, he does almost all of his moral fantasizing on a private scale. He is of the critical moment and (accordingly, it seems) apart from the mass-cultural one. However, his sense of vocation as an artist has an evangelical bent. He really regrets his inability to imagine the country he reads about in the newspaper. Even as he maintains it, he feels contstrained by the narrow focus on private life that Trilling and much of the *Partisan Review* crowd call for.

Roth is also more conservative about style than they are. The most surprising part of "Writing American Fiction" for readers who know Roth mainly as the freewheeling, mischievous writer he would later become is a digression in which he harshly (some would say priggishly) criticizes writers such as Bellow, Herbert Gold, and Grace Paley for favouring a "bouncy" style that gives the sense they are having fun writing. For Roth in 1960, it is no time for serious writers to be taking pleasure in style:

> If the world is as crooked and unreal as it feels to me it is becoming, day by day; if one feels less and less power in the face of this unreality; if the inevitable end is destruction, if not of all life, then of much that is valuable and civilized in life—then why in God's name is the writer pleased? (131)

But for a few moments, such as Leo Patimkin's drunken speech to Neil in "Goodbye Columbus," the prose of Roth's pre-*Portnoy* fiction does not bounce. He gives his American English Jewish-immigrant inflections, as Bellow does, but is much more staid in doing so. Mostly it comes out in dialogue, which is contained by his decorous narration.

Today's reader of "Writing American Fiction" may be tempted to write in its margins, "You feel that way about 1960, wait till you see 1969," and, more to our purpose, "You feel that way about *Henderson the Rain King*, wait till you read *Portnoy's Complaint*—till you write it."[4] The glory of that novel is the pleasure it takes in, and generates from, the author's rollicking style playing on the thoroughly contemporary incivility, estrangement, perversion, and madness of the narrator.[5] A receptive reader basks in Roth's delight in making Alex Portnoy, an epitome, a cartoon, of Jewish-male generational neurosis, sing his grievance:

> That is the real struggle: to be *bad*—and to enjoy it! That is what makes men of us boys, Mother. But what my conscience, so-called, has done to my sexuality, my spontaneity, my courage! [...] Why must the least deviation from respectable conventions cause me such inner hell? When I hate those fucking conventions! When I know *better* than the taboos! Doctor, my doctor, what do you say, LET'S PUT THE ID BACK IN YID! Liberate this nice Jewish boy's libido, will you please? Raise the prices if you have to—I'll pay anything! Only enough cowering in the face of the deep dark pleasures. (139-40)

Roth's performance thrives on Portnoy's degeneracy. There is something libidinal about the novel's tremendous energy. Roth gets *excited* aesthetically. He takes his hero's indecent longings and unimaginable transgressions as occasions for stylistic bravura. The novel's most notorious passage is a tour de force:

> I believe that I have already confessed to the piece of liver that I bought in a butcher shop and banged behind a billboard on the way to a bar mitzvah lesson. Well, I wish to make a clean breast of it, Your Holiness. That—she—it—wasn't my first piece. My first piece I had in the privacy of my own home, rolled round my cock in the bathroom at three-thirty—and then had again on the end of a fork at five-thirty, along with the other members of that poor innocent family of mine.

> So. Now you know the worst thing I have ever done. I fucked my own family's dinner. (150)

Even Portnoy's farcical failed attempt at raping an Israeli soldier, his one monstrous act among so many merely deviant ones, makes for a troublingly winning comic set piece. The high/low point comes when he fantasizes about giving her the venereal disease he thinks he might have:

> *You* are on the defensive now, Naomi—explaining your vaginal discharge to the entire kibbutz! What I wouldn't give to be at that meeting when you get arraigned for the charge of contaminating the pride and future of Zion! You think they got worked up over those watches! Wait'll they get a whiff of this! Then perhaps you'll come to have the proper awe for us fallen psychoneurotic Jewish men! [...] Make ready, Naomi, I am about to poison your organs of reproduction! I am about to change the future of the race! (302-03)

Far removed from his old piousness about what subjects a novelist ought and ought not to enjoy writing about, Roth takes special pleasure in especially inappropriate comic invention.[6]

"Why in God's name is the writer pleased?" Most likely, because he is writing so well. Roth contends in his memoir *The Facts* (1988): "[*Portnoy*] was a book that had rather less to do with 'freeing' me from my Jewishness or from my family (the purpose divined by many [...]) than with liberating me from an apprentice's literary models" (156-57). This is a case in which it is unusually apt to say that a writer has found his voice. In giving his talent over completely to the purposes of Portnoy's monologue and revelling in the reckless, transgressive, at times even perverted imagining the combination of character and speaking situation calls for, Roth seems to discover the qualities that will characterize his best work.

These qualities coalesce in a characteristic voice. Ross Posnock gives a good description of it in the introduction to *Philip Roth's Rude Truth*, reflecting on a speech by an unnamed minor character in *The Counterlife*:

> Reading this, we know where we are: the outrage, wit, excess, cadence, and above all the voice—the careening, over-the-top verbal intoxication that takes on a lyric

> life of its own, one of near giddy pleasure in its enraged vulgar onslaught; we are in a Philip Roth novel. (2)

Posnock, whose leitmotiv in writing about Roth is immaturity, emphasizes the rudeness of the characteristic Roth voice, its unrestrained intensity and relish of transgression. One point to add is that it is raised in opposition. The speaker's rhetoric is generally overt and adversarial: he (or she, but much more often he) is trying, if not to win an argument, then to assert himself *against* someone. In *Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives*, Debra Shostak makes the case that Roth's method is "perhaps best described as dialogical" (3), giving a survey of his career through *The Dying Animal* (2001) that treats the opposition of voices as the defining feature of most of his books and of his life's work. As well as being an important means of working through his subject matter, stage-managed diegetic contention seems to galvanize his style, much as his extradiegetic contention with norms of propriety and rectitude does.

And it seems also—I'm getting ahead of myself here—to be the key to his working out how to become, in *The Counterlife*, at once the exquisitely wild writer of Portnoy's monologue and the moral writer he first set out to be.[7]

CHAPTER ONE

A Contained Explosion

Roth tells Hermione Lee in his *Paris Review* interview:

> Portnoy wasn't a character for me, he was an explosion, and I wasn't finished exploding after *Portnoy's Complaint*. [...] I looked in the arsenal and found another dynamite stick, and I thought, 'Light the fuse and see what happens.' I was trying to blow up more of myself. This phenomenon is known to students of literature survey courses as the writer changing his style. (285)

Certainly, the change in his writing that takes him from decorous restraint to satyric wildness is explosive in its having produced, in a great burst, an unignorable disruption that may be awesome or awful but is seldom reckoned anything less. Whether that explosive change obliterated the writer he had been before, as he suggests it did, is less certain. I propose that in some important respects he keeps to his old ethics of fiction in *Portnoy*—particularly in how he frames Portnoy's monologue and maps Portnoy's trip to Israel. The monologue, with all its reckless disregard for the imperatives of serious realism, is always removed from the novel's reality by two or three orders of meaning. Diegetically, Portnoy's speaking situation and the state of mind that produces his monologue are what's real. The things says indicate that reality, but, constituting as they do the substance of a Freudian case study, inside a Jewish joke, sometimes in the form of a dream sequence, they do not denote anything the novel credits as being real. His verbal performance is much more the focus of the novel than the presentation of his moral and psychological condition is, but Roth frames that performance in such a way that its content is removed from the realm of moral fiction as he seems still to understand it. He is especially careful to do so when matters of public conscience are, or might be, at issue. When he has Portnoy visit Israel, he makes sure to keep him far away from any concentration of Palestinians, effectively evading the Israeli-Palestinian question. Through all of this, he manages to suspend his responsibility to write morally, without abrogating that responsibility, and go on a rampage with Portnoy.[1]

Some of Roth's best readers would disagree. Lee argues that "*Portnoy's Complaint* succeeds [...] because the 'complaint' takes its life throughout from the autonomous, odd, insistent realities of 'le vrai'"; because it gets beyond Portnoy's solipsism and "com[es] to terms with the outside world" (*Philip Roth* 80). Her evidence is the quality of the descriptions of things and observations about people in Portnoy's monologue, "solid occasions [that] show a relish for 'the nature of things as they are'" (80). Posnock describes *Portnoy* as the novel with which, "having established in the early sixties his 'maturity credentials' [...] [Roth] start[s] burnishing his immaturity credentials" (12). He reads it normatively, as a statement of militant immaturity—of opposition to "bourgeois restraint" and determination to win "vitality from socializing from socializing forces bent on exacting obedience, restraint, repression" (xi). On this reading, Portnoy's monologue is an affront to the impulses and orthodoxies that once compelled him to be a serious, morally upstanding realist. Steven Milowitz takes the opposite tack, reading it as coded moral fiction of an especially serious kind. He contends: "Portnoy's complaint is bound up with the six million; it is not a complaint born only of a particular childhood in a particular home but born of a particular history" (152). For Milowitz, the Holocaust is the "central obsessional issue" of all of Roth's works and the subtext to Portnoy's ostensibly self-obsessed ranting (ix, 152).

It seems to me that Hillel Halkin, whose short essay "How to Read Philip Roth" is regrettably the only Roth criticism he has published, strikes closer to the mark in saying that in *Portnoy*, Roth "invents an outrageous 'autobiography' for himself whose outward scurrilousness is the fictional correlative of the states of soul he wishes to portray" (44). This is more of a biographical reading than seems necessary or worthwhile—though, fair enough, Roth does not seem to venture too far from his own subjectivity and experience in inventing Portnoy—but the basic point rings true. Though the acuity of Portnoy's perceptions is striking, the vividness of the scenes he describes does not bear on their relation to reality in the novel. Lee gives no basis for equating the vivid or the "solid" with the real, nor does she account for the total control Portnoy exerts over his world as an unreliable narrator. What Shostak aptly calls the novel's "claustrophobic enclosure within [Portnoy's] hysterical (and hysterically funny) voice" (189) keeps external reality, however insistent, at bay. What's more, Lee overlooks one of the novel's main comic conceits: that, far from being autonomous, the outside world Portnoy claims to encounter appears to be determined by his psychology. That he is aware of this is one of the novel's better sustained jokes. Towards the end of his monologue, he addresses his analyst, Dr. Spielvogel:

> Dreams? If only they had been! [...] The coincidences of dreams, the symbols, the terrifyingly laughable situations, the oddly ominous banalities, the accidents and humiliations, the bizarrely appropriate strokes of luck or misfortune that other people experience with their eyes shut, I get with mine open! [...] Doctor, maybe other patients dream—with me, *everything happens*. I have a life *without* latent content. (290-91)

He then proceeds to tell Spielvogel how at a moment of psychological and spiritual crisis, true to his childhood fancy that his mother was a shapeshifter who followed him in different forms and right in line with his endlessly frustrated Oedipal ambitions and hopeless longing to make himself whole by proving himself as a Jewish man, he met a sexually irresistible Israeli soldier who was the spitting image of his mother's high school yearbook photo; resolved to marry her; being spurned, tried to rape her; was thwarted in doing so by an inability to get an erection in the Holy Land; and was all but castrated by her when she got the upper hand on him.

Most of all, Lee fails to take the framing of Portnoy's monologue into account. The epigraph to the novel establishes that its real setting is a psychoanalyst's office and that its reader is not being spoken to directly, but allowed to listen to a patient speaking with his analyst. Portnoy's sporadic appeals to Spielvogel and Spielvogel's delivery of the novel's "punch line" remind the reader of this. The novel presents a private economy of meaning. Being a sort of case study in Freudian analysis, it sets a diegetic context for interpretation in which the speaker's statements are to be understood as indications of hidden meanings, all having to do with the contents and working of his mind. That context matches the comic conceit of those meanings not being very well hidden. The reader cannot be expected to interpret Portnoy's monologue purely in Freudian terms, as Spielvogel would,[2] however the speaking situation and the speech's unusual appositeness to it combine to strongly suggest some kind of interpretation in terms of Portnoy's state of mind. The novel allows other interpretations but sets them up as being counter-intentional. A reader who is alert to its rhetoric should not be able to understand Portnoy to be "coming to terms with the outside world" in his monologue—should not be able to read the monologue as in any way being about a real world outside Portnoy's consciousness—without being aware that he is imposing an interpretation on the text.[3] (That is not to say the text might not reward its reader for making such an imposition.)

The novel's generic frame overlaps its rhetorical one. Towards the end of the second chapter, Portnoy guesses the genre of the book he is in: "Doctor Spielvogel, this is my life, my only life, and I'm living it in the middle of a Jewish joke!" (39) The novel-as-joke even ends with a proper punch line. Part of the wit of the punch line is that is surprises the reader by revealing the novel's structure and designating its genre at the last possible moment, prompting him to reconsider and adjust his reading of the whole text. If it is one long Jewish joke, then as a matter of generic convention it is not to be taken literally. How jokes mean, if they even mean anything, is a vexed question, but it seems safe to say they are never straightforwardly substantive.

The prominence of Freudian psychology in the novel, as a structuring principle and a preoccupation, gives a strong direction to the reader as to how he should interpret *Portnoy* as a joke. For Freud, a joke, like an analysand's monologue, is a coded expression of its teller's psychology.[4] Freud takes the sort of humour that characterizes *Portnoy*, which treats painful experience as an occasion for joking, to be defiantly solipsistic. "What is fine about [it]," he writes, "is the triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability" ("Humour" 117). Its guiding impulse is a refusal to come to terms with any reality that stands in the way of the joker's self-assertion. Read in the spirit of Freud as the set-up of a joke, Portnoy's monologue is all about him and to hell with the world. A reader who is mindful of the novel's genre and its Freudian focus, and who knows Freud's thinking on jokes, may understand the monologue as Lee does (and might gain something from doing so) but should be aware he is declining to take a direction from the novel.

None of this is to say Portnoy's monologue has nothing to do with real life. With it, Roth seems to be celebrating a kind of immaturity that flouts orthodoxy and is an antidote to repression, just as Posnock argues he is. The monologue is distinct and separable from the novel's frame for it. Whatever purpose the novel puts it to, it also speaks for itself. Posnock's account of what it says—more precisely, of what it means as a performance—gets something important about it right, which is finally the same as getting something important about the novel right.

My point is that the rhetoric of the novel removes the substance of the monologue from the novel's diegetic reality, which is the order of meaning at which Roth feels a responsibility to be true to life. *Portnoy* is, at base, a realist novel. Speilvogel's office is the real world. In writing about that world, Roth does the duty he defines for himself by presenting Portnoy's moral condition, as indicated by the monologue he performs in Portnoy's voice. He does not invest nearly as much energy in that presentation as he does in the performance for which it is a pretext and the novel's aesthetic success depends far more on the quality of the performance than it does on that of the presentation. However, because of his deft framing, by his standards the novel's success or failure as moral fiction depends solely on the probity of the presentation. The monologue's outward scurrilousness does not bear on the judgment. Roth does his duty, freeing himself to have his fun. [5]

This is not a matter of creating plausible deniability or keeping up appearances. Roth seems at this point in his career to feel a need to uphold his ethics of fiction, more or less as he formulated it in defending *Goodbye, Columbus*, even as his exploding talent threatens to propel him towards amoral aestheticism or worse. He still stands by "Writing About Jews": in an interview from shortly after *Portnoy* was published, he deflects a question from George Plimpton by referring him to it ("On *Portnoy's Complaint*" 20). The priggishness about style that sours "Writing American Fiction" is far gone, but for Roth, probity still must come before pleasure in writing. He appears not to be interested in being any kind of writer other than a moral one, as a story he tells in a 1974 essay on the genesis of *Portnoy* illustrates. Around 1966, he had written a version of what became the novel's second chapter, the famous masturbation chapter, "Whacking Off." It was, he claims, his breakthrough to the satryric, voice-driven approach to writing that would distinguish *Portnoy* and become his signature. But although it delighted him and he thought it was "worth saving," he considered it "unpublishable"—he was, in other words, willing to consign to his drawer one of the great comic set pieces in American literature, a work from which a vital new voice that was wholly his own seemed to emerge, as a matter of principle—until it occurred to him to recast the piece as a psychoanalytic monologue as "a means of legitimizing" it ("How Did You Come To Write That Book, Anyway?" 36-37). Having made that small but crucial change, he went on to publish it in the *Partisan Review* and set to work writing *Portnoy*. In a 2006 interview on the occasion of *Portnoy*'s publication in the Library of America series, he tells Terry Gross:

> In talking to the invisible analyst, or at least using that as the conceit, I had opened up my verbal floodgates. The psychoanalytic session gave me permission to speak freely of sex. [...] The freedom came not from being a wild man. I was free because I had found the vessel into which to put this stuff. That is, the vessel was the psychoanalytic session. There was my freedom.

His discovery of a suitable framework for reckless play may have been as important as his discovery of a talent for it was in making *Portnoy* happen.

Of course, authors' intentions for a work, whether they declare them or make them evident in the text, are not authoritative. Declared intentions often make for extremely useful criticism and textual intentions, being part of the text, ought to bear on good readings, but both may be discounted productively. A case could be made that reading Portnoy's monologue as a substantive critique of the society, or just the Jewish milieu, that produced it, against Roth's claims otherwise and the text's counterindications, is in the spirit of the novel—that it is a way of joining in Portnoy's mischief and taking his side against the (arguably repressive or less interesting) actual or implied author.

Milowitz's reading is more in line with authorial intentions yet still seems to be a reading-in. He treats Portnoy's monologue as a presentation of his state of mind but argues that that state of mind is largely determined by the experience of being a Jew after the Holocaust and focuses on what its presentation says about that experience, roundaboutly interpreting the novel as religious-historical commentary. It is an ingenious reading but it is necessarily speculative. The text contains no solid evidence that Portnoy is "fascinated with [himself] because [he] is tormented by the Holocaust" (152). (Milowitz produces one quotation, which must be read very tenuously to count as support for that claim.)

Though it may give a basis for worthwhile counterintentional readings like Milowitz's, the novel, as realist moral fantasy, seems generally to resist even speculative reading in terms of historical, religious, or political matters. It is decidedly, even determinedly, a private fiction. Not only does Roth not take up the challenge he set in “Writing American Fiction,” but he seems at pains not even to give the impression he may be saying something about public life. This is most evident when he has Portnoy visit Israel—a site of intense historical, religious, and political controversy if ever there was one.

The Israel chapter of *Portnoy*, “In Exile,” is even farther removed from diegetic reality than the rest of the novel is. Portnoy, whose ordinary waking life is like a dream out of a psychoanalysis textbook, describes his pilgrimage as being “more dreamy than real ” (284). His experience has “the air of the preposterous,” is “incredible and strange” (285). The “solid,” real-seeming qualities Lee identifies in the novel’s descriptive prose—its precision, “the hardness of [its] outlines” (80)—give way to oneric haziness. The running joke of much of the chapter is Portnoy’s amazement at being in a Jewish country: a country in which, it follows, everything must be Jewish. His plane touches down on “a Jewish airstrip” (285). He sees “Jewish graffiti” on the walls (286). Even “the *flag* is Jewish” (286). The joke requires him to describe all his surroundings with the same abstract term, leaving little room for concrete detail. This makes the description vague and emphasizes the subjectivity of Portnoy’s impressions. The part of the chapter in which this joke is played out, and in which the setting for the chapter is established, even looks hazy. On the cue, “My dream begins as soon as I disembark,” the text springs into italics and mostly stays italicized for five pages. The effect is to suggest a dream sequence in an old Hollywood movie, or a mirage:

> *Up and down the beach, as far as I can see, Jews* [...] *I stretch out on the beach, I close my eyes. Overhead I hear an engine: no fear, a Jewish plane. Under me the sand is warm: Jewish sand. I buy a Jewish ice cream from a Jewish vendor. “Isn’t that something?” I say to myself. “A Jewish country!” But the idea is more easily expressed than understood; I cannot really grasp hold of it. Alex in Wonderland.* (285, 289)

Being a dream inside a psychoanalytic monologue inside a Jewish joke, Portnoy's adventure in the homeland is all about Portnoy, *not* about Israel. This conclusion is so overdetermined that the reader gets a sense of the author straining to make it perfectly clear.

There are matters of public conscience on which it may be necessary to take a position in writing realistically about Israel, and Roth, whose ethics of fiction would require him to get to the truth of those matters, seems determined not to assume any such burden, or to give the appearance of doing so, in a novel that is mainly a comic extravaganza of obscenity and personal grievance. He is writing in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. Israel remains under threat and its claims to legitimacy as a state and sovereignty over its newly won territory are widely disputed. The displacement and disenfranchisement of Palestinian Arabs that started with Israel's establishment in what had been Palestine has been exacerbated by Israeli expansion into areas with predominantly Arab populations. The moral claims of the Palestinians have to be weighed against those of a Jewish population that is committed to a grand vision of religious-historical recovery and democratic self-determination, vastly outnumbered in the region, and little more than a decade removed from the Holocaust. And so on—the situation then being much as it is now. For the most part, Roth avoids addressing those realities, or seeming to, by making Portnoy's Israeli travelogue as unreal and narcissistic as possible.

Even so, the comic conceit of an American Jew who has only known Jewishness as otherness feeling alien in a country where everyone and everything is Jewish, however deftly it is framed as the reverie of an unreliable narrator unburdening himself to an analyst who is ready with a punch line, still invites the question: you really think someone could go to Israel, even *that* guy, and see nothing but Jews uncomplicatedly enjoying their new country? To which a perfectly receptive reader might respond: Portnoy is describing his dream of Israel and, anyway, he is not the person to give an objective account of life there, especially not in the condition he's in when he arrives. But that answer seems unlikely to satisfy someone who would raise the question. To that reader, who is not misreading the text or reading it counter-intentionally, so much as he is being reserved or skeptical his reading, Roth provides a more straightforward answer. He has Portnoy only go places he is unlikely to see Palestinians. Portnoy does visit Jerusalem—it would be implausible for him not to—but he only mentions having been there in passing; only describes visiting the Hebrew University and its hospital, thoroughly Jewish institutions well on the west side of the city; and notes that he was buffered by a tour group of "a hundred ladies from the Detroit Hadassah" when he went (285). Roth keeps him away from East Jerusalem and the Old City, foregoing the comic possibilities of having him visit (to name only the two sites that suggest the most obvious jokes) the Wailing Wall or King David's tomb. The rest of Portnoy's itinerary puts him at a distance from concentrations of Palestinians, as well as from disputed territories. He skirts the Golan Heights, never coming closer than the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He keeps well to the north and the east of the Gaza Strip. The closest he comes to the West Bank, Jerusalem notwithstanding, is 'Ein Gedi, a remote oasis whose only inhabitants are members of the kibbutz there. It is nowhere near a Palestinian population centre.

Roth is able to treat Israel purely as a set of opportunities for comic invention, and do it in good conscience, by removing Portnoy, the vehicle for his invention, from Israeli reality. He does the same thing with nearly every subject Portnoy takes up when he is not overtly talking about himself. Understanding himself to be duty-bound to write truthfully, with probity about real life and being moved to turn his writing over to Portnoy's unreliable and reckless voice, Roth does all he can to clear realities out of Portnoy's way before setting him loose. Roth is still a moral writer, on roughly the terms he set for himself when he was a serious young realist, but writing morally is for him now more a matter of minimizing the moral dimension of his fiction than doing anything else. Where once he had been working at “the expansion of moral consciousness,” an enterprise “of considerable value to a man and to society” (“Writing About Jews” 151), he is effectively doing damage control.

CHAPTER TWO

A Frank Reappraisal

Roth writes in the author's note to *Reading Myself and Others*, his 1975 collection of essays and interviews:

> I seem (from the evidence here) to have felt called upon both to assert a literary position and to defend my moral flank the instant after I had managed to take my first steps; of late I have tried to gain some perspective on what I've been reading and writing since.
>
> Together these pieces reveal to me a continuing preoccupation with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world [...] the worlds that I feel myself shuttling between every day [...] (xi)

As we have seen, he rushed to the defence of his early stories with an ethics of fiction that values imaginative writing for its fidelity to the unwritten world. In doing this, he staked out a literary position that kept his moral flank well guarded but proved awkward when his talent developed in an unexpected way. Even so, he maintained that position, making adjustments here and there, well into his career. In collecting his statements about his work in *Reading Myself*, he seemed to put a period on all that and to ready himself to give a fresh account of his vocation as a fiction writer and the value of his fiction. Four years later, he did so with *The Ghost Writer*, a novel in which he eschews the moral responsibility he assigned himself as a young man and declares a change in allegiance from the unwritten to the written world, supplanting "Writing About Jews" with a declaration of aestheticism in the form of a pointedly reckless fiction in which he appropriates the voice, and imagines away the martyrdom, of Anne Frank.

The novel is forthright in setting expectations for its reader. Its first sentence runs:

> It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago—I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a

> *Bildungsroman* hero before me, already contemplating my own massive *Bildungsroman*—when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man. (3)

It is, then, the *Bildungsroman* of a middle-aged man writing with affectionate irony about his younger, unfinished self. Specifically, it is a *Küntslerroman*. That it is so much smaller than the *Bildungsroman* the hero dreams of writing is an initial clue that in coming to maturity as an artist, his intentions for his art are to change drastically.[1] The expectation this will be so is bolstered, and the direction the change will take suggested, by the narrator's making a gentle running joke of "how serious a literary fellow [he] was—and, hand in hand with that, how young" (8). Presumably, the hero's literary education is to bring him around to the narrator's aesthetic by relieving him of a certain kind of seriousness about his vocation. As he is a young literary fellow of the nineteen-fifties, the reader can guess what aesthetic commitments that seriousness is likely to involve.

There is every indication that in presenting this education, Roth means to make a statement about his own art. Whereas *Portnoy* is framed so as to discourage its reader from identifying author with narrator, *The Ghost Writer* fosters such identification. Roth's narrator/hero, Nathan Zuckerman, is evidently an alter ego. Nathan's early life and career correspond closely with Roth's. (Celebrated writer and reluctant celebrity that he was by 1979, Roth could count on most of his readers knowing this.) The criticisms made of Nathan's story "Higher Education" by his father and his father's "moral mentor " Judge Wapter are the same ones Roth answers defending his first stories in "Writing About Jews"—the ones against which he defined himself as a young writer. The novel is framed as a sort of retake of that defining moment. Being such, it gives him an opportunity to revise and extend, or renounce and replace, his initial statement of artistic principles.

The novel's first two chapters set out the moral and aesthetic questions at issue, making them the basis of a problem of patrimony for its hero. Nathan goes to see "The Maestro" of the first chapter's title, E. I. Lonoff, "to submit [him]self for candidacy as nothing less than [his] spiritual son" (9). He wants to devote his life to writing, and the father who raised him disapproves of the writer he is starting to become, so he is looking for a literary father with whom to replace him: a model, a mentor, someone whose approval would sanction his work. Lonoff, a reclusive, Bernard-Malamud-like short story writer, appears to him to be the leading candidate. Felix Abravanel, an author of big novels with a larger-than-life public persona, who might be described as being a cross between Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer, is the other major possibility, though Nathan doubts he has much interest in young *male* admirers. It seems clear that in working out what kind of fiction he will write and how he will live as a writer, Nathan will settle somewhere between the extreme positions Lonoff and Abravanel occupy.

Where Nathan seems ready to follow Lonoff closely is in the priority he gives to art. Lonoff devotes himself completely to writing and reading. Literature seems to be the only thing that can sustain his interest. As little as a day off from his routine of "turning sentences around" causes him to go "frantic with boredom and a sense of waste" (18). He even scoffs at the possibility of reading for enjoyment. Only "a book of real depth" will do for him, and he must spend three hours a night with it, on consecutive nights, reading closely and taking notes, or else he is bound to worry he has "wrong[ed] a serious author" (67). He does not like to leave the house, except to go teach literature. His singlemindedness seems to enable him to write great books—and makes him a maddening husband. It is what works for him as a writer and writing is what matters. When Nathan tells him he hopes to live as he does, Lonoff advises against it on the grounds that "an unruly personal life will probably better serve a writer like [him] than walking in the woods and startling the deer" (33). Never mind the near certainty that asceticism would, in the unlikely event he could manage it, make Nathan miserable and unbearable to live with. It would be bad for his art. In giving Nathan advice about the writing life, as in determining how he himself will live, Lonoff takes for granted that a writer's overriding responsibility is to do what best serves his talent, whatever the consequences may be for the unwritten world.

Nathan spends most of the novel's second chapter, "Nathan Dedalus," brooding over warnings and accusations about the consequences publishing "Higher Education" may have for his family and community. (Lonoff has gone upstairs to do his reading, leaving Nathan to spend the night in his study, which doubles as a guest bedroom.) Nathan's father, Victor "Doc" Zuckerman,[2] has urged him not to publish the story, which is based on an old dispute in the family over the terms of a bequest, because he thinks it reflects badly on Jews in general and the Zuckermans of Newark in particular. He finds it "disgusting," a distortion of the facts that makes a big deal of a rare unseemly incident in the family's history and leaves out everything admirable about the people involved (86). For his part, Nathan takes it to be an honest and largely sympathetic portrayal of a Jewish family much like his own. In "Writing About Jews," Roth mentions that many of the Jews who criticized his first stories were older people who addressed him as though he were "an erring child" and they, "loving but misunderstood parent[s]" (150). Here, he has Doc say to Nathan:

> It's not your fault that you don't know what Gentiles think when they read something like this. But I can tell you. They don't think about how it's a great work of art. They don't know about art. Maybe I don't know about art myself. Maybe none of our family does, not the way that you do. But that's my point. People don't read art—they read about *people.* And judge them as such. [...]
>
> Nathan, your story, as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing and one thing only. [...] It is about kikes. Kikes and their love of money. (91-92, 94)

His objection to how he and other family members are fictionalized notwithstanding, Doc's problems with "Higher Education" are the same ones Roth's Jewish critics had with "Defender of the Faith" and "Epstein": that it is low-minded, unrepresentative of Jewish life, and sure to confirm anti-Semites' ugliest prejudices.

Doc shows the story to Judge Leopold Wapter, a “pillar” of Newark’s Jewish community, and the Judge sends Nathan a letter in which he takes a harder line than Doc does. The letter is pompous, ill-informed, and hectoring—so much so that one might accuse Roth of souring the comedy of the scene and undermining its satire by being flagrantly unfair to the critics he is caricaturing. Wapter bloviates about Nathan’s promise and “the artist[’s] responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice,” then asks him to answer a questionnaire that begins, “If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?” and ends, “Can you honestly say that there is anything in your short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels?” (100-04) In between, he questions Nathan’s Jewishness, asks him why he “think[s] that the cheap is more valid than the noble and the slimy is more truthful than the sublime,” and implies that he writes stories only to make money (103). Wapter is not one of Roth’s admonishing parents. He is more of the party of the “man of prominence in the world of Jewish affairs” who after reading *Goodbye Columbus* wrote to the Anti-Defamation League: “What is being done to silence this man? Medieval Jews would have known what to do” (“Writing About Jews” 160). Reading “Higher Education,” he feels disgusted and betrayed, and above all, outraged at the affront he sees being made to the six million. He suggests that Nathan could learn something about how a young person ought to write about the Jewish experience by going to see *The Diary of Anne Frank* on Broadway.

A few pages from the end of “Nathan Dedalus,” Roth seems effectively to be dramatizing “Writing About Jews.” Between Doc’s pleading and Wapter’s letter, the charges to which that essay is a rebuttal have been laid in full against his alter ego, and the question underlying all of them, whether it is acceptable to write about unexemplary Jews after Auschwitz, has been made plain. Nathan has spent the day being taught to live with a minimum of concern for anything other than his art, but he is up late fretting over the consequences his writing may have out in the real world, where people read about *people*. He stands by his story—the vexing question is how to defend it. As he starts, then discards unfinished, letter after letter to his father, he seems to be groping towards an ethics of fiction like the one Roth adopts in his situation, in "Writing About Jews." He is trying to find a way to convince his father that in writing "Higher Education" he "was upholding the responsibilities placed on [him] by his [Doc's] hero, the judge" (109). Writing fiction, his "exalted, transcendent calling," must be good for his fellow man and his society, but he has only an inchoate idea of how that is so (5). It seems to involve fidelity to real life. His on-the-spot response to his father's criticism of "Higher Education" had been to make much of his having stayed true to the facts of the incident on which it is based—"everybody was" greedy, he insisted; Sidney, the roguish cousin who was greediest of all "actually existed [...] and no better than [he] depicted him" (86, 93)—and now, sitting at Lonoff's desk, he is looking for the words to explain that, more than being factual, the story is true. Whenever he gets as far as relaying Lonoff's praise for his writing, that his is "the most compelling voice [Lonoff has] encountered in years" (72), he tears up his draft. Talk of purely aesthetic merit is out of place. He is determined to justify himself as a writer on his father and Wapter's terms, which seems likely to mean making a serious moral case for realism.

Then comes the turn, in the story and the artist's statement Roth uses it to make. Amy Bellette, a former student of Lonoff's now working as a librarian and helping him to organize his papers, a refugee from somewhere in Europe and a writing prodigy, arrives back at the house. Meeting her earlier, Nathan had felt an immediate attraction and resolved to do something about it. No luck: she goes straight upstairs, leaving him to masturbate over what might have been and read a Henry James story. A while later, he hears a voice overhead—a woman crying. He stands on Lonoff's desk, on the volume of Henry James, and listens. The woman is Amy. Lonoff is comforting her. She is pleading with him to leave his wife for her; he won't. He calls her "the great survivor" (118). She calls him "Dad-da" (118). At her request, he takes her in his arms and sings a couple of Jimmy Durante numbers to soothe her. She asks him again to leave his wife, saying he and she "could come out of hiding" and take a villa in Florence together (119). He asks her: "You want a corpse on your conscience? She would be dead in a year." (119) She tells him she does have a corpse on her conscience, her own corpse, and exposes herself to him. She begs him to touch her body, to kiss it. He politely tells her to stop, then leaves her room. Nathan steps down from the desk and falls into bed overcome with frustration "over thinness of [his] imagination and what that promised for the future" (121). He thinks:

> Dad-da, Florence, the great Durante; her babyishness and desire, his mad heroic restraint— Oh, if only I could have imagined the scene I'd overheard! If only I could invent as presumptuously as real life! If one day I could just *approach* the originality and excitement of what actually goes on! (121)

It is not clear whether, ironically, the scene that makes him despair for his future as a professional imaginer is invented by the future self narrating his story or merely remebered by him, but the young Nathan is about to prove himself capable of such invention. His doing so brings him around to an idea of his vocation quite unlike that which the young Roth expounds in "Writing About Jews."

Nathan spends the rest of the night, and the next chapter of the novel, "Femme Fatale," imagining a wildly unlikely backstory to the confrontation he has overheard: that Amy is Anne Frank; that she survived Belsen and took on a new identity after the War, thinking everyone who once knew her had been killed and wanting to forget her past; that after reading one of Lonoff's stories in a magazine, she wrote asking him to bring her to America to be his student, and he accepted; that upon learning her father was alive and had had her diary published, she decided to go on keeping her survival secret, so as not to diminish the *Diary*'s impact on its readers; that years later she broke down at a performance of the Broadway *Anne Frank*, called Lonoff, and told him everything; that he believed she had suffered terribly, but did not believe her story, though he was sure she did; that she had fallen in love with him; and that now they are confidants and play quasi-erotically at being father and daughter, but he refuses to let the flirtation go any farther.

This is irreverence verging on sacrilege. Nathan imagines away Frank's martyrdom and remakes her in his image. His Anne Frank is an ambitious young writer who has to decide between being estranged from her father and compromising her work. She understands that *The Diary of a Young Girl* would be a different book, an inferior one, were it not the last testament of a Holocaust victim. Her death at Belsen, no less a part of the text for being beyond the scope of her narration, frames *The Diary* as a tragedy on a human scale that is a synecdoche of a world-historical enormity.[3] It freights her words with meaning they bear well. She could not reunite with her father without her survival becoming public knowledge. That revelation would give her book a happy ending, diminishing it irreversibly:

> Were [*The Diary*] known to be the work of a living writer, it would never be more than it was: a young teenager's diary of her trying years in hiding during the German occupation of Holland, something boys and girls could read in bed at night along with the adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson. But dead she had something more to offer then amusement for ages 10-15 [...] (145)

So she decides to keep her secret, though "in bed at night [...] she crie[s] and beg[s] forgiveness for the cruelty she [is] practicing on her perfect father" (133).

Nathan has Frank forsake her father for the good of her book—pointedly not for the good it might do. She is pleased, first and foremost, by how well written it is. When she finishes reading it for the first time since she was captured, her first thought is that the Christians she had known in Amsterdam will be impressed: "Who realized she was so gifted? Who realized we had such a writer in our midst?" (135) She reads it again, more critically, marking up the infelicities in its prose but mostly marvelling at its quality. "What deftness," she thinks, "what wit!" (136) It's only after her third time through that she begins to consider how the book will be received when it finds its audience. For some time after that, she focuses on its value as testimony. This gives her ground to make moral justifications for staying away from her father. So long as its author is a martyr, she argues to herself, *The Diary* will be “a book with the force of a masterpiece to make people finally see” (146). But she is “not, after all, the fifteen-year-old who could, while hiding from a holocaust, tell Kitty, *I still believe that people are really good at heart* ” (146). She quickly gives up the idea that her writing will be a force for good in the world. “What would happen when people had finally seen? The only realistic answer was Nothing.” (146) She finds more compelling the idea that “her responsibility [is] to the dead” (147). For her mother and sister and all the six million, she will be an “avenging ghost” (148). By letting herself be counted among the dead, she will “restore in print their status as flesh and blood” (147). She will wield her book like an axe and get the revenge she is seething for, on their behalf. Yet, she comes to ask, what can it mean to do anything on their behalf? “There [is] nothing to give the dead,” she concludes, “they [are] dead” (149). And still she keeps her secret, preserving the “masterpiece” that bears her name at the cost of losing her father a second time and remaining lost to him. Her book is worth more to her, if only as proof of her talent. She is desperate to be loved, as she tells Lonoff, but as a writer far more than as a daughter (153).

The twenty-three-year-old Nathan’s fantasy of Frank’s life after Belsen is a private, vicarious assertion of artistic freedom against moral demands, which prepares him to make such an assertion in public and in his own name. It is, as Posnock puts it, “not simply [a fantasy] of a new start but of violent severance from origin as the spur of creative liberation” (33). With it, Nathan rehearses on a grand scale the stand he is going to take in his family and his community. He has Frank adopt Lonoff as a replacement father as fully as seems possible. She sits on his lap and calls him “Dad-da” because her commitment to his ideal of living for art requires her to be dead to her real father, though he is the person she has always loved most and the only real family she has left. Nathan has her treat her *Diary*, the first and most famous classic of Holocaust testimony, as a work of art that has no value as a moral instrument and owes no duty of fidelity to real life. By not dispelling the false reports of her death, she fictionalizes the book's ending, passively but purposefully, for broadly aesthetic reasons. In doing all of this, she succeeds brilliantly on her terms. *The Diary* captivates its readers, and "of all the Jewish writers, from Franz Kafka to E. I. Lonoff, she [is] the most famous" and beloved (152). As Posnock says, Nathan presents her as "a figure of artistic autonomy" and "of creative power" (34-35).

In inventing and identifying with his Anne Frank, Nathan comes to understand that to free himself to realize his talent, he, too, will have to break decisively with the moral community in which he was raised. Just before he begins making up her story, when he is worrying that he will never be able to "invent as presumptuously as real life," he wonders:

> But if I ever did, what then would they think of me, my father and his judge? How would my elders hold up against that? And if they couldn't, if the blow to their sentiments was finally too wounding, just how well would I hold up against being hated and reviled and disowned? (121)

The next morning, after having performed a feat of supremely presumptuous invention, reimagining an exemplary witness to the Holocaust as a writer every bit as ambitious he is and as impious about the facts and what's good for the Jews as he is tempted to be, and having seen his talent galvanized by the effort, he is ready to face those consequences. Now he is enough Lonoff's son to put his talent first and he understands that it is incompatible with the demands his elders have made on it. He decides that his fiction of Amy as Anne is "the unchallengeable answer to [Judge Wapter's] questionnaire," though, "far from being unchallengeable," it would seem to Wapter "a desecration even more vile than the one [he] had read" (171). Nathan's newly settled idea of good fiction, which has everything to do with the written world, is incommensurable with Wapter's.

Wapter is only interested in the unwritten world. He is a moralist. Nathan has given up on being any kind of moral writer. He will no longer try to justify his work, to the Wapters of the world, or the loving but misunderstood parents, or himself, on anything but aesthetic terms.

Nathan's seriousness and compunction are giving way to a recklessness that better suits his talent. Lonoff has told Nathan that his voice is what sets him apart from his less gifted contemporaries and instructed him to cultivate it. Until "Femme Fatale," the young Nathan's voice is contained by the forty-something Zuckerman's narration. When Nathan irreverently imagines Anne as Amy, the distance between narrator and hero seems to collapse. The hero's voice bursts forth. Nathan, the apprentice, becomes Zuckerman, the real author. This is a carefully framed performance by the older, narrating Zuckerman.[4] In the novel's other three chapters, Zuckerman's narration is easy and ingratiating, with knowing irony that sometimes gets to be a bit cute. It emphasizes his distance from Nathan and sets up a contrast with what is to come. When he makes his narration a conduit for Nathan's emerging voice in "Femme Fatale," focalizing it through Nathan's wild travesty of Anne Frank, it becomes quicker, sharper, more intense. He goes from writing sentences like

> And always at dusk, before we reassembled at the table to observe the Sunday-evening rites—to partake of the sacred delicatessen supper, washed down with sacramental soda pop; to await together the visitation from heaven of Jack Benny, Rochester, and Phil Harris—the 'men,' as my mother called us, went off for their brisk walk to the nearby park. (84)

to writing ones like

> 'For them, for them'—over and over, week after week, 'for them'—until at last she began to wonder if having survived in the achterhuis, if having outlived the death camps, if masquerading here in New England as somebody other than herself did not make something very suspect—and a little mad—of this seething passion to 'come back' as the avenging ghost. (148)

The chapter culminates in a frenzied two-page-long speech by Frank to Lonoff. Making a Jewish saint speak from beyond the grave as an amoral writer driven by rage that feeds on her "towering egotism" (135) and monumental grievance, against all good taste and prevailing orthodoxy, Nathan's talent explodes. As Posnock might say, when we hear Frank tell Lonoff how seeing her diary in print made her want to restore herself through her art, we know where we are; we are in a Philip Roth novel:

> The package came from Amsterdam, I opened it, and there it was: my past, myself, my name, *my face intact*—and all I wanted was revenge. It wasn't for the dead—it had nothing to do with the dead—it had nothing to do with bringing back the dead or scourging the living. It wasn't corpses I was avenging—it was the motherless, fatherless, sisterless, venge-filled, hate-filled, half-flayed seething thing. It was myself. I wanted tears, I wanted their Christian tears to run like Jewish blood, for me. I wanted their pity—in the most pitiless way. And I wanted love, to be loved mercilessly and endlessly, just the way I'd been debased. (153)

With the shift to sustained direct discourse, Nathan fully realizes Roth's characteristic voice—the voice Zuckerman seems to have been holding back in the first two chapters, with their homey narration. The speech is much, much darker than anything in *Portnoy*, and hardly funny, even when Frank is being witty, but the hallmarks are there. Speaking transgressively, seemingly from the id, raging in opposition to a whole world, Frank gives the sense of "careening, over-the-top verbal intoxication" Posnock describes (2). This the decisive moment in Nathan's development as a *Küntslerroman* hero.

Roth uses "Femme Fatale" to redefine himself as an artist. Having returned, as Nathan, to the rhetorical situation of "Writing About Jews," he answers his early critics with pretty much the opposite of an ethics of fiction: a morally irresponsible but aesthetically successful fiction about a writer who achieves aesthetic success by abjuring moral responsibility. In doing so, he designates his discovery of Portnoy's voice as the event that made him as a writer and gives a performance of Portnoyesque verbal bravura that is, quite unlike Portnoy's scrupulously framed monologue, heedless of moral considerations. He has declared his allegiance to the aesthetic and "Femme Fatale" is the novel's aesthetic high point. It admits no need for further justification, though it plays freely with Holocaust testimony, profaning a document widely held to be sacred.

Many are the critics who object to, or see grounds for reasonable objection to, Roth's appropriation of Frank's story and persona. There are grounds for reasonable objection to it. Shostak, who approves of the appropriation, notes that Roth risks appearing "to desecrate the grave, as it were, of a sacrosanct heroine, trivializing her by denying her the death that confirms her tragedy and by placing her in juxtaposition to a rather egocentric phantom of his own imagination" (128). Some critics read "Femme Fatale" that way and are appalled. Joel Shatzky, for one, writes with Wapter-like scorn:

> *The Ghost Writer* is not merely a falsification of the Holocaust: it turns one of its martyrs into a sick Jewish joke. [...] Because Roth and other fiction writers do not feel the obligation to keep to the historical record of the Holocaust as carefully as possible, the very inaccuracies or fantasies they concoct give more ammunition to those who would like to discredit its very existence. (110)[5]

Other critics express milder disapproval of, or skepticism about, what Clifton R. Spargo calls Roth's lack of "compunction about the appropriating reach of his imagination" (88). Still other critics are not bothered by the appropriation in itself but find it to be an artistic dead end. Arguably the most eminent of these, Alan Cooper, argues that Nathan's Frank fantasy is not an answer to the moral questions posed by his, and Roth's, critics but unsustainable deferral of them. On his reading, Nathan "hid[es] from his father's accusation by placing his writer's imagination at the service of his cringing emotional need" (185).

Remember, also, that in "Writing About Jews," Roth calls his critics' appropriation of the six million for their rhetorical purposes "an insult to the dead" (165).

Up to a point, there is no rebuttal to be made to these objections. Roth does not keep to the historical record of the Holocaust at all carefully. He pays no mind to anti-Semites who might read his story as a denial of that record. If he has any compunctions about the appropriating reach of his imagination, he declines to act on them. He has his narrator use Frank's testimony to invent a fiction that serves his emotional needs. This is an appropriation of the six million, even if it removes Frank from their number. In all of this he disregards demands that he do otherwise. He has repudiated his old ethics of fiction in favour of a kind of aestheticism. As Shostak says, he "must depend on the power of imaginative identification, in the possibility that one *can* invent and impersonate others, and that there is some redeeming value in doing so" (128). That value, so far as he credits it, will not be moral. His choice of Anne Frank as the object of the impious imagining in which his alter ego's artistic education culminates makes it as clear as possible that he is indifferent to moralists' claims that fiction writers ought to be faithful to reality and qualms about the representation of Jews after Auschwitz.

That being said, Roth is also faithful to Frank's book in ways that those who have sacralized it are not.

As soon as *The Diary* was published in America, Frank's story and persona were appropriated by those who preferred that she be perfectly exemplary. Cynthia Ozick laments that *The Diary* has been "bowdlerized, distorted, transmuted, traduced, reduced; [...] infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, sentimentalized; falsified, kitchified, and, in fact, blatantly and arrogantly denied" in the years since it first appeared in English translation (78). In her diary, Frank is by turns afraid, angry, defiant, despairing, striving, oversexed, childish, optimistic, pessimistic, and much else besides. *The Diary*'s popularizers, particularly Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich, who wrote the hit Broadway adaptation, made her into a squeaky-clean, happy-go-lucky exponent of universalist optimism and forgiveness.[6] As Norman Ravvin notes, this outraged many who admired her writing, including Albert Camus and Elie Wiesel (71). But it was the sanitized Anne that captured the public imagination. *The Diary* came to be a testament that was more treasured than read. When it was read, it was read as the illustration of "the ultimate shining nobility of [the human] spirit" Eleanor Roosevelt makes it out to be in her introduction to the American edition (7). This is all just starting to happen at the time of *The Ghost Writer*'s action. A sad irony in "Femme Fatale" is that, for all she has sacrificed for her art, Frank will soon come to be known and loved less as the author of her *Diary of a Young Girl* than as the ingenue in Hackett and Goodrich's *Diary of Anne Frank*, which leaves out her literary aspirations, among so many other things.[7]

True to Frank's aspirations, Roth treats her diary as literature. In appropriating *The Diary*, he is faithful to her presentation of herself, in all its complexity. It's only the book's ending, the part she didn't write, that he changes. He is able to remake her in his younger self's image because, on close reading, *The Diary*'s narrator and implied author turns out to be a lot like his younger self: a precocious middle-class secular Jew whose "greatest wish is to become [...] a famous writer" (Frank 247; Roth 138);[8] who loves her family but "do[esn't] feel the least bit responsible to any of [them]" (Frank 239; Roth 140); who is ambivalent about her Jewishness; who is often dizzy with sexual feeling; who is "hotheaded" and given to fits of loathing and rage (Frank 140); who feels she "[has] to laugh at the humorous side of the most dangerous moments" (237). She is ambivalent and conflicted. Much of the time, her writing issues from the same emotional needs that Nathan's fantasy of her does. Her situation really is a lot like his. Ravvin praises Roth for the "honesty and accuracy" with which he portrays her (81). He has Nathan show the kind of respect for the written world, in reading as in writing, that Lonoff models. Nathan treats *The Diary* as a "book of real depth" and takes care not to "wrong a serious author." His attention to and identification with Frank, the author, is opposed to Wapter's use of Frank, the icon, to advance his ideological demand that Jews be idealized in public. In telling Nathan he could learn something from Anne Frank, Wapter recommends the play, not the book. Roth's amoral aesthetics is decidedly anti-ideological. (As, I think to his credit, his ethics of fiction had been.) Rather, as Milowitz well says, the novel that constitutes Roth's second major artist's statement "revels in all that ideology rejects: ambiguity, contradiction, irony, doubt" (50). In this—or, perhaps, with respect to every article but irony—it is much like *The Diary of a Young Girl*.[9]

But again, Frank was a martyr as well as a writer, perhaps more importantly, and the fiction on which so much in *The Ghost Writer* depends denies her martyrdom. In the novel's final chapter, "Married to Tolstoy," Nathan adds a comic coda to his fantasy of her survival, imagining that he could silence his critics by marrying her: "Heedless of Jewish feeling? Indifferent to Jewish survival? Brutish about their well being? Who dares accuse of such unthinking crimes the husband of Anne Frank!" (170-71). The joke here is partly that the idea of marrying Anne Frank is as much an affront to respectable Jewry as actually marrying her would be a sop to it. To make her live as the subject of his kind of fiction, he has to leave out the fact of her murder. Many people—people who read about *people*—will find this to be unpardonable. But Nathan has become Zuckerman. He has made his choice. It may not be the right one. Whatever his allegiance, he has to live in the unwritten world. The novel ends with Lonoff "administering [Nathan's] rites of confirmation" by offering him the use of his desk to start on a fictional account of his visit (180). Lonoff is rushing out the door to chase after his wife, Hope. She has resolved to leave him, after thirty-five years of suffering his distance, neglect, and quiet moral superiority. That there is no malice in him only seems to make things worse for her. The reader expects that she will come back to him and also, that he will make her unhappy as long as he lives. Early on, Nathan mentions in an aside that Lonoff's death five years after the novel’s action, a great loss for the world of letters. Remembering this, the reader may feel some relief on Hope’s behalf.

CHAPTER THREE

An Ethics of “And”

> Nathan as an artist, as the author paradoxically of the most reckless comedy, tried, in fact, to lead the ethical life.
>
> Zuckerman’s eulogy in *The Counterlife*

With *The Counterlife*, Roth brings the aesthetic priorities he sets in *The Ghost Writer* in line with the ethics he elaborates in “Writing About Jews” and “Writing American Fiction.” He returns to writing moral fiction while maintaining the imaginative freedom he turned to aestheticism to secure and, in taking up the question of Israel’s settlement of the West Bank, fulfills his long-held ambition to successfully write fiction about public life. *The Counterlife* is, in other words, a watershed in his career, something a great many critics have observed for a variety of reasons.[1] For Posnock, it is the book in which Roth stops guiltily thinking of “art and impersonation as diversion from pursuit of the real” (127). For Shostak, it is the one that brings to the fore the dialogical principle she sees as structuring all of Roth’s work. Both of their points are important to the development I mean to describe. Roth’s old realist ethics of fiction becomes available to him again when he determines that the sort of wild imagining that brings him the most aesthetic success can be a way of pursuing the real. Where the setting and subject is Israel, that means sending Zuckerman—that “being whose existence is comparable to [his] own and yet register[s] a more powerful valence” (*The Facts* 6), by then a veteran of three novels and a novella,[2] collected in *Zuckerman Bound* (1985)—on an expedition to the West Bank and having him meet an array of variously imagined Israeli versions of his author. Roth investigates the controversy over settlement dialogically, opposing the voices he has Zuckerman hear in a carefully managed, expansive debate. His is, as ever, a non-normative moral fiction. He does not argue a position on the issues under contention and takes care not to seem to be arguing one. Rather, he aims at the "expansion of moral consciousness" ("Writing About Jews" 151), just as he did as a serious young literary man.

The turn back to ethical engagement in Roth's fiction depends on a change in his ontology. In his fiction prior to *The Counterlife*, he takes for granted a common-sense separation of art and reality. There is a written world and an unwritten one, and he shuttles between them. As a dutiful young realist, he strives to make his fiction true to real life. As the prose pyrotechnician responsible for *Portnoy*, he struggles to keep it so. In *The Ghost Writer*, he eschews his realist ethics of fiction and privileges art, for its own sake, over reality. That novel and the others in *Zuckerman Bound* imagine the consequences doing so might have for a writer's life. Through all of this, Roth is preoccupied with his art's relation to reality, but he does not find the nature of reality, or the difference between it and art, to be much worth examining. The distinction between the written and the unwritten world appeals to him, he says, because it is simple and sufficient: "everyone can think through readily enough to the clear-cut differences between the two" (*Reading Myself* xi).

With *The Counterlife*, Roth makes the case that there is no unwritten world. Reality may appear to be a stable, necessary given, but so far as it is available to human subjectivity, it is a snarl of fictions: "The treacherous imagination is everybody's maker—we are all the invention of each other, everybody a conjuration conjuring up everyone else. We are all each other's authors" (145). Those words are Zuckerman's. Twenty-five years after having resolved to subordinate real life to the life of art,[3] he comes to believe that the only real, the only possible, way of living is artistically. As he sees it, the way any person knows any other person is by fictionalizing them—by telling themselves a story about them they believe. What's real is the story. This will be a fiction based on a fiction, imagined by a fictional character. Who a person is, to themselves and to the fictionalizing world, comes down to what role or roles they contrive to play. For Zuckerman, all identity is artistic performance. He does not believe in any such thing as an authentic self. “Playacting,” he tells his brother, “may be the only authentic thing we *ever* do” (138). To human subjectivity, then, every experience of the world is something written (and overwritten, and continually rewritten), inside and out. It seems safe to say this is Roth’s position as well as Zuckerman’s. In interviews from the mid-eighties through the early nineties, he expounds it in much the same terms Zuckerman does. Speaking in the run-up to *The Counterlife’s* publication, he tells two interviewers: “We are all writing fictitious versions of our lives all the time, contradictory but mutually entangling stories that, however subtly or grossly falsified, constitute our hold on reality and are the closest thing we have to the truth” (“An Interview” 11-12). That is the novel’s working premise.

Roth’s new ontology gives *The Counterlife* its form and theme. As Shostak notes, “Roth uses for the whole novel the strategy observable in the “Femme Fatale” chapter of *The Ghost Writer*. He grants ‘Nathan’ the flexibility to imagine a scenario, flesh it out into fully realized episodes, then drop or reverse it” (204). Each of the novel’s chapters presents a substantially different reality. Characters are reinvented from chapter to chapter. The novel’s unity derives not from any diegetic continuity, but from an organizing intelligence that fictionalizes freely as a way of understanding the world, and from the theme its variations develop. The theme is, in Zuckerman’s phrase, “*the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn stories into*” (111). At every turn, the novel foregrounds the fictionalizing that, on Roth’s view, composes reality.

The first chapter, “Basel,” concerns the death of Zuckerman’s brother Henry at thirty-nine. Henry, a successful dentist in suburban New Jersey with a wife and three children, elects to have heart bypass surgery so that he can stop taking a course of drug treatment that, while otherwise entirely successful, has made him impotent. He wants to resume the affair he had been having with his dental assistant. Casual adultery is the only transgression he allows himself—he is otherwise a model citizen, husband, and father. He dies on the operating table. The night before the funeral, Zuckerman sits down to write a eulogy but instead writes a fictional account of Henry's final year, "piecing Henry's story together from the little he [knows]" (13). He spends the day of the funeral trying to decide what to make of his brother's fatal decision and what to do with the story he has written about it

In the second chapter, "Judea," Henry has survived the surgery but still feels depressed and unfulfilled until he has an epiphany on a scuba-diving trip to Israel and joins a West Bank settlement led by a charismatic radical, Mordecai Lippman. Zuckerman travels to Tel Aviv, then Jerusalem, then Lippman's settlement, observing and listening, and all the time trying to understand why Henry, who had never been the least bit religious, has abandoned his old life for this new one. Finally, he tells Henry to quit acting out and come back to New Jersey. Henry refuses, calling his brother's psychological explanations of the change in his life belittling and insisting that he is in Israel not for his own sake but for the good of the Jewish people.

The third chapter, "Aloft," takes place on Zuckerman's flight back from Israel. It begins with him writing Henry a conciliatory letter, in which he brings his judgment of Henry's self-reinvention closer in line with the religious-historical justification he gives for it, and then reading a letter from his Israeli journalist friend Shuki Elchanan urging him not to exploit Lippman's potential as a Zuckermanesque fictional character, because a book in his style about Lippman would give Americans the wrong idea about Israel. He begins to write a response, but is interrupted by the yeshiva student in the next seat. It's Jimmy Ben-Joseph, an overexcited American kid he met at the Wailing Wall. In "Judea," he is a comic crackpot, prophesying that the Messiah will not come until baseball is popularized in the Holy Land. Here, he is a callow and disturbed, Leon-Czolgosz-like terrorist preparing to hijack the plane and demand an end to all memorialization of the Holocaust. Were Jewish history not a moral reprimand to gentiles, he believes, gentiles would stop resenting Jews and that would be the end of anti-Semitism. The air marshal who restrains him with extreme, perhaps deadly, force, as Zuckerman looks on, gives a spirited rebuttal to his manifesto.

Zuckerman returns to the situation of the first chapter in the fourth one, "Gloucestershire," with one difference: he is the one who dies in surgery, having an unnecessary heart bypass so he can go off a drug that makes him impotent. What the respectable brother might have done for the sake of adultery, the famously reckless one does so that his new wife, Maria, can conceive his first child. Henry, who has no heart trouble, mistress, or interest in making aliyah, does not know this. He has been estranged from his brother since the publication of *Carnovsky*, Zuckerman's *Portnoy*-like novel based on their family life. He attends Nathan's funeral and is appalled to hear his editor give a eulogy that is mainly an appreciation of *Carnovsky*. Afterwards, he bribes his way into Nathan's apartment and finds, along with evidence that his brother wrote the eulogy himself, a typescript consisting of four chapters: "Basel," "Judea," "Aloft," and "Christendom." The book is largely about him. Nathan gets him all wrong and, what's worst, writes in undisguised detail about his one extramarital affair, ten years earlier, about which he confided in him. Outraged at how treacherously he has been fictionalized, he takes the first three chapters and dumps them in a trash can at rest stop on the turnpike.

Henry leaves "Christendom," the final chapter of Roth's novel, as of Zuckerman's typescript. It follows on from "Judea." Zuckerman returns from Israel to London after an uneventful flight; attends a Christmas carol service with Maria, her mother, and her sister; and takes Maria out to dinner for her birthday. The sister and an elderly woman sitting nearby at the restaurant give him his first real experiences of anti-Semitism. He confronts the woman, who had been complaining about the smell coming from his and Maria's table, and Maria is mortified. When he presses her to tell him about her sister's and mother's feelings about Jews, and about English anti-Semitism in general, she has a lot to say and is embarrassed by all of it, but more than anything, she is furious with him for fixating on the matter. Saying she can't live with someone so preoccupied with religious difference and suspicious of gentiles, especially someone who will write about her and her family, she leaves him and leaves the novel. The crisis has a curious effect on Zuckerman: while remaining secular, for the first time in his life, he begins to identify strongly as a Jew. He entreats Maria to come back to him and reminds her that, in any case, there's no escaping his fiction. In a final statement of the novel's theme, he tells her: "It may be as you say that this is no life, but [...] this life is as close to life as you, and I, and our child, can ever hope to come" (324).

Even there, at its most self-reflexive, the novel seems more interested in particular realities than in play with artifice. Unusually for an insistently metafictional work of its moment, its basic concerns are those of the traditional realist novel. It argues that fiction is the basis of lived life, from which it seems to follow that all fiction is metafiction, but those conclusions are only starting points for its investigations in the world.[4] When Zuckerman tells Maria she can't leave the novel, his meaning is not merely the obvious one that he is her author in the ordinary sense, but also that the stories that make up each of their lives—including, whether she likes it or not, the national and religious histories he and she were born into—are already inseparably entangled. The idea of having the subject of a novel's first three chapters read them in the fourth chapter and find himself so badly treated that he destroys the only copy might sound too clever by half, and would probably turn out to be so in most novels that would entertain the idea, but Henry's reading and destruction of Zuckerman's typescript is more than postmodern hijinks. It gives Zuckerman an occasion to imagine Henry's resentment at feeling himself contained and diminished by his brother's judgment regardless of whether he agrees with it—at always having his efforts to make a satisfying story of his life overwhelmed by Zuckerman's more powerful, and altogether merciless, storytelling. In his doing so, as in his exertions in trying to figure out what story to believe, and to tell, about Henry's death and his turn to Zionist radicalism, Zuckerman is doing what a realist novelist does, assaying human possibilities by imagining people in situations and making it believable.

Roth's redefinition of reality allows for his return to realism. If there is no unwritten world, there is no need for him to make the choice between art and reality he dramatizes in *The Ghost Writer*. He can be true to life without giving up the imaginative freedom his talent demands.

So Roth resumes his role as a moral writer, pursuing, on very different terms than before, the realistic "exploration of moral fantasy" ("Writing About Jews" 151). As Posnock says, he "move[s] from a guilty relation to art and impersonation" in which he "imagines art and impersonation as diversion from pursuit of the real" to "an exuberantly ludic stance" (127). What once registered as recklessness, on his terms, can now be called exuberance. No longer beholden to a given set of facts, he can distort reality wildly in playing with it, so long as his distortion is congruous with the shape of things as he makes sense of them. He goes on inventing as presumptuously as real life, through the galvanizing agency of Zuckerman, but now rather than retreating from real life in doing so, he engages with it and seems to assume a responsibility to get it right. Zuckerman's ardent inquisitiveness reflects Roth's attitude as an author. As Roth turns his subject matter over and over, within and between the novel's chapters, he gives the sense he is trying to take in more of what's there. Posnock argues: "The rigor of the novel is its fidelity to the *making* of counterlife" (137). Certainly, that's part of it. By "counterlife," Posnock means the kind of thorough, disruptive self-reinvention that Henry's transformation in "Judea" exemplifies (xiv).

Counterlife is arguably what interests Roth most in *The Counterlife*—its working title was *You Must Change Your Life* (Shostak 204)—but he is faithful to life in presenting all manner of fictionalizing that constitutes it. He does not seem to many any less of an imaginative effort to realize Henry's self-assertion as the uncritically conventional person he has always been, in "Gloucestershire," than he does to make Henry believable in defending his abandonment of his family, his dental practice, and the rest of his respectable old life to become Lippman's gun-toting acolyte, in "Judea." The novel's rigor is in its fidelity to the making of life, as fiction, in all the possibilities it assays.

In imagining possible lives, Roth seems not to stray far from his own subjectivity. *The Counterlife* is not as tightly focused on his alter ego as the Zuckerman novels that precede it are—Martin Amis only exaggerates somewhat in saying that *Zuckerman Bound* is "perhaps the most cramped and stubborn exercise in self-examination known to modern letters" (290)—but it is Zuckerman's book and the other characters whose perspectives he takes in it are, with the debatable exception of Maria,[5] very much like him in one way or another. Roth's apparent method of writing other minds is self-projection. He imagines himself, in a version of one or another of the roles that comprise his identity, into a subject position different from his own, creating a character with whom Zuckerman identifies and empathizes.[6] In a 1992 interview Roth describes *The Counterlife* as "a laboratory in which I've run a series of fictional experiments about what things would be like *if*" (*Conversations* 199). More precisely, these are for him experiments about what things would be like *if I were*. He writes his way through himself, inventing a dentist, a journalist, a West Bank settlement leader, a hijacker, an El Al marshal, but always reinventing and, as Zuckerman, meeting, himself.

It is not quite, as Halkin contends, that "nothing interests [Roth] enough to write well about it except [his] own self and whatever directly impinges on [him]" (45). He is by his own admission self-obsessed, but the issue here seems to be confidence more than interest. Now that he has redefined reality, his duty to be realistic is more difficult to fulfil than he once understood it to be. The reality available to him turns out to be much slipperier and more heavily mediated than common sense suggests. When he imagines other people's realities, he does not have anything else to go by. What he can be surest of is his own subjectivity. So, it seems, he makes it the basis for his imagining and writes about people who are in some respect a lot like him. Halkin aptly compares him to one "of those 19th-century microbe hunters who, unable to find suitable subjects on whom to conduct their investigations, decided to infect themselves" (47). He is, as Zuckerman admits to being, "a moral guinea pig" who "exhibits [him]self in disguise" (275).

In a sense, Roth is responding to the difficulty of writing realistically about the wider world in the way he describes inward-looking novelists such as Bellow doing in "Writing American Fiction." As he does of so much else that essay, he disapproves of their turn to the private self as a reliable subject. Of Bellow's fantasy of Africa in *Henderson the Rain King*, he writes with censorious sarcasm:

> There is nothing here of nationalism or riots or apartheid. But why should there be? There is the world, and there is also the self. And the self, when the writer turns upon it all his attention and talent, is revealed to be a most remarkable thing. First off, it exists, it's real. *I am*, the self cries out, and then, taking a nice long look, it adds, *and I am beautiful*. (132)

In *The Counterlife*, Roth does seem to focus on his experience of self because it is a reality he is confident he can present faithfully, and upon consideration, it does reveal itself to be, if not beautiful, then awfully interesting to him. However, he does not turn his attention away from the world outside himself.

Roth does make such a turn in earlier books that seem to have his experience of self as a basis. In *Portnoy*, his framing of Portnoy's monologue and mapping of the Israel chapter serve to remove the novel all but completely from reality, be it public or private. Spielvogel's couch is its only point of contact with the world. At the heart of *The Ghost Writer* is Nathan's diminishment of a major work of Holocaust testimony to the scale of his coming-of-age story. His aestheticism, which opposes the aesthetic to the real, excludes the possibility of writing about the realities of public life. That choice seems to harden into a limitation as the trilogy goes on. *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), Roth's last full-length novel before *The Counterlife*, finds Zuckerman debilitated by back and neck pain and unable to write about anything but his own suffering. "Chained to self-consciousness," he laments, "Chained to retrospection. Chained to my dwarf drama till I die" (551). He wants to write about "the world of historical pain instead of [his] pain in the neck. War, destruction, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, literature on which the fate of a culture hinges," but he can't do it (550-51). Posnock observes that the novel's ending, which has Zuckerman begin to write its first chapter from his hospital bed, "is moving precisely because the narrator abjures such immense subjects and soberly trains his eye on the immediate horror that is nothing but itself" (128). With *The Prague Orgy* (1985), the eighty-five-page epilogue to *Zuckerman Bound*, Roth makes an effort to open his work up to take in the public scene, having Zuckerman travel behind the Iron Curtain to recover the suppressed manuscripts of a short story writer and Holocaust victim modeled on Bruno Schulz. Tellingly, the novella is presented as entries from Zuckerman's notebooks, not as a finished work of his, as the first three novels in the series are. For Roth, notebook writing is a "way of springing into fiction," preparation for making art (*The Facts* 3). He does not seem to have worked out how to make the subject matter of *The Prague Orgy* come alive as fiction in his voice. It is a slight, underrealized work that has attracted little attention since it appeared. At best, it serves Roth as a useful springing-off point for *The Counterlife*'s more successful expedition to Israel.

Israel, as a setting and a subject, affords Roth an opportunity to write fiction about historically important matters of public conscience while still focusing on Roth-like characters with Rothian preoccupations. In Israel, Roth discovers, public and private life overlap closely in a discourse that is, in its tone and content, like something out of a Philip Roth novel.

So much is contested and someone is always shouting about something. The frenzied argumentative eloquence that distinguishes Roth's best writing is the stuff of everyday conversation. Zuckerman is in his element: a country of "implacable, dissident, warring voices" (255). Shuki advises him that "the rules of civilized discourse [are] absolutely crippling in an Israeli discussion" (65). Owing to a combination of civility and reserve, Zuckerman says relatively little between his first Israeli conversation with Shuki and his final one with Henry. This gives his other interlocutors the chance to assail him with speeches. By the end of his day at Agor, where debate is intense even by Israeli standards, he feels overwhelmed:

> I wasn't exactly a stranger to disputation, but never before had I felt so enclosed by a world so contentious, where the argument is enormous and constant and everything turns out to be pro or con, positions taken, positions argued, and everything italicized by indignation and rage. (130)

This continuous, inescapable debate not only characterizes life in Israel—it composes Israel. The basic issues in the country's public life are the private preoccupations of a typical Roth character, self-authorship and Jewish identity. Zuckerman writes in his letter to Henry: "Look at the place you now want to call home: a whole *country* imagining itself, asking itself, 'What the hell is the business of being a Jew?'—people losing sons, losing limbs, losing this, losing that, in the act of answering" (145).[7] Zionism, as he understands it, is a project for collective self-authorship. It invents a democratic state as an apparatus to create and maintain conditions for authentic Jewish life.

The consequent reality is determined by the outcome of public deliberation over what the nature of Jewish authenticity is and what measures ought to be taken to secure its attainability.

The classical Zionist answer to the first question is dramatic self-reinvention of the sort that fascinates Roth. Zuckerman reminds Henry:

> Zionism [...] originated not only in the deep Jewish dream of escaping the danger of insularity and the cruelties of social injustice and persecution but out of a highly conscious desire to be divested of virtually everything that had come to seem, to the Zionists as much as to the Christian Europeans, distinctively Jewish behaviour—to reverse the very form of Jewish existence. The construction of a counterlife that is one's own anti-myth was at its very core. (147)

Lippman's anti-Hellenist territorialism is one version of Israeli counterlife. Shuki's wary liberal-intellectual nationalism is a less extreme version, but still, after so many centuries with no alternative to living in Diaspora, a new Jewish possibility. The Chasids Zuckerman sees in prayer at the Wailing Wall revive an ancient one.

For all of them, their private experiences of Jewish life depend on the public life of the Jewish state. The great Israeli debate may begin with different parties' attempts to convince each other that theirs is the right way of being a Jew, but it is brought to boil by their competing demands on state power. Shostak makes the point well:

> Authenticity is not [...] the only question that arises with Jewish self-invention. The ethics of choice are also at issue, especially under the conditions imposed by Israel's embattled political position in the Middle East. To enact the Jew the Zionists dreamed of its to make power central to the conception of the subject. (301)

Lippman's idea of empowered Jewishness calls for Israel to defend its sovereignty over Judea and Samaria to the death; Shuki's, for it to make a working peace with Palestinians, ceding territory in the West Bank if necessary. Between and beyond these basic positions are numerous others, all premised on a differing accounts of what it means to be Jewish,[8] which mandate different and often irreconcilable courses of action by the state. Ethically difficult choices have to be made. At stake is everyone's security, much they hold sacred, the fate of the Palestinians, the stability of the region, and the course of history. The controversy over settlement is just one issue among many that are as serious and contentious. Shuki tells Zuckerman just after he arrives, "Every Jewish dilemma there ever was is encapsulated in this country. In Israel it's enough to live—you don't have to do anything else and you go to bed exhausted" (64).

Life in Israel has a lot in common with the basic subject of the novel, the authorial self as exemplified by Philip Roth.[9] Fictionalization, the activity that for Roth makes all reality, is plainly a way of life there. More overtly than citizens of any other country, Israelis live in and according to stories, which are constantly rehashed and disputed. As it is in so much of Roth's fiction, not least of all *The Counterlife*, Jewish identity is the central question at issue in the national free-for-all of narrative and counternarrative, argument and rebuttal, in which every Israeli is involved. They are doing what Roth does in the novel, inventing new possibilities for being a Jew. Because statehood is a new condition for post-Biblical Jews, all life in Israel is counterlife, the form of self-authorship that most interests Roth. Zuckerman calls Israel a "laboratory in Jewish self-experiment" (147). He could be talking about the novel. Because the public and the private converge in Israel's experiments in Jewish self-renewal, and because power is exercised on a large scale in conducting them, affecting many people besides the Israeli polity, Israel presents Roth with an occasion to at last engage a big, historic ethical controversy in his fiction—to write moral fiction on the scale he regrets not being able to write it on in "Writing American Fiction," albeit not about America—while remaining focused on the private lives of people like him. He focuses on the question of settlement, but in investigating it presents from several sides the whole knot of conflicts for which it is a flashpoint.

In "Judea" and "Aloft," Roth projects himself into a range of ethically engaged Israeli subject positions, convening a sort of imaginary debate about settlement and related issues. He invents, at times wildly, but always with probity, Rothian characters that are true to the country's reality and has them speak to the controversy. Reality being something written and only available to rewriting, fidelity to the real Israel is a matter of creative interpretation. Israel is a difficult text: densely overwritten, exasperatingly complex, full of cruxes. Populating it with a quasi-representative sample of fictional counterparts is Roth's way of getting a handle on it. He treats Israel much as he does *The Diary of a Young Girl* in *The Ghost Writer*: as the work of serious authors, whom he must not wrong in his reading, even as he makes of their text a countertext that's fully his own.

At the outset of "Judea," Roth signals that Zuckerman's Israeli travelogue will be very different from Portnoy's narcissistic dream vision of omnipresent Jewishness. Zuckerman recalls having lunch with Shuki and his father on a visit to Tel Aviv in 1960. Mr. Elchanan, a welder who came to Israel from Odessa after the October Revolution, asks him if he's going back to America. When he says yes, next week, Mr. Elchanan refuses to hear of it: "Don't be ridiculous. You'll stay" (52). He picks Zuckerman up by the arm and guides him to the window. "See that tree? That's a Jewish tree. See that bird? That's a Jewish bird. See, up there? A Jewish cloud. There is no country for a Jew but here" (52). Zuckerman gives a long, nuanced explanation of why he chooses to live in the Diaspora. Mr. Elchanan takes him back to the window and says, "So many words... such brilliant explanations. Such deep thoughts, Nathan. I never in my life saw a better argument than you for our never leaving Jerusalem again" (55). Zuckerman remembers him fondly, as a man of "forceful wit" with a "playful, poetic imagination" (51), but opposes his idealizing obliviousness, expressed through the Portnoyesque trope of "Jewish" personification, to his own conscientious, searching attention to the realities they are discussing. Mr. Elchanan has repeated his idyll of an uncomplicatedly Jewish state so often that no counternarrative can disturb it. As politely as he attends to and answers Zuckerman's speech, he does not listen. Over the hundred and twenty-five pages that follow, Zuckerman will spend more time listening than doing anything else. The first thing he does after getting settled in Tel Aviv is sit on a bench and look at the beach. He does not see the Jews on "Jewish sand" eating "Jewish ice cream" Portnoy sees in his place (289). To Zuckerman, Israel will not appear to be uncomplicatedly Jewish—not when the situation, and Jewishness itself, is so complicated.

Zuckerman waits on the bench for Shuki, the closest he has to an Israeli counterpart. He remembers Mr. Elchanan as "an Israeli counterpart to [his] own father" and speculates that that may be why he and Shuki get on so well (51). In their youth, he and Shuki were like-minded young intellectuals with moderately successful brothers whom they overshadowed, high ideals about their respective countries, and roaring sexual appetites. Three decades on, Shuki is a broken man. In the Yom Kippur War, his brother's platoon was captured and brutally killed.[10] His father had a fatal stroke a month after receiving the news. Now Shuki's son insists on doing his term of compulsory military service, though he is eligible for an exemption, as he is one of the country's most talented young pianists. Though, being a newspaper columnist, it's his job to do so, it distresses and exhausts Shuki to think about Israeli politics. He is solemn, disillusioned, constantly worried. He has grown fat and lost interest in sex. He wears "a grin having nothing to do with amusement," which Zuckerman "equate[s] [...] with the dressing over a wound" (64). With Shuki, Roth imagines himself, more or less as he is, into the thick of the worst of recent Israeli history, creating a character with his mindset who can speak to the country's present situation with authority.

Roth uses Shuki to frame the novel's investigations into the settlement question. In his conversation with Zuckerman—in the first of many full-blown speeches delivered to Zuckerman in Israel—he sets out a moderate liberal Zionist position, which serves as a base line for the novel's further treatment of the matter:

> There is now so much antagonism between Arab and Jew that even a child would know to keep them apart—so Mr. Lippman drives into Arab Hebron wearing his pistol. Hebron! This state was not established for Jews to police Nablus and Hebron! This was not the Zionist idea! Look, I have no illusions about Arabs and I have no illusions about Jews. I just don't want to live in a country that's *completely* crazy. (77)

Zuckerman sympathizes with this view. There is every indication Shuki's is the idea of Jewish self-reinvention that seems most credible to him. Shuki's speech also prepares the reader for the one Lippman will give when Zuckerman gets to Agor. Andrew Furman argues that

> because Roth has Shuki describe Lippman and his fanatical movement (modeled after the messianic Zionists of the Gush Emunim Jewish settler movement) before he allows Lippman to speak for himself, we are convinced that Agor's leader must be more than a little bit nuts before we even meet him. (641)

This is overstating the case. It is unlikely the reader will be convinced of anything, but she will likely be predisposed to see Lippman as Shuki does. Shuki is concerned about how Zuckerman, and, should he choose to write about Agor, his readers, will see Lippman. In their conversation and his letter (which reasserts his view of Lippman after Lippman has spoken), he warns him against letting his "proclivity for exploring serious, even grave, subjects through their comical possibilities" cause him to fall in love with Lippman as a subject for fiction, making him stand for Israel in whatever he writes about Agor; points out that Lippman's Arab counterpart, whom he won't be meeting, is "as bad if not worse"; and reminds him of how little of the country he is seeing (77, 157-58).

Here, Roth is directing the reader not to see Lippman as Shuki fears she will and marking the limits of his investigation. Zuckerman will not cross the Green Line.[11] As Furman notes, the only Arabs he will meet are the proprietors of the restaurant at which he and Henry have lunch (644-45). Roth's subject is Israel, not Israel-Palestine, to the extent the two can be separated. Moreover, he is only presenting a small sample of Israeli voices.

Roth establishes an important limitation for Zuckerman as a narrator in the scene at the Wailing Wall that follows his meeting with Shuki. Zuckerman finds religious experience unbelievable. He gives his impressions of the men he watches praying at the Wall:

> To me it looked as though they were communing solely with the stones in whose crevices pigeons were roosting some twenty feet above their heads. [...] Rock is just right, I thought: what on earth could be less responsive? Even the cloud drifting by overhead, Shuki's late father's 'Jewish cloud,' appeared less indifferent to our encompassed and uncertain existence. I think I would have felt less detached from seventeen Jews who openly admitted that they *were* talking to a rock. (86)

This is not an alienation his imagination can overcome. A little while later, he finds he is unable to enter into the subjectivity of a young Chasid who insists that he come join his minion: "I realized that of course I could have no more idea of what was going on in his mind that he could have of what was going on in mind" (89-90). Even if he could overcome his conviction that the divine has no place in a believable presentation of reality, it seems imagining the Chasid's subjectivity would take him too far outside his own.

Having set the parameters of the debate he is staging and developed a position closely identified with him to serve as a touchstone for the speeches that are to come, Roth sends Zuckerman into "the Jewish heart of darkness" (Maria's phrase, 263) to meet Henry's Colonel Kurtz. True to his name, Lippman is a formidable speaker. As Shuki does, he speaks with the authority of experience: he fled Germany for Mandate Palestine with his family in the thirties and was seriously injured leading a company of paratroopers in the battle for Jerusalem in the Six-Day War before reinventing himself as a settlement leader and militant territorialist provocateur. He argues for the Jewish people's imperative to claim by force whatever they can of their Biblical inheritance, with a degree of rhetorical excess and verbal intensity that recalls Portnoy at his most explosive. The force of his presentation is matched by his argumentative skill, which impresses Zuckerman, for all that he disagrees with him. Lippman is, as Shuki puts it, "the ultimate diatribalist" (158). Zuckerman compares his speech to that of a "legendary courtroom litigator" (116) and describes him as a virtuoso violinist "for whom centuries of distrust and antipathy and oppression and misery have become a Stradivarius" (145). He is an Israeli version of Roth's wildest-ever self-projection: Portnoy given more serious grievances and a public stage on which to work them out. He speaks with the "exorbitant, raw, regressive" rudeness Posnock attributes to Portnoy (2-3), railing against Hellenized "niceys" and "goody-goods" like Shuki who would share with the Palestinian adversary territory that it is Israel's for the taking.

Lippman's case is compelling, even if it is unlikely to convince readers not already inclined to side with him. Roth makes it clear he is the dangerous demagogue Shuki says he is,[12] but also makes his success as a demagogue credible. A representative long quotation—a representative quotation of his must be long, as much of the effect of his speaking derives from the momentum he builds—may give an idea of why his "word-whipping" leaves Zuckerman feeling "outclassed" and, even when he feels moved to respond, unable to give a rebuttal (130):

> *God* protects us! All we need is never to give ground and God will see to the rest! We are God's instrument! We are building the land of Israel! [...] Sure, in Tel Aviv, in the café, in the university, in the newspaper office, the nice, humane Jew can't *stand* it. Shall I tell you why? I think he is actually jealous of the losers. Look at how sad he looks, the loser, look at him sitting there losing, how helpless he looks, how *moving*. [...] The loser hates and is the virtuous one and the winner wins and is wicked. [...] I accept it. Let us be wicked winners for the next two thousand years, and then when the two thousand years are over, when it is 3978, we will take a vote on which we prefer. [...] And whatever the majority wants, I too will agree, in 3978. But in the meantime, *we do not give ground*! (122)

Henry reinvents himself by taking on Lippman's voice as best he can. Much as Zuckerman does in speaking as Anne Frank, he discovers a new possibility for himself in a voice unlike the one he is accustomed to using and radically changes his priorities in order to realize that possibility. He gives his private life over completely to the goals of Lippman's settlement and the settlement movement—his "old life of non-historical problems seem[s] to him [...] embarrassingly, disgustingly, unspeakably puny" (104-05)—and, having rewritten himself into the part, is able to talk like Lippman. Echoing Lippman's taunt that he is "not an American-Jewish novelist who steps back from a distance and appropriates the reality for his literary purposes" (128), he tells his brother:

> This isn't writing a novel, Nathan! Here people don't jerk around like your fucking heroes worrying twenty-four hours a day about what's going on inside their heads and whether they should see their psychiatrists—here you fight, you struggle, here you worry what's going on in *Damascus*! What matters isn't Momma and Poppa and the kitchen table, it isn't *any* of that crap you write about—*it's who runs Judea*! (140)

This, after feeling himself "condemned to silence" by Zuckerman's eloquence and gift for narrative nearly all his adult life (205). For his part, Zuckerman persists in trying to make Henry's conversion to Lippmanism believable to himself by thinking up psychological explanations for it. Most of these seem plausible and they contribute variously to the reader's understanding of Henry, but none of them is sufficient, as Zuckerman admits (132).

Roth allows the possibility that Henry is right by effectively putting him in Zuckerman's position in *The Ghost Writer* and putting Zuckerman in Doc's position. Zuckerman is no more able to understand why Henry would forsake his family for Lippman's settlement than his father could understand why he did the same, after a fashion, for his art. If he is to be taken at his word, Henry is living by values that are incommensurable with Zuckerman's. Although his commitment to the settlement's mission, so far as he explains himself, seems to owe more to ethnoreligious identification than religious feeling, the territorial claim the settlement was built to secure depends on the Bible being given authority his brother cannot credit. What's more—and here, some distance opens between author and narrator[13]—Zuckerman cannot believe Henry sincerely credits it. Brothers know each other, he says, "as a kind of deformation of themselves" (80). No brother he can imagine would give up everything to do God's will. He tries to explain Henry's self-reinvention in terms that seem credible to him. Up to a point, his speculations ring true. Henry is not to be taken wholly at his word. His motivation is plainly much more complicated than he will admit or even understands, and Zuckerman knows him as well as anyone does. However, Zuckerman's perspective does not contain Henry's.

Henry gets the last word. In his chapter-closing speech to Zuckerman, he affirms his position on settlement and his underlying allegiance to the divinely-written world in a fair imitation of Lippman's voice. It is a deft performance by Roth. He casts Henry's speech in the mold of Zuckerman's implicit artist's statement in *The Ghost Writer*, as confident self-assertion of new values in a new voice against an authority whose values are incommensurable with those new ones, and leaves it to speak for itself. But he does so having identified himself as closely as possible with the authority incapable of believing it. So he imagines a Rothian experience and defence of radical militant Zionism while making it clear that that experience is alien to him and that his opposition to the position defended is beyond argument. (Which is not to say the axioms that put it beyond argument for him are necessarily sound.)

I have only discussed the major speeches in "Judea"—the table speeches, so to speak, as opposed to the speeches from the floor. Many other characters contribute to the debate. Zuckerman recalls Maria defending Israel at a dinner party in London, hears from Henry's daughter Ruth and his wife Carol over the telephone, is told by his cab driver on the way to Agor about the death of his son in a bomb attack, is lectured by Lippman's wife and another three of his followers upon his arrival and at dinner there. And, perhaps most memorably, he is accosted by Jimmy Ben-Joseph at the Wailing Wall.

This is a moment of wild, giddy comic invention playing on the tendency towards grandiose self-authorship Israel brings out in people. Jimmy, a gangly twenty-something kid from New Jersey, moved to Jerusalem twelve days earlier to study Talmud and find a wife. Already, he has come up with bigger plans: he will bring baseball to Israel and the Messiah will come. “How can there be Jews without baseball?” (94). He is overjoyed to meet Zuckerman, his favourite writer. Zuckerman is a poet of baseball, the inspiration for his project. He will understand. Zuckerman humours him but gets away as quickly as he is able to. As he leaves, he sees Jimmy chasing down an imaginary fly ball and making an acrobatic catch with his kipa just short of the Wall. He leaps over and around men in prayer shouting: “Ben-Joseph catches it! [...] Ben-Joseph catches it! [...] The season is over! The Jerusalem Giants win the pennant! The Jerusalem Giants win the pennant! Messiah is on his way!” (94). Shostak observes, “Jimmy is one more impersonation of Nathan (as Nathan is of Roth), a performance of possibility” (136). In “Judea,” Roth uses the guise of Jimmy to explore the comic possibilities of *aliyah*, or maybe those of Jerusalem Syndrome, and present a sympathetic, if unmistakably crazy, version of the Israeli counterlife Henry pursues.

Jimmy reappears in “Aloft” as an embodiment of the danger that comes with a “proclivity for exploring serious, even grave, subjects through their comical possibilities,” which Shuki warns Zuckerman of in the letter he reads just before noticing Jimmy in the next seat (157). Armed with a pistol and a grenade, Jimmy is planning to hijack their plane and demand a moratorium on memorializing the Holocaust. His stated goal is to put an end to anti-Semitism. “Jews without a Holocaust will be Jews without enemies,” he argues. “Jews who are not judges will be Jews who are not judged” (168). It is not clear whether he is serious—apparently not even clear to him. After a while, he says it’s all a performance, inspired by Zuckerman’s fiction: “Come on, you think I’d be crazy enough to fuck around with the Holocaust? I was just curious, that was all. See what you’d do. How it developed. *You* know. The novelist in me” (169).[14] Like Zuckerman, he is an artist who thrives on recklessness. His pistol and grenade are not fakes. His performance may yet include going through with the hijacking. Zuckerman is grateful when it is censored by the El Al marshal who forcibly arrests Jimmy. It is a darkly funny scene, an unlikely and audacious exploration of the comic possibilities of terrorism and Holocaust denial, but Roth also uses it to undercut the novel's comedy, acknowledging that he is having fun with matters of life and death.

With the marshal's speech, which closes the chapter and marks the end of the novel's sustained engagement with the subject of Israel, Roth reprises the argument for Jewish aggression made by Lippman, Henry, and Lippman's other followers, in light of the danger Jimmy represents. As Zuckerman notes even as he is being strip searched and harshly interrogated as a possible accomplice of Jimmy's, the marshal's brutal intervention in the situation has saved the lives of everyone on the plane. His Rothian-Runyonesque speech in praise of the ruthless, self-serving Jewishness of, for example, T.S. Eliot's Bleistein—"what the whole world cannot forgive, cannot abide, never would, never will—Bleistein! A powerful Jew with a Jewish id, smoking his big fat cigar! *Real Jewish might* !" (181)—has an authority Henry and Lippman's speeches lack. In the scenes at Agor, there is a lot of talk about the settlement's precariousness but little if any sense that it is really under threat. El Al was at the time of the novel, as it is now, the only airline to post air marshals on every flight, because of security risks unique to its situation as Israel's national carrier. The marshal speaks from first-hand knowledge of the unusual danger that is a fact of life for Israelis and from the experience of defending against that danger ably and with physical courage. He gives a relatively strong statement of the political attitude Roth seems, broadly, to oppose, while shifting the focus of contention in the novel away from settlement and towards Israel's embattled position in the world. Roth ends *The Counterlife*'s Israel debate on this note of qualification or conciliation.

So what is the reader to make of that debate? How does it work as moral fiction?

James Wood seems to have *The Counterlife* high in his mind when he complains in a 1995 review that in his last several books Roth has failed to adequately address the substantive issues he has taken up.[15] In the eighties and early nineties, he argues,

> [Roth's] characters shouted at each other, but too argumentatively to offer any argument to the reader; or too symmetrically not to cancel themselves out. Jewishness, women, Israel, the burden of fiction-making, the antagonistic self: his characters had become parlour soldiers, and the novel the piano around which they gathered to sing their little rages. (246)

Wood expects fiction that is about something to be normative. He makes the not-unreasonable demand that, however subtly they go about it, authors give definite answers to the questions they raise. Roth disappoints him in books such as *The Counterlife* by indeterminately opposing a range of answers. Most contemporary ethical criticism, following the lead of Wayne Booth and John Gardner, among others, looks for the same sort of thing Wood does.[16] It uncovers and examines value judgments it finds texts to be making, often not explicitly or intentionally. That seems an ill-advised way to approach *The Counterlife* as moral fiction—or, at best, a counter-intentional one. The novel is full of value judgments, some of which are presented more sympathetically or made to seem more credible than others, but its overwhelming tendency is to hold them in opposition.

Roth suspends his judgment. As Shostak says, "Whether or not Roth really believes he has no opinions—a doubtful premise concerning a writer who articulates views so forcefully—he has adopted the *stance* of having no fixed position" (7). The novel is propelled by complication. Roth's strategy of continual reinvention, his piling on of voices and countervoices, his turning things over and over, through all of which he enlarges the world he's imagining and creates aesthetically interesting occasions for his writing, keep him from forming settled ideas about his subject matter. His ideas are nowhere more unsettled than in "Judea" and "Aloft," the chapters in which his imagination runs wildest and works through the greatest number and variety of voices. He seems to spend the whole expedition to Israel keeping up with himself and his subject. Like Zuckerman, he is full of impressions of the country and "[doesn't] begin to know what they add up to" (101).

But then, Roth has never thought it his business to attend to what his imaginings may mean. In "Writing About Jews," he describes his responsibility in writing fiction as a matter of faithfully presenting reality. Drawing conclusions from his experiments in "moral fantasy" he leaves to his critics. He elaborates on this in a 1969 interview. "Discussing the purposes of his art," he says, "Chekhov makes a distinction between 'the solution of the problem and a correct presentation of the problem'—and adds, 'only the latter is obligatory for the artist'" ("On *Portnoy's Complaint*" 18). For Roth in *The Counterlife*, probity in fiction still seems to come down to presenting the world correctly, though, having decided there is no unwritten world, he now takes it to be a matter of close reading and creative interpretation. As I have tried to show, in "Judea" and "Aloft" he seizes on Israel's appositeness as a subject for him, given his ontology and preoccupations, the nature of his talent, and the experience of self that serves as a relatively sure basis for his invention, and presents an outlandishly imagined but (with qualifications he is careful to make) representative sample of Israeli society.

That representativeness is something new for Roth. His refusal to give the "balanced portrayal" of Jewish life his elders demand is the keynote of "Writing About Jews." There, he declares, "The test of any literary work is not how broad is its range of representation [...] but the depth with which the writer reveals whatever he has chosen to represent" (156). Though his ideas about the value of literature change over the next twenty-five years, his conviction that it has nothing to do with representativeness is a constant. But all that time, his focus is on private life. Public life is composed collectively. Writing about it in depth, at the level of individual experience, would seem to require attention to the variety of people who contribute to it. In the Israel chapters of *The Counterlife*, Roth is evidently at pains to expand the novel's range of representation and acknowledge the limits of that range. He canvasses the question of settlement, imagining a wide array of responses. While he understands that, in the words of Clive James, "a book with everybody in it would last as long as life, and never live at all" (175), he tries to give a good survey and makes a point of noting the important perspectives he is not bringing to bear on the issue.

In doing so, Roth's concern seems not only to be the correct presentation of the controversy over settlement in its various facets. In what would be another departure from his earlier position, he seems also to be interested in what his reader will think about the controversy upon reading what he has written.

Roth convenes a debate with the reader as its audience. Though it's obvious that, broadly speaking, his sympathies are with Shuki's side, he is a good chairman. He wants for every viable position to be argued, for every speaker to make his case the best he can, for the parameters of the debate to be well understood, and for all the contention to enlarge and clarify the house's understanding of the issues being contested.

The metaphor of a debate seems more apt than that of a trial, though Roth does, in some respects, take on the role of a presiding judge. After Chekhov distinguishes the writer's obligation to present problems correctly from the separate matter of solving them, he continues, "The court is obliged to pose the questions correctly, but it's up to the jurors to answer them" (88). Whereas Wood and most contemporary ethical critics conceive of moral fiction on an inquisitorial model, with the author conducting the investigation and delivering the verdict, Roth favours an adversarial model. He officiates between opposing advocates, sees that everyone gets a fair hearing, and leaves the reader to deliberate. S. Lillian Kremer contends that in *The Counterlife* Roth "ultimately transfer[s] hermeneutic responsibility to readers," who must themselves "choose between distinctive readings of situations" (66). It is astute of her to describe Roth's positioning of the reader as a transfer of responsibility. He gives the reader jury *duty*. In fulfilling his Lonoffian responsibility as an author and writing a book of real depth, he calls her to assume her Lonoffian duty as a reader and do the book justice. However, where the Israel chapters are concerned, that shouldn't mean choosing between the positions Roth sets out, as Kremer has it. This is where the courtroom metaphor breaks down.

Doing justice to Roth's presentation of the settlement question requires more of his reader than a judgment between supposed alternatives. Roth does not, in general or in any particular, merely set up a choice between the party of Shuki and the party of Lippman, or between any of the individuals on each side who have their say. A great strength of his writing about Israel in *The Counterlife* is how overdetermined and messy the reality it presents is. He does not diminish his subject by making it easier to understand. Martin Amis gets it right when he says, "The book convocates in the theme of Israel, but loosely, not too schematically, not too *teachably*, above all" (293). The problem Roth sets for the reader is irreducible to anything like an either/or question, or a set of them. To schematize it like that would be to do him wrong—to disregard his ontology and the spirit of the novel. Roth posits and imagines a world of proliferating complication. Zuckerman reflects near the end of the novel that in life

> The burden isn't either/or, consciously choosing from possibilities equally difficult and regrettable—it's and/and/and/and/and as well. Life *is* and: the accidental and the immutable, the elusive and the graspable, the bizarre and the predictable, the actual and the potential, all the multiplying realities—plus the multiplying illusions! (306)

Throughout *The Counterlife* and especially in its Israel chapters, Roth revels in the possibilities of "and/and/and/and/and," inventing wildly and variously, accumulating voices and perspectives, setting his rampaging talent loose while faithfully realizing a wider and wider world.

A dutiful reader of "Judea" and "Aloft" will let those chapters complicate her thinking about settlement and augment her understanding of the realities at issue without leading her towards a conclusion about them. She will most likely take sides in the controversy, up to a point—it's only natural to form opinions and develop sympathies as one reads about a matter so contested—but more than anything, she will let herself be carried by the current in Roth's writing that would draw her away from settled ideas. She will attend to the and/and/and of the text, keeping pace with Roth's unflagging, surprising enlargement on the world he imagines, and defer the relevant either/or questions, or leave them to answer themselves as she comes to more fully understand them. In her reading, she will be as faithful to the difficulty of Roth's imagined Israel as Roth is to that of the Israel the Israelis imagine.

Though ostensibly the point of debate is to decide questions,[17] its value as a form of discourse arguably has more to do with elaborating them. Dialogical opposition opens questions up. Most of the time, a listener appreciates a good debate not because she is persuaded by one side, but because she appreciates how well both sides have argued their cases, together enriching her total understanding of the matter at issue. That dutiful reader of *The Counterlife*'s Israel chapters will not focus on the relative merits of the speeches Roth opposes, with an eye towards comparative judgment, as a juror must do. She will focus on the substance of the speeches (as partly determined by their framing) and what they contribute to the collective elaboration of the issues under contention, as one does watching a good debate. Roth's moral fiction in "Judea" and "Aloft" is about public ethical questions that must be decided, but it has nothing definitle to say about what decisions ought to be made. Its value is all in its elaboration of the questions. Writing wildly and freely in a voice all his own, about a supremely strange and unruly public scene that makes for a subject perfectly suited to his imagination—being, in other words, utterly unlike the mature author the young man who wrote “Writing About Jews” and “Writing American Fiction” expected to become—Roth still pursues, and achieves, on a larger scale than his younger self was ever able to manage, “the expansion of moral consciousness.”

CONCLUSION

Serious in the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties

Writing in 1973, Roth describes his fiction from “Whacking Off” forward as being “subversive of [his] considerable investment in seriousness” (“On *The Great American Novel*” 87). To be sure, the work he produced in the late sixties and early seventies has none of the evident moral import and decorum that characterize *Goodbye, Columbus* and the two grave Jamesian novels with which he followed it. Its focus is freewheeling, reckless comic invention. With it, he seems to be making a concerted effort to loosen up, having determined that as a tightly-wound, righteous social realist he was suppressing the best part of his talent. He leaves behind the conspicuously serious author of “Writing About Jews” and “Writing American Fiction.” Over the years that follow, he looks back at that young man with varying mixtures of sympathy, embarrassment, amusement, and mild incredulity. By the middle of his career, the fiction in defence of which he first defined himself as a writer no longer has much of anything to do with him, as far as he is concerned. His assessment of it seems close in line with the critique he has a young editor (a precursor to Zuckerman’s eulogist, perhaps) give of his alter ego Peter Tarnopol’s first novel in *My Life as a Man*:

> I found it much too proper a book, properly decorous and constrained on the formal side, and properly momentous (and much too pointed) in presenting its Serious Jewish Moral Issue. Obviously it was mature for a first novel—too obviously: the work of a gifted literature student straightjacketed by the idea that fiction is the means for proving righteousness and displaying intelligence; the book seems to me very much a relic of the fifties. (116)

Once he had made a start on *Portnoy*, Roth was no longer the sort of serious writer he worked at being when he was, like Tarnopol’s younger self, “Serious in the Fifties” (the subtitle of a story by Tarnopol and a phrase that recurs in Roth’s writing about his early career, 33). However, in his best work, Roth remained a serious writer of one sort or another. He did not so much subvert his investment in seriousness as convert and reconvert it in working through the problem of his talent's seeming incompatibility with his ethical commitments.

In *Portnoy*, Roth makes a serious effort to write moral fiction along the lines he draws defining the value of his first stories in "Writing About Jews," even as he gives the novel over to his emerging talent for reckless comic invention. The novel is, as Zuckerman writes of its fictional counterpart *Carnovsky*, "a classic of irresponsible exaggeration" (*Counterlife* 211), but it is also a realist character study. The irresponsible exaggeration is Portnoy's, not Roth's. Roth satisfies the requirements of his ethics of fiction by framing the scurrilous monologue that makes up most of the novel as a presentation of Portnoy's moral condition. According to the novel's rhetoric, the things Portnoy says indicate but do not denote reality. He is real, as are the analyst to which and the office in which he bears his soul—that's all Roth will vouch for. Roth seems much more interested in performing in Portnoy's voice than in presenting his state of mind, and the novel's success, which is predominantly aesthetic, not moral, has much, much more to do with that performance than with that presentation. Still, Roth keeps to the principles underlying his old seriousness. "The expansion of moral consciousness" ("Writing About Jews" 151) is no longer his focus, but, seemingly out of obligation, he still works at it. The effort takes him to the limits of the ethics of fiction he set out when he was a very different writer. He takes the reader farther "beyond simple moral categorizing" than he likely ever expected to go in his work (151) and shows the reader a private life that is at least strange and unruly as the public life he despairs of being unable to make credible in "Writing American Fiction." (All the same, his ambition to succeed at fictionalizing public life remains unrealized.)

Roth comes to express his seriousness as aesthetic, rather than moral, attention in *The Ghost Writer*. He eschews the realist ethics of fiction he detailed in his early essays and declares his new aestheticism in a *Küntslerroman* that culminates in his alter ego Zuckerman's irreverent appropriation of Anne Frank's life story and voice. Roth devotes himself to the written world, no longer accepting any responsibility to the unwritten one. He has Zuckerman take as his role model a fictional version of Bernard Malamud—Malamud, whom he criticizes in "Writing American Fiction" for "spurning" the real world in his work (127-28). He presents the development that drew him astray from the high moral purpose of his early fiction, his discovery of Portnoy's voice—and, more broadly, of the characteristic "careening, over-the-top," 'verbally intoxicated' voice Posnock aptly describes and identifies as the hallmark of his art (2)—as the defining moment in his maturation as a writer. He places Zuckerman in the rhetorical situation of "Writing About Jews" and has him answer his critics by recklessly ventriloquizing Frank in a variant of that voice. Where once he went on a speaking tour to give his bona fides as a moral writer, he has Zuckerman revel triumphantly in the utmost irreverence. But it is a serious, a principled irreverence. Though he imagines away Frank's martyrdom, Zuckerman is, as Ravvin observes, scrupulously faithful to her writing. He takes her seriously as the author she worked at becoming before her murderers made her the Holocaust witness whose testimony he falsifies. Redefining himself in writing about the subject matter with the very highest stakes for a Jewish writer of his generation, Roth makes it clear that he is serious about literature and nothing else he might be expected to take seriously.

Writing about Israel's settlement of the West Bank in *The Counterlife*, Roth directs the aesthetic attention that is the substance of his seriousness to a public ethical controversy, which he treats as a collectively authored text that deserves the same sort of serious consideration Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* does. So he resumes his role as a moral writer and at last fulfills his early ambition to successfully bring his moral imagination to bear on the public scene. (Though not on the American public scene—that will come in the nineties, with a late-career turn that is beyond the scope of this paper.) Roth has decided that reality, so far as it is available to human subjectivity—all identity, all that can be known about other people—is a mass of overlapping and often inconsistent fictions, written by everyone involved and only apprehensible through further fictionalizing. In Israel, deliberation over matters of public conscience is deeply entwined with the writing of private life. The basic question being answered privately and publicly is how to live authentically as a Jew. Each Israeli lives a personal answer to the question; the Israeli polity determines what actions the state ought to take to ensure that Jewish authenticity, however they define it, is attainable. Those actions, which are likely to include staking some claim to territory to which there are reasonable competing claims, have significant moral consequences, particularly for the country's Palestinian population. The controversy among Israelis over West-Bank settlement is, as matters of public conscience go, a subject unusually well suited to Roth's talent and what he knows well. The people contesting it share his preoccupation with Jewish identity; are as used to personal and collective self-authorship being a way of life as anyone anywhere; and tend to argue, loud and often, in something like his characteristic voice. Using his "gift for theatrical self-transformation" (210) and the method of dialogical opposition Shostak describes, he investigates the settlement question by sending Zuckerman to Israel to effectively moderate a debate among a variety of imagined Israeli versions of himself. Stage-managing and performing the debate affords Roth many occasions for wild invention, but on the whole, he is up to something more serious. Expanding and expanding on the matters in question, enlarging his reader's understanding of the controversy, he returns to the basic enterprise of his earliest moral fiction.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Roth was called a traitor, in print and from the pulpits of synagogues, before *Goodbye, Columbus* had even appeared. The onslaught of accusation and denunciation, which shocked and troubled Roth, began upon the publication of "Defender of the Faith," a story about a ne'er-do-well G.I. who seeks preferential treatment from his Sergeant because he's a fellow Jew, in the *New Yorker*, in March of 1959. It gathered force when the collection won the National Book Award for Fiction the following year and became a much-discussed bestseller, and culminated in Roth being shouted down and threatened while trying to address an audience at Yeshiva University in New York, in 1962. Roth devotes a chapter of his 1988 memoir *The Facts*, "All in the Family," to this episode in his career (113-30).

[2] Trilling, I should add, has more specific ideas than Roth does about what social and moral subjects fiction does best to treat. Roth is not a "moral realist" as Trilling defines that often-misused term.

[3] In his preface to the 1995 Modern Library edition of *Goodbye, Columbus*, Roth calls the *Partisan Review* "the magazine to whose strategies of cultural attack and techniques of literary assault [his younger self] felt an immediate affinity" and describes his habit of reading each new issue from cover to cover the day it appeared at his university library (x). It is the magazine to which the young Alex Portnoy secretly buys his father a subscription in the hopes of civilizing him (7-8) and the one in which the young Nathan Zuckerman dreams of seeing his work published (*Ghost Writer* 62-63). Roth held *Commentary*, a similar magazine with many of the same contributors, published by the American Jewish Committee, in similarly high esteem.

[4] A good place for that marginal comment might be beside where Roth describes prose of the Bellow-Paley type as being "at its worst" "a form of literary onanism" (131).

[5] In describing "the direction [his] work has taken since *Portnoy's Complaint*" Roth favours the term "satyric" over "satiric"—"satyric, suggesting the sheer pleasure of exploring the anarchic and the unsocialized" ("On *The Great American Novel*" 76).

[6] The response from the *Partisan Review*/*Commentary* crowd was as one might expect, and their opposition seemed to upset Roth even more than that of his Jewish elders to his early stories had. The scathing review Diana Trilling, wife of Lionel, contributed to *Harper's* so rankled Roth that he wrote and published an aggrieved eight-page-long response to it ("Document Dated July 27, 1969"). Irving Howe's attack on the book in *Commentary* in 1972 is the apparent original of the review that obsesses Nathan Zuckerman in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983).

[7] I am using "wildness" here and throughout as a somewhat squishy term to denote a slippery quality of Roth's writing: the apparently libidinally charged, often (as Posnock argues) pointedly counter-conventional playfulness through which his voice seems to break loose and run rampant. By "recklessness," I mean wildness that is careless around or that trespasses boundaries, especially moral boundaries, which Roth might take to be authoritative (unlike those set by the polite conventions he seems to feel justified in flouting.)

Chapter One

[1] I will not bother to recap the novel's plot, as it will be useful to do for *The Ghost Writer* and *The Counterlife*, because I have described Portnoy's monologue, and the novel *is* his monologue, which ends in a primal scream, followed by his analyst's single comment, the novel's "punch line": "So. Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (309).

[2] Several critics have done so, with varied results. See, for instance, Sam B. Girgus's "Philip Roth and Woody Allen" or Steven David Lavine's "Degradations of Erotic Life."

[3] For the sake of simplicity and inconspicuousness, I will alternate the gender of pronouns used to refer to persons of unspecified gender chapter by chapter rather than instance by instance.

[4] Jon Morreall gives this summary of Freud's basic ideas about joking:

> We use jokes, Freud says, in order to let into our conscious minds forbidden thoughts and feelings, which our society has forced us to suppress. This is not a conscious process, for the suppressed thoughts and feelings originate in the unconscious. Joking, or at least the thinking up of jokes, is an involuntary process. In this respect joking resembles dreaming. (28)

[5] Posnock does not comment on this, though it confirms his general observation that even when Roth is at his most unruly, "always within him is [...] the good boy" (xi).

Chapter Two

[1] By "maturity," I mean artistic maturity, which may involve the kind of learned immaturity Posnock attributes to Roth.

[2] Doc's given name is only revealed in the sequel to *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*.

[3] The edition of *The Diary* that was a bestseller in America begins with an introduction, written by Eleanor Roosevelt, that alludes to Frank's martyrdom and ends with an epilogue describing her fate and that of the diary. What's more, it is difficult to imagine any but *The Diary*'s very first readers not knowing its ending before they open it.

[4] That Nathan imagines Anne/Amy's story as a young man but only writes it in middle age may be an acknowledgement that a decades-long process of artistic maturation is being telescoped to fit the novel's unity of time.

[5] It cannot help Roth's case with him that in *My Life as a Man* (1975), he has a character observe that the name "Shatzky" sounds like nothing so much as "the past tense of Shitzky" (27).

[6] Hackett and Goodrich have Frank twice say, "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart" (*Diary* 278). With the success of their play, this would become her most famous quotation. They do not, however, allow her such reflections as:

> I don't believe that the big men, the politicians and the capitalists alone, are guilty of the war. Oh no, the little man is just as guilty, otherwise the peoples of the world would have risen in revolt long ago! There's in people simply an urge to destroy, an urge to kill, to murder and rage [...] (237)

Ravvin gives an excellent, damning account of Hackett and Goodrich's adaptation of *The Diary* and their play's importance as an intertext to Roth's novel.

[7] Or maybe this is not an irony: it's after seeing the play, and the audience's reaction to it that Frank has her breakdown and comes closest to calling her father. She might know what's coming.

[8] Frank writes,

> Whether these leanings towards greatness (or insanity?) will ever materialize remains to be seen, but I certainly have the subjects in my mind. In my case, I want to publish a book entitled *Het Achterhuis* [Dutch for "the house in back," referring to the Franks' hideout]. Whether I shall succeed or not, I cannot say, but my diary will be a great help. (247)

The Diary was first published in The Netherlands under the title *Het Achterhuis*.

[9] Roth shows remarkable probity in reading and imagining Frank—but that's not value that the novel, taken as an artist's statement, acknowledges.

Chapter Three

[1] A partial list of these, which I have cribbed in part from Derek Parker Royal, includes Robert Alter, Martin Amis, Joseph Cohen, Alan Cooper, Andrew Furman, William H. Gass, Eugene Goodheart, Parker Royal, Ross Posnock, Mark Shechner, and Debra Shostak.

[2] The Nathan Zuckerman who appears in *My Life as a Man* is, it's generally agreed, a different guy.

[3] And/or, depending on what one makes of the distance between narrator and hero in *The Ghost Writer*, a few years after marking such a resolution by writing a book in which his younger self does so.

[4] Shostak puts it well:

> In textualizing the self, in seeing the self as narrative, as a discursive invention, Roth manages to recover metafiction from the implicit nihilism and anxiety of the postmodern decentered or indeterminate self. Instead, by refusing to allay the doubts it raises—in Nathan, in the reader—the novel challenges readers to transcend the anxiety of the interpretive act, to embrace and be liberated by the duplicity of reality itself and not merely the duplicity of language. (205)

[5] Roth's subjectivity is decidedly American-Jewish-male and Maria is a Christian Englishwoman, but she is also a writer and very unhappily married, as Roth once was, and her cast of mind recalls Roth's at his least libidinally charged. Her relative lack of libido arguably makes the gender difference easier for him to bridge. All told, I think Roth deserves credit for convincingly imagining a character quite unlike himself, though the argument that she is another Rothian self-projection has something to be said for it, beyond the obvious point that all characters are to some extent projections of their authors.

[6] In "Femme Fatale" it goes the other way around: Roth's identification with and empathy for Anne Frank becomes Nathan's self-projection onto her.

[7] Zuckerman is echoing Shuki's observation from the day before: "In the books all you seem to be worrying about is what on earth a Jew is" (73).

[8] As well as, in most cases, ethical commitments that don't have anything directly to do with identity and/or religion.

[9] The phrase "the authorial self," used to mean the self, understood in terms of "the ways in which [...] the processes by which we create and sustain our own selves" are "analogous to [...] the writing of fiction," comes from Halkin (43, 45).

[10] "After the Syrian retreat [from the Golan Heights], they found [Shuki's brother] and the rest of his captured platoon with their hands tied behind them to stakes in the ground; they had been castrated, decapitated, and their penises stuffed in their mouths. Strewn around the battlefield were necklaces made of their ears" (63).

[11] As another one of Roth's alter egos, "Philip Roth," will do in *Operation Shylock*, the novel that continues *The Counterlife*'s investigations in Israel.

[12] This is most evident when Lippman's speech veers off into racist paranoia ("between the hammer of the pious white American Christian and the anvil of the dirty foreigner, the Jew in America will be crushed—if he is not slaughtered first by the blacks, the blacks in the ghettos who are already sharpening their knives" (124).) More subtly, Roth hints that, like Portnoy and Mr. Elchanan, Lippman sees Israel as he expects to see it, not as it really is, by having him use a negative-image version of the "Jewish" personification trope at a crucial moment in his speech. Capping a long justification of his armed vigilantism as a necessary countermeasure to Arab (not to say Palestinian) stone-throwing, he shouts: "Every stone is an anti-Semitic stone!" (122).

[13] For the purposes of my argument, as far as I can tell, there is no interesting difference between diegetic author Zuckerman, who writes the typescript Henry bowdlerizes, and actual author Roth. Where I discuss Roth as the author of the text, read, "Roth and Zuckerman, as diegetic author, rather than as narrator."

[14] Jimmy repeatedly claims to be acting as Zuckerman's disciple: "Every idea I ever had, I got from reading your books" (167), "You're a real father to me, Nathan" (169), "All I know about cracking offensive jokes I learned at your great feet" (169), "It's you who inspire me to my feats of masterful improvisation" (170).

[15] The other books Wood seems to have in mind are *The Facts*, *Deception* (1990), and *Operation Shylock*. I should note that I am seizing on a small part of his review of *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) because it is an especially spirited statement of a common criticism of Roth's writing from around the time of *The Counterlife* and because Wood is perhaps the leading exponent today of a relatively conservative approach to fiction that, while valuable, seems a bad match for the kind of moral fiction Roth is writing in "Judea" and "Aloft."

[16] Booth and Gardner's seminal works are, respectively, *A Rhetoric of Fiction* and *On Moral Fiction*. The anthology *Ethics, Literature, and Theory*, edited by Stephen K. George and published in 2005, gives a useful survey of the ethical turn in late-twentieth-century literary criticism.

As with Wood, I don't mean to put down the main stream of contemporary ethical criticism, but merely to argue that a different approach would be better suited to reading *The Counterlife* as moral fiction.

[17] I mean debate on motions—Oxford debate, for example.

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