Ethical Perspectives on the Novels of Philip Roth

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Michael Sauter

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1 Introduction

The same questions come up: "Who am I? How do I act? What do I do?"

My work does not offer answers. I am trying to represent the experience, the confusion and toughness of moral problems. People always ask, what's the message. I think the worst books are the ones with messages. My fiction is about people in trouble.

—Philip Roth in 1960

Philip Milton Roth (1933-2018) is widely considered one of the greatest American writers of the 20th and 21st century. His creative output bridged more than six decades. This study focuses on the so called "Zuckerman novels" which have been published in the years between 1979 and 2007. In the series of novels, Roth negotiated the relationship of biography and fiction in ever new and complex ways, expanding the scope of the novels as time went on. Starting with *The Ghost Writer* in 1979, Roth introduces Nathan Zuckerman as a young writer setting out on his career and eager to find his place in the world. In the novels, Roth engages in a complex game of ever-changing and developing identities. As Zuckerman launches into his literary career, the later novels depict him at various times of his life.

The central argument of this study is that the series of novels can be understood as a complex and experimental form of exploratory ethics and ethics of identity. The basic premise of this study is to treat the Zuckerman books as a cohesive whole, even though there are, of course, rifts and discontinuities.[1] The readings presented here are located at the intersection of two critical discourses: ethical criticism and ecocriticism.

Roth scholarship used to focus on autobiographical parallels in analyses of the Zuckerman novels. This study, however, concentrates on the ways that Zuckerman is presented and constructed as a character in the novels, which negotiate a wide scope

[1] Other critics, for example Debra Shostak in *Countertexts, Counterlives* have taken a similar approach. Pia Masiero's *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld* in particular shares the research focus on the Zuckerman novels. However, we differ in our perspective on the novels, for example I include ecocritical readings of the American trilogy. This publication is based on a thesis defended in 2012 and is based on research up to that date.

of ethical questions. Biographical references are therefore kept to a minimum. The focus on ecocritical readings in the chapters on the American trilogy similarly are intended to offer new perspectives on the Zuckerman novels.

All readings share a focus on the question how Roth's fiction stages conflicts and crises of identity and ethical dilemmas. The analysis of different textual strategies for the staging of such ethics is another focal point of the study. The interpretive frameworks for the analyses are developed in various close readings of the texts. The section "Ecologies: Environmental, Literary & Ethical" discusses the interrelation between ecocriticism and literary ethics, and introduces the theoretical background underpinning the readings.

Chapter one, *Zuckerman Bound and Beyond* is dedicated to a reading of the trilogy and its epilogue as well as to readings of *The Counterlife* and *The Facts*. I begin my analysis with the first appearance of Zuckerman in *My Life as a Man* and argue that Peter Tarnopol's "Useful Fictions" already formulate the basic concepts that will animate and propel the following novels. Particularly, the narrator's opinion that forms of narrative must be in tune with the subject matter of the narrative comes into focus. Consequently, I am interested in the various modes and genres of narrations employed throughout the Zuckerman series. In this line of thought, the *Bildungsroman* of *The Ghost Writer* contrasts with the hectic street scenes of *Zuckerman Unbound*. Whereas *The Ghost Writer* is characterized by a nostalgic first-person-narration, *Zuckerman Unbound* relies on a much more direct and coarse third-person-narration. I argue that these novels stage ethical dilemmas in idiosyncratic ways by creatively exploiting narratological differences between the discrete novels. Furthermore, I am interested in the formal means by which ethical questions are negotiated in the novels. In this regard, *The Anatomy Lesson* is an exploration of chronic pain and crisis. A special focus in this context is the nexus between identity and narrative. *The Prague Orgy* is analyzed as a formal hybrid with deep reciprocal ties to the preceding novels. The reading considers its function as an epilogue and demonstrates the ethical potential of the genre. My reading of *The Counterlife* interprets the novel as a logical next step and continuation of the narrative mode of *The Prague Orgy*. In particular, I focus on the chapter "Aloft" and the liminal situation of the flight between Tel Aviv and London. I argue that the surreal situation aboard the plane allows for a creative reconsideration of the central themes of the novel. This chapter concludes with remarks on *The Facts*.

The chapter on *American Pastoral* is central to this study. The novel is read from a variety of different ecocritical perspectives. Subchapters are dedicated to the multi-facetted role of animal metaphors in the novel, the concept of the pastoral and an analysis of the spatial concepts structuring the novel. Within the framework of a cultural ecological interpretation, these diverse perspectives are integrated into a comprehensive analysis. The cultural-ecological and ecocritical readings of Roth's fiction attempt to reinterpret the novels in a new light.

The following readings of *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain* expand this analysis and demonstrate a continuous focus on ecocritical themes in the novels of the American trilogy. The final Zuckerman novel, *Exit Ghost*, is read as an epilogue to both, the American trilogy and the entire series. A concluding chapter summarizes the findings.

2 *Zuckerman Bound* & Beyond

The readings in this chapter are informed by questions of narrative identity and narrative ethics. For the purpose of this analysis, the works are read independently, but understood and interpreted within the wider context of all the Zuckerman books. A basic premise of this approach is the assumption that – while often fraught with inconsistencies – there is a continuity in the development of the protagonist Nathan Zuckerman, which is analyzed here across texts. However, the ethical potential of the novels is not exhausted by the plot or the development of character. Instead, the readings presented here are interested in the mutual interactions between all the different components of narrative. Concomitant with this interest in narrative identity is the question of form. The main argument is that Roth methodically uses specific narrative strategies to support and contextualize Zuckerman's progress throughout the series by which a self-conscious evaluation of narrative devices is achieved. Also, Zuckerman's varying fates and experiences are explored through the lens of a variety of genres and writing styles. Questions of identity are then discussed in the novels in a mediated manner as Roth experiments with different generic conventions. Philip Roth playfully employs a wide range of these narrative devices: The early Zuckerman sightings in *My Life As a Man*, the serious young writer questing for purpose in *The Ghost Writer*, the trials of fame and notoriety in *Zuckerman Unbound,* the exploration of crisis that is *The Anatomy Lesson*, and the epilogue *The Prague Orgy*: all these texts draws on different aesthetic means. References include the *Bildungsroman*, but also comic strips and slapstick-aesthetic, to name just a few.

Whereas the novels of the later "American trilogy" explicitly turned to American society in the 20th century, the focus of the first three *Zuckerman* novels is more clearly the personal growth of it their protagonist. Seen together, however, the range of themes in *Zuckerman Bound* is impressive. Arguably, the diversity of different themes here is presented in a more sequenced, almost stroboscopic manner, while the wider canvas of the later novels, arguably beginning with *The Counterlife*, has more room for simultaneity, interrelations, and more complex descriptions of society.

The main emphasis in this chapter is on *The Anatomy Lesson* and the *The Prague Orgy*. Especially the latter is often passed over in criticism. This reading

evaluates *The Prague Orgy* as a pivotal work, drawing on an ethics of the epilogue to analyze its liminal spaces and from there extrapolates its significance for the other novels. In contrast, *The Counterlife* is (represented with a relatively short analysis and) seen as continuing the themes of *The Prague Orgy (*and thus represented with a relatively short analysis). Due to these similarities I decided to include *The Counterlife* in this chapter with *Zuckerman Bound*. The same goes for another 'non-canonical' appearance of Zuckerman in Roth's 1988 "novelist's autobiography" *The Facts*. While Zuckerman is a constant to all these works, the works themselves vary widely. As Zuckerman sets out on his career and develops as a character, so do the narrative strategies. Consequently, the novels read like an exploratory narrative experiment relying on a range of narrative styles.

2.1 Prologue, or *My Life as a Man*

When reading *Zuckerman Bound* and the following Zuckerman novels, it is instructive to begin before the beginning. One way to do this is to turn to *My Life as A Man*. This novel has been published in parts between 1970 and 1974, thus preceding the publication of *The Ghost Writer* by at least five years. Even though readers get first glimpses of Zuckerman in this novel, it is not considered a Zuckerman novel. Nevertheless, *My Life as a Man* can be used as an instructive starting point for a discussion of the later novels: Zuckerman appears only as a character in the short fiction of writer Peter Tarnopol. The novel's beginning consists of two short stories in which Zuckerman serves as the protagonist, ostensibly based on experiences of his creator Tarnopol. This configuration represents a first take on the complex way of self-reflexively narrating the literary life explored in more depth in the later novels. While the process is recalibrated in the later iterations, certain fundamental assumptions remain unchanged throughout and are epitomized neatly by the short stories in *My Life as a Man*.

Zuckerman's first appearance is as a character in the short stories of writer Peter Tarnopol, that is–intradiagetically–in a story within a story. The 'early' Zuckerman presented here has certain similarities with the protagonist of *The Ghost Writer*, but there are also notable differences. In the following the focus is not on the content of the stories or details of Zuckerman's biography, but on the way these

stories are framed and how the narrator describes their function as "Useful fictions."[2] The immediate juxtaposition of two short Zuckerman texts gives the impression of a literary experiment, especially so because the stories are highly metafictional. I will argue that this experimental outlook extends to the remaining Zuckerman novels. Arguably, the metafictional commentary of these short stories amounts to a "baring of the device" in Shklovsky's terminology. The stories are understood here as representing basic premises which remain valid for the entirety of the Zuckerman novels. As such, these first appearances of Zuckerman speak directly to the intertwined complex of the ethics of identity and narrative ethics, or literary ethics as a whole. *In nuce* we can observe how narrative identity is tied up in a dialectical process in which 'narrative' and 'identity' are mutually constitutive and self-reflexively interdependent. As a corollary of this statement we can say that reliance on different narrative strategies leads to different ways of constructing identity and it is this connection in particular which opens these texts up to various ways of ethical questioning.

In *My Life as a Man* this dynamic is set up in the following way: The novel is prefaced by "A Note to the Reader:" containing the information that "the two stories in part I, 'Useful Fictions,' and part II, the autobiographical narrative 'My True Story,' are drawn from the writings of Peter Tarnopol" (front matter n.p.). This note to the reader serves as a fictional marker of authenticity pointing out the fragmentary nature of the novel. The two stories which form part I paint two different versions of Zuckerman. A central difference is that one is told from a third person perspective, while the other is told in first person. At the end of "Salad Days," the first of the 'useful fictions', the narrator announces a shift in voice and perspective for the next story:

> The story of Zuckerman's suffering calls for an approach far more *serious* than that which seems appropriate to the tale of his easeful salad days. To narrate with fidelity the misfortunes of Zuckerman's twenties would require deeper dredging, a darker sense of irony, a grave and pensive voice to replace the amused, Olympian point of view… (*My Life* 31-32)

The narrator invokes the category of 'fidelity' as a benchmark and thus poses the question of the adequacy of certain narrative techniques, styles and tone of narration, which in his opinion must be matched to the subject matter at hand. The narrator goes on to question this first hypothesis and muses whether a new author might be what is needed: "or maybe what that story requires is neither gravity nor complexity,

[2] For another perspective see Jay L. Halio (126-141).

but just another author, someone who would see it for the simple five-thousand-word comedy that it very well may have been" (32). Tarnopol's statements have several implications: "to narrate with fidelity" speaks the questions of authenticity, "another author" and a "comedy that it very well may have been" to questions of authorial intent and questions of genre. These are basic topics which, with the addition of narrative perspective, can be addressed in an analysis of narrative ethics and identity. They further give rise to such fields of inquiry as an ethics of authenticity. Arguably, these questions also are prototypical for the experimental spirit of 'what if' which animates the Zuckerman novels. All these questions, however, are connected to the matter of subjectivity. In the passage quoted above, Tarnopol goes on to further relativize matters: unable to come up with a comedic take on his (and Zuckerman's) woes "he wonders if that isn't more the measure of the man than of the misfortune" (32). It becomes clear that to Tarnopol these stories are a way of making sense of his life and he hints at their autobiographical content, pointing out that the author "himself experienced a similar misfortune at about the same age" (32). *My Life as a Man* is a boisterous, loud, and extreme novel and this, too, sets a precedent for the Zuckerman novels, which tend to focus on the protagonist's crises and tumultuous episodes of his life.

Philip Roth has gone on the record offering similar opinions to those held by Tarnopol, for example concerning questions of narrative perspective. While I do not argue that these opinions have held true through the entirety of Roth's career, they add interesting commentary on how to think about the different narrative perspectives in the Zuckerman novels:

> *How conscious are you as you are writing of whether you are moving from a third- to a first-person narrative?*
> It's not conscious or unconscious—the movement is spontaneous.
> *But how does it feel, to be writing in the third person as opposed to the first person?*
> How does it feel looking through a microscope, when you adjust the focus? Everything depends upon how close you want to bring the naked object to the naked eye. And vice versa. Depends on what you want to magnify, and to what power.
> (*Reading* 142)[3]

Roth has also commented on the 'moral perspective' of the reader and how it might be influenced by the author: "The shifting within a single narrative from the one voice to the other is how a reader's moral perspective is determined" (Reading 142). What

[3] In the same interview, Roth says about Zuckerman "The older and more scarred he gets, the more inward-looking he gets, the further out I have to get. The crisis of solipsism he suffers in *The Anatomy Lesson* is better seen from a bit of distance" (143).

is the 'moral perspective' Roth talks about here, and what kind of poetological assumptions underlie the 'determination' in this context? In agreeing with Roth that formal decisions such as narrative perspective directly influence the reader's perception and that this extends to the realm of the moral, or rather, the ethical, I argue the Zuckerman novels serve as a testing ground par excellence for questions of literary ethics.

The Zuckerman stories of *My Life as a Man* are at odds with the 'canon' of the following novels, but as I have shown here, many central questions are already explored at the very beginning. The incongruousness between the stories themselves, but also in respect to the later novels is constitutive of Roth's approach, most clearly echoed in *The Counterlife*, to alternate and juxtapose contradicting versions of stories or perspective. Roth's use of the image of looking through a microscope, focusing and foregrounding different parts of the image at different times, is telling. It underlines the experimental character of his fiction, which is both metafictional *and* interested in an extratextual reality. The Zuckerman texts playfully probe questions of identity, the relationship between art and life, and the different ways of turning autobiographical experience into fiction. This, at least, is one possibility to describe the way in which Roth's work serves as "useful fictions."

2.2 *The Ghost Writer*

Following his introduction in *My Life as a Man*, Nathan Zuckerman was elevated to the status of full-fledged protagonist in *The Ghost Writer* (1979). The novel is the first 'proper' entry in a collection of what would eventually amount to nine novels in all. It is the beginning of a narrative that would–if not conclude then at least come to an end–almost thirty years later with *Exit Ghost*. From the very beginning, these novels explore moral and ethical themes arising out of the life of their writer-protagonist. Decidedly metafictional from the start, the novels explore themes such as the ethics of writing or questions of authenticity. The novel follows the young writer Zuckerman on a weekend visit with his idol, the aging writer E.I. Lonoff. Zuckerman has just published his first short stories, which have created quite a stir, not only involving his family, but also high-ranking representatives of Newark's Jewish community. At Lonoff's he also encounters Hope, Lonoff's wife and Amy Bellette, a former student of the elder writer who now works as his assistant. She catches not only Nathan's attention but also captivates his imagination: he fantasizes that Amy might be the undercover-identity of Anne Frank, who, in his daydreams actually survived the Holocaust.

The Ghost Writer self-referentially plays with the concept of the *Bildungsroman* and examines the porous boundaries between art and life. Zuckerman's quest for a place in society, for the approval of other writers, and a new identity apart from his family is explored in the mode of the *Bildungsroman*–with an ironic tinge. In *The Ghost Writer* Zuckerman, a young writer, tentatively setting out on his career and already embattled, is forced to find his own way but also actively seeks for roles to take on. In the novel, different concepts of identity are explored while his position remains in flux. The simple premise of the novel is increasingly complicated, entangled and brought into contact with a range of different contexts, The following short analysis focuses on the question of how the topic of narrative identity is explored within the boundaries of Roth's appropriation of the *Bildungsroman*. A second focus will be the ethos of the writer and how an ethics of writing is discussed in the novel.

2.2.1 Marrying Anne Frank: The Bildungsroman of the Young Writer

The opening paragraph of the novel deftly introduces the self-referential framework of the *Bildungsroman*:

> 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)

The two mentions in the first sentence are not the last explicit references to the genre. The young writer prefers to frame his life in its terms and recurs to it frequently, for example referring to "my briefcase, a bulging *Bildungsroman* briefcase" (78). The self-ironic gesture hints at a certain naiveté of the bright-eyed Zuckerman. It is only one instance in a novel full of highly ironic undertones. Many passages are reminiscent of Henry James' style, in places amounting to a full pastiche of his writing. Adeline Tintner has dedicated a series of essays to pointing out numerous parallels and references to the works of Henry James in *Zuckerman Bound* (cf. Tintner) These intertexts and references inform not only *The Ghost Writer*, but the entirety of the first Zuckerman trilogy. In keeping with the theme of the writer's *Bildungsroman,* main topics in the novel are the ethos of the writer and the ethics of writing, the place of the writer in society, and his relation to other writers, as well as the readers.

The novel frames the search for Zuckerman's writer-identity in terms of familial relations and allegiances. At the same time as he experiences backlash from his parents for his first publications, he is looking for mentors and father figures in the literary field.[4] This drive to find a place of his own is opportunistic. For example, Zuckerman's solemn words of adoration for Lonoff are undercut by the fact that Lonoff had been his second choice. At first Zuckerman had put high hopes in a similar relationship with the cosmopolitan writer Abravanel, who, in many regards, is described as the polar opposite of Lonoff (cf. 66). He is, at this point, giving precedence to his career over relationships and undergoes a process of individualization that estranges him from his family and, potentially, the wider

[4] The following novels *Zuckerman Unbound* and *The Anatomy Lesson* also elaborate on Zuckerman's fraught relationship with his parents. One of the main stressors for the relationship remains his writing.

Jewish community. Deciding not to gloss over a conflict with his father, his mother reminds him "But–what about your father's love?" (109). Zuckerman's resolute answer "I am on my own!" (109) comes with caveats and a psychological toll: self-doubt. "[J]ust how well could I hold up against being hated and reviled and disowned?" (121). In this situation he and Lonoff discuss 'tribes' of writers, preferences and influences, a literary family tree. In one sense, the literary relationships overlay his birth family, with Lonoff as a father figure. However, Zuckerman feels he (?) needs to position himself within this literary framework, is asked to give an account of himself: "Yes. You haven't finished. Aren't you a New World cousin in the Babel clan, too? What is Zuckerman in all of this?" (49). Zuckerman's answer is unclear, but he envisions himself as part of a new family. At breakfast the next morning he imagines sitting together: "like a happy family of four" (156). In a sign of the tension he experiences he acknowledges that "[t]hroughout breakfast, my father, my mother, the judge and Mrs. Wapter were never out of my thoughts" (157). Zuckerman's in-between position, his yearning for a mentor and a career as a writer is contextualized through these different layers. In addition, he tries to position himself within the literary field and beyond the reproach of his family. The most salient example of this pattern is his fantasy of Amy Bellette being Anne Frank.

The young writer is embattled, in conflict with his family, and feels particularly under attack as his controversial fiction–he wrote a short story about his family–leads to accusations of anti-Semitism. In the chapter "Femme Fatale" he launches into an elaborate fantasy of Amy Bellette being Anne Frank. By imagining that he marries her, he is styling himself a champion of the persecuted, hoping to make himself invulnerable to any accusations of anti-Semitism in the process. This fantasy is pervasive and exerts a strong fascination: "I was continually drawn back into the fiction I had evolved about her" (157). The 'fiction' is intricately fleshed out down to the smallest detail, for example he explicitly imagines how the revelation of the true identity of his bride might change his family's view of the renegade son: "*Well, this is she….Anne, says my father*–the *Anne? Oh, how I have misunderstood my son. How mistaken we have been!*" (159). In a similar vein, he thinks of proposing to Anne, once again with the intention to clear his own name: "Oh, marry me, Anne Frank, exonerate me before my outraged elders of this idiotic indictment!" (170). However, both him and Amy Bellette have chosen Lonoff as a father figure, which in a sense creates a competition for affection between the two and would add quasi-incestuous

overtones to a potential liaison. Nathan overhears an intimate moment between Lonoff and Amy Bellette, realizing the close relationship of the two: "I love you. I love you so, Dad-da. There's no one else like you" (118). Zuckerman is struck by this revelation of the affair. His reaction–"Oh, if only I could have imagined the scene I'd overheard! If only I could just *approach* the originality and excitement of what actually goes on! But if I ever did, what then would they think of me, my father and his judge?" (121)–is speaking directly to his current predicament as a writer. It also speaks to a certain envy, to the fact that fiction may never outdo or achieve the 'narrative' richness of reality.[5] The fantasy of instrumentalizing a marriage to Anne Frank is full of absurd implications. Stemming from the feeling of being unjustly accused, the writer longs for a way to deflect criticism. However, behind the fantasy of being unassailable and beyond reproach are more intricate assumptions about a writer's role. The implication that a writer can atone or expiate for his writing by good deeds, or in this case by marrying the right person might be seen as naive by both the writer and the audience that would accept such a proposition. The converse case that a writer's work might become unpalatable to an audience due to the writer's actions or biography also touches upon the ethics of writing. The scandal around Paul de Man's wartime writings falls into this category. The fantasy of Anne Frank is eventually an indicator for Zuckerman's need for acceptance by the community of writers and the audience which points to the interrelation between ethics of life and writing.

2.2.2 The Ethics of Writing

Much of *The Ghost Writer* circles around the question of "what makes a writer"? The novel is an inquiry into the ethos of writing and the profession, or calling of the writer. To the young aspiring Zuckerman, the visit with his idol Lonoff is almost as if to a shrine, the "high altar of art" (4), where he willingly takes on the role of son and apprentice. In reading the novel, one becomes aware of a double perspective: Important, again, for this pivotal moment is narrative perspective. As Zuckerman reminisces about these events "twenty years ago" (3), he revisits a period of his life that has been formative for himself as a writer. The experience is singular, and the two days spent in the presence of Lonoff have remained on the writer's mind for a

[5] cf Roth, "Writing American Fiction"

long time. The clear timeframe of the weekend and the unexpected invitation to stay overnight have etched the experience in his memory. There is a tension between the sensations of the young Zuckerman and the ironizing tone of the older Zuckerman. This rift between the older Zuckerman, the seasoned writer, and the younger Zuckerman, the impressionable novice is a productive device. Going back to the foundational differences alluded to in *My Life as a Man* and the reasons given for the preference for one narrative perspective over another, one can argue that *The Ghost Writer* presents a special form of the first-person narrative that allows for a mixture of impetuous experience and calm reflection. The mode of the older writer recounting the experiences of his youth allows for both: chronicling his 'Salad days' as a writer and to engage in the deeper 'dredging' necessary for the later, more complicated Zuckerman.

2.2.2.1 Lonoff

The Ghost Writer's focus on writers means matters of poetology come to the fore: Zuckerman finds a quote from the Henry James story "The Middle Years" pinned above the desk of Lonoff: "We work in the dark–we do what we can–we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art" (77). Lonoff's description of his writing practice ties into this sense of duty, but describes the act of writing in much more sober terms. "I turn sentences around. That's my life. I write a sentence and then I turn it around again. Then I have lunch. Then I come back in and write another sentence. Then I have tea and turn the new sentence around" (17/18). This self-description is repeated "I turn sentences around and that's it" (51). Writing here appears as abstract endeavor in which life merely interrupts. In Zuckerman's view, Lonoff functions as the high priest of art, and his writing study serves as the inner sanctum. However, this dedication has its downsides when confronted with daily life outside the study. Lonoff's everyday life is so removed from the outside world that rare excursions into town bring mundane excitement: "I carry a briefcase. I wear a hat. I nod hello to people on the stairway. I use a public toilet. Ask Hope. I come home reeling from the pandemonium" (20). This hermit's life leads to marital problems with Hope, which are eventually on full display for all the guests to see. In this specific configuration, devotion to art and active participation in life then represent opposing impulses. As a result, the ethics of

writing are as much characterized by what they preclude as by what they help to bring forth.

2.2.2.2 Zuckerman

Questions of the ethics of writing, the responsibility of the writer, and censorship crystallize around a letter, which Zuckerman has received from Judge Wapter and his wife. His father had contacted the judge in an attempt to appeal to his son's dense of duty. As a result, Nathan has received a letter discussing his newest short story. The letter starts out harmless with the judge pointing out: "I do believe that, like all men, the artist has a responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice" (101). He further points out the special responsibility arising from talent and the gratitude owed to family: "But with great talent come great responsibilities, and an obligation to those who have stood behind you in the early days so that your talent might come to fruition" (102). In a rhetorical (and temporary) reversal the judge concedes that "the artist has always considered himself beyond the mores of the community in which he lived" (101). However, the letter is followed by a list of ten questions, intended to bring him to reconsider the choice of his topics and treatment of "Jewish themes." The List starts with "1. If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?" (102) and culminates with "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?" (104). These questions are rejected by the young writer, but they underscore the tensions he has to navigate as he sets out on his literary career. In the face of such criticism from persons of high standing in the Jewish community, Zuckerman insists on his personal and artistic autonomy.

2.2.2.3 Amy Bellette/Anne Frank

Zuckerman's fantasy of Amy Bellette being Anne Frank has been already mentioned in the context of his positioning as a writer. But the idea of Anne Frank surviving the Holocaust also poignantly explores and satirizes the concept of authenticity and its ethical implications. Frank's *Het Achterhuis* is one of the most well-known and auratic works of world literature. By positing the survival of its famous author, the

novel delves into the connection between writers and their texts. In literary studies, the concept of the author has arguably made a comeback after the supposed 'death of the author.' What is explored here is the notion that the personality and personal history of the writer not only inform the process of writing and resultant work but imbue it with significance. Similarly, Lonoff submits to a writing process he describes as tasking because he seems to believe that writing must be an agony ? and it must be hard to achieve quality results and, respectively, greatness. The thought experiment "what if Amy Bellette was Anne Frank, what if she survived?" teases out the many implications of such thinking. Within the fantasy, Anne identifies her own death as an important component of her book's success. As a consequence, she decides to remain dead to the world, not daring in any way to potentially devalue the importance of her book. In other words, she values her books reception over her father's right to learn his child has survived. This issue is at once removed and tied to the ethical obligation felt by her, the responsibility "to the dead" she assumes by writing her diary (147). In a highly ironic passage, Anne ponders the reasons why she remains undercover: "But all I did once I was here was sit in the bathroom thinking that if he [her father] knew, if I told him, then they would have to come out on the stage after each performance and announce, "But she is really alive. You needn't worry, she survived, she is twenty-six now, and doing very well" (124).[6] Talking about the popular musical adaptation of her book, she imagines the actors having "to come out" after the show[7] and giving an account of her life after the events of the show. To her this underscores her impression that "I have to be dead to everyone" (124). The dilemma of Anne Frank contextualizes the other instances of struggling writers in the novel in surreal ways.

2.2.3 Conclusion

The Ghost Writer ends with a memorable scene in which all characters abruptly leave the premises of Lonoff's house, in essence leaving Zuckerman behind. Bellette, called out by Hope for her affair with Lonoff, leaves in a hurry. Hope herself packs her bags, intends to leave Lonoff, and heads for Boston. Lonoff, unwilling to be troubled by these events is grudgingly moving to follow his wife. Earlier, at breakfast, Hope had

[6] See R. Clifton Spargo for details of the theatrical adaptations of *Het Achterhuis*.
[7] See the chapter on *The Prague Orgy* concerning an ethics of the epilogue.

addressed Amy as her successor and warned her about the downsides of a relationship with the writer: "There is his religion of art, my young successor, rejecting life! *Not* living is what he makes his beautiful fiction *out* of! And you will now be the person he is not living with!" (175). Not *living*, but writing then seems to be a flawed mode of existence. The title of the novel, *The Ghost Writer*, then might refer not only to Amy Bellette/Anne Frank, but also to Lonoff, who leads a spectral existence among the sentences he keeps turning around. Lonoff leads the life of a recluse, surrounded by his thoughts and retired from the pandemonium of daily life, which had invaded his house that weekend. The novel contextualizes questions of the ethics of writing by juxtaposing the three layers of Zuckerman's budding career, of Lonoff's professional ethos, and the fantasy of Anne Frank surviving the holocaust which opens up a variety of ethical questions.

The novel manifests the beginning of a dynamic that can be traced through all of the following novels–the pull of the social and the urge to retreat. This dynamic becomes even more pronounced in the American trilogy, in which Zuckerman has retreated from society, not unlike his mentor Lonoff. Therefore, Hope's warning to Amy also has implications for Zuckerman as well, who still needs to find his own way as a writer and has idolized Lonoff's take on his art. At the end of the novel, the old writer is aware that the tumultuous events of the weekend will end up as material for Zuckerman's future work: "'I'll be curious to see how we all come out someday. It could be an interesting story. You're not so nice and polite in your fiction,' he said. 'You're a different person'/'Am I?'/'I should hope so'" (180). This foreshadows the topic of transgression and the next chapter in the Zuckerman saga, *Zuckerman Unbound*.

2.3 *Zuckerman Unbound*

Philip Roth's 1981 follow-up to *The Ghost Writer* is evocatively titled *Zuckerman Unbound*, but contrary to what one might expect - given the title -, an epigram taken from the earlier novel establishes continuity and warns of what is to follow: "'Let Nathan see what it is to be lifted from obscurity. Let him not come hammering at our door to tell us that he wasn't warned.' E. I. Lonoff to his wife December 10, 1956." Despite this ominous foretelling of the trappings of fame, all warnings could not have prepared Zuckerman for the onslaught of public attention he has to weather after the publication of his scandalous bestseller, *Carnovsky*. Consequently, the differences to the series' quiet beginning in *The Ghost Writer* could not be more pronounced. Among the most obvious changes is the one in narrative perspective, which turns from first to third person narrative. And although the theme of identity continues to play an important role, it does so in different ways. I argue that *Zuckerman Unbound* can be read as a commentary on the role of memory in the formation and construction of identity. This is of interest to my inquiry into ethical aspects of the text. Literary form becomes–when contrasting the two novels–a site for the negotiation of ethical aspects which are manifest in the intersubjective component of identity formation and its presentation in the text.

2.3.1 Becoming Unbound, or Life after *Carnovsky*

How can the differences between the first two Zuckerman novels be described? Whereas remembering was already part of the narrative time structure of *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound* relegates matters of memory to plot and metaphoricity. Compare the nostalgia-tinged beginning of the first novel, "It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago" (*Ghost* 3) with the abrasive *in medias res* beginning of "'What the hell are you doing on a bus, with your dough?'"(*Unbound* 3). While the former one is indebted to a pastiche of Henry James' style, the latter dives head on into the vernacular, mimicking everyday speech in lexis "what the hell" and syntax "with your dough?" While instances of this can also be found in *The Ghost Writer* they do not surface until later in the novel. Looking at the two beginnings, we recognize a distinct change in the aesthetics of the texts. As pointed out earlier, each of the novels seems to be characterized by a conceptual affiliation to literary genres and modes of representation which are attuned to the

protagonist's stage in life and his current situation. Zuckerman's new-found notoriety, the plot and aesthetic choices in the novel all mark a clear departure from *The Ghost Writer*. Gone are the references to the *Bildungsroman*, instead, popular culture and everyday life lend this outing its dominant flavor. The result is an episodic, headlong structure, which has led critics to decry a lack of structure and form (cf. for example Willi Winkler's review). A closer look however will show that this change in style is justified by a larger and encompassing aesthetic concept.

Among the many pop-cultural references, several mentions of "Joe Palooka" point to one possible interpretive lens for the novel. Joe Palooka is a heavy-weight boxer and the eponymous protagonist of a highly popular and syndicated comic strip which enjoyed its greatest popularity in the years after World War II . The Palooka references throughout the novel, I submit, are ambiguous as they point to three different aspects: first they serve as a reference to the genre of the comic strip, second, these mentions carry the connotation of "dunce," and third, they speak to a sense of the mass-produced popular culture and the pugilistic nature of the heavy-hitter Joe Palooka. During his phone conversation with a blackmailer threatening to kidnap his mother, Zuckerman asks the caller whether he intends to mimick "some punch-drunk palooka" (Unbound 60). Another difference between the novels is that many passages in *Zuckerman Unbound* are set on the streets of New York City, and Zuckerman is accosted by his fans at almost every turn. This gives the novel a rougher feel as Zuckerman is charting his way from refined *Bildungsroman*-hero to street-wise comic strip protagonist. In Alvin Pepler, the novel features a tragicomic character at once entertaining, resentful, and threatening, whose mental gymnastics and feats of memory take on a particular slap-stick character.

Whereas the mood of *The Ghost Writer* was influenced by the anguished search for recognition and a literary father figure, now the scandal around Zuckerman's short story "Higher Education" is dwarfed by the publicity created by *Carnovsky*. And the struggle for a literary career in the *Ghost Writer* has made way for an atmosphere of paranoia in *Zuckerman Unbound*. The first-person narrative is replaced with a third-person narration characterized by free-indirect discourse and strong internal focalization. The literary themes and conversations in *The Ghost Writer* make way for series of unqualified self-anointed literary critics and wanna-be writers–like Alvin Pepler. And with the introduction of blackmail, the text briefly veers into crime novel or detective story territory. In another twisted recourse on a

theme in the former novel, in *Zuckerman Unbound*, Zuckerman's romantic interest, the actress Caesara O' Shea, played the role of Anne Frank on stage (cf. 90), a situation that featured in Zuckerman's fantasy about Amy Bellette in *The Ghost Writer*.

With *Carnovsky* Zuckerman has written a bestseller. With this triumph comes increased public recognition, a new-found celebrity that is not always appreciated by the writer. One of the novel's four chapters is titled "You're Nathan Zuckerman" –an accurate but potentially threatening identification that the writer has become accustomed to. Zuckerman is constantly approached throughout the novel, but often reduced to the protagonist of his latest novel. In the public eye, the persona of Carnovsky has overshadowed (and eclipsed) Zuckerman the writer. Often he is confronted about his novel or outright mistaken for his creation: "It's Carnovsky " (5). This 'misidentification' is impervious to correction and passer-bys insist on calling him "Mr. Carnovsky" (6) even though he has already clarified and explained the situation. As Zuckerman sums up: "They had mistaken impersonation for confession and were calling out to a character who lived in a book" (10). This continues a theme from the previous novel: Zuckerman is constantly evaluated against the backdrop of his fiction. Just as Lonoff had remarked in *The Ghost Writer* that Zuckerman was "not so nice and polite in [his] fiction" (180). Now his financial advisor draws similar parallels by stating "you're more conservative in financial affairs than in your fiction" (47). Zuckerman's chosen reaction–to ignore this constant onslaught of attention–is not a viable path of action for his family members, who come under a similar degree of scrutiny. When his mother approaches him about how to react when she is addressed as "Carnovsky's mother," he counsels her to not comment in any way. She responds "But you can't, Nathan. If you say nothing, it doesn't work. Then they're sure they're right" (64-65). The misidentification creates a need to position oneself and to clarify one's own identity. Zuckerman at times feels compelled to act the exact opposite of what could be expected of Carnovsky. For example, he is very conspicuous about his behavior around O'Shea's chauffeur because he "[m]ustn't confuse the driver about the hypothetical nature of fiction. Important to have that straight for the seminars back at the garage" (81).

The degree of public exposure is relativized in Zuckerman's interactions with Caesara O'Shea. The movie star is used to the attention of the public and much more well-known than the writer. On their date he realizes that her fame eclipses his and

he has the strange sensation of going out of focus–"his face blurring out again as hers now caught the gaze of the people leaving the hotel" (90). The language of the passage strongly suggests a cinematic perspective and interactions with the actress foreground questions of performativity in further ways: considering a date with her creates a certain anxiety in Zuckerman. His friends try to soothe him: "'He means,' said Mary, 'that you can be yourself with her.' 'And who's that?' 'You'll come up with something' André assured him" (78). In this context the performative side of identity is foregrounded. Zuckerman tags along as O'Shea navigates life in the public eye. He begins to live his public life as a performance under the guidance of the actress, for example when pondering whether to put on a show for attendants at the New York society' hot spot *Elaine's* (cf. 84-85). O'Shea also serves as a cautionary example about the effects of sustained success: "I'm a little tired of my face" (87) she confesses, hinting at her desire to break out of the bubble of celebrity.

As in *The Ghost Writer*, Zuckerman's relationship to his father is tense, and his family has actually tried to shield the elder Zuckerman from reading his son's latest novel. At his father's death bed, Zuckerman decides to recount new insights on cosmology and the nature of the universe as opposed to building a connection with his dying father. While it is not entirely clear whether the father is at all conscious, he fixes his gaze at his son Nathan and utters his last word: bastard" (193). Hearing the devastating words, Zuckerman tries to rationalize what he had heard and comes up with a number of possible mishearings. His brother Henry later tells him that their father had indeed called Zuckerman a bastard, because he had read *Carnovsky* (217). Here then is a moment of recognition that is very different from all the other times that Zuckerman is recognized on the streets. The circumstances of his father's death give these final words weight. Literary acclaim and fame has come at a high price. A definite mixed-blessing, this has led to a moment of stand-still at odds with the frantic details of Zuckerman's daily life: "Zuckerman had privately declared a one-year moratorium on all serious decisions arising out of the smashing success. When he could think straight again, he would act again. All this, this luck–what did it mean? Coming so suddenly, and on such a scale, it was as baffling as a misfortune" (4). The questioning of categories such as 'luck' is a result of becoming "unbound." Unbound, Zuckerman faces challenges to his identity, and moves into ethically problematical territory.

2.3.2 The Discourse of Memory in *Zuckerman Unbound*

Memory plays an important role for the formation of narrative identity. Memory and remembering are central topics in the novel manifested in three different ways of representing different forms of memory in the novel. First, I argue that in the novel books and the writing process itself serve as a metaphor cluster for identity formation and self-positioning. In a second section the focus will be on Alvin Pepler and his photographic memory. This is followed by an analysis of Newark's emergence as a landscape of memory in the novel. Memory and identity are without doubt interrelated concepts. In the following we will survey how that interrelation is treated in the novel. It is no coincidence that at the exact moment in time at which Zuckerman becomes "Unbound," memories become indispensable. This explains his need on to go back to the places of his youth, to revisit his own memories, and his weak spot for the antics of Pepler, who regales him with his encyclopedic knowledge of Newark history.

2.3.2.1 Memory, Identity, and (the Writing of) Books

As *Zuckerman Bound* is a trilogy about its writer-protagonist Nathan Zuckerman it is no surprise that the topic of writing–and by extension books–play an important role in the individual novels. References to books and in particular to novels can be seen as an especially productive crossroads to examine. Drawing from the experience and the memory of the writer, writing, especially of autobiographically inspired books, is a process intimately related to narrative ethics and identity. Both Zuckerman and Pepler, who is an aspiring author himself, work on book projects. Turning his recent experience into fiction, Zuckerman starts his new project *Dans le Vrai*. Both book projects are tied up with the self-image of their respective authors and their quest for a new, reaffirmed self-concept. Consequently, the depiction of books and the writing process in the novel speaks to the intersection of ethics, identity, and questions of both personal and cultural memory.

Zuckerman's growing library serves as a metaphor for the connection between personal reading and personal identity. "Carrying his books from one life to the next

was nothing new to Zuckerman" (49). Zuckerman details how he went with few books to college, but returned with "five cartons of the classics" (49). His early reading, especially of the works of Tom Wolfe, and in particular "Look Homeward, Angel" have made a lasting impression–"Look Homeward, Angel" is the title of the last chapter in *Zuckerman Unbound*. The operating principle at play here could be summed up by "you are what you read". Wayne Booth's study on literary ethics is titled *The Company We Keep* and predicated on the idea that books, not unlike people, constitute "company."'. Similarly, one can trace ideas of the autonomy of art as deriving from the autonomy of persons[8]. Following this line of thinking, books have moral authority, and this authority, to a certain extent, is derived from their authors. Consequently, Zuckerman can ask "What would Joseph Conrad do? Leo Tolstoy? Anton Chekhov?" (109) hoping to find a heuristic and a guideline for proper action in his own dilemma. Reminiscent of a slogan used by Evangelical Christians–"w.w.j.d" ("What would Jesus do")–the question Zuckerman asks of literature explored in *The Ghost Writer* is endowed with reverence and quasi-religiosity. Zuckerman ironically juxtaposes this lofty idealistic take with a supposed mob ethics: "Probably better to ask what Al Capone would do" (110). In yet another metaphorical mutation, books become weapons e.g. when Zuckerman compares *Carnovsky* to a bomb that deeply disturbed his father (cf. 136).

For Zuckerman, with each following station of his life, the library grows: "thirty cartons to be packed from shelves no longer his," then, "when he was divorced from Virginia, there were just under sixty to cart away," and when he left Laura, he "left Bank Street with eighty-one boxes of books" (50). This image of course is highly comic. But in keeping with the moratorium and the general sense of a state of exception, these books have not found a new home on shelves in Zuckerman's new apartment, but have, quite uncharacteristically, remained boxed up so far (cf. 50). The library serves as a metaphor for an increase in experience and knowledge–but also for the current state of the owner. In a twist, books also are shown as a means of self-fashioning. O'Shea intentionally places Kierkegaard's "*The Crisis in the Life of an Actress*" for Zuckerman to find in order to impress him. When she asks him "What is the crisis in the life of a writer?" He responds "First, their indifference; then, when he's lucky, their attention" (94).

[8] See Jacob.

Zuckerman himself begins to jot down the incidences recounted in the novel and begins a new book project, titled "Dans le vrai" after a phrase from a short story by Flaubert (cf. 132). This authorial instinct to turn life into fiction takes precedence to confronting crises in a timely manner: Instead of calling the police after he received a call threatening to kidnap his mother "he sat back down at his desk and for another hour recorded in his composition book everything the kidnapper had said" (132). In basically all the following novels, Zuckerman will work on texts which bear a passing resemblance to the Zuckerman novels by Roth.[9] The procedural nature and selectivity of memory reproduction in books is highlighted in the editorial process of writing.

2.3.2.2 Alvin Pepler

Furthermore, the nexus between the process of writing and identity formations is also exemplified in Alvin Pepler's literary ambitions. Pepler is a central character of the novel and at once comic and tragic. Coming from a similar Jewish-American background, he stalks Zuckerman and is hard to shake off. In a sense, he functions as the personified downside of Zuckerman's new celebrity. Zuckerman typically tries to avoid or escape these situations but Pepler turns up out of the blue more often than not. There is a sinister side to him and Zuckerman believes him to be the blackmailer who threatens to kidnap his mother. Pepler invades Zuckerman's privacy and pursues his own agenda: he is looking for a mentor to help along his publishing career.

Pepler also has a traumatic past. He once enjoyed 15 minutes of fame as a quiz-show contestant. To Pepler's dismay, these shows were rigged and despite his all-encompassing photographic memory he was forced to lose to a new candidate who, the producers felt, would be more popular with the general public. Pepler is traumatized by the incident: "I haven't been the same person since" (32). He is particularly dismayed that he was forced to lose on a 'Americana' question he could have easily answered if allowed." Let him beat me on a subject like trees" [10](37). It is this slight that Pepler wants to eradicate and thus set the picture straight. "My name would be restored to what it was" (20). Pepler wants to write a "serious book …[w]ith all the facts" (16). A daunting task since his photographic memory seems to supply him with a limitless number of facts. To a certain extent, Pepler serves as a double to

[9] See Masiero for an in-depth analysis of the Zuckerman novels from a narratological perspective.
[10] Also see the readings of the American trilogy here, particularly *American Pastoral*.

Zuckerman. But Pepler seems to adhere to the credo "you are what you know" as well as "you are what you write". His initial humility–"'I wouldn't dream,' Pepler was saying, 'of comparing the two of us. An educated artist like yourself and a person who happens to be born with a photographic memory are two different things entirely" (19)–later turns to open hate for Zuckerman as Pepler believes Zuckerman stole his biography to write *Carnovsky*. Pepler is presented in a comic fashion, but there is a tragic undercurrent: "'I shouldn't eat this stuff,' he told Zuckerman. 'Not anymore. In the service I was the guy who could eat anythying. It was a joke. Pepler the human garbage can…" (27-28). In a metaphoric displacement this voraciousness extends to his unquestioned ingestion of knowledge.

Pepler's photographic memory makes him a tragic antipode to the writer E.I. Lonoff. The latter suffers from his writing process and painstakingly dedicates his life to turning "sentences around" (cf. *Ghost* 17-18). In contrast, Pepler has no filter and seems to be entirely at the mercy of his photographic memory. Whereas Lonoff seems to suffer from the consequences of over-monitoring his output, Pepler mostly gushes forth, unable to stop and exercise restraint (cf. Zuckerman's critique of Pepler's book review, p. 154). The frantic enumerations and catalogues of Pepler certainly feel 'loose,' they are part of the raw authenticity that Zuckerman is drawn to, but they also stand in stark contrast to the controlled prose of Lonoff: "Priceless. The *vrai*. You can't beat it. Even richer in pointless detail than the great James Joyce" (139).[11] Referring to the fact that Pepler's stories, especially those about his acquaintances, are made up, Zuckerman's thoughts are represented as such:

> What a *novelist* this guy would make! Already is one. Paté, Gibraltar, Perlmutter, Moshe Dayan–that is the novel of which he is the hero! From the daily papers and the dregs of memory, that is the novel he conjures up! Can't say it lacks conviction, whatever may be missing in the way of finesse. Look at him go! (140)

Zuckerman is exhilarated and caught up in the effusive display: "Alvin you're amazing" (138) he exclaims when confronted with the enthusiastic Pepler and calls him an "Angel of Manic Delights"(137). He is carried away by the sea of words and temporarily even forgets about the threatened kidnapping of his mother (cf. 140). Pepler is incapable of stopping. Interestingly, Zuckerman himself will be carried away in a similar fashion in the next novel of the trilogy, *The Anatomy Lesson*.

Photographic memory also makes Pepler an outsider. It is telling that the quiz show announced him with the words "He's terrifying, he knows everything" In a way,

[11] See Roth "Writing American Fiction"

this makes Pepler a monster, set apart and haunted by his memories–as he says: "it's indelible, it's there forever" (144). As a result, he seems unable to hold a clear thought. Not only is he able to identify the song and year "'Tzena, Tzena', 1950" at once, he knows who recorded the song, which company published it, and so on. His knowledge is so extensive that he effortlessly creates arcane sub-sets of his data. For example, he remarks about the number one hits of the year 1950: "To begin with, that's the year there are three with 'cake' in the title" (135). Whereas this sort of insight might appear trivial, it also runs counter to traditional forms of historiography. Cultural memory, and as matter of consequence often national identity, is built on certain canonical events. Pepler's indiscriminate knowledge of historical data implies a countermovement to this sort of selective perception of history: "Everyone knows 1066, but do they know 1098?" (144). In his effort to show off the vastness of his knowledge, Pepler also engages in something akin to a 'history of the world,' decentering Eurocentric historiography in the process: "1598: Shakespeare writes *Much Ado about Nothing*, Korean Admiral Visunsin invents ironclad war-ships" (144). But these feats of memory amount to little more than a manic, if infectious, regurgitation of facts. Awash in a deluge of knowledge and data, Pepler desperately tries to wrest back control over his public persona. He is very much tied to his past and obsessed with clearing his name – just like Zuckerman, he fights against the public perception of his person.

2.3.2.3 Newark-Landscape of Memory

In much of Philip Roth's fiction, Newark plays a central role. A sense of nostalgia for post-war Newark becomes especially apparent in the novels of the American trilogy. Arguably it is in *Zuckerman Unbound* that Newark comes into focus as a landscape of memory for the first time in the Zuckerman books. At this disorienting stage of Nathan Zuckerman's life, the city in which he grew up and spent his youth holds a special place in his memory. Zuckerman has spent his formative years in Newark. His childhood in the Jewish area of Newark makes him allow others to categorize Zuckerman and his standings in society -. Alvin Pepler identifies with Zuckerman because he is from the same background. Blurring the boundaries between characters, he claims that *Carnovsky* was based on his experience, that Zuckerman had stolen his story. If nothing else, this speaks to the strong sense of identity and the

shared memories of those having grown up in Newark at the same time. Pepler, too, has a sense of pride for his hometown that is observable when he recites a list of famous sons and daughters of the city and includes Zuckerman in this Newark pantheon (13).

At the end of the novel, Zuckerman returns to Newark with his brother. Still shaken from his visit to the deathbed of his father and his accusatory last words, Zuckerman feels threatened and orders a limousine with a driver, relying on the same service Caesare O'Shea had used when they went out together. He orders the driver to drive through the Newark of his youth, which has changed considerably in the meantime. As they pass through the neighborhood, the divergence between present Newark and the one of his recollection become apparent. In this final image of the novel, many of the topics discussed above are entwined:

> A young black man, his head completely shaved, stepped out of one of the houses with a German shepherd and stared down from the stoop at the chauffeur-driven limousine in front of his alleyway, and at the white man in the back seat who was looking his place up and down. A chain fence surrounded the three-story house and the little garden of weeds out front. Had the fellow cared to ask, Zuckerman could without any trouble have told him the names of the three families who lived in the flats on each floor before World War II. But that wasn't what this black man wished to know. "Who you supposed to be?" he said.
>
> "No one," replied Zuckerman, and that was the end of that. You are no longer any man's son, you are no longer some good woman's husband, you are no longer your brother's brother, and you don't come from anywhere anymore, either. They skipped the grade school and the playground and the hot-dog joint and headed back to New York, passing on the way out to the Parkway the synagogue where he'd taken Hebrew lessons after school until he was thirteen. It was now an African Methodist Episcopal Church. (224-225)

Prompted to give an account of himself, Zuckerman responds with "no one" –an answer reminiscent of Ulysses reply to the cyclops Polyphemus. In referencing the Odyssey, the passage is another way of framing Zuckerman as adrift. Like Ulysses, Zuckerman is trying to get home, but his childhood home in Newark no longer exists. Zuckerman's internal landscape of memory (he is able to name the names of the three families in the building) is superimposed with a new reality. The "chain fence," complements the threatening undertones which underly this depiction of a formerly Jewish neighborhood. Not only has this section of Newark has after World War II become a black neighborhood, the German shepherd with his connotation as a guard dog and associated echoes of the holocaust serve as an alienation effect, signifying the radical change of what was once a vibrant Jewish neighborhood. In a similar vein, "the little garden of weeds out front" signifies to Zuckerman a story of decline and a lack of care. The new tenant recognizes the writer clearly as an outsider, greets him with aggression, and once again Zuckerman is asked to give an account of himself, to

state his relation to this place. His recognition at this moment seems striking: "[y]ou're no longer any man's son, you are no longer some good woman's husband, you're no longer your brothers' brother and you don't come from anywhere anymore either" (224-225). Disappointed he foregoes visiting the other places of his childhood, heading back to his New York home, where he experiences a state of fragile identity. The decision to skip "the grade school and the playground…" then is two-sided. It shows that the landmarks of Zuckerman's youth have turned incontrovertibly alien, but also that they persist in the writer's memory. The replacement of the synagogue with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the final sentence of the novel epigrammatically sums up this recalibration of the Newark landscape and sense of displacement of Zuckerman; it underlines the fact that Zuckerman's Newark and his self-image is tied to a landscape existing only in his recollection.

2.3.3 Conclusion

Zuckerman Unbound is about disruption in Zuckerman's life. This break has many causes: he has left the sheltered life of the writer's recluse and is thrown into the turmoil of literary stardom. Formally, the novel mirrors this change in its aesthetic concept based on hectic, partly absurd episodes, infused with slap-stick humor and references to popular culture. While the novel has little coherent plot, it is nevertheless driven by its episodic nature. Zuckerman's new-found celebrity figure comes with a loss of security and constant challenges to his person, and repeated requests to declare himself. At this stage, he feels compelled to return to the Newark of his youth, only to find it completely changed. While the sudden publicity has left Zuckerman dazed and in a form of stasis–"a moratorium"–he considers his next moves. The fact that he is increasingly on his own–the end of his latest marriage, the death of his father–underscores the necessity to find and define his place. In this context, remembering and memory become salient themes. This analysis has shown how the topics of memory and remembering can be traced in the metaphors of books, the character of Pepler, as well as the mapping of Newark as a landscape of memory. The narrative choices outlined above correspond to the sense of chaos and loss experienced by Zuckerman. The follow-up novel *The Anatomy Lesson* will pick up from there as it engages in an exploration of the nature of crisis.

2.4 *The Anatomy Lesson*

If *The Ghostwriter* was infused with the promise of a budding literary career and *Zuckerman Unbound* was dedicated to an exploration of the trap-falls of literary fame, *The Anatomy Lesson* is a meditation on the darkest hours in the life of a writer. The term "meditation"–in this context–is at the same time strangely appropriate and out of place: in terms of boisterous comedy, Roth ups the ante reaching heights of absurdity not attained since *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Great American Novel,* or *The Breast*, but the comedy is balanced by an obsession with the themes of physical pain and creative and spiritual crisis, both relentlessly pursued in variation after variation. This insistent exploration of its underlying themes accounts for the intensity and seriousness which also characterize the novel. Even as the plot builds to a slap-stick climax in the final chapter, the comic elements do not occur out of context. Even the most outlandish of Zuckerman's antics have their origin in the depth of his despair. As a consequence, *The Anatomy Lesson* might best be described as an investigation of loss and pain which maps out different coping strategies for its protagonist. In the exceptional state of personal crisis ethical questions become especially meaningful. An analysis of the novel and its narrative strategies must therefore account for the special circumstance of physical pain and its consequences for the psyche. In the following, I will argue that the novel can be read as a literary experiment on threatened personal identity. Most salient in this regard are the disintegrative effects of severe pain on narrative identity constructs in the novel, as well as the directly connected question of the status of autonomous identity in the face of such threats.

As critics have pointed out, the five-part structure of the novel describes a progressive stripping of Zuckerman's defenses (cf. Baumgarten 182). The first chapter "The Collar" is an exposition on Zuckerman's pain, while "Gone," the second part, seems to search for causes and explanations for the mysterious ailment and offers the death of Zuckerman's mother as a possible answer. The increasingly annihilating criticism of his works and person, especially by literary critic Milton Appel, are also explored as potential sources for his suffering. The third chapter, "The Ward," continues on this trajectory but Zuckerman's pain and his delusions intensify to the point that he begins to take countermeasures of tragicomic dimensions. The final chapters, "Burning" and "The Corpus" chronicle Zuckerman's hallucinatory and giddy trip to Chicago, intent to overcome both his internal and external enemies–excruciating pain and Milton Appel–by starting into a "second life," enrolling as a

medical student at the University of Chicago. This hope, however, is only partially fulfilled. In this sense, the novel has a dilemmatic structure as both the crisis and supposed remedies infringe on Zuckerman's autonomy and prove destabilizing to his identity concepts. In broad terms this analysis focuses on the ethical implications of both the crisis and Zuckerman's evasive actions. In the idea of the "second life," one can glimpse the notion of 'counterlives' explored in the later novel of the same name, and arguably in all of the later Zuckerman novels. The reaction to crisis or circumstances then becomes a central theme for Roth, who shows that these "Second Lives" tend to come with their own new set of constraints.

2.4.1 The Crisis of Pain

Pain is a central theme in *The Anatomy Lesson*. It is so much in the foreground that the subject matter is bound to influence the process of reception–be it in the form of a superficial reading or an in-depth interpretation. What to make of the title "The Anatomy Lesson"? It invites several associations ranging from Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp* to further anatomies such as Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The component "lesson" in the title should not be underestimated. It hints at the didactic character of the work and raises the question whether Zuckerman can learn through pain. Or, to ask an open-ended question: What exactly does this lesson consist of? Who teaches and who is at the receiving end of the lesson? While this sort of question can seemingly be complicated ad infinitum, it might be worthwhile to consider the different meanings of "anatomy" to come to terms with these question in a wider context.

Moving beyond the allusions to Burton's treatise and Rembrandt's painting, it is hard to avoid the violence of the literal meaning of the Greek etymology, which sets the tone for much of the novel which is indeed about the feeling of being "cut up" alive. Most dictionaries give six or seven definitions for "anatomy", discerning several key meanings. Consider the following entry:

> **1:** a branch of morphology that deals with the structure of organisms
>
> **2:** a treatise on anatomical science or art
>
> **3:** the art of separating the parts of an organism in order to ascertain their position, relations, structure, and function **:** dissection
>
> 4***obsolete*** **:** a body dissected or to be dissected
>
> **5:** structural makeup especially of an organism or any of its parts

> 6**:** a separating or dividing into parts for detailed examination **:** analysis
> 7***a (1)*** **:** skeleton ***(2)*** **:** mummy
> ***b*** **:** the human body ("Anatomy" n.p)

In view of the title, the polysemy of "anatomy" helps to open up a wide field of associations and allows different interpretations. Interesting in our context is that "anatomy" refers to both, the description of a specimen and the specimen itself. The meaning of "anatomy" has extended to writings on the subject, and carries the implication of a systematical and structured approach. Therefore, we can say that *The Anatomy Lesson* is a self-reflexive title, pointing to Zuckerman's role as subject and object of his examination, while at the same time highlighting the role of his writing in the endeavor.

One might aptly call *The Anatomy Lesson* "diagnostic writing"[12] –which extends an invitation to "diagnostic reading" at the very beginning of the novel in the form of a paratext: "'The chief obstacle to correct diagnosis in painful conditions is the fact that the symptom is often felt at a distance from its source.' *Textbook of Orthopaedic Medicine* James Cyriax, M.D." Thus, from the start a game of medical semiotics and symptomatology is opened up. The implication being, that the pain in question is not purely physical but rather the result of a multi-factorial process involving physical, psychosomatic and psychological causes. As a result, pain becomes symbolically charged, highly metaphorical, and a sign in need of interpretation.

2.4.2 A Theory of Pain: Elaine Scarry

Before we set out on an analysis of the multitudinous effects of pain in the novel, I would like to discuss parallels between Roth's novel and Elaine Scarry's work on pain. Her 1985 study *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* is a highly influential if unconventional work. Her inquiry into the nature of pain has a distinct focus on torture and her approach is not so much medical as it is philosophical. Scarry is hard to pass by in this context because she is lucid on the

[12] As a novel, *The Anatomy Lesson* is set apart from non-fiction. An interesting comparison would be projects like Siri Hustvedt's *The Shaking Woman. A History of My Nerves*, which takes a highly personal approach to questions like the mind-body problem. Roth himself has explored the themes of frailty and suffering within the different context of life writing in his memoir *Patrimony*.

matter of the representation of pain and links the phenomenon of pain to the creative process. Other critics have pointed out a certain affinity between *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Body in Pain* [13]; the similarities are wide reaching and a closer look is worthwhile.

Scarry states: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (Scarry 4). This is as good a summary of Zuckerman's situation in *The Anatomy Lesson* as one might come across, but it does not entirely grasp the complexity with which Roth treats the topic of pain. In an interesting coincidence, the two books were published around the same time. Roth's novel preceded Scarry's study by one year and while Scarry's effort could be termed an unconventionally poetic theoretical study of pain, Roth's discourse could be termed an uncommonly informed literary effort of coming to terms with pain. Common ground between the two texts can be found in the *loci classici* both like to draw on, be it the fate of Philoctetes,[14] or Marx's dictum "The only antidote to mental suffering is physical pain" (*Anatomy* 20, cf. Scarry 33).

Scarry uses the particular situation of torture as the model for exploration of the nature of pain. While some of her insights pertain equally to the matter of pain caused by sickness, it is striking to observe the parallels between Scarry's descriptions of the "structure of torture" and the dynamics of Zuckerman suffering. This is no perfect fit, for example Scarry postulates that talking about pain mostly involves what she terms "language of 'agency'", that is the use of violent imagery, especially the use of weapons to describe abstract pain sensation (cf. 14). In contrast, Roth's descriptions of pain remain often more abstract and decidedly medical, for example "the spasm in the upper trapezius and the aching soreness to either side of the dorsal spine" (6).

Drawing on Scarry's analysis of the inherent mechanics and effects of torture on the tortured, we can point out the following with respect to Zuckerman and *The Anatomy Lesson*: First, pain defeats language and is not referential, in Scarry's words pain "resists objectification in language" (Scarry 5, cf. 161). Secondly, I would argue

[13] See for example Donald M. Kartiganer, "*Zuckerman Unbound*: celebrant of silence."
[14] Philoctetes participated in the Trojan War; when bitten by a poisonous snake he suffered from a horrible wound and was left behind on the island of Lemnos to suffer in isolation. In *The Anatomy Lesson* one of Zuckerman's girlfriends refers to his apartment as Lemnos. Later Philip Roth will take up the theme of Philoctetes in *The Human Stain* as a metaphor for Silk's suffering (cf. Scarry 5, *Anatomy 18, Stain 170*).

that the first chapter can be analyzed in analogy to what Scarry terms "the objectification of the prisoner's world dissolution" (38). Scarry describes how torture turns everyday objects and basic human needs, for example shelter, against a prisoner by manipulating the configuration of the torture room. One important aspect in this regard is the concept of isolation. If you look at Zuckerman we can clearly draw parallels to his increasingly claustrophobic confinement at home. He has furnished his study with a playmat he bought and takes to wearing "prism glasses" which allow him to follow TV news while lying on the ground, using *Roget's Thesaurus* as a headrest. The whole situation is absurd and belittling to the writer, who is forced to accommodate his pain (10-11). Scarry speaks of the "prisoner's steadily shrinking ground" and of "The Objectification of the Prisoner's World Dissolution" (Scarry 38). This is true for Zuckerman both in the literal sense–he's hardly able to leave his apartment–and the figurative sense, as he observes: "Life smaller and smaller and smaller" (*Anatomy* 22).

Finally, Scarry devotes attention to the fact that confession is turned against a prisoner in torture. In how far does *The Anatomy Lesson* share such a "confessional" nature? It can be found in Zuckerman's reluctant but recurring consideration of the fact that in some unknown ways his pain might be punishment for offenses he perpetrated by writing his novels. He struggles against the implication that his writing *Carnovsky* has hastened the demise of his father and his mother, a view that is shared by his brother Henry. In this Freudian view, Zuckerman plays the role of tormentor and victim. However, this confession never takes hold. Rather it is a train of thought continually entertained and angrily rejected time after time.

2.4.3 Pain and its Remedies

In his agony Zuckerman turns to literature for solace. Roth takes recourse on a number of open and covert intertextual references. Because they do occur in the free indirect discourse, which is characteristic for much of the novel, they provide an interesting framework of literary reference points within which Zuckerman tries to locate his personal ordeal. Among the fragments he has shored against his ruin are references to Flaubert and Joyce, to Swift and Dostoevsky (cf. 82). Another frequent references can be found in the novels of Thomas Mann, specifically to *Der Zauberberg*. Thomas Mann's novel evokes not only a certain illness but also a certain

way of dealing with disease. As Zuckerman enviously remarks, he "grew increasingly irritated by Hans Castorp and the dynamic opportunities for growth provided him by TB" (*Anatomy* 16). In this Roth seems to have taken his cues from Susan Sontag's 1977 study *Illness as Metaphor*. The first chapter takes its title from George Herbert's poem "The Collar". Upon reading it, Zuckerman rejects its message, refusing to make of his pain "a metaphor for anything grandiose" (6). As with Mann, reading Herbert reminds Zuckerman of his college days, which now seem long gone and no longer pertinent. As a student he had scribbled in the margins: "Metaphysical poets pass easily from trivial to sublime." but now he bitterly comments on personally going "in the opposite direction" (*Anatomy* 5-6). As the reader will learn later, Zuckerman indeed plans to go back the University of Chicago.

Two other references are worth mentioning. The first is part of the imagery of the novel, *Roget's Thesaurus* (10-11), for which Zuckerman has no current use. In images bordering on the heavy-handed, "the treasure" of language is here shown in its uselessness. Zuckerman is no longer writing, the flow of language is interrupted, and Zuckerman is often unable to form contiguous sentences. To compound the irony the tome is inscribed with a dedication by his father: "From Dad–You have my every confidence" (11). Given to Zuckerman for graduation at the outset of his career, the thesaurus highlights the contrast between his auspicious beginnings and his current state of crisis. Roth also includes an ironic reference to Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. When Zuckerman undergoes a particularly trying form of treatment, so-called neck traction, his girlfriend Jenny develops a matrix tracking progress in several categories over the course of seven days. At the end of his week in the hospital Zuckerman has reached new lows in categories such as "sanity", "appetite", "stoicism", "libido", or "pettiness (lack of)" (21). This layout is strikingly similar to the methods Benjamin Franklin details in his autobiography for improving and practicing virtue. Obviously, here the trends are reversed, there is no record of progress, but a decline, a chronicle of medical failure. Whereas Franklin's charting leads to the goal of the self-made man, Roth's chart is a protocol of the self unmade. Hence the "prisoner's steadily shrinking ground" (36) can be tracked in many dimensions. Another dimension that be tracked is loneliness and isolation. As he states about his condition: "enough silence even to satisfy Proust" (9). In a formulation reminiscent of Scarry, Zuckerman speaks of pain "[t]oo elementary for understanding" (23). That is, pain cannot be grasped on a cognitive level. As a result

the crisis cannot be tackled through reasoning alone. The process of coming to terms with pain is complicated by the fact that the chronic pain undermines Zuckerman's autonomy, and, in a second step in conjunction with over-medication, even Zuckerman's sense of self and subjectivity.

Zuckerman's pain challenges identity concepts on many levels. The excruciating backpains which started after his mother's death and also, significantly, after his 40th birthday, are severely limiting. Unable to follow his everyday routine, Zuckerman finds his movements restricted, and likens himself to "somebody eighty years old" (4). This leads to a case of cognitive dissonance: intense pain causes perceived old-age incongruous to his self-image of an active man in his 40s. It is also hinted that Zuckerman experiences the pain as emasculating which leads to a perceived shift in gender roles. Despite–or because of his affliction–Zuckerman has four simultaneous affairs but experiences his condition as emasculating, commenting on how his mistresses "manfully" (4) take over the household chores he is unable to do. Finally, there is a discrepancy between Zuckerman's outward appearance and his condition. There is no apparent orthopedic cause for the pain and the search for explanations soon turns to psychological roots. Zuckerman sarcastically remembers the diagnosis of an osteopath: "though to the untrained eye he might appear more or less symmetrical and decently proportioned, within he was as misshapen as Richard III" (8). In a good example of how these different levels are entwined on the level of the narration, "within" here becomes clearly ambiguous, carrying both meanings of psychological deformation and of a hidden physical cause. The plangent tone of the thought points once again to the perceived disconnect between the outward appearance of a healthy and "decently proportioned" individual and the inexplicable torture within. Severe pain therefore does not stop at challenging Zuckerman's identity constructions, it proves identity-changing.

Pain to Zuckerman is a problem of kaleidoscopic variety. This is mirrored on the level of narration by a litany of experts whose advice the writer has sought and whose diagnoses, far from bringing any relief, seem always diametrically opposed and contradictory. The lack of clear diagnosis and improvement leads to a behavioral loop in which Zuckerman turns to new experts in ever accelerating cycles. The result is a state of paralysis and indecision; the situation is complicated with each additional expert weighing in. The confusion arising from the situation is an irritant both to the

protagonist and the reader, who, just like the patient is swamped by different explanations for Zuckerman's pain. In a paradoxical turn, the writer's suffering multiplies in accord with the number of diagnoses. As these are often in open contradiction, there is no immediate action promising an improvement. Zuckerman's odyssey for a cure amounts to a mapping of the modern subject by means of its dissection into medical sub-disciplines. The list of consulted experts is long and impressive (cf. 14 and 25) and at every turn he is confronted with different etiologies of pain. Common to all of them is the way in which they locate the problem outside of the body in habits central to the author's life. One orthopedist blames the typewriter for the excruciating pain, while another osteopath locates the problem not in technical aids, but in Zuckerman's posture when writing by hand. In both cases, Zuckerman's profession would be at fault. Ranging from traditional treatments at the hands of orthopedists, radiologists, and neurologists to alternative approaches like acupuncture and experimental treatments, for example by means of an experimental "electronic pain suppressor" (26), Zuckerman runs a gauntlet of options. Both his doctors and his drug prescriptions are enumerated in great detail (cf. 14; 25). Seeking help, he goes to extremes even submitting to the above mentioned 'neck traction' which is described as a medical procedure with all the trappings of torture (15). Zuckerman also seeks to alleviate his pain through psychotherapy: the psychoanalyst whom he consults after his experience with neck traction throws him into severe depression believes he favors the trade-off the sickness offers him and accuses him of using his condition to garner attention from his four girlfriends. He talks of the "secondary gains" exceeding the "primary loss" (24) and goes so far as to suggest a connection between Zuckerman's career and his suffering, "The pain being my judgment on myself and that book?", a suggestion which Zuckerman flat-out rejects and which prompts him to break off therapy. Attempts of dealing with the problem include using a special pillow by Dr. Kotler, which Zuckerman is sent to try out. A common theme throughout the first chapters is the regression triggered by the pain, most clearly alluded to in the playmat, which Zuckerman buys in a children's store. Bereft of all higher aspirations he calls the situation "awfully primitive" (5).

On the one hand the pain is described in suggestively symbolical terms: "the hot line of pain that ran from behind his right ear into his neck, then branched downward beneath the scapula like a menorah held bottom side up" (4). On the other hand we find strictly medical diagnoses: "spasm in the upper trapezius", or "aching

soreness to either side of the dorsal spine" (6). Zuckerman considers the correlation and interdependence hinted at in the etymology of pain from the Latin *poena*, and links his punishment to his publication of Carnovsky(34). In contrast to this suspicion, there is also the theory of pain as an un-explainable excess of signification, of which no sense can be made. As "no-nonsense" doctor states :"If pain were only the expression of something else, it would all be hunky-dory. But unhappily life isn't organized as logically as that. Pain is in addition to everything else" (25). Accompanying this physical decline are side effects such as the loss of large quantities of his hair. Unsure whether this is to be attributed to his worry or to his use of medication, he turns to the "Anton Associates Trichological Clinic," treating mere symptoms.

2.4.4 "Gone"-The Pain of Absence

The second important component of Zuckerman's crisis has to be the loss of his mother who died of a brain tumor just one year after his father succumbed to a heart attack. In this sense, T*he Anatomy Lesson* picks up where *Zuckerman Unbound* ended, compounding the sense of loss and forlornness Zuckerman feels. Starting with the opening sentence "When he is sick, every man wants his mother; if she's not around, other women must do" (3), the absence of the mother is central to the novel. The theme is predominantly touched upon in the second chapter "Gone", which is dedicated to the devastating circumstances and aftermath of her death.

In the aftermath of his loss Zuckerman is helpless, the two words "Mother's gone" (42) constantly on his mind. He is not in possession of his full capabilities and unable to react adequately, for example, to a slanderous note about his mother he receives after her death. Confronted with the request of the Rabbi to provide memorable moments of the life of his mother for the service, Zuckerman declines, stating "The memories [...] come in their own time" (44) and his brother takes his part in the ceremony. In the end, Zuckerman fails to do any of the things he planned to and returns home, a defeated man: "[a] nothing fellow, he flew home to his files." (67).[15] The circumstances of Mrs. Zuckerman's death underline the importance of memory for identity constitution and for the concept of narrative identity. One incident in particular can serve as a starting point for our analysis: prompted by her

[15] Compare this with the parallel situation after his father's death in *Zuckerman Unbound* (224/225).

neurologist to write her name on a piece of paper, "instead of 'Selma' [she] wrote the word 'Holocaust,' perfectly spelled" (41). This marks one of the few direct references to the Holocaust in the Zuckerman Novels and shows a deep degree of trauma, something which strikes Zuckerman as uncharacteristic for his mother. The word "Holocaust" then opens up the question of Jewish ethnic identity. In a conflation of images, the word holocaust also seems to stand metaphorically for the devastation that the tumor wreaks in Mrs. Zuckerman's brain. The disease has progressed so far that even her first name was erased from her memory. To Zuckerman this slip of paper is invaluable and he hides its existence from his brother. He continues to carry it in his pocket, feeling a deep intimate connection preventing him from discarding the slip: "now he couldn't throw it away" (59).

Zuckerman's empathy or identification with the suffering of his mother is very high and leads to a transference of symptoms: "He felt a pain in his head the size of a lemon. It was her brain tumor" (45). Sifting through the things of his mother he stumbles on a book titled *Your Baby's Care*, a record of his infancy complete with a footprint of the newborn. This then is a record of Zuckerman's life before the possibility of a narrative identity, when somebody else had to chronicle his development. The foot print here stands as evidence of a preverbal existence of the child. Not unlike the thesaurus, it marks a beginning and a decided counterpoint to Zuckerman's current crisis. His mother's death stays with Zuckerman, and the slip of paper serves as a reminder. A sign both for his loss and his feelings of guilt.

2.4.5 The Pains of Criticism

The third major factor contributing to Zuckerman's crisis is his tense relationship and increasing obsession with Milton Appel[16] who in a recent article, "The Case of Nathan Zuckerman", had criticized him sharply. This hits the writer because he has not published anything worth mentioning in the last few years. Ironically, Appel had been one of Zuckerman's most prominent supporters during the early stages of his career and his lacerating criticism now stirs up Zuckerman's emotions to the point of indulging in violent fantasies of payback. Appel had written on Jewish-American life and the underlying familial dynamics–young, bright,

[16] Critics have pointed out that the character of Milton Appel is based on Irving Howe, eminent critic, who published "Philip Roth Reconsidered," revising his earlier positive assessment of Roth's works.

second-generation Jewish writers emancipating themselves from their overbearing immigrant fathers–and had spoken to Zuckerman who found himself in the writing: "He wasn't alone … He was a social type … His fight with his father was a tragic necessity…" (71). Even though Zuckerman didn't see his own situation in such bleak terms, it is clear that Appel spoke to a need and offered a sense of belonging for Zuckerman and his contemporaries who read him widely. Insofar as Zuckerman relied on the critic to feel as representative of a 'social type,' the recent criticism feels like a betrayal. Consequently, the confrontation with the literary critic is acrimonious and brings topics such as an ethics of criticism, but also poetology to the center of attention.

What irks Zuckerman the most is Appel's request to a mutual friend, Ivan Felt, that Zuckerman should "write something on behalf of Israel for the Times Op Ed page?" (85). Infuriating to Zuckerman is the implication that his voice would be of exceptional weight considering his critical stance. Appel now stands in a line of critics going back to Judge Wapter in *The Ghost Writer* accusing Zuckerman of his stance towards Jews and Israel in his fiction. As the writer sums up: "you distinguished in Inquiry between anti-Semites like Goebbels and people like Zuckerman who 'just don't like us'" (163). This sort of framing of Zuckerman also ties in with the increased and unrealistic expectations he has to face after the publication of *Carnovsky*. One of his girlfriends tries to calm his anger concerning this request but unintentionally touches on this sore spot: "He's asked you what he's asked because people know who you are, because you can be so easily *identified* with American Jews" (97). When his secretary, whose services allow him to keep working in a limited manner despite the pain refuses to type an incendiary letter to Appel his emotions simmer until he cannot restrain himself and decides to call him. Zuckerman is obsessed with the critic who had championed him earlier in his career. In a graceless phone-call he attacks Appel who is surprised by the spiteful call (cf. 161-168), lecturing the critic on the critic's ethical duty to do justice to the text. Far from cathartic, the call leaves Zuckerman in even worse condition. The third chapter, "The Ward," ends in a striking tableau of Zuckerman standing on his bed, reminiscent of a mad scientist: "Standing atop the paper-strewn bed, his hands clutched into fists and raised to the ceiling of that dark tiny room, he cried out, he screamed, to find that from phoning Appel and venting his rage, he was only worse" (168). This image is immediately followed by the new chapter, in which Zuckerman embarks on a trip to Chicago, not

only fueled by copious amounts of drugs, but also by his spite and hatred for Milton Appel.

2.4.6 Escapes from Pain

Chapter four and five of *The Anatomy Lesson* are dedicated to Zuckerman's trip to Chicago, where he hopes to enroll at medical school. This journey is interpreted as a way of escaping the pain. In a way, this section of the novel pertains to the second part of Elaine Scarry's study, in which she focuses on the "making of the world" and explores the connection between pain and "imagining" (Scarry 163). From the very start, the trip seems ill-advised and is only possible in a state of generous self-medication: "A double vodka on takeoff, then over some waterway in Pennsylvania three drags on a joint in the airplane toilet, and Zuckerman was managing well enough" (169). This trip is "out of character" for Zuckerman in more than one way: Firstly, he is not only out of his mind but has also decided to impersonate Milton Appel. For once Zuckerman seems to yearn back to the times of his student years, wallowing in nostalgia. Secondly, having experienced a severe crisis in New York City and seeing no future for himself as a writer, Zuckerman is avid to instill a new sense of purpose to his life. Clichéd as it is, Zuckerman chooses the medical profession in a somewhat naïve understanding of medicine as a sort of concrete profession as opposed to the abstract and ascetic lifestyle of a writer (cf. 202). Bound up with this wish is his rejection of his old life so that he sees himself embarking on a "second life" (195). The innate necessity and nobility of the medical profession is not without allure for the ailing writer.[17] Not only does he believe the medical profession to be 'real,' he also toys with the idea that going into medicine might be a way of atoning for the damage he has wrought as a writer, a "penitential act of submission" (181). Once again, *Carnovsky* is the offending work. At the height of irony, Zuckerman realizes he cannot just specialize in obstetrics but also needs to study gynecology–he himself recognizes this as ironic, mentioning the feminist critique of his work "WHY DOES THIS MAN HATE WOMEN?" (171) and even finding a specific catchphrase for this new direction: "Up with colposcopy, down with Carnovsky" (171). Lastly, the trip to Chicago is indicative of Zuckerman's despair and his increasing loss of faith in

[17]In this sense the fantasy of studying medicine is analogous to the fantasy of marrying Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer*.

doctors, an attempt to become active again and to reclaim his life, but also a form of distraction: "Other people. So busy diagnosing everybody else there's no time to over-diagnose yourself. The unexamined life–the only one worth living" (172).

Two factors seem especially pertinent for a discussion of the intersection of identity, ethics, and narrative: Zuckerman's excessive use of drugs and their side-effects, as well as his decision to pretend to be Milton Appel. While on the plane Zuckerman once again is asked to give an account of himself, and, on a whim, he takes on the persona of Milton Appel, and . launches into the fantasy of being Milton Appel, the pornographer (172). What is of concern here is not so much Zuckerman's motivation–motives might range from pure revenge to leaving his old life behind or simply entertaining himself–but the fact that Zuckerman takes on a specific persona and mostly sticks to it. In the course of this extended adventure the performative component of every identity construction becomes apparent, Zuckerman at one point is "trying a sentimental walk around the Loop as himself" (*Anatomy* 226). What is at stake in this drug-fueled romp across Chicago is the question of autonomy. Zuckerman under the influence is no longer in control of his actions, a turned character in a fiction he can only partly control, thus truly writing a story in "The lowest of genres–life itself" (103). The masquerade impinges on the topic of narrative ethics as he experiences him in the classical configuration of "himself as another":

> Donning that mask wasn't a joke: all the while he was enjoying it, his exuberant performance was making even more unrelenting all the ghosts and rages. What looked like a new obsession to exorcise the old obsessions was only the old obsessions merrily driving him as far as he could go. (*Anatomy* 283)

This performance spins increasingly out of control and gradually changes as he decides to become a doctor. While Zuckerman endows this idea with the mantle of a grand design for a new life, it draws on the same impetus to leave his old life, and especially the pain, behind.

The other factor in the novel which seriously changes Zuckerman's sense of self is his extensive use of drugs. As mentioned before, a barrage of prescription drugs does not have the desired effect of dulling the pain (cf. 216-217). However, Zuckerman soon finds his favorite medication, Percodan, a pill combining several substances, but mostly based on oxycodone. It is in this sector that recreational and medical use mingle. Zuckerman is quick to add vodka and marijuana to the mix (cf. 169). Drugs certainly fuel the antics of the Chicago trip, especially Zuckerman's masquerade. His erratic behavior is telling to his friend Bobby, who asks him. "What

drug you on, Zuck?" (*Anatomy* 203). The combination of medicines leads to a change in personality which is often touched upon in the novel, most notably an inability to stop talking (cf. 198), or "the Percodan talking." Formally, the excessive overmedication finds its correlation in increasingly frantic and disjointed language. The conversations, for example with his stoic driver Ricky become more and more intense, and the narrative less precise: "Three *(or four)* Percodan" (201, my emphasis). Zuckerman is going back and forth between extremes of elation and exhaustion, between confusion and aggression. In a hallucinatory stretch, the drug's effects are described dissociated from Zuckerman's volition and, at least in principle, the question of agency is questioned: "Chicago by night, said the Percodan, visit the new Picasso, the old El …"(215).

Zuckerman is losing himself and at the same time, delusionally so, is set to start anew. The trip to Chicago is an attempt to turn back time, to his time as undergraduate at the University of Chicago, a phase of intense personal growth and discoveries (cf. 175-179). But this repetition is impossible. The trip is an attempt at becoming someone other than himself, an attempt that starts with reinterpreting the pain: "Think of it not as unreasonable punishment but as gratuitous reward" (198). In this new view is pain is not related to *poen*a, but it is seen as providing an impulse to overcome the previous slump, "think of it as the ticket to a second life" (*Anatomy* 198). In other words, pain opens the door to a new, more authentic identity: "Forget those fictionalized book-bound Zuckermans and invent a real one now for the world. Your next work of art — *you*" (*Anatomy* 198). The beleaguered self then through pain transforms itself. From the writer's block rises the incessant talk. In keeping with the yearning for authenticity already expressed in the title "Dans le vrai" in *Zuckerman Unbound*, he finds his new life particularly invigorating, a counterpoint to the death-in-life situation he has encountered before "This is life. With real teeth in it" (*Anatomy* 290). The incessant talk is both a side-effect of the drugs and a desperate coping mechanism. In this Zuckerman all of a sudden appears as similar to Alvin Pepler from the previous novel. As Zuckerman observed "He couldn't have stopped if he'd wanted to. *Let him speak*" (*Anatomy* 225).

Zuckerman is forced to calm down when, trying to attack the father of his friend Bobby, he hits his head on a gravestone at the cemetery. Waking up in the hospital after his accident, with his jaw wired shut (cf. 263). Zuckerman finally is forced to remain silent. In analyzing plays, Scarry identifies the urge to talk and

"verbal virtuosity" as a "mode of survival." She writes "Their ceaseless talk articulates their unspoken understanding that only in silence do the edges of the self become coterminous with the edges of the body it will die with" (Scarry 33). This kind of reckoning comes for Zuckerman at the end of the novel and a similar sentiment echoes in the final sentence of the novel, intimating the futile nature of Zuckerman's escape:

> For nearly as long as he remained a patient, Zuckerman roamed the busy corridors of the university hospital, patrolling and planning on his own by day, then out on the quiet floor with the interns at night, as though he still believed that he could unchain himself from a future as a man apart and escape the corpus that was his. (*Anatomy* 291)

The novel ends with the resonant words "the corpus that was his"–corpus taking on several overtones, both anatomical and linguistic: Zuckerman is not only left with his own body, but also inescapably tied to the corpus of his work and to the range of themes he can write about. There is no running away from his life as a writer, and he will continue to perform his literary anatomies on the "corpus" he is left with. At the same time, the analysis Zuckerman gives to his friend Bobby remains valid:

> Look, it's simple: I'm sick of raiding my memory and feeding on the past. There's nothing more to see from my angle; if it ever was the thing I did best, it isn't anymore. I want an active connection to life and I want it now. I want an active connection to *myself*. I'm sick of channeling everything into writing. I want the real thing, the thing *in the raw,* and not for the writing but for itself. (204)

This impassioned plea for authenticity, fueled by the crisis of pain, carries only limited meaning; but it is clear that the following Zuckerman books begin to include different angles and widen their outlook beyond Zuckerman's most personal concerns.

2.4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to analyze the novel as study on the self under extreme pressures. Elaine Scarry was used as a reference point to conceptualize the effects of pain on personal identity. Whereas the first three chapters have been read as the description of crises, chapters four and five have been analyzed with reference to the notion of the 'second life.' While chapter four and five qualify as absolute breakdown, they also contain the idea of the second life–born out of the wish to leave the old life behind. Chemically induced through medication, Zuckerman feels increasingly

decentered, engages in a masquerade as Milton Appel, and experiences effects of depersonalization. In *Zuckerman Unbound*, there is an reference to framing "Appendicitis as a passionate, poetic drama" " (80 *ZU*). *The Anatomy Lesson* presents chronic pain and its effects as tragicomedy. The body with its shortcomings and defects figures prominently in the following Zuckerman books–one only needs to mention Zuckerman's health problems following his prostate surgery starting with *American Pastoral*. Other concepts such as "the second life" will be expanded on and transformed in *The Counterlife*. Arguably, motifs like Coleman Silk's passing in *The Human Stain* can be traced back to this concept, too. In *The Anatomy Lesson*, Zuckerman's world is shrinking, which provokes manic attempts at breaking free. Looking at the development of themes and motifs in the Zuckerman novels, one can see a clear break in so far as the narrative world of the Zuckerman novels opens up in the following novels *The Prague Orgy* and *The Counterlife*.

2.5 *The Prague Orgy*, an Ethical Epilogue[18]

Following the excesses of Zuckerman's crises and exploration of a "second life" in *The Anatomy Lesson*, *The Prague Orgy* marked an anti-thesis is more than one way. Set apart, yet belonging to the previous novels, it is called an "epilogue" to the previous novels. The most overt change in the novel is its international setting: most of the plot takes place in the Czechoslovakian capital Prague. This change of setting, I argue, has far-reaching consequences for the literary ethics of the Zuckerman novels. It also speaks to Roth's interest in Eastern Europe and Eastern European Literature. Ironically, in 2008, Horace Engdahl, the then permanent secretary of the Nobel prize jury, in an interview with Associated Press, saw slim chances for future Nobel prize winners in Literature coming from the United States and gave the following reasons:

> "There is powerful literature in all big cultures, but you can't get away from the fact that Europe still is the centre of the literary world ... not the United States," and further "The US is too isolated, too insular. They don't translate enough and don't really participate in the big dialogue of literature ...That ignorance is restraining." (Goldenberg n.p.)

The comment was widely interpreted as a sideswipe, commenting on the chances of Philip Roth and other American authors. However, the charges ring false in Roth's case and consequently, in an interview with German weekly *Die Zeit*, he claimed to have no knowledge of Engdahl's verdict or at least pretended at simply refusing to believe in the accuracy of the quote when confronted with it: "He did not say that." (my transl. Naumann, 2009). After all, it was Roth who was instrumental in introducing East European writers to an American audience when he edited Penguin's "Writers from the Other Europe" series from the mid-1970s onwards until 1989.

It is against this background that I want to take a closer look at *The Prague Orgy*, a novella which was added to the first Zuckerman trilogy and first published in 1985, as part of the collection *Zuckerman Bound*. This collection was subtitled "A Trilogy and Epilogue 1979-1985." I argue the subtitle is significant, especially given the possible alternative of calling *Zuckerman Bound* a tetralogy. The title *The Prague Orgy* is both fitting—the novel is a document of Roth's interest in Central and Eastern Europe–and misleading: the eponymous orgy is a part of the novella, but

[18] This chapter has its origins in a talk given at UVM, Burlington in November 2011.

arguably far from central to it. Dealing in matters of identity and sexuality, the novella unites prototypical themes of Roth's fiction.

Critical interest in Philip Roth's novels, however, is unevenly distributed. As far as *Zuckerman Bound* is concerned, most of the attention is focused on *The Ghost Writer*; the two later novels *Zuckerman Unbound* and *The Anatomy Lesson* have garnered less interest and are often considered inferior. In contrast, *The Prague Orgy* received generally favorable reviews: Harold Bloom, in a 1985 review, called it "at once the bleakest and the funniest writing Roth has done" as well as "the best of Roth, a kind of coda to all his fiction so far" (Bloom, n. p.). This sort of enthusiasm has not carried over to critical attention. As far as I can see, there exist relatively few journal articles on the novella and when monographs deal with *Zuckerman Bound*, relatively short thrift is given to the concluding novella. Most importantly, I think relatively little thought has been given to formal aspects of Roth's work. One question that might then rightfully be asked is: What makes *The Prague Orgy* an epilogue–and what are the consequences of such a categorization with regards to interpretation? In the following I would like to introduce at first some of the main themes of the novella and in a second step will provide an interpretation of the text *as* epilogue, looking both at form and content. As the title of this chapter already indicates, I believe that the concept of epilogue has implications when questioned with regard to ethical aspects of texts. In a final part I would like to reassess the significance of *The Prague Orgy* within the context of the Zuckerman series of novels.

2.5.1 An American in Prague

The novella is relatively self-contained, but comments on the earlier novels and picks up on central themes of the previous novels. It features long stretches of dialogue, quick political quips, and its plot is as convoluted as the alleys of Prague, which play an important role in it.

On January 11th 1976 Nathan Zuckerman meets the Czech émigré writer Zdenek Sisovsky and his companion, Eva Kalinova in his New York City apartment. They both can relate to stories of persecution. Sisovsky's novels have been banned in Czechoslovakia, while Kalinova, an actress specializing in Chekov roles, was fired from her position at the National Theatre for political reasons and sees all her ambitions thwarted in the United States. From the very beginning it is clear that

Sisovsky attempts to flatter Zuckerman and to downplay his own stature: "People have Musil, Proust and Mann and Nathan Zuckerman to read, why should they read me" (*Orgy* 456)? Soon it becomes apparent that Sisovsky hopes to enlist Zuckerman for a special mission: his father had written stories in Yiddish, but was murdered by the Nazis during World War II under horrible circumstances and the stories, remained unpublished. The stories are of supposedly high quality—"This is the Yiddish of Flaubert" (465)— and are currently with Sisovsky's books in Prague, to be more precise, in possession of his ex-wife Olga. Olga, Sisovsky implies, might be forthcoming and hand over the stories if somebody other than him, for example somebody of Zuckerman's renown and charm, asked for them.

The novella then skips to February 4th 1976. Zuckerman walks with his friend Bolotka through the streets of Prague to attend a "wonderful party" or better, an orgy at Klenek's—a palazzo on an island in the city owned by a famous director. Zuckerman is informed that Klenek's place is wiretapped, both for political as well as voyeuristic reasons. At the orgy Zuckerman is solely in the role of the spectator, seated on a couch, while Bolotka explains the proceedings, who is who in Prague society and acts as a translator in the process. Zuckerman is introduced to Olga almost immediately and she takes a strong interest in him, trying to seduce him as the evening goes on. Quite uncharacteristically, Zuckerman leaves early with Bolotka, who tells his American friend about his suffering and persecution under the regime.

In the morning of the next day, February 5th 1976, Zuckerman is woken by a phone call and Olga announces her visit to the hotel room. She explains her spontaneous decision to marry Zuckerman and they decide to have breakfast in the lobby. Olga gets into an argument with one of the government employees working at the hotel. During the row Zuckerman receives a message from a Czech university student warning him that the government might be planning to get rid of him, even kill him, should he continue to stay in Prague. Zuckerman is shocked and wants to leave immediately, but Olga entreats him to stay and to finish his breakfast, mainly as a show of force, a refusal to be intimidated by the authorities. Zuckerman then broaches the subject of Sisovsky's Yiddish stories; Olga reacts furiously and exposes Sisovsky as a manipulative liar. Speaking of his father's death she claims: "Well that's another lie. It happened to another writer, who didn't even write in Yiddish" (488-489). Zuckerman leaves the hotel and embarks on an odyssey through Prague, which in his imagination turns into a magical place built out of memories of Kafka and his

Newark childhood memories. Before his inner eye, Prague turns into Jerusalem and he begins to meditate on the history of the Jewish people. He begins to suspect he is being followed and on adventurous paths returns to Bolotka's place. In the afternoon, he meets once more with Olga, who presents him with the stories of Sisovsky's father in a chocolate box and Zuckerman seems to have achieved his purpose in Prague.

When Zuckerman returns to his hotel room, he is taken into custody by two plainclothes policemen. They confiscate the stories, make him pack his bags, deny him any contact to the American embassy and escort him to a large limousine which brings him immediately to the airport, supposedly for deportation. When he enters the car he is greeted by a man introducing himself as Novak. They begin to talk in German and Novak draws Zuckerman into an argument on the literary merits of Betty MacDonald's 1945 novel *The Egg and I*. When Novak expounds on the moral obligations of writers—"the country looks to them for moral leadership"—and Zuckerman suspiciously asks whether he is with the official writer's union, he pompously reveals himself to be the minister of cultural affairs: "*Ich bin der Kulturminister*" (501)! He goes on to extol an ideal of adaptation to social circumstances which stands in contrast to the ethos shared by Zuckerman's literary friends in Prague. After his arrival at the airport, the American writer is quickly ushered through all checkpoints and after a last encounter with the authorities leaves Prague empty-handed.

2.5.2 (Critical) Intertexts

Several critics, for example Adeline Tintner, have pointed out that the basic plot of the novella—Zuckerman travels to Prague in order to rescue the manuscripts written by Sisovsky's father, has to deal with the writer's ex-wife in the process, loses the papers and is expelled—is based on Henry James' tale "The Aspern Papers" (1888). Other contributions, for example by Russell E. Brown, have keyed in on allusions to the fate of the Jewish-Polish writer Bruno Schulz, who was murdered by the Nazis under grotesque circumstances: his death lent the (unacknowledged) blueprint for the death of Sisovsky's father[19]. Zuckerman must learn in Prague that Sisovsky has

[19] Bruno Schulz was murdered when the SS officer who had protected him killed the Jewish protegee of another SS officer. The man retaliated by killing Schulz. The incident is recounted in the novel and falsely attributed by Sisovsky to his father. The SS officer in the novel is then said to have justified himself: "He shot my Jew, so I shot his" (464).

only appropriated this true story in order to motivate him to go to Prague in the first place. Further articles (cf. e.g. Ravinn) also dwell on the influence of Bruno Schulz, but extend the focus to the role of Franz Kafka in the novella. Taking up the topic of literary kinship, a line is drawn from the Zuckerman of *The Ghost Writer* in search of a new father figure to Zuckerman in Prague, once again looking for literary relations, this time not Lonoff, but Kafka and the search for the lost stories of Sisovsky. In a similar vein, another article by Versluys focuses on the Kafkaesque flavor of the interactions in Prague: he reads the search for the stories as a failed attempt at the "saving and reconstruction of Jewish narrative patrimony" –but the "mythic Prague he [Zuckerman] dreamt about, [is] gone, both in substance and in memory" (Versluys 319). In this context, Joseph Benatov's perceptive essay "Demystifying the Logic of Tamizdat: Philip Roth's Anti-Spectacular Literary Politics" deserves closer scrutiny. Benatov develops his thought around the concept of *tamizdat*[20], which denotes "writing from Eastern Europe illicitly smuggled out and published abroad" (Benatov 107). He reads *The Prague Orgy* as "the narrative of a failed tamizdat mission". (107) From this common starting point (cf. Versluys above) he takes a different approach concentrating on what he variously describes as "tamizdat disposition", "pervasive Western tamizdat mentality" (109) or "dominant Western logic of tamizdat" (115). By this he means a certain Western stance of superiority towards the Eastern European countries, which is aggravated by clichéd ideas about the suffering of the writers and the general population in the East, as well as notions about reckless and excessive sexuality of Eastern Europeans, often interpreted as rebellion against, and also caused by, communist oppression.

Benatov singles out Milan Kundera as an example of a writer who supposedly reinforces such stereotypes in his novels and as a proponent of such a trivializing tamizdat-mentality. He then goes on to argue that *The Prague Orgy* posits Philip Roth's rebuke of such a mentality: "Roth's resistance to stereotypical discourse on the socialist Other comes at an important sociocultural moment in the 1980s, when other American intellectuals prefer the security granted by the narrative of tamizdat"

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[20] Not to be confused with samizdat. Benatov gives the following explanation in a footnote: "Of the two terms, samizdat is the one that has gained much wider circulation in the English-language world. Indeed, in its general usage it often refers to any illicitly printed writing from Eastern Europe. But in its more technical sense, samizdat denotes self-published writing behind the iron curtain (hence its domestic nature), while tamizdat refers to the official printing and publication in the West of proscribed writing from the socialist world. … tamizdat assumes a 'double life' as printed copies are both distributed in the West and smuggled back east" (Benatov 108/109)

(Benatov 115). The literary counterpart to such a tamizdat mentality can be found in the Czech writer Ivan Klima, who repeatedly criticized Kundera and others for their biased view of the East. In the novella, the writer Bolotka—Zuckerman's main point of reference and tourist guide in Prague—is identified with Klima by several critics.

In his reading, Benatov treads a fine line. On the one hand he points out—under the heading "A Momentary Lapse of Reason" (125)—that Roth himself falls back on such clichéd views. On the other hand, Benatov defends him as "on balance a perceptive critic of the dangers of easy stereotypical cold war discourse" (110). This balancing act continues: Arguably, the novella contains explicit sexual material and aims to shock in a variety of ways—that is, there are characteristics, which might lead to the opposite judgment that this is a piece written in the "tamizdat mentality." Benatov argues twofold: first, Zuckerman's tamizdat mission fails and the stories are confiscated by the police; second, Roth refuses to engage in "the rhetoric trading on Eastern European lascivious sexuality" (115) and thus avoids the "tamizdat mentality". As mentioned above, the novella is full of "lascivious sexuality" and in order to support his reading of it, Benatov turns to Zuckerman's reaction to it. Other critics (for example Versluys) have pointed out the strange reticence and passivity which quite uncharacteristically sums up Zuckerman's deportment in Prague. Its title notwithstanding, Zuckerman is not partaking in the eponymous orgy and keeps his status as an observer. Therefore, the reading hinges in no small part on the perceived difference in behavior between the Zuckerman of the novella and the Zuckerman of, for example, *The Anatomy Lesson*.

Benatov reads the novella on a meta-level as a political and poetological commentary on Eastern Europe, as well as on the West and its slanted conceptions of the East. This entails a reflection on how the "socialist Other" (Benatov 115) is constructed. This double perspective also structures his argument: he highlights the Bakhtinian polyphonicity of the novella which he finds missing in Kundera's work (cf. Benatov 122) while at the same time reading Roth's text as a pastiche of Kundera and his "tamizdat mentality" writing. In this way, *The Prague Orgy* is analyzed as an intricately structured and ambivalent text, relying heavily on ironies and only interpretable in context with the preceding novels. This raises the question of the epilogistic relationship between the first three novels and *The Prague Orgy*.

2.5.3 *The Prague Orgy* as Epilogue

If one were to look up the term in a relatively basic resource as say the, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, we find a simple definition: "Epilogue: a concluding section of any written work" (Baldick 83-84). We also learn that its function used to be to solicit applause from the audience and that "both the speech and the speaker were known as epilogue." Finally, "[s]ome novels have epilogues in which the character's subsequent fates are briefly outlined." I would like to draw on a more complex understanding of the epilogue as lined out in Mathias Mayer's article "Der Epilog als Signatur—eine ethische Perspektive auf Musils Roman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*". Mayer views the epilogue as a site of ethical unrest. This unrest is created through the characteristics of the epilogue: the epilogue is spoken after the play concludes, therefore it can prevent a sense of closure and finality. The end proves to not be the final word. As a result the epilogue tends to recontextualize what happened before. It offers a different perspective at a critical time, when the play and performance can be evaluated in its entirety by the audience. According to Mayer, the epilogue is tied to the concept of the epic theatre, therefore an epilogue frames the play with narrative content. Due to its position after the play, the epilogue is situated in a liminal space between theatrical fiction and real life. It does not only mediate between the sphere of the theatre and 'life', it also occurs at the border between stage and audience, typically in front of the stage. From this position, the epilogue vouches for the authenticity of the play. The epilogue is characterized by openness and a place of questioning and criticism. By both imposing and delaying closure, the epilogue mirrors the never-ending processuality of ethical reflection (Mayer 146-149).

Turning to the novella again, we can notice the importance that Roth himself attributed to the Prague material within the framework of the trilogy. In a number of interviews he has underlined the importance of his experiences in Prague, which he had visited yearly over a five year span starting in 1971 and ending in 1975. In a 1985 interview with Mervyn Rothstein, he stated: "It wasn't clear to me until midway through the third book"–"The Anatomy Lesson"–"that this material–which in fact had inspired the whole enterprise–belonged at the very end. In order for Prague to have the impact upon the reader that it originally had on me, I had to write a 697-page introduction" (Rothstein n.p.). We can therefore see a structural and thematic epilogical theme concerning the previous trilogy. The liminality of the epilogue is

mirrored in the east-west cliché, the oscillating plot between countries in the East and West, which characterizes the novella. The comparatively short novella recontextualizes the entire trilogy in light of its wider scope. Zuckerman's struggle in the United States is juxtaposed with the suffering of the dissidents. In this way, *The Prague Orgy* hints at all the things left unsaid in the first three novels. On the one hand, this includes all the preconditions for Zuckerman's career that are taken for granted, on the other hand, this also extends to all the things that have been conveniently left out of the narrative.[21]

The theater serves as a generic blue-print and metaphoric frame for the novella. This parallel extends to formal features, as well as the content and can also be traced in the imagery of the novella. Due to the constant surveillance, all characters in the novella are continuously "playing" roles and hide their true intentions. Examples include Zuckerman and Sisovsky. As a consequence of surveillance, all of Prague in the novella is a stage: there is a voyeuristic and performative element and several times it is mentioned that even private encounters occur under the watchful eyes of the authorities. Several more times there are attempts to evade security cameras by switching off the lights. In full awareness of the cameras and microphones, elaborate scenes are put on for those who listen in: "She hands me the note and I read it. *You cannot trust Czech police to understand ANYTHING, even in Czech. You must speak CLEAR and SLOW and LOUD.*" (481) or in another instance: "Olga points to the chandelier [where a microphone is hidden] "What means indescribably?" (482). In another indication of the play-like character of *The Prague Orgy,* there are several stage directions, most famously "Enter Zuckerman, a serious person" (495) . Other instances include:

> Here she gets up from the bed, goes to the dresser, and removes from the top drawer a deep box for chocolates. I untie the ribbon on the box. Inside, hundreds of pages of unusually thick paper, rather like the heavy waxed paper that oily foodstuffs used to be wrapped in at the grocery. The ink is black, the margins perfect, the Yiddish script is sharp and neat. None of the stories seems longer than five or six pages. I can't read them. (497)

The descriptor "an epilogue" obviously reinforces the characteristics mentioned above. The novella thus figures as an epilogue in that it presents a synthesis of the first three novels–in content, but also in form. I argue that with respect to narrative perspective and form, *The Prague Orgy* explores a hybrid form which successfully mediates between the different narrative modes of the first three novels. For example,

[21]Compare Zuckerman's notion of the 'countertext' in respect to autobiography (*The Facts*, 172)

its diary form can be seen as a hybrid between the first-person and third-person narratives of the earlier novels. Apart from the introductory "*…from Zuckerman's notebooks*" (453)[22], the dates, for example New York, Jan. 11, 1976 serve as textual markers of authenticity. More clearly than before, the materiality of the text is foregrounded: This is manifested on the plot level and in the topic of smuggling texts, but also in the generic conventions, the aforementioned stage directions and the diary form used. More than the preceding novels, then, *The Prague Orgy* moves towards a self-referential and metafictional textuality that is explored in more detail in *The Counterlife*.

At the end of the novella, Zuckerman is escorted by the cultural minister to the airport. The final scene, which details the American author leaving Czechoslovakia, is worth quoting in full:

> He reads over the biographical details—to determine, you see, if I am fiction or fact—then, sardonically, examining me as though I am now utterly transparent, comes so close that I smell the oil in his hair and the skin bracer that he's used after shaving. 'Ah yes," he says, his magnitude in the scheme of things impressed upon me with that smile whose purpose is to make one uneasy, the smile of power being benign, "Zuckerman the Zionist agent," he says, and returns my American passport. "An honor," he informs me, "to have entertained you here, sir. Now back to the little world around the corner." (506)

I would like to look at this passage in more detail because, fittingly for an ending to the trilogy, or for that matter for the ending of the epilogue, these very last words are charged with meaning. The border guard trying to determine whether Zuckerman is "fiction or fact" can be read as another instance of a totalitarian literary critic. The question of "fiction and fact" has occupied Zuckerman, his supporters and his detractors for the course of the entire trilogy, be it in *The Ghost Writer* or in *Zuckerman Unbound*, where this is exactly the kind of problem that Zuckerman has to deal with. Of course, that is the question real life literary critics might ask in attempt at biographical criticism, trying to determine which parts of *The Prague Orgy* are based on Roth's experiences and which are pure fiction. Taking into account the complexity of the text, Zuckerman seems to discredit the idea that close examination—and indeed the border guard comes uncomfortably close—could yield satisfying and clear-cut results. The final passage is full of ambiguity and avoids clear

[22] See Pia Masiero's reading of *The Prague Orgy*, which points out this important detail.

pronouncements, for example in the description of the events: "as *though* I am now utterly transparent" (my emphasis).

The threatening guard, only "being benign" for the moment, once more recalls the atmosphere of threat and paranoia pervading the novella: everybody seems to know about Zuckerman "the Zionist agent". The text makes a point of the opposition between "Zionist agent" and explicitly mentioning the "American passport" thus intertwining the themes of anti-Semitism and the East-West conflict, highlighting that these categories cannot be reduced to each other. The final sentence of the novella belongs to the border guard: "an honor to have entertained you here, Sir. Now back to the little world around the corner." Once again the sentence is full of sinister undertones: implying that Zuckerman had been followed from the start and that the ongoings of the last three days have been orchestrated by some sort of Czechoslovakian authority. In addition the sentence ties back into the theme of a theatrical performance: the border guard as usher, saying farewell to Zuckerman as he leaves the theater. Alan Cooper sees an echo of radio the radio show *Mr. First Nighter/The First Nighter Program* (1930-1953) (Cooper 208). Typical phrases of the show include: "The Little Theater Off Times Square", "And now we move out of the theater and into the streets" or the disclaimer "Tonight's play was pure fiction and did not refer to real people or events". This intertext underscores the performance nature of Zuckerman's stay in Prague. In keeping with the characteristics of the epilogue, the border guard's farewell words occur in the liminal situation of the border crossing and speak to the contents of the entire novella. The question remaining is, what this "little world around the corner" actually is. The formulation leaves the possibility that this other world is no less a stage than the streets of Prague. Certainly the end of the novella shows Zuckerman in a liminal place between East and West, passive, questioned, deported.

2.5.4 "The Little World Around the Corner"

The openness of the epilogue at the end of the novella is palpable. In 1985, New York Times reviewer Michiko Kakutani wrote in a review of *Zuckerman Bound*: "Roth fans can only hope that instead of merely marking the end of the Zuckerman saga, it marks another beginning." (Michiko Kakutani 1985). And indeed, Zuckerman's "little world" was about to expand considerably. *The Prague Orgy* was followed by *The*

Counterlife in 1986 and after roughly 10 year hiatus, the American trilogy consisting of *American* P*astoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain,* was published and considered among Roth's greatest successes. *Exit Ghost*, the final novel of the series, was published in 2007. The latter novels have kept a wider perspective, so with regards to *The Prague Orgy* we can see it as a starting point for Zuckerman's increasing involvement in a wide range of matters beyond the literary. Thus *The Prague Orgy* with its focus on life behind the Iron Curtain is both a precursor in theme, as well as in form, for the late novels. There are parallels with *Exit Ghost* in particular. While the latter was not officially published as an epilogue to the American trilogy it was definitely perceived as the final installment in the Zuckerman series. And while the novel picks up after the events of *The Human Stain* and sees Zuckerman returning to a post-9/11 New York City, there are clear indications of direct references to the earlier epilogue. To name just one parallel, like *The Prague Orgy*, *Exit Ghost* is preoccupied with drama as a genre. Zuckerman tries to write a play making sense of his New York City experience in a play titled *He and She*. In an ending reminiscent of *The Prague Orgy* and the stage direction "Enter Zuckerman, a serious person", Zuckerman ends his play with the following lines: *Thus, with only a moment's more insanity on his part—a moment of insane excitement—he throws everything into his bag—except the unread manuscript and the used Lonoff books—and gets out as fast as he can. How can he not [as he likes to say]? He disintegrates. She's on her way and he leaves. Gone for good* (292). Once again a manuscript is left behind. Even though the situation at the end of *Exit Ghost* is of a different nature than the border crossing in *The Prague Orgy,* both texts, which I have analyzed as epilogues, end with a liminal experience.

2.6 *The Counterlife & The Facts*

Published in 1986, *The Counterlife* continued the Zuckerman series in novel ways, while still drawing on the same themes explored in the earlier books. As in *Zuckerman Bound*, characters are confronted with complicated moral choices or put in high-pressure situations. The novel playfully explores the different implications of various ethical decisions and it does so by juxtaposing narratives of different outcomes. As a result, there are moments of bifurcation as different chapters explore different versions of reality. This aesthetic choice leads to a non-linear and fragmented narrative. The juxtaposition of different choices and outcomes foregrounds not only the montage technique of the text, but also the ethical reasoning and decisions at the heart of the dilemmas explored in the novel. As a consequence, the novel comes close to being an experiment in ethics. By tracing different characters and divergent story arcs, the novel showcases the complex interactions between identity and ethics. By engaging in 'repetition with a difference' an assessment of different outcomes leaves the sphere of the speculative–different responses to central questions are explored and fully realized in narrative.

The novel is characterized by an even higher degree of self-reflexivity than usually encountered in Roth's work: protagonists decide to "leave the book" (cf. 312) or, in a classic mise-en-abyme, discover the drafts for chapters of the novel (cf 225-232). Most shockingly, the novel explores the implications of Zuckerman's death. This chapter sketches some continuities between *The Prague Orgy* and *The Counterlife* and I argue that the latter organically develops the themes of the earlier "epilogue," picking up on many of its central themes. In a further section I single out the chapter "Aloft" for a more detailed reading. I argue that the liminal situation of the flight and the surreal tone of the chapter make it unique within the wider context of the novel. This chapter concludes with a section on *The Facts. A Novelist's Autobiography*. Published in 1988, this "autobiography" holds a status similar to the Zuckerman appearances in *My Life as a Man*, insofar as it is technically not a Zuckerman book but in which the writer has a significant role in it. It offers Zuckerman's commentary on his role as a literary character for Philip Roth's fiction and imagines a critique of Roth's writing process through the eyes of his protagonist.

2.6.1 *The Counterlife* and the *The Prague Orgy*

In *The Prague Orgy* the materiality of the text was foregrounded by various means: the plot is about the smuggling of manuscripts and the text plays with textual markers of authenticity, using elements typical for diary entries or stage directions to give the impression of a play, alluding to the performance character of much of the interaction. In *The Facts*, Roth writes about his literary process: "In the past, as you know, the facts have always been notebook-jottings, my way of springing into fiction" (3). This is also the way it was portrayed for example in *Zuckerman Unbound*. However, *The Counterlife* marks a departure because it gives up the notion of a coherent literary work. And while it is always difficult to speak about facts in fiction, the novel subverts the idea of a linear fact-based narrative by exploring the implications of competing and contradicting sets of facts. Whereas the first-person narration of *The Ghost Writer* is followed by third-person narratives in *Zuckerman Unbound* and *The Anatomy Lesson*, *The Counterlife* changes between different narrative perspectives from chapter to chapter. The chapter 'Gloucestershire,' for example, starts out with a first person account by Nathan Zuckerman, then switches perspective after the death of the writer.

In *The Counterlife*, the productive mechanism is achieved by the juxtaposition of alternate versions of the plot. The effect is created by opposing the linearity of the reading process with repeated new starts and chapters that do not follow a chronological order. Instead, the narrative often goes back to a common starting point, as if a video tape was rewound, to then set out in a new direction. In the first chapter, "Basel," Zuckerman's brother Henry decides to undergo surgery and dies– the chapter then explores the aftermath of his death. In the second chapter, "Judea," Henry survives the surgery, but instead leaves his family behind and emigrates to Israel. The effect achieved here is similarly destabilizing as the ethics of the epilogue discussed with respect to *The Prague Orgy*. The mere montage of different alternatives subverts the notion of a traditional linear narrative.[23] Tracing the development of the Zuckerman novels one can attest to a steadily widening view on the world. In this sense, *The Counterlife* not only continues to explore issues of textuality and ontology, in a very real sense Zuckerman's world, the story world of the novels, is growing, going beyond the US and Prague, to include Israel and England.

[23]Similar techniques have been explored in postmodern movies, e.g. Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt*.

Much of the conceptual power of *The Prague Orgy* stems from the 'fish-out-of-water'-trope of Zuckerman leaving the United States and being confronted with a society in which dissident writers are forced to take over menial jobs and surveillance is a constant. By the simple means of Zuckerman being abroad in a communist country, the whole of the Zuckerman trilogy is recontextualized as possible only within a clearly delineated framework of post-World War II American society. In *The Counterlife*, all the implicit preconditions of Zuckerman's career are illuminated at once. The novel builds on this relativization by introducing even more variables into the equation. Zuckerman has weathered criticism about his writings before, but it is intensified in The Counterlife for a variety of reasons. The discourses that have animated the series so far seem to be recreated here in a different light, mostly because more seems to be at stake. The novel explores what it means to be Jewish outside of the United states, be it as an immigrant in Israel, or in the United Kingdom. Searching for his brother in Israel, Zuckerman is confronted with the radical fervor of Lieberman and his followers, as well as with the completely different perspective of his friend Shuki, who represents a different Israeli standpoint but nevertheless implores him to be careful about writing about his experiences in Israel (cf. 157-162). In the chapter "Aloft," Zuckerman is caught in the middle of a surreal plot to hijack a plane. The chapter exploits the liminal situation to create a space for free-flowing association and reflection. The concept and the title of the novel can be traced to a passage in which Zuckerman muses about his brother's motivation: "The construction of a counterlife that is one's own anti myth was at its very core. It was a species of fabulous utopianism, a manifesto for human transformation as extreme–and, at the outset, as implausible–as any ever conceived. A Jew could be a new person if he wanted to" (147). The counterlife, it becomes clear, is inextricably tied to one's identity, a transformation of the self. It is a daring–fabulous utopianism–act of the imagination and of reinvention. The novel stages a creative and productive tension between the lives and counterlives of the protagonists, whose ethical motivations become more transparent as the different outcomes of their decisions are played out in the novel.

The Counterlife mixes first- and third-person-narration. The first-person narration is reserved for the two last chapters–"Gloucestershire" and "Christendom." This change is particularly effective in "Gloucestershire" which breaks into two parts. After deciding on surgery, Zuckerman declares:

> Caught up entirely in what has come to feel like a purely mythic endeavor, a defiant, dreamlike quest for the self-emancipating act, possessed by an intractable idea of how my existence is to be fulfilled, I now must move beyond the words to the concrete violence of surgery. (205)

After a paragraph break, third-person narration resumes–"So long as Nathan was alive, Henry couldn't …." (204)–implying that Zuckerman did not survive the "concrete violence". One way of looking at *The Counterlife* is scrutinizing the use of such intentional blanks from a reader-response perspective. These blanks occur more organically between chapters, which are only loosely connected, but also within chapters, as shown here. Such a change of perspective caused by the death of the narrator, impacts the power dynamics of the novel. Zuckerman, the writer, is no longer in control, he is subjected to the alien perspective of his brother, which is presented in the third person: "He was a man utterly without a sense of consequence. Forget morality, forget ethics, forget feelings–didn't he know the law?" (226). In the prismatically fractured narrative situation, the chapter presents a character criticizing the way he is turned into fiction, invoking moral and ethical restraints on the writer. As a whole then, *The Counterlife* works as a self-conscious reflection on the conditions and preconditions influencing the production of literature.

2.6.2 "Aloft"

The third chapter, "Aloft," is the shortest of the five parts constituting the novel. It forms a unity with the preceding chapter "Judea" insofar as it takes place entirely on Nathan's flight back to London from Tel Aviv. The next chapter, "Gloucestershire," is no continuation of the narrative in "Aloft," instead, only the final section of the *The Counterlife*, "Christendom," picks up following Nathan's flight. There is a significant difference, as Nathan states: "only a few hours after leaving Henry at Agor and arriving in London with the notes I'd amassed on the quiet flight up from Tel Aviv, my mind suffused still with all those implacable, dissident, warring voices …" (255). This is an alternate version to the events recounted in "Aloft" insofar as the hijacking did not take place in this version. The violent events of "Aloft" lead to the plane being rerouted to Tel Aviv after the hijacking attempt.

"Aloft" is a central chapter in more than one way. Arguably its setting is far from arbitrary: The liminal space between Tel Aviv and London corresponds to the centrality of the chapter in the middle of the novel. Things are literally "up in the air" and Nathan is confronted with a chorus of "warring voices," is constantly challenged

and asked to give an account of himself. I argue that this chapter works as an emphasis and countermovement to the rest of the novel, distilling and interweaving the themes of the novel. In the chapters "Basel," "Judea," "Gloucestershire" and "Christendom," Zuckerman is confronted with different stressful situations and ethical dilemmas: Zuckerman travels to Israel where in Lieberman he meets a fervent proponent of the settlement movement. In another chapter serious heart disease makes him opt for surgery and he experiences anti-Semitism in England. In contrast, "Aloft" puts Zuckerman aboard a plane, an aluminum tube isolated from its surroundings. All the other topics of the novel are brought in, but somewhat stripped of their real-world referents. In the surreal atmosphere of the flight, these matters become even more significant as Zuckerman tries to make sense of the many insights he gained in Israel. This chapter is tethered to the other chapters by the letters Zuckerman reads and intends to write. Most notably, he writes to his brother, reads Shuki's letter exhorting him to be careful in his literary treatment of Lieberman (thus repeating the concerns of many starting with Judge Wapter in *The Ghost Writer*) and recalls his conversation with Henry's wife Carol over the phone prior to the flight.

Aboard the plane Zuckerman is confronted with a number of challenges, questions that make him consider his own position. The passenger seated next to him poses an incredulous question: " 'Why is it?' He was asking, his helplessness in the face of the question now rather touching. 'Why do Jews persist in living in the Diaspora'" (143). The incredulous question puts the man at odds with Zuckerman who tried to argue the opposite with his brother. The chapter is characterized by a surreal atmosphere created through Zuckerman's description of the scene: About a group of orthodox Jews forming a minyan he comments: "they looked like their objective was to pray at supersonic speed–praying itself they made to seem a feat of physical endurance" (141). Zuckerman describes himself feeling "voyeuristic" (141) in the situation. The centerpiece of the chapter is an attempt to hijack the plane in which Zuckerman becomes entangled. The description of these events border on the absurd, the experience of the abduction is both alien and, at the same time, comic. In what is an image of the liminal and undecided nature if the chapter, the plane never reaches London but is rerouted to Tel Aviv (cf. 181). As a result, the events aboard remain strangely unconnected to the other narratives of the novel. The experience is encapsulated and limited, which heightens the strangeness and sets it apart from the other chapters in the novel.

The hijacking attempt starts relatively late in the chapter, when Zuckerman is approached by a fellow passenger seated in the same row. As it turns out, this is a repeated encounter with Jimmy of the "Lustigs of West Orange" (94), or as he calls himself, "Jimmy Ben Joseph" (94). Zuckerman had met the young American before at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where he introduced himself: "I'm your greatest fan. I know everything about you. I write too. I wrote the Five Books of Jimmy" (92). Alluding to the Torah, the Five Books of Jimmy appear to be a satire that Jimmy has yet to publish. Jimmy is euphoric but potentially unstable. As they part at the Wailing Wall, Jimmy gives an impromptu stand-up routine, turning the holy site into an imaginary baseball stadium, pretending to catch a baseball running towards the wall: "The season is over! The Jerusalem Giants win the pennant! The Jerusalem Giants win the pennant! Messiah is on his way!" (94). The conflation of the holy site with the quintessentially US-American ballgame hints at the complex processes of identity and alterity experienced by the confused young man. Aboard the plane, Zuckerman at first does not recognize him and is irritated by his incongruous appearance: "He was reading a Hebrew prayer book and eating a candy bar" (143). Jimmy is clearly under a lot of stress, eating continuously and sweating profusely: "Torn wrappers from three or four candy bars were scattered on the seat" (155). He turns to Zuckerman and announces his intent to abduct the plane and land on German soil. He shares a manifesto with Zuckerman:

> FORGET REMEMBERING! I demand of the Israeli government the immediate closing and dismantling of Yad Vashem, [...] ISRAEL NEEDS NO HITLERS FOR THE RIGHT TO BE ISRAEL! JEWS NEED NO NAZIS TO BE THE REMARKABLE JEWISH PEOPLE! ZIONISM WITHOUT AUSCHWITZ! JUDAISM WITHOUT VICTIMS! THE PAST IS PAST! WE LIVE! (165)

And then he claims: "the big idea itself I owe to you! Forget! Forget! Forget! Every idea I ever had, I got from reading your books!" (167). Zuckerman is confronted with an ardent follower distorting and exaggerating his ideas and implementing them in the course of the abduction. In this sense the novel uses the mode of the absurd to shed a light on the question of authorial responsibility. In a sense Jimmy is a West Orange version of *Zuckerman Unbound's* Alvin Pepler, a sign that Zuckerman never escapes the tug of Newark and his far-flung relations there.

Owing to the comedic qualities of Jimmy and the basic absurdity of the situation, the hijacking attempt in itself feels surreal. There is a dream-like quality to the events which is emphasized by the aforementioned liminal quality of the chapter.

The hijacking has the structure of a joke, complete with punch line. At first it seems the situation is defused: "Wow. For a few minutes there you really thought, 'Some Jewish pothead from suburban West Orange has got nothing to do better than hijack an El Al 747'" (171). This sense of relief is almost immediately turned on its head again after Zuckerman asks: "What *is* that in your pocket?" Subverting expectations, Jimmy produces a real weapon: "'Oh, that?' He reached in absently to show me. 'It's a hand grenade.'" (171). The nonchalance of Jimmy runs counter to the shock-moment of the life-grenade. Zuckerman is panicked and Jimmy continues to produce the gun he had mentioned. To Zuckerman the gun refers back to the weapons he encountered at Henry's West Bank settlement Agor: "It was the pistol, Henry's first-act pistol. This then must be the third act in which it is fired." (171). The writer, drawing on Anton Chekhov's dictum establishes a meta-fictional connection between the chapters. As the scene unfolds, Zuckerman analyzes its development like a literary critic: "Farce is the genre, climaxing in blood" (171). As soon as the weapons are produced, Jimmy is apprehended and attacked by security agents on the plane and severely injured. The comedic qualities of the event are undercut by the harsh fate awaiting Jimmy: "the foe of the Jewish superego was totally out of it now and looked more than likely to be bleeding to death" (181). The events are then reframed in terms of the tragic.

For Zuckerman this incident is traumatic. In addition to the shock, he is apprehended and searched by the security forces who consider him an accomplice. The following inquiry often veers into the absurd, once again underscoring the surreal mood. Zuckerman is forced to undergo a body search, is shackled, and questioned while naked: "We're going to ask you to give an account of yourself" (174). Zuckerman attempts to explain himself and tries to distance himself from the hijacking attempt, as well as from the contents of Jimmy's manifesto as his interrogators attribute it to him:

> "But we know who you are," the hustler said, just as the syringe slid into Jimmy's thigh. "The author. Calm down. You're the author of this," he said, and showed me "FORGET REMEMBERING!" "I am *not* the author of that! He is! I couldn't begin to write that crap! This has nothing to do with what I write!" "But these are your ideas." (175)

By implication the issues raised here are about authorial responsibility. Jimmy's ideas are attributed to Zuckerman. In a continued pattern, the events of the hijacking are negotiated in terms of the literary and the meta-fictional; one of the security personnel begins a discussion about anti-Semitism in literature and asks: "Who's the little Jew with a cigar in T.S. Eliot's wonderful poem?" The liminal space of the flight

invites associations and so the guard enlists Zuckerman's support for a putative meeting with T.S. Eliot: "if only we had T.S. Eliot on board today. I'd teach him about cigars. And you'd help, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you a literary figure like yourself, help me educate the great poet about Jewish cigars?" (180) Zuckerman, who himself has been accused of writing negatively about Jews, is here confronted with an exaggeration of the motif. Reminiscent of Milton Appel's suggestion to write an op-ed piece in support of Israel in *The Anatomy Lesson*, Zuckerman is asked to use his status as a "literary figure" to defend a political cause.

2.6.3 Conclusion & Coda: *The Facts*

The Counterlife occupies a pivotal point between *Zuckerman Bound* and the American trilogy. That is, similarly to *The Prague Orgy*, *The Counterlife* occupies a spot 'in between' the two Zuckerman trilogies and, just like the "epilogue," explores liminality. Unsurprisingly it continues many of the themes of the earlier books and foreshadows central aspects of the following novels. What sets it apart from the rest of the Zuckerman canon is the willingness to engage in literary experimentalism. Out of all the Zuckerman novels it is the most overtly meta-fictional. Its narrative, divided into five contradictory parts, refuses the establishment of a clear plot. In this way, the novel clearly develops the themes of the first Zuckerman trilogy but also marks a radical departure. Seeing that the later books dial back the degree of experimentalism, it can be argued that the novel has a singular position while at the same time serving as a blue print for later material. One can argue that the concept of the "Counterlife" gives shape to what Roth has explored in earlier novels like *The Anatomy Lesson*, but that it also remained a formative concept for the following novels.[24] Characters from Seymour Levov to Coleman Silk and Delphine Roux try to shape their own life-narrative in ways reminiscent of the 'counterlives' Zuckerman chronicled.

My reading of the chapter "Aloft" has shown how Roth interweaves the different strands of narrative in one central chapter. The situation of the flight epitomizes the states of being in transit and the liminal and the chapter is at once tied into the different narratives, but also set apart from the rest of the novel. Characterized by a surreal atmosphere, the chapter tackles the central questions of

[24] See Debra Shostak, *Countertexts/Counterlives* .

the novel but removes them from the more realistic settings of the other chapters. Apart from the hijacking attempt, different letters, political manifestos and even literary criticism from unexpected directions come together to form a manic yet comic mixture.

This spirit of playful experimentation is continued in the next appearance of Zuckerman. Following the tribulations of *The Counterlife*, which, in one 'counterlife' include his own death and funeral, Nathan Zuckerman resurfaces as the interlocutor of Philip Roth in his 1988 "novelist's autobiography" *The Facts*. This text starts out with a letter to his protagonist asking for commentary on his manuscript: "Dear Zuckerman, …" (*Facts*, 3) […] "Is the book any good? […] Be candid" (10). The book ends with a devastating response by Zuckerman: "Dear Roth, I've read the manuscript twice. Here's the candor you ask for: Don't publish–you are far better off writing about me than 'accurately' reporting your own life" (*Facts*, 161).

In what amounts to a literary sleight-of-hand, the protagonist counters Roth, but also pleads for his further existence, about which he appears concerned. In parts, this plea then is reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster pleading with his creator for sympathy and a companion. Unlike Frankenstein however, Zuckerman was given a wife, Maria, by his creator. And she, too, has a commentary about Roth's manuscript: "'Surely,' she said, 'there must come a point where even *he* is bored with his own life's story'" (188). In his reply, Zuckerman is familiar with Roth's work and cross-references reading *My Life as a Man* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, coming across as a perceptive critic. The commentary is drenched in self-irony, for example when he comments on his endeavor: "Nobody who wishes to be worthy of serious consideration as a literary character can possibly expect an author to heed a cry for exceptional treatment" (*The Facts* 195). The list of Zuckerman's complaints is wide-ranging, starting from being typecast–"But I'm fixed forever as what you've made me–among other things, as a young writer without parental support" (Facts 163)–to a theoretical treatise on the interrelation between life and fiction. In analogy to the notion of a counterlife, Zuckerman speaks of a hidden countertext, presumably a complementary text comprised of all the things censored and edited out of the text at hand: "With autobiography there's always another text, a countertext, if you will, to the one presented. It's probably the most manipulative of art forms" (172). At the same time, he separates autobiography from fiction, distinguishing between the authors ethical or aesthetic intent. Zuckerman argues for his own continued existence and claims

that Roth is much more successful fictionalizing than chronicling his life: "With this book you've tied your hands behind your back" (169). Hearing of Roth's health problems he is fearful for his own fate as a fictionalized version of the author:

> P.S. I have said nothing about your crack-up. Of course I am distressed to hear that in the spring of 1987 what was to have been minor surgery turned into a prolonged physical ordeal that led to a depression that carried you to the edge of emotional and mental dissolution. But I readily admit that I am distressed as much for me and my future with Maria as for you. This now *too*? Having argued thoroughly against my extinction, in some eight thousand carefully chosen words, I seem only to have guaranteed myself a new round of real agony! But what's the alternative? (*The Facts* 195)

In a generalizing statement, he argues that "The whole point about fiction (and in America, not only yours) is that the imagination is always in transit between the good boy *and* the bad boy–that's the tension that leads to revelation" (167). If one accepts this be to correct for Roth's fiction by and large, we can see how *The Counterlife* is a literalization of this dictum by openly "shuttling" the imagination between different versions of behavior and their different outcomes. On a more personal note, Zuckerman comments on the driving factors behind Roth's fiction "Because if there wasn't a struggle, then it just doesn't seem like Philip Roth to me" (165).

This amount of linguistic play is not kept in the following works. In its place we find a changed Zuckerman, no longer the central focus of the narratives, but central in his role of weaving the story of his chosen protagonist's counterlives. As for the themes explored, there are direct lines of reference from the last chapter, "Christendom," to the later novels. Speaking about life in England, Zuckerman states: "Well that's over. The pastoral stops here and it stops with circumcision" (323).[25] This is a good description of the basic tensions underlying the next Zuckerman novel, *American Pastoral*.

[25] See Bonnie Lyons "En-Countering Pastorals in *The Counterlife*".

3 Ecologies: Environmental, Literary & Ethical

This chapter provides a survey of ecocritical theory and explores the ways in which it is related to different forms of ethical criticism. In this chapter the focus lies on the concept of cultural ecology, which will serve as an interpretive framework for the ensuing interpretations.

The use of the term 'ecology' has proliferated tremendously in recent times and has for a long time left behind the conceptual confines of the scientific discipline founded by the likes of Johann Jacob von Uexküll and Ernst Haeckel in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This trend has gone so far that ecologists have taken a stand against such popularization. Stephen Jay Gould for example remarks disparagingly that "common usage now threatens to make 'ecology' a label for anything good that happens far from cities or anything that does not have synthetic chemicals in it" (qtd. in Love 37). This notwithstanding, it is undeniable that ecological thought has taken a prominent place in the collective consciousness over the last decades; the vexing problem ecocritics and many others who are concerned about the long-term viability and the sustainability of a livable environment on Earth being that consciousness does not necessarily imply readiness for change, that despite scientific insights on such pressing issues as 'Global Warming,' or to be more precise 'Climate Change,' countermeasures and more generally, new ways of thinking and conduct, are only slowly implemented on a personal, national, and global level.

Ecology is a core interest of ecocriticism, which, as a result of these interests in the natural world and literature, has always considered itself to be an interdisciplinary field. This inherent multi-facetedness of ecocriticism has, over time, led to a self-reflection on the constitutive elements of the field. As Buell wrote in 2005, ecocriticism is "still finding its path" (Buell, *Future* 1); six years later, in 2011, Timothy Clark concludes his *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* on a strikingly timid note, even when considering that he talks about long time-spans: "Anticipating the daunting but exciting kinds of literacy essential in the centuries to come, ecocriticism offers its emerging and still *faltering* voice" (Clark 203, my emphasis). The sentence seems to imply that ecocriticism is 'still finding its path' while at the same time implying hope for a fully realized ecocritical field, which then perhaps might be expected to talk with a more authoritative voice that is actually heard. If we consider the launch of the "Association for the Study of Literature &

Environment" (ASLE) in 1992 as the foundational moment of institutionalized ecocriticism, a quick calculation shows that Clark is writing 19 years after the official inauguration of the field. In comparison, the heyday of 'theory' in its postmodern and poststructuralist forms is often labeled the 'Age of Theory' or the 'Theoretical Era' and dated from roughly 1968 to 1987, another span of 19 years (cf. Harpham 18). The questionability of such roughhewn attempts at periodization aside, comparing these time spans, one can reach two possible conclusions: either ecocriticism develops at its own slow pace, or, maybe, the wait for the emergence of a unified field is misdirected. What if 'still finding one's path' is a desirable quality? In today's protean theoretical landscape a clear grasp of a field, which would allow to speak with an authoritative voice, might just be the signal to move on and, as every so often, to 'redraw the boundaries,' now that that's settled. In this perspective ecocriticism's mutability seems reflective of the dynamism of its various subject matters and a clear sign that its epistemological potential is far from exhausted. Rather, I would argue, this seeming lack of unity in the field of ecocriticism might have its cause in the fact that ecocriticism, just as ethical criticism, has emerged at a time when classical modes of theorizing were superseded by newer forms of criticism, which, by their transdisciplinary focus, have never reached the amount of homogeneity of earlier theoretical schools. As such, the idea of finding one's path to an ecocritical identity might be misdirected in that ecocriticism is vying for an institutional status which no other field of literary criticism has reached in recent times and which any new form of criticism is unlikely to achieve due to the new conditions of theorizing in the last twenty-five years.

Since its incipience ecocriticism has shown a strong desire for cohesion and shared theoretical and methodological standards to rival 'competing' approaches, which obviously runs counter to the multiplicity of research interests in the field. Ecocriticism has always drawn parallels to other theoretical movements and their developmental stages, for example feminism (cf. Glotfelty, "Introduction" xxii-xxiv). To this day there is a lingering insecurity about its theoretical precepts and its methods, especially in comparison to other, established forms of criticism. Some of this insecurity may stem from one of the central tenets of ecocriticism, namely that, in Laurence Coupe's words, "the point is not just to speak *about* nature but also to speak *for* nature" (Coupe 4). Which leads to the critical problem of 'How to speak *for* nature?' This has been recognized as a central concern and theoretical problem by a

wide variety of critics, who have pointed out that unlike other identity-based forms of criticism like feminism or post-colonialism, ecocriticism, and specifically *ecocritics* cannot speak as easily *for* the designated subject, nature (Buell, *Future* 8). Another reason for these might be found in the thinly veiled distrust with which the first practitioners of ecocriticism were met by academics from the more established theoretical fields. Buell points to the fact that ecocriticism was not present in the leading university departments; as a movement it originated in a less prestigious association and was at the beginning in danger of being considered not scholarship, but "amateur enthusiasm" (*Future* 76).

Ethical criticism was in a similar, if slightly different position at the beginning of the ethical turn, which is often dated to the beginning of the 1980s. In contrast to ecocriticism, which aimed to establish a new field of literary (and not only literary) study, ethical criticism was more concerned with recovering a long-lost tradition of reading and criticism; Davis and Womack consequently introduce their edited collection *Mapping the Ethical Turn* by stating their purpose "as with the meaning of the verb to *map*, this volume, in certain ways, seeks to tell a story that highlights a terrain that has always been there. Ethical critics, like cartographers, do not necessarily discover or make a territory but, instead, describe and give shape to what has always existed" ("Preface" ix). During the entire heyday of 'theory,' ethics was a virtual non-entity on the theoretical landscape, mostly owing to a deep distrust of ethics, which, in a time of the almost universal deconstruction of the subject, put the subject and its decision-making processes at center. Geoffrey Galt Harpham has summed up the then dominant position:

> it was in the discourse of ethics—was it not?— that the subject, grossly flourishing in all its pretheoretical arrogance, claimed an undisturbed mastery over itself and indeed the entire world by claiming to base its judgments and actions on the dictates of universal law. According to this account, whenever someone claimed to be acting on "the ethical imperative" or "the moral law," they were in fact rendering mystical and grand their own private interests or desires. (Harpham 18)

Buell finds similar words that hint at a structural analogy between the two critical movements, when he points to the problem that the "idea of nature" was not all that new in literature and criticism at the time, and thus the forming of a new field of criticism could be questioned. He sums up: "[t]his is a specter that has bedeviled ecocriticism from its birth: the suspicion that it might not boil down to much more than old-fashioned enthusiasms dressed up in new clothes" (Buell, *Future* 2-3). What can we say about this analogy between the "private interests or desires" on the one

hand and the "old-fashioned enthusiasm on the other? Both would utterly discredit the critical movement in the eyes of practitioners of the traditional 'theory' of the day. It underlines the similar situation both movements found themselves in, with regards to other dominant discourses. However, the "Age of Theory," which gave name to the preponderance of theories inclined to post-modernism and poststructuralism in the 1970s and 1980s is often taken to end with the affair surrounding Paul de Man's wartime journalism in 1987 (cf. Harpham 18; Birns 281). It is at this time that both ethical criticism and ecocriticism begin to organize themselves as new critical approaches.

If we were to ignore a few outliers, important pioneering works such as Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* established the early 1990s as the beginning of ecocriticism proper and then tried to situate this date within the wider context of literary theory. Considering this, two relevant observations come to mind: first the rise of ecocriticism seems to parallel, if a little bit delayed, the rise of ethical criticism. And second, this 'timing' puts both ethical criticism and ecocriticism right in the middle of the above-mentioned crisis of the dominant paradigm of 'theory.' The result was consequently that both were classified into a rubric aptly named 'after postmodernism' or 'after poststructuralism,' a new context for literary theory, which Terry Eagleton prefers to subsume under the heading *After Theory*. This certainly does not imply the obsolescence of 'theory's' concerns, nor the impossibility of theory and theorizing in our current context–if one had doubts in this area at all, one could rather question whether we have successfully answered all the questions posed by modernism. However, I believe it exposed the precepts of 'theory' to a re-evaluation and correctly signaled the arrival of a new stage of theoretical inquiry, which is characterized by the contemporaneity of plural approaches, increasing interdisciplinarity, and especially transdisciplinarity, as well as a mounting eclecticism; in contrast, theoretical debates appear less acrid and polemical, extreme positions are defended less severely.

Ethical criticism and ecocriticism can be seen as representatives of this new way of engaging in critical discourse. They are both characterized by an openness to a variety of theoretical approaches and we can point to a lot of shared characteristics between the two forms of criticism. It belongs to the paradoxes of the history of criticism that, on the one hand, ecological goals can be diametrically opposed to tenets of a more conservative, subject-centered ethical criticism (cf. Zapf "Literary"

847-848), and that, on the other hand, ecocriticism can be described as a form of ethical criticism. Despite the inherent inter- and transdisciplinary of both approaches it is noteworthy that they originated in the humanities. The early advocates of ecocriticism were literary scholars, who reached out to other disciplines like ecology or geography to engage in a meaningful and adequate criticism. This is one of the reasons why ecocriticism covers such a wide spectrum from theoretical reflection to (especially in the last few years) activist pursuits. To remember ecocriticism's roots in the humanities helps to focus on its position with regards to the 'two cultures' debate. While the front lines are certainly not as clearly defined as C.P. Snow has drawn them in his 1959 Rede lecture, the debate has continued to elicit responses from the humanities (cf. Snow 2012).

In ethical criticism we often find a stance which highlights the competencies of the humanities in providing reflection of current ethical issues, thus assuming a rival position to the natural sciences. While underscoring the differential quality of the contribution of ethical criticism, the situation is different in the field of ecocriticism. From its very beginning, ecocriticism was characterized by its interdisciplinary slant, which, through its focus on ecology, meant an increased interest in the natural sciences, specifically biology. However, this interdisciplinary exchange has not always led to the intended results and a closer cooperation with the natural sciences has been a desideratum for at least some strains of ecocriticism. Critics investigating such a possibility for, to speak within Snow's framework, a third culture, include for example Glen A. Love (cf. Love 61-64). A concept often relied on to build a conceptual bridge between humanities and natural science in that context is E. O. Wilson's notion of consilience (cf. Wilson 8-14). The concept presents Wilson's attempt to conceptualize his argument for the "intrinsic unity of knowledge" (8) and, as such, it can also be used to conceptualize interrelations between other fields. While the concept indeed is helpful in thinking about such connections, critics have questioned to what extent the concept may implicitly endorse a scientific framework for studies in the humanities (cf. Easterlin 12). However, in the sense of a "'jumping together' of knowledge by the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines to create a common groundwork of explanation" (Wilson 8), consilience might be a good model to think about the specific configuration of ecocriticism, which, as Patrick Murphy argues, "should not be misconstrued as a singular theory, but rather as a movement with common concerns among its participants" (Murphy 7). Such a general, catchall

definition seems apt to accommodate ecocriticism's historical disparateness. And as long as those 'common concerns' are strong enough to assure 'consilience,' doubts that "'environmentalism' [may] just [be] an unhelpfully singular term for a host of diverse and even incompatible arguments and issues" (Clark 203) remain unfounded. With this in mind, there is no reason to speak with a 'faltering voice.'

3.1 Ecocriticism, an Overview

A short overview of the development of ecocriticism will help to locate the place of cultural ecology in the critical discourse. In most places Joseph W. Meeker's study *The Comedy of Survival* (cf. "The Comic Mode") is named as the first ecocritical work. This account of course precludes earlier seminal works such as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* or Raymond William's *The Country and the City*. The latter is generally considered to be 'more' ecocritical than Marx's study in that it is more concerned with rural life and its literary treatment by authors such as John Clare. Marx's work is famously less interested in the natural world per se, but in cultural conventions.[26] The other ecocritical study from the 1970s which is named as the pioneering work is Annette Kolodny's 1975 study *The Lay of the Land* which offers a feminist revision of concepts such as Marx's, who by then had been heavily criticized as a member of the so-called Myth and Symbol school of criticism (cf. Kolodny, "Unearthing").[27] The 1970s also saw the coinage of the term 'ecocriticism' by William Rueckert (cf. "Literature"). As the awareness of environmental problems grew in the 1980s[28] more and more scholars turned to environmental themes in their work.

The 1990s were the decade of the emergence and consolidation of the academic field of ecocriticism. The application of seminal studies on both sides of the Atlantic, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* in the United States and Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* in England were accompanied by the foundation of ASLE and the first collection of eco-critical essays, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, published by Glotfelty and Fromm in 1996. The latter offers an example of the comparison between feminism and ecocriticism. Glotfelty's introduction also features

[26] In the course of our discussion of cultural ecology, it will become apparent to what extent such an approach can be made very productive within an ecocritical framework.
[27] On this dynamic see Marx's lucid comments on his study 35 years after its publication, "Afterword."
[28] In Germany the founding of the Green Party and its subsequent success may serve as a convenient marker of the increasing mainstream appeal of environmental discourse.

one of the most influential (and wide) definition of ecocriticism: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, "Introduction" xvi).

In the 1990s, Lawrence Buell became one of the leading scholars in the field. His study *The Environmental Imagination* is probably the defining work of ecocriticism. Not only does he engage with questions of the pastoral, he also discussed categories such as place and space, themes he would return to periodically in his later works. Buell influenced the field and its basic assumptions to a great extent. For instance, the beginning stages of ecocriticism were characterized by a variety of discussions, one being if and how ecocriticism should differ from established forms of literary criticism, for example whether it should include more activist and practical elements. Buell synthesized these arguments and introduced criteria of his own, for example criteria of what constitutes an environmental text. His now famous criteria were:

> "The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device, but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history."
>
> "The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest."
>
> "Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation."
>
> "Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text." *(*Buell *Environmental* 7-8)

Highly controversial almost from the beginning, Lawrence Buell has since then backed off these strict criteria. They are reasonably designed to clearly circumscribe and delineate a field of research, to the study of which a new, fledgling academic discipline such as ecocriticism could devote itself. However, the clear interdisciplinary focus of ecocriticism from the beginning seemed to work against this premise. The predilection for mimetic literature and the realistic mode that can be detected in these criteria has been the subject of much debate and criticism. Leaving

behind these criteria has led to an opening up of the field and concomitant internal developments which led to further differentiation within the field. As Murphy puts it:

> Thus the equation of nature writing = nonfiction = fact = truth that formed the dominant mode of literary criticism that privileged the nonfiction natural history essay over all other literary modes in the early years of American ecocriticism is cast aside for a recognition of the multivalent textual displays of the search for better ecologically ethical understanding. (Murphy 33)

As a result, ecocriticism has arguably become more open and interesting but perhaps at the cost of an intellectual identity crisis with no clearly defined subject matter. Apart from these classificatory efforts Buell and others have tried to chronicle the historic development of the ecocritical field, which for the most part is a history of differentiation and expansion.

Over the years the interests of ecocritics have shifted and continually expanded. ASLE was joined by other associations for the study of literature and the environment, for example EASLCE in Europe. ISLE as a leading publication was joined by newer journals such as EASLCE's *Ecozon@*. And a continuous flow of conferences around the globe has led to a branching out not only into new disciplines, but also into new countries. 2009's "The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons" in Antalya, Turkey might serve as just one example. Despite the internal rifts, ecocriticism having found its place in theoretical introductions like Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory* or in anthologies like Julian Wolfrey's *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* points to its acceptance as a valid, if sometimes critically and quizzically looked upon newcomer to literary theory.

As we have seen, from the beginning ecocriticism was very interested in its status as a field of study and as a literary theory in its own right, which led to sideways glances at other contemporary forms criticism and theory, as evidenced in Glotfelty's comparison of the development of ecocriticism with the different evolutionary stages of feminist criticism. As a result, it has become habit to refer to the different developing stages of ecocritical theory as 'waves,' therefore enabling the discernment of first-wave, second-wave, third-wave, etc. works of ecocriticism (cf. Buell *Future* 21-23). The problems posed by such a rough categorization are obvious, e.g when it comes to the opening of the ecocritical canon. Lawrence Buell's aforementioned criteria let us categorize *The Environmental Imagination* then as a work of the first wave, in Buell's own words, "[f]or first-wave ecocriticism,

'environment' effectively meant 'natural environment'" (Future 21). The ensuing debate which led to reconsiderations then led to new emphases, summed up as the second wave: "Second-wave ecocriticism has tended to question organicist models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism" (Buell 22). Dana Phillips' *The Truth of Ecology* (2003) can be counted as a landmark study challenging many of Buell's positions. Further waves are in the wings: the third wave is commonly associated with a further embrace of literary theory and ecocritical theorizing, for example in Timothy Morton's deconstructionist *Literature Without Nature*, while some new developments such as the turn to new materialisms in ecocritical theory are apparently eager to claim the title of "fourth-wave" for their endeavors. The discussion is ongoing and ecocritics themselves have taken up a critical discourse concerning the shortcomings of their fields, engaging in what, to use the analogy to feminism once again, Judith Butler would call 'discourse-immanent critique.'

3.2 Cultural Ecologies

While my main focus will be on the concept of "Literature as Cultural Ecology", it is worthwhile to dwell on Peter Finke's approach "Evolutionäre Kulturökologie," as it forms the platform for Zapf's further deliberations. Finke in turn situates his research project in relation to several other approaches which have used the term cultural ecology in the past or can be considered related from today's vantage point. He lists four main areas of influence, among them the classical cultural ecology as used by Julian Steward in the 1950s, several human and social-ecological approaches, what he terms more recent developments, as well as "Hintergrundstheorien"–thinkers delivering the theoretical backbone. Finke counts his own approach under the last heading, naming Uexküll, Bateson, and Naess as major influences. Uexküll, one of the pioneers of ecology, contributes the terms of "Umwelt und Innenwelt", Gregory Bateson's idea of an ecology of mind is instrumental to the idea of analyzing cultures, whereas Naess lays the theoretical underpinning for deep ecology (cf. Finke "Kulturökologie" 252-257).

At the heart of Finke's project is the idea to "analyze culture and cultures as ecological systems" ("Kulturökologie 248, my transl.), to directly focus not only on natural ecology but also on cultural ecology. Analyzing culture as an ecological system, he claims, allows for more precise description of culture and a conceptual

honing of the notion of culture. As can be expected, the dichotomy of nature and culture is central to the approach. Finke stresses the dependence of the cultural on the natural. Looking for an apt metaphor, he rejects the traditional image of nature and culture as horse and rider and instead proposes a new image of a mistletoe on a tree, emphasizing culture's dependence on nature and the symbiotic relationship between the two (277).

Finke, who among other things, specializes in the philosophy of sciences, is especially concerned with the two-cultures divide, which, to him, is one of the main reasons why the relationship between nature and culture has not been sufficiently theorized in the past. In principle, he maintains, Snow's diagnosis of a split in society still holds. Traces of the divide can be found in the rift between ecology and economics ("Evolutionäre"181-2).

Proposing a new theory of culture, Finke offers examples for the applicability of his approach. Literature, according to Finke, is an especially promising field of cultural ecological research. In pointing to central themes of interest, he draws on characteristics traditionally identified as strengths of literature and considers them in the light of his theory. He argues that literature allows us to experience cultural ecosystems in all their variety in a very immediate fashion that is hard to reproduce in other media or forms of art, as literature has the ability to raise consciousness of cultural systems. However, as Finke is careful to point out, not literature on its own, but interpretation and discourse on it serve this function. As a result, fictional literature in particular becomes a space to experiment with potentially new forms of culture (Finke, "Kulturökologie" 272).

In the field of ethics, Finke emphasizes the normative component inherent to a cultural ecology. He recommends sustainability as a key value for an ecological ethics and tries to define the meaning of sustainability in a variety of contexts. Another key value is variety. Finke argues that variety in culture is beneficial, even though he cautions against variety as an absolute value in itself. Therefore, the evaluation of variety is context-dependent. Threats to variety are therefore certain forms of globalization and the increasing concentration of economic leverage. Explicitly mentioned is also the problem of power, if concentrated in the hands of a few, with risks evenly distributed among the entire populace. One benchmark Finke mentions in his conception of a cultural ecological ethics is the "principle of intelligent imitation of nature." This guideline is prone to draw heavy criticism; the keyword

therefore must be "intelligent." It precludes, as Finke is careful to point out, mindless adaptations of ecological principles, one example of such an 'unwanted' adaptation being social Darwinism. Clearly expecting criticism along these lines, Finke insists that this maxim of imitation does not constitute a case of the naturalistic fallacy (Finke, "Kulturökologie" 267-269). However, it is this accusation that practitioners of cultural ecology will have to expect in one form or another. Cultural ecology's interest in bridging the gap to the sciences here seems to work against it, as critics have charged the approach with reductionism.

Zapf identifies two central functions of imaginative literature: as a "*sensorium and imaginative sounding board*" ("State" 56) and a "site of a constant *creative renewal*" ("State" 56). Based on these functions of literature, Zapf proposes a triadic functional model of literature identifying three central contributions which literature can fulfill. The first of these functions is termed "cultural-critical metadiscourse". Its effect typically "consists in the representation of typical deficits, blind spots, imbalances, deformations, and contradictions within dominant systems of civilizatory power" (Zapf, "State" 62). The second function, the "imaginative counter-discourse" then "can be described as a counter-discursive staging and semiotic empowering of that which is marginalized, neglected or repressed in the dominant cultural reality system" (Zapf, "State" 63). Finally, the third function pertains to literature's way of relating the previous two in productive ways:

> The third functional aspect or dimension of literature as the medium of cultural ecology can be described as the reintegration of the excluded with the cultural reality system, through which literature contributes to the constant renewal of the cultural center from its margins." (Zapf, "State" 64)

The distribution and emphasis of these discourses vary from work to work. Zapf argues that fluctuations can be explained not only by individual differences, but also by the specific characteristics of different forms of literature. One example is the preponderance of the imaginative counter-discourse in Romantic literature. The approach outlined here often focuses on symbolism and imagery. The literary work is both part of the aforementioned discourses, but also stages them in ways observable within the literary work. This triadic functional model of literature will be used as the basis for the following readings of Roth's work. [29]

[29] For a detailed English language discussion of this approach see Zapf, Hubert. *Literature as Cultural Ecology. Sustainable Texts.*

3.3 Outlook

As ecocriticism continues to evolve and ethics become ever more differentiated, many further points of contact are to be expected. In fact, as I have pointed out, ethics seem to be an integral part of the ecocritical enterprise. Areas in which the two already come together include such theoretical hybrids as the recently emerged post-colonial ecocriticism. In this particular combination different impulses from a variety of fields come together. Cosmopolitanism, for example, has received increased research interests as evidenced in the number of monographs for example by Appiah, and find their expression in Ursula Heise's study *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008). Environmental interests, postcolonial theory and political studies are brought together in collections such as *Postcolonial Green. Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (2010), edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, for which Heise wrote an "Afterword." Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin cover a lot of ground in their interdisciplinary volume *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010). Such new fields then clustered around new concepts such as that of ecological imperialism (cf. 34) or new 'axioms' such as "there is no social justice without ecological justice" (35). Huggan and Tiffin also venture into Animal Studies, another field that requires more attention. Ecocritics stray wider in their search for new theoretical impulses and thus the possibilities for recombination grow. The growing influence of Ulrich Beck's sociological theories of risks in ecocritical circles already yields interesting ethical perspectives as the contemplation of risks is likened to ethical reflections, and of course can be considered in the continuum from cosmopolitanism to globalization and ecocritical awareness.

The challenge to ecocriticism on the grounds of its perceived lack of theoretical underpinnings has not gone unanswered and many new approaches, cultural ecology among them, have tried to open up ecocritical discourse to new impulses from the sciences and contemporary literary theories. Such impulses include notions such as toxic discourse, originally introduced by Stacy Alaimo, who has proposed a concept of trans-corporeality in her study *Bodily Natures*. Trans-corporeality as one of the new forms of materialisms poses an interesting challenge for the foundations of ethics in that it assumes that the borders between different lifeforms become permeable. As such the construction of an ethical subject becomes increasingly difficult. New ecocritical approaches such as the turn to material ecocriticism as advocated by Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann and others also fall into this category. Recent

developments have pointed to a re-engagement with materialism and ecocriticism to the extent that there was talk of a materialistic turn. In this context the works of David Abrams, especially his *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) and *Becoming Animal* can be named. In many cases there are theoretical overlaps between different approaches, even though they focus on entirely different aspects.

The recent turn to animal studies, a field allied with post-humanism, offers new possibilities for cultural ecological applications. Donna Haraway's thoughts on the ontological status of the cyborg have been superseded by an interest in the relationship between humans and animals and specifically dogs. Haraway expressly sketches the lines of thought from her concept of the cyborg to her interest in animals –both serving the same purpose of questioning and deconstructing notions of the human subject. The human/animal dichotomy is especially resonant in the field of cultural ecology as both sides and their interrelationship are scrutinized not only in isolation, but also in their hybrid state, as "naturecultures" in Haraway's term. Examples of this are the direction of a non-anthropocentric humanism or post-humanism but also thoughts on the co-evolution of human beings and certain species of domestic animals (cf. Haraway *Companion* 26-32)

Current examples of this increasing importance of theory and overviews of current developments can be found in the 2011 volume *Ecocritical Theory* edited by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby and the collection of essays *Literature, Ecology, Ethics* edited by Timo Müller and Michael Sauter, (2012). Notable overviews include the *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* (2016) edited by Zapf and *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (2017), edited by Heise, Christensen and Niemann. The concept of the environmental humanities highlights the extent to which similar theoretical developments have taken place in adjacent disciplines. This paradigm shift towards the ecological has proven productive across academic disciplines.

In the above, I have tried to present the centripetal forces characterizing the theoretical landscape of ecocriticism in a positive light. In my opinion, the openness and flexibility and even the coexistence between pro-theory and anti-theory camps is to be considered a strength and not a weakness. A case in point is the negotiation of such traditional ecocritical topics as space and place. In the course of their reconceptualization they were continually reconfigured along the lines drawn by current theoretical discussions veering between the local and the global, between

place attachment and cosmopolitanism. In a tragic paradox of which every ecocritic is aware, ecocriticism can rest assured that its concerns and research interests are, given the general perception of ecological crisis, considered valid and important. Ecocriticism itself seems to be both symptom and catalyst of growing ecological awareness. Because of this ongoing 'popularity' there is no stock shortage of new approaches contributing to research. A case in point is Nancy Easterlin's 2012 study *A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation* which shares many of the discussed traits but presents its own program for new way of practicing the humanities. There are certain parallels here to Peter Finke's approach and also to the idea of literature as cultural ecology. Easterlin states: "biocultural criticism and theory strengthen the aims and practices of literary studies by combining scientific psychology and evolutionary studies with literary criticism, history, and other areas of the humanities and the sciences" (Easterlin 5). The conceptual vicinity of the biocultural approach to forms of cultural ecology is apparent in passages like this: "I suggest the biological and cultural evolution together highlight the centrality of meaning making processes for species and by extension provide ample justification for interpretation as the core aim of our discipline" (6). While not exclusively ecocritical in nature, her attempt at providing a biocultural framework for the humanities is an interesting concept which shares common sympathies with the ecocritical project. For example writing on the psychological components of nature as an ecocritical category plays an important role in the chapter "Minding Ecocriticism." However problematical, in all these endeavors there also seems to be the utilitarian motive of proving the worth of the humanities to the modern education system. Nancy Easterlin puts it quite bluntly: "we cannot simply be learned, but must be learned *for* one purpose or another, and that that purpose must not be only demonstrable but attractive to administrators and students alike" (Easterlin 3). While the first part of her argument is hotly contested the latter part seems, in recent years and on both sides of the Atlantic, as a realistic estimate of the current situation,.

Despite this focus on theoretical advances and new theoretical hybrids, it is important to keep in mind the broad spectrum of ecocriticism, which also includes activist criticism, often arguing against certain forms of theoretical approaches/theorization. A case in point is narrative scholarship in the vein of Scott Slovic, or the Darkmountain project. And while some of these projects refuse to take part in theoretical discussions, they do based on the conviction that certain forms of

literary theory are not conducive to the furthering of their goals. The persistence of this variety of different approaches has made ecocriticism a very wide umbrella term for a host of different expressions of cultural and literary studies. As mentioned before, so far there has not been a lot of discussion on the quality of environmental literature and literature discussed. The margin of what can be considered ecocriticism has widened considerably but there are still certain conventions that are rarely breached. Given the diversity of the field, there is understandable disagreement about the future direction of ecocriticism. The differentiated approach to literature and the inherent trans- and interdisciplinarity of the field still offers potential for innovative ways to think about literature and the environment. In the following discussion of Philip Roth's later Zuckerman novels some of these theoretical impulses will be taken up. Going against the grain of the very latest theories, one of my main concerns will be to establish a concept of 'nature' as a central component of Philip Roth's work.

4 American Pastoral

Jewish-American writing is generally not associated with a strong tradition of nature writing; even mere descriptions of the natural environment are considered rather rare. This is so much of a truism that Andrew Furman simply named his article on ecocritical perspectives in the field of Jewish-American literature "No Trees please, We're Jewish":

> I find that reading and teaching Jewish American Literature has become more and more problematic. For Jewish American fiction writers in this century have, by and large, created a literature that either ignores, misrepresents, or at its most extreme, vilifies the natural world. (Furman 49)

Furman discusses several of Roth's works and in passing comments on the *American Pastoral* in his article. Not surprisingly, he minimizes the role of 'the pastoral' in the novel, pointing out the satirical potential of Levov's move to rural Old Rimrock and interpreting it pretty much as an elaborate joke by Roth. In Furman's reading Levov's livestock operation registers as "fatuousness" and he interprets Merry's anger as having its sources in this antisocial and reclusive move to the countryside, in the betrayal of Jewish ideals of urbanity and social life. While there is some merit to this view, which can be argued with the aid of certain supportive passages, this sort of reading keeps Roth firmly in the phalanx of Jewish-American writers not interested in nature. Consequently all attention to the natural world in the novels seems to be reduced and relegated to the status of merely coincidental doodlings at the edges of a larger picture—preferably that of an urban setting. This, once again is a valid view highlighting traditional themes of Jewish-American literature in Roth. However, taking into account the wider picture—and the doodlings in the margins—is justified by the obvious change in tone in the Zuckerman series, which I have traced from the first trilogy to the epilogue of *The Prague Orgy* and will now continue in this analysis of the beginning of the American trilogy in *American Pastoral*.

In the following, I attempt an ecocritical reading of *American Pastoral*. To be more precise, the focus will be on the role of animals and the categories of space and place in the novel. Given the wider focus of this study, the role of the animal is examined with animal ethics and animal justice in mind; the category of the pastoral, which is of central importance, allows for the integration of ethical questions into the

reading of space and place. At the same time, the readings will take into account the aesthetic structure of the novel.

That rural life should play an important role in the fiction of Philip Roth is hardly surprising when we remember that he used to spend much of the year in rural Connecticut. This seems to be a fact that has eluded the otherwise relatively autobiographical streak of Roth criticism. If there is one iconic quote from the author that is repeated over and over again in critical studies of Roth's work, it is the following pronouncement: "Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness," sometimes supplemented with "are my closest friends." The quotation appears in different publications (cf. also *Reading* 96) but originates from a 1974 interview by Joyce Carol Oates ("A Conversation" 98). It is cited for example by Debra Shostak in her important study *Countertexts, Counterlives* (3) and serves as ornamental quote at the homepage of the *Philip Roth Society*. Turning to the original interview, it is striking to see, that the popular quote is shortened in a significant way. Roth contextualizes the *place* of the aforementioned 'friendships': "Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness are my closest friends; it is with them that I take those walks in the country at the end of the day" ("A Conversation" 98). As a symbolic anecdote, this reframing of Philip Roth's fiction to include attention to the natural world seems both warranted, and neglected so far in current criticism. This is not to pronounce Philip Roth the second coming of Henry David Thoreau or John Muir, nor to claim him as an ecologically aware writer, but to point out to a certain blind spot of criticism which this study attempts to address. In the following an ecocritical and cultural ecological reading is proposed in order to deal adequately with the opening up of Roth's fictional universe in the latter Zuckerman novels.

After his appearance in the London of *The Counterlife*, Nathan Zuckerman vanishes from the scene of Roth's fiction. After a short appearance in *The Facts*, Roth published his highly personal memoir *Patrimony*, and two novels sharing the protagonist Philip Roth–*Deception* and *Operation Shylock*.[30] It is in the mid-1990s that Roth announces himself to the literary scene anew with a fresh approach as shown in his provocative *Sabbath's Theater*. Here we already encounter a narrative situated in the Berkshires, the region Zuckerman makes his home in the following books. However, it is with the publication of *American Pastoral* in 1997 that Roth

[30] At the same time this was a period of intense personal crisis for Roth, who went through divorce and mourned the passing of his father (cf. Miller "Chronology" 606). Claire Bloom has given a highly critical account of the bitter divorce in her memoir *Leaving a Doll's House*.

returned to Zuckerman as protagonist. An almost universally acclaimed novel, the book was voted among the best novels of the last 25 years when the *New York Times* let a panel of writers and critics vote on the matter ("What is" n.p.). Following the experimental *The Counterlife* the novel might appear as a more reticent outing, but it represents nevertheless a stark departure from the first Zuckerman trilogy. As will be shown, these differences pertain to formal as well as structural aspects.

American Pastoral is one of Roth's longest and most complex novels—while a precise plot summary would take far too much space, it is highly instructive to sketch out the basic premises and narrative structure of the novel. A short excursus detailing the plot structure and different layers of the narrative is therefore in order. The novel is divided into three parts, which are named in reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The first part in particular deserves attention, as it serves as a precarious framing device for much of the rest of the novel. It is titled "Paradise Remembered," features Nathan Zuckerman as an overt first-person narrator and introduces several narrative layers, as well as several cataleptic passages foreshadowing the basic plot of the novel, which is later elaborated and modified in the following two parts.

Zuckerman reminisces about his Newark youth in the 1940s and the central role which Seymour Levov, called the Swede for his blonde hair and fair complexion, assumed, for the Jewish community of Newark and him personally. The Swede is remembered as a savior figure, a consummate high school athlete onto whom the entire neighborhood projected their hopes and dreams during bleak wartimes. Zuckerman recounts how the Swede made a lifelong impression on him, how he once met him in 1985 again at a baseball game and how in 1995 he received a letter in which the Swede asked the writer for help in the writing of a biography of his father, the late Lou Levov. The letter, implying some dark family secret, is decidedly at odds with Zuckerman's assessment of Seymour as a highly impressive but shallow human being and therefore proves not only incongruous, but highly intriguing to the author, who agrees to discuss the biography project over dinner. At the subsequent meeting, however, the Swede appears to have changed his mind and retreats behind a surface of decorum, which leaves Zuckerman's curiosity frustrated. A few months later Zuckerman meets Jerry Levov, a former class-mate and the Swede's brother, at his 45th high school reunion and learns that the Swede has passed away five days before. Contrary to his belief that the Swede lived an entirely happy and unremarkable life, Zuckerman learns from Jerry that in 1968, the Swede's daughter Merry had built a

bomb and blown up the postal office attached to a general store in Old Rimrock, where the Levovs had made their family home. Stimulated by the news and swamped by the nostalgia of the reunion, Zuckerman begins to dream up a "realistic chronicle," (89) of the Swede's life that, even though entirely speculative, begins to take center stage. Over a number of pages, the focus of the narrative moves smoothly from Zuckerman to the Swede, foregrounding Seymour Levov's perspective through internal focalization and increasingly turning Zuckerman into a covert narrator. In flashbacks, the reader learns about Seymour's torturous quest for answers, his attempts at understanding his daughter's actions, the family life of the Levovs, Merry's childhood, and the mounting tensions as she grows older.

The second part entitled "The Fall" picks up the action right after Merry's disappearance in 1968. A woman supposedly named Rita Cohen visits Levov at work and purports to be in contact with Merry. Over the course of several meetings, she extracts several possessions of Merry and finally, a large sum of money from Seymour. In general, this middle part explores the ways in which the Levov family deals with the tragedy of Merry's crime and her disappearance. In doing so, the narrative spans five years. This time period is characterized by the severe depression and alienation of the Swede's wife, Dawn Levov, and Seymour's vexing and re-iterative self-questioning. The circular nature of the Swede's attempt at coming to terms with the traumatic experience of the bombing planned by his daughter finds its formal expression in the novel in the use of a repeated introductory formula. The phrase "Five years pass," precedes several passages detailing yet another iteration, another version and another perspective of looking at the events and of trying to understand what happened. At the end, Dawn plans to move out of the old house, to which Seymour is still emotionally attached.

After five years, the Swede receives a letter by Rita Cohen tipping him off to the whereabouts of his daughter, who, to his surprise, has found a refuge in a dilapidated corner of Newark. This second part ends after the Swede meets with his daughter, who has converted to Jainism and barely manages to subsist in terrible squalor. Shocked by Merry's untenable living conditions and unsure what to do, he calls his brother Jerry, by now a cardiac surgeon in Miami. His brother extends support for the last time, scolding Seymour for his indecision, and offering to fly up to Newark and to forcibly apprehend Merry; the chapter ends with Levov's declining the offer.

"Paradise Lost," the third and last part, runs to almost exactly a third of the novel. The action sets in almost immediately after the Swede's phone conversation with his brother. In a masterful interweaving of narrative strains, Roth orchestrates a climactic dinner scene, in which all the relevant characters of the novel convene at the house of the Levovs. The presence of Seymour's parents, Lou and Sylvia Levov, and their innocent reminiscing about Merry serves as a poignant counterpoint to the realities encountered by the Swede only a few hours before. While Lou Levov pontificates about the decline of the glove business, of political life (the Watergate scandal), and the general slippage of morals (the recent success of *Deep Throat*), Sylvia Levov seeks out Seymour's help, not wanting to trouble her husband with the latest infidelities and subsequent divorce of Henry in Miami. In flashbacks, Seymour remembers the scathing interview and negotiations his fiancé was subjected to by his father prior to their marriage, strongly highlighting the problems of the inter-ethnic marriage, that so far had not been dwelled on much.

There are three more couples invited. All have played significant roles in the lives of the Levovs. As the evening progresses, the intricate personal ties, secrets, and hidden conflicts surface.

Among the guests are Bill and Jessie Orcutt, the Levov's WASPish neighbors. When he returns from Newark that evening, Seymour realizes his wife has an affair with Bill, the architect of their new house. Jessie is an alcoholic in need of constant attention and supervision. As the dinner progresses, she slides into psychological crisis, eventually assaulting the doting Lou Levov with a fork, barely missing his eye.

Barry and Marcia Umanoff have come from New York City to attend the dinner. Back in the 70s they had offered to let Merry sleep over, should she not be able to return after a day spent in New York with fellow protesters against the Vietnam war. While Barry remains reticent, Marcia, a caricature of a cynical academic, rejoices in riling the easily outraged Lou Levov. She never fails to provoke and provides incendiary commentary throughout the evening. In this she is a counterpoint to the conservative Lou Levov and represents the "progressive" side of the culture wars. The characterization here, although undercut by the generally highly ironic discourse, seems relatively negative, owing to the lack of a worthy opponent among the guests.

Sheila and Shelly Salzmann complete the circle of guests. Shelly is the family practitioner of the Levovs and Sheila was Merry's speech therapist. Levov confronts

Sheila, who, as he has just learned from his daughter, had hidden her for three days after the bombing, failing to inform the parents. In another revelation, the reader learns that the Swede had an affair with Sheila in the weeks following his daughter's disappearance.

The above information is not dispensed in a linear manner; rather, several events play out in a convoluted manner, often interrupted by extensive flashbacks. At times passages isolate the Swede in one-on-ones with other characters, for example with his mother or Sheila Salzmann. The end is both shocking and, in a sense, anti-climactic. Orcutt's wife attacks Lou Levov with a fork. The evening dissolves into chaos and the novel ends on a meditative note when the narratorial voice resurfaces asking: "And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levov's?" (423).

4.1 Central Themes

In order to contextualize the following analysis of the novel, it is worthwhile to take a step back and point to some of the main themes. Especially considering the specificity of my ecocritical analysis, I first look at the novel in a wider context and acknowledge some of its main themes which will not be covered in detail later on. The way in which these themes will be discussed here is by juxtaposition and alignment with other works of literature. Sometimes there are clear, intertextual references; sometimes there are structural similarities, or telling differences. These short comparisons are designed to situate the novel within a wider framework of literary culture. The aim is to illuminate through this parallax certain aspects of the novel in order to contextualize the later, more focused readings.

While anointing *American Pastoral* the great American novel might go too far, one can, from its title, subject matter, and scope, certainly infer high ambition in writing the novel. There are several intentional parallels and intertextual references to Melville's *Moby-Dick*, arguably one of the great American novels.[31] As I will argue later in more detail, Roth draws comparisons between the whaling industry and

[31] Critics have pointed out that part of the new orientation of the later Zuckerman novels is a tendency to reference writers of the American Renaissance, eg. Melville, but also Hawthorne, especially in *The Human Stain*. For example, several critics have pointed to the conceptual similarities to Hawthorne's romances. See Shechner or Jane Statlander's *Philip Roth's Postmodern American Romance*.

Levov's leather business. But there are a few other similarities and telling differences in theme and structure that deserve mentioning.

For once, there is the narrator, in both cases a first-person narrator, Ishmael and Nathan, who is increasingly relegated to the background, only to resurface at the ending. Famously, Ishmael provides an explanation of how he could narrate the sinking of the Pequod.[32] In the case of *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman marks most of the novel as his own fantasy, but then his role diminishes. In the final lines, the outward observer reappears and questions the ethical stature of the Levov's lives. Whereas Melville's novel famously opens with the line "Call me Ishmael," Roth's narrator Nathan Zuckerman points in an equally enigmatic manner to the protagonist: "The Swede". This introductory sentence thus points to a character that figures as both, Ahab and the Whale, in Roth's novel. If we are to believe the young Zuckerman, it introduces a larger-than-life figure no less mythical than Moby-Dick and equally elusive. But the Swede is not only Zuckerman's 'white whale'. He himself is engaged in a monomaniac attempt to understand the tragedy of his family. Depending on the perspective, the Swede presents as Moby-Dick or Ahab in the novel. Zuckerman is attracted to the enigma of Seymour Levov, who in turn becomes a rabid searcher of answers turning all his attention to the recovery of his daughter Merry. This searching is also an expression of the tragic configuration of the plot: Zuckerman imagines Levov torturing himself, incessantly searching for his single mistake, his *hamartia* so to speak, which has brought about his fate.

The comparison between Levov and the whale might seem far-fetched, but we can note that the Swede reaches his fame and mythical stature in partly the same way Moby-Dick does. It is his outward appearance—his "anomalous face" and "Viking" appearance (3)—which catalyzes the communal imagination of the Jewish community in wartime Newark. Despite, and because, of his exceptional stature the Swede remains psychologically and emotionally unavailable. In the latter course of the novel his almost supernatural equanimity and ability of suffering will be sorely tested, but remain on display; in his psychological assessment of Levov, Zuckerman cannot think of any psychological depth structures or complexities hidden behind the

[32] The omittance of the epilogue detailing Ishmael's survival in the English Edition caused a stir, as there was no rationale for the narration assuming Ishmael went down with the Pequod. In the epilogue Ishmael explains: „I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out the rocking boat, was dropped astern. So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, … On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last." (427).

impressive surface (23). The fact that he has misjudged Levov so thoroughly also lays the foundation for his obsession with the Swede. *American Pastoral* therefore is built on the same fascinations as Moby-Dick and the whale-hunt, that is, the mythical and the unknown, the obsession and the madness of the chase. In describing the Swede, Zuckerman uses the term "mask" frequently. As I will argue below, the use of the mask motive foreshadows the emptiness, maybe even the pathological component of Levov's psychological makeup. The image of the mask, of course is central to *Moby-Dick*, in which Ahab famously justifies his pursuit of the whale:

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? (140)

Both Levov and Zuckerman in their own way display this will to knowledge and to "strike through the mask". This double movement of unveiling motivates large stretches of the novel. As mentioned before, due to the mostly fictional status of Zuckerman's 'realistic chronicle,' the investigation of Levov as the Other also implies a production and projection of the self in the story.

There are instructive parallels between *American Pastoral* and Richard Powers' *The Time of our Singing* (2003). Similarities can be found in scope, in both cases covering much of the 20th century, and in setting, going beyond the United States in an attempt to contextualize historical developments there. Moreover, the social interactions of people with different ethnic backgrounds and cultures figure prominently in both texts: Young couples face a censorious environment opposing their marriage and citing the supposed incompatibility of their families. In Power's case African-American and German–Jewish Jewish-American and American-Irish in Roth's case. Powers uses the proverb "The bird and the fish can fall in love, but where will they build their nest?" as a leitmotif and varies it over time (*Time* e.g., 13; 143; also 630). In both novels, strong forms of encyclopedism serve as a narrative backbone and provide a coherent inventory of metaphors. In *The Time of our Singing* it is music and musicianship which motivates the protagonists and is part of the family tradition. In *American Pastoral*, Newark Maid and the passion for glove-making take on a similar, intergenerational role. Another point of interconnect is the focus on political radicalization in the 1960s. In Powers' novel, Ruth, the youngest sibling of the Strom family joins the Black Panthers and embarks on an underground journey similar to Merry's involvement with violent circles. Finally, the titles of the

novels share a common reference to a place outside of time: In Powers, the singing referenced in the title, refers to the protagonists singing "Time stands still" by Dowland, which serves as a temporary relief from the inimical and racist climate the family experiences. (cf. Zapf "Absence" 92-93). *American Pastoral* on the other hand references the American garden as discussed, for example by Leo Marx, and Arcadia; but in an important passage Zuckerman defines the American pastoral not spatially, but merely temporary, the 24 hours of Thanksgiving, which serve as a comparable respite (cf. 402). The focus on time in both novels is explainable by their perspective and their at times nostalgic backward look on the 20th century. Whereas Powers ventures into scientific territory and uses the character of David Strom to introduce the notion of "loopy timelike lines" (11) allowing for the possibility of time travel, Roth relies on Zuckerman's nostalgia and story-telling skills to move through time.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, *American Pastoral* has certainly resonated even more with its audience.[33] In its attention to the possibilities of domestic terrorism, it is not unlike John Updike's 9/11 novel *Terrorist*. This novel which garnered mixed to bad reviews relies on an implausible thriller plot and a neo-realistic mode of narration to trace the transformation of its protagonist into a fundamentalist terrorist set to execute another terrorist attack on Manhattan. Whereas both Roth and Updike put their focus on an exploration of the social foundations which might lead individuals to become terrorist, the two novels differ most in the style of narration. Where Updike uses multiple character-bound perspectives in a third person narration, Roth creates a complex and mediated narrative channeled through the author figure of Nathan Zuckerman. In direct comparison it becomes clear how much of the postmodern experimentalism of *The Counterlife* has carried over into the American trilogy.

Taking a different approach, we can interpret *American Pastoral* as a novel about the American family in the 20th century. This, of course, is by no means a stretch of the imagination—the novel dedicates long passages to the Levov dynasty, to Seymour's marriage to Dawn, to the relationships between fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and sons; all before the background of multi-ethnic American society. Thinking back to Furman's argument in "No Trees please, We're Jewish," we could say, Roth is here fully in the social territory which so often is the

[33] Also see Varvogli, "The Inscription of Terrorism: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*". Varvogli argues that Zuckerman identifies with Merry, citing an "affinity between the writer and the terrorist as creative and destructive agents of change" (101).

mainstay of Jewish-American literature. However, in typical Rothian fashion, the hyperbole of the prose and subject matter actually obscure some of the more unobtrusive underpinnings of the novel. *American Pastoral* presents the moving story of a father who loses his daughter. In this regard, the novel resembles Siri Hustvedt's *What I Loved*, with which it shares some interesting parallels. Starting with the detached narrators of Leo Hertzberg and Nathan Zuckerman, both novels are elegiac in tone. Hustvedt's novel indicates this tone already in the title, the past tense an indicator of loss and the nostalgic undercurrent pervading the text. Just like *American Pastoral, What I Loved* focuses on personal and intergenerational dynamics, as well as the contingencies of raising children. Loss comes in two main shapes in the novel, the death of the narrator's son, Matt, and the estrangement of Mark, the son of Bill Wechsler, the closest friend of the narrator. Just like in *American Pastoral*, Mark's behavior in the end is not explainable; he turns out to be a compulsive liar and shows sociopathic tendencies. The parallels to the theme of the essential unknowability of other people, even one's own children, in *American Pastoral* are clear; this emphasis on the trials of raising children seems almost drowned out in critical response to the Roth novel.[34]

American Pastoral also bears a passing resemblance to Ian McEwan's *Solar*. Discussing McEwan's novel here is especially helpful with regards to ecocritical readings. *Solar* has been met with mixed reactions by ecocritics. Ostensibly about global warming, *Solar*, however, deals less with the environment than with the social milieu of environmental activists and scientists.[35] In this way, *Solar* is a good test case for ecocritical readings of novels similar to those written by Roth.[36] Parallels

[34] The ecocritic Patrick Murphy has argued for the importance of writing about family relations, particularly about father-daughter relationships, which he deems of special significance. In a chapter titled "Nature-Nurturing Fathers in a World Beyond Our Control," he advocates strongly for the beneficial effects of fatherhood in creating a sense of responsibility, especially in view of the environment: "all men need to become fathers in the sense of assuming ongoing responsibility for the rest of the world, not through patriarchy and the logic of domination, but through heterarchy—mutually constitutive, nonhierarchical relationships" (150). In a further step, he commends authors for daring to write about this side of their personality, "I wish that more fathers would take the risks that Sanders and Bohjalian have taken in writing about father-daughter relationships in both nonfiction and fiction." (Murphy 159). The quote stresses the equal preference of fiction and nonfiction, but it is relatively clear that Murphy does not think about novels like *American Pastoral*. This invites an interesting thought experiment. What about fictional father-daughter relationships written by non-fathers? The fraught relationship between Levov and his daughter point to the problems inherent in such a concept. However, as will be discussed later, the title "nature-nurturing fathers in a world beyond our control" might at least in part apply to Levov, who moves to rural Old Rimrock, always already thinking about the daughter he wants to raise there.

[35] For a short take on the discussion see Bartosch.

[36] The similarities are not entirely accidental, McEwan has gone on record describing Roth as one of his favorite writers and as a friend (Zalewski n.p.).

between the two novels can be found in the focus on larger than life male protagonists going through crisis. Arguably, *American Pastoral* treats its protagonist with more sympathy than *Solar*. What these characters have in common is their status as charmed individuals, paying a high price for their exceptional status. Michael Beard wins a Nobel Prize early in life and ever after seems to grapple with the way it has influenced his further career. Seymour Levov figures as the personification of the American Dream. A beloved high school athlete and role model for the children in his neighborhood, he goes on to marry Miss New Jersey and takes over his father's profitable business. Both characters' successes therefore provide the possibility of a fall and of tragic development; indeed, they both suffer horrible punishment and defeat.

Solar has been hotly debated with regards to its status as a novel about climate change. The apocalyptic scenario and occasionally even the theme of renewable energies are often relegated to the background. A motto preceding the novel is taken from John Updike, which already points to the essentially social concerns of the novel. Considering *American Pastoral* from an ecocritical perspective then would amount to a mirror image of an analysis of *Solar*: McEwan's novel raised high expectations in ecocritical circles, but then turned out to set other priorities; *American Pastoral*, given its author and subject matter, arguably did not register with ecocritics and at first sight seems not involved in environmental matters, but on close examination proves to be highly relevant in several ecocritical contexts. Much has been made of the theme of the pastoral in the novel, but is has attracted only mild ecocritical attention. Analyzing texts outside the typical ecocritical canon, despite a theoretical embrace on the side of ecocritics is still relatively rare. Ecocritics themselves are aware of the possible problems inherent to a focus on nature writing:

> The danger that green literature becomes didactic in a simplistic way is really a danger that it loses its power as art and becomes reductive propaganda or vague 'right-on' rhetoric. There is a point at which green literature can become a contemporary form of Leo Marx's 'sentimental pastoral' (Gifford 172)

In focusing on 'non-traditional' texts by ecocritical standards one is not guaranteed to avoid said problems, but it might help to avoid some of the more frequent critical automatisms and provide valuable insights.

4.2 Contextualizations

The largest observable change from the previous Zuckerman novels lies in the new status of Nathan Zuckerman. He has become at once less *and* more central to the novels. No longer the protagonist of the novels, he is relegated to the position of narrator, but of course, this increases his conceptual importance, while reducing his visibility. The new Zuckerman no longer is at the center of society, but has taken up the life of a recluse. A factor contributing to this decision certainly is his impotence – and incontinence– in wake of prostate surgery. Zuckerman's health problems are a constant background of the American trilogy. As a corollary of his own affliction, Zuckerman develops a fascination for energy, and particularly, highly energetic individuals; most prominently Seymour Levov, but also Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* are among these figures to which he feels a strong attraction. Tellingly, Zuckerman begins his version of events with a speech commemorating the high school anniversary with the words "Let's remember the energy" (40). Nostalgia for that lost energy becomes a strong motivator for the narrative process. Both Zuckerman and Levov look back on their lives and try to make sense of it. In general, the novel follows a scheme in which specific places in the present trigger memories of earlier events, conversations, which took place in the same locale, so that this nostalgic mode informs the progression of the story of the novel.

The narrative set up in *American Pastoral* is not without its epistemological and ethical problems. For one, here even more than in the earlier Zuckerman novels the question of the status of the Other comes to the fore. What is it that Zuckerman is doing in telling the story of the novel? Is he just looking for 'fodder' to satisfy "the opportunistic maw" of the novelist's imagination, as his writerly acquisitiveness is once called in *The Human Stain* (170)? Is his behavior especially detestable given he is making up Levov's views, speaking for him and using his tragedy as building brick for his fiction? Is not Zuckerman's behavior especially damning given that the Swede indeed seems to have moved on from this earlier chapter of his life? Apart from the simple, maybe too simple answer that it is quite in the authority of literature to do these things, I would argue in addition that speaking with the voice of the Other, or speaking for the Other does not necessarily imply arrogance—yet the *American Pastoral* dwells on the problem. Zuckerman himself recognizes the values at stake in talking about the Other, ironically speaking of the "insignificant business of *other*

people, which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous" and which is at the heart of social life even given a general ineptness in understanding others. While the novel shifts from Zuckerman's point of view to the Swede's, several caveats are built into the narrative, underlining the hypothetical character of the narrative. Zuckerman is quite aware and wary that Jerry Levov, Seymour's brother is arguably in a much better position to tell his story and might entirely disagree with his view of things, and acknowledges so in his narrative (74). Another instance of doubt and of safeguarding his narrative can be found in Zuckerman's attestation that he tried to research his topic, even though he refrains from digging too deep. Eventually he decides to go on with the writing of the manuscript without any more corroboration or confirmation from Jerry Levov. The basic structure of the novel discussed above also implies an at times covert post-modern aesthetic running through the text. Despite neo-realistic appearances, the novel focuses on the mediated nature of its narrative, incorporating several meta-fictional aspects and thus providing continuity to the earlier novels, and *The Prague Orgy* and *The Counterlife* in particular. As a result, the language of the novel is infused with the voice of Nathan Zuckerman: even though he recedes often to the status of a covert narrator, he never vanishes entirely from the text, thus underlining the tentative and provisional nature of all the events recounted in the novel.

Due to these changes in narrative perspective and the decided rejection of realism, *American Pastoral* truly is a novel about the ethics of *imagining* the other, which of course, then raises the question of 'authenticity.' On the one hand we face the narrator Nathan Zuckerman dreaming up "a realistic chronicle" (89) of someone else's life, on the other hand his characters suffer immensely from not being able to explain or even understand the actions of others. In keeping with the tragic theme of the novel, Zuckerman imagines Seymour Levov as a protagonist in his mental theater (cf. 89), which serves as another highly self-reflective conceptual framework in the novel.

While the *American Pastoral* is clearly not a biography, it raises purposely ethical questions concerning life writing. This is not a new development in Roth's oeuvre. One only has to look back to *The Ghost Writer* and its treatment of the Anne Frank subject, which raises similarly delicate and intricate questions. In an interesting twist, John Paul Eakin, a specialist on autobiographical writing, has pointed out that he discovered his interest in the ethical aspects connected to life

writing when he wrote an article about *Patrimony*, Philip Roth's memoir of preparing for his father's death from a brain tumor. Life writing in its current form has seen a marked rise in popularity in the 1990s (Eakin, "Introduction" 3). It is interesting that at the same time, Roth launches his project of the American trilogy, which can be considered a fictional form of life-writing. Or, from another angle, as a meta-fictional exploration of the mechanics of life writing–besides, of course, painting a vivid picture of post World War II American life.

Despite its main focus on the societal revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, the novel encourages readings in light of the ongoing process of globalization. As such it relates the events in Old Rimrock with historical events all over the globe, leaning on an ethics of interdependency. Focusing on the decades after WWII, new forms of mass media play an important role in accompanying processes of globalization and serve as important catalyzers in *American Pastoral*. Marshall McLuhan's key phrase "[t]he medium is the message" and the idea of the "global village" (McLuhan 17-35; 51-60) provide a good key to this complex of problems. Both formulations have since attained idiomatic status and despite their relative "old age" given the changes brought on by the internet, they still describe succinctly the effect of media on the experience of space and individuals. In the novel, Merry is directly influenced by the images brought to the Levov's living room via television. At one point in her adolescence, she becomes obsessed with images of Vietnamese monks setting themselves on fire. In one sense this draws attention to the differences between the reporting of World War II and the more direct and timely reporting of the Vietnam war, and as such serves to locate the narrative in the 1960s.[37] It also draws attention to the question which reaction such images warrant and what the appropriate site of protest and public engagement is. Opposing her wish to take part in antiwar activities in New York, Seymour Levov encourages his daughter to become active in her own hometown. He challenges her to "bring the war home to your town" (112), an advice his daughter eventually follows with unintended consequences. Ironically, the war and its implications already draw closer with the

[37] The reporting of the Vietnam War is of note because it influenced domestic opinion on the war. A number of highly iconic photographs transported the horrors of the war and entered the cultural memory. In certain right-wing circles the media have been accused of covering the war, of undermining domestic support and have been blamed for the failure of the American campaign in Vietnam. As a result military strategists have changed media policies which led to a very restrictive media policy in the first Gulf War. After this policy was heavily criticized, the introduction of so-called embedded reporters in the second Gulf War, was an attempt to channel only select news to the American public.

introduction of television sets into living rooms. The horrific images shock the young Merry, prompt her sympathy and leave her deeply disturbed, if not traumatized. For a period of several weeks she cannot get enough of these images, and after a while, her interest vanes and the phase appears to be over. Later, Levov worries whether this might have instigated Merry's radicalization. This is just one instance in the novel, which constantly shows the dynamic between the local and the global, between rural Old Rimrock and world politics in flux.

The following ecocritical analysis aims to provide a comprehensive reading of the novel. The readings will pick up on current trends in ecocritical theory: The first part focuses on the motive of the animal and contextualizes the attendant questions with regards to post-humanistic theories. In the second section, different concepts of space and place in *American Pastoral* will be analyzed. The pastoral mode will be considered as a special figuration of place concepts. In the concluding section of this chapter the relevance of the findings for a cultural ecological reading, and particular the function of literature as reintegrative interdiscourse will be recapitulated. The aspects analyzed also include conceptions of time and the concept of the double bind in the novel.

4.3 Humans and Animals in *American Pastoral*

The traditional pastoral setting calls for shepherds—and sheep. How do these fixtures of the genre figure in Roth's treatment of the 'American pastoral'? In the novel, the question of the animal and its relation to the human is framed within a wider discourse of human enterprise: animals occur in a variety of contexts going beyond the scope of the generic convention. Within the overarching structure of the novel, animals appear as life stock, as resource, and at a later, processed stage, as product, in the form of leather gloves produced by Newark Maid. It is in this nexus with the manufacturing business that the question of the animal intersects with questions of the social organization of work and the spatial networks enabling intercontinental trade. Thus the animal is at the center of a complex, whose careful scrutiny leads to such different avenues of investigation as the role of globalization, off-shoring and the evolution of capitalism, or the history of the glove-making trade. Newark Maid is

the hub which ties these different strands together. On the level of narration, the animal fulfills a similar function: as a narrative device it provides Roth with the opportunity to tell the story of the Levovs, the story of Newark, and by extension the story of American society and industry from World War II to the end of the twentieth century.

The animals which provide the source for this narrative catalyst remain hidden for the most part. However, at numerous times in the novel, the true foundation, of the leather business is laid bare and the animal bereft of its "skin" shines through, granting insights into the internal dynamics of the trade. This seemingly antipastoral treatment is countered with the encyclopedic history of glove-making, often recounted by Lou Levov, the patriarch of the family dedicated to the preservation of the family tradition. Glove-making in its own right is presented as a vestigial remnant of craftsmanship in an industrialized world, an "artisanal" old-world trade, and an art. As such glove-making is an atavistic craft belonging to a pastoral past ever more receding given the increasing industrialization and, ironically, decline of American manufacturing in the 1960s. The novel thus strikes a balance between these poles of the human, the cultural, and the animal. Keeping the long history of animal use in agriculture or processes of domestication in mind, it is clear, that the lines between these different spheres are far from clearly drawn.

To this basic structure of the novel, several additional layers of meaning and metaphor are added: in diametrical opposition to an ethic of animal use, Merry Levov converts to Jainism and subscribes to an ethic of non-violence extending to the smallest of animals. On a different and less obvious level, a hierarchical conception of the relation between human and animal is metaphorically exploited, for example when the categories of the animal or the monstrous are invoked to explain Merry's violence and her rebellion against the standards of the 'normal'. Given the centrality of the theme, passages explicitly dealing with these questions can be pinpointed, and it is with close readings of these that I begin an ecocritical reading of *American Pastoral*. As I hope to show, the question of the animal constitutes an important aspect of Roth's novel; far from marginal, this is where much of the ethical potential of the novel lies.

4.3.1 Theoretical Contexts in Environmental Ethics, Post-Humanism and Animal Studies

This chapter will summarize a few contexts in the field of Animal studies and current developments in ecocriticism before I set out on an analysis of the role of the animal in *American Pastoral*. What are we talking about, when we talk about human beings, animals and their interrelation? Historically this relationship was inscribed in a wider context which hypostatized man as the crown of creation, the primacy of culture over nature or the primacy of mind over matter. From the beginning stages of the newly developing field of ecocriticism, such notions were a main target of critical attention and criticism. Be it a critical view of Christianity[38] or the endorsement of the deep ecologist conviction that man must not be granted special status within the wider ecological "web".[39] The last years have seen the continued rise of environmental ethics, and an increasing emphasis on animal ethics, in particular, on animal rights.[40] Critical interest in this field, the interrelations of humans and animals, is not only a domain of ethics proper, but part of the relatively new and burgeoning field of animal studies.

Animal Studies have received valuable impulses from philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida, who have written important studies on the relationship between the human and the animal. Agamben has offered a variety of approaches to the topic in his seminal book *The Open*, most notably his concept of the "anthropological machine," which, based on the opposition of inside and outside, describes exclusionary and inclusionary mechanisms, on which the discursive construction of difference between the human and the animal is based. In Agamben's view, the aim must be to stop these mechanisms (cf. 33-38).[41] Jacques Derrida's post-humously published collection of talks *The Animal That Therefore I Am* starts out with an inquiry into the gaze of the animal, "What animal? The other" (3) and it is

[38] See for example Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."
[39] One of the founders of deep ecology, Arne Naess has been especially influential, see *The Ecology of Wisdom. The Writings of Arne Naess* for a good overview; the writings of Fritjof Capra, especially his use of the web-metaphor have been similarly important, see e.g. *The Web of Life. A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*. A more recent contribution to the field is David Abram, *Becoming Animal. An Earthly Cosmology*.
[40] For short introductions from an ethical perspective see Heike Baranzke, "Tierethik" or Lori Gruen "Animals".
[41] For a discussion of different uses of the concept "anthropological machine" see Claviez, "Jamming".

specifically the topos of nakedness and shame, which informs his developing argument. In his introductory statement he announces his intention as follows: "In the beginning, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible would be naked. Naked in the first place—but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity and of the nude in philosophy" (1). The following analysis of *American Pastoral* explores the way the otherness of animals is framed. The nakedness addressed by Derrida figures indirectly in a variety of contexts in the novel, it is implied in the focus on skin, both animal and human, and in the recurring theme of masks and masquerade.

Another lens through which we can view questions of the human and the animal is the relatively new field of post-humanism. Animal studies can take place in a post-humanistic context, and often boundaries between the two fields blur (cf. Wolfe xxix). Similarly to other word formations featuring the prefix 'post,' post-humanism suffers—or enjoys—the flexibility in interpretation afforded by the affixation of the prefix "post". While in one sense post-humanism is concerned with going beyond the human,[42] the term can also be used to express an interest to go beyond humanism, as Cary Wolfe states: "posthumanism in my sense isn't posthuman at all—in the sense of being "after" our embodiment has been transcended—but is only posthuman*ist* in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited from humanism itself" (xv). He combines systems theory and deconstruction to argue two main theses concerning the relationship between humans and animals, which can be summed up as follows:

> The first is that posthumanism entails the effacement of any presumed ontological divide between the human and the animal. The second and related argument running through the whole is that great care must be taken to ensure that this effacement is not undertaken in ways that reinscribe the very assumptions that produced the animal/human divide in the first place. (Sacasas n.p.)

[42] These versions of post-humanism would draw on works such as *Neuromancer* by science-fiction author William Gibson, who is widely considered one of the founders of the cyberpunk-genre. It is characterized by a fascination with technology, and an exploration of the potential symbiosis between man and machine. Even though the aforementioned studies by Agamben or Derrida seem to prove Sabine Bobert wrong when she claims that the important questions today are no longer "zwischen Mensch und Tier" and focuses on "die Grenze zwischen Mensch und Maschine", it is worth mentioning that these issues are discussed in a theological context in essays such as her "Praktische Theologie im Zeitalter der Posthumanität." For a discussion of the philosophical reception of this form of post-humanism and its role in challenging key philosophical concepts such as 'free will' see Zoglauer,"Philosophische Probleme der Neuroprothetik".

Donna Haraway can be considered a bridging figure between the different forms of post-humanism. One of the early advocates of a post-humanistic view, who in the 1980s had relied on the construction of the "ironic political myth" (149) of the cyborg in her influential essay, has since turned her attention away from cybernetic organisms to animals, and specifically dogs. Scrutinizing our shared history and interactions with animals, she argues, might be more helpful in conceptualizing the vagaries of human identity formation in our time, than the old model of the cyborg (*Companion* 9-10). *The Companion Species Manifesto*, a pamphlet published in 2003, and the full-scale study *When Species Meet* (2008) are examples of this ongoing engagement with the relationships between different species, or as the subtitle of the Manifesto states, "Dogs, People and Significant Otherness".

In the following, the function of the animal in the novel will be the focus of attention, but of course the interrelation between the human and the animal is always a corollary of that interest. This raises the question how humanity is defined and connotated in the context of the novel. What kind of humans populate Roth's novels and specifically *American Pastoral*? The simple answer would be—very few. Even when taking into account the fictional nature of the novel and dodging the ever-popular questions of what exactly a literary character is, we cannot but state that Roth doubles this removal by declaring roughly 75% of the novel the figments of Nathan Zuckerman's imagination, the result of a discursive performance. Leaving this meta-level, Roth's characters still represent interesting configurations that can be termed post-human in a very literal understanding of the term. In *Everyman*, Roth wrote famously "[o]ld age isn't a battle; old age is a massacre" (156). In an attempt to delay the onset of said massacre, the human body is increasingly modified, so that old age is not only a massacre, but also the harbinger of post-humanity. *Everyman* in particular traces the technological interventions brought by old-age: multiple surgeries, the insertion of stents and pacemakers, and the laying of bypasses. The same theme is identifiable in *American Pastoral*. At the high school reunion, Zuckerman provides ironical commentary on his former class-mates, who sum up their lives by giving a status report on their marriages and the number of their children and grand-children. Zuckerman states: "I have neither child nor grandchild but I did, ten years ago, have a quintuple bypass operation of which I am proud. Thank you" (62). Whereas this contrast only jokingly draws parallels between the medical cyborg and biological procreation, the seriousness of the matter is out of

doubt. Roth, who chronicles the infirmities of old age, especially in his focus on the decline of the older Zuckerman, has an acute eye for detail in these matters. Zuckerman points out about his generation: "[S]omething powerful united us. And united us not merely in where we came from but in where we were going and how we would get there. We had new means and new ends, new allegiances and new aims, *new innards*" (44, my emphasis). The passage obliquely refers to death—"where we were going"— and then, in an enumeration proceeds to delineate the new perspective afforded by old age, only to underscore with the last item "new innards," the cost and sacrifice through which such new perspectives are gained. Julius Pincus, one of the attendees acknowledges openly "[i]f a little fourteen-year-old girl didn't die of a brain hemorrhage last October, I would be dead today" (58). The abstract fact of organ transplantation is here made concrete by the graphic evocation of the "little" girl and its sudden death. Such an unconditional need of an Other for the continuation of one's own vital processes underscores the interdependency and fragility of personhood in the novel. Receivers of a transplant technically represent a form of chimera; their explicit mention in the novel shows that an analysis in the context of the theories delineated in this chapter does not constitute a mere application of new-fangled theoretical fads, but is grounded in Roth's interest in the shifting and evolving nature of human identities and personhood.

In tracing evidence of these matters in Philip Roth's novels, it is probably advisable to keep perspective. The argument is not that Roth writes "green" literature or engages in outright animal rights advocacy. Rather, the intention is to highlight tendencies in Roth's work that are often overlooked. My contention is that Roth has created a complex novel to the extent that it provides information beyond the usual analytical categories applied to his work, much of which is of particular interest to an ecocritical reading. The following sections provide close readings drawing on these contexts.

4.3.2 Close Reading: The Fundamentals of Leatherwork

In this close reading I turn to a grotesque scene in the first chapter, which in its crudity and hyperbole might not strike the reader as out of the ordinary for Roth, but can be seen as programmatically encapsulating central themes of the novel.

Zuckerman remembers the halcyon days of his youth in the years after World War II and his uneasy friendship with Jerry Levov, the Swede's brother. The anecdote recounts how Jerry 'humiliated' himself in the process of wooing a girl in his class: "As a Valentine present, Jerry made a coat for her out of hamster skins, a hundred and seventy-five hamster skins …" (31). This marks the beginning of the episode, which details the seemingly abstruse efforts of Jerry, which eventually leave the girl "so revolted when she opened the box, so insulted and horrified that she never spoke to Jerry again" (33-4).

I contend that the scene must be read as a *reductio ad absurdum*—simply put, Jerry is structurally doing the same as Newark Maid and for that matter, any leather processing company. However it is only in Jerry's project that the absurdity of the procedure becomes apparent. Clearly, the choice of hamster skin sets this project apart. Unlike mice, rats, or minks, hamsters are not animals typically associated with animal testing or bred for fur. The use of hamster skin leads to an effect of estrangement, not unlike the effect Jonathan Safran Foer aims for when at the beginning of *Eating Animals* he asks his readers to consider eating dog (24-29). To stay in the realm of formalist terminology, the hamster episode amounts to the equivalent of 'baring the device,' both in respect to the literary work and the trade in leather; in this way the basic dynamics of the transactions which at other times are concealed by habit or the division of labor are unveiled. This in turn leads to the dispersion of the industrial process across continents and different companies. The manufacture of Jerry's coat brings all these things together and functions as a model which highlights the objections which can be raised against the use of leather for clothing from an ethical perspective.

Through a number of tragicomic complications it becomes clear that the idea of producing the coat is ill-advised, but these complications also serve to contextualize the project. *En miniature*, Jerry engages in some of the practices which tend to obscure the facts of leather production on a larger scale—after all, little in a Newark Maid glove reminds of the sheep killed in the process of manufacture. Jerry's creation does not have this advantage, but he aims to adequately present his work: he uses his mother's perfume to combat the stench of the "malodorous" skins and insists on premium packaging. "He was going to send it to the girl in a Bamberger's coat box …., wrapped in lavender tissue paper and tied with velvet ribbon" (32). Both strategies misfire. The perfume wears off and the fancy box raises false expectations,

thus compounding the girl's shock. Functionally, these attempts at presenting the product in a favorable light point to how a chain of processing turns the living animal into a resource, and finally into a luxury item, which serves to distance the death of animals and the attendant ethical questions.

The box in itself presents a problem, as it is too small for the coat, which from faulty processing of the skins, has grown too stiff to fold: "Eventually Jerry tore the entire coat apart and resewed it so that the stitching lay straight across the chest, creating a hinge of sorts where the coat could be bent and placed in the box. I helped him—it was like sewing a suit of armor" (32). Together with an earlier remark stating that in the 1990s Jerry's creation would have received "all kinds of prizes at the Whitney Museum" (32) this draws attention to the question of the adequacy regarding the use of leather. Assuming a utilitaristic stance on animal ethics, one might construe a situation in which the use of leather might be permissive, for example in the creation of protective clothing such as a suit of armor. The evaluation necessarily changes if we suppose other uses, be it for the sake of art—then the question of motivation might come into play, could not a coat like this be part of an activist anti-fur campaign?—or simply fashion. The latter is, orders from the armed forces aside, the domain of Newark Maid, which specializes in dress-gloves. Lou Levov mourns the 'good old times' when every woman owned several pairs of gloves (cf. 348), points out the seasonality of the business, and claims that Jackie Kennedy almost single-handedly saved glovers when her wearing gloves strengthened the lowering demand—only to fall again after she left the White House following her husband's assassination (cf. 349). In light of such fads, justifying the killing of animals for leather seems questionable. In the novel, the glove trade is typically, portrayed from the perspective of Lou Levov or his son, Zuckerman's memory of Jerry's ill-fated endeavor thus works as a corrective to the predominant view of the business in *American Pastoral*.

In yet another way, the anecdote tellingly illuminates the characters of Jerry Levov and Nathan Zuckerman. Jerry's creative impulse, his determination, resolve and idealism, off-kilter as it is, seem heartbreakingly innocent, especially given Zuckerman's skepticism and the final outcome. The project which involved 'finagling' the skins from biology students, more 'finagling' to find out the girl's measurements, the design of a pattern, the processing of the skins, the sacrifice of the parachute used for lining (a gift from his brother), and eventually the sewing and packaging thus

garners Zuckerman's respect: "It had taken him three months to transform an improbable idea into nutty reality. Brief by human standards" (33). It is a fitting irony, but also only consistent, that the creator of such a Frankensteinian vestment, the result of intricate needlework, goes on to become a successful cardiac surgeon, and also shows, that the two Levov brothers, despite their differences, have certain traits, such as determination and a belief in their own actions, in common.

The episode is also indicative of Zuckerman's creative method and the way the writer's mind works: He remembers the hamster skin episode trying to fathom what kind of incident might have derailed the fortunes of the Levov family. It is this anecdote which prompts Zuckerman to probe in conversation with Levov: "Is Jerry gay" (31)? An educated guess, as he remembers Jerry developing an aversion to girls in the aftermath of his tanning project. Zuckerman now tries to construe the 'hamster skin episode' as a deep-seated trauma, an etiology for Jerry's suspected homosexuality. In accordance with one of the general themes of the novel —"That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong" (35)—Zuckerman's guess is off. When Zuckerman learns of the factual catastrophe, Merry's involvement with the terroristic underground and her bombing of the village store, he follows the same instincts: looking for an act of transgression, trying to imagine the singular point in time when her development took the wrong trajectory. This particular episode then serves to illustrate a further point: Jerry's dedication to the realization of his idea parallels the Swede's fascination with the 'American pastoral'; in their unflagging will to pursue their goals all men of the Levov family are alike. The Swede follows his dream with an equal amount of idealism and naiveté; Jerry's project is an early warning that despite all efforts, a fortuitous outcome is never assured and tragedy might ensue.

4.3.3 Glovemaking

If nothing else, Jerry's failure shows that in the production of leather, the process of tanning is of the essence. The skins which arrive at the Newark Maid factory are already cured and tanned, ready to be processed and turned into gloves. The Levovs source their leather from a variety of places, among others from Brazil and Africa. Tanning is an important step in the production of leather, but it also distances the animal origin of the raw materials. Due to Newark Maid's position at the end of the supply chain it is disconnected from the unsavory aspects of producing leatherwares.

The taxing and repugnant task of tanning is outsourced, and yet the Levovs pride themselves in having worked in tanneries at some point. The following description, a single sentence, is reproduced in its entirety despite its length because it gives a good impression of what kind of work is involved in the tanning process even if it is not apparent at the Newark Maid factory:

> The tannery that stank of both the slaughterhouse and the chemical plant from the soaking of flesh and the cooking of flesh and the dehairing and pickling and degreasing of hides, where round the clock in the summertime the blowers drying the thousands and thousands of hanging skins raised the temperature in the low-ceilinged dry room to a hundred and twenty degrees, where the vast vat rooms were dark as caves and flooded with swill, where brutish workingmen, heavily aproned, armed with hooks and staves, dragging and pushing overloaded wagons, wringing and hanging waterlogged skins, were driven like animals through the laborious storm that was a twelve-hour shift—a filthy, stinking place awash with water dyed and black and blue and green, with hunks of skin all over the floor, everywhere pits of grease, hills of salt, barrels of solvent—this was Lou Levov's high school and college. (12)

Clearly, these lines are highly charged and invite associations on multiple levels. First, the passage makes it absolutely clear that this trade is based on the killing of animals—the smell of the slaughterhouse pervades the tannery—and the fact that chemicals are used is not only occupational hazard, but also hints at the fact that while leather might be considered a "natural" material, the modern manufacturing process definitely is not. Further, the lines evoke the image of an industrial hell, a new world descendant of Blake's "dark satanic mills". The tannery is not only processing skins, but entire animals, and the workers work between thousands and thousands of dead animals, "ghoulishly swelled" (14), and their processed remnants. The image of hell is underscored by the enormous heat. At the same time the low ceilinged room and the use of wagons invite comparison to the work of miners, themselves engaged in the exploitation of a resource. The "brutish men" which are likened to animals seem both the requirement and the product of the working conditions, a dynamic which was explored within similar parameters of enclosure and savagery by Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, specifically in the first scene set on "[t]he firemen's forecastle of an ocean liner." (251). This, of course, is the less obvious of nautical associations, given the quotation's ending with an allusion to Herman Melville's famous passage in *Moby-Dick*: "a whaleship was my Yale College and my Harvard" (101). The comparison reaches farther than the mere allusion: the description of the tannery is reminiscent of the whaling ship in all its watery confusion: "awash" in dyes, with "swill" covering the floors and waterlogged skins in need of "wringing." As pointed out in another place in the novel, easy access to water

is a main prerequisite for the establishment of tanneries (cf. 11), and the image of the whaling ship seems super-imposed on the tannery on other levels: the "hooks and staves" used in the tannery are tools used on the Pequod for the harpooning and handling of whales. The structural affinities between tannery and whaling ship become clear when we consider that the Pequod basically is a moving vessel designed to process the resources accessed by harpooning whales while still at sea. Whaling and leather production are thus presented as analogous enterprises. The passage constitutes a mirror image of a passage in *Moby-Dick*, which, as Leo Marx points out, uses the same analogy in the reverse direction (Marx 15). In the chapter "A Bower in Arsacides" Ishmael explores a beached skeleton of a whale and associates it with an industrial textile mill.[43] Roth, and Zuckerman, take all the cultural associations, the ideological baggage of *Moby-Dick*—not least as *the* great American novel—and use it to contextualize their own stories, to fit the myth to the realities of the 20th century. It is then interesting to see that the tannery embodies a scaled-down version of Melville's education. For the Jewish immigrant or 2nd generation immigrant Harvard and Yale might have been unrealistic expectations and the tannery becomes the more generic "high school and college." But the full import of the allusion becomes clear when we take into account the place of origin of Melville's famous line.

"I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard" (101). The line comes at the end of chapter 24, "The Advcocate," in which Ishmael takes it upon himself to defend the profession of whaling from misperception and low opinions such as that it constitutes an unrespectable and undignified line of work (cf. 100). The function is similar in *American Pastoral*. By way of accepting the tannery, the Levovs accept a version of themselves, circumscribed as hard-working and tough. To Lou Levov, the failure to appreciate the "honor and glory" of glove-making and the leather business is unthinkable. The tannery experience seems to be at the heart of what the Levovs stand for, where they invented themselves as an American family, and this is why Merry's actions and her attitude towards the family business meet with incomprehension: "The men of three generations, including himself, slogging through the slime and stink of tannery. The family that started out in a tannery, at one with, side by side with, the lowest of the low—now to her 'capitalist dogs'"

[43] "Through the lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving the unwearied verdure. Oh, busy weaver! Unseen weaver!—pause!—one word!—whither flows the fabric—stay thy hand! —" (345)

(*Pastoral* 213). Concerning tanning, the central process in the production of leather, we then find a telling ambivalence in the novel. On the one hand, the work in the tanneries is a source of personal pride and a personal ethos, on the other hand, the tanning process is considered vile and each of the Levovs have sooner or later left this stage of processing behind. In the Newark Maid factory, far away from the "primitive places" (123) the aspect of artistic craftsmanship then can be foregrounded. The internal contradictions of the leather trade and specifically the tanning process can be summed up in the Swede's words: "[a]wful work. Said to be the oldest industry of which relics have been found anywhere" (123). This tension then can be dissolved by downplaying the unsavory parts of the process and as a result, the matter is successfully closed off from any sort of ethical questioning.

Instead the Levovs see themselves as upholding a tradition of glove making which fulfills the function of a pastoral retreat. There is a constant need to talk about glove making and this need is not limited to the transmission of knowledge from father to son, but is also shared with outsiders, for example Zuckerman or Rita Cohen. This talk is part of a discourse, which stabilizes knowledge: "Trade talk was a tradition in glove families going back hundreds of years—in the best of them, the father passed the secrets on to the son along with all the history and all the lore" (121). With its insistence on the personal transmission of knowledge—strictly in a patriarchal system—trade talk forms a conduit to a long-gone 'golden age' of glove-making and consummate skills. As a corollary, the trade talk also serves to stabilize identities. The greatest outpouring of encyclopedic detail in the novel occurs when Seymour Levov gives Rita Cohen a tour of the factory. Just days after the vanishing of his daughter, the Swede finds comfort in recounting "his father's words" (121) to a stranger, confirming his own life-choices in the process. The continuance of the discourse, however, is far from guaranteed, and despite the fact that the Levovs keep alive a tradition which elsewhere just might be surviving "in a little family-run shop in Naples or Grenoble" (127), the narrative here, just as Newark's, is one of decline, best summed up in the wry and self-deprecatory words of the best leather cutter in the cutting room, who modestly declines a compliment: "You should have seen my dad" (128). As such, Newark Maid is a relict, and Rita Cohen, who, of course, has a different agenda at the time, mocks the Swede by asking him: "Are you the last of the Mohicans?" (130). The striking formulation draws attention to the observable fact of

the vanishing of knowledge and industrial culture in Newark and the Swede's romantic self-stylization as a self-less entrepreneur.[44]

There is some credit to this view of Levov as a self-absorbed person, but there are also signs that seem to contradict this impression, for example his motivation for keeping the family business in Newark. Although a part of production moved offshore to Puerto Rico in 1958, Newark Maid bucks the trend of leaving the United States, and continues to manufacture in Newark up to the middle of the 1970s. The production is kept there despite Lou Levov's admonitions to move the plant after the riots of 1967 and in spite of the fact that all competitors have moved on long ago, leaving Puerto Rico for South East Asia. The Swede's decision to stay in Newark is only in part a matter of loyalty, it is also an attempt at convincing his estranged daughter that he is not the cold-hearted capitalist she makes him out to be. The defining need is the lack of qualified labor, which is increasingly hard to find and train in Newark and apparently can be found more cost-efficiently, and in a safer environment, in Puerto Rico. Trying to keep to quality standards, Newark Maid tries to avoid the move to South East Asia and considers contracting work in Czechoslovakia.

Eventually, the plant in Newark is shut down shortly after Merry resurfaces, and for some time production moves to Czechoslovakia. Even in the context of the Cold War, the imperative of quality work and the need for skilled labor trounces the rift between East and West. But the intricacies of politics and global matters seem rarely a matter of concern. For example, little time of reflection is spent on the darker side of the business. To Levov, it is only worth a passing remark that the salt used for curing the skins in Africa, specifically Ethiopia, must be poisoned lest it be stolen out of storage for food by the locals (cf. 33). It is in moments like this that one realizes that the glove-making trade is not as innocent as the Levovs present it. Such short moments in which the wider framework of manufacturing comes into view are rare, but they do exist, for example when blemishes on the leather tell the story of its production: "There is something called butcher cuts that occur if the animal was cut

[44] Rita Cohen's use of the phrase "last of the Mohicans" also refers to the patriarchical and paternalistic form of industry the Levov's represent. The novel presents several feminist challenges to Levov's mindset. See Marshall Bruce Gentry's "Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*" Arguably, Newark Maids declining business must be seen in relation to a change in fashion brought about by the societal changes of the 60s, offering new social roles for women. As a corollary of these changes, dress gloves become increasingly obsolete and Newark Maid must look for new products.

too deeply when it was flayed" (223). Significantly, as soon as the production process leaves any traces on the finished product, its value diminishes.

It is through passages like the one above, that the legitimacy of the Levov's business model is subtly but constantly questioned. These questions concern the responsibility for those affected by the production process, but also the question of animal rights, the question whether it is ethically permissible to "use" animals in such a way. Seymour Levov gives a clear, yet problematic distinction between the human and the animal: "Monkeys, gorillas, they have brains and we have a brain, but they don't have this thing, the thumb. They can't move it opposite the way we do. The inner digit on the hand of man, that might be the distinguishing physical feature between ourselves and the rest of the animals. … It enables us to make tools and build cities and everything else" (131). In this view, the use of tools is the hallmark of culture and civilization, the realm of the animal is defined *ex negativo*—those species not endowed with an opposable thumb. Of course, this definition is humorous in its reductiveness, and clearly it is in the Swede's self-aggrandizing interest to play up the importance of the glovers, after all they are the ones protecting the opposable thumb. Still, in its simplicity, in its disregard of such markers as cognitive skill, brain-size, overlap in DNA sequence etc., the definition is stunning: while the passage certainly does not qualify as a fully-reasoned philosophical stance, it throws a telling light on the Swede. The groping beginning "Monkeys, Gorillas" certainly reproduces colloquial speech, but is characteristic in its blurring of monkeys on the one hand, and Gorillas as representatives of primates or apes on the other. The lack of precision shows that the focus here is only partially a comparison with one of the closest relatives of *homo sapiens*. However, it is hard to suppress the suspicion that such disinterest would not also give rise to a cavalier attitude towards animal ethics, which certainly cannot be expected to be sensitive to the quandary of an adequate treatment of animals. While passages such as this one remain inconclusive and even marginal on their own, a cohesive picture emerges when one realizes that the same complex of problems is pervasive throughout the novel. Merry, for example, is more discerning when it comes to the differences between humans and animals, is much more cognizant of the inherent ethical challenges encountered by Newark Maid and is in general a more sensitive person than her father in these regards.

4.3.4 Violent Alternatives: Merry's Challenge to the Status Quo

Seymour Levov appears to be the protagonist of the novel and Zuckerman's chosen subject, but his equally enigmatic daughter Merry plays a central role in the novel. Zuckerman dedicates extensive room to an exploration of the Swede's unfathomable ability to deal with tragedy on an epic scale while still keeping composure, and yet, in her capacity as the "American berserk" (86) personified, Merry incites Zuckerman's novelistic imagination almost as much as her father. Much could be said in favor of seeing her at the very center of the novel, as it is her who violently challenges at almost any juncture any construct of meaning which her parents have erected. A contrarian mind from early childhood on, Merry comes across as an incomprehensible negation of everything the Swede and his wife stand for. In Zuckerman's fabulation, she not only challenges the Levovian idyll, she questions the anthropocentrism of the culture around her, the belief in the superiority of humankind over animals.

There are two scenes in the novel which allow for this kind of characterization. Depending on point of view, one could also speak of a single scene, as the first is intercalated into the second: Levov's reunion with his daughter. Confronted with the squalor of his daughter's life, he remembers an anecdote which becomes part of a wider narrative in the novel which traces Merry's development from an amiable, at times defiant, child with a head of its own into a spiteful 'monster' and a terrorist. While in "sixth or seventh" grade at a Montessori school, Merry's class is asked a number of questions on the student's philosophical outlook (cf. 248). In her assignment, Merry counters the question "Why are we here?" (248) with a single question of her own: "Why are apes here?" (248). This failure to provide the desired answer—an age-appropriate, heartwarming, yet superficial view of the meaning of life is expected—provokes the teacher, who asks her to improve on her original answer. Merry's decision to merely add another question, "Why are kangaroos here?" (248) does little to satisfy the teacher. These answers provide an interesting change of perspective, exposing the original question as too wide and limited at the same time. Immediately apparent in Merry's answers is a refusal to go with commonplace, quietistic and simple explanations for the existence of human life on the planet, and a reluctance to attribute any kind of meaning to the fact. The question "Why are apes here?" issues a challenge to the teacher and remains challenging in its own right. On the one hand, the question evokes the spectrum of evolution and Darwin's *The*

Descent of Man as context, a relevant complication of the matter, but precluding the simple expected answer. On the other hand, the question can be construed as pointing to the inherent futility of asking these questions or to the implication that our existence is of no special note, at least compared to that of other species. Interesting is the shift in focus: while the "we" in the original allows us to read it a personal question or as pertaining to human beings in general, the juxtaposition of "we" with "kangaroos" and "gorillas" puts clear emphasis on the human species as a whole. When the teacher asks for clarification the added question seems to stubbornly insist on the implications of the first, but complement it. Owing to their upright mode of movement on two legs and the arm like features of their forelegs, kangaroos show certain anthropomorphic traits, but marsupials have little in common with other mammals, thus the answer implies both similarity and a high degree of alterity. Again, the refusal to come up with an edifying answer recontextualizes the question and invites reflection on its presuppositions. Due to this, the asking of such questions is of course standard philosophical practice and can lead to real insight, but the implication in the novel, supported by the teacher's negative reaction is that this is not the spirit in which the questions were posed.

Merry already widens the focus of the initial question "Why are we here?" in her responses, but the philosophy project ends with an even more complex question: "What is life" (248)? Merry remains consistent and answers: "Life is just a short period of time in which you are alive" (248). The definition can hardly be argued, partly because of its circularity. But it is an inclusive definition as it seems to ascribe life to all living beings irrespective of species. This is of course contingent on one's willingness to read the "you" as a generalizing and inclusive subject in the vein of "one." The other reading would require a sense of self that can be addressed with "you". This objection aside, Merry's definition works for almost any living organism be it plant, animal human, or microscopic organisms. The definition only reaches its limits where the traditional categories fail, for example in the case of viruses. In a certain sense Merry's verdict echoes Zuckerman's nihilistic statement about her father, "He had learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense" (81). If anything, it seems less bitter. The scene, which certainly has a high symbolic content shows Merry to be a precocious child. Presented from the twice mediated perspective of the father, it displays a basic irony: despite the refusal to answer the questions, Merry's answers show a high degree of understanding and philosophical

insight, which goes unnoticed by the teacher. Merry's definition of life also seems to foreshadow her later turn to Jainism, which in its reverence for life and advocacy of asceticism includes ritual starvation in its religious outlook. By providing these open-ended questions, these class-room scenes also serve as a counterweight to the often thoughtless use of animals in the novel; they question the common presuppositions of the centrality of man and open up space for reflection on adequate relationships between animals and humans.

The second important scene, the first meeting between father and daughter after five excruciating years, could be described as a collision of different ethical value systems. The Swede, tipped off by a letter from Rita Cohen meets Merry in Newark and registers with shock: "She had become a Jain" (232). Her decision to become a Jain is ripe with ironic inversions on a number of counts. Least of those is that even to a secular Jew, it must come as a shock that his daughter, who grew up as the child of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father intent on creating—more or less successfully—a post-religious environment for their child, has joined a religious society, for whom the swastika is one of the central symbols.[45]

The second irony given Merry's history of violence–in the same scene the reader learns she has killed four people in bombings following her going underground–is her following the five major virtues of Jainism, which are written out on index cards above her bed. The first one, *ahimsa* entails the idea of complete non-violence: "I renounce all killing of living beings, whether subtile or gross, whether movable or immovable" (239). The passage is powerful in its description of extreme decay and squalor. Levov is overwhelmed to have his daughter back and at the same time struggles to acknowledge her fragile state. Adding to the shock of this amount of destitution is the discovery that her current fate is self chosen. What makes the encounter entirely traumatic is her willing admission to several more murders. Her confession is in stark contrast with her behavior which is now guided by her oath of nonviolence. Levov accompanies his daughter to her room. The walk to Merry's room seems to modeled on the literary trope of a descent to hell. This catabasis takes its beginning in already-blighted Newark, and leads through an uncanny underpass to a dilapidated building, "a wreck marooned" (234), where Merry stays in a dank and lightless room.

[45] For an in-depth discussion of Jainism see Paul Dundas' definitive introduction *The Jains*. For a very short overview see Mircea Eliade 328-332. Exact numbers of believers are hard to arrive at, one problem being that members might identify as Hindu in questionnaires.

Merry's adherence to the tenets of Jainism implies a wide-ranging sacrifice. The recurring formula in the precepts is "I renounce". And while she coolly explains her father the concept of *ahimsa* and how it was instrumental in providing ideas to Mahatma Gandhi and his ideology of nonviolent resistance (cf. 244), the effects of following the doctrine are severe. As much as she is pointing to the intellectual stature of Jain doctrine in Indian cultural history over centuries, she cannot disperse her father's shock and concern over her skeletal appearance (cf. 243): How much do you weigh, Meredith" (243)? The child who had criticized that her mother's only conviction was being "pro c-c-c-cow" (102) now has left behind her political convictions and subscribed to a course of utter detachment from the world: "I renounce all attachments, whether little or much, small or great, living or lifeless; neither shall I myself form such attachments, nor cause others to do so, nor consent to their doing so" (239).

On the one hand this stand seems exceedingly respectful. There are different rules making sure no animals are hurt, for example evidenced in the veil which ascertains one does not breathe in insects, or the injunction against walking around in the dark for fear of squashing animals underfoot. On the other hand, extreme forms, such as the resolve to drink only sterilized water, or not washing "to do no harm to the water" (232) draw serious doubt on the advisability of these strictures. On the one hand this mindset would, at least theoretically, resonate with deep ecological tenets, on the other hand, deep ecology has expressed reservations against any religion, particularly those, who advocate a renouncement of the world. What many deep ecologists, for example Vernon Grass, would instead favor is a turn *towards* immanence and the world. To an outside observer like Levov, Merry's ethics seem to have effaced the boundaries between the human and the animal; he expresses this overall impression in his clichéd observations : "She would have lived better than this, far better, if she were one of Dawn's cattle" (237).

The sort of seclusion which Jainism seems to propagate, and is symbolically reinforced by the veil, isolates the individual. While it is clear that this sort of hermetical isolation is created out of respect for other human beings and all "living things" it is of note that both medicine and ecocritical theory in the last years have shifted the focus on the fact that human beings are not self-contained or self-sustained units; rather they live in symbiotic relationships with colonies of bacteria and interact with outside environmental stimuli. The medical concept of the

microbiome (cf. Zimmer n.p.) or Stacy Alaimo's theory of trans-corporeality might serve as an example. Alaimo's basic argument is that "understanding the substance of one's self as interconnected with the wider environment marks a profound shift in subjectivity" (20). Her concept of inter-corporeality therefore assumes the existence of an "ethical space" in which it is the duty of subjects to "inquire about all of the substances that surround us, those for which we may be somewhat responsible, those that may harm us, those that may harm others, and those that we suspect we do not know enough about" (18). The similarities to Merry's stance are obvious, but there are also clear differences; to Alaimo, the idea of openness, of permeable membranes between life forms is tantamount. Identity is constituted across the boundaries which the traditional notions of the subject postulate. Merry recognizes the same sort of ethical obligation, but tries to isolate herself from her surroundings, and aims to minimize her impact by eventually erasing her own existence and identity.

Merry then presents a highly ambiguous stance in the novel. In its extremity, her Jainism does not seem a viable lifestyle alternative for larger parts of society, but Merry's function in the novel is to be a personification of the extreme. An extreme, which cannot be subsumed in traditional frameworks of meaning. The Swede capitulates faced with such fervor, he does not know how to act—characteristically his brother Jerry is advocating violence in order to bring Merry to her senses. The Swede however remains mortified, unable to act and calling in his brother's advice. However, it serves as a corrective to the more mindless use of animals as resource. What Roth presents here are extreme positions, undercut with tinges of irony: in turning to Eastern philosophies and becoming a self-taught Jain, Merry follows the New Age *Zeitgeist* and displays the typical American trait of self-reliance.

In a different context it is Merry, who bonds the most with Count, the most important bull of Dawn's cattle operation. The bull has to be sent to a butcher and the novel dramatizes the conflict between emotional attachment, Dawn's teary-eyed "I can't do this" on the one side and Seymour Levov's level-headed "You've got to do this" (201) on the other. There is a line between emotional attachment and responsibility for the animal. When Count is brought away—the novel speaks of necessity, but it is not clear what occurrence necessitates the move—Merry focuses on a small detail: "the night before Count left he bred a perfect little heifer, his parting shot. She got the brown spots around the eyes—'He th-th-th-threw brown eyes all around him'" (201). Superficially an observation of the passing on of phaenotypical

characteristics, Merry's comment goes beyond the binary logic of the decision-making process, and commemorates the animal, which had been an important part of the family. Merry's statement therefore also is a testament to the mythical and symbolical meaning of Count in the novel: the animal, the old 'patriarch' of the herd has reached the end of the line and yet manages to procreate one more time. And after he leaves, "there was never an animal to compare with the Count" (202), foreshadowing the end of the fragile Levovian pastoral. Count is at the center of many of Levov's memories, which for the most party include his happy wife and child caring for the animal. Whereas the novel never makes an explicit comparison, Count and Levov share certain characteristics and the animal is a core constituent of the pastoral as envisioned by Levov.

This discussion of attitudes towards animals can be extended by including the perspective of Dawn Levov, who is the driving force behind the cattle enterprise Arcady Hill Breeders. Her character is an ambivalent one, on the one hand she clearly cares deeply about the animals, on the other hand it cannot be denied that her involvement in agriculture is motivated by her desire to prove wrong those, who have her pigeon-holed as the 'former Miss New Jersey'. In this context it is notable that Dawn's family background not only differs on the count of ethnicity, but also in their reliance on animals as a source of income. Whereas her husband grew up in a glove-making business, Dawn's family has run a dairy business. This explains her affinity to cattle breeding.

4.3.5 Conclusion: The Role of Animals in *American Pastoral*

This overview of passages dealing explicitly with animals and the attitudes humans take towards them has shown a variety of different takes. In keeping with this wide-spread theme, animals then take on metaphoric or obviously symbolic character. Count, the lead bull which after long deliberation is marketed as "A BULL UPON WHICH A HERD CAN BE BUILT" (372) can be named as one example. In a slightly different bend, several characters in the novel use animal metaphors to dehumanize or insist on the humanity of their interlocutors. Rita Cohen puts all the contempt in her challenge to Levov when she blurts: "Yours is the lowest species on this earth—don't you know that *yet*?" (370). The Swede conversely insists on his

daughter's human integrity using the same imagery, emphasizing "[s]he's not an animal" (375).

Such analogies are driven to extremes when Levov, admittedly in a tormented state, wishes for his daughter to be an animal, specifically a cow (cf. 238). The shock value of the thought derives from a number of factors. First by drawing on the trite and clichéd view of the animal untroubled by reflection and thought, the statement raises serious questions about Levov's own mindset and his cognitive grasp of the situation. On the one hand, the wish can be interpreted as a mere desire to undo reality, an escapist fantasy. On the other hand, and related to the first point, given his daily contact with animals and animal products, both at home and at work, how could Levov assume they are less capable of suffering or inducing pain? Finally, the train of thought seems to expose Levov's self-centeredness, that he is less concerned with Merry's well-being than with his own peace of mind. In this view the utterance implies his obviously absurd idea of trading his recalcitrant daughter for a docile farm animal, thus perfecting and healing the destroyed pastoral of his design. This seemingly marginal utterance seems absurd, especially in light of pathocentric ethics. The unspoken context here is a long line of reasoning begun by Bentham, who in *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* famously reduced the matter of the justification for animal rights to the benchmark question "Can they suffer?" (Bentham, qtd. in Gruen 348.) In his hurt state, Levov obviously is not capable of reflection, but his choice of expression complements the image of insensitivity created by other passages in the novel.

In a paradoxical move the novel constantly reestablishes the link between leather products and the animals from which they are sourced, thus breaking the chain of displacements which disconnects the two emotionally for the most part. When Seymour Levov explains his business to Rita Cohen he makes that link explicit by pointing out what perhaps is only visible to the expert eye: "But you can still see the animal. If you were to look at the animal," he said, "here it is—the head, the butt, the front legs, the hind legs, and here's the back, where the leather is harder and thicker, as it is over our own backbones" (129). The passage describing the topology of the goat hide is typical in its parallelization of animal and human anatomy. But the similarities become only apparent if one were to look at the animal, something that does rarely happen outside Levov's technical discourse, for example through Merry's philosophical questioning. The analysis of Jerry Levov's oddball couture experiment

can be used to illustrate a similar dynamic. Roth presents different ways of approaching the animal in the novel. On one side of the spectrum we can point to the capitalist approach of Newark Maid, on the other side we have the extreme ethics of respect practiced by Merry, who suffers severe side-effects in the process of living in accordance with Jain rules. Besides these two extreme ends of the spectrum we find a middle ground, to some extent in the thoughtful cattle breeding of Dawn, but especially in the attitude of young Merry, who shows great sensitivity to the topic.

As we will see in the next chapter, the animal is a focal site in which economic and philosophical discourses intersect. Newark Maid sources their raw materials from all around the globe, produces in Newark but also in Puerto Rico and Czechoslovakia. As far as the trade is concerned, the company has its roots in the skills of leatherworkers from all over Europe, mostly from Italy, but also from Germany and other countries (cf. 128). Through the history of Newark Maid and the skill of processing the leather, both the evolution of the craft, and the succession of immigrant generations with the accompanying social changes are narrated. In its focus on animals, the novel is not limited to the American continent. The lifestock from which the Arcady Hill Breeders herd is built comes from Switzerland, where the Levovs bought animals and sought out know-how for their business. Taking her cues from a different part of the world, Merry chooses a religion originating in India in her endeavor to change her life. These are the major points covered in the novel, in a few instances, short allusions to certain modes of human-animal interactions can be found. In the final dinner scene, for example, there is short mention of hunting, equestrian sports and “steeple-chasing,” which in the context serves to underscore the differences in class-origin between the Levovs and their neighbors, the Orcutts (cf. 331).

The animal is a constant in the novel, be it in the urban spaces of Newark and the tannery or in Old Rimrock with its wildlife and the cattle business. Critics like Furman have seen the move to the countryside as an antisocial and essentially “non-Jewish” act and interpreted the ensuing family tragedy as a sort of consequence of this out of character behavior. Yet the opposition between urbanity and rural life allows Roth to approach many of the classical themes of Jewish-American literature from a different perspective. Most importantly, animals serve as a yardstick for the ethical revaluation of man’s place in the world. Often this is an indirect process, but as the reader ponders the imponderables of Swede Levov’s life, the focus on the

animals in the novel serves to contextualize and frame the human experience. Once the reader engages in this activity and becomes clear that what seems encyclopedic padding of the novel indeed discusses relevant questions on a seemingly unassuming level.

Paradoxically then, the animal occupies both a central position, and is yet unobtrusive and marginalized in the novel. This may be termed a realistic element in the novel, which chronicles urban and suburban American life in the second half of the 20th century, but it can also be explained as a literary strategy. The discourse on the animal is often just caught with the glimpse of an eye, at the edge of the readers sight and awareness; often overshadowed by the high-adrenaline drama of the human tragedy, it only becomes visible in parallax vision, requiring attention to detail. In terms of the triadic model, the relation between human and animal appears to be problematized in an evenhanded manner. The novel appears to reject both thoughtless use of animal resources and Merry's self-denial, which is reminiscent of more radical deep ecologist lines of thinking. The ending of the novel, however, with its explicit question "And what is wrong with their life?" (423) invites the reader to answer, to retrace the life of the Levovs. This brings the matter back into focus, and depending on the readers willingness to comb through the vast material of the novel and reconnect these patterns, this closing gesture subjects the narrative to a renewed ethical inquiry.

4.4 Spatial Configuration and the Pastoral

A concern for matters of space and place, or to name more terms, the local, global, regional, has been central to environmental criticism since its beginnings. The fact that a pluriform 'movement' such as ecocriticism has settled on central analytical categories is no contradiction : the concepts of space and place mirror this polyphonicity as they have been theorized by a variety of different academic disciplines and themselves appear as protean categories. This increased interest in space, place and geography is not exclusive to the ecocritical community. The end of the 20th century has seen what has been called the spatial turn or the rise of spatial studies (cf. Wegner 180). One basic tenet that most theories of place share is the

assumption that place is a category that entangles and mingles with the natural environment (cf. Buell, *Writing* 60). *American Pastoral* presents a complex portrait of American culture, but the novel's imaginary space does not stop at U.S. borders. The entire world comes into focus and there is tension between the local and the global in the novel. One example is the war in Vietnam and the reaction and attitudes of the American public. It is this tension between the local and the global, but also the novel's investigation of the ideologies attending an American sense of place, which leads me to look at the category of place in *American Pastoral*.

Over the years, there have been many changes in the way place has been theorized in the field of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell, for example, has updated his theoretical overview in each of his studies from 1995, 2001 and 2005. Buell has given expression to the centrality of place by stating "[t]here never was an is without a where" (*Writing* 55). His phenomenological taxonomy of place-connectedness (*Writing* 64-74) might serve as one example of the complexity of place as a concept. Within this taxonomy Buell proposes five different modes of place-connectedness. He distinguishes between a concentric sense of place, which organizes place in layers around one's own standpoint and a more disjointed sense of place for which he uses the metaphors of the scattergram and the archipelago. Further modes account for the dynamic historicity of places, and an accumulative sense of place which is derived from the sum of all places meaningful to one person. Finally, Buell's system accounts for fictive or virtual places to accommodate for the possibility that places might be highly influential even if they are not accessible. Buell's example here is the sense of place which connected the Israelites to their territory during Babylonian captivity. These dimensions can be shown to coexist in the literary text as well. Concepts of place, however, are not only reconfigured through new metaphors. Different aspects of the respective concepts are emphasized depending on the political agenda, so that as time passes, the value attributed to place-attachment changes: the focus on place and other related concepts such as the local, rootedness, dwelling, etc. within ecocriticism has led to a countermovement underlining the importance not only of smaller places, but of systemic interconnection within a much larger place—planet Earth. Ursula Heise, whose *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* is a good example for this new evaluation, diagnoses a need for "a new kind of eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism that might be able to effectively engage with steadily increasing patterns of global connectivity" (210). On the other end of the spectrum, we find

positions such as the activist Darkmountain Project. At least rhetorically, the movement embraces the inevitability of environmental catastrophe and from an apocalyptic, deep ecological standpoint advocates the creation of art intended to set humanity on a better path of sustainable growth following such a catastrophe. Principle six of "The Eight Principles of Uncivilisation" presented in the Dark Mountain manifesto states: "We will celebrate writing and art which is grounded in a sense of place and of time. Our literature has been dominated for too long by those who inhabit the *cosmopolitan citadels*." (*Dark Mountain Manifesto*, my emphasis) While this appears to address the literary world as much as artists of the ecocritical community, the contrast to Heise's position is striking.

Given these different theoretical options, which approach would be suitable for Roth's novel? The analysis of spatial structure in the wide-ranging *American Pastoral* requires a loose, open concept of space and place, which allows for the mapping of interdependencies. Doreen Massey's progressive sense of place seems well equipped and adapted to a reading for at least two reasons. The Marxist inflection of this theory of place blends well with the novels description of the culture wars in the 1960s pitching the successful businessman Seymour Levov against the Marxist critique of his daughter Merry. Massey's conception of place as a social construct seems a good fit for the novel which operates with the concept of the pastoral to structure spatial relations. Drawing on David Harvey's concept of "time-space compression" Massey adds the category of power to her analysis of place and is interested in the "power geometry of time-space compression" (Massey 61). To illustrate this notion, modern technology has allowed travel across vast amounts of space and increasingly smaller time frames. But this sort of time-space compression is only available to a small elite. On the other end of the spectrum, Massey sees people who might move a lot but do not do so in a state of empowerment, for example refugees (cf. 61) and speaks of the "imprisonment" of those who locally experience the effects of globalization but themselves are not in a position to leave their own place (cf. 62). She enumerates four criteria to define her concept: (1) places are dynamic, not static. Massey is anti-Heideggerian in her insistence that the category of place is not related to the category of Being at all. (2) There is no need for places to have clear-cut boundaries, even though these might be helpful for analysis. (3) Places are not unified through a single identity, they are characterized by internal differences and conflicts. And (4), despite this seeming delimitation of places in her concept of place, Massey is not denying the

importance of place as a category and the specificity of individual place. In summary:

> It is a sense of place, an understanding of 'its character', which can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond. A progressive sense of place would recognize that, without being threatened by it: it would be precisely about the *relationship* between place and space. What we need, it seems to me, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place. (Massey 68)

This formulation then situates Massey's approach in the middle of the spectrum between more static forms of place attachment on the one side and eco-cosmopolitan approaches on the other.

Spatial analysis so far has not been a main focus of cultural ecological analyses. Interpretations tend to focus on metaphors and imagery or questions of narratology. (cf. Müller "Poet's"; "Formen"). An expansion of critical interest to place and space could be worthwhile, in fact the category of place seems by definition cultural ecological. Remembering the fact that place is always at least a dualistic concept, "co-constituted environmentally, socially, and phenomenologically through acts of perception" (Buell, *Future* 145), we can reframe places as sites of cultural ecological negotiations. Zapf explains the cultural ecological element of literature as follows:

> Literature has always been the medium of a 'cultural ecology' in the sense that it has staged and explored, in ever new scenarios, the relationship of prevailing cultural systems to the needs and manifestations of human and nonhuman 'nature'. ("Remarks" 3)

If we apply this insight to *American Pastoral* we can see as manifestations of human and nonhuman nature the interactions between the protagonists and landscape, to use a very hands-on word for environmental nature, and the animal world. While the latter has been the topic of a prior chapter, the focus here will be on different conceptualizations of place.

It is not adequate to simply examine such interactions between the human and the other lifeforms and the environment. We cannot neglect on the one hand, the phenomenological component mentioned by Buell and on the other hand, the embeddedness of places both, in the interdiscourse of literature and in the discursive field, which Zapf calls "prevailing cultural systems" (3). In other words, mutual effects between such a cultural system and conceptions of place are to be expected. In the novel, the dominant cultural system finds its paramount expression in the form of the pastoral, which in its own right is a highly controversial concept with a long critical history. Especially in its genuinely American version as analyzed by Leo Marx,

I understand pastoral as a way of conceptualizing and configuring place. Inherently a relational concept, the pastoral is well-suited to the mapping of space- and place-interrelations. A discussion of the spatial concept underlying *American Pastoral* therefore would be sorely deficient without a thorough look at the concept of the pastoral, its specifically American expression and its implications for the novel. Therefore, the discussion below will proceed from such a general analysis to an in-depth look at several places.

4.4.1 Which pastoral?

According to M.H. Abrams, a "pastoral" is "a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet's nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting." (141). This handbook entry of course goes on but here already we have *in nuce* several features characteristic of the pastoral, most prominently the opposition of city and country, the nostalgic tone and an idealized 'natural' setting. Taking in this description, it is easy to see why the pastoral should have become one of the central interests of ecocriticism. What this short quotation does not mention is that in the course of its long history since its beginnings in Theocritus and Virgil's *Eclogues,* the term pastoral has come to be understood more and more independently from any kind of specific poetry (Garrard 38-44). As a consequence and in order to prevent the term from becoming a catchall for anything remotely related to a nostalgic and idealized description of the countryside, several forms of classifying the pastoral have been proposed.

These classifications attempt to sort pastoral literature by geography, content or political value. Terry Gifford discerns three forms of the pastoral: first a closely defined term for a specific kind of poetry, and in a wider sense other forms of literature, which by and large still fall within Abrams' definition cited above. Second, pastoral may refer to "any literature that describes a country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2) and third, as a derogatory term for an idealizing literature which is glossing over the often times harsh realities of country life. In contrast, Garrard, who dedicates an entire chapter to the pastoral in his introduction *Ecocriticism* takes a chronological-geographical approach, discerning classical pastoral (predominantly Greek and Roman) from romantic pastoral (predominantly

English) and American pastoral. Most of these classifications can be traced back to influential works by William Empson, Leo Marx and Raymond Williams.

William Empson in his *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935) has proposed to see the pastoral as any kind of literature which in some way treats the opposition of city and country. Leo Marx, in his *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), identified the pastoral as an important concept for the creation of the American state and national identity. He introduced a distinction between simple and complex pastoral and argued that Americans seek a state of balance, which he associated with the so-called middle landscape. Raymond Williams is the authority for the English tradition of scholarship of the pastoral and his *The Country and the City* tracks these dynamics. This short overview is far from complete, but it might allow us to approach the question of the pastoral in the novel with a rough conceptual framework. What form of pastoral do we encounter in Roth's novel? Its title notwithstanding, I would like to argue that its exploration of the pastoral is not limited to the American form, but draws on the entirety of the pastoral tradition. If we consider Gifford's criteria for the "three kinds of pastoral" we realize that the novel easily meets at least two of them. It features Dawn and Merry searching for Count, their breeding bull, and the description of Dawn's Arcady Hill Breeders operation fulfills the narrowest definition, which Leo Marx summed up in the formula "[n]o shepherd, no pastoral" (qtd in Gifford 1), and the novel deals explicitly with the contrast of country and city in the form of the Newark-Old Rimrock dichotomy. As for the final criterion, the pejorative use of "pastoral" for an uncritical, euphemistic literature, it certainly does not apply in a roundabout way. The use of 'pastoral' in the novel's title and content is too ironic to disqualify the novel on such grounds. But the novel repeatedly gives room to such a simplistic notion of the pastoral and while it violently opposes it, it never so much as completely discredits it: most prominently, the closing sentence "[w]hat on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levov's?" can be read as a plangent reinforcement of such nostalgic yearning (422). This co-presence of different viewpoints characterizes the novel as a highly complex pastoral in Marx's sense, which achieves part of its complexity from the inclusion of the simple pastoral.

Gifford, who discusses the novel in passing, rates the novel as an anti-pastoral, that is a work functioning as a corrective to idealizing pastoral conventions. He traces an anti-pastoral tradition beginning with English poet Stephen Duck (cf. 120) and includes *American Pastoral* on the grounds that Roth's interest is in Seymour Levov's

attempt to understand the failure of the utopian dream of bourgeois retreat that has its American origins in the pastoral literature of early pioneers, travelers and wilderness sages such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau" (78). The decision to include the novel is understandable, especially since Gifford's use of the concept includes works which expose "cultural uses" of the pastoral (128), but as a result, Roth's novel is grouped with the works of Cormac McCarthy and Edward Abbey (cf. 120), which leads to the suspicion that "anti-pastoral" might be, if not the wrong category, too wide a concept to grasp the idiosyncrasies of individual novels. What becomes apparent here is the fact that Roth's novel, despite its appearance, is not a pastoral, in any of the classical senses, at least not in the same way as the other works predominantly discussed by ecocritics today.

Gifford has proposed a new category, which he calls the post-pastoral and which potentially would be a better fit for novels like *American Pastoral*. He argues:

> What is needed is a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated from by their possession of language (149).

Why then is Roth's novel considered an anti-pastoral by Gifford? The novel seems to meet the requirement of awareness of the conventions and pitfalls of the genre, and arguably has found a special kind of language to address the matter with the necessary degree of differentiation and sophistication. It is interesting to note, that Roth has foregrounded the problem of language in his American trilogy in exactly this context. The novels have a distinct focus on the topic of language. Characters like Merry, who struggles with stuttering, or Faunia Farley, who pretends to be dyslexic, foreground language in an abstract sense and explore linguistic and philosophical questions metaphorically. It is easy to see, that such abstract engagement with the matter is not what is called for in the new definition of post-pastoral. Gifford attempts two other definitions, which shed a clearer light on its conceptual basis: In the first, he describes the post-pastoral as an overlapping mix of the three traditional forms of the pastoral, and in this sense Roth's novel is post-pastoral. However, the second attempt at definition, a list of six factors, which may, or may not be present in the literary work, makes clear that the decisive criteria are not so much textual features, but writerly intent. Gifford, who submits his six criteria modestly as a necessarily rough tool for analysis, lists as the first and central principle "an awe in attention to nature" (152). Further elements of the list underline the potential of the

post-pastoral as an interesting conceptual base for cultural-ecological analyses, as Gifford states, its task is "to convey an awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature" (162). But applying these criteria to *American Pastoral*, we can see that Roth may skirt all of the relevant issues, yet does not do so in an emphatically enough fashion to qualify, so to speak. To put it differently, it can be shown that Roth metaphorically thematizes what Gifford's sixth element calls for, namely "the ecofeminist's realization that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities"(165), but, presumably, nobody would credit Roth with being an ecofeminist intent on saving the planet.

Merely reading the title *American Pastoral* and without prior knowledge of the genre, one would be hard-pressed to decide whether it belonged to a novel or an academic publication about a particular form of pastoral. This ambivalence is hardly coincidental: one could say, the encyclopedism in the novel is not limited to a detailed description of the glove making trade, but stretches to an in-depth look at diverse concepts of the pastoral. This treatment is not systematic, but insistent. With a varying focus on different characters, the novel probes different pastoral conceptions and their implications. Even though it appears self-evident, the double perspective already present in the title is one of the main structuring devices of the novel. The distinction to be maintained then is between an anti-pastoral narrative and a quasi-theoretical meta-commentary.

For lack of a better term then, we can call the novel a postmodern-, or better, meta-pastoral. There is a certain tawdriness in simply adding the shop-worn prefix 'meta,' not only because of its proliferation in recent (and not so recent) literary theory, but because the pastoral from its very beginnings took part in the sort of self-referentiality which nowadays is considered a hallmark of processes of metaization.

To speak of meta-pastoral then is a tautological formulation, but for the purpose of this project it serves to differentiate Roth's exploration of the pastoral from other similar forms such as the anti- or post-pastoral. In *American Pastoral*, Roth critiques both pastoral conventions and theories of the pastoral as well as its cultural influence through the medium of a highly diversified narrative. Reconsidering the final sentences in this context then, the despairing question "[a]nd what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levov's?" (423), it is easy to see the normative character of any pastoral. The word-choices "Wrong" and "reprehensible" point to the ethical content of the question, as

the process of reflection begins yet again as the novel ends. This normativity can be identified in the idealistic conception of the "middle landscape" which seeks a compromise between a 'genuine' natural state and the civilizing aspects of human interference. The extant analysis of the phenomenon can be found in Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*.

Ecocritics have had an ambivalent position concerning the pastoral mode. In Garrard's words, "ecocritics have tended to be highly suspicious of pastoral, albeit unwilling to dispense entirely with the implicit critique of contemporary society it may offer" (Garrard 62). The charge against the pastoral would include its intricate connection to normative, idealistic and nostalgic discourses. One attempt to make the pastoral more palatable to ecocritics is Garrard's idea of a "pastoral ecology," a concept he has created to account for so-called "post-equilibrium ecology," that is a form of ecology which emphasizes discontinuities and dysbalance over states of equilibrium (63-65). To think of a "pastoral ecology," however, seems already an attempt at rescuing the concept of pastoral, which, for a variety of reasons, is not well regarded in ecocritical circles. Pastoral, as a mode of representation, is considered to focus predominantly on the cultural aspects, to propagate a fantasy world, behind which any chance for a serious treatment of the natural environment fades. Indeed for Marx, the idea of nature is non-essential to the pastoral, a standpoint which Buell set out to correct, or rather rethink, in *The Environmental Imagination*. In his chapter on "Pastoral Ideology", which he terms Pastoralism, he is of two minds concerning the concept: on the one hand, it prevents a real engagement with the natural world, while on the other, it also stimulates interest in the natural environment, and thus he is not ready to condemn the concept in its entirety. In his outlook he is hopeful that the pastoral will move beyond mere "representation of nature as a theater for human events" (52). If ecocriticism at all is to be understood as a fully valid literary theory and not only a political movement intent on canon revision and activism, the pastoral should remain a mainstay of ecocritical inquiry. As Garrard points out, the English and American traditions of the pastoral are still noticeably different. According to him, in an American context the pastoral is less offensive for "the ratification of an oppressive social order" (as is the case in England) but rather due to "its identification with masculine colonial aggression directed against women, indigenes and the land" (Garrard 49).

Leo Marx addresses this sort of criticism in a lucid afterword to *The Machine in the Garden,* acknowledging much of his research was later justifiably questioned and criticized. Identified as a main proponent of what was later derogatorily named the "myth and symbol school" of American studies, he was accused of overgeneralization and essentialism.[46] While much of this criticism had its merit, Marx' study is still relevant and especially so in the context of this project. Not only is it the seminal study on the American pastoral, it is also a popular benchmark against which Roth can show the idiosyncrasies of a Jewish-American attempt at a construction of the pastoral.

In the context of this analysis of *American Pastoral*, it is not without importance that much criticism on the pastoral is not neutral with regards to politics. Both Leo Marx and Raymond Williams can be considered, at least at certain points of their career, Marxist critics, and William Empsom has drawn comparisons between the pastoral and proletarian literature. The pastoral is among the most researched topics and accounts for an immense number of publications; it was analyzed by such prominent theorists such as Wolfang Iser in *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre*, and the aforementioned Lawrence Buell and Jonathan Bate. The setting of *American Pastoral* seems to specifically resonate with the left-leaning studies by Marx and Williams, to a lesser degree even with feminist critiques of the pastoral such as Ann Kolodny's.

The novel is interested in the deep societal changes after World War II, and the "culture wars" of the 1960s and 1970s. It is interesting to note, that the publication dates of Marx' and Williams' studies roughly coincide with the end of the narrative arc of the novel. The publication of Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* falls into 1973, the year of the Watergate hearings and Merry's return in the novel. I argue that these treatments of the pastoral are of increased interest due to this contemporaneity. As far as the analysis of the novel is concerned, there will be no strict distinction between an American or British tradition of pastoral because arguably the novel explores several concepts of the pastoral. Even though the title "American pastoral" seems specific, the novel includes places beyond the United States and contextualizes the American developments. Williams is a good guide in this regard; for example the emphasis on Newark and the contrast with Old Rimrock seems to reverberate with the Marxist leanings of the protests against the Vietnam

[46] See Bruce Kuklick's 1972 article "Myth and Symbol in American Studies."

War in the novel. In an act of theoretical archaeology one would probably not be amiss analyzing Roth's novel as tracing the 1960s and 70s as a liminal phase, a transitional phase between two "structures of feeling" in Williams' terminology (cf. 35).

In which way is the question of the pastoral interrelated with questions of space and place? It is interesting to note that even in abstract descriptions of pastoral 'discourse', the category of place is omnipresent:

> Since Theocritus the pastoral has defined itself and declared itself as a literary discourse that has retreated from both the sophisticated discourse of the court and the illiterate discourse of the real shepherd. Meeting *somewhere* between the two, pastoral discourse is a *linguistic borderland* that constructs the artifice of Arcadia." (Gifford 46, my emphasis)

This specific use by Gifford seems intentional, drawing parallels between the linguistic construction of the (utopian) place and the place itself.

While the concepts of space and place on the one hand and the pastoral on the other hand intuitively seem interrelated, it is worth spelling out how to conceive of this conceptual interrelation. I refer to the pastoral as a way of configuring space and place because several of the features of spatiality are folded into the concept. The geographical or the spatial aspect can be found in the concept of the pastoral as referring to a distant landscape which is often additionally separated from its surroundings for example by mountain ranges in the topos of the secluded vale. (cf. e.g. Gifford 20) Part of this aspect is the oppositional quality between the pastoral and the urban setting. The second aspect can be found in the specific temporality of the pastoral, which is often theorized as diverging from the position of the urban observer. The topos of the Golden Age which was often said to persist in pastoral constructs and the concomitant idea that pastoral landscape is situated outside the flow of time come to mind (Gifford 20). A third aspect can be found in the ideological investedness of pastoral literature. In this sense the pastoral landscape is a fictive or virtual place in the sense of Lawrence Buell's phenomenology of place attachment– the pastoral taps into both environmental and cultural parameters of places. As a result, the pastoral as a cultural concept, while problematic to a majority of ecocritics, is of high interest to the critic interested in cultural ecology.

Most importantly perhaps, the concept of the pastoral despite its predilection for the well-balanced, almost homeostatic state of the middle landscape essentially is about movement. From the constitutive tension between city and country, between different classes, between different outlooks on life–remember the poet and the

shepherd as constitutive participants–arises a dynamic which includes the acting characters but also the reader. Gifford conceptualizes this dynamic within the framework of retreat (into Arcadia) and return (to the urban center) (Gifford 45-80 and 81-115).

Drawing on the insight "that place is space, to which meaning has been ascribed," (Carter, Donald and Squires, qtd. in Buell, *Future* 63) the following analysis is based on different characters and the way they assign meaning to space. As a consequence, this chapter returns to some of the characters already discussed in the previous section; but they will now be presented from a different perspective. In many places, new connections will become apparent as the interpretation builds on the earlier analysis. While an effort has been made to structure the following analysis in the above-mentioned fashion, the reader will quickly perceive that the question analysed easily cuts across the analytical categories. I contend that the reason for this lies in the inherently relational quality of place and in the fact that Roth uses Bill Orcutt and Seymour Levov's 'competing senses of place' as a central narrative device in the novel.

4.4.2 Newark and Old Rimrock: The City and the Country?

It seems fitting to start this discussion of place with the city which has held Philip Roth's imagination for the longest time. Newark, where he grew up, figures prominently in *American Pastoral*: it is the hub from which Levov's move to Old Rimrock and the business enterprises of Newark Maid take their start. These movements take opposite directions, one a retreat, the other an exploration, but they are structurally parallel in so far as they are characterized by a move away from Newark. In the novel, the decline of Newark and Levov's relocation are described as co-dependent variables. Lou Levov calls Newark a "carcass" (235) and implores his son to move production completely overseas. Within the pastoral paradigm then, Newark provides the urban setting, from which a retreat into Arcadia is envisioned and enacted. Part of the tragedy and the historical analysis in the novel is the fact that once the movement of "retreat" is exhausted, the return back into Newark is experienced as almost impossible. In absence of jobs and civic engagement, the situation has deteriorated in the city. As in the description of a return to Newark in *Zuckerman Unbound* (222-225), this deterioration is expressed in images of absence

and emptiness, lack of care, urban decay and a slow recolonization of the urban environment by plants and animals. These descriptions picture the Newark of the 1970s and onwards, the time when Merry re-settles in downtown after returning from her traumatic journey through the American underground.

The novel opens with an extended passage of Zuckerman's childhood memories and youth in Newark and ends about 25 years later with the disastrous dinner in Old Rimrock, which is overshadowed by Seymour Levov's knowledge of Merry's return to Newark's urban wasteland. In the interval, the city has seen a steady decline, with the race riots of 1967 being an incisive turn of events. At the outset of the novel, Zuckerman, by way of his recollection gives an entirely different image of the city, underlining the sense of community:

> Perhaps by definition a neighborhood is the place to which a child spontaneously gives undivided attention; that's the unfiltered way meaning comes to children, just flowing off the surface of things. Nonetheless, fifty years later I ask you: has the immersion ever again been so complete as it was in those streets, where every block, every backyard, every *floor*—the walls, ceilings, doors, and windows of every last friend's family apartment—came to be so absolutely individualized? (43)

The place in question here is the neighborhood as perceived by a child. In remembering "the surface of things" presumably hints at their concrete importance to the child observer. The rhetorical question ending the passage indicates that this an account of a lost world. The idea of the neighborhood, a term which occurs five times in Zuckerman's speech, as a close-knit community is an essential concept of the novel. The passage demonstrates par excellence in which way places are invested with meaning by individuals, here to the extent of 'complete' immersion and 'absolute' individualization of the smallest spatial units. For Zuckerman, the neighborhood is an individual system of reference points providing orientation.

The neighborhood is also the status quo against which Seymour Levov's move to the countryside is measured. A side effect of belonging to the community in Newark was the attending knowledge about its members. Zuckerman states: "we knew" (43). And it is the social coherence, especially in the face of adversity "that made the neighborhood a cohesive place" (41) in this part of Newark. It is here that the Levovs and Zuckerman have their shared roots, and the fact that everybody knew about everybody else is a contributing factor to Nathan's fascination with the Swede, who lived an entirely different life outside the known parameters once he left Newark behind. Most of the high school class mates have moved out of Newark, as a result, the meeting gives the opportunity to catch up after a long time. After such a long

interval, people have changed considerably and give updates talking about their present circumstances. This is not restricted to the sharing of youth memories and a comparative count of grandchildren, but also includes the laying bare of family secrets long covered up, such as Zuckerman's classmate who talks about a family member that was sent to a mental institution and lobotomized (cf. 54). Through the shared memories at the reunion, the old Newark, a long lost and forgotten place is resurrected, if only temporarily. Zuckerman registers this, leaving the reunion and feeling, "I was a biography in perpetual motion, memory to the marrow of the bones" (45), which prompts him to write his own, alternative speech to address his class mates.

On a different note, the passage quoted above is a good example of the scalability of the notion of place as an analytical concept. It can encompass an area as wide as the neighborhood, an entire city or region, but at the same time it is a deeply personal category. Zuckerman enumerates several possible frames for place: streets, blocks, backyards, down to the highly specific "floor". Massey's concept of progressive place, which entails a relational aspect, theorizing place always in conjunction with space and its surroundings, allows for 'fuzzy' boundaries and emphasises the personal dimension of place. In the first paragraphs of the speech, the sense of community created by the sense of place is underlined, yet the narrator safeguards against allegations of nostalgically glorifying the past with a rhetorical question: "Am I wrong to think that we delighted in living there?" (42). This appeals to the sense of community of the audience and at least potentially invites contradiction. It is in contexts like this one that the reader become aware of the extent to which the novel is a novel of memory and that all memory by definition must be selective.

Newark Maid, the business of the Levov's, plays an important role in juxtaposing the local and the global. For once, it draws on the skills of immigrant workers in the local labor market. In its beginning stages, Newark Maid is organized in a decentralized manner; Levov collects the products of individual craftsmen and works mainly as a distributor. These craftsmen come from all over the world. In the second stage the production process is concentrated in the factory building and increasingly streamlined. Following the race riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Newark Maid finally moves production offshore to Puerto Rico, following its competitors who have left the United States long before. In other words, there is only a relatively short time-frame in which manufacturing takes place in Newark. Only for

a few decades manufacturing is concentrated in Newark before it disperses across the globe again. The specifics of the leather supply chain have been discussed before and at times give the impression that Newark Maid is a colonial enterprise. This at least seems to be Merry's accusation and to an extent Rita Cohen's. In this they seem in agreement with Raymond Williams, who had argued that "[t]hus a model of city and country, in economic and political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world." Describing the effects of colonialism in Great Britain, he states "[d]istant lands became the rural areas of industrial Britain…" (280). In comparison, this has always been the case for the Levovs, who source their leather from locations around the globe. Going beyond William's analysis, deindustrialization in Newark has set in and the jobs are moved to cheaper markets.

Old Rimrock is introduced as the anti-thesis to the urban Newark. Nathan Zuckerman explicitly uses the pastoral discourse, in order to describe the life of the Swede and his move to the countryside. He conceptualizes the story of Seymour Levov within a pastoral framework, and then attributes certain roles to other characters, for example to Merry, who is conceptualized as an intruder into the Arcadian ideal. The place name, Old Rimrock, is telling in a variety of ways. The component "old," is a traditional part of place names and serves to modify the second part of the name and sets the village apart from a putative Rimrock or even, New Rimrock, but in the context of the novel, the old seems to carry more significance. "Old" here also carries connotations of tradition and 'origin'. The novel never ceases to highlight the area's importance in the Revolutionary War, creating the impression of Old Rimrock as a bedrock of American values and history. The noun "rimrock" denotes a geological formation, the often overhanging rock formations which form the rim, or edge of higher terrain (cf. "Rimrock" n.p.). The component 'rim' therefore denotes a liminal quality. This liminal quality is exploited with regard to several contexts in the novel. On the one hand, this imagery draws on the myth of the frontier, on the other hand it refers to the liminal position of suburban aggregations between urban centers and entirely rural areas. This "in-betweenness" already hinted at in the name invites us to consider "Old Rimrock" as middle-landscape.

The extent to which Old Rimrock is likened to a New World Arcadia is evident not only in the highly ironic references such as the Levov's address, New Arcady Hill Road, but also in its remoteness from the flow of history. The place is described in

terms of a secluded, sheltered position, into which the chaos of history enters in the form of Merry Levov. Her act of violence finds its only equivalence in Revolutionary War battles and the fatal explosion of a munitions plant during World War II (302). In Old Rimrock time is structured through repetitive routine, one case in point being the repeat mention of Russ Hamlin, the owner of the general store, who "had raised the American flag every morning since Warren Gamaliel Harding was president of the United States" (113). The emphasis here is on the cyclical constancy of "every morning" while the explicit mention of the president's middle name "Gamaliel" imbues the simple statement with a historical reference point on the one hand and biblical overtones and the colorings of a modern myth on the other. This isolation of Old Rimrock from the historical developments in the world 'outside' is necessarily an illusion, but just one example of a number of instances in which the opposition between inside and outside structures the novel.

Whereas Newark, as per Zuckerman's description, appears as a closely knit and highly integrated convolution of social and geographic space, Old Rimrock is characterized by its rural and spread-out layout, which underscores the fish-out-of-water situation implied by Lou Levov when he points to the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in the rural areas of New Jersey. The Swede's relationship to the place is notedly different from the place attachment Zuckerman describes in his speech manuscript. The Levovs, unlike Nathan in Newark, must learn the social dynamics of the new place. In the course of the novel, much is made of the disconnect between the Swede's fantasies of the place and the social realities, which are disclosed as the plot moves on.

4.4.3 The Swede

As we can see from both the discussion of Old Rimrock as a middle landscape and Nathan Zuckerman's recollections of Newark, a sense of place is of tantamount importance in the novel. Taking a closer look, we can distinguish the house of the Levov's as a clearly demarcated place within Old Rimrock. In some sense, the house is at the center of the Swedes pastoral dream.

Put another way, the house is of such great interest because meaning is ascribed to it from the very beginning. The Swede projects his future on the house, and he starts to imaginatively intertwine his future with the house from the moment

he first sees it. In the course of the novel the meaning of the house is reinterpreted by characters such as Dawn, who wants to leave it behind and begin a new life with Bill Orcutt. Thus the meaning of the house is reconfigured as the novel progresses. The house is a visible sign of Levov's business success. I argue that its functions are comparable to those 'country houses' analyzed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Compare for example Ben Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" (cf. Williams 27-34) Seymour Levov's fondness for his house is similarly reflected in many passages explaining the significance of the building for him. Whereas Levov remains an outsider, his neighbor acts like a "country squire"(301), which underscores the socio-economic status of Levov's Old Rimrock neighborhood. With the conflict between father and daughter coming to a head, Levov is increasingly confronted with accusations over his business practices. According to Gifford:

> Raymond Williams has shown how this Arcadia serves to disguise in myth the very opposite that is taking place in reality. City activity is financing these country houses; the exploitation of nature in these estate is also an exploitation of people; county estates have been produced by the eviction and dispossession of the poor. (31-2 Gifford)

It is this dynamic that is criticized by Merry. Far removed from the production facilities of Newark Maid, the house has seemingly no connection to economic realities beyond the pastoral of Old Rimrock.

Owning the house is an end in itself for Seymour Levov. He has no use for the extended tracts of land that come with it. His interest in the cattle breeding program run by his wife with help from his daughter is marginal and for the most part he is simply content funding the loss-making enterprise. Rather, the house, not the surroundings, is charged with a number of different symbolisms. The descriptions of the house are presented for the most part from Seymour's perspective and when Dawn's differing opinions become apparent, the Swede sees her 'infidelity' to the house as an infidelity towards him (189). All of the components of the house promise the sort of stability the Swede envisions for his family:

> The stone house was not only engagingly ingenious-looking to his eyes—all that irregularity regularized, a jigsaw puzzle fitted patiently together into this square, solid thing to make a beautiful shelter—but it looked indestructible, an impregnable house that could never burn to the ground and that had probably been standing there since the country began. (190)

To Levov, the house represents an aesthetic achievement, but this achievement is necessarily supplemented by its utilitarian value as shelter. The house is the focus of all the dreams of Levov, a manifestation of the American Dream. This function seems

to be symbolically written into the aesthetic and architecture of the building. The irregularity of the stone walls is owing to the fact that it is build from remnants of the Revolutionary War. The stones were gathered from the fire places of Washington's revolutionary army who had camped several times in the area (307-308). The house is literally built on and from the debris of the Revolutionary War. The "patient" act of fitting these disparate pieces together echo the process of the development of the United States, an image of the motto *e pluribus unum* prominently displayed on the seal of the United States. In this perspective, the house turns into a civil religious shrine, which unknown to most, is a monument to the birthing throes of the young country, the house itself *is* American history. On a personal level, the same symbolism can be detected if one reads the house as a figuration of Levov's life project, a thought not that daring considering that the identification between Levov and his house is strong. This is explicitly mentioned in passages like this: "He never seemed to understand … that he was not himself a one-hundred-and-seventy-year-old stone house, its weight borne imperturbably by beams of carved oak—that he was something more transitory and mysterious" (202). The jigsaw puzzle in this case would refer to the marriage between Jewish-American and American-Irish backgrounds. The resulting house, however, makes a "square, solid thing" (190) . The key word, square here is not only pertinent to the shape of the house and the ideal shape of bricks, but descriptive of the Swede. "Square" used to have positive connotations but from the 1940s on had become a pejorative term for conservatives ("square" n.p.). The description of the house thus already hints at the sources of the alienation between father and daughter.

The house, like no other element in the novel stands for the pastoral. As the novel makes clear there is an uneasy identity between the house and the Swede. The house becomes a central image for the Swede's dream, which subordinates all other aspects of his life to the vision of a well-lived life in this particular house. He chooses his girlfriends based on his fantasy of how they might live with him there and he even names his daughter Merry after imagining her merrily playing around this house (189). Within the Arcadian secludedness of Old Rimrock, the house provides further shelter, is deemed "indestructible" and "impregnable". It will never "burn to the ground" but these same qualities are the point of attack by Dawn and Orcutt, who plan a new, more open and modern house allowing in "[a] flood of sunlight" (325; cf.

368)! Finally, the house enables him to take part in an American myth, allowing him to style himself "like some frontiersman of old" (310).

The immediate surroundings of the house, roughly 100 acres, are primarily depicted with reference to historical events and relatively few details of the natural environment are given:

> A barn, a millpond, a millstream, the foundation remains of a gristmill that had supplied grain for Washington's troops. Back on the property somewhere, an abandoned iron mine. Just after the Revolution, the original house, a wood structure, and the sawmill had burned down and the house was replaced by this one—according to a date engraved on a stone over the cellar door and carved into a corner beam in the front room, built in 1786, its exterior walls constructed of stones collected from the fireplaces of the Revolutionary army's former campsites in the local hills. (307-308)

The short overview shows how lucid the matter of the land and its relationship to human beings is treated in the novel. The passage puts emphasis on the usage of land, stating the hundred acres have not been cleared for farming, but for the timber used in the iron forges of the 18th century (307). The size of the property is underlined in that "somewhere" an abandoned mine can be found. This emphasis on the far-reaching ground is also present in the descriptions of the cattle operation, (cf. 197-201), and cows are described as widely roaming and occasionally getting lost.

The trees surrounding his house in particular seem to go beyond Levov's usual conceptual grasp. In place of capitalistic ownership the first, in a Leopoldian manner, conceptual basics of a land ethic appear.[47]

> The Swede couldn't get over those trees in the first years out in Old Rimrock. I own these trees. It was more astonishing to that he owned trees that that he owned factories, … It was puzzling to own trees—they were not owned the way a business is owned or even a house is owned. If anything, they were held in trust. (325)

In an ironic reversal, Dawn cites the responsibility to care for the land when she intends to convince him to sell the house, pointing out all the necessary work, now a mere burden that the cattle business is gone: "there's a *responsibility* you have with land. You can't just let it go" (193). However, this move from the old house to the newly designed one on only one tenth of the ground presents a great sacrifice for Levov. To him, these trees are essential, dating back to his first sighting of the house, when he sees a swing in the trees and imagines his future daughter playing in the garden. While they are referred to as Merry's family trees it becomes apparent that

[47] See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*.

"this garden" is exceedingly sterile. The trees near the house are heavily managed: bands of steel hold them up forming a parallelogram, lightning rods are installed in them, they are sprayed with insecticides twice a year and an arborist is hired for the care of these trees (cf. 326). All this seems to run counter to the passage above, these trees are not simply tress, they are culturally formed extensions of the house.

The central, summary expression of the Swede's sense of place inextricably tied-up with the pastoral middle-landscape of Old Rimrock can be found in his identification with one of America's mythical figures: Johnny Appleseed. Roth dedicates a little more than three pages to a passage describing this identification (315-319), which encapsulates almost all of the central concerns of the novel and is a good example of the multi-perspectival, morphing narrative, which in this case slips into a mode treading the boundary between free-indirect discourse and interior monologue: "Johnny Appleseed, that's the man for *me*. Wasn't a Jew, wasn't an Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestant Christian—nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American. Big. Ruddy. Happy. No brains probably, but didn't need'em—a great walker was all Johnny Appleseed needed to be" (316, my emphasis). The Swede's man, Johnny Appleseed, here is taken to be not so much a post-religious as a civil-religious American saint. The epitome of the "happy American".

The image of Johnny Appleseed in *American Pastoral* is relevant to a discussion of place not only in its affiliation to the concept of the American garden[48], but also for its implications for the spatial structure of the novel. The identification with Johnny Appleseed is bound up with the concept of walking. In a passage reminiscent of Thoreau's essay "Walking", the Swede walks the five miles from his house to the general store in Old Rimrock and back. This round-trip is at the heart of the novel: the path leads him through the pastoral ideal, yet Merry is going to destroy its endpoint and therefore the idyll. The walk serves to differentiate within the pastoral between the village and the secluded house, which appears as the site of an even more 'pure' pastoral, not only a sanctuary, but an inner sanctum. Whereas Thoreau's walker *saunters*, that is walking towards the holy land—"*à la Sainte Terre*" (260)— the Swede *strides*, implying a no less determined movement. The story of Johnny Appleseed to Levov takes on the function of an egalitarian foundational myth of the United States, because the country he is walking across is "no less his than it was William Orcutt's" (318), his WASP-ish neighbor. At stake here then is a place

[48] See Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land. The American West as Myth and Symbol*

attachment both deep, and somewhat superficial. With reference to the name of a local newspaper he has an indifferent yet positive response: "The word 'Lackawanna' was pleasing to him in and of itself" (317)–on the one hand this pictures Levov at ease and happy in his surroundings, on the other hand, he is missing a critical relationship to the land and its history. In this instance the meaning of Native American place- and river names such as "Lackawanna".[49] seems to elude him. The passage serves as a clear reminder that discourses of the American pastoral are inextricably interwoven with the history of settler colonialism.

The description of the Swede pretending to be Johnny Appleseed on his walks culminates in a striking statement: "What he had been doing out on the road … was making love to his life" (319) in imitating the motion of sowing apple seeds, he symbolically turns into the guardian of the garden. This fantasy of walking the clearly defined path to this house encompasses Levov's love for Merry, Dawn, the house and the landscape around him. Johnny Appleseed is the overarching concept through which the Swede would like to make sense of his family life. The narrative becomes a regular bedtime story for Merry, and in the process of its telling the Swede extends the concept and inscribes Merry and Dawn in the story, creating the family Appleseed.

On his way back the Swede delights in the road to Old Rimrock. For him, it is at the center of an identity-creating chain of belonging: "husband and father, Seymour Levov, Arcady Hill Road, Old Rimrock, New Jersey, USA" (318). This series relates Levov's personal sense of place to concentrically larger contexts. Levov will lose almost all these identity-markers. Merry destroys the general store and vanishes, Dawn decides to get rid of the house and leaves her husband. Consequently the path between his house in Arcady Hill Road and Old Rimrock loses its significance. His pastoral ideal and the American dream turn into a nightmare and the seemingly stable set-up created by his move to Old Rimrock is destabilized.

Bill Orcutt is the representative of a different sense of place, one which is not available to the Swede. A member of the WASP elite of Morris County, William Orcutt III's grasp of place is structured through the genealogy of his family. As such he draws attention to the cultural specificity of the American pastoral, which draws on a

[49] In addition, the term Lackawanna obviously evokes strong images of the American Pastoral. George Inness's painting "The Lackawanna Valley" is one of the definitive images of the "machine in the garden," a reproduction graces the cover of the paperback edition (2000) of Leo Marx' study, and is discussed in detail: Marx calls it a "striking representation of the idea that machine technology is a proper part of the landscape" (220).

long Christian and exclusive tradition. The relationship between the Levov's and the Orcutts then may be characterized by bouts of Jewish and Irish resentment respectively but initially the spirit of neighborliness outweighs the tensions. Lou Levov, in an attempt at preventing his sons move to supposedly hostile Old Rimrock, points out that not long ago the Ku Klux Klan had burned crosses in the area. The attractiveness of Orcutt to Dawn is clearly presented as having its roots in his WASP background. In a sense Dawn escapes the Swede's appropriation of the pastoral setting, which already has been destroyed by Merry, and by romantic affiliation to Orcutt adopts his sense of place–a process, which finds its expression in the planning of a new house and hatred for the house so central to the Swede's dream. Orcutt's pastoral differs in central aspects from Levov's , but in comparison is no less hollow and fragile than the Swede's construct.

William Orcutt is introduced as an environmentalist, as a conservationist and also as a conservative:

> As president of the local landmarks society, already established as the historical conscience of a new conservationist generation, Orcutt had been a leader in the losing battle to keep Interstate 287 from cutting through the historical center of Morristown and a victorious opponent of the jetport that would have destroyed the Great Swamp, just west of Chatham, and with it much of the county's wildlife. He was trying now to keep Lake Hopatcong from devastation by pollutants. Orcutt's bumper sticker read "Morris Green, Quiet, and Clean," and he had good naturedly slapped one on the Swede's car the first time they met. "Need all the help we can get," he said, "to keep the modern ills at bay." (300-301)

A passage like this serves a variety of functions. First, whatever version of the pastoral—its historicity is emphasized. Whereas the Swede newly arrives from the city and accepts the status quo around which he built his fantasy, Orcutt has a sense for the development of Morris County and registers changes such as the newly built Interstate 287. Second, preventing change is a constant task–the succession of conservationist projects ranging from the attempt at saving the historical center of Morristown to effort to preserve "the Great Swamp" and "Lake Hopatcong" serves to illustrate this. What becomes evident in this is once again the historicity of the middle landscape and the resulting need for on the one hand stabilizing and on the other hand exclusionary practices. Constant effort is needed to merely uphold a semblance of the pastoral. Third, this sort of environmentalism is not only conservationist, but conservative and reactionary. "Morris Green, Quiet and Clean" is an expression which seems positioned against outside influences intended to keep "the modern ills at bay". Right here we have the paradox of the pastoral which even though historically determined aims at ahistoricity and stability. It is an effort prone to fail and it is no

wonder that Merry's bombing is conceptualized as an intrusion of history in Old Rimrock (87).

Orcutt takes the Swede on a tour of Morris County, which serves to illustrate some of the dynamics at play. While most of the tour is already familiar to Levov, his sense of place is nevertheless challenged: when Orcutt points out the historical location of a "whorehouse … for young men from Old Rimrock" (302), "across" the river in Easton. This passage subverts the pastoral and shows that earlier incarnations of the town were not purer and no less corrupted, that the construction of "Golden Ages" is always contingent on the needs of the present (Williams 45) and does not uphold under closer inspection. The idea of the 'good old times' only shows a fraction of a complex reality. Any look at the context of a pastoral 19th century Old Rimrock would point to the fragility of the idyll, which must push some societal phenomena outside its boundaries in order to survive and to its embeddedness in a wider, industrializing landscape. Interestingly, a river must be crossed, not only in that the brothel is geographically separated from the town, but in the fact that to reach it, an act of literal and metaphoric 'transgression' is necessary. The pastoral is upheld by a process of mental zoning and exclusion as well as and spatial separation. Later, when Orcutt begins an affair with Dawn, Seymour will remember the tour and Orcutt's reference to the whorehouse in Easton.

The highlight of the tour and the most impressive to Levov is a visit to the local graveyard, which Dawn will refer to as "The Orcutt Family Cemetery Tour" (312). The cemetery serves as a genealogical reference for the Orcutts, who can trace the presence of their family in Morris County to the Revolution. "The first Morris County Orcutt," is presented and Orcutt fondly states: "There he is. The sturdy, fecund patriarch" (305). The present tense deixis refers to the location of the burial plot on the one hand, but it also points to a presence of tradition, history, and memory. In this sense, the cemetery is a place of memory, *a lieu de mémoire* for Orcutt. This underscores the social sense of place available to Orcutt, as it has been theorized in Germany by Aleida and Jan Assmann in their work on cultural memory, drawing on on the work of Pierre Nora who theorized *lieu de mémoire*.[50] The gravestones then tie the Orcutt family into the larger history of the United States. The ancestors whose headstones Orcutt is showing off all went to the same colleges, befriending historical persons such as Andrew Jackson and profited in the process. The Orcutts can relate

[50] See for example Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnis (*322-327).

to this sort of national history, the narrative of the nation in which the family participates, however marginal. When the Swede has a brush with this form of history it comes in the form of the Old Rimrock Bomber, and it is presented as an intrusion of history into the supposedly ahistorical pastoral. As Zuckerman puts it in his assessment of the Swede's fate: "People think of history in the long term, but history, in fact, is a very sudden thing" (87). Arguably, the Orcutts, due to their long family tradition, have more resources in the faces of "sudden" challenges than the Levovs do.

This difference in relating to history is also tied to the matter of education. Whereas a tannery was Lou Levov's high school and college, the customary education of an Orcutt consists of attending Princeton, followed by Harvard Law (321). This fact is emphasized during the tour, when Orcutt refers to famous classmates of his ancestors. This privilege has its counterpart in the Swede's belief and identification with the egalitarian myth of Johnny Appleseed. In this case, giving the Swede a tour of Morris County serves to affirm Orcutt's identity and rootedness. In contrast, dealing with Orcutt is a learning experience for Levov. By contrasting the different senses of place which coexist in the same physical space, the novel negotiates US-American identity along the categories of ethnicity, religion and immigrant status.

Life in Old Rimrock retrospectively reconfigures the Swede's sense of place for Newark. This becomes evident in a scene of highly symbolical character. It is on the tour through Morris County that he becomes aware of a case of idiosyncratic childhood toponymy. Newark's Morris Canal never brought up associations with Morris County for the Swede, rather, the child thought of an uncle of his, who was also called Morris. We could say then, that the awareness of Newark's environment, not only natural but economic and industrial, is radically changed through the move to Old Rimrock. The Swede's internal map, his imaginative investment into the landscape is rewritten, a highly personal model of place and space overwritten by Orcutt's explanation. Sense of place is here portrayed as a continuous process. Another anecdote illustrating this revolves around the "Peach Special"—a train which was used to transport peaches grown in Hunterdon County into the city. On the one hand this anecdote opens up a little known chapter of agricultural history in New Jersey–at one point all the peach trees succumbed to a disease (304)–on the other hand, the image of a train carrying only peaches develops a powerful aesthetic potential and in time, this anecdote becomes a loved staple of Merry's bedtime stories

(304). This example, in short, shows how place knowledge turns into place attachment.

Orcutt then serves to complicate the image of the Swede's sentimental pastoral. The "country squire" (301), as he is referred to by Dawn, serves as a reminder that class differences persist and that the Swede's dream of living a post-ethnic, civil-religiously informed American life is to a large extent illusory. There is no simple pastoral but at least the coexistence of several idiosyncratic pastoral modes. This configuration prevents equality. As in many other instances in the novel the idea of the pastoral is shown to be a social construct –in itself not a remarkable insight– and the quality of these constructs is dependent on ethnic background and in how far one is capable of instrumentalizing these constructs for political goals. As I have shown this works both ways–the Swede's idea of the pastoral can be seen as an attempt at leveling social differences. This use of the pastoral, however, precludes the idea of the Swede's adhering to a naïve or sentimental pastoral. Here we already have the paradox of the impossibility of the pastoral and yet the belief in its potential and an attempt at its implementation. The evaluation of Levov's efforts at creating his own pastoral then oscillates between a contra-factual naiveté and an endearing effort to carve out a place for himself and his family. There is an ethical impulse here in that the reader is invited to make up his own mind, which underscores the dilemmatic structure of the novel and its tragic dimension. Orcutt's and the Swede's Old Rimrock might exist in the same space, but they are two different places.

4.4.4 Merry

The sense of place associated with Merry is of particular interest because she moves between different place concepts. Within the spatial concept of the novel we can state that Merry combines anti- and counter-pastoral impulses. However, it is important to note the ambivalence throughout. Merry blows up the village store and in this sense can be read as an anti-pastoral character. However the counter-pastoral not only in the sense of a refutation, but also in the sense of an alternative take on the pastoral, is in evidence too, as will be shown below.

How can this counter-pastoral be defined? I base my argument on two observations: first the descriptions of the urban landscape of Newark, and second Merry's conversion to Jainism. Merry lives and works in the ironbound section of Newark (175), a part of town named for the fact that it is surrounded by railroad

tracks. I read the ironboundedness of the place in parallel to the secludedness of the classical pastoral. Arcadia as an ideal landscape is tucked away, an ahistoric pocket where the 'Golden Age' prevails. In a complete inversion, this dilapidated section of Newark is cut off from the outside and no one from the outside is daring to go there. How far Merry is removed from the suburban life of the other Levovs can be illustrated by the liminal situation on the way to her apartment:

> They had reached her room … turning west through an underpass that led to McCarter Highway, an underpass no more than a hundred and fifty feet long but of the kind that causes drivers to hit the lock button on the door. There were no lights overhead, and the walkways were strewn with broken pieces of furniture, with beer cans, bottles, lumps of things that were unidentifiable. …And there were bodies, too, that were living, people shifting around in the filth, dangerous-looking people back in the dark. (233)

This imminently threatening scene on the one hand makes clear that it is very hard to find Merry. This dangerous stretch of 150 feet separates Merry's world from the outside. Roth here combines biting social commentary on the devastation of inner-cities with the structural framework of the pastoral. Well-known descriptions of urban plight, of urban decay are invoked to contrast with the idyll of Old Rimrock. Newark is presented as a wasteland and images of urban decay prevail. As Williams has pointed out in reference to poems by T.S. Eliot, sometimes modernist depictions of the cityscape are "as relentless and as conventional as pastoral" (240). The bitter irony of course is that within this scrapheap, the Swede finds his daughter who after having violently embraced Marxism and the ideology of the Weather Underground, now settled on a new philosophical stance, Jainism. Merry can be interpreted as a "shepherd" character in the anti-pastoral. In her conversion to Jainism she takes a passive stance to ensure welfare of all animals and she works in a undefined capacity at a building referred to as "the old Cats and Dogs Hospital" (175). And perhaps the bitter implications of the topos "et in arcadia ego" (cf. e.g. Gifford 154) has never been so excruciatingly realized as when Merry tells her father, that among the holiest of Jainism's central ideals is sacrificial death by starvation (244). Merry was a bringer of death in Old Rimrock, and in Newark she is encountered as a veiled, skeletal figure, emanating the stench of decomposition (239, 265). In conclusion Merry's reappearance sets up a balance between Old Rimrock and the ironbound section of Newark, where her shocking living conditions constitute a symbolical counter pastoral.

What are the implications of this counter-pastoral scene for the novel? One could argue that the character of Merry takes an interesting trajectory, from the

pastoral happy childhood in Old Rimrock, to the absolute anti-pastoral of her politicized years, to ending up in downtown Newark, both ideologically and spatially removed from her childhood and her radical past. The descriptions of the surroundings of Merry's new home, the underpass, etc. are reminiscent of the descriptions of decay and destitution in the fast-growing and industrializing cities of the 19th century.[51]

This Newarkian counter-pastoral is clearly defined. It locates Merry not only geographically but in the spatial imagination of her father: "The kid in that tree who was now on the floor of that room" (326). When Merry resurfaces in Newark, she returns from the unknown. Her whereabouts in the last five years, a mystery to the Swede, can be associated with the concept of "space"–to her family Merry is lost in the space of the Weather Underground. In other words, the Swede could not 'place' his daughter during these five years. Merry was inaccessible and this instigates her father's relentless effort to assign meaning to her absence, to find a place for his daughter. Of course this process is not only spatial, but also temporal. When Merry tells the story of her odyssey through the political underground, she opens up this space to understanding for Levov, inscribes meaning into the vast space of 1960s and 1970s America.

Roth is not content to leave it at that. The dualism of whatever the Swede stands for with Merry as his counterpole is brought into movement. Now that Merry is locatable, she once again has a place both in the world and in the Swede's mind and poses a threat to whatever is left of the Swede's family and its pretenses at normality. This threat of reality overshadowing, the worst assumptions about Merry's state of mind and body loom over the Swede during the entire concluding dinner scene in the novel. Her fate and her living conditions are a constant mental presence. The dynamic enfolding of the counter-pastoral into what is left of the pastoral dream puts the Swede in great fear: "The Swede understood instantaneously what was happening. Merry had appeared in her veil! And told her grandfather that the death toll was four! She'd taken the train up from Newark and walked the five miles from the village. She'd come on her own! Now everyone knew!" (419). As the reader soon learns, the chaos is merely the result of Jesse Orcutt's knife attack on Lou Levov—comically this comes as a relief to the Swede. On an aesthetic level, however, once again the parallelism between the counter-pastoral and the pastoral is underlined.

[51] See Williams' commentary in the chapter "The City and the Future" (274).

The imagined path of Merry from Newark to the house overlaps with the Swede's idyllic commute, and the last five miles from the village are the same route on which Swede fancied himself to be Johnny Appleseed. As we learn, "[t]he thought of her walking the length of that underpass one more time had terrified him all through dinner" (419), but this is only half the truth, as things can get worse should she decide to walk through the middle landscape of Old Rimrock, "a landscape that for so long now has been bound up with the idea of solace, of beauty and sweetness and pleasure and peace,…" (420-421). The passage of the imagined transit from Newark to Old Rimrock features the most exuberant descriptions of the natural world in the novel. Enumerations of various plants—"clover, yarrow, wild sunflowers, stringy alfalfa" (419)—combined with tropes of American literature as when the Swede remembers going trout fishing with his daughter, in need now of restitution as much as Nick Adams is in Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" short stories (cf. 420).

Merry then in the latter half of the novel occupies the opposite and a broken spectrum of illusionary, yet pastoral-like constructions of family life and American identity. Her presence in the novel serves to contour the problem of the Swede's naïve pastoral. Through the character of Merry, the readers conceptions of what the pastoral in the novel might constitute are constantly relativized. Through her adherence to Jainism, the novel suggests in its imagery, Merry is to a certain extent "becoming animal" to borrow the title of David Abram's study. The novel explores the ethical potential of the contrast between Jainism's extreme ethics of respect and the devastating effects of following these rules for Merry.

Guided by the assumption that sense of place is an individual category, this section has scrutinized personal place attachment and place creation through a focus on central characters. I have argued that Roth has different senses of place interact, as such, the novel describes an ongoing process of social negotiation through its depiction of the different, interrelated places of Newark, Old Rimrock, the Swede's house and its garden. In this section the focus was on aspects concerning sense of place and place attachment This analysis of space and place in the novel adds important factors to an ecocritical reading. The focus on the animal discussed in the earlier section complicates the question of space. On the one hand, there are relationships to the global, for example the supply chain of Newark Maid, on the other hand metaphors and symbols in the novel draw on the domain of the animal. From a cultural ecological perspective it is striking how interrelated the different

aspects are in the novel. Through the use of the concept of the pastoral the social and 'natural' spheres are constantly intertwined. Williams' criticism that in some pastoral literature "the real land and its people were falsified; a traditional and surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what is really a suburban and half-educated scrawl" (258), applies only in part to Roth's novel in an American context. Roth is aware of the pastoral conventions and their literary potential and is probably more interested in the ways the pastoral negotiates the social implications of American identity (in its widest sense), Jewish-American appropriations of the American Dream, and culture wars of the 1960s and 1970s, but he leaves enough nature in his novel, so to speak, as to prevent the novel from simply "scribbling over" or hiding the natural environment. As a consequence the novel's characters engage intellectually with questions of environmental ethics, for example on the significance of owning trees as opposed to owning houses (325). As the pastoral is constantly affirmed and criticized as an utopian mode, the reader is invited to explore the ethical implications pointed out by the novel.

. The mode of the pastoral in the novel thus is the site of an imaginative empowerment, for example for Levov, but at the same time a site of wide-reaching cultural critique. Normative conceptions of the 'easy life' in the countryside and the belief in its character as quintessential to the American experience are criticized and deconstructed. Instead, the interdependence of categories such as nature, culture, social class and ethnicity comes into view.

4.5 "The pattern which connects"—Tracing Interconnectivity in *American Pastoral*

This analysis of *American Pastoral* so far has proceeded from a general introduction to more detailed sections on a single theme: the role of the animal, as well as the role of space and place concepts. In these readings, the ethical potential of these textual phenomena have been discussed and questioned as to their contribution to the ethical valence of the novel. In this concluding section, the focus will turn to abstract structural and structuring characteristics of *American Pastoral*. In this context, special emphasis will be put on those features which interconnect the various themes discussed above as well as the different time layers of the novel. In this way, the readings of the preceding chapters will be tied into a more comprehensive reading.

Among those features scrutinized are temporal structure and the ways time and time-perception are conceptualized, but also more abstract concepts such as the 'double bind' or the dichotomy of inside and outside in the novel. I submit that these concepts in particular pervade and influence the text. In a similar manner, the analysis will draw on Bakthin's notion of the "chronotope" ("Forms" 84), which allows for an equally integrative approach. In terms of a cultural ecological reading, this approach represents an interest in those features of the text which could be interpreted as a reintegrative interdiscourse. Common to all the following analyses is the attempt to trace the interconnectivity of features like the pastoral and spatial concepts, as well as the role of animals in the novel. I argue that these interconnections in particular are inviting ethical reflection because they bring together different aspects of the novel in always new configurations.

4.5.1 "The Angel of Time is passing over us"—Temporal Structure and Different Conceptions of Time

Time, and the passage of time are central themes of *American Pastoral* and consequently, the representation of time passing is a central aesthetic concern. This impression is reinforced from the beginning, where the reader is confronted in quick succession with four different narrative layers covering the second half of the 20th century in Zuckerman's framing narration alone. The relevant time spans are the time of World War II and the years immediately following, with their renewed optimism, a meeting with Seymour Levov in 1985, another meeting ten years later in early 1995 and finally the high school reunion later in 1995. Given that these dates serve as a rough framework and considering the other Zuckerman novels' settings, the reader encounters an elderly Zuckerman for the first time.[52] The narrative is consistently backward-looking and tinged with the nostalgia of the aging and infirm narrator. As the high school reunion in the first part serves to illustrate, for Zuckerman and his class mates death is a realistic presence that must be reckoned with. An important function of the reunion is to take stock of who is still alive. The attendees congratulate each other to have stayed off the "In Memoriam" page of the reunion brochure where the deceased are listed (55). Zuckerman is still alive, but marked by quintuple bypass- and prostate surgery, he is no longer the active protagonist of the earlier novels or the *The Counterlife*. He has retreated from society

[52] Zuckerman's struggles with the side-effects of prostate surgery, with the infirmities of old age and with increasing memory loss is a central theme of the following novels.

and is in fragile health. In this situation, he seems to be grateful for occasions like the reunion which allows him to reconnect with the world of his youth. There is a clear connection between vitality and storytelling, as well as writing. For example, in *The Prague Orgy*, one's life story was compared to "one's body and blood" (505).[53] In the wake of the reunion in *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman feels so enlivened that he calls himself "a biography in perpetual motion, memory to the marrow of my bones" (45). Unable to fall asleep he pens a speech he would have liked to give had he been asked. The image of "memory to the marrow" is polyvalent, pointing to the visceral importance of memory and stories, but also hinting at the fact that at this point Zuckerman has more to look back on than look forward to. Clearly, his creativity and interest in life was rekindled by contact to his former class mates and the nostalgic reverie, the experiences transformed into a new writing project almost on the spot.

Drawing on the evident change in narrative stance between the earlier novels and the American trilogy, I argue that Zuckerman has begun living by proxy, delving into the lives of others such as that of Seymour Levov or Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain*. Silk is aware of the trap falls of being friends with Zuckerman, afraid of having fed an "opportunistic maw, a novelist's mind" (170). However, Silk, like Levov, is a character whose inner life is mostly made up by Zuckerman himself, therefore the talk of the "opportunistic maw" carries a note of self-recognition. If we see the comment as an admittance of Zuckerman's compulsion to turn life into fiction, then it is not only an admission of poetological method, but also implies the writer's feeding on the life stories of other people. To phrase it differently, the Nathan Zuckerman of *American Pastoral* lives *through* stories in a very literal sense, "seeking solace…nowhere but in sentences" (65). In writing, especially about the past and familiar places, Zuckerman reconnects to the vitality of his youth.

Given Zuckerman's state of passivity it is not surprising that he adoringly thinks back to Levov's level of energy and emphasizes the amount of energy he and his classmates had in their high school days—a sentiment he links with fond memories of the hopeful atmosphere in the United States following the war: "Let's remember the energy" and "the upsurge of energy was contagious. Around us nothing was lifeless. Sacrifice and constraint were over" (40). He uses these terms in his private reunion speech to emphatically account for the sense of the nation's rebirth after World War II. And it is in part this energy which he admires in Levov. In this

[53] See also my reading of *I Married A Communist*.

regard Levov is like his father, whom he characterizes with view of "[a]ll that crude energy that, try as it might, could not remake the troubled world" (358). The mystery of Levov's life story catalyzes Zuckerman's interest and re-energizes him, but the surprising news of Levov's death from prostate cancer also confronts him with his own mortality.

Roth uses the high school reunion to playfully explore different meanings and conceptions of time, for example through the use of repetition, but also through different metaphorical frameworks. On the one hand, this serves to underscore the nostalgic atmosphere; on the other hand, it is an early indicator of the importance of time in the novel. *American Pastoral* is concerned with the transitoriness of being and preoccupied with the idea of death.[54] Consequently, the passage of time in view of death approaching is among the most immediately observable conceptions of time in the novel, particularly at the reunion.

On one level, this apprehension is made concrete in the conversations. Highlighting the social and interpersonal processes of aging, Roth takes a snippet of conversation,—"Don't go away!"—and charges it with symbolism. As Zuckerman observes the attendees command "each other—with those three poignant words" (46). The time of the reunion is limited and with many stories to share it is too short to be interrupted, on the contrary, social interaction must be maximized given the time constraints. It is easy to see that while the words "don't go away" have a practical dimension in simply signifying the shortness of time and the wish to continue conversation, they also pertain to the larger context of the former classmates' lives. The three words repeated over and over again ring with the implicit admission of the finiteness of life and yet take the form of an admonishment to Zuckerman and his friends not to go away, not to die, and not to leave them alone.

To Zuckerman, the futility of this hope is apparent, and his assessment offers a different access to the phenomenon of time. He remarks: "The Angel of Time is passing over us and breathing with each breath all that we've lived through" (46). Arguably, this solemn observation is offset by the fact that at the time this insight comes to him, the band plays Frankie Laine's 1949 song "Mule Train," an upbeat and goofy song that nevertheless takes on a somber note given the circumstances. In the lyrics, which are about the progress of a mule train, there is a recurring and always slightly altered line in the chorus, which changes from "Seems as how they'll never

[54] Many critics have remarked on this particular trait of *American Pastoral*, cf. e.g. Andrew Gordon, "Critique" (41).

stop" to "Seems as though they're gonna reach the top" and finally "They'll keep going till they drop" ("Mule Train", own transcription). Which, considering the occasion is both, a nostalgic song from their high school days and another metaphorical reference to the course of life and a foreshadowing of death "till they drop."[55] Zuckerman's evocation of the "Angel of Time," a quasi-religious, mystical entity and anthropomorphic personification of time is only in superficial contrast to this background. To Zuckerman this "Angel of Time" is as graspable a presence as the song is to a young man on the dancefloor (46).

The novel explicitly recurs to famous literary tropes about the nature of time and memory. In allusion to Proust's use of the 'madeleine', Zuckerman finds at least the promise of temporary respite from the threatening presence of time and death:

> Within five minutes of leaving the reunion, I'd undone the double wrapping and eaten all six *rugelach*, each a snail of sugar-dusted pastry dough, the cinnamon-lined chambers microscopically studded with midget raisins and chopped walnuts. By rapidly devouring mouthful after mouthful of these crumbs whose floury richness—blended of butter and sour cream and vanilla and cream cheese and egg yolk and sugar—I'd loved since childhood, perhaps I'd find vanishing from Nathan what, according to Proust, vanished from Marcel the instant he recognized "*the savour of the little madeleine*": the apprehensiveness of death. "A mere taste," Proust writes, and "the word 'death' … [has] …no meaning for him." So, greedily I ate, gluttonously, refusing to curtail for a moment this wolfish intake of saturated fat but, in the end, having nothing like Marcel's luck. (46-7)

The passage is telling in various ways: Zuckerman is shown to be impatient, unable to hold back on eating the pastries from which he expects so much. The pastry is described in microscopic detail and its ingredients are enumerated in an enthusiastic polysyndeton. The quintuple repetition of 'and' adds on the one hand a breathless effect, and an almost mathematical, summary component on the other hand. The enumeration of the individual components of the pastry pave the way for the eventual disappointment that in eating the *rugelach* he has "nothing like Marcel's luck." And so it is that in the process of eating the *rugelach* the presence of death for Zuckerman is not obscured as hoped, but on the contrary, affirmed. However, the passage is not limited to mere literary allusion–as such the passage with its several mentions of "Marcel" and "Proust" seems too heavy-handed. Clearly the passage refers to a certain concept of memory and remembering. Whereas the "madeleine episode" in Proust is an example of the concept of a *mémoire involontaire*, that is an uncontrolled act of remembering, Zuckerman here instrumentalizes, even premeditates, the act of eating

[55] A similar technique for the marking of the passage of time can be found in Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Das Karussel" in which both spatial (circular) and temporal motion is evoked by the recurring line of "Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant" (476), indicating the passing by of the figure on the carousel.

the *rugelach*. There is no uncontrolled act of remembrance exactly because Zuckerman already frames the experience on a meta-level. What is at stake here is not necessarily personal memory, but cultural memory. With regards to this categorization two observations can be made: Firstly, there is the ethnic variation in substituting the quintessentially French *madeleine* for the Jewish *rugelach*, and secondly, the entire episode gains its significance from the fact that Proust and especially the famous "madeleine passage" have entered the cultural memory. Here, it seems, the focus is not so much on the phenomenology of memory, but on the literary convention. To read this passage poetologically is to ask what it says about the structure and the role of memory in *American Pastoral*. In how far does this painfully obvious comparison draw up a program for Zuckerman's later search for Levov's lost time? It is worthwhile to point out that while Zuckerman may envy Marcel's experience he refers to it as "luck," a fact that underscores both the nature of Marcel's experience and Zuckerman's in keeping with the pessimistic outlook of the novel. Zuckerman then recognizes the inherent irony, noting that the *rugelach* are essentially unhealthy and full of "saturated fat" (47, Gordon "Critique" 41).

This is also a moment where the materiality of the literary text, specifically of *American Pastoral* is foregrounded. There is a noted difference in the way he refers to the author of *A la recherché du temps perdu* and specifically his protagonist, a distinction which points to the meta-fictional game Roth has played involving the biographical Zuckerman novels. The distinction between protagonists and author is particularly striking in this novel for all the above reasons. Most striking perhaps is the way the direct quote from Proust is rendered. Following rules of citation, the quote is inserted which makes for a curious appearance of an ellipsis followed by a modified verb in parentheses and another ellipsis in the text of the novel. The materiality of the text is also highlighted in other instances: Zuckerman's script for the high school reunion speech or Rita Cohen's letters are represented in different typography. (40-44 and 175-176)

Arguably Roth touches upon a fourth option of looking at and construing of time and its passage. It precedes the above passage and is much more unobtrusive. It is a seemingly simple remark coming at the end of a very long and convoluted sentence describing the nostalgic and tacitly sad atmosphere of the high school reunion, but also including parenthetic flashbacks to his time at the high school. The sentence concludes with the words "for those few hours time, the chain of time, the

whole damn drift of everything called time, had seemed as easy to understand as the dimensions of the doughnut you effortlessly down with your morning coffee" (46). The sentence is marked by the gradual qualification of the concept of time. At first, time is conceptualized as a rather loosely defined stretch of time "those few hours time" while the first qualification "chain of time" emphasizes the directionality and contiguity of time. The final statement then proceeds to reintroduce ambiguity by using the generalizing "whole" and the distancing "everything called time". Folded into this expression is the idea of time as a stream, as evoked by the notion of drifting, which in turn implies passiveness. The ambiguity rests in the phenomenological insight that time may pass slowly or fast. These qualifications, however, are questioned in the further course of the sentence: "had seemed as easy to understand as the dimensions of the doughnut you effortlessly down with your morning coffee."[56] This qualification coming at the end of the sentence structure, which runs to over 200 words might simply provide a stop to the train of thought and could be roughly interpreted as: 'the philosophical matter of time is, or is not, as mundane as breakfast'. Yet, this interpretation fails to take into account the strange wording of "the dimensions of the doughnut you down effortlessly." What is at stake in understanding the dimensions of a doughnut, and under which circumstances would one pay attention to the dimensions of a doughnut? Such questions are not the domain of daily life but of the mathematical field of topology. In topology a doughnut shaped object is called a torus, and in respect to time, and more specifically physics, the torus is one theoretically possible shape of the universe, and therefore strongly associated with the concepts of space-time, finiteness and infinity.[57] Therefore, one could put forward a poetics of time in the novel, which discerns between the *madeleine*, the *rugelach* and the *doughnut*. The symbolism of the respective pastries of course remains vague. However, the novel clearly and specifically contrasts *rugelach* and *madeleine*, whereas the *doughnut* seems to be rather unspecified, associated with the everyday, the "whole damn drift of everything called time," which remains undefined, passes "effortless," and without any of the significance associated with the other pastries. We could then speak of 'disinterested' time—that is a conception of time not calibrated to human beings and dependent on memory, but simply a basic and invisible condition of existence. In this context, the doughnut

[56] The idea of drifting in itself is famously implicit in the final lines of *The Great Gatsby*, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 188).
[57] Cf. Zeeya Merali, "Doughnut-shaped Universe bites back."

would symbolize the quotidian, the unobserved passing of time. This sort of imagery is much more likely to be encountered in texts by writers such as Richard Powers, who has used the concept of "loopy timelike lines" (11)—plausibly integrated into *The Time of Our Singing* by means of a physicist protagonist—as a metaphorical basis for a narrative structure sidestepping not only linearity of narration but also the linearity of time in the story world.

Jainism, Merry's chosen religion has its own understanding of time, which despite several intricacies, can by and large be termed cyclical (cf. Dundas 19; Balslev 108). Arguably, Zuckerman's narrative concept for the novel depends on a cyclical form of story-telling. Levov's experience of the passing of time in the wake of his daughter's terrorist attack is representative for the general atmosphere of the novel in that it underscores repetition and a certain circularity of thoughts. The account of these five years, in keeping with the succession of events, sets in after Levov's encounter with Rita Cohen and concludes five years later with the arrival of a letter pointing out Merry's whereabouts (cf. 147-174).

The interval of five years between Merry's disappearance and her return to Newark seem unbearably long to Seymour Levov and the novel succeeds in finding narrative devices to impart the quality of prolonged suffering, despite the fact that the five-year interval is described in a mere 27 pages. Characteristic for the account is the repetitive passage "Five years pass", which introduces a new retelling of these years, each time highlighting a different aspect of Levov's thought process (147; 152; 157). The last reoccurrence is slightly altered: "And this is just a part of what is meant by 'Five years pass.'" (167). This is an effective strategy in the novel, which provides an overabundance of facts and details, creates dense descriptions by the repeated narration of events from different perspectives, only to acknowledge in the end, that the attempts were not satisfactory. Given Zuckerman's great talent and the harrowing descriptions of suffering, this admission of inadequacy serves as an impressive and shocking intimation of the suffering in the novel. The following passage is another example of this pattern in the novel:

> The Swede went alone to visit Conlon's widow. How he managed to get to that woman's house for tea is another story—another *book*—but he did it, he did it, and heroically she served him tea while he extended his family's condolences in the words that he had revised in his mind five hundred times but that, when spoken were still no good, even more hollow than those he'd uttered to Russ and Mary Hamlin: "deep and sincere regrets …the agony of your family … my wife would like you to know … (215)

The passage draws heavily on repetition, both syntactically "he did it, he did it" and thematically: "revised in his mind five hundred times." At the same time, the sentence "How he managed to get to that woman's house for tea is another story—another *book*—" is both tragic, and potentially even comic. After all, *American Pastoral* as a whole is built on the idea of telling the tale of "How he managed" over and over again. Roth arguably goes to aesthetic limits with repetition and bleakness in the novel. The idea that this still would not do justice to the subject foregrounds the limitations of fiction. And the idea of "another book," comparable to *American Pastoral* in length and concentrating on this bleakest hour of Seymour Levov's life is terrifying to the extent, that one can detect grim humor on Zuckerman's side who self-reflexively addresses the narrative excess. The idea to dedicate an entire novel to this excruciating thought process implies the slowing down of time, with the time of narration exceeding narrated time by a wide margin. The telescopic effect in this way points both to the power and limitations of narrative and storytelling. In an interesting contrast, the actual conversation is then represented by mere stock phrases such as "deep and sincere regrets" while the relevant and painful details are not recounted. This underscores the rehearsed nature of the words, while the rest of the conversation is suppressed, in what may be an effect of the psychologically extreme situation. At first, Mrs. Conlon's reaction appears gracious and sympathetic: "You are parents who have lost a child. There is not a day that goes by that you won't be in my thoughts and in my prayers" (216). Once again, the fact that Conlon, who suffered the loss of her husband, sees the need to pray for Levov *every* day underlines his tragic situation—the passage of time, slowly and from day to day, is emphasized. Conlon states her family will survive, implying Levov's family will not:

> The difference is that for us, though recovery will take time, we will survive as a family. We will survive as a loving family. We will survive with our memories intact and with our memories to sustain us. It will not be any easier for us than it will be for you to make sense of something so senseless. But we are the same family we were when Fred was here, and we will survive. (216-217)

The passing of time, in this case is implying the potential for healing. It is therefore no surprise that this concern deeply structures the novel. This is nowhere more evident than in the theme of the pastoral, which is defined by Zuckerman in highly ironic, but specifically temporal terms:

> And it was never but once a year that they were brought together anyway, and that was on the neutral dereligionized ground of Thanksgiving, when everybody gets to eat the same thing, nobody sneaking off to eat funny stuff—no kugel, no gefilte fish, no bitter herbs, just one

> colossal turkey for two hundred and fifty million people—one colossal turkey feeds all. A moratorium on funny foods and funny ways and religious exclusivity, a moratorium on the three-thousand-year-old nostalgia of the Jews, a moratorium on Christ and the cross and the crucifixion for the Christians, when everyone in New Jersey and elsewhere can be more passive about their irrationalities than they are the rest of the year. A moratorium on all the grievances and resentments, and not only for the Dwyers and the Levovs but for everyone in America who is suspicious of everyone else. It is the American pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty-four hours. (402)

The passage emphasizes the status of the "moratorium," which underlines the utopian nature of the pastoral. It seems possible only at the cost of falling out of time, a notion that reoccurs often in the novel, for example in this passage, but also in many descriptions of Levov's torturous self-questioning.

4.5.2 The Double Bind as Central Constellation in the Novel

The plot of *American Pastoral* clearly displays the hallmark traits of the Rothian blend of tragedy and comedy. Among others, Mark Shechner has read the novel as drawing on Shakespeare's *King Lear* (cf. "*American Pastoral*, or the Jewish King Lear"). The text supports such a reading, but the tragic mode might not be the only way of describing its workings. What the reader repeatedly discovers in the novel is a dilemmatic structure, which proves to be without solution or leaves only one, highly undesired course for action. Navigating these aporias serves as the foundation for the ruminative and circular narrative structure of the novel. These dilemmas are often best described as either-or situations and have their analogy in plot structure and constellation of characters, where doubles, quite typically for Roth, abound. In the following, I will describe these situations as a central structuring device of the novel relying on Gregory Bateson's concept of the 'double bind'. Arguably, it can be considered as a structuring device of the novel in two ways: on the one hand, the double bind figures as a frequently recurring motive and consequently sets the tone for the novel. On the other hand, I interpret the 'double bind' not only as two conflicting demands on a subject, but also as a way of paradoxically linking the two demands. Bateson is careful to point out that his hypothesis merely "appeals to everyday experience and elementary common sense" ("Minimal" 245), but in the realm of literary aesthetics, it also serves to connect two not only incommensurable, but, figuratively speaking, mutually repellent configurations. In this way, occurrences of the double bind, be it in structure or imagery, can be counted among those devices

through which the novel engages in an uneasy and tentative reintegrative interdiscourse.

The double bind hypothesis originated as an attempt to account for the genesis of schizophrenia. It is used here in a wider, more general sense. However, the idea that double binds may be among the causes of psychopathology seems relevant to *American Pastoral*. It serves well to sketch the amount and quality of mental strain and suffering the protagonists are subject to. From the beginning, Zuckerman voices his suspicions about Levov, "that he might be mentally unsound, that this smile could perhaps be an indication of derangement" (36). Working backwards from his initial impressions, Zuckerman is set to find out about Levov's secret, later corroborated by Jerry's account of his life. As a result, one can argue that the 'double bind' is worked into the fabric of the novel in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy: Zuckerman's initial suspicions are confirmed in the widest sense, and he then goes on to imagine the details of Levov's predicament, following his first impressions. Zuckerman then frames the conflict along the lines of his own experience,[58] often framing it in terms of the force field of decency and moral responsibility versus social transgression.

While the full formulation of the double bind is more precise with regards to contextual parameters, e.g. the importance of situations of learning, we can, for our purposes, reduce this figure of thought to the following elements:

> The first proposition from which the hypothesis is derived is that learning occurs always in some context which has formal characteristics [...] Further the hypothesis depends upon the idea that this structured context also occurs within a wider context—a metacontext if you will [...] The hypothesis also assumes that what occurs within the narrow context [...] will be affected by the wider context [...] There may be incongruence or conflict between context and metacontext. [...] The organism is then faced with the dilemma either of being wrong in the primary context or of being right for the wrong reasons or in a wrong way. This is the so-called double bind [...]That is all there is to it. ("Minimal" 245)

The instances of double bind in the novel similarly depend on the clash between different or changing contexts, in which habitual ways of dealing with problems are no longer leading to satisfactory solutions. One such context can be identified in Levov's narrow understanding of the good, his grasp of what is right and what is wrong, and his belief in the validity of the American Dream. The metacontext then can take different forms, and we can conceptualize the conflict along different lines. For one, Merry's trajectory in life challenges Levov's belief system and, as for example

[58] See for example Zuckerman's conflict in *The Ghost Writer*, where he finds himself caught between the competing demands of his family and his ethos as a writer.

Jerry Levov argues, creates a new reality to which the Swede is not able to adapt. Similarly, we can observe how much Lou Levov is stumped by the change of values in the wake of the social revolution of the 1960s; this, to a lesser degree holds true for his son as well. When he asks his brother "[w]hat the hell is wrong with doing things right?" (275), he gives angry voice to the states of cognitive dissonance experienced as the consequence of the double bind.

At a relatively early time in the novel, Zuckerman gives the following assessment of Levov, picturing him as blissfully unaware of life's challenges and problems:

> *Never in his life had occasion to ask himself, "Why are things the way they are?" Why should he bother, when the way they were was always perfect? Why are things the way they are? The question to which there is no answer, and up till then he was blessed he didn't even know the question existed.* (87)

The passage—set in italics, presumably to mark this as Zuckerman's attempt at guessing Levov's train of thought—draws attention to Levov's naiveté and consequential unpreparedness for the events of the novel. The fact that the question never occurred to him implies both defense and accusation, the outcome of which sees Levov at the least as too unimaginative and uncritical, to ever have challenged the status quo. "Why are things the way they are?" is the sort of revolutionary question which Merry asks and which traditionally is used to challenge authority, for example in the case of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, which was originally published under the title *Things as they are, or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, and is highly critical of English society of the time. The lack of this critical capability therefore in Zuckerman's eyes sets Levov up as "[a] guy stacked like a deck of cards for things to unfold entirely differently. In no way prepared for what is going to hit him" (86). The emphasis is on Levov's inadequate 'calibration' for the circumstances he encounters, which paves the way for further double binds, as he lacks the means to resolve internal conflict.

The imagery of the double bind predictably is most prevalent in the novel when it comes to open conflict. With regards to their different ethnic backgrounds, the marriage of the Levovs poses its own problems for the respective families. Levov's father in particular challenges his son, and then proceeds to submit Dawn to a cruel interview process, negotiating the fault lines between Judaism and Catholicism and extorting concessions concerning the upbringing of potential grandchildren (cf. 391-400). Levov is not too supportive of his wife in this situation, but recognizes:

"Opposing the father is no picnic and not opposing the father is no picnic" (387). This is an almost classic formulation of a double bind revealing multiple conflicts, for example fighting for his love, or, alternatively, abandoning it. But there is also the possibility of seeing Dawn as the one who opposes the father, while Levov himself does not dare to do so, and still finds himself in a difficult situation. In this, as in other situations, Levov's answer is a sort of stoicism, an inability to act which at times borders the lethargic or defeatist. When he is blackmailed and taunted by Rita Cohen, Levov's impulse is to show restraint. At their final encounter Cohen tries to seduce him by all possible means, yet fails to elicit an action from him: "There was so much emotion in him, so much uncertainty, so much inclination and counterinclination, he was bursting so with impulse and counterimpulse that he could no longer tell which of them had drawn the line that he would not pass over" (147). The conflicting impulses cancel each other out, and in this symbolically charged situation—he stands at a threshold, both literally and figuratively—he cannot cross the line, both real and imaginary, and ends up running from the confrontation. Depending on the view point, this behavior either marks a tragic character flaw, or an ethical victory.

A wide range of different views of Levov and his behavior are relayed to the reader by means of assessments of characters such as Nathan Zuckerman, Jerry Levov, Dawn, or Sheila Salzmann. The novel presents complex interpersonal relationships and often contrasts behavior and reaction to specific events. Jerry, Levov's impetuous brother, at times functions as a foil against which the wavering brother must appear weak-willed and inept at taking decisions. After discovering Merry in Newark and uncertain what to do next, Seymour calls his brother. The phone call between the two is paradigmatic for their relationship. Jerry, the irascible brother and Seymour, the more thoughtful and undecisive one (272-281). This leaves the two brothers as complementary halves of ethical reasoning. Seymour seems unable to make any decisions at all and when in doubt puts the respect for others above his own interest: "No, there was such a thing as ethical stability. No he could not be so ruthlessly self-regarding" (352). On the other side, Jerry never holds back. In this Jerry seems more in charge of the situation and, given the exceptional subject matter of the novel, often more adequate (if inconsiderate) in his responses. Whereas Jerry Levov can hardly serve as ethical paragon, he displays some of those characteristics his brother sorely lacks. However, what appears as a deficiency in the Swede for most parts of the novel is shown in another light at the final dinner

scene(297). His mother turns to Seymour with a delicate family matter, unable to ask Jerry, because even when the family is concerned she cannot expect him to show consideration or moderation. What often creates the impression of quietism and acquiescence in Seymour Levov, here is portrayed in a more amiable and favorable light as a gift for diplomacy.

So far we have seen how the novel keeps an intentionally ambivalent stance on a variety of issues, be it ideas of the pastoral or evaluation of characters. The motif of the double bind as presented here adds to this element of undecidability, which is created in almost every layer of the novel, for example by the complex narrative situation. Another strategy, which was already discussed implicitly by focusing on the two Levov brothers, is the use of doubles. Roth's fondness for doubling and mirroring characters in his fiction is well documented.[59] In this way the novel weaves a complex web of interrelating narrative strands, which continue to comment on each other. Here, we can identify the reintegrative inter-discourse at its most apparent. The mode of narration in this context is telling. The nostalgic backward looking perspective of the narrator is essential to his inquiry, but Zuckerman's integrity and his interest in the rifts and faultlines of biographies prevent him from glossing over inconsistencies. He is content to let the paradoxes and aporias of his narrative . The novel is driven by Zuckerman's inquisitive curiosity and his overflowing imagination. His interest is in connecting different patterns and providing both a view of the minutiae as well as a panoramic of Levov's life. Speaking metaphorically, Zuckerman constructs and reconstructs a life story, trying to find ways to relate the different parts. Seeking the parallel to Bateson, one could say he searches for "*the pattern which connects*" (Bateson *Mind* 7). In writing about the education system, Bateson offers the insight *"[b]reak the pattern which connects the items of learning and you necessarily destroy all quality"* (7). The pattern is responsible for the integration of disparate fields of learning, and if we translate the image to Zuckerman's activity, such a pattern is needed to give a "realistic chronicle." After all, Zuckerman can only draw on limited experience. His interactions with Seymour Levov, first when he was a youth, then at the baseball game and at the dinner, an encounter with his brother Jerry at the high school reunion must serve as the rudimentary framework onto

[59] For an overview focusing on doubles, specifically of the author, see Josh Cohen, "Roth's Doubles". In conclusion, Cohen states, what also seems to hold for merely 'intratextual' doubles, namely that they tend to undermine the original's credibility (cf. 92). By providing alternative patterns of action, Roth relativizes the often radical stances of his characters—the resulting spectrum of options invites ethical engagement and evaluation by the reader.

which his fantasy of the Swedes life is latched. Zuckerman settles on one incident of transgression, which he chooses to be the origin and starting point of Levov's tragedy. A moment with incestuous overtones, when Levov, after a day at the beach, gives in to his daughter's request "Daddy, kiss me the way you k-k-kiss umumumother" (89)—and kisses her. Zuckerman imagines Levov going back over and over again to this one moment as the possible source of all troubles. Despite rationalizations and relativizations, it is telling that transgression, which is an important theme in the novel, is one possibility of overcoming a double-bind. The parallel of Genesis and the Story of the Fall of Man might illustrate to which extent double binds are constructed or dissolved according to the authority and valence attributed to the injunctions or the learned behavior, pointing to an ethical and normative component of the double bind not immediately apparent in Bateson's examples of learning and conditioning

The connecting pattern of the novel might therefore be found in transgression, but other assignations are also thinkable: Following a remark by Mark Shechner, who likened *The Human Stain* to a Hawthornian romance[60], we can see similarities between Hawthorne's method in writing romances and Zuckerman's writing of *American Pastoral*. The "realistic chronicle" he dreams up may only be in so far realistic as it does not stray from the "truth of the human heart" as Hawthorne formulated in his famous thoughts on the romance (3). As stated above it is Nathan Zuckerman's interest in conflict that fuels this strong emphasis on double bind situations. Elaine Safer points out that the very idea that Levov might have led a troubled life sparks the initial interest of Zuckerman (100). In a similar manner, Zuckerman's willingness to frame life in Old Rimrock as a pastoral and the rich irony and satire he gains from this decision is the main reason for the theme's predominance in the novel. Indeed, both themes, the double bind and the pastoral, are interconnected. In one sense, the double bind can be described as the conflict between internalized values and external demands, which is exactly what is at stake in the conflict between the factual and the counterfactual, between Levov's pastoral and societal circumstances. In the following section I argue that the dichotomy of the internal versus the external is a governing distinction.

[60] Cf. also Jane Statlander's *Philip Roth's Postmodern American Romance*, in which she proposes to read all of the later Zuckerman novels as romances. See also my earlier remarks concerning the similarities between *American Pastoral* and Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

4.5.3 "They're inside the gates"—Inside/Outside as Governing Distinction and Unifying Concept

The binary opposition of inside and outside is one of the most basic oppositions imaginable. In most cases it occupies a central and fundamental position, be it in the form of Russell's paradox, or a central category in Jacques Derrida's theory of language, or in the form of Uexküll's *Innenwelt/Aussenwelt* distinction. Depending on context and conceptual rigor, one might say the inside/outside relation is underlying, or at least related to such other oppositions as culture/nature, or mind/body. Figurative and metaphorical use of the inside/outside opposition is widespread and can for example be analyzed with George Lakoff's theory of conceptual metaphors. These examples at once illustrate the centrality of the inside/outside opposition and the ease with which it generates related, but often more specific sets of oppositions. This principle of mutability underlies the use of the inside/outside opposition in *American Pastoral*, where it serves to bring together and unify disparate fields into a coherent main theme. I argue that several clusters of metaphors are aligned with the inside/outside distinction in the novel. In these metaphors, we can recognize the connection between the main themes discussed here: the role of the animal, spatial configuration especially the pastoral and the epistemological problem of unknowability, which we have touched upon in discussing the narrative situation and the general set up of the novel.

By bringing together these different fields of imagery, the inside/outside opposition becomes part of the reintegrative interdiscourse created by the novel. And while the imaginative counter discourse is often presented in Levov's failure to create a personal pastoral, the inside/outside opposition highlights the poignant circumstances of its failure. These parallelizations and alignments achieved by structural arrangement and metaphorical language might seem trivial, but they do have ethical valence—if the careful reader picks up on them. In this case, the interconnectivity of the individual aspects leads to a semantic web, which allows the reader new insights and new mental configurations.

The inside/outside opposition is inscribed in the act of reading on many levels. The theme is present in metaphors such as the one in the statement that "the plague America [is] infiltrating the Swede's castle" (86) and can be found in the spatial structure of the novel. As shown in the preceding chapter, there is a short distance between Arcadian Old Rimrock and dismal, hellish Newark. These oppositions are

clearly conceptualized in the sense of a protected inside vs. a potentially threatening outside world. The basic structure of the novel as represented in the chapter headings "Paradise Remembered," "The Fall" and "Paradise Lost" show an oscillation between a 'paradisiacal inside' and the consequences of the fall, the banishment to the outside. Of course, due to the realities of the fall, paradise can always only be a memory, but it is important to point out that owing to the intricate construction of the novel, the story never progresses in a linear fashion, but through the kaleidoscopic intermingling of many time layers constantly shuttles back and forth between paradisiacal memories and stark realities. In addition, we always must acknowledge that whatever story is presented, it originates solely in Zuckerman's fantasy. In the dinner scene, which will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter, there is much talk—and actual evidence—of transgression, a central principle of the novel, which of course is in tune with the heading of the part: "Paradise Lost".

The reason why the inside/outside opposition is so interesting in a discussion of the ethical merits of the novel is that it relates directly to the central category of Otherness. Arguably Zuckerman's relatively recent move to the Berkshires has made him even more sensitive to Otherness and the opening pages of the novel represent Zuckerman's attempt at coming to terms with the phenomenon that is Swede Levov. As already mentioned before, Nathan Zuckerman's new narratorial stance can therefore be described in terms of the inside/outside opposition. He is an outside observer, but through means of his fiction occupies an always hypothetical inside, fleshing out a subject position pretending to be Levov's. Zuckerman is forced to take this step because he has chosen as his subject a man, apparently consisting of nothing other than surface (23; cf. 20). My earlier comparison between the novel and *Moby-Dick* dwelled on Ahab's intention of "punching through the mask." The motive of masks is recurrent in the novel and significant in a variety of contexts.

Masks can hide a face and act like a veil. They might be used to prevent individualization and represent types. They are associated with the theater. The concept of the *persona* might derive from masks used in ancient tragedy and the Latin description of speaking through the mask—"per-sonare". All these definitions can be reasonably applied to *American Pastoral*. Zuckerman explicitly mentions his own mental theater –"I lifted onto my stage the boy…" (89)–when describing the beginning of his narrative process and the masked nature of Levov's personality sparks Zuckerman's interest. But the mask imagery is not only restricted to Levov.

Many of the characters in the novel are described in similar terms. The mask, like the animal hides which take on such a prominent role in the Swede's life, can be interpreted as mediating between inside and outside. It might be considered the social equivalent to those permeable membranes that Stacy Alaimo no longer accepts as the boundaries of sovereign individuals (15-17). As we will see, masks can also be associated with impermeability and the loss of expressiveness and emotion.

Zuckerman's description of Levov, from the beginning includes notice of his features described as a "steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask" (3), setting him apart from all other students. The widespread adulation casts him in an almost superhuman light and by necessity begs the question of his human traits: "Only … what did he do for subjectivity? What was the Swede's subjectivity? There had to be a substratum, but its composition was unimaginable" (20). Over and over again Zuckerman's attempt at probing the substratum is frustrated leading to a series of experiences which he tries to put into words. He complains "all that rose to the surface was more surface" (23) but even this configuration has its allure, after all it was impossible to say whether "that blankness of his was like snow covering something or snow covering nothing" (37). While this question keeps Zuckerman's interest, the Swede's demeanor and perceived lack of depth structure lend him an uncanny air that he cannot help but notice over and over again. "I began to wonder if it wasn't that he was incognito but that he was mad," and "not mentally sound" (23, cf. 36). The theme of mental disorder introduced here resurfaces with other characters, drawing on similar imagery of the unfathomable face or mask.[61] As a corollary or maybe even cause of this particular constitution, Levov himself is unable to fathom other people and never suspects that others' intentions could run counter to their superficially observable behavior (cf. 356; 409-10). In turn this does not prevent Levov from dissembling, wearing a "mask" to deceive the husband of his lover (cf. 353) or from living "behind a mask" (81) or "masquerading" (174) in general.

Therefore Zuckerman's prevailing sentiment remains: "This is the jar you cannot open" (30). The Other is not accessible, remains out of reach even for the writer well versed in psychology. Even though Levov's tragic life story eventually

[61] See also David Brauner, who remarks on the mask as "recurring trope that is used to signify the impossibility of gaining access to the hidden motives and thoughts of other people" ("Subverting" 30-31).

proves Zuckerman's suspicions, the larger problem of unknowability remains. He does not hesitate to generalize the epistemological conundrum he finds himself in:

> And yet what are we to do about this terribly insignificant business of *other people,* which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous, so ill-equipped are we all to envision one another's interior workings and invisible aims. (35)

While the passage is evidently ironic, it draws attention to the essentially social configuration of human beings and gives expression to Zuckerman's exasperation about the bind he finds himself in: on the one hand he is almost bored by these social entanglements, on the other hand he regretfully acknowledges he cannot escape them, and in particular his fascination for Swede Levov. Had it not been for the meeting with Jerry Levov at the high school reunion Zuckerman would have given up on his investigation: "He's all about being looked at. He always was. He is not faking all this virginity. You're craving depths that don't exist. This guy is the embodiment of nothing. I was wrong. Never more mistaken about anyone in my life" (39). Experiences like this have led the writer to formulate his philosophy concerning the possibility of knowing about other people, his insight represents one of the central passages in the novel:

> The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It's getting them wrong that is living, getting them wrong and wrong and then, on careful reconsideration, getting them wrong again. That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong. Maybe the best thing would be to forget being right or wrong about people and just go along for the ride. But if you can do that—well, lucky you. (35)

This mantra will prove to be a program for the remainder of the novel which continually plays with the disruption of the reader's expectations and in particular those concerning the behavior of characters. What Zuckerman advocates here is slightly reminiscent of Nick Carraway's defining character trait of reserving judgment–but as he alludes in closing "well, lucky you," (35) this is a rare trait, even more so in a Rothian novel, which, more often than not, is built on the clash of strong opinions. The passage quoted above has far-reaching implications, which can perhaps best be summed up as a specific form of an ethics of alterity. The passage makes mention of reflection—careful reconsideration—and seems to stress both the futility and necessity of understanding others. Arguably, Zuckerman is skeptical even about the potential of self-knowledge. This is at least hinted at in an image he chooses to describe the cognitive dissonance between the nostalgia fueled feeling of youthfulness

and the realities of old age, describing the surreal impression of the high school reunion as “merely the futuristic theme of a senior prom that we’d all come to in humorous papier-mâché masks of ourselves as we might look at the close of the twentieth century” (46). In Zuckerman's world, everybody wears a mask.

Another focal point of the inside/outside opposition in the novel concentrates on Dawn Levov. A former Miss New Jersey, her outward appearance leaves a lasting impression on others. Whereas her husband’s good looks seem to create few complications for him, Dawn suffers considerably from her public image. Uncomfortable with being “ogled” (407) during her time at the pageants, Dawn fights to be recognized for other qualities than her looks, trying to refute those who would prefer to reduce her to these attributes: “Oh her, she’s nothing but a face” (194). Dawn’s decision to start an agricultural business springs from her desire to be recognized as a hardworking and intelligent woman in her own right. This is only partially crowned by success and even though she tries to downplay her past, she is, against her opposition, perennially identified as a former “Miss New Jersey”. In this regard *American Pastoral* poses the question of the gendered response to individuals and her husband.

The traumatic experience of loss engendered by Merry’s crime starts a transformational process in Dawn, which leads her at first into clinical depression, and later to a new life without Seymour Levov. Dawn as other characters is described in terms of the mask-imagery. Her husband refers to her features as an “angular mask not much bigger than a cat’s” (411). After overcoming depression, during which she is described in poses of utter withdrawal (177), Dawn sets out on a new course, which, in her husband’s words can be summarized as “face, house, husband, all new” (366). Starting with a face-lift, Dawn begins to leave her past behind her. Plastic surgery underlines the double structure of face/mask in the novel, because it applies the characteristic of exchangeability to the face. The face, of course, is not immutable and that is one of the reasons Dawn decides on the surgery. Levov, at first skeptical, gathers medical advice from Dr. Salzmann, learning that outward changes are apt to influence psychological processes. In a sense, Dawn begins rebuilding from the outside in. New “face, house, husband” therefore also implies an increasingly exclusionary process, leaving her husband and old life behind, stepping into a new life. Once again, the inside/outside opposition is explicitly written into the novel, most obviously in Levov’s observation that “[a] gate, some sort of psychological

gate, had been installed in her brain, a mighty gate past which nothing harmful could travel. She locked the gate, and that was that" (410). This negative interpretation is a matter of perspective; the element of rebirth is addressed by herself in a thank-you note to the Swiss surgeon: "Now it is as if I have been given new life. Both from within and from the outside" (188).

The occurrence of the mask motive is not limited to the Levovs. Rita Cohen combines the attacks on Seymour and Dawn in her vicious judgment "[a] whole family and all you really fucking care about is skin. Ectoderm. Surface. But what's underneath, you don't have a clue" (137). Yet, she is described herself in the same terms as Levov: "the cosmetics caused her expressionlessness to seem even more frighteningly psychopathic than when her face was just unhumanly empty of color" (142). Continuing the theme of likening humans to animals, Zuckerman describes Jerry Levov's face as the "mask of a prowling beast" (60). In all these cases, the mask either serves as a communicator or cover for psychological processes. This relationship is made explicit in the case of Merry Levov. On a strictly abstract plane her stutter can be analyzed as a disturbance in the communication process between inside and outside. Language and communication as a whole traditionally has been assigned this mediating and social function even though the idea of transmitting content through language has been superseded by more differentiating and elaborate theories of language and understanding. During the reunion between father and daughter, the motive of mask and stutter are shown to be interrelated. Merry has finally overcome her stutter, but this transformation is inextricably bound up with her new existence as a Jain.

Referring to the veil, Levov asks his daughter "Won't you at least take off that mask while we're talking? So I can see you?" and she replies "See me stutter do you mean?" (250). The vanishing of the stutter to her father is one of the most miraculous transformations in his daughter, who implores him to leave her alone. In this scene, the abstract quality of the veil and mask theme is once again underlined in Levov's recognition "[t]he veil was off, but behind the veil, there was another veil. Isn't there always?" (266). As a tragic irony, Levov cannot cope once he tears the veil off Merry's face. His reiterated command "Speak!" (265) goes unheeded, and he attacks his daughter, prying her mouth open. Overpowered by her smell—"the smell of everything organic breaking down. It is the smell of no coherence. It is the smell of all she's become" (265)—he eventually has to retch and vomits on his daughter, who

refuses to accompany him and stays behind. The outward disregard for her condition seems connected with an insight about ascetical renunciation: “The truth is simple. Here is the truth. You must be done with craving and selfhood” (264). Levov is not ready to accept this ‘truth’, but remembers the incident in the following dinner scene, and, admitting to the traumatic quality of the encounter, concedes “I am done with craving and selfhood. Thanks to you” (372).

In passages like the above, the imagery combines the themes of the animal with the theme of the mask and the inside/outside opposition. The same dichotomy can also be found in a wider context, where it is used to contextualize the sense of freedom or captivity some of the characters experience, for example in statements like this: “[s]he’s not like a cat or a bird that you can keep in a cage” (375). The example of Bill Orcutt may serve to illustrate the many ways in which the human-animal relation is inscribed into the inside/outside opposition. Levov, newly aware of Orcutt’s affair with his wife describes him in a number of images all playing with the dissonances of inside and outside, and masquerade: “Up top the gentleman, underneath the rat” (382); “Sealed and civilized and predatory.”; “The humane environmentalist and the calculating predator”; his “civilized savagery” and “civilized form of animal behavior” (383). Here, inside is connotated with the animal and the predator, whereas the outside is associated with the “gentleman” and presumably the “environmentalist”. With its inscription of oppositions such as civilized/savage in the inside/outside dichotomy, these descriptions are part of the deconstruction of the pastoral discourse in the novel.

The final dinner scene proves to be entirely pervaded by relevant imagery. This is far from a coincidence; the ending of the novel is characterized by a challenge to surface perceptions. In this sense the scene is apocalyptic in the proper sense, it is revelatory. Just following the discovery of Merry in Newark, Levov realizes his wife is having an affair with Orcutt, and the reader is for the first time confronted with important parts of the narrative, for example Levov’s affair with Sheila Salzmann. As mentioned before, the scene is characterized by a strong tension between the keeping up of outward appearances and the inner disintegration of Levov. As such, the dinner scene is the logical continuation of the five preceding years, which are characterized with recourse to the same opposition:

> That is the outer life. To the best of his ability, it is conducted just as it used to be. But now it is accompanied by an inner life, a gruesome inner life of tyrannical obsessions, stifled inclinations, superstitious expectations, horrible imaginings, fantasy conversations, unanswerable questions. (173)

This description of the years following Merry's deed carry the tone of Zuckerman's voice, who at times seems satisfied to have found a depth-structure to Levov's psyche, even when it comes at the cost of tragedy. In the dinner scene, Zuckerman concentrates all the different plot elements in one place. The novel is composed to move in on this final, revealing scene. Speaking with Bakhtin we could talk of the chronotope of the (multiple) encounter. Put shortly, the chronotope to Bakhtin is where the spatial and the temporal dimensions of the novel intersect. The dinner has exactly this function in the novel. "The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" ("Forms" 250). In the context of *American Pastoral* we can use the double meaning of the word "place" in Bakhtin's definition and include our analysis of Levov's house in our understanding of the scene. The house is the place in which Levov's personal pastoral begins and ends, grace to its long and storied history, it also stands symbolically for the entire country. Taking another Bakhtinian perspective, we can say that in his climactic finale, Zuckerman hastens the collapse of the idyllic chronotope into reality.[62]

Collapse might be the term best suited to describe what Seymour Levov experiences in the final chapter of the novel. To a large part this is owing to various resurfacings: after being buoyed up by hope for the last five years the family reunion could not have been more shattering. What weighs heaviest on him is his daughter's admittance of multiple murders: "Among the many things the Swede could not think about from within the confines of his box was what would happen to his father when he learned that the death toll was four" (365). The "box" mentioned refers to his anxiety and depression and the feeling of being caged. Levov feels "stalled, stopped, suspended" and has a "sense of nothing more to follow, of nothing to happen ever again, of having entered a coffin carved out of time from which he would never be extricated" (337). The imagery here takes on the gothic overtones of the live burial reminiscent of Poe's horror stories. The description of mental dissolution thus uses the concepts of enclosure on the one hand, and threatening delimitation on the other:

[62] The subchapter "The Idyllic Chronotope in the Novel" (224-243) in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" is highly instructive with regards to *American Pastoral*. Analyzing different forms and configurations of the idyll, it opens up another approach to the novel and describers many of the basic motives that Roth relies on, as well. For example.: "the narrowness and isolation of the little idyllic world is emphasized" while "[o]pposed to this little world, [is] a world fated to perish, there is a great but abstract world, where people are out of contact with each other …" (234).

"[h]e had been cracking up in the only way he knew how, which is not really cracking up at all but sinking …" (384). The impression of dissolution and futility "Nothing hangs together—none of it is linked up" (368-369) holds true for Levov, but exactly the opposite is the case on the level of coherence in the novel. The different motifs complement each other and are all interrelated. The strong formulation of the "coffin carved out of time" is highly suggestive. It represents a death-in-life-moment, and emphasizes the suspended nature of his experiences, hinting at the possibility that this might be worse than death. The coffin that is carved out of time figures as the antipode of the American pastoral which later in the novel is defined in a similar way, a singularity fallen out of time, and therefore a purely temporary reprieve from the increasingly combative environment of American society (402).

Adding to his dismay is his discovery of his wife's affair: "Dawn and Orcutt: two predators. The outlaws are everywhere. They're inside the gates" (366). Not only does this formulation cast Levov himself as prey, it doubly emphasizes the inside/ outside binary opposition. On the one hand the threatening predators are described as *out*laws, that is as going against customary rules and remaining outside of the community, and on the other hand they are described as *in*vaders that have penetrated Levov's defenses. This picks up on the theme of Levov's pastoral being a fortified enclave which can be traced from the description of the "cloistered hills" (87) of Old Rimrock to the descriptions of his house and which is spelled out in all its implications here:

> Yes, the breach had been pounded in their fortification, even out here in secure Old Rimrock, and now that it was opened, it would not be closed again. They'll never recover. Everything is against them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life. (423)

This personal experience of feeling beleaguered is generalized to all of society. In light of the social revolutions in the 1960s and the rise of the counter-culture, the binary opposition of inside/outside takes on a more inclusive 'us vs. them' character. Lou Levov serves as a representative of the older generation and traditional values, while the other dinner guests have adopted new values, although to differing degrees and out of different motivations. The heated discussion about the pornographic movie *Deep Throat*, a scandalous sensation at the time, is just one of several parts of the conversation showing the growing rift. Lou Levov is stumped by the general acceptance of the new, public status of pornography; his question "[t]hen why do you

let it into your lives?" (344) and Orcutt's reply "[i]t leaks in, Mr. Levov" (345) draw on images of contamination and the impossibility of defending against it. For the younger Levov, the movie is only marginally interesting:

> *Deep Throat* has never been the real subject anyway. Boiling away beneath *Deep Throat* was the far more disgusting and transgressive subject of Merry, of Sheila, of Shelly, of Orcutt and Dawn… The mockery of human integrity, every ethical obligation destroyed—that was the subject here tonight. (380)

The passage comically juxtaposes the concerns of Lou Levov with the more personal pains of his son.

It is worth pointing out that the imagery discussed above, for example the importance of skin and membranes, of boundaries, persists in this final part of the novel. In an environment conducive to personal transgressions—and open discussions about transgression, see for example the conversation about pornography—Dawn informs Marcia Umanoff coldly: "try as you will, you can't get under my skin tonight" (363).[63] In contrast, character descriptions draw on clinical terminology: after Jessie Orcutt's attack on Lou Levov, she is described as "stripped of all receptors and all transmitters, without a single cell to notify her she had overstepped a boundary fundamental to civilized life" (422-423). The transgression, at the heart of Zuckerman's project, is here easily recognized, but only from an outside perspective: Jessie Orcutt, suffering from alcoholism, remains numb to the event. In this sense, the attack also figures as a final reminder, that it is not only Levov, but the majority of characters assembled around the table who struggle.

4.6 Beyond the American Pastoral

The transfer of the narrative from Zuckerman's framing narrative to the fantasy and romance of Levov's life is hardly trivial. The Swede himself is described from the very beginning as wearing a mask and Zuckerman likens his creative method early on to the staging of a play (88), which lends the novel the air of a performance. The ethical moment in this narrative act can be found in it surprising openness. The first few hundred pages of the novel give the impression of a highly opinionated Zuckerman, hell-bent on finding fault with the Swedes seemingly perfect life. And so Zuckerman's

[63] Siri Hustvedt's novel *What I Loved* is similar in its interest in identity and otherness; in a similar way, skin as a mediating membrane between inside and outside comes into focus and is used as metaphor, cf. the discussion of "Dermagraphism" (71-72).

disappointment in cracking this surface shell at the first meeting in Manhattan is palpable. Zuckerman himself is convinced that all life is tragic and there is a certain gloating undertone to many of his observations and descriptions of Levov. However, and this is where the surprising openness comes in, the novel still finds niches for finding a redeeming value in the utopian ideal of the pastoral. The closing lines "What is less reprehensible than the life of the Levov's?" as ironic as they maybe, testify to the lingering ambivalence of the novel. It is also easy to overlook, especially given the air of finality in the last lines of the novel, that Zuckerman's realistic chronicle remains essentially open-ended.

In this context it is particularly remarkable that while the novel does not end on a happy note, the Swede's story does not end in unmitigated gloom and doom. The facts given by Zuckerman include Levov's death of prostate cancer that had metastatized through the entire body and Levov's wish to talk about a family matter, which Zuckerman interprets as his wish to confess, to share his burden with someone outside his family circle. In his first disappointment, Zuckerman is fooled and believes that there really is nothing but surface to the Swede, but later he has to correct himself. While there is more depth to Levov's character than he previously thought, Zuckerman is still dismissive of the fact that the Swede was unable and unwilling to divulge the family secret. The only encounter which is temporarily distanced from both reference points, are the traumatic events of the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as Levov's mysterious wish to contact Zuckerman in the mid 1990s comes right in the middle of that time span, in 1985.

The encounter at Shea stadium in 1985 is recounted twice, once from an 1985 perspective, once with the additional knowledge of 1995 (cf. 15-17; 80-81). The first account is still infused with Zuckerman's admiration: "He wore a white shirt, a striped tie, and a charcoal-gray summer suit, and he was still terrifically handsome." (15) Even in hindsight, Zuckerman still acknowledges that Levov might have found some peace of mind: "put it aside as best he could, new wife, new kids—the three terrific boys; he sure seems to me to have put it aside the night in 1985 I saw him at Shea Stadium with young Chris" (80-81). This is critical as Zuckerman seems to imply that Levov had made the same mistake twice, emphasizing the "second shot," "all over again" and ironically commending him for the "talent" to submit to the "standard rules and regulations that are the heart of family order" (81). In this perspective, the Swede has not learned and simply repeated his quest for the pastoral

after his marriage with Dawn fell apart. Zuckerman is definite in his assessment that Levov could not have left his first life entirely behind, that everything that followed must by necessity have been tainted by what came before. “He had learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense and when that happens the happiness is never spontaneous again” (81). How then to read the encounter at the baseball stadium? Even Zuckerman seems impressed by Levov’s steadfastness in pursuing his pastoral dream. We know even less about this attempt at creating a new family than about the first attempt which is chronicled in detail in the novel. Even though it is hard to believe that the Swede could ever leave behind the traumatic events surrounding Merry’s bombing of the post office, he seems to have achieved a modicum of mental peace. As devastating as the events of the novel and its bleak ending might seem, the novel actually offers a glimpse into the future which might allow for a less disillusioned interpretation. Owing to the narrative structure of the novel this move beyond the catastrophic ending is buried in the first third of the novel. Several further pieces of information, for example Jerry’s claim that Levov kept in touch with his daughter over the years, can be found in the first quarter of the novel. It then seems fair to say that what had set up the Swede for such great suffering,—his talent for suffering—also is a source of resilience. In this view the illusionary ideal of the pastoral is seen as ambivalent, both as an impossible and deceiving utopian idea, and, despite of its deconstruction, a structure capable of providing coherence. Levov began anew, and once again remains a blank, the preferred surface for Zuckerman’s projections. While a positive or negative evaluation is dependent on the reader, the novel maintains a highly skeptical and nevertheless ambivalent stance towards the pastoral.

Between the highly detailed and realistic narrative on the one hand, and the inherent epistemological skepticism adequate to Zuckerman’s attempt at providing a “realistic” chronicle on the other, *American Pastoral* achieves a high degree of complexity within the text. In terms of a cultural ecological reading, it has become obvious in the above readings that the cultural-critical metadiscourse in the novel is by far the most pronounced. The imaginative counter-discourse is relatively reduced and dispersed throughout the entire novel. It can be associated with the many positive descriptions of the natural world, although these are always to be seen in a double perspective including the ambivalent stance opposite the social construct of the pastoral. Merry’s terrorism is not condoned in the context of the novel, but

represents a form of counterdiscourse. Her violence is then off-set by her radical asceticism following her conversion. In both stages of her development, Merry radically challenges the values of her surrounding culture. The passages relating to the young Merry, who is intelligently and critically engaged with her environment, then offers a glimpse of a more moderate position which avoids the excesses of radical protest or her Jainism.

Nathan Zuckerman's narrative in itself, of course, serves as a reintegrative interdiscourse recombining the events of the novel and forming disparate parts of American history into a coherent whole. Most striking is the web of internal references constructed by the novel. In looking at a passage from the end of the novel, we can point to some of these sometimes only associatively available connections:

> She used to collect everything, catalog everything, examine with the pocket magnifying glass he'd given her every chameleonlike crab spider that she brought home to hold briefly captive in a moistened mason jar, feeding it dead houseflies until she released it back onto the goldenrod or the Queen Anne's lace ("Watch what happens now, Dad") where it resumed adjusting its color to ambush its prey. (420)

Merry is here pictured in the same space which her father crosses when he indulges in his fantasies of being Johnny Appleseed. But it is not only the happy Swede and young Merry who meet in this fictional space. At the same Levov thinks about the older Merry in her room in Newark and imagines that she comes all the way to Old Rimrock, complicating the situation at the final dinner even more. The passage therefore combines different time layers and juxtaposes characters at different stages of life. All the while the "chameleonlike" crab spider takes on a multiplicity of meanings within the context of the novel. Far from describing a "simple pastoral," Roth chooses a predatory animal, which lies in wait at the center of beauty and the middle-landscape. The camouflaging animal adapting to its surroundings resonates with the discourse of inside/outside and appearance versus substance in the novel. The mentioning of the "prey" evokes the use of the word "predators" in relation to several characters in the novel. With regard to Seymour Levov, the "chameleonlike" spider might take on yet another significance, hinting at the adaptive process which Levov has to undergo as he moves to Old Rimrock in hope of living the American Dream in his own, private version of the American pastoral.

5 *I Married a Communist*

The publication of *I Married A Communist* in 1998 built on the new format pioneered by *American Pastoral* and continued a new way of telling Zuckerman's story by expanding on Roth's new focus on wider historical and cultural issues. Once again, the novel explores an iconic period in the history of the United States. Whereas *American Pastoral* had a clear focus on the societal revolutions of the sixties and early seventies, *I Married A Communist* is firmly rooted in the anxious atmosphere of the post World War II anti-communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era. This chapter offers a reading which builds on my detailed analysis of *American Pastoral* and shows in which ways *I Married A Communist* develops and deepens the themes discussed in the earlier novel. The second Zuckerman trilogy shares certain characteristics across all installments that will be discussed here. *I Married A Communist* initially received less critical attention than the other novels of the trilogy. In this context it is interpreted as a valued addition to the trilogy, which explores central topics in creative and new ways.

Upon publication, *I Married A Communist* was widely seen as Philip Roth's retaliatory answer to Claire Bloom's memoir *Leaving the Doll's Hous*e, which cast a particularly unfavorable light on her former husband.[64] In Roth's novel, protagonist Ira Ringold is betrayed by his spouse Eve Frame - a telling name. While it is hardly disputable that there is a subtext of personal animosity, seeing this as the defining feature of the novel tends to obscure the view on several interesting aspects of the novel. *I Married A Communist* is an intricately written novel, in which wrath and anger play an important role – the protagonist's name Ira is certainly telling, too. It is a tale of sound and fury, but its telling is hardly idiotic. Rather, the novel relies on a well-thought out narrative construction to blend different narrative voices in its recreation of period-detail and personal drama.

In a first step, this analysis will dwell on the ecologically-inflected themes of the previous chapter. Arguably, environmental discourse and its societal implications remain an important undercurrent in the trilogy. Tracing continuous themes, the analysis will look into the spatial dynamics of the novel, which this time mostly remains limited to a triangle involving Newark, Manhattan, and Ira's retreat in Zinc Town. The motif of Ira Ringold's shack in Zinc Town introduces distinct echoes of

[64] See Safer (102-103)

Thoreau and Walden. In the novel it functions as a sanctuary and a place for reflection, but also for conflict. Continuing another theme from the previous novel, there is once again an unobtrusive but sustained focus on animals.

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to questions of narrative identity and narrative ethics. Central to this scrutiny is the narrative situation in which the narrator Nathan Zuckerman goes through a number of interviews with his former English teacher Murray Ringold, who was just as formative an influence as his brother Ira to the young Zuckerman. Zuckerman and Ringold collaborate in a reconstructive project in which Nathan complements the informed and even-keeled assessment of Murray with own, often nostalgic, memories. As such, the novel works as a doubly-mediated reconstruction of a life and its historical context. The specifics of story-telling in a face-to-face setting have wide ranging implications. The interview setting also is much more concrete than the mode of creation employed in *American Pastoral*, where Zuckerman's reverie on the dance floor seamlessly flows into in the "realistic chronicle" that constitutes the majority of the novel. As a consequence, Nathan Zuckerman's live choices, his mind-set, and his living conditions are given more room here. This creates space for a self-referential and meta-fictional commentary provided by the novel. While Zuckerman's status is still firmly that of the bystander, using his perspective to chronicle American life in the 20th century, he himself is present and involved in the collaborative process. Murray, his interlocutor not only provides a story, but also questions the motives and challenges the living situation of the writer. In this light, the interviews with Murray not only help to tell the story of Ira Ringold, but re-evaluate influences in Zuckerman's life, questioning his choices. The chapter concludes with a summary of the analysis.

5.1 Environmental Discourse in *I Married A Communist*

In the previous chapter on *American Pastoral* I have analyzed the spatial dynamics of the novel in much detail: Newark as a hub of commerce, the conceptual opposition of Old Rimrock, and the blighted city center. The interrelation between Swede Levov's crumbling pastoral and the crass anti-pastoral of his daughter Mary's living condition. *I Married a Communist* is characterized by no less complex spatial dynamics and once again these are codified at least in part through environmental discourse, most notably the idea of Thoreauvian retreat from society.

A few central places serve as the main setting of the novel. There is Zuckerman's house near Athena college where he listens to Murray Ringold's story for several consecutive nights. This is where the frame narrative is situated. In addition, there is post-World War II Newark, where the paths of Zuckerman and the two Ringold brothers, Ira and Murray, cross for the first time. There is Eve Frame's apartment in Manhattan, where Ira goes to live, and an assortment of other Manhattan apartments. The American Midwest is featured in retrospectives and plays a minor role when Zuckerman goes to study in Chicago, or on a few excursions with Johnny O'Day to mining towns. The central counterpart to the Newark and New York City is Ira's shack in Zinc Town, which remains a constant presence in Ira's life through his relationship with Eve Frame and most importantly, after the end of his career.

In Zuckerman's recollection Newark appears as a self-sufficient, self contained unit in which social interactions follow the natural and predetermined course. As a result, there is a firm identity to be derived from belonging to a neighborhood. This is reminiscent of Zuckerman's evocation of Newark as a neighborhood in his reunion speech in American pastoral. Thinking back to his childhood. Zuckerman states "...I traversed the two miles from my house to the library: tick, tock, tick, the metronome of daily neighborhood life, the old American-city chain of being" (17). By evoking the metronome and the concept of the chain of being, the sense of security, continuity and the sense of one's own place in society is underlined. The sense of security is also paramount in his formulation "The hospital, the library, and as represented by my teacher, the school: the neighborhood's institutional nexus was all reassuringly present for me in virtually that one square block" (17). The "institutional nexus" provides reassurance and stability; conversely it is before the backdrop of institutions defending themselves against a supposed communist threat, that the majority of the novel's action play out.

For all the comforts Zuckerman derives from his neighborhood, there is a darker side to Newark that is slowly developed in the course of Murray's narrative, for example Ira's involvement with the Italian Mafia. To young Zuckerman, Newark is his home and the site of his everyday life. Leaving Newark then is equivalent to diving into an exciting world that he only knows from radio broadcasts. Attending Eve Frame's party with Ira leaves the young writer highly excited. Contrasting to that, Ira Ringold is drawn to spend a lot of time at a cabin in Zinc Town, New Jersey. This is

from the very beginning introduced as a conceptual counterworld to life in New York City. This "shack" is near a pond and offers few luxuries. But it furnishes an "antidote to West Eleventh Street and an asylum from West Eleventh Street" (51). Eve, but especially Sylphid dislike the "shack" (cf. 246), Murray at one point calls it "Sylphid-proof" (247). It is only at the end of their relationship that Ira acquiesces to having improvements done on the building. When Eve decides she wants to decorate and renovate the shack this feels like a threat. As Zuckerman remarks about Eve's apartment, the contents of her home "were not decoration, not ornamental bric-a-brac, but possessions bound up with pleasurable living and, at the same time, with *morality*, with mankind's aspiration to achieve significance through connoisseurship and thought" (120). Here then objects and possessions are seen as an outward projection of internal values. Ira values the bare-bones charm and meditative atmosphere of the shack and does not want Eve's personality superimposed on it. After the scandal forcing the end of his career, Ira retires to the shack for good.

Ira claims the shack "Keeps me in practice being poor. Just in case" (51) and Zuckerman realizes it has similarities with the room Johnny O'Day used (cf. 227). Therefore it presents an opportunity for Ira to keep in touch with his working-class roots. The basic living arrangements figure as an embodiment of "independence and freedom" (72). Zuckerman remembers: "Ira retreated to Zinc Town to live not so much close to nature as close to the bone, to live life in the raw, swimming in the mud pond right into November" (50). This view is repeated in various contexts and role-models for this "idea of the shack" are openly cited in the novel: "It has a history. It was Rousseau's. It was Thoreau's. The palliative of the primitive hut. The place where you are stripped back to essentials, to which you return–even if it happens not to be where you came from …" (72). In the formulation of 'palliative' once again crops up the notion that contact with nature might serve as an 'antidote' (cf. above) to the ills of society. This notion of a retreat from society is mirrored in Nathan Zuckerman's current living situation.

To a certain extent the shack functions as a refuge, a protected sphere far away from the societal pressures of Manhattan and it is here, that severe political disagreements can come to the surface and politics can be discussed without fear of denunciation. Ira gets into a row with his producer Sokolov about the further course of his radio program in face of the increasing persecution of communist sympathizers in the media (cf. 211). This sense of a safe haven, however, is at least partly misplaced.

Later he learns that his closest friends, Horace Bixton and Ray Svecz, have betrayed him and informed on him. Returning to Zinc Town for good, Ira remains an outsider until, through the mediation of Tommy Minarek, he regains the acceptance of the Zinc Town Community.

5.2 Animals

Unlike in *American Pastoral*, there is no pervasive background like glove making and cattle farming that provides a unifying field of images for the novel to drawn on. But to a much lesser extent there are two forms of encyclopedic background, one being taxidermy, the other mineralogy. Both fields are tied to the surrounding of the shack, the rural mining country, which shows clear signs of the negative consequences:

> "Ira's interest in taxidermy was part of a working-class fascination he still had, not so much with nature's beauty, but with man's interfering with nature, with industrialized nature and exploited nature, with nature man-touched, man worn, man-defaced, and as it was beginning to look out in the heart of zinc country, man-ruined." (194)

Just like in *American Pastoral* and later in the Human Stain, Roth plays with the anthropomorphization of animals. In a passage that admittedly is more about capturing the spirit of a particular community at a particular time, Roth writes about an Italian cobbler who organized a funeral for his beloved pet canary "Jimmy" (cf. 61-66). This serves as a backdrop for the social circles in which Ira moves in his youth and where he will eventually end up in conflict with the Italian Mob. In *The Human Stain*, the focus is on Prince, a crow. Here it is the funeral of Jimmy the canary that is given an extended treatment[65]:

> "Russomanno was devastated, so he hired a parade band, rented a hearse and two coaches drawn by horses, and after the canary was laid out for viewing on a bench in the cobbler shop–beautifully exhibited with flower, candles, and a crucifix–there was a funeral procession through the streets [...]. The canary was placed in a small white coffin with four pallbearers to carry it. A huge crowd assembled, maybe as many as ten thousand stretched out along the procession route." (61-63)

Murray describes a carnivalistic festival full of laughter (cf. 63). He states "when the canary died, everybody at the funeral was laughing away except Ira" (65). The descriptions of the parade point to the cultural background of the Italian cobbler and

[65] The funeral for the bird recalls an actual historic event.

reference catholic custom and iconography. Ira's reaction to the carnival indicates his willingness to go his own way.

Among Ira's best friends in Zinc town are Horace Bixton and his son Frank, both taxidermists. Ira takes the aspiring writer Zuckerman to their workshop and asks them to tell him about their work. He claims that both writing and taxidermy are about the "illusion of life" (195) and hence taxidermy can be instructive. The workshop is a menagerie of dead animals. As the two listen, he "had skinned the whole fox so it was down to an emaciated-looking red carcass about the size of a newborn human baby" (196). Once again there is a conceptual overlay between a dead animal and a human being. The entire scene in its spooky clinical detail, down to the "brain spoon" (196) and a specialization on song birds, evokes a link to American *Pastoral.* The conversation turns from taxidermy to the question which animals are eatable during hard times: "What's crow like" (197). To Zuckerman this is awe-inspiring as the ever-energetic Ira seems to be completely at ease at the workshop. The slight sense of threat evoked by the dissection of animals finds an echo in Murray's suggestion that it was denunciation by the Bixtons that made Ira's situation worse and by association cost the young Zuckerman a Fulbright Scholarship (285). As with the "rock dump" which is guarded by Tommy Minarek, these views into working life allow Ira to stay in contact with working men as he tries to further his political agenda by means of a connection to the miners.

As I turn to the ethics of identity and narrative, it is worth pointing out how the category of place is constitutive to identity in the passages on Newark discussed above. Similarly, ideas of as represented by Ira's shack in Zinc Town serve to define the self in opposition to the prevalent discourses in society, but is doing so by recurring to a Thorauvian ideal of self-reliance, that is, one of the constitutive tenets of American society. In this sense, Ira's move to the shack figures as a mere repetition and is potentially bereft of the political significance it once had. The descriptions of the shack and the counter world it represents are well within central U.S. discourses on self reliance and the healing powers of the environment. Arguably, this "-socio-environmental" component in the novel is supplemented by the focus on the starry night sky at the end of the novel. Here, the reader is confronted with a form of 'nature' that is irrevocably other and yet at the same time invites metaphorization (cf. 320-323).

5.3 The Ethics of Identity and Narrative

I Married A Communist develops an intricate narrative structure, in which questions of narrative ethics and the ethics of identity appear intertwined and mutually constitutive. On the level of plot, the fact that most characters were integral to Zuckerman's personal growth or in other ways influential, ensures a constant focus on questions of identity and personal development. The narrative framework of the novel reunites Zuckerman with his former English teacher Murray Ringold in a collaborative and reconstructive endeavor to do justice to the life of Ira Ringold, Murray's brother and Zuckerman's childhood idol. Their shared reminiscence is characterized by retrospection and revision, underlining the fluid nature of identity that is constantly reconfigured and changing in response to life's challenges. The novel as a whole then stages an inquiry into the many different factors that influence a life. Correspondingly it dwells on themes such as autonomy and free-will, betrayal and the impossibility of intersubjective knowledge, and the inevitability of erring in the judgment of other people. Confronting these themes and his life story leads Zuckerman to reflect on his role as a writer. In turn, his musings and insights reflect on the structure of the novel, adding a layer of metafictional and poetological commentary. In the following, the analysis will turn to the implications of the narrative framework, the three central topics of autonomy, betrayal and error, and return to the question of Zuckerman's role in the narrative.

5.3.1 The Interview

The action of the novel is sparked by Zuckerman and Murray coincidentally meeting when he attends a Shakespeare Class at nearby Athena College (cf. 3). The following nights, the two men meet at Zuckerman's house and Murray begins to tell the story of Ira's downfall. Most of the storytelling is done by Murray, and the narrative is carried on over several days. "'I could listen and listen,' I told him, 'but maybe you should get some sleep. In the history of storytelling stamina, you've already taken the title from Scheherazade. We've been sitting out here for six nights.'" (262). The reference to *One Thousand and One Nights* brings into view the high stakes as the character of Scheherazade impersonates the link between story-telling and survival.[66] Murray's

[66] See also my reading of *The Anatomy Lesson* for Elaine Scarry's claim about 'talking' as a "mode of survival".

narrative at times takes the form of a confession and the storytelling functions as a necessary connection between two men with a shared bond to Ira: "'I'm the only person still living who knows Ira's story, you're the only person still living who cares about it. That's why: because everyone else is dead.' Laughing, he said, 'My last task. To file Ira's story with Nathan Zuckerman.'" At the end of the novel the reader learns that Zuckerman had not seen Ringold again and that he had died two months after telling him Ira's and his own life story (cf. 323). Storytelling is framed as a 'last task', implying the ethics of witnessing, and pointing to the special status of the writer, taking an interest in listening to stories.

In the course of the interview, an intertwining of narrative strands takes place. Zuckerman learns about the lives of the Ringold's, Murray in particular offers up information what happened in his life after Ira's death (cf. 316). In other places, certain blanks remain in place. For example, Ira's and Murray's unhappy childhood and suffering is alluded to only in passing (cf. e.g. 216), and as will be discussed later, Zuckerman in turn is not forthcoming with information pertaining to his life. Interestingly, Murray leaves one of the biggest revelations for last: the fact that Ira had killed a member of the Italian mob in Newark and thus had to leave the city at an early age (294). Shockingly, the added information does not lead to an intensified re-evaluation; the killing remains merely circumstantial, another hint at the unchecked rage boiling in Ira. At the end of the novel, this additional information does not add to a deeper understanding of Ira's character, but it points to the depths of his passions and despair and serves to explain his motivation. It is a dark secret, underscores a sense of dread and menace when confronting Ira.

Conversely, Zuckerman learns about circumstances influencing his life of which he had not been aware. In the words of Murray: "Of course it should not be too surprising to find out that your life story has included an event, something important, that you have known nothing about–your life story is in and of itself something you know very little about" (*Married* 15). Murray suspects that Zuckerman was denied a scholarship because he was known to associate with Ira. One's life, and by extension one's sense of self and identity are seen here as co-constituted through unknowable forces, thus limiting the concept of an autonomous subject.
The novel stages an inquiry into the different modes and as this inquiry begins to take on force, Zuckerman himself begins to look inward. In this sense *I Married A*

Communist is about narrative identity and ethics as it traces the effects of confronting one's story and the consequences of facing and revising one's story.

Formally, this narrative set-up means that wide stretches of the novel consist of direct speech, faithfully rendered in double and single quotation marks. I argue that this approach works exceedingly well in conveying some of the main arguments of the novel, namely highlighting the collaborative recollection process. but other critics have reacted negatively to this brazen display of characteristics also present in other Roth novels. One of the strengths of this method is its potential for "baring the mechanism", embracing the positionality of the characters and their rants, and the possibility to orchestrate a multitude of voices in the novel.

5.3.2 Personal Identity and Autonomy

Autonomy and free will are central topics in the novel and they are discussed in several contexts. How tenuous the notion of a stable, autonomous subject appears is clear after the discussion above. In *I Married a Communist*, autonomy is problematized in a number of contexts, foremost political contexts, family relations, and concerning artistic independence. Marxist organizer Johnny O'Day is the paragon for the novel: "'Entangling alliances,' he told Ira, 'is something I don't want any part of at no time. I regard kids as hostages to the malevolents'" (35). This ideological purity arguably comes at the cost of humaneness. Ira will remain childless but enter into a confrontative relationship with his step-daughter Sylphid. Murray portrays her mother Eve as completely reliant on the daughter. As a result it appears that the daughter completely controls her mother and sabotages the relationship between Ira and Eve. As for Zuckerman, his early writings suffer from a desire to emulate his heroes, writers of radio plays, however never rising above epigonality in the genre. As recounted in the other Zuckerman novels, he will find success as a writer eventually, but at the time of meeting Murray Ringold, Zuckerman has retired, which in turn can be seen as an attempt at reclaiming autonomous agency: "But my seclusion is not the story here. It is not a story in any way. I came here because I don't want a story any longer. I've had my story" (71). Parallel to this retreat from society, we can interpret Ira's shack in Zinc Town as an attempt at preserving a modicum of independence and autonomy. The quest for autonomy, of course, can be seen from different angles, and especially in the case of Zuckerman, his motives for his retreat are questioned. Physical well-being and freedom from pain also appear to come into

focus as important preconditions for autonomy and development. Ira's decline is accompanied by a deterioration of his health, he suffers from severe pain, an ordeal reminiscent of Zuckerman's crisis in *The Anatomy Lesson*: "'I'll tell you what else was closing in on him. Those muscle pains. That disease he had. They told him it was one thing and then another thing and they never figured out what the hell it was"(178). The pain and discomfort experienced by Ira are further components to explain his irascible personality.

5.3.3 Betrayal and Unknowability

Betrayal is a concept at the center of the novel. At its core, Murray's narrative circles around the betrayal of his brother by his wife Eve. From the beginning, Ira has few defenses against Eve's charm. "She *was* dazzling–and dazzlement has a logic all its own" (54). For betrayal to be possible, one must put trust in others. From this perspective, being engaged in social relations necessarily incurs the risk of being betrayed. In the novel, this idea is taken further:

> You control betrayal on one side and you wind up betraying somewhere else. Because it's not a static system. Because it's alive. Because everything that lives is in movement. Because purity is petrifaction. Because purity is a lie. Because unless you're an ascetic paragon like Johnny O'Day and Jesus Christ, you're urged on by five hundred things. ... without the big lie of righteousness to tell you why you do what you do, you have to ask yourself, all along the way, "Why *do* I do what I do?" And you have to endure yourself without knowing (318).[67]

Pure autonomy is seen as superhuman, a life without betrayal only possible in a state of unnatural purity, a theme that Roth was going to explore in more detail in The Human Stain. Betrayal is a lens through which cultural phenomena become explained: "The master story situation of the Bible is betrayal" (185). Also, error is a concept that is linked to betrayal in the novel. Just like betrayal, error seems to be an unchangeable precondition of being alive. "'It's all error,' I said. 'Isn't that what you've been telling me? There's only error. There's the heart of the world. Nobody finds his life. That is life'" (319). This echoes a central line of reasoning in *American Pastoral* (cf. 35). Ironically, Zuckerman and Murray Ringold engage in a sort of personal archaeology, as if, by getting the story right, they could do justice and make good the ways in which Ira and his fellow progressives have been wronged during the McCarthy era. This attempt to get the story *right* then ironically takes place despite the narrator's insight into the nature of error, the impossibility of getting people

[67] Compare also the description of Ira's lover Pamela: "a free, unfettered spirit, highly intelligent and unintimidated by respectable society. In other words, she's a human being–this with this one, that with that one, something else with the other one" (167).

right, and is motivated by the desire to come to terms with betrayal. While betrayal is portrayed as a basic human experience, it is not valorized. The central act of betrayal–Eve Frame's book accusing her husband of being a communist–is ironically contextualized. In a preface, Frame questions the ethics of her actions: "Is it right for me to do this? Is it easy for me to do this? Believe me, it is far from easy." In this view it is her who takes on a burden. She continues: "How can I possibly consider it my moral and patriotic duty to inform on a man I loved as much as I loved Iron Rinn?" (244). These attempts at moral justification ring hollow.

5.3.4 Zuckerman Challenged

I Married A Communist is a narrative vehicle transporting Zuckerman back to his formative years. Putting the charismatic brothers of Ira and Murray and their influence on Zuckerman at the center ensures a steady focus on questions of identity and ethics and the dialogic interview-setting of *I Married A Communist*'s frame narrative is central to questions of narrative identity. This concept has a double sense here, as it might refer to the narrative reconstruction of Ira Ringold's life from various sources, as well as to the positionality of Nathan Zuckerman which is renegotiated in the novel. As for Zuckerman, this process does not occur in a vacuum. Whereas the first trilogy saw Nathan in intense contact and struggle, he retires to the position of observer in the second trilogy. This novel puts Zuckerman in direct contact with a childhood hero, but more so than in *American Pastoral*, this is a two-way communication, as a result, Zuckerman takes on more contours.

In tracing his own development, Zuckerman becomes aware how much he was emulating his role-models, often unquestioningly. This can be shown in the realm of art, where he aims to become a writer for the radio. However, with hindsight he admits: "And what with the words at my disposal then, I instantly transformed everything into agitprop anyway, thus losing within seconds whatever was important about the important and immediate about the immediate" (229).

The novel focuses on crucial decisions in Zuckerman's life: during his studies in Chicago, Zuckerman finds himself torn between two mentors: Johnny O'Day, who had taught his idol Ira and Leo, an older student and lecturer at the university. While O'Day's radical Marxist politics appeal to a sense of purity in Nathan, Leo is critical of politics. When Nathan tells Leo of his decision to become a Marxist organizer, Leo pushes Nathan away, claiming he had betrayed him by even so much as entertaining

the idea of dedicating his life to a political ideology. Shortly after, the novel presents a self-reflective Nathan. In passages that are both meta-fictional and poetological, he dwells on what factors had made him a writer. He settles on one defining characteristic – his ability to listen. In passages reminiscent of Nick Carraway's self-description in *The Great Gatsby,* Zuckerman develops the theme:

> Occasionally now, looking back, I think of my life as one long speech that I've been listening to. The rhetoric is sometimes original, sometimes pleasurable, sometimes pasteboard crap (the speech of the incognito), sometimes maniacal, sometimes matter-of-fact, and sometimes like the sharp prick of a needle… (222).

In addition, the concept of "life as one long speech that I've been listening to" aligns with the poetological and formal conception of the novel, which is characterized through extensive use of direct speech. Mark Shechner criticizes the novel's tendency to indulge lengthy diatribes by its characters. There is a certain merit to this critical point of view, but one can easily see, how an impassioned rhetoric of anger and wrath functions as a structural principle. As such the concept of the novel could be described as the careful balancing of rants, of presenting strong individual perspectives only to temper and relativize them in hindsight. The description of Ira in the novel, for example is characterized by the crudeness of his own, highly emotional rhetoric, and becomes more differentiated through the tension between Zuckerman's reflective, nostalgic adulation, and Murray's down to earth commentary, which tends to point out Ira's blind spots and shortcomings.

Zuckerman's self-questioning at times appears 'lachrymose': "Can that have been the unseen drama? Was all the rest a masquerade disguising the real no good that I was obstinately up to? Listening to them. Listening to them talk" (222). Tinged by self-deprecation, the function of the writer is hinted at as 'no good' – listening. Zuckerman continues this inquiry by talking at first in terms of instrumentalization and utility value about the 'use' as a writer he might have been assigned, contrasting this idea with the concept of a cognate inclination to writing: "Where was it decided that this was my use? Or was I from the beginning, by inclination as much as by choice, merely an ear in search of a word?" (222). The answer remains inconclusive "But whatever the reason, the book of my life is a book of voices. When I ask myself how I arrived where I am, the answer surprises me: 'Listening.'" (222). This central characteristic is mirrored in Zuckerman's enthusiasm for radio plays and the oratory of Ira Ringold. Thus "an ear in search of a word" points both to the impressionability of the youth, as well as artistic growth.

In the course of their conversation, Murray Ringold challenges his former student to explain his seemingly inexplicable retreat from society. The old man respectfully–"I don't want to overstep my boundary" (319)–but firmly points out that Zuckerman's way of life baffles him: "Sorry, but I do have to tell you: you're still a young man by my count, much too young to be up there. What are you warding off? What the hell happened" (320). As Zuckerman puts it: "my seclusion is not the story here. It is not a story in any way. I came here because I don't want a story any longer. I've had my story" (71). The writer engages in a deliberate evasion of story, a form of self-erasure. This is not only a matter of getting out of touch with one's own story, but history as a whole:

> "That it is," I said. "You have a choice up on this mountain: either you can lose contact with history, as I sometimes choose to, or mentally you can do what you're doing–by the light of the moon, for hours on end, work to regain possession of it"[68] (262)

Murray Ringold fails to see the merit of a post-historic or post-story life and warns Zuckerman, conflating Ira's fate with that of the writer: "Beware the utopia of isolation. Beware the utopia of the shack in the woods, the oasis defense against rage and grief. An impregnable solitude. That's how life ended for Ira, and long before the day he dropped dead" (315). Ringold characterizes Zuckerman's current place in life as a death-in-life situation and challenges him to change.[69] Zuckerman's reaction: "[n]ow I laughed at *him*" remains ambivalent and can be read as mere rejection or defensive reaction to an unwanted truth (320).

The novel closes with an account of star-gazing, presenting a different angle of the universe as resistant to rationalization and story. This marks a departure from the focus on culturally mediated concepts such as the pastoral, or Thoreauvian notions of escaping the ills of society. At the end of the novel, Zuckerman engages with a different, less mediated representation of the natural world: A view of the night sky as a form of nature, that resists comprehension and integration into the story. To Zuckerman, the cold facts of astronomy represent a "universe into which error does not obtrude" (323) that is, as sphere entirely other from the concerns of humanity. The coldness of space does not lend itself to story-telling, it is resistant to an ethics of

68 Compare Zuckermans description of "work by the light of the moon" to the discussion of literary work in *The Ghost Writer* where E.I Lonoff's work ethic is encapsulated by the Henry James quotation "we work in the dark" (77).

69 In contrast, Zuckerman has vivid memories of Murray enacting a scene of Macbeth. The teacher closes with the line "But I must also feel it as a man." and analyzes it. In the context of the frame narrative, this underlines Ringold's view of the necessity of emotional involvement (314/315).

identity, or narrative. Instead there's the "wheeling logic" (321) of the stars. But Roth then engages in a conceptual blending, projecting this cold logic on the stories that have engaged his protagonists for the last few days. Zuckerman remembers a story he was once told as a child, that his grandfather, who had recently died, had turned into a star (322). Zuckerman thinks of all the characters in the novel–dead by now–as celestial bodies, for example "the furnace of Eve burning at twenty million degrees" (322). On one level this blending claims the turbulence of astronomy for human lives, the ultimate rebuke to the meaning-making function of storytelling. At the same time even in their meaningless the starts take on an important function for Zuckerman, exactly because of their ahistorical nature. Trying to avoid 'story' Zuckerman claims astronomical information in the newspaper was the only section he "cared to look at" (321). But the stars have always been invested with meaning – referring to "antiquity's great constellations." Zuckerman acknowledges a form of astronomical sublime: "It is beyond belief and also a fact, a plain and indisputable fact: that we are born, that this is here" (322) positing awe of the material world that seems to cut through his usually jaded opinions.

In a flurry of enumeration, all participants in the story are transposed into the starry night sky. Those included in the list are at once relegated to the quotidian disinterestedness of space, mere specks of meaning in the vastness, dwarfed in comparison, and at the same time invested with a sort of dignity, conferred by the sublimity of the chaotic 'furnaces.'[70] The final words "The stars are indispensable" reverberate with multiple meanings. Zuckerman is looking for orientation and, at the same time, freedom from meaning from the stars. He is reorienting himself in a much larger context. But the stars also evoke the memory of the radio writers and actors Zuckerman idolized in his youth. They remind him of Eve Frame, the movie star, and of all the people who served as guiding lights in Zuckerman's life, the Ringolds, Johnny O'Day, or Leo. The novel therefore ends on an ambivalent note with the tension of distant nature and the inescapability of human story unresolved.

5.4 Conclusion

I Married a Communist proves to be a fascinating book. In a pattern established by *American Pastoral*, the novel introduces an ensemble of formative figures from

70 Upon their last meeting, Murray Ringold speaks in similar physical terms about the "entropy" of the "moral system" as the underlying reason for his belief that "Every action produces loss" (318).

Zuckerman's youth, foremost Ira and Murray Ringold. This time, it is the meeting with his former high school teacher Murray that serves as a catalyst for Zuckerman's imagination. Murray's account of Ira's life serves as the narrative backbone of the novel, inviting Zuckerman's own recollections and perspective. This makes *I Married a Communist* both strangely simple and boisterous. Formally, the novel is characterized by an intermingling of voices that grow to a roaring crescendo, but never fail to counterbalance each other.

In this chapter I have traced a sustained effort in Roth's later writing to include references to environmentalist concerns that address the natural world as constitutive for an understanding of American culture. I have also shown how the novel tackles questions of personal identity and autonomy in my thoughts on narrative identity and ethics. Zuckerman takes on the role of an involved but distanced observer and, as the world in its complexity takes to the stage of Roth's fiction, the formerly central protagonist retreats behind the curtain. To expand the image, he now serves more as stage manager contextualizing the 'play' with his own thoughts and experience. In this sense, Roth's fiction becomes at the same time both more cerebral and open to the world. Of the three novels, *I Married a Communist* gives the most concrete and immediate account of its origins, a series of interviews. It is this dialogic situation at the heart of the novel which allows for a differentiation of viewpoints and sees Zuckerman pressured to "give an account" of himself to Murray.

While the novel has received less attention than *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain* (and is yet to be made into a movie), I argue its meaning and relevance grows when seen in the context of the trilogy. Roth develops themes he begun to work through in *American Pastoral* and sets up themes to be fully developed in *The Human Stain*. The novel stands out, not least because the eponymous book 'I Married a Communist' is not Zuckerman's work, but Eve Frame's. Yet another way in which the Zuckerman of *I Married A Communist* is less involved. Roth's next novel, *The Human Stain*, would pick up where *I Married A Communist* ended, with Zuckerman living in seclusion, but re-awakened by his friendship with Coleman Silk. In this text, *The Human Stain* repeats the pattern of focusing on formative influences on Zuckerman, but this time around he becomes the chronicler of a transformation he experiences late in life. Having set the earlier novels in the 60s and 70s, as well as during the McCarthy era, Roth now turns to the political upheavals of the 1990s, what was, at time of publication, more or less the recent past.

6 *The Human Stain*[71]

When *The Human Stain* was published in 2000, the focus of Philip Roth's American trilogy turned to present day US-American society. Following the turbulence of the 1960s detailed in *American Pastoral* and the focus on the McCarthy era in *I Married a Communist*, the events of *The Human Stain* unfold before the backdrop of the Bill Clinton impeachment scandal. This chapter will trace lines of continuity and expand upon the analysis of the preceding novels and look into the specific ways Roth contextualizes ethical problems in the novel. The central concept of the "human stain" is developed in contrast to a supposedly "pristine" environment and refers to the effects of human interaction with the environment. I argue that for this negotiation of the human condition, Roth draws on an already established tradition of animal imagery and metaphoricity which I have analyzed in the preceding readings.

The first section of this chapter therefore will show the implications of animal metaphors in the novel and the concept of the "human stain." From its first paragraph, the narrative of *The Human Stain* is situated in a rural context:

> the rural post office, a small gray clapboard shack that looked as if it might have sheltered an Okie family from the winds of the Dust Bowl back in the 1930s and that, sitting alone and forlorn across from the gas station and the general store, flies its American flag at the junction of the two roads that mark the commercial center of this mountainside town. (1)

In few words, central parameters of the narrative space are sketched down: the rural mountainside setting, the American flag, the relative isolation – "alone and forlorn." It is a reference to a specifically US-American relation to the natural world which is also underscored by the reference to the Dust Bowl. Similar to the *American Pastoral*, it is at the intersection of environmental discourses and cultural memory that questions of social identity and the human are negotiated, the most extant example being Faunia Farley's retreats to the Audubon Society at Seeley Falls.

The second part of the reading is dedicated to the relationship between Nathan Zuckerman and Coleman Silk, with a specific view towards the narrative situation. *The Human Stain* chronicles upheaval in Zuckerman's personal life. The third novel of the trilogy in particular sees him struggling with the consequences of his prostate surgery, in particular? his impotence. The friendship with Coleman Silk serves as a

[71] This chapter is based on research for two earlier essays of mine, Sauter 2008 and 2010.

catalyst for change. As Zuckerman concedes "I completely lost my equilibrium" (37). This shock leads to life changes and an ethical reevaluation. With regards to his own situation and his friendship to Coleman he states: "This was how Coleman became my friend and how I came out from under the stalwartness of living alone in my secluded house and dealing with the cancer blows. Coleman Silk danced me right back into life" (45). The "back to life" movement is what characterizes the novel and explains Zuckerman's motivation to exonerate his friend posthumously by continuing the work begun in "Spooks." This process is revelatory and a central concept in this context is "knowing" and knowledge. The following analysis will therefore concentrate on the concept of "the human stain" and the interrelations between the characters, specifically the significance of knowledge in the novel.

6.1 Animals

A recurrent theme of the American trilogy is the occurrence of anthropomorphized animals.

Ranging from Count, the bull, in *American Pastoral* to Jimmy the canary in *I Married A Communist*. At the center of interest in *The Human Stain* is a crow named Prince. However, this is not an isolated occurrence. Animal imagery and metaphors are pervasive throughout the novel, which in part can be explained by the intertextual references to Greek and Roman myth. Faunia Farley's name references the mythical creature of the Faun and Zuckerman Zuckerman constantly emphasises an animal side to her. He thinks of her as a "beast of burden" (48) as he watches her working alongside the cows she is taking care of. Faunia lives and works at a live-stock farm that specializes in producing organic milk. Importantly, she talks to animals and engages in imagined conversation with Prince the crow. Zuckerman also remarks on her being in touch with nature in other ways: at one point he observes that Faunia looks at trees, "as though they were speaking" (Roth 211). To a certain degree Silk too is compared to animals. Zuckerman refers to him as "goat-footed Pan" and his former lover Steena Palson compares his behavior and demeanour to that of a predatory bird: "Do you remember yourself? You were incredibly good at swooping, almost like birds do when they fly over land or sea and spy something … and seize upon it" (24).

For Faunia Farley, the Audubon Society at Seeley falls is a sanctuary to which she retreats in times of crisis. This continues the theme of the Thoreauvian retreat so prominent in *I Married A Communist*. As with Ira's shack, the Audubon Society is a

place where matters of identity and self-image are negotiated. Faunia is fascinated with the crows there, in particular Prince. Faunia identifies with the crows who she observes closely. Feeling encumbered by her current situation and traumatized by the death of her children, she expresses the wish to be a crow. In her assessment of the birds, she stresses factors such as their sense of humor, their intelligence and the social cohesion among them. In particular, their practicality and matter-of-factness appeals to her. Finally, the crows are not earthbound and they embody the dream of a quick escape for her. She points out that they are scavenger birds: "If there's death, they're there" (169). Arguably this proximity to death strikes a chord with Faunia who has suffered many losses and who has attempted suicide several times. Spending time with the crows alleviates her helplessness and offers a respite from her life. "Who do I talk to? Where do I go and what do I do and how the fuck do I get out? I am a crow. I know it. I know it" (169).

The eponymous "human stain" is Faunia's way of describing Prince, the crow at the Audubon society. Prince is an outsider, "really a crow that doesn't know how to be a crow" (243) and in this Faunia sees parallels to her own situation. In particular his voice is off and does sound unnatural: "He imitates the schoolkids that come here and imitate him," the girl explained. "When the kids on the school trips imitate a crow? That's his impression of the kids. The kids do that. He's invented his own language. From kids" (243). Faunia's take on the phenomenon accounts for the circumstances: "That's what comes from being hand-raised," said Faunia. "That's what comes of hanging around all his life with people like us. The human stain" (242). The concept is developed from this starting point and expanded beyond the original context:

> we leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen–there's no other way to be here. Nothing to do with disobedience. Nothing to do with grace or salvation or redemption. It's in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. (242)

In this description, the stain appears as a pre-linguistic imprint. The metaphoric potential of Prince is therefore complex. The crow serves as an interlocutor for Faunia and she projects her wishes and hopes onto him. In many ways Prince appears to be a symbolic representation of Coleman Silk.

In many respects, language is at the center of *The Human Stain*. The central incident of the scandal that led to Coleman Silk's retirement was centered around the denotations and connotations of the word "spooks" (cf. 84-85). Faunia Farley

pretends to be illiterate, and Coleman Silk's daughter is engaged in language teaching. Her question "What do you do with a kid who can't read" (59) then is used as a motif to refer to Faunia later on. In a similiar vein, *fluency*, is of interest. Despite her fluency Delphine Roux feels out of depth, , indicating that it is not only language but cultural differences that are to blame for a lack of comprehension between ?? (cf. 275/276). In this context, Prince the crow is marked as speaking in a special language: "Prince is really a crow that doesn't know how to be a crow" (243). Part of this ineptness comes from his particular way of crowing: "He doesn't have the right voice" (242). As a result, Prince is hounded by the other crows for this otherness. Critics like Elaine Safer (cf. 127) have read this as an image for the scandal that led to Coleman Silk's retirement.

6.2 Narrative perspective and "knowing"

Nathan Zuckerman undergoes a big change in *The Human Stain*. As critics have pointed out, the upheaval created by his friendship with Coleman Silk, who "danced him back to life" must inevitably influence his motivation and presentation of materials, as he tries to do justice to his late friend. Consequently, like in *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*, the narrative situation is complicated. This is in part engendered by the subject matter. As all the characters try to make their own personal 'counterlife' a success, secrets make up the 'countertext,' the part of the biography that is no longer relevant or actively hidden.[72] The chapter "Everyone knows" takes its title from the anonymous note dispatched by Delphine Roux accusing Coleman Silk of having an affair with a woman half his age. The question of who knows what at which point in time is central. *The Human Stain* carefully, and step by step, reveals the backgrounds and life-stories of its characters. There is an ethical momentum in this slow revelation as the readers are constantly forced to reevaluate their understanding of the character: Coleman Silk passes as white, Faunia Farley's illiteracy is merely an act, etc. The two previous novels have already expounded on the same theme of ??. In *American Pastoral,* it is phrased in terms of inevitably "getting wrong" (*American* 35) what motivates and drives other people. In a similarly fundamental way, *I Married a Communist* locates "error" (*Married* 319) at the heart of human interactions. From these concepts speaks a certain skepticism

[72] See Shostak's discussion of secrets in the novel (257-266)

that underscores the unknowability not merely of an abstract 'other,' but very specifically, the people around us.

Nathan Zuckerman is the first-person narrator of the novel, however many sections are written from the perspective of other characters. The plot gives several motivations for Zuckerman's writing. Similar to the set-up in *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman is approached to finish a book project for his acquaintance Coleman Silk. He asks him to finish "Spooks," his account of the scandal leading to his retirement. After Silk's death, Zuckerman feels compelled to write an honest accounting of his friend's life and death. For example, after Silk's death in a car accident he talks to Silk's sister Ernestine (317-337) to learn more about Silk's life. Zuckerman certainly draws on the original manuscript of "Spooks," on eye-witness accounts, and many more sources for his narrative. Not always is it clear, where exactly his knowledge comes from and, at times, we must assume he makes things up to fill out the blanks. This approach resembles the Hawthornian concept of "Romance" and several critics have pointed out this generic similarity.[73] At the end of the novel Zuckerman is confronted with Lester Farley. In an exchange full of references and implications for the entirety of the novel the Vietnam veteran asks Zuckerman about his writing project: "'What kind of books do you write? Whodunits?' .... 'What? Romance?'" (356). The mention of the whodunit also is in keeping with the research Zuckerman does and might be a good description of Zuckerman's work in the American trilogy– detective work concerning the biographies of his subjects.

After Silk's and Farley's death in a car accident, Zuckerman states "everyone now knew" (284). Zuckerman's narrative might not be per se unreliable, but it is clearly influenced by his sympathies. Descriptions of conversations between Coleman Silk and Delphine Roux must be fictionalized or have come to Zuckerman through Coleman Silk. As a result, these narratives are highly personal. The writer is driven to posthumously exonerate his friend Silk. In conversation with Zuckerman Ernestine says, "There are no more criteria, Mr. Zuckerman, only opinions"(331). This criticism of the times also has validity for the novel and its narrative structure. There are few indisputable facts. Delphine Roux is portrayed in an unflattering light in the novel, but structurally she appears as a double of Silk. Both characters go to great length to

73 Cf Shechner. Hawthorne famously stated in his Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* that a writer of Romance "wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material" (3). The Romance "sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart–[yet] has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation"(3).

escape the worlds of their upbringing in order to reinvent themselves. Whereas Silk passes as white, Roux emigrates to the United States to leave her stifling family behind (cf. 276-277). Together with the customary hyperbole and irony of Roth's fiction, the complex web of motivations and interrelations in the novel precludes one-sided readings. As a case in point, the novel can be read as a critical commentary on the identity politics and academic discourses on political correctness. However, it is hardly possible to reduce the text to such a reading due to the complexities of the text, specifically the narrative situation which tends to complicate such supposed simple meanings.

The theme of knowing resurfaces in the final scene of the novel. Zuckerman says about his confrontation with Farley: "Conning me. Playing with me. Because he knows I know. Here we are alone up where we are, and I know, and he knows I know. And the auger knows. All ye know and need to know, all inscribed in the spiral of its curving steel blade" (354). The reference to the final lines of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in relation to the auger with its echoes of the chiastic "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" underscores at once the complexity as well as the menace of the situation. The confrontation and the novel end with a view of Farley fishing on top of the ice. The mutual recognition in this moment of clarity is especially threatening, as Zuckerman has reason to believe Farley is lying to him. The tension between the lies and the mutual knowledge about them remains unresolved.

6.3 Conclusion

The Human Stain weaves together a rich tapestry of interconnected story lines. This reading has focused on the role of "knowing" with regards to the personal life stories of the characters and the narrative structure of the novel. Zuckerman's hesitant reentry into the social world, catalyzed by his friendship with Coleman, Silk's decision to pass as white and his affair with Faunia, the tragic life story of Faunia Farley, Lester Farley and his struggle with PTSD, and Delphine Roux and her experience of alienation at Athena college. All these characters share a strong desire to live self-determined lives and to escape the censure of society. More often than not, their efforts to leave their old lives behind prove counterproductive in the long run, or at least inefficient, as they find themselves confronted with new sets of restrictions. The universality of this experience that "nothing is on your own terms for long" (145) is reflected in the concept of the "human stain." It has been analyzed here as a paradox concept which draws its power from intersecting discourses in the novel.

Significantly, the concept is developed with reference to an animal. Prince the crow serves as a multi-faceted symbol speaking to social conventions, the significance of communications, and furthermore invites comparisons to several of the characters in the novel. The concept is alluded to in the closing passage which is reminiscent of a camera zooming out. Les Farley is seen as a mere 'spot,' metaphorically bound up with the concept of the "human stain": "the icy white of the lake encircling a tiny spot that was a man, the only human marker in all of nature, like the X of an illiterate's signature on a sheet of paper" (361). This image blends several concepts: The pristine environment, the human being that appears as 'spot' and 'X' as if it were a marker on a map. How alien this presence can be construed is conveyed in the 'illiterate's signature' which not only recalls Faunia Farley and her 'act' of illiteracy (cf. 297) but also creates associations to the concept of the book of nature[74]. In this context, the whiteness of the lake turns into the whiteness of pages, and the human presence appears haphazard and unauthorized, authored by an illiterate.[75] The novel closes with the sentence: "Only rarely, at the end of our century, does life offer up a vision as pure and peaceful as this one: a solitary man on a bucket, fishing through eighteen inches of ice in a lake that's constantly turning over its water atop an arcadian mountain in America" (361). At the end of *I Married a Communist*, the turmoil of the novel's events is put in a wider context. The insignificance of the lone human being is countered by the menacing presence of Les Farley. The ecological processes of water turning over refer to processes far beyond the control of a single human being, while the use of the term 'arcadian' recalls *American Pastoral* and its inquiry into the nature of the concept. This tableau concludes the American trilogy. *The Human Stain* was followed by just one more Zuckerman novel, *Exit Ghost*. It marks a departure from the three preceding novels and sees Zuckerman returning to New York City and engaging with a new generation of writers. As *Exit Ghost*'s title hints back to the inaugural Zuckerman novel *The Ghost Writer*, it represents a return in many ways, including a last appearance of Amy Bellette. In the next chapter, this concluding novel will be interpreted – in analogy to *The Prague Orgy* – as an epilogue to both, the American trilogy and the entirety of the Zuckerman canon.

[74] Cf. Dieter Schulz, "Thoreau's Excursions, Science, and Hermeneutics".
[75] For a divergent interpretation pointing out parallels to Melville's *Moby-Dick*, see Posnock (234-235).

7 Epilogue: *Exit Ghost*

Exit Ghost provides a highly differentiated closing statement to the Zuckerman series. *Exit Ghost* is interpreted here, in analogy to *The Prague Orgy*, as an epilogue to both the American trilogy and the entirety of the Zuckerman novels. This analysis consists of three parts. The first is dedicated to an application of the ethics of the epilogue to *Exit Ghost*. The second part revisits the topic of narrative identity. In a concluding part, a cultural-ecological reading of *Exit Ghost* continues the analysis of environmental themes in the later Zuckerman novels.

Whereas the American trilogy was published between 1997 and 2000, *Exit Ghost*, as of now the last of the Zuckerman books, was published in 2007. As such it is set apart not only by the momentous events of 9/11, 2001, but also by intervening works in Roth's oeuvre. After the publication of *The Human Stain* in 2000, Roth returned to his protagonist David Kepesh, publishing *The Dying Animal* in 2002. 2004 saw the publication of the *Plot Against America*, widely interpreted as Roth's reaction to the politics of the first four years of the Bush presidency. The novel represents a turning point as Roth afterward turned to writing shorter novels which concentrate on smaller sets of characters and shorter time frames, eschewing the grand narrative designs of the American trilogy. The first of these novels, *Everyman,* was published in 2006. Roth started out on what appeared to be a new series of novels which feature an even bleaker outlook on life and a more relentless focus on questions of aging and dying than his earlier works. The series was continued in 2008 with *Indignation*, and in 2009 with *The Humbling*. Only with the publication of *Nemesis* (2010) were these four publications grouped together under the heading "Nemeses"—before they were listed as "other books" with novels such as *Portnoy's Complaint* or *Sabbath's Theater*. *Exit Ghost's* publication date in 2007 shows its temporal vicinity to the Nemeses project. Arguably it could be grouped with the Nemeses, as well as with the Zuckerman books.[76]

In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman returns to New York City after more than a decade of living in Western Massachusetts just off "a rural mountain road" (1) in order to receive treatment for his incontinence, a side effect of the prostate surgery he

[76] Roth himself went on record to that effect, cf. Thorne "Nemesis". This notwithstanding, critics have emphasized the comic side of the novel, be it Elaine B. Safer in "Alienation and Black Humor in Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost*" or James Milton Mellard in "Gifts reserved for age: a Lacanian study of comedy in Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost*."

underwent. Once in New York, Zuckerman spots Amy Bellette, the woman he fell in love with many years ago, as recounted in *The Ghost Writer*. In high hopes of improving his physical condition, Zuckerman is rejuvenated by his visit to New York, as it triggers memories of a happy period in his life. When he comes across an ad looking for an exchange of residences, offering an apartment in New York City for a quiet rural retreat, Zuckerman takes the opportunity to live in the city again. He meets the comfortably wealthy couple behind the ad and agrees to set up the exchange. Billie Davidoff and Jamie Logan are insecure aspiring writers and he falls in love with Jamie immediately. Later, Zuckerman is contacted by Richard Kliman, a friend of the couple and himself an aspiring writer working on a biography of Zuckerman's idol E.I. Lonoff. Kliman is aggressive in his research and asks for Zuckerman's support in publishing the biographical study which aims to unearth Lonoff's long-kept secret, namely that during his teenage years he had had an incestuous relationship with his sister. Zuckerman, inspired by his meetings with Jamie, begins to write a play tentatively titled *He and She*. Amy Bellette, who at one point had been Lonoff's lover and as a result is now at the center of Kliman's inquiries, contacts Zuckerman and asks for a meeting. She suffers from a brain tumor and in a state of confusion has already given Kliman parts of Lonoff's script for a novel which supposedly supports Kliman's incest hypothesis. After an elaborate exchange between Amy and Zuckerman and various plot complications, Zuckerman's stay in New York comes to an abrupt end. He escapes, unable to persuade Jamie to leave her husband and begin a relationship with him, and equally unable to dissuade Kliman of his plan to publish his book on Lonoff. The novel ends with a dejected Zuckerman leaving the city hastily, calling off the arrangement with the writers and retreating to the Berkshires, where he finishes the play *He and She*.

7.1 *Exit Ghost* — Epilogue to the American Trilogy?

Upon its publication, *Exit Ghost* was interpreted widely as not only offering closure to the series, but explicitly picking up from its beginnings in *The Ghost Writer*. This is certainly true, but threatens to underestimate the degree to which the other novels and themes resonate in this final installment of the Zuckerman series. *Exit Ghost* provides a coda to the earlier novels taking up the main narrative strands and themes; with regards to various subjects, the novel brings the semblance of closure by

filling in the holes of earlier narratives. The life story of Amy Bellette, for example, had remained a mystery. In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman's fantasy of Amy Bellete being Anne Frank is contrasted with an autobiographical account of hers, which proves his fantasy, if not correct, to be surprisingly close to reality.

The novel shows Nathan Zuckerman in decline and depicts his battle with the side-effects of prostate surgery, incontinence and impotence, with stark realism. In its description of disease and failing bodies, *Exit Ghost* is reminiscent of *The Anatomy Lesson*. The list of allusions and thematic parallels, many of them highly ironic, is virtually endless, but one clear and striking connection has not garnered much attention: *Exit Ghost* can be interpreted in analogy to *The Prague Orgy* as an epilogue to the American trilogy, and by extension as an epilogue to the entirety of the Zuckerman canon. As discussed in the chapter on *The Prague Orgy*, the epilogue has several ethical implications which will be discussed here.

To many, references in *Exit Ghost* to *The Ghost Writer* have been most apparent. Criticism has pointed out that reintroducing Amy Bellette and E.I. Lonoff as important characters helps to establish a symmetry with the earlier novel, which led Michiko Kakutani to call it "a kind of valedictory bookend to 'The Ghost Writer'" (Kakutani n.p.). In one of the central scenes of the novel the connection between the two novels is metaphorically established. During an extended conversation between Amy and Nathan, she hands him a self-written letter to the editor but denies being the author. Rather, she claims, Lonoff had dictated the letter, stating: "Reading/writing people, we are finished, we are ghosts witnessing the end of the literary era—take this down" (186). This overt reference not only puts the late Lonoff in the role of a "ghost"-writer, but also represents a damning verdict on the state of literature and literary culture, diagnosed as living a ghost-like existence, only a half-century after an idealistic Zuckerman had visited his literary idol at his home in the Berkshires, imagining him practicing his craft at the "high altar of art" (*Ghost* 4).

Parallels between the novels also include doubles, especially ironic ones such as that of the obnoxious Richard Kliman. As one of the 'not yets' he is not unlike the young Zuckerman starting out on his literary career. His attempts at preventing Kliman from publishing his findings on Lonoff mirror those undertaken by his father and Judge Wapter trying to prevent the publication of stories such as "Higher Education" in *The Ghost Writer*. These structural parallels are used in *Exit Ghost* to repeatedly raise the question of the writer's ethical duties. At this stage, Zuckerman

seems to imply he believes in differentiated argumentation. He judges the ethical demands on fictional writings, in other words his writing, with one set of values, and those on supposedly nonfictional biography, in this case Kliman's project, with another.

Richard Kliman can also be read as harking back to Alvin Pepler, who like Kliman tried to garner Zuckerman's support for a book project in *Zuckerman Unbound*. When the writer impatiently cuts off Kliman, saying, "[s]pare me the lecture about the impenetrable line dividing fiction from reality" (267), he holds true to his convictions that these two domains are not always as separate as they are made out to be, but he himself has a record of strategically imparting this exact understanding. In *Zuckerman Unbound* he self-consciously decides to forego a more affectionate farewell, only shaking O'Shea's hands on grounds that he "[m]ustn't confuse the driver [of their limousine] about the hypothetical nature of fiction. Important to have that straight for the seminars back at the garage" (*Unbound* 81). The reference to academic forms of transmitting knowledge in these attempts at creating a gap between art and life, at establishing the autonomy of art, on the one hand points to the desired authority of such discourse, while on the other it hints at the fact that this might be only the 'official' opinion, removed from the realities of the literary profession.

In many respects Zuckerman in *Exit Ghost* has taken the position of Lonoff, not only because he has moved to the Berkshires, only a few minutes from where his mentor used to live. In this perspective, Jamie Logan can be viewed as a younger version of Amy Bellette. The constellation is reversed, however, as this time it is not the writer who is in a relationship but the young woman, and his attempts at winning her only inspire his literary imagination. Through the disclosure of Amy Bellette's life story, her survival of the Holocaust, the novel once again actualizes the deep current of trauma which always hides under the surface of the Zuckerman novels.[77] While it is obviously present in *The Ghost Writer*, the later novels like *The Anatomy Lesson* vary on this theme, if only in the ominous form of the slip of paper with 'Holocaust' written on it that Zuckerman's mother carries in her pocket.

To what extent can we consider *Exit Ghost* an epilogue in the vein of *The Prague Orgy*? The latter saw Zuckerman going behind the Iron Curtain at the height of the Cold War and gaining a new perspective on his career in the process. In an analogous

[77] See for example Aimee Pozorski, *Roth and Trauma. The Problem of History in the Late Works (1995-2010)*, or Rudolf Freiburg, "Trauma's Normalcy: Pain in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*."

movement, in *Exit Ghost* he returns to New York City after spending eleven years in Western Massachusetts. Roth uses the blueprint of Washington Irving's "Rip van Winkle" (1819/20) to structure Zuckerman's experience: Rip van Winkle wanders off into the woods in the Catskills; after sleeping for twenty years he wakes up and to returns to find his village part of the American republic rather than the British colony he knows. The extremity of this analogy makes the comparison to *The Prague Orgy* even more plausible, the implication being that Zuckerman in returning to New York enters a new country, a new societal order.

New York has changed markedly and Zuckerman compares his decade-old impressions to the present. This is the place of some not-so-subtle criticism of American culture in the early 2000s: the change of perspective that once had been provided by a change of place is now provided by re-engagement with the cultural mainstream of America. The bitter irony of this analogy is that, once alerted to the parallels to *The Prague Orgy*, the reader will detect parallels between the dissident writers of Prague struggling against communist oppression and the dissident liberal writers of New York City struggling against the perceived oppression by the Bush administration. From a different angle, we can describe the dynamic of country and city along the lines of a pastoral movement, which had its beginning in *American Pastoral*. In this view, *Exit Ghost* marks the (temporary) return to the city, reversing the retreat which began in *American Pastoral* and lasted through *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*.

This return to the city is mirrored in a change in narrative perspective and style. The first-person narration in *Exit Ghost* is much more immediate and less obscured than in the three preceding novels, and like *The Prague Orgy*, which incorporates the formal features of diary and drama, the novel presents itself as a formal hybrid, incorporating the text of the fictional play, *He and She*, that Zuckerman is writing during the course of the novel. Especially in the ending of the novel, which is presented twice, once in Zuckerman's narration, once in his dramatic adaptation, the liminal standpoint from which the epilogue is spoken becomes apparent. Through its double structure the ending both foreshadows and stalls, if not his death, then at least his exit from the stage of Roth's fiction. The title of the novel is taken from a stage direction in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As many critics have pointed out, it complements the announcement by Zuckerman in *The Prague Orgy*, "Enter

Zuckerman, a serious person" (*Prague* 495). And just as the earlier novel, *Exit Ghost* leaves many issues unresolved.

These similarities extend to plot elements, which, often symmetrically and ironically arranged, draw attention to changing attitudes towards various forms of texts and pose questions of the ethics involved in Zuckerman's actions. In Prague, he tries to smuggle a manuscript out of the Eastern Bloc, and in New York he tries to suppress Lonoff's last novel which possibly contains allusions to his incestuous affair, thus stalling Kliman's book project. In both cases the manuscripts are lost to Zuckerman: the first is confiscated by the totalitarian regime, the latter disposed of in the hotel wastebasket.

The fact that *Exit Ghost* concludes the series and remained the final Zuckerman novel invites reinterpretations in light of the added material. Besides the major parallels pointed out above, minuscule allusions abound. Israel, for example, does not figure widely as a theme of the series, with one notable exception in *The Counterlife*. In *Exit Ghost*, its importance in relation to American Jewry is revisited in Billy Davidoff's exasperation about his father voting for George W. Bush in spite of the progressive leanings of his family. His justification "I did it for Israel" (*Ghost* 89) points out how, at various points in time, Zuckerman novels like *The Prague Orgy* or *The Counterlife* looked beyond a merely domestic American context of identity. In another echo of earlier novels, Zuckerman looks at the personal ads and eventually stumbles across the request for a "rural retreat" in the real-estate section, reminding readers of the outrageous deconstruction of such personal ads in *The Human Stain*, where Delphine Roux self-consciously labors over formulations only to unwittingly send the result not to the newspaper, but to the entire literature department (cf. *Stain* 262-264).

Another of these marginal allusions—yet a central one for this argument—can be found when Amy Bellette in passing asks Zuckerman to become Lonoff's biographer in order to prevent Kliman from soiling his reputation. "'Nathan,' she said, 'won't you be Manny's biographer?'" (195). The question has the potential to set up a constellation well known from *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*, in which Zuckerman is approached by important figures in his life, Seymour Levov and Coleman Silk respectively, who are trying to enlist him in a literary project of a biographical nature. But this time, the writer declines: "Oh, Amy, I wouldn't know where to begin. I'm not a biographer. I'm a novelist" (195). What makes him resist the

offer? One possible answer is that he, recently returned to New York City and the buzz of city life, may be too engaged in his own fantasy project of wooing Jamie Logan and the writing of *He and She* to be interested in living by proxy through the biographies of others. Still, for Zuckerman to resist delving into the life of his idol and mentor Lonoff and rejecting the opportunity of unearthing this man's secrets seems almost out of character. Zuckerman's explanation, citing the difference between a novelist and a biographer, rings hollow but shows once again that Zuckerman clearly applies different ethical standards to these different forms of writing. It is not entirely clear whether he differentiates between himself and other writers or between different writing professions. If one were to assume the latter, one could state that novelists, in aesthetically transforming reality and *qua* the autonomy of literature, are held to much more lenient standards than biographer, whose responsibility is to their subject.

This distinction between the biographical and its aesthetic transformation is at the heart of much of the Zuckerman series. Amy's pitch to Nathan occurs at the end of their conversation, during which she has handed him her letter to the editor, which presents an all-out attack on "cultural journalism," specifically an attempt to reduce Hemingway's short fiction to biographical data. From the outset she criticizes this mindset as deficient: "There was a time when intelligent people used literature to think. That time is coming to an end" (181). The letter seems infused with an ethical impetus akin to the tendency of New Criticism to insist on the autonomy of the work of art as a way of shielding the author from reproach (cf. Siebers 44-68). Zuckerman admits that in other circumstances he would have responded "not without some sympathy" (184) even though the letter entertains the idea of massive censorship by means of totalitarian control as a desideratum: "If I had something like Stalin's power, I would not squander it on silencing the imaginative writers. I would silence those who write about the imaginative writers" (184). The fact that the genesis of this incendiary statement cannot be precisely identified—at best we can attribute it to a variety of factors including Amy's strong ethical convictions, the state of her tumor-riddled brain, her claim that the letter was dictated by the 'ghostwriter' Lonoff, or even Zuckerman's increasingly unreliable mental powers—is a case in point for her argument echoing the New Critical belief that literature can never be simply summed up and paraphrased. She writes, "[t]he way in which serious fiction eludes paraphrase and description—hence requiring *thought*—is a nuisance to your cultural journalist"

(183). This reads like an adaptation of Cleanth Brooks' concept of the "Heresy of Paraphrase" to now include novels and biographies (cf. Siebers 67; Brooks 192-214). Bellette's charge of "poisonous nonsense" is levied against the inadequacies of biographical criticism and the unnamed cultural journalist, but Zuckerman suspects that the intended addressee is Richard Kliman and his interest in Lonoff's biography.

The letter thus provides two things, a hint at Lonoff's secret and an outline of a possible defense. It attacks inadequate forms of reading and provides a blueprint for Zuckerman's attack on Kliman. The irony of such a treatise appearing in *Exit Ghost*, the conclusion of the Zuckerman series which has consistently examined the interrelations between biography and fiction and which has attracted considerable scholarship tracing these interdependencies, has caught the eye of several critics (cf. James n.p.). As the ending of the novel shows, Zuckerman clearly subscribes to Bellette's view and attributes to Kliman the "deadly literal-mindedness and vulgarity that attributes everything to its source in a wholly stupid way" (279). The fact that Zuckerman has not looked over Kliman's notes before he reaches this verdict undercuts the judgment and adds to the vagueness created by the double structure of the ending. The sense of suspension achieved by the ending draws on this vagueness, both an intimation of closure and an act of the subversion of meaning. In this the ending is fitting for an epilogue. *Exit Ghost*, despite its two endings, feels open-ended in that it resists easy closure. As a coda to the Zuckerman novels, it continues to negotiate the impulses and themes, the ethical questions that have occupied the previous novels.

7.2 *Exit Ghost* – A Narrative of Beleaguered Identity Concepts

Trying to sort the Zuckerman novels for content is not an uncontroversial endeavor. There exist different opinions, but one could state that the first five novels from *The Ghost Writer* to *The Counter Life* were dedicated to an exploration of different facets of Zuckerman's identity. The American trilogy from *American Pastoral* to *The Human Stain* then shifted the focus to a wider society and combined it with an exploration of other people's identities, be it Seymour Levov, Ira Ringgold or Coleman Silk. *Exit Ghost* is a marked departure from these in that the focus is

shifting back to Zuckerman. The novel thus combines characteristics of the earlier and the later novels. Zuckerman moves back into the center of attention, yet the conceptual openness of the American trilogy is preserved. In many respects, *Exit Ghost* is reminiscent of *The Anatomy Lesson* in its focus on health problems and decay, but what is new is a focus on American society under the presidency of George W. Bush. It is a novel about beleaguered identities, identities under threat and, finally, the disintegration of identity and personal self. Reading the Zuckerman novels as an experiment in narrative identity and ethics, *Exit Ghost* is the novel in which the experiment comes full-circle. The ethical repercussions can be found in the confrontation with the younger generation, but also in an evaluation, a taking stock of Zuckerman's vita. The meeting of Bellette and Zuckerman in particular, reconnects the themes of *Exit Ghost* to *The Ghost Writer*. In this section, the main focus will be on the these two characters.

The existential anguish brought on by decay, or at least the impression of decline in the novel, is not limited to Nathan Zuckerman, but extends to Amy Bellette, Jamie Logan and Billy Davidoff, as well as the national identity of the United States in the years after 9/11. Roth situates the plot in late 2004 and the events of the novel take place in late October and early November, around election night. For the young couple—both democrats—the election amounts to a momentous decision on the future of the United States. George W. Bush appears as the Nemesis in the process of destroying America; Billy calls him "[a] tremendously limited ignoramus about to wreck a very great thing" (72). The "thing"—with which he means the United States— is seen as endangered after four years of President Bush and three years after the attacks on the World Trade Center. In this time span America's role in the world and its conception of what it means to be American have changed. After initial hopeful signs, the disappointing results of the election usher in four more years under President Bush, which leaves Jamie in shock, exclaiming "[t]here's nothing to stop them now, except Al Qaeda" (85). In Zuckerman's aesthetic transformation in *He and She* the sentiment is plainly stated as follows: "It's not Al Qaeda that scares me—it's my own government" (126). The bitter disappointment and the internal conflict which compels a sort of self-hate for being American strikes Zuckerman, who has withdrawn from political life and refused to even vote, as exaggerated. In his mind, Zuckerman puts the election results in perspective, comparing the day to other difficult times in American history:

> It's bad, but not like waking up in the morning after Pearl Harbor was bombed. It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after Kennedy was shot. It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after Martin Luther King was shot. It's bad, but not like waking up the morning after the Kent State students were shot. I thought to say, We all have been through it. But I said nothing. (86)

He does not speak up, sensing that Jamie "didn't want words anyway. She wanted murder" (86). The young couple clearly lacks the perspective Zuckerman could provide, but Roth insists on showing both perspectives at the same time without any exchange between them. The parallelism of Zuckerman's "[i]t's bad, but not like waking up …" is potentially soothing, calming through repetition. The events he enumerates all are deeply connected to the United States' self-image and part of the collective cultural memory, but in Jamie's eyes they stand for an America that is now in danger of vanishing. The incidents all stand for attacks on national identity: Pearl Harbor is probably the only event in American history to rival the shock of 9/11, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King stand for blows to the nation's hopes for a more equal society in the wake of World War II. The last example, however, the shootings at Kent State University, references an incident in which the state turned on its citizens as the National Guard of Ohio opened fire on a group of peaceful protesters. Despite his wonder at the overreaction, Zuckerman nevertheless finds some understanding for Jamie and Billy, framing his insight in terms reminiscent of Claude McKay's sonnet "America" (1921): "Watching these two, I got the sense easily enough of why anyone their age with their commitments would want to flee the pain-inducing lover their country had become" (87). The irony of comparing the struggle of African Americans for equality to the discomfort of Democrats under the Republican president is of course stinging.

7.2.1 The Suffering of Amy Bellette

The reunion of Nathan Zuckerman and Amy Bellette in New York is certainly at the core of the novel and signifies the meeting of two especially fragile characters. The two form a double which is tied together, not only through their mutual friend Lonoff, but by the extent that their identities are endangered by old age and illness. I argue that by analyzing the implications of these afflictions, the novel comments on the slow disintegration of identity concepts and explores ethical questions of personal autonomy.

Forty-eight years have passed since the two met at Lonoff's Berkshire home, he an aspiring young writer, she a young and brilliant student with whom he falls in love almost on the spot. Zuckerman is still impressed by her beauty but he does not recognize her when he sees her in New York City. He eventually recognizes Amy by her voice and her accent. Her voice has been less subject to change than looks, but Amy is associated with voice, or rather, with disembodied voices from the beginning. In *The Ghost Writer* Zuckerman had fantasized about her being Anne Frank miraculously surviving the war, and in this way had made her one of many possible 'ghostwriters' in the novel. After only a short meeting during the day, Zuckerman overheard a conversation between Lonoff and Amy in the late evening. Zuckerman's imagination was engaged when he eavesdropped with his ear pressed to the ceiling of Lonoff's study, where a temporary guest room had been installed. It is this 'ghostly' dialogue which Zuckerman spun into his elaborate fantasy of Anne Frank. Her ghostly quality is once again alluded to in *Exit Ghost*, where Zuckerman describes her "wraithlike looks" (17). This prior history is the reason for Zuckerman's surprise when he sees her at the hospital. The place of this first encounter is already indicative of their health issues. Judging from her outward appearance, Amy has fallen on hard times and is marked by disease. Most disturbingly, she wears a converted "pale blue hospital gown" (18) as dress. Her attire already points to her marginalized existence and invites speculations about her mental health. This first sighting of Amy prompts Zuckerman to go and buy all of Lonoff's work and to reengage with the writer, reading his stories in his hotel room. From the beginning Zuckerman and Amy are aligned due to their loyalty to Lonoff and, as it turns out, their shared contempt of Richard Kliman.

At first sight it is obvious that Amy has a 'troubled brain': "a sinuous surgical scar cut a serpentine line across her skull, a raw, well-defined scar that curved from behind her ear up to the edge of her brow" (18). Zuckerman's description exudes a certain maliciousness created by the alliterations and the evocative word-choice. The irregular pattern of the scar is described with the words "sinuous," "serpentine" and "curved," of which two can carry connotations of deviousness, metaphorically reinforcing the image of cancer as an insidious condition "insinuating" itself within the body. In another passage Zuckerman notices the "demonic scar" (176), implying the metaphor of possession when it comes to the tumor's increasing disturbance of Amy's mental processes. The image carries the implications of violence ("raw") and

recency ("well-defined"); the use of "skull" steers the focus to the underlying anatomy while the simple "across" intimates the extent to which this scar influences Any. The scar as a whole leaves an imprint on the body, the substratum of identity. Zuckerman learns that she suffers from a brain tumor, which has just recurred after surgery.

The slow disintegration of Amy's identity and sense of self are described in terms of the tumor changing her personality and her cognitive processes, as well as her self-image.[78] The tumor is presented as having agency and appears to be the reason why Amy cannot withstand Kliman's prodding and against her will gave away information on Lonoff. Symptoms and personality changes experienced as a result of the tumor include uncharacteristic aggression, loss of sense of reality and an inability to register the severity of her condition, which unsettles Zuckerman (cf. 178-179). Amy rather nonchalantly states "[t]he thing's come back. Did I tell you that" (177)? And while she has lucid moments, her grasp of reality is bewilderingly fragile, most saliently when she asks him, "[w]as I ever married to you" (187)? Zuckerman is shocked by this demonstration of the effects of the tumor, which leaves her brain "compressed and distended all at once" (186). Distention and "excrescence" (181) are keywords in that the lethal condition seems to bring with it a certain destructive, yet somehow creative change in her mind.[79] Amy terms her writings disparagingly "the excrescence of the excrescence" (181), yet this formulation also seems to attribute authorship to the growth in her brain. She consistently describes her tumor as possessing agency, supplementing and crowding out her own personality and her sense of identity: "My tumor found Kliman *winning*" (177). She cannot remember giving out any information about Lonoff and tries to explain those episodes of amnesia with recourse to her condition as well: "Might the tumor have done it?" (180). It seems these invocations of the tumor need to be read not so much as a second identity in the sense of a dissociative identity disorder, but in the metaphoric

[78] Another occurrence of a brain tumor in Roth's fiction can be found in *The Anatomy Lesson*: Zuckerman's mother dies of a brain tumor. Roth's own father died of the same condition and Roth's care of his father is chronicled in the harrowing memoir *Patrimony*. For an article discussing the ethics of life writing with recourse to the memoir see John Paul Eakin, "The Unseemly Profession."

[79] Susan Sontag has argued in *Illness as Metaphor* that "[i]n the twentieth century the cluster of metaphors and attitudes formerly attached to TB split up and are parceled out to two diseases. Some features of TB go to insanity … [other] features of TB go to cancer … The romantic view is that illness exacerbates consciousness" (36). In Amy Bellette's condition, we can find traces of this notion. The effects of the brain tumor include both of Sontag's categories. An argument that interprets Amy Bellette as a "romantic" character might turn to the references to Keats in *Exit Ghost* or start by revisiting the chapter "Femme Fatale" in *The Ghost Writer*, which is dedicated to Zuckerman's fantasies concerning Bellette's identity with Anne Frank.

use of the term, describing the changes in character and self-image brought about by the disease.

Amy Bellette serves as the de facto executrix of E.I. Lonoff's literary estate. She has given most of the manuscripts to a university and holds on to only a small number of personal items and literary works, for example the draft of the final novel. The novel obviously is concerned with the matter of literary heritage and the ways in which literary works reflect on authors even after their death, but Amy is concerned about Lonoff's standing in the literary pantheon beyond the threat of the indicting last manuscript. Lonoff's canonicity seems in danger. Zuckerman's renewed assessment and confirmation of Lonoff's genius upon rereading his stories in the beginning of the novel is the exception; the author has fallen into oblivion. Amy Bellette sees this as a sign of the literary establishment setting the wrong priorities. Already under the influence of cognitive loss, she causes a stir in a New York Public Library exhibit called "Landmarks of Modern Literature," which she later describes to Zuckerman as "terribly stupid politically correct crap" (176). What seems to irk her is the revisionist impulse of the exhibit, which introduces an alternative canon, leaving out luminaries of American literature. The exhibit features Gertrude Stein but not Ernest Hemingway, Edna St. Vincent Millay, William Carlos Williams and other central modernist writers (cf. 176). Bellette states: "Just nonsense. It started in the colleges and now it's everywhere. Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison, but not Faulkner" (176). The exclusion of Faulkner prompts her to cry out, but in the process she subconsciously substitutes the author and screams "Where is E.I. Lonoff? How dare you leave out E.I. Lonoff!" (176).

This canon revision seems to be sensitive to matters of identity, especially gender and race, as for example Amy's juxtaposition of Wright, Ellison, and Morrison with Faulkner implies. It seems that at the moment when her own identity is terminally threatened she stands up for Lonoff's posthumous reputation. This complex of motives in the novel draws attention to two main points. Firstly, identity constructs are mutable and can be stabilized only for a certain time. What is true for the individual literary work, which upon publication is no longer under the writer's control, is true for the author's life, which only to a certain extent can be protected from public scrutiny, and for the body of his literary work, which is subject to reading habits and tastes and political opinions. It becomes clear that "literary identity" is conferred by a community and can be suppressed or framed at will. The second point

is based on the observation that Bellette defends Lonoff when her own identity is under attack by the tumor. What comes to the surface is self-denial in the service of the writer's heritage. The novel, just like *The Ghost Writer*, thus raises the questions of the costs of living with the writer, whose way of life necessarily structures his surroundings and surrounding persons.

Amy's dependence on the writer is absolute; obviously such a strict orientation towards a single person touches upon ethical issues. Amy's communication with the deceased Lonoff seems to provide her with answers to that central ethical question "What should I do?" In such situations Amy turns to Lonoff: "All my life, whenever I couldn't find my way, I've always been able to ask myself, What would Manny do?" (175).[80] This question shows the extent to which Bellette has internalized Lonoff's moral standards and what control they exert over her even after his death. It might not be coincidental that among certain Christian denominations in the United States it is common to wear wristbands with the initials WWJD, standing for the question "What would Jesus do?" The wristbands serve as a reminder to live in imitation of Christ and obey Christian moral standards. The similar phrasing in Amy's "What would Manny do" points to the religious function which art and her relationship to Lonoff take on. In this sense, Amy's "religion of Lonoff" allows her to define her own standpoint in the sense of a tying back, *re-ligare*, which is among the possible etymological roots of 'religion.'

Amy has only narrowly escaped to the United States but most of her family perished in the Holocaust. She is deeply traumatized and as a result can no longer fashion a coherent story of her life. In keeping with Freud's early theory of trauma,[81] she points out that she has failed to develop beyond a certain stage: "I'll die a child" (187). This stunted narrative identity is explicitly mentioned in the novel, and it comes in the form of a lay diagnosis by Zuckerman:

> For most people to say I've stayed in my childhood my whole life would mean I've stayed innocent and it's all been pretty. For you to say I stayed in my childhood my whole life means I stayed in this terrible story—life remained a terrible story. It means that I had so much pain in my youth that, one way or another, I stayed in it forever. (193)

[80] See also Zuckerman's use of the same pattern in *Zuckerman Unbound* (109).
[81] See for example "Die Fixierung an das Trauma, das Unbewußte": "Es kommt auch vor, daß Menschen durch ein traumatisches, die bisherigen Grundlagen ihres Lebens erschütterndes Ereignis so zum Stillstand gebracht werden, daß sie jedes Interesse für Gegenwart und Zukunft aufgeben und dauernd in der seelischen Beschäftigung mit der Vergangenheit verharren, aber diese Unglücklichen brauchen dabei nicht neurotisch werden" (Freud, "Fixierung" 285).

This account of developmental crises in Amy's life carries even bleaker overtones when we consider her child-like status in the relationship with Lonoff. Against the background of the incestuous relationship between Lonoff and his sister, which Nathan Zuckerman and Amy Bellette would like to keep under cover, it is especially striking that the relationship between Lonoff and Amy has the overtones of a father-daughter relationship. The scene which Zuckerman overhears in *The Ghost Writer* already plays with this taboo when Amy calls Lonoff Dad-da: "I love you. I love you so, Dad-da." Later in that novel, at the end of the *femme fatale* chapter, Zuckerman imagines the following justification for the relationship: "Of course I love the Dad-da in you, how could I not? And if you love the child in me, why shouldn't you?" (*Ghost* 154). This morally questionable configuration seems not so much alarming as that it excites Zuckerman's imagination. As the reader learns, Amy has been robbed of any impulse to live a life of her own after Lonoff's death.

When Amy recounts her conversations with the deceased Lonoff, the reader gets the impression that these conversations go beyond a mere soliloquy and take on the characteristics of hallucinations. The effects of the tumor add an additional layer to Amy's problems. As a Holocaust survivor, she has already been deeply traumatized and suffers from psychological deformations. As a result her sense of time is out of joint and her health status makes her susceptible to outside suggestions. Her helplessness in the face of Kliman's advances comes to mind, but Zuckerman himself also does not shy away from manipulating her.

Zuckerman tries to dissuade her from the idea that Lonoff had an incestuous relationship in his youth. He launches his attempt when she is particularly vulnerable, having admitted that Lonoff has dictated the letter to the editor to her from the grave, and when she is pleading with Zuckerman to become Lonoff's biographer. In the ensuing conversation she introduces the incestuous relationship as fact, whereas Zuckerman is intent on debunking the idea as a misreading of the manuscript and a misunderstanding of the writing process: "Fiction for him was never representation. It was rumination in narrative form" (200-201). His argument misses the point as Amy seems to base her opinion of Lonoff not on the script but on personal conversation with the writer (cf. 198). Not unlike a lawyer pleading his case in court, Zuckerman casts doubt on her memory and proceeds to aggressively reshape Lonoff's history. Amy is utterly confused and cannot withstand or understand Zuckerman's onslaught: "Why do you attack me like this" (199)? In the process of

defending Lonoff, Zuckerman takes authorship of the lives of all characters involved and proceeds to shape events to his liking: "I'll make this reality mine, Amy's, Kliman's everyone's. And for the next hour I proceeded to, effulgently arguing its logic until I had come to believe it myself" (201). In convincing Amy and later stymieing Kliman he succeeds in controlling the events, something that had eluded him in his last novel project. In his attempts at controlling Amy he is no less ruthless than Kliman. Identity here is portrayed in all its fragility, to the extent that there is no longer a stable subject to speak of and sovereignty over actions is impaired. As a result, the novel problematizes the preconditions for ethical decision-making. In the face of diminished capabilities, the ethical questions discussed gain even more significance. Turning now to Zuckerman, we can see that his mental constitution is no less fragile, a fact that impacts the narrative as well as the structure of the novel.

7.2.2 Nathan Zuckerman's Last Stand

As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that not only Amy Bellette suffers from cognitive problems but also Zuckerman himself. In the beginning the reader is led to believe that Zuckerman's health problems are restricted to the unintended consequences of his prostate surgery, incontinence and impotence. Later on it becomes clear that his memory is also slipping. This introduces once again an element of epistemological skepticism. Whereas in earlier installments of the Zuckerman novels this was achieved by the unreliable narration inherent to the speculative nature of Zuckerman's novelistic projects, *Exit Ghost* takes the concept one step further in that now Zuckerman's statements about himself have clearly become unreliable. This has ethical implications, not only for an ethics of reading, but insofar as the series of Zuckerman novels comes to an end. This ending, the last appearance of Zuckerman, encourages a retrospective perspective and shines a bright light on the ethical themes that have been negotiated in the earlier novels.

This grasping for memories is built into the narrative structure of the novel. Zuckerman admits at some point that he experiences memory slips in daily life, but is unwilling to acknowledge the full extent. In *He and She* the topic of memory loss is also negotiated. The male protagonist claims his memory for literary facts is still solid (226). However, this claim is soon subverted in a scene in which he is grasping for the name of a Hardy novel, "the one with the reddler in it, the reddleman" (230). It is

only after he leaves that his memory comes back and he can identify the novel as *Return of the Native*, recognizing in this moment the general deterioration of his ability to remember. Zuckerman experiences similar problems in his own life: when he draws on T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" (1942) to comment on his status, his memory leaves him. "How does Eliot's ghost begin? Sardonically. 'Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age.' Reserved for age. Reserved for age. Beyond that I cannot go. A frightful prophecy follows that I don't remember. I'll look it up when I get home" (169). The passage discredits the narrator, opening up the possibility that other, more essential facts might be missing from the larger context of the novel. The quotation "reserved for age" is repeated three times, eerily underlining the sarcasm inherent in the choice of the words "gifts" and "reserved." This echo both implies Zuckerman's attempt to trigger his memory and the application of the lines to his own situation. They are by now clear limits to his memory beyond which he cannot go. The repetition of "reserved for age" therefore is the aesthetic representation of the grasping and insecure mind which underlies the entire narration. Shocked by the realization, Zuckerman addresses the late Lonoff, not unlike Amy Bellette does, and shares his realization that Lonoff is no longer the older of the two: "You are no longer my senior by thirty-odd years. I am yours now by ten" (170). This loss of memory is existential for two reasons. Memory and mental acuity are preconditions for his profession as a writer. Memory loss threatens to make writing impossible. Already, it has great influence on his work and Zuckerman loses no time turning his experiences into the play, fearing that his memory might fail him (cf. 159-160). In a general sense, the notion of narrative identity is built on the capability to remember. A loss of memory would predict an increasing difficulty in constructing the coherence of one's own life.

Loss of memory undermines Zuckerman's self-esteem and leads him to constantly question himself. When he tries to meet Amy Bellette he waits for an hour before he leaves the house. In a tragically funny symmetry, Amy herself has waited for Zuckerman at a different restaurant. In this striking image of the breakdown of communication and the increasing isolation of the novel's protagonists lies the troubling question of whose brain has failed: Amy's or Zuckerman's. Two of the five parts of the novel are consequently titled "Amy's Brain" and "My Brain."

Loss of memory also increases Zuckerman's passivity, which becomes especially apparent in his interactions with Richard Kliman. Twice in the novel there

is a discontinuity between Zuckerman's recollections and the way Kliman remembers, or pretends to remember, certain events. This asymmetry propels the plot as it keeps the conversation between Kliman and Zuckerman going even though Zuckerman ends every conversation with a complete rejection of Kliman's proposals. Neither Bellette nor Zuckerman are a match for Kliman and his drive to unearth Lonoff's secrets. Structurally there is a parallel between the way Kliman extracts the manuscript for the novel from Amy and the way he keeps in touch with Zuckerman.

Zuckerman no longer trusts his memory and therefore is susceptible to suggestion from others. Kliman manages to convince him he forgot about a lunch-appointment by shrewdly exploiting Zuckerman's insecurity about possible memory loss (cf. 242-243). This leaves Zuckerman deeply insecure and vulnerable to manipulation. As often in the Zuckerman novels, the actual creation of the novel is hinted at but remains mysterious. Comparable to earlier novels, for example *Zuckerman Unbound*, there are remarks about the possibility of current events showing up in a new novel: "Titles for something. Perhaps this" (41). The novel dramatizes the potentially disastrous effects of memory loss on Zuckerman and his writing, yet presents the novel *Exit Ghost* as its product. The novel traces Zuckerman's confusion and translates his mental lapses into a somewhat rough and jumpy plot line but for the most part his changed state of mind is not influencing the formal level of narration (word choice, grammar, etc.). The fear of memory loss serves as strong motivation and influences the plot because Zuckerman hastens back to his hotel after every conversation with Jamie and begins to draw up new scenes corresponding to the preceding conversation. At the end of the novel, he leaves New York City hastily, apparently defeated, and returns to his lonely hilltop. The same pattern is in place until the end. The novel concludes with the ending of his play *He and She*, which transforms the earlier events slightly.

Zuckerman's decline is echoed by the intertextual references in the novel, many on the topic of aging and dying. Notable examples are references to the already mentioned "Rip van Winkle." the last letters of Keats, or Joseph Conrad's *The Shadow Line* (1917). In the field of music there are repeated mentions of Strauss's *Four Last Songs* (1948), which have a profound effect on Zuckerman: "The composer drops all masks and, at the age of eighty-two, stands before you naked. And you dissolve" (124). Besides the obvious connotations of death, brought on not only by the title, but also the lyrics of the songs, which include an adaptation of Eichendorff's

poem "Im Abendrot" (1837), there is an interesting comparison that can be drawn between Strauss and the aging writer. At the end of their lives, both experience a deep feeling of being out of place, a sentiment enforced by the reference to "Rip van Winkle." In his lifetime, Strauss bore witness to almost all of the major political changes of the twentieth century and after World War II felt like he belonged to another world; Zuckerman feels similarly after his return to New York City. In sharp contrast to these high-cultural references, Zuckerman complains about Kliman's lack of seriousness and pejoratively declares, "I think he should be in video games" (115), insinuating that these newfangled cultural products do not amount to works of art. In situations like these the aestheticist outlook of the young Zuckerman of *The Ghost Writer* comes to mind.

Whereas much of the novel is dedicated to the description of decline, there is at the same time a reinforcement of the sense of Zuckerman's identity and his literary stature. A long and unique section of the novel dedicated to the life and work of George Plimpton serves to characterize his own work, primarily *ex negativo*. Kliman offers Zuckerman, who had been unaware of Plimpton's passing, a report of the memorial service. This excursus, which can be read as an homage to the writer who had died in 2003, serves to emphasize Zuckerman's standpoint. Zuckerman points out essential differences between himself and the late friend and writer. As he reminisces about Plimpton's character, his aristocratic WASP background and his style of writing, Zuckerman's Jewish identity comes back into view.

While Amy's communications with Lonoff seem to be the source of a twisted creativity, the loss of memory dulls Zuckerman's creative edge. But even in his case the link between processes of memory and elementary creative processes is explicitly mentioned in the novel. Grasping for words, Zuckerman has caught himself several times in the process of substituting the adequate word for seemingly coincidental neologisms which then take on the characteristics of catachresis, as in his substitution of "heartbed" for "heartfelt" (159). Despite the jarring aspects of this increasing disorientation, there is a creative potential in these moments. While Zuckerman himself focuses on the threatening note of the symptoms, he nevertheless engages in a sort of wordplay which might benefit from this connotative and associative use of words. When he says that he sees himself turning from "someone whose acuity as a writer was sustained by memory and verbal precision into a pointless man" (159), he not only admits how much he defined himself through his

works and words, but—as if to steadfastly fend off decay—engages in a pun. Losing his acuity—originally from the Latin *acus* for needle—makes him a *point*less man. The pun thus bitterly conflates the writer and his work, and at the same time underscores his pain at seeing his linguistic precision waning.

Zuckerman describes the process he is going through in powerful language. He says that it "felt less like the erosion of memory than like a slide into senselessness, as though something diabolical residing in my brain but with a mind of its own—the imp of amnesia, the demon of forgetfulness …" (159). The wording is reminiscent of Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" (1845) and underlines the uncanny and dark aspects of memory loss. The parallels to Amy's condition are obvious: whereas Amy bafflingly explains the negative effects of her brain tumor by assigning agency to it, Zuckerman in a similar manner envisions a supernatural entity responsible for his cognitive decline. The image of the demon reverberates with the description of Amy's demonic scar. In her case the scar also serves as bodily index of her mental decline, whereas in Zuckerman's case Roth draws on the image of "leakage" to illustrate parallels between Zuckerman's incontinence and his declining memory (162). In both cases, the mental decline is observed and verified by others. Zuckerman realizes the severity of his problem when some of his closest friends and first readers decline to comment on new manuscripts, which he interprets as a way of their saving face and avoiding giving harsh criticism. Despite this recognition, Zuckerman decides to publish the manuscript, indicating his unwillingness to accept these signs of decline.

The novel contrastively treats the topic of slow degeneration in an unflinching manner. Amy confirms that Hope Lonoff, the writer's surviving wife, is "in some kind of facility in Boston. She has Alzheimer's disease" (155). The vagueness of the "some kind of facility" seems not only owing to Amy's lack of conceptual grasp. It speaks to the uncanny fact that increased lifespan and the rise of dementia make necessary facilities that are in equal parts homes for the elderly and mental health clinics. The 'insanity' of old age in the novel does not only lie in the "Rash Moments"—an overt intertextual allusion to Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*—such as Zuckerman's spontaneous decision to stay in New York, but in the slow descent into madness which age can trigger.

The theme of insanity thus runs through the entire novel, from Zuckerman's first sighting of Amy—"[e]ither she's impoverished or she's crazy," he remarks (18)—to the novel's ending, which frames insanity as both a potentially threatening

presence and a liberation. *He and She* concludes with a final phone conversation between the two: "Good. Hurry. Into insanity. Off with your clothes and into the bayous. (*He hangs up.*) Into the chocolate-milk-colored water filled with dead old trees." And the final stage direction, which follows immediately, begins, "*Thus, with only a moment's more insanity on his part—a moment of insane excitement …*" (292). The play ends not only with the jump into insanity but with the image of a jump into the bayous of Jamie's Texas home, which satisfies Zuckerman's fantasy of the two having an affair. The image of the couple jumping naked and vulnerable into the water combines the possibility of a baptism with the intimations of death evoked by the murky water and the "dead old trees." The end thus symmetrically accounts for both the second retreat into his isolated existence in Berkshires and the reckless embrace of insanity here depicted as an immersion into the bayou. The disintegration of identity, the ambivalent forms of escape, depicted here reverberate as the end-point of an experiment in narrative ethics. Zuckerman's exit remains under-defined and as memory loss closes in, "he disintegrates" (292).

7.3 The Ethics and Ecology of *Exit Ghost*

This section picks up on the previous analysis of *American Pastoral*. Using Zapf's triadic model for interpretation, this section analyzes the interconnections between the environment, literary creativity, and ethics in the novel. In order to position *Exit Ghost* as a coda to the Zuckerman novels, it is helpful to reconsider its spatial setup in relation to that of *American Pastoral*. We can conceptualize the general trajectory of the *Exit Ghost* in terms of a reverse pastoral movement. At first Zuckerman returns to the city, only to retreat again to his Arcadian mountaintop at the end of the novel. The dynamic of country and city is emphasized by the symmetry of Zuckerman wanting to return to the city and Jamie and Billy at the same time planning to leave it. The two parties of this exchange are presented as having diametrically opposed and therefore complementary needs. The viability of this arrangement, however, is undercut by the paradoxical fact that Zuckerman's desire to stay in the city is driven by his infatuation with Jamie, so that an exchange of residences would not achieve the desired results.

Besides this sustained interest in the different characteristics of country and city living, there are other factors which invite closer attention to the representation of the natural world. *Exit Ghost* foregrounds the setting of Zuckerman's West Massachusetts house in several ways. In the beginning of the novel, which evokes memories of the introductory passage in *The Ghost Writer*, Zuckerman mentions his "rural mountain road in the Berkshires" (1). This well-worn phrase, which serves both as a geographical and by now as an ideological and literary triangulation for Zuckerman, develops into a leitmotif for the novel. Zuckerman's house near Athena already had been the primary setting of *The Human Stain*, but it is in the more condensed and streamlined narration of *Exit Ghost* that his living environment is highlighted, especially as the novel seeks to create a contrast with the hectic life in Manhattan.

Jamie and Billy's Manhattan apartment, as serene as possible in such a large city, serves as counter-pole to Zuckerman's house. Upon inspection of the apartment, Zuckerman informs the couple that his house in the country is "no more peaceful than this" (34). Described in the ad as a "homey, book-lined 3-room Upper West Side apartment" (29), it displays to Zuckerman a "modest opulence" (33). Apart from the layout and interior design, Zuckerman identifies two potential workplaces on his initial tour of the apartment, one overlooking a church, the other facing a tree outside the window. Just as Zuckerman describes the view outside his kitchen window in the Berkshires (56), he pays attention to the apartment's environment. There is no simple contrast between city and country, no clichéd view of the wall as in Melvillle's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853). The apartment offers serene outlooks. There is no urban grime and decay in sight. Rather, the observer is drawn in by an emulation of rural life. Zuckerman identifies the intention of the historicist architecture of the church as aiming "to transport its Upper West Side congregants back five or six centuries to a rural village in northern Europe" (34). But 'authenticity' is not important in this context. The passage draws attention to amalgamation processes in the modern city; one could thus envision a reading of the neighborhood as a transcultural space where oppositions such as city and country are increasingly destabilized and the terms 'nature' and 'environment' are extended to emphatically include the urban setting.[82]

[82] See Brandt et al. for a collection of essays on the subject.

Surprised by his quick decision, Zuckerman questions his motives in swapping residences: "To see a Victorian replica of a medieval church out the window while I worked rather than my mammoth maples and uneven stone walls? To see cars moving when I looked down to the street below rather than the deer and the crows and the wild turkeys that populated my woods?" (35-36). This juxtaposition underlines the artificiality of the architecture, opposing the replica with the supposedly more authentic and natural trees and uneven stone walls, drawing a careful analogy between cars and a diverse wildlife. It is clear that his motivations for the exchange lie outside the benefits of such environmental attributes. Zuckerman weighs the advantages of city life against the benefits of his cabin. Intent on moving to the city, he also sees the things he is giving up in the process.

The other view is no less interesting: "[i]mmediately outside the window the fan-like leaves of a thriving gingko tree" (34) can be seen. The gingko is not an indigenous part of North American flora; it seems to take a highly symbolic function in the context. Zuckerman notices the tree as he walks into the room, while in the background Strauss's *Four Last Songs* can be heard, underscoring the symbolical nature of the scene. Ginkgo trees are often used as ceremonial or temple trees in Asia and well-known for their longevity, which can extend to several thousand years. Consequently, it has been used as a literary symbol, for example by Goethe in a love letter. But most significantly, the ginkgo was believed to have medicinal uses and is used in the treatment of dementia and memory loss, even though there are doubts to its effectiveness. With these characteristics the thriving ginkgo tree figures as a symbol for Zuckerman's hopes for a new start in the city, while also ironically and paradoxically addressing his health problems. This apartment, just like the tree, might provide the antidote to his ailments and to the general malaise of his old age, which are not-so-subtly hinted at in the Strauss songs or in the many references to the Conrad novel *The Shadow Line*.[83]

What are the characteristics of Zuckerman's home that make it so desirable to the young writers? For one, it seems to meet all the criteria of "living in the country" and to promise a life in harmony with the natural world. Consequently the descriptions of the surroundings of his retreat often resemble advertising copies:

> … a small kitchen with a window looking out back onto a grove of twisted old apple trees to a good-sized oval swimming pond and a big storm-damaged willow tree. The twelve acres were

[83] For an analysis concentrating on this intertext, see Levy.

> situated across from a picturesque swamp where waterfowl were plentiful and a couple hundred feet back from a dirt road that you followed for close to three miles before you reached the blacktop … (56)

The passage emphasizes the seclusion of the place, which is removed not only by the fact that no blacktop road leads there, but by the size of the property and the location of the house on it. The cultural framing of the natural environment is omnipresent in these descriptions, be it in the more obvious instances of the probably man-made swimming pond or in the culturally informed way of perception, hinted at in the description of the swamp as "picturesque." [84] Constant components of these descriptions are the road and the mountaintop situation of the writer's retreat: "My cabin could as well have been adrift on the high seas as set twelve hundred feet up on a rural road in Massachusetts …" (70); "located on a dirt road atop a mountain and across from a large marshy swamp that was a bird and wildlife refuge" (29). These descriptions vary in the focus on different animals or trees. Adding to the feeling of remoteness is the protection of the "wildlife refuge" (29). The natural surroundings therefore are portrayed in a variety of functions. The trees for example isolate the house from everyday life, they provide the habitat for a variety of different species, and finally they encourage a creative atmosphere conducive to writing, which Zuckerman terms "quiet, steady, predictable contact with nature and reading and my work" (31). Apart from these factors, the novel also points to a more basic function: the forests can be hunted and they provide food for the tenants of the house (cf. 39).

Another central and constitutive element of these descriptions is the swamp, which features prominently. In *He and She,* the male character talks about the experience of living in his place. The loneliness of his situation seems somewhat alleviated by the presence of the bird: "And when you're in my house, across from the swamp, with only the tall reeds and the heron for company out the window …" (212). The female character picks up on the theme a little bit later and attributes cognition and knowledge to the bird: "except for that heron out your window, nobody knows anything about you" (217). The birds and the trees constitute the writer's company and, curiously, the relationship is conceived to be reciprocal.

All in all, the setting is calming Zuckerman's nerves. *Exit Ghost* goes beyond the earlier novels of the American trilogy in giving explicit reasons for Zuckerman's retreat to the Berkshires. Whereas these reasons were rather mysteriously hinted at

[84] For (eco)critical views on the picturesque and related concepts see Byerly and Wallach.

in *American Pastoral*—"[certain] problems having been taken out of my life—that's the problem" (*Pastoral* 63)—they generally seemed to have their cause in his health problems. *Exit Ghost* modifies the account, revealing that Zuckerman received threatening anti-Semitic letters, which prompted him to leave New York. Once again, this is evidence of a doubling of structures in Roth's fiction: it turns out Zuckerman fled out of fear of domestic terrorism, much in the way Jamie and Billy now fear international terrorism and want to leave New York expecting another Al-Qaeda attack.[85]

Water figures as an important motif in the novel, both as part of the natural environment and as metaphor. Significantly, Zuckerman opens the novel by stating there was "a kind of drought within [him]" (1). The idea of alleviating the consequences of this drought and quenching his thirst one more time, will come to motivate him for the entirety of the novel. As the plot progresses, the motif is conspicuously transformed to account for more graspable pathologies. The loss of fluid that created the drought can be understood both literally and figuratively: literally, it can be found in Zuckerman's incontinence, his leaking of urine, and figuratively speaking, it is a symbol of the loss of his memory. Conceptualizing incontinence and memory loss as loss of fluid, he complains of "leakage" from his mind (162). From the beginning, Zuckerman's character is closely associated with water, both in metaphorical and spatial proximities. He is presented as an avid swimmer who would like to swim not only in his natural pool but also at the university pool down at Athena College. His incontinence, however, prevents this:

> I listen to music, I hike in the woods, when it's warm I swim in my pond, whose temperature, even in summer, never gets much above seventy degrees. I swim there without a suit, out of sight of everyone, so that if in my wake I leave a thin, billowing cloud of urine that visibly discolors the surrounding pond waters, I'm largely unperturbed and feel nothing like the chagrin that would be sure to crush me should my bladder involuntarily begin emptying itself while I was swimming in a public pool. (4)

At the outset Zuckerman's desire is not to return to New York for good, but to seek medical assistance in order to control his incontinence in a socially acceptable way. While it provides for the necessary tranquility for writing, Zuckerman's self-imposed

[85] Anonymous threats, often anti-Semitic in nature, are a staple of the Zuckerman series and a recurring motif. In an ironic reversal of the dominant theme in *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman moves to the countryside in order to evade anti-Semitism and threats to his person, whereas Lou Levov never understands the Swede's decision to move to the countryside and points out the rampant anti-Semitism in a similar rural setting in New Jersey.

isolation seems to wear on him and his desire to swim at Athena speaks to a wish for contact. In pastoral terms, what Zuckerman seeks is something closer to the semblance of the middle landscape, retaining his rural house but accessing the comforts of 'civilization' and society in nearby Athena. The other central occurrence of a body of water aside from Zuckerman's swamp and pond are the bayous in Houston, which serve as the backdrop for Jamie's childhood memories. The swamp and the bayous, while beautiful and picturesque, always remain subtly threatening, an impression that is reinforced at the end of the novel, where both reappear as symbols of death and potentially rebirth.

The ending of the novel is given to Zuckerman's play *He and She*. The final scene reworks his last conversation with Jamie Logan, altering the ending in so far as he can convince her to come and visit him in his hotel before he leaves in haste. In a final twist, Zuckerman's counterfactual rewriting of his encounters with Jamie support his earlier statements on how literature works. As wish-fulfilling fantasies, the scenes of *He and She* are, to the reader, evidently not based on fact.[86] In this way, they support Zuckerman's argument against Kliman's literal reading of Lonoff's novel and show the dangers of unreflected biographical criticism.

The double ending of *Exit Ghost*–Zuckerman sitting down to complete the manuscript and the ending of *He and She*–stages Zuckerman's departure in two versions. As a result, the final scene of *He and She* already takes on the character of an epilogue[87]. The final stage directions of the play emphasize 'insanity' as the prevalent state of mind (cf. 294). Only in the last sentences of the novel, which are part of a complicated ending within an ending, does the tone revert to the simplicity that Lonoff advocated for the occasion: "[t]he end is so immense, it is its own poetry. It requires little rhetoric. Just state it plainly" (152). Picking up on the earlier description of the effects caused by listening to the Strauss songs—"and then you dissolve" (124)—the last sentences are: "He disintegrates. She's on her way and he leaves. Gone for good" (292). If we read this as a symbolic death of Zuckerman or at

[86] This is of course, only based on the tentative knowledge of the reader. Critics like James have doubted the ontological status of female characters in Roth's fiction and entertained the notion that the main text of *Exit Ghost* represents a cover-up, whereas the play *He and She* should be taken as a hint that Zuckerman indeed has had an affair with Jamie Logan ("Falter Ego", n.p).

[87] Roth's next novel, *Indignation*, features a similar ending in which the narrator, Marcus Messner, is revealed to be dying from wounds sustained in battle during the Korean War. Implying that the story is told from beyond the grave, the final chapter "Out from Under" begins "HERE MEMORY CEASES" (*Indignation* 225) and recontextualizes the preceding narrative, taking on the character of an epilogue.

least its portent, the has-been has left the stage whereas she, the not-yet, is on the way. This stands in stark contrast to the final paragraph of Zuckerman's narration:

> And along the way, like Amy, like Lonoff, like Plimpton, like everyone in the cemetery who had braved the feat and the task, I would die too, though not before I sat down at the desk by the window, looking out through the gray light of a November morning, across a snow-dusted road onto the silent, wind-flurried waters of the swamp, already icing up at the edge of the foundering stalks of the skeletal bed of plumeless reeds, and, from that safe haven, with all of New York having vanished from sight—and before my ebbing memory receded completely—wrote the final scene of *He and She*. (280)

The image of water, which has been a constant throughout the novel, is taken up here again. It has been an image for a leaking memory before, and here Zuckerman continues this line and relies on the image of the tides to address his dwindling memory. The natural environment is emphasized as the locus of literary creativity and creation. The passage draws attention to the fact that however flimsy *He and She* might be, Zuckerman finishes the manuscript at the end of the novel, which puts him once again in opposition to the not-yets, Jamie and Billy, who wanted to exchange places in order to get their own writing on the way. The view of the pond also brings to mind the ending of *The Human Stain*, which takes place on a frozen lake "that's constantly turning over its water atop an Arcadian mountain in America" (*Stain* 361). While that ending emphasizes a systemic view, as well as the ecological and circular movement of the lake, Zuckerman's safe haven appears wintry and dead.

The novel thus shines a light on the interrelations between the natural world and creative life. The novel is tinged with sadness and loss and, quite like the preceding texts, obsessed with death. But it is not as occupied with existential themes as one could expect. Zuckerman, his return to New York notwithstanding, is a more detached narrator and observer of current developments in society and the arts than in earlier novels. As a consequence the novel can be seen to engage in a cultural-critical metadiscourse on current developments in literature and society, ranging from more general cultural criticism as in the "Rip van Winkle" theme to more specific observations such as Zuckerman's critical remarks about the excessive use of cell phones (cf. 63-65). The novel is highly critical of politics and seems to sympathize with critics of George W. Bush, yet Zuckerman relativizes the anxiety which grasps Jamie and Billy by contextualizing the re-election of President Bush with recourse to tragic historical dates such as the attack on Pearl Harbor—in itself not without irony. The incident is also a sign of Zuckerman's increasing detachment, who puts the transitoriness of presidential terms in the wider perspective of American history.

In the field of literature, Amy Bellette's outrage at the ongoing canon revision in the field of American literature might be read as just one instance of this critical impulse. In keeping with the meta-fictional play Roth started with the invention of his character Nathan Zuckerman, the novel offers many passages in which the relationships between life and art, between a writer and his or her work are explicitly discussed:

> Without the least idea of what is innately transgressive about the literary imagination, cultural journalism is ever mindful of phony ethical issues: "Does the writer have the right to blah-blah-blah?" It is hypersensitive to the invasion of privacy perpetrated by literature over the millennia, while maniacally dedicated to exposing in print, unfictionalized, whose privacy has been invaded and how. (182)

Amy's reaction is understandable, justified and ironically part of an ongoing meditation on the ethics of literature in the Zuckerman novels. Picking up a similar discussion in *The Ghost Writer, Exit Ghost* asks questions in two areas. On the one hand it pitches Zuckerman's understanding of ethical decorum against Kliman's impulses; on the other hand, it continues an investigation into the status of art and the sacrifices that are made in its name, for example by Amy Bellette.

The imaginative counter-discourse in the novel is associated with Zuckerman's decision to leave the isolation of his Berkshire retreat in order to improve his current condition. Despite his frail condition and failing memory, the visit to New York brings a sense of closure in many regards. He learns about Amy Bellette's fate and even though he must recognize the tragedy of her life, he is able to alleviate her suffering by talking to her and supporting her financially. His infatuation with Jamie Logan inspires him to write one more text, *He and She*, trying to avoid the negative effects of memory loss one last time. *He and She* takes stock of the realities of *Exit Ghost* and transforms them in a process that is part wish-fulfilling fantasy, part writerly self-assertion. A certain ethos of authenticity seems to prevent Zuckerman from imagining a happier outcome, but *He and She* must be considered a success, both for its completion and for its embrace of the subject-matter, which despite its bleak denouement represents an improvement over other potential choices such as *A Man in Diapers* (cf. 41).

Arguably, Roth's treatment of the infirmities of age and his unflinching portrayal of Zuckerman's bodily and mental decline can be, in a wider sense, construed as part of an imaginative counter-discourse. Despite the fact that sickness is a common theme in literature, his realistic description, specifically of the after-

effects of prostate surgery, serve an important function. It is only in recent years that those suffering from the disease have come forward and discussed their ailments publicly, often pointing to the discursive strictures against the discussion of their condition, which is still widely considered taboo. In this sense the later Zuckerman novels can be seen as offsetting a blind spot of modern society.[88]

The detached nature of the novel can also be attributed to the fact that it seems to play out in a vacuum of agency created by a strange dynamic between the main characters: Roth writes about the changing of the guards, a generational change, which he conceptualizes by dividing the characters of the novel into 'not yets'—Jamie, Billy, Kliman—and the 'have beens,' Bellette and Zuckerman. Therefore, none of the characters are content. The 'not yets' struggle to make their way in, whereas the 'have beens' try to fend off decline, or, like George Plimpton, have already died. It is therefore an ambivalent insight when Zuckerman realizes that he might soon turn into the topic of a Kliman biography. The insight signals his own demise and the future success of his adversary. The novel stops short of describing the completion of this process; the closest it comes to doing this is the ending, which doubles the account of the final events in New York. Zuckerman finishes *He and She* after his return to the Berkshires. Both texts then draw on descriptions of the natural world in their endings. Seen in parallel, the two endings can be regarded as a structural expression of the reintegrative interdiscourse in the novel. Zuckerman the creative mind and Zuckerman in the process of vanishing, life and fiction—the novel negotiates these by now traditional themes and catches the liminal moment before the writer is "*Gone for good*" (292).

In conclusion we can once again point to *Exit Ghost's* function as the final installation of the Zuckerman series, the keystone of a vast literary architecture spanning more than half a century of narrated time and almost 30 years of continuing narratives—a time span in which Roth has engaged in the "Making of a Storyworld," to borrow the subtitle of Pia Masiero's study of the Zuckerman cycle. The extent to which the novel serves as an echo chamber of the earlier novels and the way it provides a tentative closure, for example in its many references to *The Prague Orgy*, suggest that *Exit Ghost* is an epilogue to both: the American trilogy and the entire series of Zuckerman books.

[88] See Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*. For an example pertinent to Zuckerman's illness see Dana Jennings' *New York Times* blog on living with prostate cancer. The blog aimed to speak out on the disease, which is still considered taboo and is often not recognized as a condition which can lead to severe impairment and death, hence the title of the first entry, "The Good Cancer?" ("Good" n.p.).

8 Conclusion

...my interlocutor was told by the "English Wikipedia Administrator"—in a letter dated August 25th and addressed to my interlocutor—that I, Roth, was not a credible source: "I understand your point that the author is the greatest authority on their own work," writes the Wikipedia Administrator—"but we require secondary sources."

—Philip Roth in 2012

This study has sought to analyze the Zuckerman novels from a variety of different angles. I have argued that the novels are best understood as an experiment in exploratory ethics. Zuckerman, the protagonist goes through a series of predicaments and crises and it is in this mode of being challenged again and again that numerous ethical questions arise. As the novels are highly self-reflexive and metafictional, these ethical questions often cluster around the intersection of narrative and identity. The methodology used throughout my readings was to approach the texts on their own terms and tease out their particular ethical potential. As a consequence, the range of readings is both eclectic and wide, but all center on questions of identity, the Other, as well as the ethics of living in a modern and individualistic society. I have analyzed moments of crises and dilemmatic structures in the novels, but also metaphors concerning the discourse of memory and time, or the role of the animal as they pertain to a wider discourse of ethics.

There is an ethical element to reading the Zuckerman novels in order. As the series progresses, the later novels begin to recontextualize and reframe the earlier entries of the series. The incremental addition of new layers of complexity, the formal experiments, and the many continuities between the individual novels, add to a nuanced and highly critical understanding of literature's potential to deal with and experiment with ethical questions. With every new iteration of the series, Roth has created an increasingly intricate network of narratives. As I have shown in my analysis of the two epilogues *The Prague Orgy* and *Exit Ghost*, it is worthwhile to consider the relationships between the novels, as these can influence ethical evaluations of all the novels. This sort of dynamic interplay between texts encourages

and elicits ethical reflection as the reader is constantly forced to adapt to the new status quo of their considerations.

Starting with *My Life as a* Man, I have analyzed the novels with regards to form and content and always in concert with a focus on different modes of narration and questions of ethics and identity. I have traced these themes from the ethics of writing in *The Ghost Writer* to the discourse of memory in *Zuckerman Unbound*. *The Anatomy Lesson* is an exploration of chronic pains and their effects on identity constructs. *The Prague Orgy* and *The Counterlife* both occupy a special place in the series due to their hybrid forms and experimental character. I have analyzed *The Prague Orgy* in particular as an epilogue with far-reaching, ethical implications. In my reading of the novella as an epilogue, I have shown how in this context a reframing of the preceding trilogy is enacted.

In choosing ecocritical approaches for my interpretations of the American trilogy, I have tried to account for the widely-noticed change in scope in the later Zuckerman novels. *American Pastoral* was analyzed in a kaleidoscopic fashion with a focus on the role of animals in the novel, the mode of the pastoral, and especially its spatial configuration. I have explored several methods of tying these disparate approaches together in an integrated cultural ecological reading. My reading of *I Married a Communist* interpreted the novel both as a challenge to Nathan Zuckerman and a communal effort in reconstructing the past. Here, the ethical dimension of time and community came into sharp focus. In my reading of *The Human Stain,* I have shown how Roth uses animal metaphors to explore questions of identity and alterity especially with regards to. The analyses concluded with a reading of *Exit Ghost*, which was analyzed as an epilogue to the American trilogy and the entire series of Zuckerman books. My analyses have tended to return to liminal moments and places, be it the movement between East and West, surreal encounters in airplanes or the intricate workings of pastoral retreat and return. Roth's fiction is questioning, subversive, ironic and often hyperbolic – in an early interview with Martha McGregor, Roth stated his vision clearly:

> The same questions come up: "Who am I? How do I act? What do I do?" My work does not offer answers. I am trying to represent the experience, the confusion and toughness of certain moral problems. People always ask what's the message. I think the worst books are the ones with messages. My fiction is about people in trouble. (2)

The questions raised here by Roth are at the heart of ethical discourse; but returning to this statement at the end, the eye of the reader rests on the word ‘trouble’. Roth’s protagonists are driven, often rebelling against the status quo, engaged in an adversarial relationship with the world. ‘Trouble’ is at the center of Roth’s exploratory ethics. It is a starting point. generating questions–and reactions. In staging these processes in his fiction, and exploring their potentials, consequences and outcomes, Roth engages in his particular form of narrative ethics.

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