

Fifties Nostalgia in Selected Novels of Philip Roth



Sebastian Schmitt

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Preface

This study investigates the significance of a formative period in American history for Philip Roth's writing: the American fifties. Nostalgia for this "golden age" still plays an important role in popular and political discourses in the United States. In three case studies, this book analyses how Philip Roth engages with fifties nostalgia in his novels *Indignation*, *I Married a Communist* and *Sabbath's Theater*. These novels are not simply set in the American fifties, they are essentially about this historical period which still captures the American imagination. Contextual close readings of the individual texts illuminate how these novels are pervaded by a specific rhetorical structure, the American jeremiad, and how this allows Roth to dramatize a specifically Jewish-American form of Americanization. By investigating the functions of fifties nostalgia in his novels, the present study sheds light on the means with which Roth appropriates American history as a form of dissent in his writing and how he appropriates the American fifties to engage with contemporary political discourses in American culture. This serves to reveal the imaginative and ideological constraints that Roth contends with in his novels.

Writing this book has been a very long and often arduous process which would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of my colleagues, friends and family. I am particularly grateful for the ongoing support, patience and love of my wife Victoria. I would also like to thank my parents Karola and Rainer Schmitt as well as my sister Hanna for their supportive words throughout the years. Finally, I would like to express my special gratitude to Prof. Dr. Gerd Hurm (*Trier Center of American Studies*, University of Trier) on whose initiative I started writing the book and who has encouraged and advised me over the years.

1. Introduction: Constraints of the Imagination

I sometimes think of my generation of men as the first wave of determined D-day invaders, over whose bloody, wounded carcasses the flower children subsequently stepped ashore to advance triumphantly toward that libidinous Paris we had dreamed of liberating as we inched inland on our bellies, firing into the dark. ‘Daddy,’ the youngsters ask, ‘what did you do in the war?’ I humbly submit they could do worse than read *Portnoy’s Complaint* to find out.

Writing and the Powers That Be, An Interview with Philip Roth (Reading Myself 7).

Finally: ‘rebelling’ or ‘fighting’ against outside forces isn’t what I take to be at the heart of my writing. [...] Over the years, whatever serious acts of rebelliousness I may have engaged in as a novelist have been directed far more at my own imagination’s system of constraints and habits of expression than at the powers that vie for control in the world.

Writing and the Powers That Be, An Interview with Philip Roth (Reading Myself 11-12).

From September 1969 to May 1970, a long series of terrorist bombings shook the American public. This was left-wing terror, perpetrated by radical groups like the *Weathermen* who believed in violent revolution to stop the fighting in Vietnam and to overthrow what they considered an imperialist U.S. government. The targets were public buildings such as federal buildings, draft boards, or townhouses and this series of attacks turned out to be the terrible climax of several years of public unrest in the United States (cf. Patterson, *Grand Expectations* 716-17). As it happens, the novelist Philip Roth, whose *Portnoy’s Complaint* had caused a public scandal of quite another sort a few years earlier, was personally acquainted with the parents of one of the Greenwich Village bombers, Kathy Boudin. He wrote a couple of pages about the incident in the early 1970s – nothing but a few ideas for a concept of a novel, but over the years he often returned to these notes as a source of inspiration. It took him more than twenty years until he finally decided to transform the ideas into a novel. The *Weathermen* and the terror that they and others brought to American streets indeed became the key inspiration for this new work, which was published under the title *American Pastoral* in 1997 and which won him the Pulitzer Prize (Roth Pierpont 206-7).

Seymour Levov, former athlete and wealthy owner of a textile factory, is the protagonist and it is his daughter who detonates the bomb which blows his serene life and dreamy vision of America into fragments. As Debra Shostak has shown, the blown-up post office in *American Pastoral* is not only a reminder of these terrifying months in the late 1960s, but more importantly a symbol of a nostalgic vision falling apart – the realization that the American idyll, the golden postwar decades, have never existed. It stands for the sim-

mering conflicts underneath the idyllic surface of the American 1940s and 1950s, before they came to the fore in the 1960s. The explosion that drives the plot in *American Pastoral* explodes the dream of a lost sense of union and community in American culture and exposes it as nothing but myth (Shostak, *Philip Roth* 244-45). Seymour Levov's brother Jerry calls it the "past undetonated", an irretrievable dream of pure "nostalgia" for a better America that cannot be retrieved, because it was blown to pieces in 1968 (*AP* 61). It is this nostalgic vision, this "undetonated past", its functions in Philip Roth's writing as well as its determinants that will be the subject of this thesis. Whereas this "undetonated" past itself plays only a minor role in *American Pastoral*, in which Roth scrutinizes the American sixties, the "undetonated" fifties take centre stage in several closely related novels: *Sabbath's Theater*, *I Married a Communist* and *Indignation*. It is in these novels that Roth takes a close, critical look at the American fifties and the nostalgic longings which they have since then inspired.

His approach to the issue of nostalgia is in some ways paradoxical, which is not untypical. Not only is Roth's work itself suffused with paradoxes and ambiguities, but also Roth's own statements about his work and his approach to writing often contain statements which are inconsistent. The two quotations above, from an interview in 1974, illustrate this point. On the one hand, Roth seems to suggest in an ironic and metaphoric tone that his writing is essentially "liberating". Its purpose is to engage readers with the wrongs in society, in this case the sexual mores prior to the upheavals of the 1960s. On the other hand, Roth undermines this seemingly straightforward statement by adding that his writing should not be confused with some form of political or social activism. What may seem to be an unintended inconsistency is a paradoxical pattern that has occurred repeatedly in Roth's public statements about his writing, for instance with respect to his own ethnic identity or the relationship between his writing and his readership (cf. Brauner, *Philip Roth* 13-15). In a more recent interview from 2008, Roth describes his impulses to write *Indignation*: "If you look in the newspaper at the names and ages of the soldiers getting killed in Iraq now, you find these terrifying ages like 19 and 22; it's just awful. And it was that particular awfulness of young death that engaged me". Later on in the same interview, Roth comes back to the aspect of topicality and rejects the idea that his novels have anything to do with current issues in American politics: "There is no relevance between my books and what's going on. I see what's going on like any other voter, or potential voter, or citizen, which is I get appalled, I get angry, I get frightened, and so on" (Mustich 2008). Consciously or not, Roth's ambivalent judgements about his own writing foreground the paradox at the heart of his work.

There is a deeper meaning behind the paradox with regard to Roth's writing and to American literature in general. For David Brauner it illuminates the intricate relationship between public and private in Roth's fiction. It is the "political zeitgeist" which leads Roth to engage himself with the limits of his own imagination and thus inspires him to produce "inflammatory" fiction that challenges cultural norms (Brauner, *Philip Roth* 19). It is this idea, from which the present study takes its point of departure. It aims to explore the cultural dimensions of Roth's preoccupation with what he has himself described as his "imagination's system of constraints and habits of expression" (*Reading Myself* 12). For the boundaries of what a writer can express are not only defined by individual creativity or inspiration, but they are also culturally determined. The "system of constraints" and "habits of expression", to which Roth refers in the interview, are both private and collective limitations of what can be meaningfully expressed. As Gonzalez points out, Roth's experiments with content and form can be seen as challenging "cognitive obstacles", as in the fusions of "his fictional, and his actual, biographical world", which encourage readers to contemplate the truth-value of his novels (63). Likewise, Ann Basu claims that Roth often tests American myth-making, notions of national and masculine identity or generic boundaries in his novels (9-11). Following what Sacvan Bercovitch has called the hermeneutic of non-transcendence, this study illuminates how Roth's fiction engages the boundaries of what is ideologically conceivable in American culture by probing the limits of his own imagination.

Although Roth's own comments about the political dimensions of his fiction are rather ambivalent, a scholarly tendency has emerged in recent years to place Roth solidly in the American non-conformist tradition. In fact, it is especially Philip Roth's later work starting with the *American Trilogy* (*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, *The Human Stain*) in the 1990s that has spawned a lot of academic research on Roth's status as a political writer (Brauner, *Philip Roth* 16). According to Derek Parker Royal, the central characters in *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist* belong to "a long line of American literary figures" struggling with the promise of America, which enables Roth to excavate the "more troubling side of the American Dream" ("Pastoral Dreams" 202). Ross Posnock argues in his monograph *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* (2006) that Roth's provocative style resists "bourgeois" mentalities in American culture (90-92). Elaine Safer explains in *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth* (2006) how Roth's humorous stance enables him to mock American culture, in particular its history and the "private obsessions of its denizens", exposing the "hypocrisies and foibles of our time" (15-16). Catherine Morley concludes in *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction: John Updike, Philip Roth and Don DeLillo* (2008) that "Roth's ironic epic of re-

turn and wrath engages with, consumes, and demythologizes the foundational myths of the American people” (114). A more recent view of Roth as an oppositional writer is presented by Aimee Pozorski in her study *Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later Works (1995-2010)* (2011). Pozorski maintains that Roth’s later work is informed by numerous tensions, which testify to “Roth’s powerful way to illuminate the failure of the American project overall” (9). Drawing on trauma theory, Pozorski shows how Roth’s later fiction consistently returns to the nation’s origins in the American Revolution in order to reveal the traumatic character of the American experiment (7-10). She places Roth firmly in a long tradition of oppositional writers who have denounced the ever-present gap between the utopian dream of America’s promise and the bleak realities of the present. Considered from such a perspective, Roth is fundamentally at odds with public representations of America’s foundational ideals, which tend to cloud the fact “that America is founded on fractious trauma” (12). For David Brauner, such evaluations entail a “canonization” of Philip Roth in the American non-conformist tradition (“Canonization” 488).

The common denominator of such a view is the presupposition that American writing at its best should assess whether American society lives up to its ideals and promises. As Bercovitch points out, there is a longstanding tradition in American Studies to represent American literature as oppositional writing. According to this scholarly consensus, which Bercovitch has termed the *hermeneutics of transcendence*, literary works transcend the boundaries set by the culture from which they emerge. In other words, the paradigm of the oppositional writer is based on the premise that the American artist can actually take a step back from the world he inhabits to scrutinise American society from a critical distance and to point out its virtues and its wrongs. By contrast, Bercovitch proposes, in what he considers to be a *hermeneutics of non-transcendence*, to refrain from an ideological celebration of transgression and to determine instead in which ways literary works both affirm and resist their ideological frameworks. He has questioned the once widely held assumption that writers can explore the culture they live in from such a detached position without being influenced by the ideologies that shape their cultural environment. For Bercovitch, this is not to disqualify the impressive amount of work by scholars writing in this oppositional tradition, but it is to rephrase the question of an artist’s relationship to the American Dream, also by building on the substantial work done by these critics. Instead of asking in what ways Roth’s work opposes the American ideology, it may be asked in how far it both affirms and resists the culture from which it originates. David Brauner’s observation that Roth’s historical novels represent American ideals in a very ambivalent manner serves as a starting point for such an analysis. As Brauner demonstrates, these novels both cele-

brate the “heroic feats of liberation” of the American Dream and denounce them at the same time as “futile fantasies of escape” (*Philip Roth* 151). Likewise, Brian J. McDonald argues that Roth’s later fiction represents not only a rejection of the American Dream, but also an “affirmative impulse” towards American democracy (Rev. of *Roth and Trauma* 211). From this perspective, Roth’s novels appear as “metaphorical sticks of dynamite”, with which he commits “acts of self-liberation” and which testify to a “definitive rupture with a larger community” (Brauner, *Philip Roth* 19). In a similar vein, Barbara Shostak contends that Roth’s *American Trilogy* is concerned with the meaning of America and that his fiction is informed by a mode of writing that transgresses cultural norms while at the same time taking these transgressions as its subject (*Philip Roth* 19). Consequently, it is necessary to rephrase the question: It is not so much Roth’s denouncements of the American Dream, but rather this uneasy paradox of cultural affirmation and rebellious resistance in his work that needs to be illuminated. The present study contends that the relationship between conformism and non-conformism in Roth’s work is an uneasy one, a relationship full of ambiguities, paradoxes and complexities.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct such a study by analyzing Roth’s massive oeuvre in its totality. Discussing recent studies from Shostak, Brauner, Posnock, and others, Gooblar concludes in his *The Major Phases of Philip Roth* (2011) that there is “extraordinary variety to be found within Roth’s work” and that it ultimately defies attempts to interpret it from a unifying perspective (4). Siding with Gooblar’s recent verdict, the present study does not attempt to submit Roth’s entire body of work to a totalizing interpretation which might override the diverse and heterogeneous nature of his writing. Instead, it seems more useful to interpret his work in a bottom-up approach by looking at selected works which are thematically related. This resembles Gooblar’s approach, who finds it useful to break “Roth’s career down into clusters of books” (6). Yet while Gooblar distinguishes chronological phases in Roth’s career, it is also possible to establish loose thematic relations. This approach is particularly suited for an analysis of the ideological relationships between his work and contemporary discourses in American society. Thus, the present study aims to offer an in-depth study of *I Married a Communist*, *Sabbath’s Theater*, and *Indignation*, which are all related in their thematic preoccupation with the American fifties and which participate in current socio-political discourses about the fifties – a thematic aspect of Roth’s fiction that has received little scholarly attention so far.¹ It will

¹ Roth’s portrayal of the American fifties in his later work has mostly been discussed with regard to *I Married a Communist*. Yet, a detailed analysis of its ideological function in Roth’s body of work is still lacking. For discussions of Roth’s treatment of the fifties in individual works see for instance Royal, “What to Make of Roth’s *Indignation*; Or, Seri-

demonstrate in which ways these novels participate in current discourses about the American fifties and how they address contemporary issues through a historical lens. It will proceed from detailed close readings of each novel to more general statements about the position of the novels in American culture by drawing on Sacvan Bercovitch's work on the American jeremiad.

Roth's later work is intriguingly preoccupied with American history and it is the main contention in this thesis that this preoccupation with key moments in American history demonstrates Roth's role as a literary, latter-day Jeremiah denouncing the evils of the present day while celebrating his own vision of a better America. Generally speaking, the American jeremiad is a mode of rhetoric that extolls the utopian virtues of the American Dream and condemns the failure of American society to realise these ideals. This allows the writer to participate in a specifically American mode of rhetoric and thereby to identify himself with the ideological denominators on which American society is founded. With *Sabbath's Theater*, *I Married a Communist*, and *Indignation*, Roth has written novels which are not just set in the American fifties, but which take this period in American history as their subject. The novels take part in contemporary discourses about the political and cultural significance of the fifties. They are novels in which history and the individual's place in it take centre stage. They are novels of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries which negotiate certain meanings of the American fifties. As this study contends, Roth appropriates the mythical status of the American fifties with regard to the American identity in order to make critical statements about present-day America. Building upon the rhetorical structure of the American jeremiad, Roth uses the American fifties to shed light on what he sees as the wrongs of the present and thus to light the path to a better, alternative America. Standing in a tradition of Jewish-American intellectuals, who feel that they are especially endowed with the ability to criticize American culture, Roth manages to transform generic conventions of Jewish writing into a Jewish-American mode of writing, thereby writing himself into American culture. His writing is therefore informed by a specific duality between affirmation and resistance to American culture. The observation that Roth has been writing jeremiads is not new² and has not

ous in the Fifties" (2009); Hornung, "The Personal is the Fictional: Philip Roth's Return to the 1950s in *I Married a Communist*" (2007); Hutchison, "'Purity is Petrefaction'" (2005); Hutchison, *Writing the Republic* (2007); Goldblatt, "The Whitening of the Jews and the Changing Face of Newark" (2006); Kinzel, *Die Tragödie und Komödie des amerikanischen Lebens* (2006); Schwartz, "Roth, Race, and Newark" (2005); Alexander, "American History, 1950-70, by Philip Roth" (2003).

² For attempts to apply Bercovitch's approach to Jewish-American literature, cf. Girgus, *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea* (1984) and Kramer, "Biblical Typology and the Jewish Imagination" (2011). As regards applications to the work of Philip Roth see Girgus, *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea* (1984)

always been a form of praise. For Krupnick, who considers his later novels since *Sabbath's Theater* to be jeremiads, this entails a loss of aesthetic quality. Among Roth's novels from the 1990s, he certainly favours *Sabbath's Theater* over the *American Trilogy*, which he criticises for being too laden with Roth's tendency "to preach cultural jeremiads" (30). In fact, he does not consider Roth a political writer at all and finds him "least interesting in his rants and homilies about the state of American culture" (49). Apart from critical asides such as Krupnick's, Sam B. Girgus's monograph *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea* (1984) contains the only systematic application of Sacvan Bercovitch's model to Philip Roth's body of work to date. He focusses on several Jewish-American writers and describes this tradition of the Jewish-American jeremiad as the *New Covenant*. According to Girgus, many Jewish intellectuals have found in the rhetorical genre of the jeremiad a way to participate in the American way and they have contributed in shaping it. These Jewish writers express "the condition and dilemma of the modern American" (13) through the rhetorical framework of the American jeremiad and in their work the Jewish hero becomes a representative of the modern man. Drawing on traditional Jewish literary motifs, the Jewish-American jeremiad usually takes the form of an urban novel in which the Jewish protagonist goes through an alienating confrontation with the idea of America. Emancipation, tolerance and individualism³ are the central tenets of this American promise for many American Jews. For some Jewish-American intellectuals, for instance Louis Brandeis, identifica-

and "The New Covenant' and the Dilemma of Dissensus: Bercovitch, Roth, and Doctorow" (1993). Ann Basu's more recent study *States of Trial: Manhood in Philip Roth's Post-War America* (2015) partly draws on Bercovitch's model of a ritual of consensus to investigate the relationship between American nationhood and masculinity in selected novels by Philip Roth.

³ The present study uses the term *individualism* in its original Tocquevillean sense as self-determination, i.e. as a freedom from constraints and the individual freedom to live one's life according to one's own conceptions (cf. Wasser 39-40). As Alexis de Tocqueville points out, "Providence has given to every human being the degree of reason necessary to direct himself in the affairs which interest him exclusively; such is the grand maxim upon which civil and political society rests in the United States" (Tocqueville, *Democracy I* 501). He defines the term individualism more specifically as "a novel expression, to which a novel idea has given birth. Our fathers were only acquainted with egotism. Egotism is a passionate and exaggerated love of self, which leads a man to connect everything with his own person, and to prefer himself to everything in the world. Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; [...] Individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to spread in the same ratio as the equality of conditions" (*Democracy II* 118-19). According to Fluck, Tocqueville's individualism is essentially a way of life that springs from American democracy and the principle of equality. It forces individuals, who no longer belong to social estates, to define their individual identities themselves (Fluck, "American Dream" 727).

tion with the American way has gone so far that they have represented it as a mirror image of traditional Jewish values such as human dignity or freedom (4-17). This Jewish-American tradition of the *New Covenant* is by no means the only path which Jewish immigrants have taken in the last century but according to Girgus, “the thinkers who are concerned about the American idea do represent the mainstream and most influential aspect of Jewish life and thought in America” (9). Philip Roth is a major representative of this tradition and Girgus identifies the “ghetto of the mind” as a recurring theme in Roth’s fiction (118). As a latter-day Jeremiah, he seeks to “help liberate people from the bonds and shackles that they put on themselves” (119). This ghetto mentality leads many Jewish-Americans to feel victimized and to indulge in self-pity, which limits their potential to achieve true freedom in America, and Roth denounces this state of mind in novels such as *Portnoy’s Complaint*, *My Life as a Man*, *The Ghost Writer*, or *Zuckerman Unbound* (122). This also means that Philip Roth’s life as a writer represents a specific kind of assimilation, whereby Jews have appropriated the myth of America. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, who in a recent preface to his influential *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* described Philip Roth as an author representing a specific Jewish-American mode of Americanization, these groups found a “distinctive way to shape America as they immersed themselves in it” (xix). Girgus focusses exclusively on Roth’s work after his “entrance into mainstream American culture” with *Portnoy’s Complaint*. Yet apart from Basu’s study on masculinity, no attempts have been made to apply Bercovitch’s approach to Roth’s later work. In the 1990s, the *American Trilogy* revived his literary career and Roth began focusing more on historical themes (Gooblar, *Major Phases* 8-9). Clearly, it remains to be seen whether Roth’s later work following this historical turn in his writing has transformed his preoccupation with this “ghetto mentality” or whether his concerns have shifted altogether to other subjects.

In sum, the present study contends that Philip Roth has continued writing Jewish-American jeremiads since the 1990s and that it is not enough to explain the thrust of these jeremiads only in terms of a Jewish-American “ghetto mentality”. His body of work may be studied in thematic clusters so that the impressive diversity in his work can be accounted for. In order to avoid generalizations, it is sensible to focus on one of these clusters and to demonstrate the specificity with which Roth’s novels participate in current discourses in American culture. Close readings of the individual texts will illuminate how these more recent novels are still pervaded by the rhetorical structure of the jeremiad and how this allows Roth to dramatize a specifically Jewish-American form of Americanization. By looking especially at the functions of fifties nostalgia in his novels, the present study will shed light on the means with which Roth appropriates American history as a form of

dissent in a typically Jewish-American idiom. It will attempt to illuminate the imaginative and cultural constraints that Roth contends with in his writing. Finally, this serves to demonstrate how the meanings of American history are negotiated between Roth and his readership.

1.1 The American Fifties

There is a widespread consensus among scholars that cultural representations of the American fifties⁴ frequently draw on nostalgic sentiments in American society.⁵ Many Americans perceive the decade as a simpler, happier time in which America was more innocent, in which there was more agreement about American values and which ended rather abruptly in the 1960s. Popular debate about this era still abounds in clichés and while the period continues to be a signifier of public nostalgia, scholars in recent decades have tried to unearth what has been termed “the other fifties”, highlighting the complexities and sometimes contradictory character of a formative period in American history. And while popular treatments of the subject such as David Halberstam’s *The Fifties* slowly begin to bring a more complex picture to the fore, Joel Foreman bemoans the fact that the overall impact of this revisionist project on popular culture has been very small. “From the perspective of this assessment, public understanding of the fifties is like the space behind a heavy door that the collective force of many scholars has only managed to set ajar”. On the other hand, this revisionist emphasis on conformity and Cold War ideology has in turn led to a scholarly movement that tends to underscore “the substantial manifestations of dissent and resistance” at that time (Foreman 1-3). The prevailing popularity of nostalgic representations of the American fifties in spite of the scholarly effort is probably due to the fact that nostalgia is an emotional approach to the past. It is also a highly attractive perspective in political rhetoric, because it establishes an emotional and highly suggestive contrast between the present and an imagined past. What is important for nostalgia is not so much the temporal distance between past and present, but the manner whereby we construct the past as a negative mirror image of the present. Thus, the origin of nostalgia for the past is usually a present event, mood or circumstance which determines the way we

⁴ The present study follows Fredric Jameson’s distinction between the historical period of the 1950s and its representation in popular culture, “the fifties” (519-20).

⁵ Nostalgia is a notoriously vague concept (Sprengler 1). For a brief history of the study of nostalgia see Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia* (2009), especially 11-37. For a general definition of the concept see Davis, “Nostalgia” (1977). For a useful analysis of nostalgia and its relationship to postmodernism see Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern” (1998). Cf. also Jameson, “Nostalgia” (1989).

construct our image of the past. According to Davis, nostalgia and its emotional recreation of the past is closely connected to the way we construct our identities. It is a way of affirming who we are (Davis 417-19). Sprengler, for whom nostalgia should not be defined exclusively in terms of an emotion, agrees that nostalgia is deeply embedded in our historical consciousness and the myths we construct about ourselves and our history (1-3). Consequently, fifties nostalgia can be understood as an ideological construct and it is therefore open to political appropriation.

In his study *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (2004), Daniel Marcus traces the historical development of fifties nostalgia, demonstrating that nostalgic representations of the fifties have usually served ideological purposes. It was in the late 1960s and the early 70s, when America lived through a phase of heightened fascination with the fifties, in spite of the fact that critics on the left were denouncing the decade as a time of repression, racism, and anti-communist paranoia. Youth movements such as rock and roll fans started this development by reclaiming popular icons from the 1950s. Elvis Presley was one of the iconic heroes of this revival, which led to a more general spread of fifties nostalgia in American society. Actors like Marlon Brando or James Dean came to be seen as rebel figures representative of the American way of life. Marilyn Monroe was the sex symbol of this celebrated earlier, more innocent era. The rebellious adolescent was the central protagonist of this revival (Marcus, D. 9-17) and so the “urban, male, white, working-class greaser” came to exemplify the youth culture of the 1950s, effectively superseding the iconic status of popular Beats such as Allen Ginsberg or Jack Kerouac (30-31). Teenage rebellion plays a special role in nostalgic representations of fifties culture and contemporary cultural representations of the fifties usually rely on the dichotomy between rebellion and conformity (Fallon and Hurm 9). Family sitcoms like *Happy Days* celebrated the fifties as a chapter in American history in which Americans enjoyed outstanding affluence and social security. The enormously successful sitcom played on simple nostalgia and allowed its audiences to indulge in carefree escapism, while it did not bother its consumers with the social and political conflicts that shook the United States in the 1950s (Marcus, D. 25-27). All in all, this revival remained a short-lived phenomenon, which had lost its appeal already by the end of the 1970s (35). Afterwards, the fifties have always been subject to a lively debate about the symbolic significance of this period within the nation’s cultural memory. Cultural appropriations of the fifties have often followed political purposes and today the period has become a “cultural shorthand” for a number of social and political developments (204). Since the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s, conservatives have been tapping the political potential of fifties nostalgia and have constructed a nostalgic image of

an age when the nuclear family was still intact, when citizens still enjoyed greater independence from the government, when the American economy was still booming and when the United States were actively fulfilling their moral imperative as a leading democratic superpower and a force of good. The sixties, on the contrary, have been held up as the ensuing national disaster that damaged family values permanently, turned social roles upside down and heralded an era of heedless self-indulgence. It was during the Reagan presidency with its calls for national renewal that this fantasy of a better America and its subsequent destruction in the following decade was elevated to a centrepiece of American conservative ideology (Marcus, D. 36-39). Addressing national apprehensions, this ideological offensive was revived by leading conservatives such as Newt Gingrich during the Clinton presidency in the 1990s and again after 9/11.⁶ Yet, as Daniel Marcus points out, the overall significance of fifties nostalgia has been somewhat mitigated by the increasing number of cultural appropriations of more recent decades and a declining number of voters interested in the period (191-94). But in spite of these recent developments, conservatives continue to use political nostalgia as a central element in their ideological agendas (205). This conservative narrative, which can “be summarized as a decline, fall, and renewal of American spirit, values, and power” was initially left largely unchallenged by Democratic politicians (117). Bill Clinton was the first Democratic president who tried to appropriate symbols and icons from the fifties and sixties, confronting the Republican position on its own terms. While being presented by the Bush campaign as a representative of the abuses of the sixties, Clinton managed to associate himself in the popular mind with Elvis Presley and John F. Kennedy. Conjuring up images of the two national heroes, the Clinton campaign created a narrative that placed Clinton’s policies in the cultural context of fifties and sixties nostalgia. Whereas the myth of Elvis Presley denoted a fulfilment of the American Dream and a national reconciliation bridging the gaps of race and class, John F. Kennedy could be made to stand for the lost redeemer president who had finally found his true successor in Bill Clinton (150-59). Daniel Marcus concludes that “Elvis and JFK provide the Democratic answers to the Republicans’ national chronology of 1950s normality, 1960s deviance and trauma, 1970s hangover and stagnation, 1980s return to health and glory. Elvis explodes the narrow definition of the 1950s put forward by Reagan, creating opportunities to link the disruptive Democrats to the best of the 1950s through the history of rock and roll” (165). Bush’s response to Clinton’s successful campaign was to associate himself with former president Truman, but this invocation of America’s

⁶ And more recently, one might add, this nostalgic vision of postwar America was also a key element of the Trump campaign in the 2016 presidential election.

heroic Cold Warrior backfired and made Bush seem out of touch with contemporary America (Marcus, D. 168). The 1992 election thus proved a milestone in the history of fifties nostalgia. For the first time, a Democratic president succeeded in appropriating a cultural icon from the 1950s for his campaign, while the Republicans failed to re-establish the conservative narrative that had been so successfully implemented by Ronald Reagan. The fifties finally became a positive point of reference for both political camps, although the conservative definition of the rise and fall of American greatness in the fifties and sixties was successfully reasserted by politicians like Newt Gingrich and Rush Limbaugh in the second half of the 1990s when Clinton's popularity waned. Today, in a post-9/11 world, the fifties remain a contested site of ideological struggle (202-5).

In her study *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (2005), Mary Caputi analyses the ways in which "the mythical fifties" have been appropriated and engaged by neoconservatives and scholars from the left and arrives at similar conclusions. According to Caputi, this ideological struggle over the true place of the fifties in American culture bespeaks a general uncertainty about the meaning of America and the role of collective melancholia in American political rhetoric. Working with a different theoretical framework, based on definitions of melancholia by Julia Kristeva and Walter Benjamin, Mary Caputi relates a similar narrative about the ways conservatives since the Reagan Revolution have tried to appropriate fifties nostalgia to promote their policies. She considers the fifties a metaphor which signifies "who we are and what we stand for" (4). Conservatives tend to associate the fifties with economic prosperity, intact family values and, in more general terms, a happier age. Most importantly, in the hands of conservatives the fifties become a stable model of American identity at a time when American culture is filled with postmodern uncertainties. The paintings of Norman Rockwell encapsulate this conservative vision of the "true" America, which was supposedly lost in the disruptive sixties and which needs to be recuperated (3-10). Caputi argues that it was mainly America's economic prosperity and its status as a global superpower fighting communism that allowed conservative politicians to identify this seemingly better America with the fifties. America's moral superiority over the godless Soviets coincided with an economic boom that seemed to validate the American way of life as universal. Retrospectively, America still seemed to be able to live up to its promises in the fifties, although such a view overlooks the fact that individual opportunity and social mobility were not available to all the diverse strata of American society, but mainly to the white middle-class (11-18). The promise of regaining predictability and control over one's life underlies this conservative desire to relocate the American identity in a Rockwellian version of the fifties. In contrast to "the sometimes bewildering

fragmentation and vaunted diversity highlighted in contemporary American life”, the fifties may represent “the homogeneity, the accord, the like-mindedness” as well as the “orderliness and predictability of many a 1950s sitcom rerun, wherein Dad proclaims ‘Honey, I’m home!’ and hangs up his hat” (Caputi 22). According to Caputi, this longing for a lost sense of control can be explained with a strong strain of melancholia that runs deeply through contemporary American society.

Yet while Caputi’s treatment of the conservative uses of fifties nostalgia concurs with Marcus’s extensive study to some extent, her discussion of the ways in which the political left has engaged this conservative myth-making differs significantly from Marcus’s account. Whereas Marcus is mainly interested in fifties nostalgia in popular culture and politics, Caputi mostly focusses on leftist scholars and their revisionist histories of the American fifties, which shed light on issues such as racism, homophobia, and paranoia (23). She observes that an influential part of the American cultural left rejects the view that the fifties may serve as a foundation for America’s identity (26-27). Caputi has been criticized for her somewhat simplistic treatment of the subject, aligning participants in this debate about the cultural value of the fifties either on the right or on the left, effectively levelling any differences among conservatives for instance (Lane 748-49). It nevertheless seems safe to say that, as an effective way of using popular culture to justify their policies, politicians have employed nostalgic notions of a better America in the past decades.

1.2 Symbolic Convergence Theory

The present study presupposes that our everyday lives are shaped by rhetoric in fundamental ways. This goes far beyond a description of rhetorical strategies in human discourse. It is assumed that rhetoric permeates not only human communication in its diverse forms, but also the ways in which human beings try to make sense of themselves and the world they live in. Among the almost inexhaustible number of communication theories explaining how communication works, *Symbolic Convergence Theory* (SCT)⁷ is particularly well suited for the present analysis, since it is a widely used

⁷ For standard works on symbolic convergence theory see Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision” (1972) and *The Force of Fantasy* (1985). Good and concise overviews of SCT are provided by Cragan and Shields, *Symbolic Theories* (1995) and Bormann, Cragan and Shields, “Three Decades” (2001). For a survey of major criticism of SCT see Cragan and Shields, *Symbolic Theories* (1995) 190-98, and Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, “Defending Symbolic Convergence Theory” (2003). For a brief discussion of the discipline’s history see Ball, “Ernest G. Bormann” (2001).

communication theory belonging to the symbolic paradigm of applied communication research. According to this paradigm, human beings tend to create shared symbolic realities which provide them with meaning, allow them to share emotions and offer motives as well as justifications for their actions (Cragan and Shields 30). As a communication theory, SCT provides a proven model of how rhetorical patterns are disseminated from smaller rhetorical communities to societies or nation states. In contrast to other applied communication theories from the symbolic paradigm, SCT stands out as the one that has been applied to Puritan rhetoric.⁸ First and foremost, *Symbolic Convergence Theory* is a theory of communication explaining “the way in which messages are transmitted from small groups, to public speeches, to mass media, and eventually, to the larger public” (Ball 217). It has been widely applied by researchers working in various fields such as rhetorical studies, political science, marketing communication, forensics, public opinion polling, and history.⁹ Thus, it may serve to support Sacvan Bercovitch’s claim that the American jeremiad, originally a Puritan mode of rhetoric, became the nucleus of a uniquely American rhetorical structure which has pervaded every stratum of American society to the present day. The basic tenets of the SCT approach provide a valuable model of communication for Sacvan Bercovitch’s containment/subversion-theory of American dissent. It allows to explain how the rhetorical structure of the jeremiad penetrates American society and how the various symbols of the American ideology are disseminated.

SCT assumes that all human discourse, regardless of time and place, is informed by a process whereby groups create common fantasies. This claim is based on the premise that human beings usually tend to explain events by recourse to human agency. Consequently, the fantasies people engage in always contain human (or quasi-human) protagonists and antagonists, each with traits and motivations that allow identification (Bormann, *Force* 9). A fantasy in this sense constitutes “the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfil a psychological or rhetorical need” (5) and serves to provide a coherent explanation through simplification of an otherwise complex or unclear state of affairs. The theory presupposes that such fantasies “permeate” human communication in settings ranging from everyday conversations to more sophisticated forms such as literary narrative. Successful fantasies, i.e. fantasies which are shared by a growing number of individuals, are disseminated among larger groups of people through a process that analysts

⁸ See Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision” (1972) and *The Force of Fantasy* (1985). In the latter, Bormann traces the development of the American tradition of Romantic pragmatism in American culture from its colonial beginnings to the Civil War.

⁹ See Ball, “Ernest G. Bormann: Roots, Revelations, and Results of Symbolic Convergence Theory” (2001) 223; cf. also Shields and Preston, “Fantasy Theme Analysis in Competitive Rhetorical Criticism” (1985) 109-15.

call *chaining out*. Fantasies which *chain out* produce a chain reaction among the participants of the discourse, which increases the speed of the conversation, arouses general excitement, causes more frequent interruptions among speakers and makes the participants show more emotion. Fantasies may also *chain out* among larger groups of people via literary texts, the media and other public formats (Ball 219). *Chaining out* may occur in all forms of human discourse and key elements of this process are always the reiteration of symbols, their embellishment and reconfiguration in new contexts as well as the creation of *symbolic cues* that serve as “shorthands” for the entire fantasy among insiders (Bormann et al., “Three Decades” 283). Fantasies usually emerge in small group communication before they are accessed by larger groups of people, for instance via public speeches, and picked up by the mass media (290). Bormann defines the content of such communication as the *fantasy theme*. When participants begin to share and develop common symbols in such a manner, *symbolic convergence* is taking place – a common symbolic reality is created. Regardless of its scale, *symbolic convergence* involves sharing of common emotions and values (Bormann, *Force* 5-12). The underlying assumptions important in this context are that “reality is created symbolically” (Ball 219) and that such group fantasies are joint creations of rhetorical communities (Bormann et al., “Three Decades” 273). Analysts find evidence of symbolic convergence by analysing how such diverse forms as “wordplay, narratives, figures, and analogies” are disseminated “in different contexts”. Such evidence often takes the form of the *symbolic cue* that may spark the same responses as the initial fantasy without an entire retelling of the *fantasy theme*. *McCarthyism* is such a cue that evokes a whole set of narratives, emotions and values (Bormann, *Force* 6), but of course such symbolic cues are not restricted to lexical items and may either be verbal or non-verbal (Cragan and Shields 36).

When symbolic convergence involves large groups of people sharing a common symbolic reality, a *rhetorical vision* emerges. Symbolic realities of this type comprise whole sets of fantasies and are usually “composite” visions in the sense that many individuals have been involved in creating them. Prominent examples include the Cold war rhetorical vision or the concept of the American frontier (39-41). Rhetorical visions have their plots, heroes, antagonists, and sets of key values. Individuals “may share several rhetorical visions providing social realities for such things as hobbies, politics, intimate relationships, and religion”, but they may also participate in “all-encompassing and impelling” rhetorical visions that “permeate an individual’s social reality in all aspects of living” (Bormann, *Force* 8). Alluding to any one of these elements or *symbolic cues* may cause the same reactions among participants as the initial fantasy. In this way, rhetorical visions help creating collective identities (Ball 219). Active participation of every member in the form

of reiteration, reconfiguration or embellishment is the key to symbolic convergence and thus to the creation of an identity that may successfully legitimize human action (Bormann et al., “Three Decades” 285). In this sense, the American jeremiad, a key rhetorical structure of the American ideology, can be conceived as a stable rhetorical vision constitutive of the American identity (Bormann, *Force* 257n.7). It is interesting to note that researchers have demonstrated the overall superiority of “artistic fantasy themes” over inartistic ones. This bespeaks the key function of the imagination and of literature in particular for the formation of symbolic convergence on a large scale. Consequently, lack of rhetorical “artistry” may be one cause of failure when fantasies do not succeed in creating collective identities. Other causes may be a lack of “reality links”, of novelty, of access to the media, or the success of other, competing symbolic realities (Bormann et al., “Three Decades” 291-293).¹⁰ Accordingly, the political narratives about the fifties and the sixties can be understood as competing *rhetorical visions*. In fact, the development of fifties nostalgia from a revival movement *chaining out* among youth groups, before turning into a nationwide celebration of cultural icons contributing to the American collective identity, may represent a case in point.

1.3 The Containment-Subversion-Theory of American Dissent

Investigating how fifties nostalgia is negotiated¹¹ in American literature is to enter the realm of ideology. Few Americanists have influenced ideological

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that current research on neurological processing of narrative has recently produced fascinating empirical evidence for the human ability to share narratives collectively. As Hasson et al. have demonstrated, communicating narratives successfully to other people can trigger a peculiar synchronization of brain activity among participants of the conversation. It seems that this potential of narrative is quite independent from the language in which the narrative is communicated. One study even suggests that rhetorically more elaborate narratives may be more likely to cause such a synchronization of brain activity. These findings are quite significant with respect to SCT, because SCT has long postulated a synchronization of human behavior when narratives are shared collectively. See Hasson et al., “Engaged listeners: shared neural processing of powerful political speeches” (2015) and Hasson et al., “Not Lost in Translation: Neural Responses Shared Across Languages” (2012).

¹¹ The term ‘negotiation’ has achieved a certain popularity since the ‘historicist turn’ of the 1980s and implies a reciprocal process of exchanging meanings between reader, text, context and author in which the interpretation of a text is ‘negotiated’. This rejects the idea that there is a straightforward relationship between “the text as fictional foreground and the context as real background”, claiming with Derrida that the context is as much interpretable text as the fiction itself (Volkman 332-33, cf. also Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 114).

approaches to American literature as much as Sacvan Bercovitch.¹² When in the 1960s a new generation of Americanists began to revise the ideas and concepts developed by their predecessors, a new paradigm in American Studies was in the making. From its very inception, Sacvan Bercovitch played an important part in the shaping of this new paradigm which broke with the widespread ideological consensus of the myth-and-symbol era. Apart from significant institutional changes, this new paradigm involved a new interest in developing ideological approaches to American culture. Since then the study of ideology and how it is negotiated in American literature has become a cornerstone of academic research. “The New Americanists”, as they were called in a much-cited essay by Frederick Crews (68), attacked both the established traditions of the New Critics and the myth-and-symbol school for their alleged neglect of ideological concerns. At that time, ideology was still a derogatory term applied only to “less accomplished” writers or works (Jehlen 2-3). Alongside this rejection went a longstanding belief that the United States were essentially a country without an ideology (Bercovitch, “Afterword” 420). Yet in hindsight, the underlying presupposition of these views itself appears to have been ideological, because it defined the American canon as subversive literature (428). Good American literature was expected to denounce the disappointing realities in American society and to praise the promises of an ideal America, which was seen as the utopian embodiment of self-reliance, individualism and freedom. According to Bercovitch and other New Americanists, this perspective only reiterated uncritically the central tenets of the dominant ideological consensus, which celebrated such virtues as exceptional characteristics of American culture. Nowadays, a critical scrutiny of the American ideology forms a central part of Americanist approaches (*RA* 354-55).

This paradigm change necessitated a non-pejorative concept of ideology that could replace earlier definitions such as Marx’s influential concept of ideology as false consciousness and his model of cultural artifacts as mere superstructures reflecting an economic base.¹³ The concept of ideology advocated by the *New Americanists* acknowledges by contrast “the shaping in-

¹² General discussions of Bercovitch’s key concepts are Fuller, *Emerson’s Ghosts* (2007) 122-146, Colatrella, “Bercovitch’s Paradox” (1994) 229-50, and Alkana, *Cohesion* (1994) ix-xxi. For more critical evaluations of Bercovitch’s work see Claviez, “Dimensioning Society” (1995) 173-205, Gura, “What Hath Bercovitch Wrought?” (1993) 562-68, Harlan, “A People Blinded from Birth” (1991) 949-71, Pease, “New Americanists” (1990) 1-37, and Crews, “Whose American Renaissance” (1988) 68-81.

¹³ Cf. Eagleton, *Ideology* 71-83. Like Bercovitch (*PI* 639-40) and Jehlen (5-6), he criticizes Marx and Engels for assuming that the relationship between economic base and ideological superstructure is a one-way road in the sense that our social circumstances determine our thinking. This negates the power ideas may exert on our everyday lives (Eagleton, *Ideology* 73).

fluence of rhetoric on reality” (*PI* 639) and “denies the possibility of objective knowledge” as such (Jehlen 6). Following thinkers like Antonio Gramsci, Karl Mannheim, Raymond Williams and Clifford Geertz, ideology is redefined as an inescapable system of thought, rather than a form of false consciousness.¹⁴ Drawing on the Gramscian concept of consensual rule through cultural hegemony (*AJ* xiii; cf. Gramsci 204-5) and Clifford Geertz’s anthropological approach to the interpretation of culture as thick description (*PI* 641), Bercovitch gives a comprehensive definition of ideology in his influential essay “The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History”:

In the broad sense in which I use the term here (in conjunction with the term “America”), ideology is the system of interlinked ideas, symbols, and beliefs by which a culture – any culture – seeks to justify and perpetuate itself; the web of rhetoric, ritual, and assumption through which society coerces, persuades, and coheres. So considered, ideology is basically conservative; but it is not therefore static or simply repressive. As Raymond Williams points out, ideology evolves through conflict, and even when a certain ideology achieves dominance, it still finds itself contending to one degree or another with the ideologies of residual and emergent cultures within the society – contending, that is, with alternative and oppositional forms that reflect the course of historical development. In this process, ideology functions best through voluntary acquiescence, when the network of ideas through which the culture justifies itself is internalized rather than imposed, and embraced by society at large as a system of belief. Under these conditions, which Antonio Gramsci described as “hegemony”, the very terms of cultural restriction become a source of creative release. (*PI* 635)

According to Bercovitch, the American ideology is a hegemony in the Gramscian sense, justifying the particular way of life and the values of the American middle-class through a dominant cultural consensus of shared values, ideas and symbols (*PI* 644-45). It consists of a powerful cultural symbology, whose development from colonial New England to the present Bercovitch has traced in various works and which takes the form of an ongoing debate about the meaning of its central symbol “America”. As a powerful form of cultural hegemony, the American ideology fosters, shapes, and incorporates radical dissent. This symbolic system absorbs any kind of radical protest that might threaten the system itself by giving it a specific rhetorical shape (*RA* 49-51). It even encourages dissent within certain boundaries, but only to restrict it to a debate about the meaning of “America”, whereby dissenters decry the perpetual gap between the real and the ideal “America”. In doing so, they actually reaffirm the culture they seek to undermine, because any kind of protest outside the symbolic system of the American ideology seems to be inconceivable (365-67). True subversion is always contained by the all-embracing ideology of “America” as an exceptional nation with an errand, which helps to sustain the dominance of liberalism and American

¹⁴ A useful overview of the conceptual history is provided by Jehlen, “Introduction: Beyond Transcendence” (1986), in particular 10-15.

middle-class society. American culture thus integrates all forms of dissent into the symbol of “America”. Broadly speaking, this integration forestalls radical alternatives to the status quo and translates complex realities into sets of binary oppositions that derive from the duality between the American way as utopia and the real America as dystopia (RA 183-85). Bercovitch shows for instance how Martin Luther King, instead of dismissing the American Way altogether, denounced racism as un-American and celebrated the Civil Rights movement as the true “America” (366). Similarly, Melville juxtaposes two different kinds of individualism in *Moby Dick*: Ahab’s extreme, misguided and un-American individualism against Ishmael’s good and truly American one (192).

The rhetorical framework of this process, which restructures radical thought into sets of symbolic oppositions emanating from the symbol “America”, is provided by a specific type of Puritan rhetoric: the American jeremiad. The American jeremiad is a particular genre of religious discourse, a political sermon taking its name from the Biblical prophet Jeremiah. The original, scriptural jeremiad is a lament of society’s apostasy and prophesies the restoration of the Israelites to their promised land. Characteristically, Jeremiah presents the fulfilment of Israel’s promise as the purpose of history (AJ 31). Having derived their own rhetorical mode from Biblical and European models, the Puritans adapted this rhetoric for their own needs in the New World and bequeathed this rhetorical legacy to successive generations of Americans. In this way, the jeremiad has been sustaining the American Dream for several hundred years (xi). The rhetoric of the jeremiad has proven flexible enough to undergo significant changes, allowing adaptations for other times, places and purposes. Its structure is closely connected to the Puritan concept of an “errand into the wilderness”. As God’s chosen people, the Puritans felt that it was their divine errand to become a Christian role-model prefiguring God’s rule on earth in a New Jerusalem. If New England did not stray from the divine path, then Christ’s Second Coming would be the fulfilment of their covenant with God. It was this belief in their national election that made them transform the traditional structure of the European jeremiad into something new. The traditional Old World jeremiad had been mainly a lament denouncing the wrongdoings of fellow believers while threatening with God’s inevitable punishment. The Puritans inverted the traditional genre from a promise of vengeance into a vision of a better world. A unique sense of mission was added as an additional ingredient to the traditional form of the jeremiad. This idea of a national purpose promised the advent of a New Jerusalem, if society remained true to its errand. They regarded God’s punishments as mere “correctives” to bring them back on the right path of their destined errand and towards salvation (7-9). This duality, lamenting the present and celebrating a better future, has been a constant in the long history of

the genre. In its original seventeenth-century form, the American jeremiad consisted of a tripartite structure: ideal (a precedent from scripture defines the behavioural norm) – reality (condemnations denounce deviations from the norm) – resolution (the promises of better things to come). Its purpose has always been to remind the chosen people of their errand and the behavioural norms that would enable them to become a new Israel on earth. The jeremiad has always depended upon this disparity between the bleak realities of the present and the behavioural norms that are supposed to signal the advent of millennium in the future (15-17). This powerful sense of mission has lent itself well to the development of an ideological consensus in American society based on the rhetorical structure of the American jeremiad.

It has also succeeded in integrating related concepts as well. From its beginnings, the Puritan concept of migration was closely associated with the idea of a divine errand and could thus be incorporated into this rhetoric. The Puritans' departure from the depraved Old World signalled the future fulfilment of the divine promise, which justified their violent expansion into Native American territory (*RA* 32-33). Whereas the Puritans denounced Europe as the Old World awaiting its redemption by the works of Christ in America, the New World was the second paradise foreseen by the prophets and kept hidden for the arrival of the elect nation (76). A concept of representative selfhood helped mediate between the conflicts inherent in an unrestrained individualism on the one hand and much needed discipline on the other hand. The common enterprise in America was defined as a personal pilgrimage for every individual, allowing believers to assert themselves by identification with the common undertaking. Hence, individual success was interpreted as communal progress on this divine path. This success was not only a question of pious or morally acceptable behaviour; it was also a matter of material gain. The Puritan venture was both sacred and secular, since the Puritans had brought to the New World the seeds of the modern capitalist order, believing that material prosperity was a sign of divine election.¹⁵ In short, the Puritan concept of a divine errand promised the Kingdom of God in America, if they managed to remain true to their beliefs and to renew Christendom. Pious behaviour and individual prosperity were interpreted as divine signs of their success on this path. Consequently, this errand provided a powerful incentive for individuals to identify themselves with this errand

¹⁵ Bercovitch follows Max Weber's theory that the peculiar Puritan (i.e. Calvinist) belief in predestination produced a unique work ethic, which has lent itself perfectly well to the development of modern capitalism. Calvin defined professional calling and material prosperity as signs of predestined election, paving the way for a work ethic that furthered the rise of capitalist structures in early modern societies. Cf. Rublack, "Reformation und Moderne. Soziologische, theologische und historische Ansichten" (1993) 20.

and to reinvent themselves as successful representatives of a chosen people bound to make the world a better place.

Building on the disparity between reality and ideal, the vision of this errand produced a constant anxiety, because the future fulfilment of the promise depended on continual improvement of the present (*RA* 32-35). The later descendants of New England transformed the jeremiad into a ritual of social discipline which established a certain continuity (79). It allowed dissenters of various origins to assert themselves as the visionary Jeremiahs exposing the gaps between reality and their own visions of a utopian “America”, in order to ensure that it would fulfil its promise someday. Therefore, forms of American dissent or radicalism are usually framed by an ideological structure deriving from the imagined opposition between the real and the ideal “America”. The generation of the first settlers brought this rhetoric to America and their children and grandchildren americanised it. Looking back in reverence to their newly sanctified heroes, later generations of Americans also participated in this ideological consensus. They evoked their forebears in a process of “generational rededication” to the common cause and the same process was repeated after the Revolution (80-87).

This legacy underwent remarkable changes during the eighteenth century. First, during the *Great Awakening* and later in the course of the revolution, the rhetoric of the jeremiad was reinterpreted under the influence of American liberalism. The concept of a common errand was no longer confined to the New England theocracy, now it comprised the entire nation. The Enlightenment idea of liberal progress replaced the concept of a Protestant renewal as the new cause of the American errand. This inclusion of liberal values such as individualism significantly changed the Puritan concept of representative selfhood (*RA* 36-37). The errand, whereby individuals could define themselves as representatives of a common undertaking, was no longer defined in exclusively scriptural terms, but came to be considered as a movement towards progress as “limitless, secular self-improvement” (147). Economic reform, liberalism and nationalism were justified as the new norms that would propel God’s chosen nation towards its destiny. This helped provide a rhetorical framework for the American Revolution (156-57). In this context, the Revolution was interpreted as the enactment or the final stage of the divine plan. Moreover, by defining liberalism as the providential goal of American culture, the American ideology helped maintain the social and political status quo, i.e. the dominance of a liberal middle-class society. Independence of both the individual and the nation became the new behavioural norm of representative selfhood, which encouraged Americans to identify themselves with the common purpose and to reinvent themselves as materially and personally independent representatives of the American Way. Achieving independence, not only nationally but also individually, mentally

and materially, was interpreted as evidence of America's progress. Independence in all its various forms was supposed to further America's progress towards the fulfilment of its destiny. The American Revolution thus saw the birth of a secularised ideological consensus. Having transformed its purely religious meanings, the Puritan vision became the cornerstone of the myth of America. America's destiny was no longer to bring about Christ's Second Coming but to lead mankind to perfection. Again, this concept helped sustain a liberal middle-class society which valued everything this new America was supposed to signify, i.e. material, scientific, and democratic progress. According to Bercovitch, it was unthinkable to abandon this vision of national purpose by turning to radical alternatives (*RA* 38-43) such as socialist experiments.¹⁶ Like the Puritan venture, the pursuit of happiness, canonized in *The Declaration of Independence*, became a public and a private enterprise, the cornerstone of this ideology. Since the individual pursuit of happiness was seen as a mirror image of America's progress, the ideology gave Americans sufficient motivation and justification for their actions. American individualism became an essential part of the concept of representative selfhood. By reinventing themselves as self-made Americans, they could believe that they were furthering the national errand. Consequently, the redemption of mankind seemed to depend on the continual struggle for the independence and happiness of every American citizen, which essentially constituted a consecration of democratic capitalism in religious rhetoric (42-43). Americans reinvented themselves as representatives of the American Way, as rebels opposing betrayals of the Founding Fathers in an ongoing ritual of generational rededication based on the rhetoric of the American jeremiad.

Albeit transformed into a more secularized form, the jeremiad remained the basic rhetorical structure of this ideological consensus in American society (*RA* 160). Numerous revolutionary Jeremiahs reinterpreted the past in the light of progress and liberalism. The Puritan settlement came to be regarded as "the sacred point of origin" in this democratic American experiment, leading up to its glorious "climax" in the *War of Independence* (164). Revolution became the goal of history, the gold standard defining all other events of the American experience. The generation following the Revolution completed this process of adaptation by venerating the heroes of the Revolution as "saints" and the *Declaration of Independence* as the "Sermon of the Mount" (163-65). Already by 1815, the first Jeremiahs warned that Americans should

¹⁶ Bercovitch clearly subscribes to the influential theory that American socialism was never able to get a solid foothold in the United States, because such radicalism was inhibited by the pervasive dominance of a liberal American ideology promoting individualism. Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955) is a classic example of this outlook. For a critical perspective on this theory and alternative explanations, see Foner, "Why is there no Socialism in the United States?" (1984).

not stray from the preordained path and justified their various demands by presenting their own “vision of the American Revolution” (RA 173). Nourishing anxieties, these self-styled prophets offered the perfection of mankind as the accomplishment of the national mission on the one hand and threatened with failure in the most apocalyptic tones on the other hand. Anxieties that America might fail its national errand to embody “the last, best hope of mankind” propelled the nation forward in this inescapable ritual of consensus. The celebrated writers of the *American Renaissance*, for instance Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau or Melville, represent for Bercovitch the aesthetic pinnacle that these ideological developments enabled (60-61).

This ideological consensus has continued to dominate American culture in the 20th and even the 21st century.¹⁷ According to Bercovitch, the counter-culture movement of the 1960s is a remarkable instance of the containment of subversive energies (RA 64). And as the present study will show, the rhetorical structure of this ideological consensus is still alive and kicking in Roth’s late twentieth-century fiction. This is probably not very surprising, since the diverse facts of American history are in constant need of reinterpretation according to the ideological norms of this consensus. And such reinterpretation is still being supplied by literary Jeremiahs such as Philip Roth. Essentially, the American consensus is an exercise in “exegesis”: in order to take part in this ideological consensus, each individual learns to interpret America in a certain way. The common denominator of this outlook is the belief in America’s destiny. In spite of all their differences and sometimes even mutually contradicting perspectives, millions of dissenters all celebrate the idea of an American mission by drawing on the same pool of symbols, values and beliefs. Participation in this debate about the ‘true’ meaning of “America” constitutes an act of socialization (29-30), because affirmation of the consensus always implies self-affirmation. Thus, the individual “pursuit of happiness” furthers the fulfilment of America’s promise, as Bercovitch demonstrates with regard to classic works of the *American Renaissance*.

His methodological approach combines traditions of historical and aesthetic interpretation of literary texts. While he follows the *New Critics* in their insistence on close scrutiny of the text and an appreciation of the literary artefact as an aesthetic whole, he follows the *myth-symbol-tradition* in his emphasis on a contextual reading of literary texts. In his study *The Office of the Scarlet Letter*, he demonstrates how such a combination of textual and cultural criticism may produce a powerful interpretation of Hawthorne’s classic text. Bercovitch believes that *The Scarlet Letter* is essentially a text

¹⁷ Cf. Bercovitch, “The Myth of America” (2006), in which he argues that even in the post-9/11 world of the internet generation, there is still no end in sight of the American ideological consensus (368).

about socialisation into American society, about learning to live according to the norms of the American ideological consensus. The central symbol, the eponymous letter, signifies Hester's process of socialisation (Bercovitch, *Office* xiii-v), while the text of the novel itself serves to socialise the reader (91-93). Bercovitch shows how the text invites the reader to "co-produce" its meaning through a deliberate strategy of symbolic ambiguity and textual gaps. The impossibility to choose a single, definite interpretation of the various symbols leads to the awareness that none of the offered explanations in the text is entirely satisfactory. And this encourages the reader to entertain different perspectives simultaneously. Readers are confronted with a pluralistic view of the truth(s) and have to develop their own individual interpretations. Yet, while the text opens up by offering the reader different choices, it also forecloses certain readings. For example, the diverse radical possibilities the protagonist may have as a social rebel are forestalled by representing her conflict as an opposition between the dominant society and her unrestrained self (Bercovitch, *Office* 23-30). In the end, this conflict is resolved when the protagonist asserts her individualism in the service of society (*RA* 214-15). Consequently, the text is a site of socialisation into the liberal, individualist values of the American way. Bercovitch claims that Hawthorne's novel is a representative exemplar of the way literature negotiates ideological imperatives (*RA* 196). First of all, literary texts are sites of socialization. Secondly, Bercovitch's American consensus is "an ideology of interpretation" – i.e. it requires its members to participate actively in the interpretation of its central symbol "America". Consenting is interpreting, a process that "the end of *The Scarlet Letter* dramatizes" and that entails socialisation (Budick 52-53). Thirdly, individualism is a central tenet of any mode of American oppositionalism: dissenters tend to assert themselves as strangers or prophets, rebels or revolutionaries, lawbreakers or truth-seekers etc. Therefore, American dissent usually takes the form of radical individualism. "America" is an ambiguous symbol, providing its believers with the opportunity to stand up for their own visions of "America". Yet, total fragmentation of meaning is held in check by the rhetorical frame of the liberal consensus: never does the debate leave the orbit of its central symbol "America". This convinces Bercovitch of the peculiar place radicalism inhabits in American society: It is consecrated by religious tropes, defined through pluralist ambiguities and interpreted through the lens of American liberalism. Radicalism serves to uphold the consensus and thus the status-quo (*RA* 215-16).

Apart from these general claims about how Hawthorne's text is embedded in the American ideology, Bercovitch analyses the relationship between text and context also more specifically. He illuminates how nineteenth-century American discourses on the dangers of European feminism resonate in the narrative by drawing on historical sources and Hawthorne's biog-

raphy. Hawthorne, it seems, was quite critical of the women's movement, which had originated in Europe alongside socialism. The American Civil War provides an equally important context for Bercovitch's analysis (*Office* 78-87). Yet, the key subtext of the novel is the American Revolution. The novel links the diverse historical events of three different stages in American history – Puritanism, the Revolution and the mid-nineteenth century – in “a historical chain of providences” (*RA* 237-38). Having recontextualised *The Scarlet Letter*, Bercovitch identifies a deep anxiety in Hawthorne's writing which echoes key questions of his time. In sum, *The Scarlet Letter* testifies to the fact that text and context are reciprocal. Bercovitch's analysis shows that while Hawthorne's classic romance cannot be properly understood without contextual knowledge, the structure of the American ideology cannot be explained without reference to the ways in which literary texts such as *The Scarlet Letter* serve as sites of socialization (*RA* 243-44). Hence, both aspects of literary analysis, the formal and the ideological, are according to Bercovitch essential elements of the work of the literary critic.

1.4 The American Jeremiad and Fifties Nostalgia

Bercovitch's far-reaching claims have been debated by historians and literary critics alike. In particular in some early reactions to his work, he is criticized for his treatment of Puritanism, for perpetuating the idea that the Puritans are to be held responsible for everything that went wrong in American history (Gura 564). Most prominent is David Harlan's charge that Bercovitch simplifies the complexities of history, flattening “American culture to a single dimension” and presenting his readers with a historical narrative “stripped of differences and drained of nuances, a history with little variation and no possibilities” (957, 964). Gura, albeit criticising Harlan's sentimental notions about the moral values of Puritan literature, agrees by and large with Harlan's view that American history and Puritan culture in particular may be more complex than Bercovitch's model allows (565). Although Bercovitch's portrayal of New England society may seem reductive and simplistic with regard to certain historical details from this vantage point, this need not necessarily invalidate his containment/subversion-theory of a rhetorical consensus based on the Puritan tradition of dissent, namely the jeremiad. Other critics have interpreted Bercovitch's containment/subversion-theory as just another expression of American exceptionalism. Pease rejects Bercovitch's “oppositional model, beginning with his notion of the jeremiad” as politically ineffective. He points out that Bercovitch defuses the political impetus of the *New American Studies* by labelling any form of oppositional criticism as consensus rhetoric (22-23). From this perspective, *The American Jeremiad*

itself appears to be just a piece of the Cold War ideology it claims to expose (Pease 28-29). Alluding to Mannheim's work about ideology as a non-pejorative concept, Colatrella coins the term "Bercovitch's paradox" to describe this problem (229). This is a "partly generational, and partly political" perspective, as Weber remarks. The main issue seems to be whether American Studies should be considered some form of social action (369), as revisionists of the *New Americanist* project such as Pease demand, or whether this view is part of an outdated tradition of oppositional criticism in American Studies (RA 17). The methodological debate thus foregrounds a long-standing controversy about the aims and objectives of American Studies. In a recent essay, Winfried Fluck demonstrates how this debate emerges from a common Americanist paradigm that focusses exclusively on the question whether American literature is subversive or not. In this light, Americanists like Matthiessen, Bercovitch, and Pease all participate in the same "romantic" paradigm in spite of their differences. Nevertheless, Fluck proposes that Bercovitch's model should receive "renewed attention" ("American Literary History" 14). Instead of outright rejecting it, because it denies the liberating power of literary criticism as dissent, Colatrella proposes to contextualise the model with regard to Bercovitch's own background. If ideologies are indeed inescapable systems of thought, then only a thorough reflexion of one's own social and political perspective will yield a more self-reflexive analysis of the ideological system from within – including a recognition of one's own limitations. Historians grapple with similar methodological problems and acknowledge the importance of historicising one's own viewpoint and methodology.¹⁸

As Bercovitch explains in his introduction to *Rites of Assent*, his leftist Jewish-Canadian upbringing has fundamentally influenced his thought. Several studies analyse this background and demonstrate the impact of Bercovitch's unique biography on his work.¹⁹ Meyerowitz points out that Bercovitch's model represents a typical Jewish intellectual outlook. It is not just the need for a "creative misreading" of Perry Miller and the desire to make a name in the field that led Bercovitch to question Miller's dominance (Delfs 601-3), but perhaps more importantly his status as an "outsider" undergoing a process of assimilation into American culture (Meyerowitz, "Jewish Crit-

¹⁸ Cf. Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme* (2010) 13-22 and Rösen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft* (2013) 167-90, especially 169-70 and 181-82. See also Rösen, "Theorie der Geschichte" (2003) 17-18.

¹⁹ The standard biography is Klingenstein, *Enlarging America* (1998) 347-406. See also Meyerowitz, *Transferring to America* (1995) 215-74 and "Jewish Critics" (1994). For overviews on other influences that have shaped Bercovitch's body of work see Claviez, "Dimensioning Society" (1995) 173-205 and Delfs, "Anxieties of Influence" (1997) 601-15.

ics” 40). It is difficult to imagine that the Jewish heritage with its old “dream of the return to Zion, inscribed in daily prayers, debated in religious scholarship, and either postponed or striven for over two millennia” has not influenced his views on the Puritan legacy (43). Bercovitch’s interest in Kafka, his English translations of Yiddish texts, and his more recent research interests in European Jewish history and literature seem to support this interpretation. Meyerowitz maintains that his model is probably best suited for investigations of literary texts by dissenters from marginal (or formerly marginal) groups like the Jewish-American community. Thus, in spite of Bercovitch’s paradox, the subversion/containment-theory of American dissent is still a relevant model and perhaps particularly appropriate for an analysis of the ideological underpinnings of Philip Roth’s historical novels.

Particular attention has been paid to certain inconsistencies in Bercovitch’s work for which he has been chastised by some critics, while others consider them a deliberate strategy of evasion. Much of this debate concentrates on the issue of transcendence. Does literature have the power to transcend its ideological confines or not? Bercovitch’s own statements are inconsistent with regard to this issue. Fuller gives a whole list of examples illustrating this shifting stance (135-42). For instance, while Bercovitch claims in the second chapter of *Rites of Assent* that the myth of America “allowed virtually no avenue of escape” (RA 56), he explains in the following chapter that “Emerson’s role as prophet was to carry the basic premises of ‘America’ as far as they would go, to the hither verge of what was ideologically conceivable – and thereby to challenge his society [...]” (RA 342). This ambiguity has been interpreted in various ways. Harlan attacks Bercovitch on these grounds and claims that he does not practice what he preaches (968). For Meyerowitz, it indicates a critic who still struggles with the implications of his theory for American culture and his own place in it (230). And whereas Fuller argues that this ambiguity is part of a deliberate strategy of avoiding “a fixed critical position” (135), Budick conjectures that Bercovitch deliberately allows us some interpretative freedom to elicit our consent to his interpretation, imitating the strategy that he identifies in Hawthorne (53-54).

In sum, Bercovitch seems to refuse a definite answer to the question as to what extent literature may transcend its ideological framework. Yet he addresses the controversy about these inconsistencies to some extent in his meta-theoretical articles “Games of Chess: A Model of Literary and Cultural Studies” (1996) and “The Function of the Literary in a Time of Cultural Studies” (1998). He proposes to consider literature a testing ground for the limits of what is ideologically conceivable. Perhaps the question whether literary works can transcend their ideological limitations cannot be answered per se. If however individual literary works can be assessed and if their power to transcend ideology can be evaluated, then the question will answer itself in

time. This redefines the purpose of literary criticism, turns it into a kind of meta-discipline describing the limitations of our knowledge and allowing us to develop “a clearer, deeper sense of these limitations” (Bercovitch, “Function” 71). This involves a cultural close reading that appreciates the aesthetic quality of a literary text and reveals the existence of universals that delimit human knowledge (Bercovitch, “Games of Chess” 16-17). He uses the chess-analogy of the middle-game sacrifice to illustrate how literary analysis may question transcendent claims about absolute truths. The middle-game sacrifice is a challenge in which “you’re presented with what seems a winning position, and your task is to see why it’s not”. The advantage of literature lies in its ability to translate abstract or absolute statements into particulars leading us away from “final solutions to the limitations we share” (24-25).

The present study proposes to overcome the binary opposition between a *hermeneutics of transcendence* and a *hermeneutics of non-transcendence*. If literature and literary criticism are conceived as a kind of testing ground for what is ideologically conceivable, then the question of the transcending power of literature becomes a matter of degree. If rules are never entirely broken nor always simply adhered to, they can perhaps be bent. On the one hand, this implies an appropriation of the rules. On the other hand, it entails a sense of affirmation that precludes “the threat of radical alternatives” to the rule system (*AJ* 160). The ostensible and much debated contradiction between transcendence and non-transcendence in Bercovitch’s model can therefore be interpreted as a question of degree: How far can the rules of hegemonic culture be bent? How far does an individual author go in his affirmation and in his appropriation of these cultural norms? The aim is an analysis of an author’s adversarial potential that may vary with respect to different aspects of the American ideology. Bercovitch gives the example of Whitman, who “affirms the absolute, aesthetically, by particularizing it; and by particularizing it aesthetically, he invites us to question and challenge – and so potentially to decline or circumvent – the endgames of representative individualism. [...] Whitman’s poetry tests those common meanings to the limits. It’s thus a full display of the power of boundaries”. Thus, literature’s capacity to bend the rules also implies translating seemingly absolute truths, such as the exceptional nature of the United States, into particulars that encourage us to question them. Although Whitman may not embrace radical alternatives to the status quo, his poetry still serves to question “the ideological foundations” of American society (Bercovitch, “Games of Chess” 34). Referring to an example taken from Faulkner, Bercovitch claims that

ideology works, aesthetically, because Faulkner particularizes issues of Justice and Individualism [...] and so transforms ideological answers into a series of concrete questions. Such questions do not liberate us from absolutes, including those of Christianity, Justice, Individualism, and American Independence. But they invite us to consider other lines of

play that may be available, culturally, under the rules. Under, as in subject to the rules, but also within and through them, at once undergirding the rules and undermining them; under, as in underlie, involving possibilities that these absolutes speak the truth – possibilities, too, of an unsettling kind, prospects that have been declared out of bounds, or that have not yet been explored – variations, transformations, or innovations that may affect the rules themselves, and so alter the nature of the game. Under as in depth. (36)

This is the adversarial potential of literature – the power to bend the rules of hegemonic culture within the ideological framework of the jeremiad, which remains the rhetorical centrepiece of the American symbology. In a preface to a recent edition of *The American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch relates how the 1960s have become incorporated into the American consensus. Like the Pilgrim Fathers, the Revolutionary Founders, or the heroes of the Civil War, the protest movement of the American 1960s has become “the covenantal source to which we must rededicate ourselves” for certain circles of oppositional intellectuals (Bercovitch *AJ*, xxxix) – “a new school of radical nostalgia” proving that the American jeremiad still integrates dissenting voices successfully into the sanctified narrative of “America” (xxvii). As an ideological consensus, which manages to integrate subversive energies by channeling them into distinctively American forms of dissent, the American jeremiad represents a powerful hegemonic mechanism to which no end seems in sight. Yet, while it serves to maintain U.S. liberalism and the dominance of the American middle class, the artistic production emerging within its boundaries has the potential to bend the limits of what is ideologically conceivable. And while this is true of nostalgic celebrations of 1960s rebellion, the fifties revival that has gripped large parts of American society and has been playing its part in the ongoing culture wars can neither be separated from this symbolic system. Rhetorically, the dominant narratives about the American fifties should be considered rhetorical visions structured according to the overarching framework of the American jeremiad. Having originated among youth groups celebrating rock ‘n’ roll icons such as Elvis Presley, excitement about fifties popular culture *chained out* in American society at large in the 1970s. Through symbolic convergence on a national scale, group fantasies developed into a full-fledged rhetorical vision that represented the American fifties as a more innocent era. The teenage rebel was the central protagonist of this vision that was populated by Hollywood stars like James Dean and characters from soap operas such as *Happy Days*. The setting of this vision was inspired by a Rockwellian America and its plot suggested a break between the innocent fifties and the sixties as a cultural fall from grace. It is this nostalgic longing for a better past that contains the hope of a potentially better future. As Linda Hutcheon has shown, nostalgia for the past is so effective, because it relies on the fact that the past is essentially “irrecoverable” and can be accessed “through memory and desire”. The con-

sequence is that ideas of the present are projected onto the past: “the invocation of a partial, idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present” (Hutcheon, “Irony” 3). This is why nostalgia lends itself particularly well to the rhetoric of the jeremiad, which also depends on a dichotomy between an inadequate reality and an ideal. In fact, the concept of generational rededication, which is so central to the American jeremiad, builds upon an American past that is constantly re-imagined by successive generations in order to conjure up moral lessons for the present. The rhetorical structures of nostalgia and the American jeremiad are thus essentially similar, because, as Hutcheon explains, “the nostalgic and utopian impulses share a common rejection of the here and now” (“Irony” 7). In this manner, fifties nostalgia provides the alternative Americas which conservative jeremiahs hold up against the bleak realities of the present in a call for generational rededication to the true path of America’s destiny. The fifties become, in other words, jeremiads of nostalgia.

In the next chapters, the present study will demonstrate how Philip Roth’s novels negotiate the significance of the American fifties with regard to the meaning of “America”. Firstly, contextual close readings of the three novels will work out the rhetorical framework of each novel, focusing in particular on how the novels deal with fifties nostalgia. Secondly, it will be illuminated how Roth, as an ethnic writer, writes himself into America by appropriating this ideological system in a Jewish-American idiom. The study will show how Roth, tapping the adversarial potential of the American symbology, frames himself as a Jewish-American Jeremiah and thus recreates himself according to the norms of American representative selfhood. From this perspective, the fifties can be understood as the yardstick with which he beats the American public to guide them back to the ‘true’ path of the American Way. Thirdly, it will be demonstrated how Roth engages his own limits as a writer as well as those which form the foundation of American culture. And finally, Roth is often presented as the anarchic rebel figure among America’s greatest literary minds, which is why this study will also reassess the verdict that Roth is essentially an oppositional writer. With regard to the aforementioned problem of literary transcendence or non-transcendence of ideological boundaries, the present study poses the question as to what extent Philip Roth manages to bend the rules of his culture.

2. *Indignation*: “The Unpronounceable Sentence Pronounced”

For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure.
R. W. Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (273).

When *Indignation* was published in 2008, reviewers had divided opinions about the novel. Some critics such as Christopher Hitchens writing for *The Atlantic* or Christopher Taylor from *The Guardian* denounced the novel as an aesthetic disappointment. While Hitchens considers “this rather-knocked-together novelette” not more than a “storm-in-a-teacup”, Taylor complains that “the story zigzags wildly from set-piece to set-piece”. Tim Rutten, who writes for the *Los Angeles Times*, aims for the middle ground, praising Roth’s ability as a writer in spite of the “book’s several miscalculations”. Other critics praise *Indignation* as a great achievement. John Banville from the *Financial Times* even considers it Roth’s finest novel since *The Counterlife* (1986) and describes it as an “intricately wrought, passionate and fascinating” piece. Similarly, the *New York Times* reviewer David Gates applauds Roth’s “power and intensity” and argues that “of all Roth’s recent novels, it ventures farthest into the unknowable”. More importantly, Gates interprets the novel as a critical dissection of a “superficially innocent era”. And Charles Simic, who writes for *The New York Review of Books*, also highlights the political impetus of the novel. For Simic, the novel’s treatment of the Korean War carries implicit political implications with respect to the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Likewise, Cooper agrees that the novel is concerned with contemporary issues (255). He also observes that the enigmatic and ambiguous character of the novella puzzles the reader in its numerous references to other works of literature and its dazzling arrangement of events leading up to the death of its central protagonist (267). Following Simic and Gates, the present study will show that *Indignation* is deeply embedded in contemporary discourses about the recent wars and the status of the fifties in U.S. history. Their assessments provide a point of departure for an analysis of the novel’s ambiguities, its baffling structure and its participation in contemporary discourses.

After a synopsis of the plot, this chapter will focus on three main areas pertaining to the ideological framework of the novel. Firstly, the portrayal of American individualism in *Indignation* will be analysed in order to demonstrate its vital function within the rhetorical framework of the jeremiad. Individualism is the key to the ideological opposition between an America which

fails to live up to its virtues and its utopian opposite. Secondly, it will be argued that by probing the limits of his own imagination, Roth succeeds in challenging the norms of the American symbology. The novel juxtaposes realist and metafictional elements and makes excessive use of different forms of ambiguity. This engages the active participation of the reader in order to elicit the reader's consent to the ideological norms of the text. Thirdly, descriptions of violence in the novel can be related to contemporary public discourses about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Employing a peculiar rhetorical strategy of symbolic ambiguity, the novel engages readers with moral issues and universal questions with regard to war as such.

Indignation was published as the second part in a tetralogy of novellas which the publisher lists as *Nemeses: Short Novels. Everyman*, the first novel in this series, had been published two years earlier (2006) and following the publication of *Indignation* (2008) Roth wrote two additional books shortly after, *The Humbling* (2009) and *Nemesis* (2010) – the latter being his last novel to date.²⁰ *Indignation* is set against the backdrop of the Korean War (1950-1953) and recounts the last months in the life of Marcus Messner, a young Jewish boy from Newark, New Jersey. The bulk of the narration is told by young Marcus himself and, as it turns out, his fate is intricately linked to the war. Growing up in the 1940s as a dutiful son of a Jewish kosher butcher, Marcus learns the craft from his father. He enrolls as a student of law at Robert Treat College in Newark, hoping to escape the draft, which enlists so many Americans of his age for the war in Korea. But soon his father is overcome by mysteriously sudden fits of paranoia and mistrust towards his son, seeing death and destruction in every corner. After a fierce argument with his father, Marcus decides to leave Newark and enrolls in Winesburg College in Ohio, five hundred miles from home. Life in Winesburg, a fictional place inspired by Sherwood Anderson's classic collection of tales *Winesburg, Ohio*, is decidedly different from the one in Newark. At first, Marcus moves into a dorm with Bertram Flusser, a student with an almost anarchic behaviour, who has little sympathy for Marcus's diligence and rectitude. Instead he keeps playing Beethoven in the middle of the night until, eventually, an argument erupts and Marcus breaks Flusser's LP, only to replace it later on. Marcus leaves and moves in with Elwyn Ayers, a senior student fond of his 1940 Buick LaSalle. He allows Marcus to use it for a date with Olivia Hutton, a girl Marcus has begun to fancy. After a stop at the restaurant, they park the car in a dark corner and start kissing each other. They are still in the car, when Olivia, to Marcus's great bewilderment, per-

²⁰ In October 2012, Philip Roth announced that *Nemesis* would be his last novel. The reception of this announcement has been mixed, ranging from surprised disbelief to serious regret.

forms fellatio on him. It is at this point in the narrative that he chooses to make an unexpected confession. He claims to be a dead man looking back on his younger self and caught up in his own endless musings about the strange events from the last months of his life. Resuming the narration of his student life in Winesburg, Marcus recounts how he cannot comprehend Olivia's behaviour, which still strikes him as abnormal. Young Marcus decides to write several letters to her. She avoids him at first, but he insists and eventually she tells him her secret. A while ago, Olivia attempted to commit suicide by slashing her wrists. Soon after, Marcus asks his roommate Elwyn for his opinion about Olivia and Elwyn's answer is rather disrespectful. After a strong argument with his roommate, Marcus leaves his dorm again and settles down in an inhospitable single room that has been vacant for quite a while. Marcus, however, is quite happy with his new austere room until he is invited by the dean of men, who seems to be concerned about Marcus's social life. The dean has noticed Marcus's frequent changes of residence and quite literally interrogates him about his social life, his atheist beliefs and his family. Winesburg's chapel requirement, which ignores his Jewish background and forces him to attend the weekly church service, is one of the bones of contention. Marcus becomes increasingly indignant as the dean's questions become more and more intrusive. Finally, this comic scene is concluded with Marcus getting sick and vomiting in the dean's office. Later on, he shares his thoughts with Sonny Cottler, a representative of the Jewish fraternity, and learns that Olivia has already earned quite a reputation for her sexual promiscuity. It then turns out that Marcus's accident in the dean's office was due to an acute appendicitis and he is brought to the hospital where he is visited by Olivia after his operation. They talk about Marcus's childhood and enjoy themselves, although Olivia refuses to tell him more about her childhood and her father. When his mother announces to visit him at the hospital, Marcus becomes anxious that she might disapprove of Olivia because of the scar she is carrying on her wrist. His mother intimates to Marcus that she is planning to divorce his father, whose erratic behaviour gets increasingly out of control. She also warns him not to continue his relationship with Olivia, whom she considers to be too dangerous after what Olivia has done to herself. After a long conversation, his mother promises not to get a divorce, but only under the condition that Marcus stops seeing the girl. When he is finally allowed to leave the hospital, his first thought is to meet Olivia. But she is gone and Marcus fears she may have left, or perhaps even hurt herself because of him. Having decided to ask the dean about it, he finds himself being interrogated once more. Olivia, the dean reveals, is pregnant and has had a nervous breakdown, which is why she has been brought to the hospital. Marcus, who is shocked to learn these things about her, rejects the dean's accusations violently. He is not to be held responsible

for the unwanted pregnancy. But the dean remains unconvinced and Marcus is certain that he will have to face expulsion (and the draft) soon. He returns to his room only to find it devastated. His former roommate Flusser, who might be helplessly in love with Marcus, as Sonny Cottler suggests, has exacted his revenge on Marcus. Unable to spend the night in his own room, Marcus accepts the offer to stay with Sonny Cottler, who then talks him into getting a secret proxy for the weekly church service. What then happens takes the entire college by surprise. A snowstorm engulfs Winesburg, during which Elwyn Ayers is killed in his car and which is followed by an escalating party in the snow. The drunken male students pillage the women's dorms and steal as much underwear as they can lay their hands on. This panty raid is eventually stopped by Dean Caudwell and many students are expelled from college. In a final speech, Winesburg's president chides the male students, reminding them that Americans are dying in Korea, and prophesies that history may have a terrible fate in store for them. What then follows is narrated by a different voice revealing that Marcus lies dying on a Korean battlefield and that all the memories are his morphine-induced thoughts in his last moments. It was neither the panty raid nor his argument with the dean but his proxy at chapel which got him expelled in the end. He was then drafted and mortally wounded by a Chinese soldier in Korea. His parents do not take the news well. His father dies some time later and his mother never comes to terms with her son's death, blaming her deceased husband for driving Marcus out of the house. The narrator remarks that Marcus has missed the decisive armistice only by eleven months and would have survived if he had been able to accept the chapel requirement. The novel ends with a *Historical Note* in which the reader is told how the cultural changes of the 1960s have finally reached Winesburg and that the chapel requirement has been abolished.

2.1 American Individualism in a Changing World

... back in those unimpeiled, unchanging days when everybody felt safe and settled in his place. (*IN* 142)

In Marcus's description of his own childhood memories, there is a sense of nostalgic longing which is not unlike contemporary American sentiments about the fifties. According to the conservative narrative, the fifties were an era in American history when family life was still intact and valued, when Americans still enjoyed greater independence from their government and enormous economic prosperity, and finally, when the U.S. were still a global superpower with a clear political imperative, i.e. to contain the spread of international communism. It is supposed to have been a simpler, more inno-

cent era, celebrated by conservative discourse in order to denounce the often complicated and conflict-ridden America divided by the uncertainties of the Culture Wars. In this nostalgic statement, however, Marcus does not refer to the 1950s, but to the preceding decade. He perceives a stark contrast between his childhood days in the happy 1940s and the difficult world of 1951. It is the safety, predictability and continuity of his life in Newark's Jewish ghetto which he praises in this nostalgic look at his own past and which articulates his feeling of alienation in the American Midwest. In short, Marcus's nostalgic longing for the forties mirrors today's nostalgic sentiments about the fifties and it captures *ex negativo* what is wrong with his world in the year 1951. It is this feeling of instability and unpredictability that is the central theme of the novel's narrative world.

The fictional universe of *Indignation* is often impenetrable and always in flux, a fact with which the characters in the novel as well as the reader struggle to come to grips. Several characters are afflicted by sudden, dramatic and, according to the logic of the narrative, rather inexplicable changes in their lives. Marcus's father, who is rather instantaneously overcome by an almost obsessive paranoia, which eventually drives Marcus out of the house, is the most obvious example. Marcus stresses the novelty of his father's fears repeatedly and claims that "[...] *almost from the day* that I began classes at Robert Treat, my father became frightened that I would die. [...] Whatever the cause or mix of causes fueling the *abrupt change* in his previously benign paternal behaviour, he manifested his fear by hounding me day and night about my whereabouts". He complains about the "crazy *new fears*" (*IN* 2-3, 13; emphasis added), that his father is "*suddenly stricken* with uncontrollable fear", "*out of nowhere*" (34, 148; emphasis added). The son is unable to make sense of this sudden development and goes on to pound the reader with a whole array of possibilities to explain "the cause or mix of causes".

Maybe his fear had something to do with the war [...]; maybe it had something to do with the heavy casualties our troops were sustaining [...] and his fear that if the conflict dragged on as long as World War Two had, I would be drafted into the army to fight and die on the Korean battlefield as my cousins Abe and Dave had died during World War Two. Or maybe the fear had to do with his financial worries: the year before the neighborhood's first supermarket had opened [...]. Or maybe his fear for me began in fear for himself [...]. (*IN* 2-3)

Significant ambiguity is usually foregrounded. In this case, anaphora and parallelisms foreground the inherent ambiguity in this passage, drawing the reader's attention to the central enigma behind these anxieties. Especially parallelism, here slight variations of the first clause ("maybe [the fear] had something to do with [...]"), is according to Su a particularly typical feature of foregrounded ambiguity (84-85). The reader is encouraged to engage in

this puzzle in much the same way as he is invited to think about the causes of Marcus's death at the end of the novel. Both the suddenness with which fear strikes the heart of Marcus's father and the fact that the causes for his change remain unanswered allow the reader to share Marcus's confusion and bewilderment. This concurs with Derek Parker Royal's judgement that "the reader is just as clueless as the narrator when it comes to making sense of events" (Royal, "Indignation" 132). The answer remains ambiguous and the reader is left with the notion that the erratic behaviour of Marcus's father is ultimately inexplicable. After his arrival at Winesburg, it soon becomes clear that although Marcus may have put some distance between his father and himself, he cannot entirely liberate himself from his father's paranoia. Having been warned by his father in an ominous anticipation of later events that "the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences" (*IN* 12), he undergoes a similar development as he is himself increasingly haunted by his father's fears that he might meet a tragic end: "I'd caught it from my father. All I could think about were the ways I could be killed" (156). He starts to suffer from the same obsessions from which he wanted to escape in the first place. In fact, his fears become so strong that they seriously impinge on his newly won freedom in Winesburg.

As regards Olivia's sudden change, her case is different from Marcus and his father. Nevertheless, from Marcus's perspective her mood swings, her behaviour, not to mention her unexpected and unexplained pregnancy, are symptoms of a personality which is as unpredictable and liable to sudden change as his father's and his own. In the following passage, he discusses her enigmatic behaviour to some extent, only to go on musing about his father's abrupt change, thereby juxtaposing both aspects as if there was some connection between his father's erratic behaviour and Olivia's: "But I wasn't happy, not just because of my raising Olivia's laughter but because of my remembering my father as he'd once been – as he'd always been-back in those unimperiled, unchanging days when everybody felt safe and settled in his place ..." (*IN* 142). The suddenness of her mood swings confounds him deeply and in this passage he describes how the "color passed out of her face", how "gloom swept through her like a storm". He also uses quite technical imagery, usually used for inanimate objects, to describe Olivia's sudden mood swings, which underscores the suddenness with which her behaviour takes him by surprise: "a switch [...] thrown, a plug pulled, her face [...] shut down" (142). The passage is followed by a whole series of questions in which Marcus speculates about her puzzling behaviour, encouraging the reader to choose from the ambiguous choices. Marcus can neither understand his father's sudden change, nor Olivia's sudden mood swings, nor his own rather sudden affliction with paranoia. Later on in the novel, Olivia's sudden disappearance and the altogether surprising revelation of her preg-

nancy reinforce the theme of unpredictability even more. The common denominator of these events and developments is Marcus's futile attempt to comprehend his father's sudden change, Olivia's behaviour and his own fears. As Ira Nadel points out, Marcus's "bewilderment that characterizes so much of his behaviour runs through the entire novella" (141). The reader is as helpless as Marcus in reading the signs and the result is a narrative world inhabited by characters whose behaviour remains as unpredictable as inexplicable. It is this unpredictability of life which challenges nostalgic notions about the fifties quite forcefully. As Mary Caputi explains, fifties nostalgia derives much of its attraction from the myth that life used to be more predictable. Sitcoms such as *Happy Days* keep perpetuating this idea as a foundational myth of fifties nostalgia (Caputi 22).

Roth confronts the nostalgic image of a happier, less complicated and more innocent age by presenting the fifties as an extremely unpredictable time, plagued not only by social but also by economic uncertainties. In *Indignation*, economic concerns form a small but not irrelevant subtext. Already at the beginning, Marcus describes the serious financial situation of his family as his father's shop struggles to keep up with the advent of supermarkets and a dwindling number of customers who still adhere to Jewish dietary laws (*IN* 2-3). His mother goes into more detail as she explains that her husband's paranoia has grown worse: "It is true that our business is off, but everybody's business is off in Newark. People are moving to the suburbs and the businesses are following behind. The neighborhood is undergoing a revolution" (147). In spite of the fact that fifties nostalgia indulges in an image of the fifties as an era of growing affluence, the novel highlights the costs of the postwar boom that increased America's prosperity up to formerly unknown heights. Although postwar Americans suffered significantly less from poverty, between one-fifth and one-fourth of the population could still not afford to pay for the essential necessities of life. Incomes were still distributed very unevenly and the gap between rich and poor had not grown smaller after the war. Economic problems, clouded by the overall rise of the standard of living, concerned not only those workers employed in agriculture or in the industrial sector, but also large parts of the middle class. Many new members of the middle class, who had benefited from government support a few years earlier, for instance benefits from the G.I. Bill²¹ or mortgage loans from the *Department of Veterans Affairs* (VA loans), were struggling to keep the debts at bay (Chafe 137-38). Nonetheless, the widely perceived affluence of postwar America became deeply engraved in the collective memory of the

²¹ Officially entitled the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act*, the G.I. Bill offered veterans from World War II a whole range of various benefits and provided an essential contribution to the economic boom of the late 1940s and the 1950s. For a discussion of its impact see Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (1996) 68-70.

nation (Heideking and Mauch 306) and detracts from the fact that the economic consequences of the postwar boom were fairly contradictory. Stark contrasts persisted in particular between the increasingly affluent suburbs and the ghettos in the major urban centres, where poverty, drugs and violence were festering (312). To sum up, while the novel presents the economic uncertainties of Marcus's family as only one of the possible explanations for the growing paranoia of Marcus's father, this clearly confronts the conservative narrative of a socially and economically superior America in the fifties.

The theme of an unpredictable future cannot be separated from a discussion of individualism in the novel. It is a dangerous and unpredictable America in which Marcus fails to achieve greater material and personal independence. By moving to Winesburg, he tries to assert himself as a representative American in different ways. First, he seeks independence from his father's control, which leads to the central familial conflict at the heart of the novel and represents his desire to recreate himself as a self-reliant American: "I was eager to be an adult, an educated mature, independent adult, which was just what was terrifying my father, who, even as he was locking me out of our house to punish me for beginning to sample the minutest prerogatives of young adulthood, could not have been any more proud of my devotion to my studies and my unique family status as a college student" (*IN* 16). His father seems to be particularly anxious about Marcus's desire to live among Gentiles (75), which bespeaks the symbolic character of Marcus's rebellion as the beginning of his Americanization. According to Sollors, generational conflict in the form of teenage rebellion is often represented as a metaphor for becoming an American. The teenage struggle for greater independence becomes a symbol of the national struggle. Generational metaphors in American culture go back as far as colonial times and are the foundation of a process of generational rededication. In revolutionary America, the nation's struggle for independence was couched in a rhetoric representing it as a coming-of-age, most prominently in the rhetoric of Thomas Paine. "Revolutionaries were, then, defying a 'parent' (Britain) in the name of adopted 'ancestors' (American beginnings), which is, of course, a widespread revolutionary strategy". According to Sollors, this rhetoric has "reverberated in American culture" (227). In a similar vein, Medovoi has shown how the rebellious adolescent came to represent America's errand in a postwar bipolar world (23-24). And Greenberg adds that Roth's novels typically celebrate the suffering rebel or outcast as an emblem of transgression (98). Furthermore, the adolescent rebel is the key element in nostalgic narratives about the American fifties (Marcus, D. 9-17). It is a symbol that is constantly reiterated and embellished as it keeps turning up in public discourse. It also serves as a *symbolic cue* with the power to evoke this whole set of fifties

mythology and the nostalgic emotions that accompany it. Tellingly, Roth also uses this metaphor in his first novel *Goodbye, Columbus*, which is also set in the American 1950s. Both Neil, the Jewish-American protagonist, and his girlfriend Brenda come into conflict with their respective parents – a conflict which signifies their socialization into American society and at the same time “the costs of the American Dream” (Rabin 11). Neelakantan remarks that *Indignation* is informed by a “double vision” that allows readers to identify with Marcus’s “fierce sense of independence” and at the same time distances them from his “overweening pride” (“Heroic Ideal” 206).

Marcus also tries to reinvent himself in Winesburg as “a new man” – a symbolic rebirth in the American Midwest according to the norms of representative selfhood. He aspires to be a self-reliant, independent man and his symbolic migration from New Jersey to Winesburg, Ohio is the point of departure for his journey into America. With his record of straight A’s and his hard work at the inn, he wants to prove to his “unsatisfiable elders” that his independent life is justified and that he is able to live on his own (*IN* 90). He describes himself as a person with absolute self-determination who is “always working on [him]self” and “always pursuing a goal” (51). Marcus dreams of taking up a new identity by dressing up accordingly. He buys posh new clothes which are very different from the ones usually worn at Robert Treat, where people dress casually (114-16). And when he secretly dons his expensive new clothes, “the gray flannel trousers” of the office worker, he looks down on his former “rags” and admires his future self in the mirror, which symbolizes his desire to leave his humble beginnings behind after his symbolic rebirth as an American:²² “The clothes I’d bought to start a new life in. The clothes I’d bought to be a new man in and to end my being the butcher’s son” (117). Again, Roth has used this motif before, as Rabin shows in her article on the novel *Goodbye, Columbus*. It contains an early instance of how Philip Roth uses dress as an “indicator both of social status and of group membership” (14). For Debra Shostak, this dream of self-invention is a central theme in the entire body of his fiction (“Late Style” 165). In his determination to improve himself, in his ambition to climb the social ladder and to become a lawyer and in his relentless urge to educate himself at the expense of his social life, he aspires to the ideal of self-perfection of the American Dream. As Bercovitch argues, this dimension of the American Dream, best represented by the “catchall” phrase of the *self-made man*, became in the nineteenth century the central means to recreate oneself individually and at the same time to “embody” the American Way

²² For a slightly different view see Brühwiler. She interprets the passage as an initiation rite, whereby Marcus attempts to “break with his adolescence and the appearance he associates with his life at home” (56).

collectively (*RA* 47-48). In sum, Marcus's journey into America begins with severing the ties to Jewish life in Newark and follows the ideal of self-perfection in order to achieve economic independence and to become a representative American.

Yet he also seeks to assert himself as a freethinking individual. He praises his former teachers at Robert Treat for their strong "opinions – some of them decidedly and unashamedly left-wing opinions, despite prevailing political pressures", while he criticises Winesburg for its lack of dissenting voices and its conformism (*IN* 85). He openly toys with atheism at a time when this was commonly regarded with suspicion. In the American 1950s, alternatives to the predominant religious triad of Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism were sometimes regarded as un-American, at times even as subversive beliefs. In the famous study *Protestant – Catholic – Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (1955), its author, Will Herberg, famously described this conviction as a "triple melting pot". As a result of this widespread belief, atheists or members of other religions were excluded from mainstream American society. In fact, after the Second World War Jewish secularists were considered dangerous subversives by significant parts of the American population (Sarna 275-82). In this context, Marcus asserts himself as a dissenter by advertising his atheism so frankly in front of the dean in tradition-bound Winesburg. It is also quite fitting that he idolizes the radical philosopher Bertrand Russell. The socialist Russell, who spoke out against the British war effort in World War I and subsequently went to prison for his beliefs, also represents Marcus's urge to stand up for his rights and to suffer for them if need be. Marcus repeatedly mentions the Nobel prize, which was awarded to Russell "in recognition of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought" (see "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1950"). Marcus cannot accept the fact that the dean disapproves of his atheist beliefs, accuses his superior of intolerance, but is then forced to continue attending church service (*IN* 106-7). His mental recital of the Chinese national anthem during the services and the conversation with the dean also signify his dissenting spirit. Marcus, whose name may allude to the Roman God of War (Neelakantan, "Heroic Ideal" 207), asserts his individualism by speaking out against some of the injustices at Winesburg and demanding freedom of opinion and religion. He thereby affirms the ideals of the American Way and conforms to the norms of American selfhood.

These three aspirations, his growing independence, his self-reliance, and his dissent, are systematically stifled in the course of the novel. Although he escapes his father's control in Newark, he does not find freedom in Winesburg. Instead he soon discovers that he has only traded his father's surveillance against the dean's and that, even worse, he shares his father's paranoia.

He does not find the independent life in Winesburg that he is looking for. While he desires to be materially independent, he cannot make a living without his father's support. His reluctance to accept help from the Jewish fraternity soon gives way to dependence on the advice and help of Sonny Cottler – the fraternity boy. And his desire for peaceful solitude in order to focus on work and study soon leads him to the most inhospitable place on the whole campus, another sign of his failure to integrate into Winesburg's student life. Finally, Marcus's indignation, harmless as it might seem, becomes part of his downfall. His protest is ineffective, leads to no real change and his inability to bear chapel attendance gets him expelled in the end.

He altogether fails to reinvent himself in the American Midwest and remains an outsider. His continuous migrations on campus symbolize the fact that he does not belong to Winesburg. These movements clearly represent his failure to recreate himself as an American and are symbolic for his diasporic condition. According to Tresa Grauer, Jewish-American writing typically identifies restless wandering, alienation and a "perpetual deferral of identification with place" as a sense of displacement which is representative of Jewishness itself (277). Marcus tries to assert his independence by rebelling against his parents and leaves them in order to become "a new man". Yet, in spite of his new clothes and his new "home" (*IN* 117, 193), he does not really arrive at Winesburg – instead, he keeps moving from dorm to dorm until he is finally expelled. At first he suffers Flusser, then he moves in with Elwyn, only to leave again and to seek a life in solitude in the most inhospitable room on campus. Finally, he even moves into Sonny Cottler's dorm, in spite of his earlier misgivings concerning the fraternity boy. Again, Roth has employed a similar symbol in his first fifties novel *Goodbye, Columbus*, in which Neil Klugman's symbolic migrations between his Jewish home and the residence of the Patimkins represent the concept of assimilation. Yet whereas in *Goodbye, Columbus* Short Hills signifies upward mobility (Rabin 13), Winesburg stands for an ultimately futile dream of independence and assimilation. But it is not only these migrations which emphasize Marcus's failure to live his dream. With respect to each of his dorms in Winesburg, Marcus deliberately stresses the fact that in each of the dorms he always occupies the lower bunk, which underscores his inferior status as an outsider. Flusser, for example, teases Marcus from his upper bunk while Marcus is lying in the bed beneath him (*IN* 19-23). Having moved to a new room, he tells the reader that he sleeps "in the bottom bunk and Elwyn Ayers Jr. in the top" (29). Later on, Marcus even summarizes his experience in concluding that he slept first "beneath Bertram Flusser and then beneath Elwyn Ayers" (82). Actually a minor and seemingly irrelevant detail, in Roth's hands it becomes a subtle marker of social hierarchies signifying his status as an outsider. The anti-semitism which he faces at the inn also rein-

forces the sense that Marcus does not belong to Winesburg. Curiously enough, he compares his work at the inn with eviscerating the chickens and regards swallowing down anti-semitic remarks as only a nasty part of his work (*IN* 27-28). This attitude is a sign of what Girgus has called a ghetto mentality in Roth's fiction. According to Girgus, Roth often confronts the Jewish conviction that discrimination or anti-semitism are a natural part of Jewish life. It is a passivity that embraces one's own status as a victim instead of choosing to oppose discrimination (cf. Girgus, *Covenant: Jewish Writers* 122). Girgus identifies this as a theme of self-bondage from which Roth's protagonists typically suffer (131) and which undermines their assertions of individualism. Marcus's work at the inn is therefore less a symbol of his growing self-reliance, but more a signifier of his life as an outsider and his failure to stand up against the injustices at Winesburg. Likewise, his clothes, at first a symbol of his dreams about the future, soon turn into a symbol of shame and degradation. As he sums it up himself, he vomits on them in front of the dean, he wears them in chapel, a place he despises, he is beaten up in them by his roommate Elwyn Ayers and it is these clothes in which he undergoes his disturbing sexual experience with Olivia (*IN* 117-18). His new clothes, which are such a strong symbol for his dream of being reborn as an American in Winesburg, come to stand for everything that goes wrong in his life. Marcus is clearly disappointed, because the promises of assimilation do not fulfil themselves for him – the American dream turns out to be a nightmare. His confusion represents not only his sexual inexperience, but also the clash between his hopes of becoming an American and the bleak realities of Jewish life at Winesburg. In conclusion, Marcus experiences the exclusive character of the American ideology. Albeit universal in its promises of equality and liberty, for many immigrants it meant that they could “not yet” be part of America (*RA* 43). Jews of the second and third generation often felt that feelings of alienation or homelessness were not only part of their exile, but general aspects of the human condition. Life in the Jewish diaspora therefore often seemed for many Jews to be a more universal trend in modern life (Zeller 9). This affirms Ranen Omer-Sherman's view that Roth's fictions tend to explore the diasporic condition of Jewish-Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Omer-Sherman, Roth's novels “contend with the insurmountable instability that follows the loss of what [he] suspect[s] is an even more intrinsic Jewish tradition” (11). Hence, Marcus's search for meaning, identity and home is not just the quest of a Jewish hero, but can be seen as a symbol of the modern American experience. And according to Debra Shostak, the “self-defeating” attempts at self-refashioning can also be considered typical features of his late style as a novelist (“Late Style” 167).

This feeling of alienation is also reflected in Marcus's attitude towards religion. He deliberately spurns his Jewish roots and especially Judaism. He dismisses his Jewish heritage in front of the dean and claims to be an atheist instead. It seems that he sees Jewishness exclusively in religious terms. This goes beyond a rejection of Judaism. In his refusal to receive help from the Jewish fraternity and in his desire to live among Gentiles, Marcus also severs the ties which bind him to Jewish culture as such (cf. Shostak, "Late Style" 172). Jewish secularism, a particularly strong movement in the United States, is not an option for Marcus. The fact that he denies his Jewish heritage as an old-fashioned religion demonstrates his alienation from Jewish culture. And his strange attitude towards blood and kosher slaughter further reveals his uprootedness. Confronted with Olivia's scar, Marcus cannot help but associate it with Jewish ritual practices. In fact, he explicitly associates ritual slaughter with Olivia's attempted suicide:

My point is this: that is what Olivia had tried to do, to kill herself according to kosher specifications by emptying her body of blood. Had she been successful, had she expertly completed the job with a single perfect slice of the blade, she would have rendered herself kosher in accordance with rabbinical law. Olivia's telltale scar came from attempting to perform her own ritual slaughter. (*IN* 160-61)

Clearly, Marcus's interpretation reflects his alienation from his Jewish heritage. The ritual has no religious significance for him at all and he reduces it to the idea of bloodletting and death. This concurs with his otherwise strikingly non-Jewish behaviour. His uprootedness is contrasted with Sonny Cottler's Jewish identity, for instance. Although not exactly a strictly observant Jew, he engages in Jewish fraternity life and tries to help Marcus, a fellow Jew, in whatever way he can (e.g. *IN* 197). This is part of the traditional obligation of Jewish peoplehood to provide help to other Jews (cf. Sarna 25). Marcus, however, is not even interested and finds Cottler's behaviour suspicious. He fears joining the fraternity might impinge on his newly won independence, especially because he suspects his father's influence behind Cottler's invitation to join the Jewish fraternity, which increases his reluctance to join fraternity life (*IN* 42-43). Perhaps this rejection of the Jewish-American tradition of *yiddishkeit* is the most obvious sign of his alienation from Jewish culture. In the early 20th century, anxieties about the preservation of Jewish life in the United States led to the emergence of "a non-religious model of Jewish unity" which preferred a sense of community steeped in common Jewish experiences, customs and values over Jewish self-definitions based on religion. *Yiddishkeit* (Jewishness) promoted the idea that Jews in America were "one interrelated family concerned with the welfare of fellow Jews, wherever they might be" in order to help preserving Jewish culture and unity, regardless of religious divisions (Sarna 166). The Jewish fraternity naturally agrees when Marcus's parents ask them to help

their son in his new environment. Marcus refuses to accept this support, because he regards it as interference in his independent life and because he seeks to reinvent himself among American Gentiles. Severing the ties to his Jewish background, he aspires to recreate himself as a representative American but fails eventually. This also supports Ranen Omer-Sherman's thesis that Roth's novels dramatize and explore ruptures in the Jewish-American identity. His protagonists cannot identify themselves with the ancient Jewish "ideology of affliction" anymore, which used to define Jewish identity primarily as a communal experience of Judaism's long history of persecution and victimhood. This notion of a collective trauma of "martyrdom, exile, global wanderings, and immigrant struggles" became the core of a Jewish identity that was constitutive of a long-standing Jewish literary tradition. Roth's American Jew can no longer relate to this definition of Jewish identity, since the experience of victimhood has become rather "remote" for many Jewish-Americans who lack the necessary historical and cultural knowledge and who therefore do not feel the need to embrace the sense of protection and community that Yiddishkeit may provide in the diaspora. And having turned their backs on the traditional "ideology of affliction", they find themselves unable to develop a new sense of selfhood and identity to fill the vacuum (Omer-Sherman 192-95). Marcus's alienation thus contributes to the novel's representation of the fifties as an unpredictable era in which America did not live up to its grand promise of individual freedom. And this failure of American Jews to reinvent themselves according to the norms of American representative selfhood is presented as particularly devastating for the second and third generation of American Jews who could not find stable models of selfhood in their Jewish communities anymore.

This aesthetic strategy is accompanied by a juxtaposition of realist and absurd as well as comic and serious discourses in the novel, which is achieved by evoking the *schlemiel* tradition.²³ This is one of Philip Roth's trademarks (Halio and Siegel, "Introduction" 12). Tragedy and comedy are often close companions in his work and he also acknowledges this himself in a much-cited statement, claiming that "sheer playfulness and deadly seriousness are [his] closest friends" (Roth, *Reading Myself* 101). The novel is loosely inspired by the tradition of the Jewish-American *schlemiel*, a stock-character that is typically haunted by ill luck and symbolically represents the fate of the Jew living among Christians in the diaspora (Pinsker 2-10). The *schlemiel* usually "has a hand in his destruction; the more he attempts, the greater seem his chances for comic failure", which is the reason why Pinsker con-

²³ For general introductions into Jewish American fiction see Wade, *Jewish American Literature since 1945: An Introduction* (1999) and Wirth-Nesher and Kramer, *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature* (2003).

siders it a “humor-of-failure” (6-7). As a form of social criticism, the comic failures of the *schlemiel* sometimes tend to decry social or political injustices. In fact, as Pinsker points out, very often diasporic Jews living in Gentile environments resorted to humour as the only weapon of choice against a dominant Gentile society. Seen from such a perspective, “the *schlemiel*’s ineptitude” stands for social, political or economic inequity (13). As such, it is ideally suited for a dissection of the American Dream. In this sense, Marcus can be seen as a *schlemiel* who brings about his ill fate by trying too hard to avoid it. This is not to say that Marcus is a flat stock-character, but he is at least partly inspired by the *schlemiel* tradition. Elaine Safer adds that the inherent tension between the serious and the comedy in Roth’s writing resides in what Roth himself has called “the paradoxical theater of the mind” (qtd. in Safer, “The Tragicomic” 170). It is a form of humour that derives its power from the “incongruity there between the ideal and the real, between the sacred and the profane”. And it is a form of humour that lies at the crossroads between Jewish and American humour. Safer claims that Roth employs this kind of humour to make the tragic in life more “palatable” (170-71). Of course, there is nothing funny about Marcus’s violent death in Korea, yet the absurd chain of events leading up to his expulsion and the comedy accompanying it are quite humorous. This is Roth’s typical style, which combines the comic and the serious as two sides of the same coin. The *schlemiel* is usually not aware of his folly (cf. Pinsker 14). Similarly, Marcus is very aware of the danger the draft represents and does everything in his power to evade it, but he does not realize that his paranoia and his misguided, albeit passionate, resistance to injustice eventually contribute to his getting drafted and killed (*IN* 230). At the same time, an almost supernatural doom seems to hang over all his actions. Marcus’s missteps are often comic or absurd, such as his argument with the dean during which he repeatedly stands up in an agitated manner, recites the Chinese anthem in his head, and finally vomits on the dean’s desk and carpet. His frantic behaviour during his sexual adventure with Olivia in the car also recalls the stock-humour of the Jewish *schlemiel*. Nevertheless, Marcus’s comic follies also have a very serious, even tragic outcome, which is why Roth’s appropriation of this ethnic motif reinforces his criticism of American society. Especially Marcus’s failure to find a better life in the idyllic world of Winesburg resembles what Pinsker describes as the “continual shifting between ambition and defeat that characterizes the experiences of East European Jewry” and that is represented by the tradition of the *schlemiel* (15). According to Halio, this often “self-deprecating” comedy in Roth’s writing is a central element of Jewish humour, which usually mingles “comedy and pathos” in a form of “self-mockery” that serves to disarm the often hostile world (“Deadly Farce” 210). As in *Indignation*, there is usually a sober purpose behind the comedy (219-

20). According to Cooper, Roth's juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic in *Indignation* serves to foreground the absurdity of the human condition. It also paves the way for a critical negotiation of American values in the twenty-first century (Cooper 255). Having exploited it in earlier novels, Roth thus returns to the motif of the *schlemiel* in *Indignation* and effectively turns it into a centrepiece of his jeremiad. He reinterprets this essentially ethnic motif in an American rhetorical mode, thereby reconfiguring the rhetorical framework of the jeremiad. He does not only reiterate the symbolic reality of the American ideology in this manner, but he also contributes to embellishing and shaping it. This underscores the fact that symbolic convergence requires the active and creative participation of the individual. This embellishment also serves to enrich the collective rhetoric aesthetically and thus makes it more effective overall.

In sum, the *schlemiel* explains the coexistence of the tragic and the comic as well as the realist and the absurd in Roth's novel. It explains why some critics have claimed that the characters are too flat and the novel lacks depth, while others have celebrated the tragic dimensions of the novel. More importantly, the incorporation of a traditional Jewish motif into his essentially American narrative based on the rhetorical framework of the jeremiad represents a form of acculturation. Roth writes himself into American culture by translating an ethnic motif such as the *schlemiel* into an American idiom. In his preface to the 2011 edition of *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, Sacvan Bercovitch surmises that in the 19th and 20th century hyphenated Jewish-Americans found a distinctly Jewish-American mode of writing that bespeaks a typical "model of Americanization". Jews managed to transform their literary and cultural traditions into distinct Jewish-American expressions, eventually flowing into "a major literary tradition", which now includes Philip Roth, and they focussed on exploring the inherent "complexities" in their hyphenated culture (*PO* xix). The way in which Roth blends the literary tradition of the *schlemiel* and its potential for social criticism with the American rhetoric of the jeremiad represents this process of "acculturation through reciprocity", whereby Jewish-Americans find ways of moulding American culture while they are at the same time being absorbed by it (*PO* xx). In fact, the process of writing the novel constitutes an act of Jewish-American acculturation, which is always in progress and never completed, because the American ideology of consensus is per definition always unfinished and future-oriented.

Marcus's failure to assert his independence is contrasted with other forms of individualism in the novel. Olivia represents a different one and her dissent is closely related to the sexual mores of the time. By depicting these ideological constraints on teenage sexuality in the 1950s, Roth celebrates Olivia's sexual transgressions as dissent. Her individualism is shaped by her

resistance against the dominant model of womanhood of the post-war era. Her deviant behaviour is characterized by her alcoholism and her transgressive sexual adventures, for which she has been hospitalized. Political containment and the strict control of female behaviour were closely interrelated in post-war America. For the sake of national security, cold war ideology promoted clear-cut gender roles and young women were expected to conform to a dominant cult of domesticity. Women were supposed to accord to a difficult double standard. Whereas especially young women were supposed to be sexually abstinent during courtship, they were still expected to arouse male sexual desire. It was considered a female responsibility to contain the male sexual drive (Nadel, A. 117). Elaine Tyler May points out that domestic containment fostered almost paranoid discourses about male and female sexual behaviour, officially sanctioned “crusades” against homosexuals and other forms of “deviant” sexual behaviour that were thought to make American society more vulnerable to Communism. It was widely believed that men who were not able to control their passions were weak and susceptible to Communist subversions and that behind many subversives there was a woman with a “misplaced” sense of sexuality (May, *Homeward Bound* 91-93). Since the 1930s, moralists had been advocating chastity as a way of containing premarital sex in order to save the nation and they continued to do so during the 1950s. Yet the wishful ideal of restraint could not have been farther from reality. It was Alfred Kinsey who exposed in his bestsellers the widespread indulgence in premarital, extramarital and homosexual intercourse among ordinary Americans (97). Of course, such scandals could not change the fact that “sexually liberated women” were regarded as “potentially destructive creatures who might be tamed and domesticated for the benefit of society”. Among growing fears about nuclear war, sexual promiscuity continued to be seen as a threat to national security long after the 1950s. Thus, the ideology of containment continued to applaud traditional gender roles with their emphasis on the home. At a time when “sexual and economic emancipation” had already progressed to a formerly unknown scale, it was still a widely held belief that it was a national imperative to make sure women were controlled and fulfilled their domestic duties (105-6). The containment ideology defined “men as breadwinners and women as mothers”, it denounced other ways of living, especially what was considered female “promiscuity”, as endangering the “country’s moral fiber”. Premarital sexual intercourse was a demonized taboo, although it was far less practiced than most moralists believed (112). However, the double standard that expected women to be always sexually alluring, while remaining abstinent, proved difficult for many women, especially since a woman’s reputation was closely bound to her sexual behaviour (117). As May points out, the stigma on premarital intercourse paradoxically led to a spread of other non-coital forms of

sexuality, which were nevertheless seen as “steps along the way”. The woman was supposed to be responsible for “drawing the line” (121). This ideological consensus, which sought (often unsuccessfully) to prescribe female behaviour in the name of anti-communist containment, came to an end when the children of the baby boom generation came of age in the 1960s and 1970s (198-99). At the same time, the emerging New Right made attempts to revitalize this Cold War ideology of domesticity, an attempt which culminated in the 1980s when the rhetoric of sexual containment, including its celebration of domesticity, returned with Reagan’s presidency. Yet, the post-war consensus of domestic containment was gone for good (215). Roth criticises this ideology in his depictions of Olivia and Winesburg. There are strict regulations and elaborated controls, delineating the amount of surveillance involved in this form of sexual containment. The comings and goings of female students are strictly observed. “All female students, including seniors, had to sign in and out of their dormitories whenever they left in the evening, even to go to the library. They couldn’t stay out past nine on weekdays or past midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, nor, of course, were they ever allowed in male dormitories or in fraternity houses [...]” (*IN* 48). Young men picking up female students for a date have to be registered by an attendant and students are forced to conduct their amorous adventures in secret. The “prevailing sexual code could be physically excruciating”, as Marcus explains in a vivid description of the consequences of “prolonged excitation that failed to result in orgasmic discharge”, turning the young men into “cripples” (49). The pinning parties at the inn, whereby Winesburg “virgins” are presented with fraternity pins by their prospective fiancés, represent the double standard of postwar society quite well. Female students are “pinned as a junior, engaged as a senior, and married upon graduation”, while male students secretly “try to feel up their girlfriends and dry-hump them in the dark” until the police stops by to round up young couples and put an end to these indecencies (26). Yet, Olivia’s behaviour is different. She resists this double standard, which demands both sexual self-restraint and active courtship, by openly flouting the sexual mores with her deviant behaviour in the car and in the hospital. Her dissent is unsuccessful, however, and she has to suffer severe consequences such as hospitalization, electroshock therapy and a nervous breakdown (cf. Jaffe-Foger, “[A]nything” 89).

The way Marcus perceives Olivia also contributes to the theme of an inexplicable, unpredictable and dangerous world. When the reader first encounters Olivia, she is presented as an object of desire, but Marcus immediately senses danger. Apart from her outstanding beauty, which arouses his sexual desire, Marcus notes her diligence and her apparently self-confident manner. Sitting in the library, Marcus indulges in an erotic fantasy about her,

but it is fear which restrains him from relieving his passion in the bathroom. The passage ends on a dark note: Marcus suppresses his desire, because he is afraid of getting caught masturbating and ending up in Korea. In fact, the dark caesura at the end of this introductory paragraph is highlighted by a climactic sentence structure, “the strong desire to rush off to the bathroom was quelled by my fear that if I did so, I *might get caught* by a librarian or a teacher or even by an honourable student, *be expelled* from school, and *wind up* a rifleman in Korea” (IN 47; emphasis added). This fear of death, to be “caught”, “expelled”, and to “wind up a rifleman in Korea”, associates Olivia with the theme of an unpredictable world in which every misstep is dangerous. In addition, Olivia’s first appearance is preceded by the dire warnings of Marcus’s father not to get involved with Gentiles and into trouble. The introduction of the character Olivia is thereby framed by two references to the dangers awaiting Marcus, which serves to qualify Olivia as a dangerous person and already anticipates her part in Marcus’s downfall.

As a narrator, he speaks with authority in this passage and on a first reading, readers have no reason to doubt his evaluation of these dangers, because he seems to speak from a certain narratorial distance. This distancing is achieved by emphasizing the temporal distance between the time of narration and the time at which the events take place: “She was absorbed in her homework, *and I, with the mind of an eighteen-year-old boy*, was absorbed in wanting to put my hand up her skirt” (IN 47; emphasis added). The narrator implies that he evaluates the events of his youth from a more detached vantage point. The reader, who does not yet know that only a few months have passed between Marcus’s first encounter with Olivia and the time of narration, is deliberately misled into giving credence to the seemingly authoritative narrative voice. Only on a rereading does the biting dramatic irony of Marcus’s self-reflexive statement in this passage come to the fore. Roth uses this device several times throughout the novel and its more general functions will be explained below. On a first reading this strategy helps to increase the sense of foreboding looming over his first encounter with Olivia, because it lends authority to the menace in Marcus’s ominous anticipations of his violent death in Korea. It helps raise the awareness of the reader and creates suspense. Readers are reminded to look for this “tiniest misstep” that “can have tragic consequences”, which Marcus’s father so mysteriously evokes before Marcus decides to leave Newark (12). As it turns out at the end, the question as to why Marcus dies in Korea will remain unanswered and the reader’s curiosity frustrated. Yet, at this point in the narrative, the reader is actively encouraged to regard Olivia as one of the numerous traps awaiting Marcus in Winesburg. At first she is described in such a manner only figuratively, but later on in the novel even literally. It is his

mother who calls Olivia “a menace” and “a trap” (*IN* 175), referring to her unstable personality.

This sense of foreboding continues to loom over the two students. It is in the context of their first kiss when Marcus reveals to the reader that he is dead, and it seems therefore fitting that their secret date takes place at a cemetery. In a description as sinister as funny, Marcus describes the conditions under which students at Winesburg have to conduct their amorous business in order to avoid punishment, “some went out to the town cemetery and conducted their sex play against the tombstones or even down on the graves themselves” (*IN* 48-49). And after their dinner, Marcus explains how important it is for him to have had sexual intercourse at least once before his death. Accordingly, he then parks his car “alongside the town cemetery” (52-53), where after initial kissing something so extraordinary happens that Marcus has “to puzzle over Olivia’s actions” for what seems an “eternity” (55), the blowjob. Again, there is a reference to the cemetery as Marcus almost panics in his embarrassment and briefly considers to “fling open the car door and spray the cemetery street” (63). Again, danger and death frame the second encounter between Marcus and Olivia. This setting obviously anticipates Marcus’s violent death in Korea (Shostak, “Graveyards” 1), but it also maintains the notion that his relationship with Olivia is both deviant, dangerous, and prone to a sudden end. For Neelakantan, it represents Roth’s “signature theme of the interplay of Eros and Thanatos” (“Heroic Ideal” 207).

Marcus’s romance with Olivia is also a symbol of his romance with America. As the female protagonist in Roth’s novel, Olivia belongs to the old literary tradition of the gentile *shiksa*, who incites Jewish anxieties and desires surrounding issues of intermarriage and assimilation.²⁴ The novel follows the generic conventions of the *shiksa*-tradition in Jewish-American literature, in which a romance with the female Gentile represents the problematic condition of the Jewish-American protagonist, torn between his Jewish origins and his desire for assimilation (cf. Cople Jaher 523-24). It is especially the stereotype of the *shiksa* as an erotic goddess of the Christian faith which is relevant with respect to *Indignation*. As Cople Jaher points out, the sexy *shiksa* embodies a reduction of female Gentiles to “sex objects” and “instruments of assimilation”. These Christian women are usually portrayed as “more carnal and promiscuous” than their Jewish counterparts, which bespeaks a literary tradition deeply rooted in Jewish culture. According to Cople Jaher, this derogatory treatment of Christian women can be understood originally as an impulse to exact a literary revenge on an oppressive Christian culture by “deprecating Christian intellect, family life, and

²⁴ For an overview on this tradition see Cople Jaher, “The Quest for the Ultimate Shiksa” (1983). See also Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America* (1973) 57-64.

purity". In Jewish-American literature, this old stereotype is still used, although usually transformed into a metaphor of Americanization (Cople Jaher 528). Typically, the Jewish-American protagonist's desire for the promiscuous Gentile arises from a desire to join the ranks of WASP society. Consequently, these women are not only promiscuous, but very often quite affluent, well-educated, beautiful, and entice their Jewish lovers to leave their Jewish heritage behind and to embrace the new culture (537-39). Beginning with *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth has been employing the tradition of the *shiksa* as a "metaphor of the penetration of this virgin land, equating, psychologically, to domination and possession" (Morley, 103). Olivia, daughter of an influential physician and promiscuous "blow-job queen" of Winesburg, is clearly indebted to this Jewish stereotype. However, Roth departs from the conventions of his first fifties novel *Goodbye, Columbus*, in which romance is also a symbol of the protagonist's desire for assimilation, by choosing an unhappy outsider of American culture as the gentile *shiksa*. Whereas Neil Klugman's fantasies of assimilation into suburban middle-class culture are personified by assimilated Brenda Patimkin in *Goodbye Columbus*, Olivia is an outcast of American middle-class society. In *Indignation*, Roth has chosen two non-conformist outsiders who are attracted to each other and start a complicated relationship, which is why Marcus's mother eventually tries to force him out of this affair. Although she claims that it is not the ancient Jewish anxiety about intermarriage that concerns her ("She can be Gentile, she can be anything. This is 1951"), Jewish anxieties about intermingling with Gentiles nevertheless form an important subtext to Marcus's love affair with Olivia. During a phone call, Marcus's father accuses Marcus of avoiding the help and solidarity of other Jews: "The first thing you do, you move out on them to find a Gentile and you room with him". He implies that Marcus is deliberately turning his back on his Jewish ties, which is probably not far from the truth, given Marcus's almost alienated relationship to his own Jewish heritage. In addition, Marcus is clearly aware of the fact that his relationship with Olivia is exactly the kind of intermingling with Gentiles that his father fears: "I had fallen in love with – or I had fallen in love with the folly of falling in love with – the very girl my father must have been imagining me in bed with on that first night he'd locked me out of the house" (*IN* 75). And as in many literary works from the *shiksa*-tradition, punishment awaits the Jewish protagonist who turns his back on his faith and seeks the love of a Gentile seductress (cf. Cople Jaher 529). Marcus utterly fails to recreate himself in Winesburg and dies on Masacre Mountain in Korea.

The anxieties and insecurities that the characters experience are closely tied to their family lives. The traditional family is the cornerstone of fifties nostalgia. As Elaine Tyler May points out, the 1950s are often mistakenly

seen as “the last gasp of time-honored family life before the sixties generation made a major break from the past” (*Homeward Bound* 7). Correspondingly, family life lies at the heart of this novel which strongly opposes the notion of an idealized traditional family in the fifties. Two families which are anything but intact come into focus: Marcus’s Jewish family from Newark and Olivia’s white middle-class family from Cleveland. There are some remarkable parallels between both families, which point to the function of family in the novel. The central conflicts in both families erupt, because the fathers seek to exert control over their children’s lives. In the case of Marcus’s father, this takes the form of an increasing sense of paranoia that drives his son out of the house. His father cannot cope with the prospect of Marcus’s growing independence as a young student at Robert Treat. Anxiety about what might befall his son in post-war America is the reason for Mr Messner’s almost absurd behaviour. Seeking personal independence, Marcus decides to move west and starts a new life in Winesburg. On the one hand, Marcus represents the teenage rebel seeking a self-reliant life independent from his father. On the other hand, fear and anxiety are the driving forces behind the conflict between father and son. The obsessive fears of Marcus’s father are concerned with the dangers awaiting his son in the wide world. The causes of the fear remain ambiguous as Marcus speculates on why his father turns out to be so obsessed with his son’s growing independence. Similarly, in Olivia’s family, there is also a conflict between father and child that leads to disaster. Olivia also struggles with her father’s attempts to exert control over her life. Although much remains in the dark about her father, the novel hints at the fact that it is Olivia’s unbecoming desire for personal independence that her father wants to stifle. After all, she is sent to Winesburg, a place she detests, in order to become a “normal girl” (*IN* 69). Jaffe-Foger points out that her “overbearing father figure” represents the social conventions that strictly regulated female sexuality in the 1950s (“[A]nything” 89). Unlike Marcus, Olivia does not go to Winesburg voluntarily and she asserts her independence through sexually deviant behaviour, doing exactly the opposite of what her father seems to expect from her. However, both Marcus and Olivia seek to escape the control of their fathers and to assert their independence in Winesburg, where they fail. They are both teenage rebels and thus essential protagonists of fifties nostalgia. Both families are anything but intact and in both families it is the intrusion of public pressures into private lives that drives the children to disaster. For Olivia, her father represents the strict norms prescribing female conduct and Marcus’s father represents the anxieties of post-war America. Thus, Roth clearly questions the conservative dream of the intact and traditional family that is often associated with the American fifties.

Apart from Marcus and Olivia, minor characters also help establish the fifties as an era in which America did not live up to its promises. Flusser, Marcus's homosexual roommate, is a good example. His anarchic individualism is the most extreme one presented in the novel. His outward appearance serves to reinforce both his functions as a social outcast and his rebellious attitude. For example, he lies smoking in his bed "fully clothed and still in his shoes". He does not change his clothes regularly and even criticizes Marcus for being the always "well-washed, neatly dressed boy" who is too conformist for Flusser's taste: "well, I am not a nice boy like you, Marcus" (IN 23-25). His contempt for Marcus is already established at their first meeting when Flusser refrains from shaking Marcus's hand and examines him "as though [he] were a member of a species he'd been fortunate enough never to have come upon before" (19). Even though Flusser plays Malvolio in a college production of *Twelfth Night*, he – the "one-man bacchanalia" (193) – shares more with the excessive Sir Toby, who disdains the Puritanical steward Malvolio. Like Sir Toby, Flusser sneers at his antagonist and insults him "mercilessly", calls him names ("Prince Charming"), mocks his upbringing ("Mama Aurelius", 25) and generally shows his contempt for Marcus's conformism and his virtuous behaviour (21). Revealingly, Flusser sees in Marcus a kind of Stoic and compares him with Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher king who wrote about Stoic philosophy in his *Meditations*. It is not far from the mark to describe Marcus as a stoic who focusses on his duties and rather swallows racist remarks than to stand up against the guests at the bar who call him "Jew" (27). And like Sir Toby, Flusser eventually takes his revenge on his enemy, humiliating him in a prank that far transgresses the limits of ordinary taste. He takes the liberty to stay in bed until noon and to shirk classes. He recklessly plays Beethoven in the middle of the night, although he knows quite well that his roommates need their sleep. Later on, he creates havoc by masturbating in Marcus's room during his former roommate's stay at the hospital. He even applauds Marcus for having puked on the dean's desk and carpet, regarding it as a form of anarchic protest (186). In his world, puking or masturbating are forms of acceptable dissent against an oppressive and intolerant society. As he acknowledges himself, his devious behaviour is directed against human society itself: He believes that "human beings stink to high heaven" (23). Whereas his desire for revenge is emphasized by his repeated recital of Malvolio's exit line, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you" (22, 186), for Marcus he remains a "sinister free spirit, a spite-filled" boy (217). Flusser's rebellions are essentially misguided, since they spring from his desire for revenge on a society that forces him to conceal his homosexual identity. It is a kind of individualist behaviour that goes too far, that serves no other purpose but to satisfy his egoistic desire for revenge. It is a destructive form of self-assertion that of-

fers no alternative to the repressive status quo of the American fifties. It is thus unsuitable as a path towards social change. As a caricature of the American rebel, he represents the dangers of a reinless and thus un-American individualism. Reflecting the larger ideological framework of the American symbology, the norms of the text denounce such radical impulses in favour of a more moderate individualism from which society can actually benefit (cf. *RA* 119, see also 198-202).

It is therefore possible to conclude that, compared with Olivia and Flusser, Marcus's individualism has outright positive connotations and readers are likely to sympathise with his plight. He tries to recreate himself according to the norms of representative selfhood and fails. He does not share Elwyn's materialistic nature, symbolised by his love of cars, or Flusser's destructive anarchy, or Olivia's self-destructive deviance, or the grotesque excessiveness of the panty raid rebellion. Instead he entertains a moderate individualism. His most radical acts are breaking (and then replacing) Flusser's LP and insulting the dean. But in more general terms he is a person who believes in social change, which is why he tries so hard to convince Dean Caudwell. At the same time, Marcus has not really arrived in American mainstream culture. In fact, it is still very foreign to him, an aspect represented by his continuous sense of amazement and symbolized by his complicated relationship with the gentile *shiksa* Olivia. He is somewhat lost between his own Jewish heritage and Winesburg's WASP culture. He seeks the ideals of American individualism and self-reliance, in denial of Jewish traditions, but he is as much an outsider in Winesburg as his fancied *shiksa*. And as all dissenters he sees himself fundamentally at odds with society. Eventually all his aspirations prove futile as he is first expelled, then drafted and finally killed in Korea. Marcus asserts himself through rebellion against his father, his rejection of his Jewish ties, his dream of social mobility and of course his indignation. Yet, it is a dangerous world for non-conformists as the novel suggests. It is the novel's enigmatic conclusion in its *Historical Note* which implies that, in the late sixties, Marcus's dissent would not have led to his expulsion and to his violent death in Korea, but his peaceful protest would have contributed to social reform. It seems that he lives in the wrong age, an age he does not really understand and which ultimately proves hostile towards him. In other words, the world of the American fifties stifles American dissent and individual opportunity. Roth denounces an America which has left its true path, but praises forms of dissent developed during the student rebellions in the sixties and seventies. He thus writes himself into America as a Jewish-American jeremiah. He denounces American bigotry and conformism in this bleak depiction of the American fifties, confronting the conservative narrative of fifties nostalgia with the changes brought about by the radical sixties.

Moreover, the rhetorical framework of the jeremiad also imbues the use of narrative space in the novel. Newark is the central setting in many of Philip Roth's novels. For Larry Schwartz, Newark's Jewish district Weequahic represents a kind of utopia, for instance in the *American Trilogy* and his non-fiction works. Roth keeps retelling the narrative of an "Edenic" Newark in the 1940s and 1950s that was supposedly destroyed in the 1960s. He imagines the Weequahic of his childhood as a fairly homogenous Jewish settlement, where its prosperous middle-class citizens enjoyed relative peace, good relations among neighbours and where gender roles were still clear-cut. As regards Roth's biography, Schwartz points out that Roth's return to Newark after many years came as a shock, when he realized that it had become an all-black community suffering from soaring crime rates. This helps to explain the nostalgic perspective of his childhood home which tends to neglect the extent of segregation, racism and most importantly the exploitation of local black immigrants in Newark in the 1940s and 1950s. Schwartz concludes that "in sum, Roth cannot seem to sidestep the intensity of the very short-lived 'utopia' that was Weequahic even though he well knows the city's history" (1-11, 14). Likewise, Goldblatt argues in his discussion of *American Pastoral* that "Roth's observations about the destruction of Newark may be perceived as a result of the loss of community, in this case the Jewish Weequahic district" (98). He adds that apart from celebrating Weequahic's safety, its affluence and its prospects of upward mobility, the early Newark also stands for a strong sense of *yiddishkeit*. In *Goodbye, Columbus*, Roth's Newark is still the safe and quiet haven in which Jewish families may thrive and entertain hopes of upward mobility. The novel displays strong ties within the Jewish community that are threatened by the menace of assimilation, represented in the novel by a contrast between Newark and Short Hills. Significantly, Neil's return to Newark at the end of the novel represents a rejection of Brenda's absolute assimilation and reaffirms a sense of *yiddishkeit* (Goldblatt 88-90). In *Indignation*, Newark is also associated with the concept of *yiddishkeit*. It is suggested in the novel that there are strong ties between the Jewish families in Newark. Mutual help seems to be quite common, which is why the Cottlers in Newark offer their help to the Messners and send their nephew, Sonny Cottler, to help Marcus (*IN* 44). It has already been pointed out that Marcus not only turns his back on Sonny Cottler and the Jewish fraternity, but that he also rejects this sense of community among Jews in general.

The main contrast, however, is established between the two colleges Robert Treat and Winesburg. This is part of the ideological framework of the jeremiad, which emerges from the contrast between the two colleges in the novel: an idealized Robert Treat (Newark) and a bleak Winesburg. Newark and Robert Treat are fleshed out primarily through retroversions: brief depic-

tions of Marcus's home, extensive descriptions of his work at the butcher shop, and short, but significant evaluations of his time at Robert Treat. The relevance of his first glimpses into college life in Newark and the accompanying prospects of upward mobility are established in the first two sentences of the novel, which deserve a closer look:

About two and a half months after the well-trained divisions of North Korea, armed by the Soviets and Chinese Communists, crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea on June 25, 1950, and the agonies of the Korean War began, I entered Robert Treat, a small college in downtown Newark named for the city's seventeenth-century founder. I was the first member of our family to seek a higher education. (*IN* 1)

The beginning of the novel introduces the reader to the two deeply interlocked themes of the novel: the "agonies" of the war and Marcus's dream of a new and better life. From the very beginning, Korea looms threateningly over Marcus's dreams of independence, linking the two seemingly unrelated events and the public and the private spheres. And from the beginning, Robert Treat is associated with the colonial period, which is no superfluous detail in a novel about American values. It is the first of a number of elements endowing Robert Treat with positive connotations and making it an exemplary symbol of the American Way. The complex hypotactical structure of the first sentence serves to emphasise the short clause that follows, highlighting the significance of Marcus's enrolment at Robert Treat: Marcus is the first member of this Jewish family to enter "higher education", at a time when the American Jewry experienced better security than ever, increasing social acceptance and entered various intellectual professions in ever growing numbers, while the percentage of Jews in the working class declined. The American Jewry had finally joined the ranks of the American middle class and it is not surprising that the early 1950s, when Judaism became America's "third faith", are still considered the "golden age" of Jewish-American culture by many contemporaries (Sarna 274-77). Accordingly, Marcus praises Robert Treat for its critical thinkers (*IN* 85) and its almost multicultural student body in the course of the novel. Looking back, he describes how much he enjoyed studying together with students from diverse immigrant backgrounds (15, 19). The reader is told about Marcus's college life at Robert Treat in numerous retroversions. From the beginning, the college is praised for its tolerance. Marcus stresses the fact that the student body consists mainly of students with a working class background and describes how he enjoys its multicultural atmosphere: "[...] It at first excited me to have lunch with them because they were Irish or Italian and to me a new category, not only of Newarker but of human being" (*IN* 15). In sum, Robert Treat's positive connotations form the background against which life at Winesburg is judged. This contrast is particularly ostensible when Marcus is interrogated by the dean. It is no coincidence that Roth chooses to write

about Robert Treat's liberal freethinkers and its climate of tolerance, which allows even Jews to teach (*IN* 85), at a moment when the dean intrudes into Marcus's privacy.

Unlike Robert Treat, Winesburg is endowed mainly with negative connotations. It is when Marcus starts to suffer under his father's suspicions that he decides to move westward from Newark to Ohio in order to become an independent young man. Yet his decision to reinvent himself according to the ideals of the American Way leads only to frustration, confusion and eventually death. Winesburg, Ohio is not the endpoint of his voyage. Instead he keeps moving around the campus, helplessly alien to a strange and sometimes even hostile environment. This restlessness symbolizes his inferior status as an outsider in the tradition-bound Midwest. His descriptions of Winesburg suggest that he is at odds with his new environment from the beginning. His first impressions of Winesburg are deceptively idyllic and Marcus praises the "scenic Winesburg campus" with its "shapely trees", "picturesquely set on a hill". Yet, his first dorm room is anything but comfortable, a "smelly" and "poorly lit" room in which he meets Flusser, a theatrically minded student who eyes Marcus with obvious distaste (*IN* 18-19). The physical dominance of the traditional Christian fraternity houses also contrasts with the serene atmosphere and is almost menacing. Marcus describes them as "imposing", "castle-like" buildings with "massive black studded doors" (21). This uninviting atmosphere serves to establish Winesburg's negative connotations in spite of its beautiful surface right from the beginning. Roth's intertextual "tip of the pen" (Royal, "Indignation" 130) to Sherwood Anderson's collection of tales, *Winesburg, Ohio*, also contributes to creating this ambivalent atmosphere. The classic novel famously depicts rural life in pastoral Winesburg, a completely fictional town populated by people whose lives are more complicated than their simple lifestyle suggests. John Updike has described the kind of associations that the novel's title commonly evokes in his important article about Anderson's classic work:

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is one of those books so well known by title that we imagine we know what is inside it: a sketch of the population, seen more or less in cross-section, of a small Midwestern town. It is this as much as Edvard Munch's paintings are portraits of the Norwegian middle class around the turn of the century. The important thing, for Anderson and Munch, is not the costumes and the furniture or even the bodies but the howl they conceal – the psychic pressure and warp underneath the social scene. Matter-of-fact though it sounds, *Winesburg, Ohio* is feverish, phantasmal, dreamlike. (Updike 189)

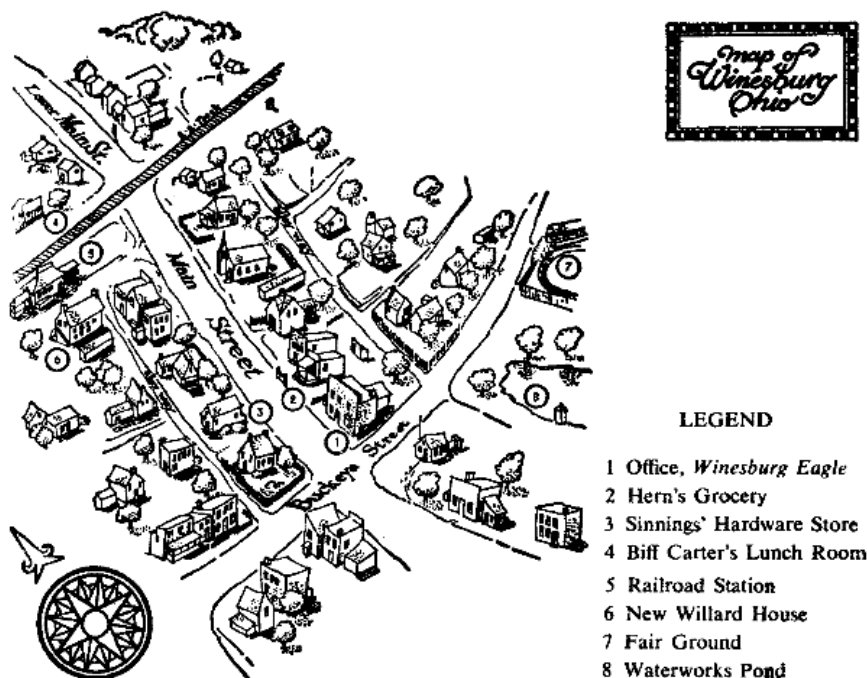


Figure 1: A map of Winesburg, drawn by Harald Toksvig for the first edition of *Winesburg, Ohio*, 1919. Rpt. in Anderson, Sherwood. *Winesburg, Ohio*. Eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray L. White. New York: Norton, 1996. 2. Print.

Roth fills his novel, also a somewhat “feverish” work, with subtle intertextual references to Anderson. Thus, “Buckeye Street” and “Main Street”, places in Anderson’s Winesburg, also appear in Roth’s descriptions of the campus (*IN* 20, 201, 204). And the “New Willard House”, the inn where Marcus works, also has a namesake in Anderson’s world (21). Brühwiler points out several additional similarities between Marcus and George Willard, the protagonist of *Winesburg, Ohio*. Since both are young and naïve, since both seek new experiences, and since both share certain “emotional incapacities” as well as a “strained relationship with their fathers”, Brühwiler argues that Marcus is in fact a distorted mirror image of George Willard. She suggests that both represent two different outlooks on adolescence and the human potential to learn from experience. Whereas George Willard stands for the “transformative power of adolescence, the potential for learning” and grows by developing “a critical sense of himself”, Marcus is characterised by his sense of incomprehension, by his inability to reconcile himself with his father and thus represents a much bleaker perspective (Brühwiler 52-55).

Yet most importantly, Roth associates his Winesburg with the Civil War (*IN* 20, 73), the traumatic experience which forms a subtext to Anderson’s

classic novel. And like Anderson, who looks back from 1919 to the seemingly more innocent decade at the turn of century, Roth turns his attention from the twenty-first century to the supposedly happier America of the fifties. Consequently, Anderson's fictional Winesburg is well suited as a setting for a novel dealing with American nostalgia. And as Roth's plot unfolds, it becomes clear that Marcus's new college does not turn out to be the place where he can readily pursue his aspirations. It has already been pointed out that Winesburg stifles his struggle for a more independent life. For instance, both the dean's insistent distaste for Marcus's atheism or the chapel requirement of the college evoke the "tripartite scheme" of American religion at that time, according to which one was expected to be either Protestant, Catholic or Jew. In fact, Jewish secularism was regarded as a form of un-American subversion. Roth clearly integrates this perspective into his portrayal of Winesburg, where the religious renewal of the 1950s with its insistence on regular church attendance was in full force. At the same time, Roth points to the latent anti-semitism that, albeit "on the defensive", still dominated certain sections of society. Latently anti-semitic conflicts about issues such as school prayer or Christmas celebrations were still quite normal at the time in spite of the fact that Judaism became more and more accepted (cf. Sarna 275-82). Roth exposes the exclusive nature of the conservative dream, which glorifies a supposedly happier age of growing affluence in the American fifties.

Furthermore, the depiction of Winesburg as a dangerous world for an aspiring young man is encapsulated by a motif of entrapment. The trap is an ongoing motif which resonates throughout the novel and culminates when Marcus is finally trapped and killed on massacre mountain. The most striking example is the "firetrap", the lonely place where Marcus finally takes up residence. The telling name and its location at the top of the building foreshadows Marcus's death in a more literal "firetrap" most conspicuously – i.e. the machine gun fire at the top of massacre mountain. The motif of entrapment is already established early on in the novel by Mr Pearlgreen, a friend of Marcus's father, who warns Mr Messner that "the world is waiting, it's licking its chops, to take your boy away" (*IN* 14). Although Marcus is sceptical about his father's paranoia, he is often preoccupied with the thought of being "caught" by the draft (33), usually when he is engaged in seemingly illicit behaviour (129-30, 133): He fears he might end up as "a rifleman in Korea" (47). He even wonders what punishments might have awaited other students before him who also broke the strict rules at Winesburg College and were caught (182). At one time, he tells Olivia about his childhood and the motif of the inevitable trap even appears in his tale about the innocent boyish pranks he used to play on a customer called Mrs. Sklon, "I couldn't trick Mrs. Sklon [...], no one could [...]. And she would catch me. Every time

[...] She always caught me when I tried to run away” (*IN* 139-40). The motif is used more often and more conspicuously in the last third of the novel when the pace of the plot increases, and Marcus approaches his bloody death in Korea. In one instance he relates how his father took him to a chicken market and where he saw how the chickens were trapped and killed, “they were in a cage, maybe five tiers high, and he would reach in [...]. First a chain is wrapped around the rear leg – they trap it that way (158-59)”. Certain characters are also associated with this motif. Marcus’s mother warns him about Olivia, insisting that “a person so unstable is a menace to you, Markie, and a trap” (175). Afterwards, Marcus wonders if his mother’s attempt to pressure him by threatening to get a divorce is not in itself another cleverly devised trap: “Her announcing that she was divorcing him [...] was merely the ploy by which she tricked me [...]. I’m caught – I’ve made her a promise I can never break, whose keeping is going to break me” (178-79). And during his second argument with the dean, Marcus also wonders whether the dean has “lured” him into his office “with no more than a kindly handwritten letter”. He concludes that he has “stepped directly into his trap” (187). The last and probably most important example occurs during the final speech of President Lentz, in which he chides the students for their inappropriate behaviour during the panty raid and promises retribution, threatening that “history will catch you in the end” (222). The frequent use of this motif, especially in the last third of the novel, also reinforces the novel’s theme of an unpredictable and dangerous world. Of course, the numerous anticipations in the story evoke a sense of fatal determinism as well, for example this ominous remark made by Markus’s father: “It’s about life, where the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences” (12). In *Winesburg*, Roth conjures up a dark world in which death is inescapable and dissent ineffective. This is contrasted with Marcus’s nostalgic descriptions of Robert Treat, where anybody, regardless of race, colour, or creed, has the freedom to speak their minds. The contrast between the two colleges is therefore the key to the novel’s ideological structure. Roth uses *Winesburg* to denounce the evils of an America gone astray, only to hold up Robert Treat’s liberalism and its multiculturalism as his vision of a better America.

2.2 Metatextual Dimensions: A Voice from Beyond the Grave

What happened next I had to puzzle over for weeks afterward. And even dead, as I am and have been for I don’t know how long, I try to reconstruct the mores that reigned over that campus and to recapitulate the troubled efforts to elude those mores that fostered the series of mishaps ending in my death at the age of nineteen. (*IN* 54)

This passage introduces the reader to the surprising revelation after the first fifty pages that is the most striking structural element of the book. It is worth dwelling on this sentence, because it contains the seeds of several structural and thematic elements of the novel. Firstly, it makes the reader aware of the central question in the narrative and encourages readers to contemplate the causes of Marcus's death in Korea. Secondly, it foregrounds the fact that the novel contains several narrative levels which are thematically connected by this motif. And thirdly, this sentence represents the starting point of a narrative strategy that keeps undermining narratorial authority successively at different points in the novel and that creates an overall sense of unreliability and indeterminacy. This sentence illustrates, in a nutshell, several of the underlying structures in *Indignation*.

Considering the novel as a whole, the narrative structure of *Indignation* appears to be based on a complex interplay between three different narrative voices. The *external third person narrator*²⁵ of the penultimate section of the book (*Out from Under*) represents the first narrative level. It constitutes a narrative frame in which Marcus's entire (*character-bound*²⁶) narration is embedded and it is only introduced when the bulk of the novel has been narrated. "HERE MEMORY CEASES", the initial sentence of the chapter *Out from Under* introduces this new *external narrator* and reveals that Marcus's entire narrative is just a story within a story. The deictic expression *here*, referring literally to the beginning of the new chapter, implies that, with the endpoint of his narration, Marcus's life has come to an end too. The capitalized letters emphasize the finality of this statement. What then follows is a summary of how Marcus dies in Korea and what happens afterwards. It is this narrative level that constitutes the primary level into which all others are embedded. The voice of Marcus's older self, which is first presented to us as a voice from beyond the grave in the quotation above, represents the second narrative level. Its *character-bound narrator* is Marcus's older self, ruminating on his own existence and trying to "reconstruct" the "mishaps" that have led to his violent fate in Korea (*IN* 54). Looking back, this narrator relates the story of his life in Newark and Winesburg, a narration that comprises the bulk of the novel. And within this narrative frame, Marcus's

²⁵ The narratological terminology used in this study follows to a large extent the system developed by Mieke Bal in her standard handbook *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2009). Some of Bal's terms are given preference here, because they are more self-explanatory than the traditional structuralist terminology developed by G. Genette and others. According to Bal, an *external narrator* does not partake in the story he or she is narrating (Bal 21). It corresponds to Genette's concept of the *heterodiegetic narrator*. For a critical discussion of the structuralist typology of narrators see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (2002) 95-97.

²⁶ A *character-bound narrator* partakes as a character in the story he or she is narrating (Bal 21). The term corresponds to Genette's concept of the *homodiegetic narrator*.

younger self in turn tells stories about other characters, such as the episode in which Marcus tells Olivia about his relationship with Mrs Sklon when he was still a young child, or the story of the fat man at the butcher shop. The voice of his younger self therefore constitutes the third narrative level and consists mainly of retroversions. The novel contains therefore three distinct narrative voices. There is an impersonal *external narrator*, relating Marcus's thoughts as he lies dying on a Korean battlefield. Within this story, Marcus's older self, floating in some kind of mental limbo, tells us retrospectively how his younger self fared in Newark and Winesburg. This story is then interrupted in turn by numerous retroversions which are related by Marcus's younger self. The *Historical Note* which concludes the novel stands out as a paratextual element and does not constitute a level in its own right.

The way that these levels are embedded into each other produces a distinct effect on the reader. The novel begins on the third level and the revelation that this story is told by Marcus's older self, speaking from beyond the grave, hits the reader completely from out of the blue. The only hint that he may still be alive is the suggestive title of the first chapter, *Under Morphine*. Only very attentive readers might wonder whether Marcus's curious claim is actually true and not just a morphine-induced hallucination (Gates 1). According to Masiero, the novel even relies on the reader's "liability to forget" this hint as they read the next 54 pages (51). In any case, we are asked to believe that the narrative consists solely of Marcus's circular thoughts reaching us from some kind of afterlife. Consequently, this passage introduces the narrative frame into which the narrative featuring his younger self has been embedded. What is not yet revealed at this point – in fact until we reach the end of the novel – is that Marcus's ontological speculations from beyond the grave are actually his morphine-induced thoughts as he lies dying on a Korean battlefield. The retrospective *character-bound narrator* gives then way to the *external third person narrator* who dominates the chapter *Out from Under*. Hence, readers are first tricked into believing that the narrative of Marcus's college life in Winesburg is the primary narrative, until it is revealed that this is part of a superior narrative frame. In this frame story, Marcus describes the peculiar afterlife which now determines his existence. Again, we are asked to believe that this is the primary narrative frame until we learn that this story is also embedded in another frame. The central narrative device at the core of this structure is the *trompe l'oeil*. The reader is made to believe that the embedded narrative he is reading is actually the primary level. And in *Indignation*, the reader is misled in this manner not just once, but actually twice. What appears to be a straightforward narrative at first, turns out to be a story within a story within another story.²⁷ As a

²⁷ For a discussion of this narrative device and the functions of frame stories in postmodernist fiction in general see McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) 115-17.

result, narratorial authority is undermined because, as McHale explains, “recursive structure serves as a tool for exploring issues of narrative authority, reliability and unreliability, the circulation of knowledge and so forth”. According to McHale, it is perfectly normal for recursive structures to occur in our everyday lives, which is why postmodern texts tend to draw attention to these structures and the *trompe l’oeil* is a fairly conventional way to achieve this. Accordingly, Roth’s use of this rhetorical device should be interpreted as a means of foregrounding the otherwise rather inconspicuous Chinese-box structure in *Indignation*.²⁸ It is quite inconspicuous, because the three narrative levels seem fairly different from each other. Usually, it is the degree of resemblance that foregrounds recursive structures in fiction (McHale 113-115). And yet, there is a certain degree of similarity between the three levels which is brought about by thematic parallels and which further foregrounds the recursive structure. The common denominator among the three levels is the motif of interpreting. As much as Marcus’s younger self fails to interpret the behaviour of other characters successfully, his older self fails to comprehend his life at Winesburg and the events leading to his death in Korea (cf. Nadel, I. 141). On the primary level, the *external third-person narrator* is also preoccupied with making sense of Marcus’s short life. And finally, the readers are themselves encouraged to interpret Marcus’s life, thus enacting Marcus’s frustrated attempts to understand the world around him

The peculiar interplay between the narration of Marcus’s younger self and its narrative frame adds to this effect. The relationship between Marcus’s older and his younger self provides a good example. Roth exploits the shifts between both levels to its full potential, for the novel is interspersed with knowing narrative comments that foreground the difference between the older Marcus who narrates the story and his younger self. For example, Marcus distances himself from his seemingly younger self when he describes his first encounter with Olivia and explains that he, “with the mind of an eighteen-year-old boy, was absorbed” in his desire to touch her (*IN* 47). Later on, after having finally revealed the “extraordinary” event that occurred during the date – the blowjob – Marcus goes on to distance himself from his confused younger self in another narrative comment. He reminds the reader that he is listening to a voice from beyond the grave: “It would be some time before it would dawn on me, as it has finally (millennia later, for all I know),

²⁸ This perspective emphasizes the postmodern underpinnings of Roth’s fiction which is not to say that these novels are postmodernist works. As David Brauner has shown, Roth criticism can be divided into three scholarly “camps”, i.e. those critics who emphasise Roth’s indebtedness to the realist mode, those who see his novels as deeply steeped in the postmodernist mode and finally those critics who regard his fiction as some kind of fusion between the two modes (*Philip Roth* 46-51).

that whatever I did might be okay with me, too” (*IN* 63). While this serves to distance the reader from the emotional immediacy of Marcus’s profound confusion on a first reading, it strikes the reader as ironic on a rereading. It is only after having read the novel that the potential for dramatic irony in this statement is fully realized. On a rereading, we are aware of the fact that Marcus’s consciousness is not a voice from beyond the grave, and certainly not “millennia” away, but that only a few months pass between Marcus’s expulsion from college in the winter of 1951 (200) and his lethal wound in March 1952 (226). These narrative comments are often emphasized by parentheses and occur several times throughout the novel, but they occur particularly frequently after the revelation of Marcus’s death: “I understood no one and nothing. (Another big theme of my life’s last year)” (74); “I had only just found out myself (Another theme: only just finding things out)” (75); “Was this moment to mark the beginning of a lifetime’s accumulation of mistakes (had I been given a lifetime in which to make them)?” (77). In other cases, these intrusions by Marcus’s older self are not highlighted in such a manner and seem more inconspicuous, e.g.: “I didn’t want to hurt her again, and so did nothing to keep her slashed wrist out of the range of my hawk-eyed mother. I did nothing – which is to say, I did exactly the wrong thing. Again” (144). As in the other instances, this is the voice of Marcus’s older self, putting the events into perspective. In the most striking example, Marcus’s seemingly older mind comments on his own innocence with regard to Winesburg’s conservative values, “so to be free of my father, I’d chosen a school fifteen hours by car from New Jersey, difficult to reach by bus or train, and more than fifty miles from the nearest commercial airport-but with no understanding on my part of the beliefs with which youngsters were indoctrinated as a matter of course deep in the heart of America” (81). Again, the narrator presents himself as an older knowing authority and explains the experiences of his younger self from a seemingly more authoritative vantage point. On a first reading, this lends authority to the voice of Marcus’s older self, but only up to the point where the primary narrative level is introduced and the first person (*character-bound*) narration gives way to a third person (*external*) narration. In this particular case, the more authoritative voice of his older self criticizes the atmosphere of conformity that is often associated with life in the fifties. Lexically, the sentence is ambiguous. While the expression “deep in the heart of America” clearly refers to the American Midwest, it is at the same time a more universal statement about the more abstract entity “America”. This ambiguity is caused by overlapping core contexts. On the hand, Marcus discusses the geographical distance between his home and Ohio, presenting his journey into the American Midwest as an act of personal liberation. On the other hand, the reference to “the beliefs with which youngsters were indoctrinated as a matter of course” refers both to

what Marcus calls the “biblical hogwash” (*IN* 81) in Winesburg and the American ideology as such, including Marcus’s desire to assert his independence by moving west and to become part of Midwestern American culture. The ambiguity is one of the elements that serve to elicit the active participation of the reader in making sense of Marcus’s death. Yet, while the authoritative character of the voice in this passage is clearly emphasized on a first reading, rereading the passage we become aware of the strong dramatic irony. The narrator, distancing himself from the “youngsters” who are supposed to be more susceptible to ideological trappings, is after all himself still a very young man of only nineteen years. This undermines the reliability of Marcus’s narration. On the whole, these numerous narratorial comments serve to undermine the authority of Marcus’s younger self and help establish Marcus’s older self as the authoritative voice, especially when it comes to ideological judgements such as the one about the “heart of America”. In contrast, this authoritative stance is undermined as soon as the reader learns that Marcus is in fact not yet dead and that the whole first-person narrative represents nothing else but Marcus’s morphine-induced thoughts and feelings. This notion of unreliability increases on a second reading, when all these numerous comments in *Under Morphine* become marked by dramatic irony. The voice of the older Marcus is no longer authoritative, but appears to be highly unreliable, because he is unconscious of his own situation.

This narrative strategy undermining Marcus’s narration concerns not only the first chapter, which amounts to the better part of the novel but can be identified in the second chapter as well. The voice of Marcus’s younger self intrudes into the primary narrative frame of the *external narrator* in *Out from Under*. After having related the circumstances of Marcus’s death and its consequences for his parents, the *external narrator* is interrupted quite abruptly by another voice.

Yes, if only this and if only that, we’d all be together and alive forever and everything would work out fine. If only his father, if only Flusser, if only Elwyn, if only Caudwell, if only Olivia-! If only Cottler-if only he hadn’t befriended the superior Cottler! If only Cottler hadn’t befriended him! If only he hadn’t let Cottler hire Ziegler to proxy for him at chapel! If only Ziegler hadn’t got caught! If only he had gone to chapel himself! If he’d gone there the forty times and signed his name the forty times, he’d be alive today and just retiring from practicing law. But he couldn’t! Couldn’t believe like a child in some stupid God! Couldn’t listen to their ass-kissing hymns! Couldn’t sit in their hallowed church! And the prayers, those shut-eyed prayers-putrefied primitive superstition! Our Folly, which art in Heaven! The disgrace of religion, the immaturity and ignorance and shame of it all! Lunatic piety about nothing! (*IN* 229-30)

Here, the *external narrator* of the final chapter gives way to a different, strangely equivocal voice. It is not entirely clear who is speaking: the *external narrator*? Marcus? Perhaps even the mother? On the one hand, the core context preceding the passage focusses on Marcus’s mother and according to

the *principle of obstination*, readers tend “to continue to frame a passage of narrative in a consistent manner unless prompted by textual or contextual features to shift to a new frame” (Hawthorn 237). On the other hand, readers soon realize that this is Marcus’s language. Certain clues and hints force readers to reattribute the passage to Marcus’s voice. Firstly, the anaphoric if-structures occur several times in Marcus’s first-person narration. Compare the following passage: “Oh, if only I could have graciously poured it for him. If only I could have handed him the glass and said, ‘Calm down, Dean. Try this, why don’t you?’” (96). This passage has an even more familiar ring: “If only my father, if only Flusser, if only Elwyn, if only Olivia!” (185). Furthermore, the strong, anti-religious language is clearly a representation of Marcus’s critical attitude towards religion: “Couldn’t believe like a child in some stupid God! Couldn’t listen to their ass-kissing hymns! [...] And the prayers, those shut-eyed prayers-putrefied primitive superstition! [...] The disgrace of religion [...] Lunatic piety about nothing!” Apart from the notable exception of the two pronouns *we* and *our*, this is mostly free indirect discourse, indicated by the predominant usage of third person pronouns, the lack of both reporting verbs and the conjunction *that* (cf. Rimmon-Kenan 111-14). The result is an ambiguous co-presence of the voices of the *external narrator* and Marcus’s. His voice from beyond the grave interferes with the *external narration*, effectively collapsing the distinction into narrative levels. It is impossible to distinguish Marcus’s language from the voice of the *external narrator*, which is why the distinction between the two voices can no longer be upheld.²⁹ This serves to undermine the narrative authority of the external narrator. Whereas the seemingly more authoritative *external narration* in *Out from Under* contrasts with the unreliability of the preceding chapter at first, the narrator’s authority gives then way to mere ambiguity. Within the recursive structure of the novel, the ambiguous co-presence of voices in this passage can be understood as a kind of *metalepsis*, i.e. a transgression of narrative levels. The sudden intrusion of Marcus’s voice into the otherwise impersonal narration constitutes a violation of the hierarchical structure of the three levels, because his voice does not belong to this superior narrative frame. “HERE MEMORY CEASES”, the impersonal narrator declares and thereby announces Marcus’s death. The sudden return of his voice a few pages later is therefore somewhat odd. Whereas Marcus’s early pronouncement of his own death turns out to be incorrect when the third person narrator takes over, the surprising reappearance of

²⁹ Cf. Bal, who discusses the impact of free indirect discourse on narrative levels as *text interference*. She points out that the degree of *text interference* may vary from one text to another, depending on whether the narrator’s or the actor’s text dominates the given passage. But in any case, “when there is text interference, narrator’s text and actor’s text are so closely related that a distinction into narrative levels can no longer be made” (Bal 56).

Marcus's voice after he has died ironically reaffirms the notion of a voice from beyond the grave. Indeed, by using free indirect discourse in such a resourceful manner, Roth succeeds in creating what seems, in his own words, rather "unpronounceable" (*IN* 212) – the eerie and paradoxical effect of a voice which might belong to a dead man. In conclusion, Roth's use of *metalepsis* undermines the reliability of the external narrator, serves to dazzle the reader once more, and destabilises narratorial authority overall.

The overall chronology of events is also fairly complex, since the novel abounds in retroversions and anticipations. Often the narration of crucial events is delayed by inserting changes in the overall chronology. There are several observations to be made. First of all, the most obvious explanation for withholding information temporarily is clearly suspense, which is fairly conventional. Nonetheless, this should not distract from the fact that there is another narrative strategy behind it. The pattern is fairly straightforward. The reader's expectations about a crucial event are raised and then it is withheld temporarily. A few examples should serve to illustrate the point. It is quite clear that when Marcus decides to leave Robert Treat and a retroversion delays the narration, readers expect to learn what happens next. Similarly, the narration anticipates that something "extraordinary" happens on Marcus's date with Olivia in order to raise expectations and to increase suspense, but Marcus makes no mention of it and goes on to describe only the date in the restaurant. The "extraordinary" event is still being withheld when Marcus reveals that he is dead. It is only much later, during Marcus's conversation with Elwyn Ayers, that the reader learns about the blowjob and it is only after his next encounter with Olivia during a history class that Marcus chooses to describe the event itself. Again, the narration of the event is temporarily withheld in order to create suspense. Later on, Marcus ends up in hospital where his appendix is removed. Olivia knocks on the door and the next meeting between the two, which the reader has been expecting for quite a while, is finally announced. Yet another long retroversion occurs and the narration of their meeting is postponed one more time as we are first told about his mother's phone call (*IN* 124-26). In another instance of this pattern, the narrator announces the meeting between Olivia and his mother and explains that he is afraid of his mother noticing Olivia's scar. But before the reader can direct his attention to this possibility, Marcus describes the conversation with his mother and then recalls his day at the chicken market (143-63). Again, the obvious explanation for withholding the information is suspense, although there is a more sophisticated narrative strategy behind this reticence. The reader grows accustomed to this kind of suspense which is created through temporary gaps in the narrative and which does not frustrate the reader's expectations. Again and again readers are assured that the missing information will be supplied eventually and that their need for narra-

tive consistency will be satisfied. However, at the end of the novel this promise of narrative consistency is finally betrayed. The most crucial question in the novel, which has been anticipated over and over again in the course of the story, the question why Marcus loses his life, remains unanswered. The reasons for his death are dissolved into ambiguity. In a dazzlingly long list of possibilities, the penultimate section of the novel reiterates the numerous “missteps” that have led Marcus to his early grave (*IN* 229-30). Readers are encouraged to believe that one explanation alone is not satisfactory and so they are compelled to arrive at their own conclusions. Readers need “consistency” and when this principle is violated, the narrative conveys a sense of uncertainty (Su 100). The enigmatic final sentence from *Out from Under* suggests that the series of events leading up to his death is essentially “incomprehensible”:

Yes, the good old defiant American ‘Fuck you,’ and that was it for the butcher’s son, dead three months short of his twentieth birthday – Marcus Messner, 1932-1952, the only one of his classmates unfortunate enough to be killed in the Korean War, which ended with the signing of an armistice agreement on July 27, 1953, eleven full months before Marcus, had he been able to stomach chapel and keep his mouth shut, would have received his undergraduate degree from Winesburg College – more than likely as class valedictorian – and thus have postponed learning what his uneducated father had been trying so hard to teach him all along: of the terrible, the incomprehensible way one’s most banal, incidental, even comical choices achieve the most disproportionate result. (*IN* 231)

The reader, whose expectations are frustrated when the central question of the novel is left unanswered, has been prepared for this moment in numerous instances throughout the novel. It is Marcus’s overprotective father who first raises this theme: “It’s about life; where the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences.” From then onwards, death looms large over the whole narrative and over Marcus’s life. He is always afraid of being thrown out of college and getting drafted and losing his life in Korea. In this sense, the ending, which withholds the solution to the puzzle and disappoints the high expectations, is also anticlimactic. It challenges our faith in a rational, explicable world. In brief, the Chinese-box structure comprising three narrative levels, the *trompe l’oeil*, the interfering *metalepsis* in *Out from Under*, and the narrative gap at the end of the novel, all serve to undermine the overall reliability of the narration and convey a sense of indeterminacy.

The atmosphere of indeterminacy is heightened even more by an ambiguous *Historical Note* which concludes *Indignation*. Whereas the idea of a concluding historical note seems to suggest a more authoritative comment on what has been narrated so far, this *Historical Note* strikes readers familiar with Sherwood Anderson’s classic *Winesburg, Ohio* in another narrative twist as surprisingly *ahistorical*. This is the irony of the final passage the reader is left to ponder: Roth’s “historical” note deals almost entirely with completely fictional locations and characters. *Winesburg, Ohio* is an inven-

tion by Sherwood Anderson and both President Lentz and Dean Caudwell are inventions by Philip Roth. The only thing that is more or less “historical” in this historical note is the fact that “the social upheavals and transformations and protests of the turbulent decade of the 1960s” (*IN* 232) also affected the American Midwest. Everything else is pure fiction and the initial reference to “hidebound, apolitical Winesburg” in the first sentence foregrounds this self-reflexive aspect of this final chapter and serves to remind the reader of the fictional character of the entire novel. At the same time, the *Historical Note* celebrates the success of sixties counterculture. Having denounced the American fifties as a failure of the American experiment, Roth concludes his novel with the optimistic prospect that America has the power to reinvent itself according to the ideals of American liberalism. This is the coda of the novel’s ideological structure. Nevertheless, the metafictional aspect of the novel’s conclusion complicates this celebration of the American Way. Roth models himself as an American Jeremiah, but in his ironic treatment of the jeremiad he keeps winking between the lines. Consequently, the ideological function of the *Historical Note* as the conclusion of the novel’s ideological structure is only an ironic projection of the idea of a better America in the American sixties.

What remains is a narrative world full of ambiguities, unreliability and indeterminacy in which no fixed moral or ideological position is tenable. *Indignation* presents a fictional world in which it is difficult to establish causality or to explain the workings of American culture. The novel constitutes a co-presence of conflicting narrative voices, which undermine each other’s authorities and make the novel essentially polyphonic. Especially the enigmatic *what ifs* and the metafictional coda in the *Historical Note*, which retrospectively question the truth value of the entire novel, deprive the reader of a definite judgement about Marcus’s violent death in Korea. This resembles a strategy that Bercovitch identifies in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*:

It is a strategy of pluralism-issuing, on the reader’s part, in a mystifying sense of multiplicity – through which each set of questions and answers is turned toward the same solution: all meanings are partly true, hence, interpreters must choose as many parts as possible of the truth and/or as many truths as they can possibly find in the symbol (Bercovitch, *Office* 19).

Thus, both in *Indignation* and in *The Scarlet Letter* a “strategy of pluralism” can be identified behind the ambiguities. Yet unlike Hawthorne’s 19th-century masterpiece, *Indignation* does not rely on excessive symbolism, but rather on creating a fictional world of *indeterminacy*. According to Su, *indeterminacy* should be distinguished from ambiguity, although it may be a result of the former. Whereas ambiguity relies on a finite number of possible interpretations from which readers are asked to choose, indeterminacy “in-

vites the reader to project an interpretation". While ambiguity encourages readers to ask, "which is the intended meaning?", indeterminacy leads to the question as to "what is the intended meaning" (Su 113). The final sentence from *Out from Under*, which suggests that the causes of his death are ultimately "incomprehensible" and "incidental", leaves readers with an unsatisfactory answer. Marcus's death, the key puzzle in the novel, remains unexplained. Paradoxically, the statement that his death is "incomprehensible" actually invites interpretation. For the entire narrative, the reader has been encouraged to seek the answer Marcus is helplessly looking for and finally the novel concludes that there is no answer. And yet, as if to contradict this statement, the *Historical Note* explains that the objects of Marcus's indignation, for instance the chapel requirement or other "strictures", are abolished twenty years later – suggesting that Marcus might not have lost his life if he had belonged to a later generation of students. This mitigates the relativism of the final words preceding the *Historical Note* and suggests that his death may not be "incomprehensible" after all. The blame, so to speak, is put on the whole cultural system of the American fifties, which invites interpretation: What are these "strictures and parietal rules regulating student conduct that had been in force for more than a hundred years and that were implemented so faithfully during the tradition-preserving tenure of President Lentz and Dean Caudwell" (*IN* 233)? "Tradition" is the cue that concludes the novel, which implies that in spite of all the various mishaps, it is Marcus's conflict with a society steeped in strict traditions that leads to his downfall.

Clearly, the symbolic strategy behind these ambiguities and the sense of indeterminacy is pluralistic. The reader realises that no single answer is satisfactory and that they have to weigh the evidence and form their own opinion. And yet, although the reader is invited to arrive at their own interpretations, the number of possible meanings is not open-ended. As readers we are offered choices from different options that are all based upon the binary opposition between self and society – the same underlying principle that restricts the diffusion of meaning in *The Scarlet Letter* (cf. Bercovitch, *Office* 23-26). Regardless of whether one emphasizes Marcus's lack of self-control, or his father's paranoia, or Dean Caudwell's intrusions into Marcus's privacy, or the chapel requirement as a remainder of Winesburg's Christian traditions, it is always the conflict between self and society that comes to the fore. And instead of presenting the reader with radical alternatives to the American Way, the novel upholds the prospect of a better America in which American dissent is allowed to fulfil a beneficial role in society. The rebellions of the sixties represent this better America, in which dissent leads to progress. Robert Treat's tolerance towards dissenting voices also stands for this outlook. This dissent is contrasted with the other forms of rebellion in the novel that fail to achieve progress. Yet for all its premium on dissent, the novel

precludes more radical forms of opposition. Although Marcus toys with certain socialist ideas, most obviously his reverence for the pro-socialist and atheist Bertrand Russell as well as his zealous incantations of the Chinese national anthem, he settles for the American Way and espouses its individualist agenda, participating in a distinctly American, albeit ineffective, form of dissent.

Moreover, the novel's indeterminacy and Roth's self-reflexive winking between the lines in the *Historical Note* do not mitigate the depictions of violence in the novel. In fact, it can be argued that the high degree of indeterminacy in the narrative and its metafictional conclusion paradoxically serve to increase the realism of Marcus's bloody visions. According to McHale, such literary worlds of ontological uncertainty are often accompanied by representations of erotic or violent materials which make the reader "resist having to 'surrender' the reality of these materials when they are erased" as mere fiction. It is very unlikely that readers manage to "reprocess" the whole narrative once its fictional character has been revealed. Instead the reader tends to resist actively revisioning the narrative as fiction (McHale 117). In other words, the narrative strategy of unbalancing the reader's sense of what is real, reliable and definite serves an ideological end. It elicits the consent of the reader to the ideological norms behind the graphic associations of bloodshed and slaughter with war. It heightens the realism of the violence, which is made to appear 'more real' than the frame(s) in which they are represented. The novel thus contains a double impetus. Whereas it denounces the Korean War as slaughter on the one hand, the novel questions its own epistemological status as historical fiction on the other. And yet, foregrounding the fictionality of Winesburg does not disqualify the bloody descriptions but instead increases the reader's willingness to accept the realism of these passages.

Intertextual connections also underscore the self-reflexive aspects of the novel and highlight its artificiality. Winesburg, Roth's "tip of the pen" to Sherwood Anderson (Royal, "Indignation" 130), is not the only intertextual relation which foregrounds the fictional character of the narrative. The novel begins with a quotation from E. E. Cummings' famous poem *i sing of olaf glad and big* (1931).

Olaf (upon what were once knees)
does almost ceaselessly repeat
"there is some shit I will not eat"

There are no further references to this quotation in the novel, but there are obvious thematic parallels. The hero of Cummings' poem is a conscientious objector who undergoes a series of humiliating and painful ordeals while he keeps refusing to fight. Likewise, Marcus has to suffer a whole chain of trials

as he desperately tries to avoid the draft. Olaf's terrible condition ("what were once knees") therefore anticipates Marcus's collapse at the end of the book when he ends up dying on a Korean battlefield with the lower half of his body disfigured and a leg almost severed (*IN* 225). Moreover, the quotation clearly defines Olaf as a rebel figure struggling to resist an unjust and brutish society. It is this defiance of social injustices that lies also at the heart of a novel that is aptly entitled *Indignation*. The reader is prepared to expect a tale of defiant rebellion against all odds and, as readers familiar with the poem might anticipate, a tragic ending. The fact that the poem famously criticises American militarism and jingoism supports the view that *Indignation* is a satiric anti-war novel (cf. section below, *Slaughterhouse America*). The tone of Cummings's anti-heroic poem is also well suited to raise the reader's expectations. Although the short quotation offers only a glimpse of the original poem, its witty and sarcastic tone can still be felt in Roth's short quotation, for instance in the playfully casual remark that Olaf has lost his legs. This coexistence of the tragic and the comic is also Roth's trademark and it is an important structural principle in *Indignation*. The tone of the novel varies constantly between the overtly comic, or absurd and the tragic.

The novel also relies on allusions to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to counterbalance the otherwise realistic narration. Shakespeare features prominently in Philip Roth's work and this is likewise true of *Indignation*. Apart from novels such as *Operation Shylock* or *Exit Ghost*, whose very titles suggest intertextual references to the plays of the great bard, also novels like *Sabbath's Theater* and *Indignation* cite Shakespeare heavily. Whereas the protagonist of *Sabbath's Theater* has been identified as a mixture of Falstaff and King Lear (Scheckner 181-82), *Indignation* cannot foreswear its heavy allusions to *Twelfth Night*. The similarities between *Indignation* and Shakespeare's comedy range from explicit quotes to thematic parallels. This is most conspicuously apparent in the character Olivia, whose very name suggests a correspondence between Shakespeare's character of the same name and Roth's mysterious "Blowjob Queen of 1951" (*IN* 122). Shakespeare's Olivia is a fairly independent gentlewoman mourning the loss of her brother. Cherishing her freedom as an unmarried woman (Elam 68-69), she rejects the advances of her suitor Orsino and instead falls in love with his servant Cesario, who delivers Orsino's letters. Cesario however is not the man he pretends to be. Cesario is just a disguise with which Viola, survivor of a recent shipwreck and twin sister to the nobleman Sebastian, conceals her true identity. When Olivia falls in love with Viola, disguised as Cesario, she undergoes a phase of homoerotic desire until Cesario's true identity is revealed. This is one of the numerous transgressions that the play's title *Twelfth Night*, a time of carnivalesque revelry in which a "Lord of Misrule" used to turn the world on its head (17-19), alludes to. Roth's Olivia shares

her namesake's sadness and her libertarian spirit in that she clearly enjoys her freedom and in spite of her brutal medical treatment (electric shocks) after an attempted suicide, she does not cease transgressing the role that society has envisaged for her. Like her namesake, Roth's heroine engages in deviant sexual behaviour, although Roth's Olivia proceeds in her sexual transgressions much more consciously and deliberately than her Shakespearean predecessor. Markus's adoration for Olivia also alludes to the play and produces a similar distancing effect. As critics have remarked, Markus's obsessive poring over Olivia's letter "echoes" Malvolio's in *Twelfth Night* and creates a comical, albeit "distorting" effect. But it is also his behaviour which suggests a certain kinship to Malvolio, as Cooper claims. In comparison with his fellow students at Winesburg, Marcus's no-nonsense attitude to his studies is somewhat puritanical as he frowns at some of the frivolous customs at Winesburg (Cooper 262), such as the drinking, smoking, and dating at the bar:

I did not like the job. The hours were far shorter than those I put in for my father at the butcher shop and yet, because of the din and the excessive drinking and the stink of beer and cigarette smoke that pervaded the place, the work turned out to be more tiring and, in its way as disgusting as the worst things I had to do at the butcher shop. I myself didn't drink beer or anything else alcoholic, I'd never smoked, and I'd never tried by shouting and singing at the top of my voice to make a dazzling impression on girls – as did any number of inebriates who brought their dates to the inn on Friday and Saturday nights. (*IN* 25)

This is another, albeit fainter, echo of Malvolio, who chides Olivia's uncle Sir Toby and his friends for their drinking and singing late at night, while they in turn mock him for his arrogance. And like Malvolio, Markus becomes the object of scorn at the bar: "More than a few times during the first weeks, I thought I heard myself being summoned to one of the rowdier tables with the words 'Hey, Jew! Over here!'" Yet, unlike Malvolio, Markus decides to say nothing and to swallow the insults (*IN* 27). Similarly, he confronts Flusser because he often listens to music in the middle of the night, a scene which shares a slight resemblance with Malvolio's reproachful attack on Sir Toby for his fondness of loud music late at night. This similarity is underscored by the fact that Marcus's confrontation with Flusser is accompanied by explicit references to Shakespeare's renowned comedy (22).

The passage in which Markus pores over Olivia's handwriting deserves a closer look. At first, it should be noted that there are considerable differences between the play and the novel. Malvolio is being tricked with a forged letter into believing that Olivia, for whom he serves as a mere steward in the household, is in love with him. Reading the letter, Malvolio, who is already dreaming of rising beyond his estate, senses an opportunity when he reads the forged letter, in which his lady Olivia declares her love for him. All the

while he is being watched from behind by his enemies who are playing this serious prank with him (*Twelfth Night* 2.5). None of these things is true of Marcus. Yet his almost obsessive admiring, touching and even literal licking of Olivia's signature, "the 'O', the 'L', the 'I', the 'V', etc." (*IN* 71), clearly alludes to Malvolio's puzzled, yet helplessly hopeful interpretations of the "M. O. A. I." in his letter (Cooper 262, cf. also *Twelfth Night* 2.5. 103-39). Evidently, Markus goes much further than Malvolio in literally consuming each individual letter of her signature. Both the intertextual allusion to *Twelfth Night* and Marcus's eerie behaviour have a defamiliarizing effect as they contrast with the realistic representation prior to this passage. Syntactically, emphatic paratactic constructions are interspersed among longer and mainly descriptive hypotactic structures and thus highlight the eroticism of Marcus's behaviour. The repeated use of the verbs *kiss* and *lick* serves the same purpose, "I put my mouth to the page and kissed the 'O.' Kissed it and kissed it. Then, impulsively, with the tip of my tongue I began to lick the ink of the signature, patiently as a cat at his milk bowl I licked away until there was no longer the 'O', the 'l', the 'I', the 'v', the second 'I', the 'a' – licked until the upswept tail was completely gone". Anaphora at the end of the short episode fulfils the same purpose and its climactic structure charges the strange episode with enigmatic significance: "I had drunk her writing. I had eaten her name. I had all I could do not to eat the whole thing" (*IN* 71). These concluding remarks do not make it entirely clear what this symbolises for Marcus, but it is certainly a defamiliarizing and hyperbolic way of showing the extent of his desire in a fairly comic manner. In his disappointment, Marcus wants to consume Olivia with mind and body. This sense of hyperbolic comedy is also heightened by the intertextual allusion to Malvolio's hilariously narcissistic behaviour in *Twelfth Night*. All of these references to Shakespeare's comedy reinforce the impression that *Indignation* is more fiction than history and emphasize its artificiality.

Apart from these literary references to Shakespeare and E. E. Cummings, there are loans from an influential historical work as well. Roth's quotations from Morison and Commager's *The Growth of the American Republic*, which is even mentioned in the *Acknowledgements* of the novel, also help foreground the intertextual character of Roth's work. Since *Indignation* ironically purports to be a historical novel, it is only fitting that there are intertextual references to well-known historical works, especially in the *Acknowledgements*. In one particular passage, the novel refers among other things to Thomas Jefferson and sheds light on his role in American history. It represents Thomas Jefferson's place in history as "inflated" and misplaced. And when Jefferson ruminates rather ineffectively on his life, readers may realise that this is just part of a narrative in which characters and especially the narrator typically fail to make accurate and meaningful observations about their

existence. *Indignation* is a novel about interpreting the facts of life and history, which is also underscored by the fact that characters fail to make sense of each other and themselves on various occasions. Marcus fails to make sense of Olivia, of his father and of himself. His father fails to make sense of his son and, albeit a minor character, even the eminent Founder Thomas Jefferson fails to make sense of “the events of a crowded lifetime” (*IN* 167). *Indignation* is not only postmodernist in its metafictional experiments, in its numerous intertextual references, in its blurring of historical fact and fiction, but also in foregrounding the very act of interpretation itself (cf. Hutcheon, *Politics* 73). Pozorski argues that the novel dismisses Jefferson’s presidency as “simple”, which “seems to counter everything we assume to be true about Jefferson, and surely what he thought about himself”. Instead, the novel presents Jefferson as a man with “an inflated sense of his place in history” (150). This concurs with Roth’s overall tendency in his later fiction to keep referencing the nation’s origins. These references in his novels to various national heroes such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, or Abraham Lincoln serve not only to illuminate the past but also to comment on the present state of America (3-4). According to Pozorski, Roth thereby attacks idealizing myths about America, complicating simplified and essentially nostalgic narratives of the nation’s origins such as the Tea Party’s story of the Founding Fathers (11). Admittedly, Jefferson’s role in *Indignation* is very small, but it is quite obvious that Roth seems to refrain from a simple celebration of America’s foundational ideals in his antepenultimate novel *Indignation*. This is in line with his otherwise ironic and self-reflexive celebration of the American sixties in the *Historical Note*. In his quotation from *The Growth of the American Republic* as well as in the *Historical Note*, Roth refrains from a simple celebration of American ideals by complicating his affirmative stance towards the American Dream with a metafictional, self-reflexive structure (cf. 73). Ironically, Marcus emphasises how soothing it is to read American history, which is in this case rather dry material, to calm his desperate mother, “Now she was fully asleep, but I did not stop. Madison, Monroe. J. Q. Adams. I’d read right on through to Harry Truman if that was what it took to ease the woes of my having left her behind alone with a husband now out of control” (*IN* 167). Again, Roth’s treatment of American history, in particular the history of the Founding Fathers, is essentially ironic while it affirms the gap between the ideals of the past, and the wrongs of the present.

The quotations from Cummings’ poem, from *The Growth of the American Republic* and the obvious allusions to *Twelfth Night* are part of a long succession of quotations and allusions to various famous literary or scholarly works. Apart from the numerous references to Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, there are for instance Marcus’s recitals of the Chinese National

Anthem (1949) or Bertrand Russell's philosophical treatise *Why I Am Not a Christian*. There is Olivia quoting H. W. Longfellow's poem *The Arrow and the Song* during her visit at the hospital (*IN* 178). There is Flusser's reference to the protagonist's namesake Marcus Aurelius (25). And there is Marcus reading extracts from *The Growth of the American Republic* to his mother (167-68). All of these intertextual connections dazzle and tease the reader who struggles with these challenges and this foregrounds the highly self-reflexive nature of the novel. *Indignation* purports to be a historical novel, but in addition to the ahistorical *Historical Note* these numerous allusions further emphasise its fictional nature. Perhaps *Indignation* shares some features with what has been called *historiographic metafiction*, which is a highly self-reflexive form of historical fiction. According to Linda Hutcheon, "such novels install and then blur the line between fiction and history" (*Poetics* 113). As a form of postmodernist writing, *historiographic metafiction* highlights the similarities between literary and historical writing, the linguistic constructedness, the use of narrative conventions and the essential intertextuality (105). This genre questions the notion that there is some kind of objective truth or falsity, but offers a plurality of truths instead. This concurs with the use of ambiguity in the novel, which compels the reader to accept that no single truth suffices to explain Marcus's death. Situating the novel in the literary tradition of *Historiographic metafiction* also explains the paradox of affirmation and rejection of the American utopia in the *Historical Note*. As Hutcheon points out, postmodernist fictions are typically characterised by the paradox of "being both inside and outside the ideology". It is a subversive challenge from within the limits of ideology, raising awareness about these limits through postmodernist irony. Literature, understood in this sense, tests the limits set by the culture that constrains us (Hutcheon, *Politics* 14-15). These intertextual clues are part of a narrative strategy that not only engages the reader but also tests the constraints of the author's imagination. As Royal points out, the countless intertextual references in Roth's work increase the self-reflexive, meta-fictional character of his fiction ("Roth, literary influence" 26). Besides, the complex interplay between the three narrative levels can also be interpreted as an attempt to flex the muscles of his imagination and to heighten the impression of constructedness. It is useful to consider Marcus's pronouncement of his own death in this context. He believes to be speaking from beyond the grave, the lonely monologue of a dead person. "I am dead. The unpronounceable sentence pronounced" (*IN* 212), Marcus comments and thereby declares himself dead. This quotation might well be taken as a shorthand for the overall aesthetic pattern behind the book. Roth confronts, in his own words, his "own imagination's system of constraints" and his "habits of expression" by spelling out what cannot be expressed. The paradox of "the unpronounceable sentence" is in itself a rid-

dle that allows the reader to enact Marcus's quest for knowledge. His failure to understand life, his past, and his place in American society parallel the reader's futile attempts to come to grips with a seemingly endless series of intertextual challenges, narrative gaps, paradoxes and ambiguities – futile “no matter how painstaking the attempt to unravel and to be revealed” (*IN* 212). This is most obviously true of Marcus's death, the central puzzle in the novel. While the reader is encouraged to wait until narrative gaps in the flow of information are eventually filled, the long prepared key question remains ultimately unanswered. Readers have to accept that there is no single satisfactory answer, but only a plurality of answers and the reader is left to project their own interpretations based on the conflict between self and society. Readers are as much involved in decoding the riddle as Marcus. Moreover, the paradox of representing a dead man's thoughts has a long tradition. On a rereading we realize that the words in *Under Morphine* represent his final thoughts as a dying man. His narration keeps him alive like Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Marcus is a story-person, a character whose life depends on telling a story and who dies as soon as his narration is finished. According to Todorov, discourse symbolises life and silence accordingly death in narratives of this tradition (*IN* 84-87). For McHale, such an “attempt to imagine a posthumous discourse” is a popular theme in post-modernist writing. Such writing often has the character of a literary monument that “presupposes the death of the one monumentalized” (McHale 230). For Masiero, it forces “the reader to dwell on uncertain narrative ground”, which is a characteristic of the *Nemeses Tetralogy* and signifies the “precariousness of human existence” (54, 59). This is Marcus's paradox and it highlights the very act of narration while it testifies to Roth's attempt to probe the constraints of his imagination as a writer and an American.

In sum, the complex structure of the novel, which foregrounds its meta-fictional aspects, bends the limits of the rhetorical structure of the American jeremiad to its breaking point. The American jeremiad assumes a fixed moral stance from which the American present can be evaluated. Yet even the optimistic note at the end of the novel, which projects the prospect of a better America, is undermined as the reader is made aware of its ahistoricity. Hence, there is no escape from the novel's epistemological outlook that rejects any fixed subject position from which American culture can be judged. If there is a prospect of a better America which is not mitigated by irony, it is to be found in the optimistic descriptions of Robert Treat – its tolerant atmosphere, its liberal discourses and its multicultural climate. Yet, on the whole it is perhaps best to consider Roth's novel as an anti-jeremiad, a novel that rejects the American utopia and creatively toys with the rhetorical structure (cf. *AJ* 191-196). Ultimately, it leaves its readers only with a rather bleak view of the American experiment. Philip Roth once famously claimed

that the American writer had his hands full in explicating American culture (*Reading Myself* 109-10). *Indignation* seems to represent a conviction that it is not just a challenge but even impossible to do so. The complexity of the narrative situation in the novel exemplifies Roth's engagement with his own limits as a writer and as an American. Attempting to pronounce the "unpronounceable" (*IN* 212) with this dazzling narrative, *Indignation* testifies to Roth's willingness to experiment (cf. Aldama 215 and Royal, "Indignation" 130). He confronts his limits as an American writer head on and engages the American symbology by appropriating the rhetorical structure of the anti-*jeremiad*. Thus, *Indignation* denounces the ideological uses of fifties nostalgia in almost apocalyptic tones, but uses the rhetorical structure of the American *jeremiad* ironically – implying that the utopian idea of a better America is no less fictional than the novel itself. And even more importantly, this ironic, self-reflexive affirmation of the American Dream suggests in its own peculiar way that an escape from the American ideology is impossible. "History will catch you in the end" (*IN* 222).

2.3 Slaughterhouse America

The craft of the kosher butcher is a recurring motif in *Indignation* which is repeatedly developed in several descriptions throughout the novel. Charging forms of traditional craftsmanship with symbolic significance is by no means an uncommon device in Roth's fiction. In *American Pastoral*, Roth delves into the details of glove-making and in *Everyman* he explores the trade of the jeweller (cf. Nadel, I. 143). In three key passages of *Indignation*, Roth establishes the craft of the kosher butcher as a motif. It first occurs shortly after the beginning of the novel when Marcus describes the butcher shop in which he used to work before he left Newark (*IN* 4-7). The second and most important passage follows a long description of the American war effort in Korea (35-37). The third and last description, focussing on Marcus's experiences at the chicken market, appears at a crucial moment of the narrative, shortly after Marcus learns that his mother is contemplating a divorce and before she meets Olivia (157-61). All three passages provide essential insights into the ideological norms of the text, but the second and the third passage are most striking in their use of ambiguity. It is therefore useful to begin discussing the second passage, since it exemplifies Roth's textual strategies most succinctly. The ambiguous passage illustrates how readers are compelled to employ their imagination in such a way that allows them to see the images of slaughter through Marcus's eyes.

I envisioned my father's knives and cleavers whenever I read about the bayonet combat against the Chinese in Korea. I knew how murderously sharp sharp could be. And I knew

what blood looked like, encrusted around the necks of the chickens where they had been ritually slaughtered, dripping out of the beef onto my hands when I was cutting a rib steak along the bone, seeping through the brown paper bags despite the wax paper wrappings within, settling into the grooves crosshatched into the chopping block by the force of the cleaver crashing down. My father wore an apron always smeared with blood within an hour after the store opened. My mother too was covered in blood. One day while slicing a piece of liver-which can slide or wiggle under your hand if you don't hold it down firmly enough-she cut her palm and had to be rushed to the hospital for twelve painful stitches. And, careful and attentive as I tried to be, I had nicked myself dozens of times and had to be bandaged up, and then my father would upbraid me for letting my mind wander while I was working with the knife. I grew up with blood-with blood and grease and knife sharpeners and slicing machines and amputated fingers or missing parts of fingers on the hands of my three uncles as well as my father – and I never got used to it and I never liked it. [...] Blood on the slotted, raised wooden flooring back of the refrigerated porcelain-and-glass showcases, on the weighing scales, on the sharpeners, fringing the edge of the roll of wax paper, on the nozzle of the hose we used to wash down the refrigerator floor – the smell of blood the first thing that would hit me whenever I visited my uncles and aunts in their stores. That smell of carcass after it's slaughtered and before it's been cooked would hit me every time. Then, Abe, Muzzy's son and heir apparent, was killed at Anzio, and Dave, Shecky's son and heir apparent, was killed in the Battle of the Bulge, and the Messner's who lived on were steeped in their blood. (IN 35-37)

The description is framed by two references in the first and last sentence to the Korean and the Second World War, which form the primary core contexts of the passage. Su distinguishes core from peripheral context in her discussion of lexical ambiguity. According to Su, the reader relies on context to disambiguate lexical ambiguity, thereby moving from core context, usually the linguistic context surrounding the ambiguous word or phrase, to peripheral context – i.e. world knowledge such as the historical or biographical knowledge of the reader (Su 69). The first historical reference associates butcher knives and cleavers with Chinese bayonets in the Korean war. What then follows seems to be a straightforward description of the craft of the kosher butcher. This lexical field of the butcher shop constitutes the secondary core context and overlaps with the primary one established first. The entire passage is full of polysemic words and phrases which are lexically ambiguous. Since Roth presents us with two overlapping contexts, the butcher shop and the Korean war, the meaning of blood and its related phrases can be interpreted in at least two ways with regard to their semantic features: literally non-human blood and figuratively human blood.

The passage contains numerous lexical items which can be related to sharp blades in the butcher shop and on the battlefield alike: *knives, cleavers, bayonet, murderously sharp, sharp, cutting, chopping, the cleaver crashing down, slicing, cut, nicked, knife, knife sharpeners, slicing machines, sharpeners*. Within this semantic field, there are altogether six different expressions which denote cutting or slicing movements. The reference to bayonets at the beginning seems to be the odd one out, but it serves to establish a co-presence

of two different contexts, namely the work of the butcher and the soldier. This creates ambiguity and readers are forced to associate the numerous items with both contexts. Another semantic field comprises lexical elements which are related to blood, wounds and body parts: *blood, encrusted, slaughtered, dripping, seeping through, settling into the grooves, smeared with blood, covered in blood, amputated fingers, missing parts of fingers, the smell of blood, the smell of carcass, steeped in ... blood*. The word *blood* alone is mentioned eight times in the passage so that readers do not fail to visualize the bloody scene. Since it is impossible to disambiguate the expressions successfully, the co-presence of both contexts initiates the imagination of the reader. The reader has to draw on peripheral contexts, such as his world-knowledge about wars and battlefields, to arrive at coherent and relevant meanings. Readers are engaged in a process of translation whereby each image has to be associated with both core contexts. This effect is reinforced by the two references to the Korean War and the Second World War at the beginning and the end of the passage. The overall effect of such a kind of ambiguity has been explained with reference to the duck-rabbit illusion.

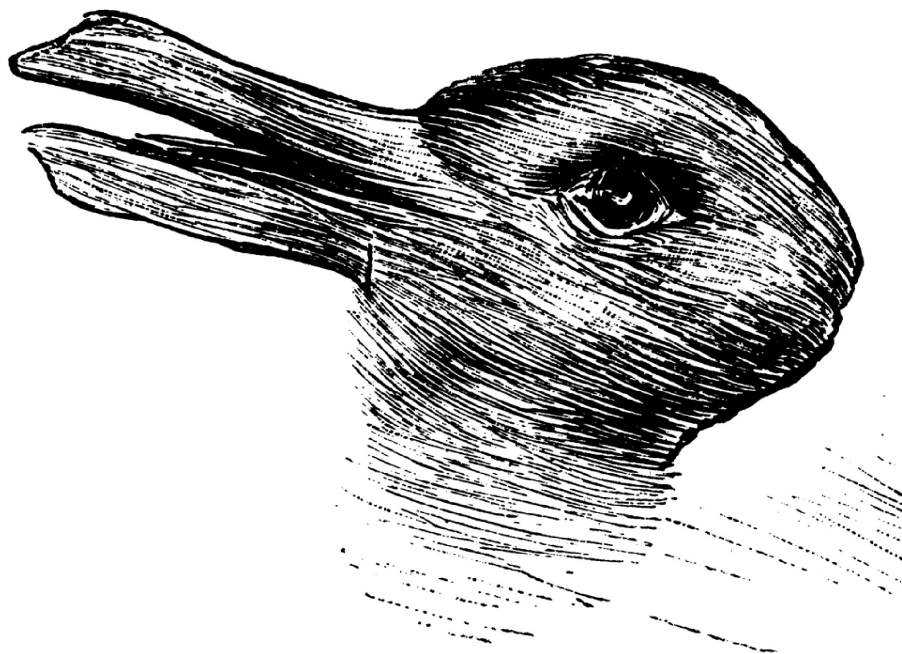


Figure 2: The Duck-Rabbit Illusion. Rpt. in Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* 4.

Once the ambiguity is established, it is impossible to make a definite choice between the two perspectives or to undo the ambiguity itself. Gombrich famously described this effect in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* and theorists of ambiguity have often drawn on his analogy to explain the effect of lexical ambiguity. Both perspectives are mutually exclusive and ambiguity results in an “incessant alternation” so that a co-presence of both meanings is conveyed (Su 14-15). “True, we can switch from one reading to another with increasing rapidity; we will also remember the rabbit while we see the duck, but the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly we will discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time” (Gombrich 5).

Syntactic and phonetic patterns serve to foreground the ambiguity of the whole passage and increase the vividness of the bloody images. According to Su, an ambiguous phrase or passage is usually marked as significant when foregrounding arrests our attention and initiates our curiosity (84-85). Strikingly, the passage is filled with onomatopoeic verbs such as *cutting*, *dripping*, *chopping*, *crashing*, or *wrapping* and alliterative items such as *cleavers*, *combat*, *Korea*, *cleaver*, *crashing*. Assonance and consonance as in the expression “*brown paper bags ... wax paper wrappings within*” reinforce this impression. All this conveys a sense of sensual immediacy arresting the reader’s attention and sustaining the imagination. Syntactic patterns also help foreground the ambiguity of the passage. Consecutive parallelisms each consisting of a single participle combined with a long adverbial phrase give the long sentence at the centre of the passage a peculiar rhythm.

And I knew what blood looked like, encrusted around the necks of the chickens where they had been ritually slaughtered, dripping out of the beef onto my hands [...], seeping through the brown paper bags [...], settling into the grooves [...]. (IN 35)

This rhythm puts an emphasis on the participles within the long, winding sentence and conveys the eerie impression of omnipresent blood. In sum, both literal and figurative meanings of the ambiguous imagery are quite balanced and our reading oscillates between them, because the literal meaning of the images cannot be suspended altogether. Marcus’s associations of blood with slaughter are clearly a result of his obsession with death and the novel encourages the reader to equate war with slaughter. Since we identify with Marcus and because we have to rely on his judgment, his peculiar outlook on war is given some authority. He is the only authority in the novel that authenticates the ‘truth’ of the description.

Whereas the imagery in this second passage is only slightly ambiguous due to the fact that we cannot suspend the literal meanings of the images altogether, the third passage, set on the chicken market, contains more forceful ambiguity. Again, there are two guiding references which frame the pas-

sage and introduce a linguistic core context. It is Marcus's remark about Olivia's scar which triggers the retroversion (*IN* 157) and it is the scar to which Marcus's narration returns after the flashback (161).

Now, Olivia's scar looked to me as prominent as if she had cut herself open only days before. As a child, I had sometimes been taken by my father to the slaughterhouse on Astor Street in Newark's Ironbound section. And I had been taken to the chicken market at the far end of Bergen Street. At the chicken market I saw them killing the chickens. (*IN* 157-58)

Marcus refrains from providing the reader with an explanation as to why he suddenly changes the subject from Olivia's scar to his childhood memories of the chicken market. The reader has to make up for this lack of coherence by projecting an interpretation. The textual core context is the reference to Olivia's scar, which suggests a connection between the two seemingly unrelated events. Although there is no explicit reference to the war, at this point in the novel the reader has already learned that Marcus tends to associate butcher knives with Chinese bayonets. Thus, the reader has to disambiguate between the literal meaning of the description and two different, but related figurative meanings: Olivia's attempted suicide and the Korean War. Literally, Marcus describes the minutiae of kosher slaughter as he experienced it as a boy. On another figurative level, Jewish ritual slaughter is associated with Olivia's attempted suicide, which is suggested by the two references to Olivia's scar introducing and concluding the passage. Clearly, Marcus's interpretation reflects his alienation from his Jewish heritage. The ritual has no religious significance for him at all and he reduces it to the idea of blood-letting: "Olivia's telltale scar came from attempting to perform her own ritual slaughter" (*IN* 161). This concurs with his otherwise strikingly irreligious behaviour. Since Marcus's odd explanations are not ironic at all, they are also testimony to his urgent desire to comprehend Olivia's behaviour. But there is also a second level of figurative meaning. The readers, who are already familiar with Marcus's inclination to associate animal slaughter with human slaughter, are apt to conjure up similar associations on their own. As the passage does not contain any explicit contextual references to the war, this layer of meaning is only suggested on a first reading. On a second reading however, the reader knows about the circumstances of Marcus's violent death in Korea and may fully recognize the symbolic significance of the whole passage: i.e. the slaughter of the trapped chickens anticipates the slaughter of the trapped soldiers on Massacre Mountain.

Again, lexically ambiguous words and phrases are foregrounded by employing parallelism: "In a nonkosher slaughterhouse they can shoot the animal, they can knock it unconscious, they can kill it any way they want to kill it" (*IN* 159). The pronoun *they* is particularly allusive, as it is not further specified and because the final clause suggests a certain satisfaction on be-

half of the slaughterers. And like the other descriptions of this type, but much more specifically, the chicken market episode symbolizes Marcus's lethal disfigurement, his fatal entrapment and his inescapable death on massacre mountain in Korea. The way the chickens are trapped in their cages and in the bloody funnel as well as the killing process and the gushing of the blood relate to Marcus's entrapment in the machine gun fire and his numerous cuts and slashes caused by the Chinese bayonets. Almost at the end of the novel, the anonymous narrator explicitly associates Marcus's childhood memories of the slaughterhouse with the bloodshed on the battlefield:

[...] Bodies in parts lay everywhere. When their BAR jammed he and Brunson, his partner, were finished – he'd not been encircled by so much blood since his days as a boy at the slaughterhouse, watching the ritual killing of animals in accordance with Jewish law. And the steel blade that sliced him up was as sharp and efficient as any knife they used in the shop to cut and prepare meat for their customers. (IN 226)

The killing process that the chickens undergo resembles Marcus's dire end and the bloodshed on Massacre Mountain. The association of war with a slaughterhouse is nowhere stronger or more explicit than at this point in the novel.

Crucially, the implications of Roth's blood-dripping equation of the Korean war with slaughter transcend the short time-span of three dark years in the 1950s.³⁰ It is war as such – be it the Korean War, the Second World War or the recent war in Iraq – which takes young lives and produces the kind of human suffering that Roth portrays so hauntingly in *Indignation*. The craft of the butcher is charged with symbolic significance throughout the book, which endows the novel with an atmosphere of looming disaster. Of course, this can be explained with reference to Marcus's obsessive fear of the war and of death, but it is also much more than that. It is a moral statement about the brutality of war. One might perhaps go as far as to say that *Indignation* is an ironic and self-reflexive anti-war novel, which has obvious political implications with respect to the Iraq invasion and the loss of human life it inflicted. And in spite of Roth's assurances that his writing is not concerned with contemporary issues, readers will not fail to make the connection to America's more recent wars. In fact, in an interview from 2008 Roth himself has associated Marcus's death in Korea with the "awfulness of young death that engaged [him]" when he was reading about the war in Iraq.

³⁰ For a different view see Brühwiler. She suggests that in *Indignation* "Korea is nothing more than the odd nightmare that every now and then haunts him [the reader] at daytime, but no longer holds his consciousness in his grip". According to Brühwiler, the blend of accurate historical facts and a fictional setting inspired by Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* reinforces the dream-like quality of Roth's portrayal of the Korean war (74). Yet, as the present study will argue, this view overlooks the topical significance of the novel with respect to the American wars in the 21st century and the ethical dimensions of Roth's allusive, yet gory depictions of the war.

If you look in the newspaper at the names and ages of the soldiers getting killed in Iraq now, you find these terrifying ages like 19 or 22; it's just awful. And it was particular that awfulness of young death that engaged me. (Mustich, n.p.)

When Roth began writing *Indignation* in 2006, U.S. losses were still a very sensitive subject in the American public (see Simic 1). 2004 saw a public controversy about the issue whether images of dead soldiers should or should not be shown in the media. Since 9/11, the *New York Times* had been publishing the *Portraits of Grief* series – a weekly instalment of short biographies recounting the lives of those who had died on that day. In 2004, the *Roster of the Dead* followed, in which the newspaper published in a similar manner happy photographs and biographical sketches of the soldiers who had died in Iraq. The format closely resembled the *Portraits of Grief* series so that it effectively associated commemoration of the victims of 9/11 with the war in Iraq. But when the TV programme *Nightline* followed suit and showed portraits of the dead soldiers on television in the same year, it sparked controversy. However, no dead bodies or severely crippled soldiers had yet been seen in the American public. In fact, it was difficult to come across images of wounded soldiers until the *New York Times* published the first photographs of injured Americans in 2005. But even those images were hardly representative of the crippling wounds that some soldiers brought home. And while this could be explained by reference to decorum, the evident lack of pictures showing dead or suffering Iraqi civilians was conspicuous. It was not until the publication of the Abu Ghraib prison photos that the wider American public became exposed to the images that were already circulating in other parts of the world (Simpson 94-97). As Simpson argues, the war in Vietnam was probably the watershed which shaped public attitudes towards proper forms of commemoration. The traumatic impact of the images from Vietnam can still be felt in American commemorative culture today. In fact, the U.S. policy of withholding images of deceased soldiers during the first Gulf War was probably a result of fears that publishing such photographs would have a severe impact on the American public and might cause another “Vietnam syndrome”. Officially, the policy was justified as a form of respect towards the families of the dead soldiers (91). Of course, the fact that this policy remained largely unchallenged in the 21st century, until public controversy made it no longer tenable, has to do with a general atmosphere of compliance between the U.S. media and the government. The American watchdog press has often been criticized for its compliant behaviour during the first years of the war (112). For example, in 2004 the journalist Michael Massing, writing for *The New York Review of Books*, wrote a sharp indictment of his own profession that is a telling example of the slowly growing discontent in the American public at that time.

The contrast between the press's feistiness since the end of the war and its meekness before it highlights one of the most entrenched and disturbing features of American journalism: its pack mentality. Editors and reporters don't like to diverge too sharply from what everyone else is writing. When a president is popular and a consensus prevails, journalists shrink from challenging him. Even now, papers like the *Times* and the *Post* seem loath to give prominent play to stories that make the administration look too bad. Thus, stories about the increasing numbers of dead and wounded in Iraq—both American and Iraqi—are usually consigned to page 10 or 12, where they won't cause readers too much discomfort. (Massing, n.p.)

Massing also perceives a widespread reluctance in the American media to subject the American public to discussions of the human death toll in Iraq. Four months after Massing's outcry, *The New York Times* issued a famous apology entitled "The Times and Iraq", in which the editors of the *Times* confessed that, "looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged – or failed to emerge". But even half a year later, there was still a widespread reluctance in the American media to show images of violence. When in November 2004 several American soldiers lost their lives and many were wounded in the battle of Falluja, the *New York Times* did no longer refrain from describing the terrible wounds that had been inflicted. But no photographs were shown. In addition, several TV channels instantly refused to show Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, which had been scheduled for Veterans Day. Officially, this was due to "foul language", but Simpson argues that it was rather a reluctance to show and expose the American public to violent images after what had happened in the battle of Falluja. He assumes that the compliant behaviour of the media, the reluctance of the American public to face violence and the interests of the American government have gone hand in hand in this development (Simpson 115-16).

Generally speaking, this situation can be seen as part of what Greiner has called a "self-disempowerment" in American democracy.³¹ He perceives a serious crisis in American democratic institutions that began during the first years of the Cold War and has been undermining U.S. democracy ever since, mainly by expanding the authority of the American president in the name of national security. Greiner observes that the times when the disproportionate gain in power of the American president was still seen as unlawful practice

³¹ For a concise overview see Greiner, "Das lange Leben der 'Imperialen Präsidentschaft'" (2013) 74-96. Cf. also Greiner's monograph *9/11: Der Tag, die Angst, die Folgen* (2011) and Savage, *Takeover. The Return of the Imperial Presidency and the Subversion of American Democracy* (2007). For a different view see Lösche, "Macht und Ohnmacht der Exekutive" (2008). Lösche agrees that the power of the American presidency reached formerly unknown heights after 9/11, but he argues that this high degree of authority waned fairly soon in the following years. According to Lösche, certain authoritative elements can still be identified in American democracy without doubt, but these do not amount to an *Imperial Presidency* anymore.

and successfully kept in check by Congress are long over. Today, presidential authority beyond the constitutional limits seems to have become a “customary law”, which is widely accepted in the American public (Greiner, *9/11* 166-67). As Charlie Savage points out, both the public and Congress are often willing to grant the president more authority “when there are pervasive fears about grave and imminent threats to national security”. After 9/11, the war on terrorism helped revive the Cold War ideal of the strong and protective president, which encouraged loyalty towards the White House and dismissed criticism of the president as unpatriotic (Savage 311-14). During the Cold War, a mentality had emerged in popular culture that glorified the strong president of the Imperial Presidency (Greiner, *9/11* 149), but it was 9/11 that revitalized this mentality, which is exemplified according to May by the re-emergence of an exceedingly strong market for patriotic consumer goods in the 21st century. American flags and images of the president on houses, bags, bumper stickers and so on served as effective propaganda in the months immediately after 9/11 – especially since many American consumers felt they were exercising an essential American freedom when they chose to buy products such as the “Enduring Freedom” bubble gum packet. It was a way of expressing feelings of national pride and solidarity in this emotionally charged atmosphere. The fact that the *Patriot Act*, which severely damaged civil liberties and increased the power of the federal government, met so little resistance can at least be partly explained with reference to this new form of patriotic consumerism. Aptly calling the bill the *Patriot Act*, political leaders consciously associated the bill with this new wave of patriotic public expression, which allowed them to benefit from this sudden surge of patriotism. A new political consensus emerged which brought Republicans and Democrats closer together, effectively stifled public debate and increased the authority of the American president by representing criticism of the White House as a lack of patriotism. This consensus embraced the entire public and pushed critics of the government to the margins. The traditional role of the watchdog press was one of the victims of this development following 9/11 (May, “Echoes” 46-48). This was the public climate in which it was possible that the American media lent their support to the government in ‘protecting’ the public from exposure to potentially disturbing images from Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, the overall climate of compliance between the media and the White House, which has done much harm to the reputation of the American watchdog press in general and which has prevented the dissemination of such images, can be understood as a consequence of this long evolution of the Cold War Imperial Presidency and the impact of 9/11.

Indignation confronts this consensus, which was still facilitating uncritical attitudes towards the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, when Roth started

writing the novel. Roth's textual strategy of ambiguity forces the reader to visualize death and violence, to face a reality which was conspicuously absent from mainstream media coverage when the novel was published. Instead of showing what he has called the "awfulness of young death" explicitly, he compels readers to use their own imagination and to conjure up such images in their own minds. Readers are caught up in an inevitable process of disambiguation, whereby they have to draw on familiar contexts and images of violence from contemporary warzones they are familiar with. The extraordinary vividness of Roth's language, heightened by alliteration and onomatopoeia, explains the impact on the reader who perhaps does not want to face such disconcerting imagery. It has already been pointed out that the self-reflexive character of the novel also contributes to the overall impact of the graphic passages. Readers are likely to resist when the narrative compels them to "reprocess" these images and accept them as fictions. Furthermore, *Indignation* elicits the active participation of the reader, who has to actively translate the images of the chicken market episode into violent images. Roth thereby represents the violence of war in a manner that fosters the consent of the reader. It may be added with reference to Simpson that it is not so much through television or photography but through "the power of literature" that real empathy or compassion can be achieved (Simpson 125). This is an essential part of the political thrust of the novel.

This active participation on the part of the reader, which is necessitated by Roth's use of ambiguity, fosters consent to the ideological norms of the text. Instead of being presented with a mere description of suffering soldiers in Korea, of which readers might disapprove, our active imagination is stirred and readers are more likely to accept the moral statement that equates war with slaughter. Both the descriptions of the butcher shop and the chicken market rely on a complex interplay between literal and figurative meanings. Especially the very ambiguous chicken market episode opens up the text as the novel offers different contexts. Thus, ambiguity should be considered a crucial technique in the overall structure of the novel. It occurs in Marcus's musings about his father's paranoia, in the various explanations for Marcus's death and it helps establish the close association between war and slaughter. This excessive use of ambiguity in the novel resembles a textual strategy that Bercovitch has identified as the key instrument in the ideological framework of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. As in Hawthorne's romance, symbolic ambiguity serves in *Indignation* to open up the text to a variety of tenable interpretations, conveying the illusion of choice. But in fact no single meaning is tenable on its own so that readers have to accept that there is a plurality of meanings. Bercovitch argues that the numerous choices we are offered effectively serve "to deprive us of choice". The text invites us to co-produce its meaning and we are supposed to see that there is no single an-

swer, just a plurality of subjective interpretations (*RA* 208-12). The same strategy can be identified in *Indignation*. The meanings of the chicken market episode are co-produced by the reader who has already learned how to interpret the blood and the blades, namely to associate the battlefield with the slaughterhouse. Without any explicit reference to this association whatsoever, the chicken market episode then demands from readers an active application of what the novel has taught them. By introducing additional core contexts such as Olivia's attempted suicide and the motif of entrapment, the description of ritual slaughter becomes truly charged with ambiguous symbolism. The reader, who is responsible for bringing this ambiguity about, is more apt to accept the norms of the text. Instead of just presenting the reader with this moral judgement, readers are encouraged to arrive at this verdict themselves. Apart from merely accepting the equation of war with suffering, this also entails an appreciation of a pluralist concept of truth, which lies at the heart of the American ideology. According to Bercovitch, this is the ideological function of ambiguity. This makes *Indignation* another example of the American jeremiad, or anti-jeremiad, and literature's function as a place of socialization.

2.4 The Ideological Framework of *Indignation*

The present study has argued that *Indignation* is structured according to the ideological framework of the jeremiad incorporating several time frames: the American Revolution, the fifties, the present and the future. It chides the American present by using the historical frame of the fifties as its yardstick and while holding up American ideals as a model for the future. It questions established representations of the American fifties, such as the concept of family, and their function as ideological instruments in the American culture wars by exposing the rhetorical nostalgic nature of American collective memory. At the same time, the novel participates self-reflexively and ironically in these discourses. Faithful to the tradition of the jeremiad, the novel evokes a dark past in almost apocalyptic tones and portrays an American society in which individualism produces no real social change. It is a time of dangerous upheavals shaking American society and making life entirely unpredictable. Yet the regenerative power of American individualism is celebrated in the descriptions of Robert Treat and in the fictional *Historical Note* which concludes the novel and promises a better future in an alternative America heralded by the dissent of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The student protests and calls for a more liberal Winesburg at the end of the novel project a better America that is true to the liberal ideals of the American Revolution. Thus, the novel denounces the gap between the real and an ideal

America. It is this ideology of consensus which endows the novel with a transhistorical significance, transcending its particular historical setting. The moral of the novel has practical implications for the American present and can thus be read as a summons for all Americans to return to the right path of the American liberal tradition. Moreover, particular elements in the novel are also presented in a fashion that tends to transcend the particular historical circumstances of the American fifties. For instance, the treatment of war in the novel goes beyond a dissection of the Korean War and is closely connected to contemporary controversies about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, *Indignation* should be considered an anti-war novel. Furthermore, the novel participates in current ideological debates about the role of the American fifties in U.S. history. It is a critical comment on attempts by conservatives to present this era as a time when traditional American values were still adhered to. Roth seems to join the ranks of those leftist critics who denounce this period in American history as a time of repression when, in their view, America was heading in the wrong direction.

Whereas the novel relies on the framework of the American jeremiad, it also complicates this rhetorical structure by introducing a metafictional dimension. The self-reflexive elements in the text question the ideological uses of history in general by equating history with fiction. This is the central irony behind Roth's appropriation of the American fifties and the American jeremiad. Apparently, he cannot use this rhetorical structure without winking between the lines, consciously or unconsciously. This prevents him from falling into the trap of fifties or sixties nostalgia and serves to debunk the myth of the American fifties effectively. Therefore, even the optimistic promise of a better future is presented in very ironic terms and the readers are left to decide whether they agree with this vision of the sixties as a better America or whether they take the final passage as a warning against the rhetorical uses of the American experience. It is this openness which elicits the pluralistic strategy of a novel that is ambiguous throughout. The central ambiguity surrounds the death of young private Messner and the reader is offered a multiplicity of explanations for it. This pluralism bespeaks an American ideology which relies on the active choice of the reader, who is expected to pick from the various interpretations discussed in the novel. The reader becomes part of a "ritual of interpretation" that follows the pluralist terms of the American symbology. Participating in this ritual of pluralist discourse furthers the cause of American liberalism and allows individuals to assert themselves in a particular American idiom (cf. *RA* 273). The novel represents, in other words, a site of socialization into the pluralist discourses which negotiate the meaning of America. Numerous enigmatic intertextual references as well as the inherent unreliability in the narrative world add to the existing ambiguities and serve to elevate the reader as the prime author-

ity who can attribute meaning to the text. Thus, the interpretative choices of the reader become a means of individual self-assertion as they bring their own images of America to bear on the interpretation of the novel. Nevertheless, radical alternatives to the opposition between the real and the ideal America, such as socialism, are practically ruled out by the novel.

And taking the argument a bit further, it can be claimed that the ironic use of the rhetoric of the jeremiad deprives the novel of its positive ending. Roth's appraisal of the American sixties in the *Historical Note* is, after all, no less fictional than his portrayal of the fifties. Of course, this requires a reader who is not only familiar with the intertexts of the novel, such as *Winesburg, Ohio*, but who also pays sufficient attention to the numerous intertextual allusions in the novel, especially in the *Historical Note*. Generally speaking, readers who read the book twice are more apt to appreciate the ironic tone of the novel and its ending in particular. Thus, *Indignation* can be considered a particular type of jeremiad – an “anti-jeremiad” which is content in chastising the American Way and refrains from projecting a vision of a better future. It contains an aesthetic strategy that Sacvan Bercovitch has identified in Melville's anti-jeremiad *Pierre*, which “is a dramatization of the traps of cultural symbology: a meta-history of continuing revolution; a sustained critique of the rhetoric of alternative America's (sic) in the United States” (RA 292, 302). Roth's ironic and self-reflexive treatment of history celebrates the American jeremiad and American liberalism while at the same time exposing the appropriation of America's past as pure rhetoric. By blurring the lines between fact and fiction, history and literature, Roth presents America and its history as an almost arbitrary conglomeration of intertextual references serving the rhetorical purposes of the American ideology. Thus, *Indignation* can be placed in a postmodernist tradition of *historiographic metafiction*, which is typically subversive and complicitous in its ironic appropriations of history and ideology (cf. Hutcheon, *Politics* 13-14, 34). If there is a symbol of hope for a better America in this novel, it is to be found in the descriptions of Robert Treat. In fact, it might be argued that the self-reflexive elements reinforce the subtle effect of the Winesburg-Newark dichotomy. Whereas the fictional *Historical Note* seems to question the ideological utopianism of the American Dream, Robert Treat is made to stand for this better America, this promise of a better future. This testifies to the paradoxical character of the novel in which affirmation and resistance of the American Dream are so closely interrelated that it is impossible to separate them. Again, the prime authority is the reader, who is compelled to bring his or her own view about the meaning of America into play. Readers take part in the ideological consensus of the American Dream as they bring their own experiences to bear on their reading processes and as they read the novel according to the norms of the American symbology. Nevertheless, both read-

ings do not leave the path of the American ideology and preclude more radical alternatives. This concurs with Debra Shostak's observation that Roth usually places postmodernist and realist discourses alongside each other in his later fiction. Consequently, he may be celebrating a realist narrative with liberal values while undermining it at the same time with postmodernist conventions such as metafictionality, self-reflexivity or intertextuality. The question whether there is an objective reality and whether it can be meaningfully represented in fiction remains unresolved. She argues that "Roth seems less interested in trying to reconcile these ideological and narrative modes, however, than in showing how they can at once inhabit the same spaces comfortably and challenge each other" (Shostak, "Introduction" 10).³² In addition, by incorporating distinctly Jewish literary themes such as the *schlemiel* and the *shiksa*, Roth's novel represents a representative document of Jewish-American acculturation. Roth manages to translate both motifs into the rhetoric of the (anti-)jeremiad, thereby participating in the American ideology of consensus and at the same time reshaping and embellishing this debate about the meaning of America with an ethnic touch. In sum, his ironic celebrations of American liberalism and the sixties have the potential to bend the limits of the American ideology significantly, while he remains clearly within the confines of the symbolic system with regard to his praise of American tolerance, dissent and multiculturalism.

³² For both a synthesis of the scholarly debate surrounding Roth's fusion of realist and postmodernist modes as well as a critical assessment of Shostak's observation see Brauner, *Philip Roth* (2007) 49-51.

3. *I Married a Communist*: “In Gossip We Trust”

Literature? What are you talking about? What use does it have? Where does it fit in? Please, I am creating a universe, not a university. *No literature.* (IMC 224)

Few of Roth's novels have generated such seething reactions as *I Married a Communist*. Containing hardly veiled and by no means flattering references to his ex-wife Claire Bloom and her best-selling memoir *Leaving a Doll's House*, in which she had depicted him as a “game-playing, Machiavellian strategist” (247), *I Married a Communist* was, or so it seemed to some reviewers, nothing more than revenge in novelistic form, his literary riposte for Bloom's decision to share her views on the failed marriage with the American public. Thus, Linda Grant's review in *The Guardian* describes the book as “an angry, bitter, resentful mess by a man who might have taken another course: [...] Pleading the Fifth. Bloom's book didn't diminish him; he's done it to himself”. Writing for *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani gives a similar verdict when she sees “a narrow, personal agenda” behind the novel and criticises the lack of cohesion in a “wildly uneven novel that feels both unfinished and overstuffed” (“Manly Giant”). And whereas Norman Podhoretz considers *I Married a Communist* “one of Roth's less successful books” (347), Robert Kelly on the other hand is one of the critics who praises the novel, as “gripping” and “memorable” (n.p.).

The novel begins with the authoritative voice of the ageing Nathan Zuckerman looking back on his youth and assessing the impact his former teacher Murray Ringold has had on his life. He was an English teacher and as Zuckerman explains, he essentially enkindled a desire for personal independence in his students and a penchant for critical thinking which has left its mark on Zuckerman's life. It is fifty years later and much has happened in Zuckerman's life until he runs into his former teacher again. During a long discussion that forms the structural backbone of the plot, the two take a critical look at the historical events that were shaping their lives in the 1950s and that had a severe impact on Murray's brother Ira, to whom the young Nathan Zuckerman used to be befriended. In these conversations with his friend, Zuckerman learns much about the events that made Ira Ringold a victim of the blacklists and that led to Murray's dismissal as a high school teacher. Having refused to cooperate with the *House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)* during one of the hearings investigating communist infiltration in American education, Murray was subsequently dismissed and became a salesman of vacuum cleaners for several years before he was even-

tually reinstated. This dismissal had probably also to do with the fact that his brother Ira had publicly insulted the red-baiting journalist and politician Bryden Grant, who would later sit on the committee that had to decide about Murray's professional future as a teacher. Zuckerman learns to his own surprise that it was in this context that the FBI started investigating himself due to his association with Ira Ringold, a presumed Communist, an association that cost him his Fulbright scholarship. Young Nathan first saw Ira Ringold at his school, where he made a lasting impression on the young boy with his powerful imitation of Abraham Lincoln. He then personally met him for the first time at Murray's house, where Ira declared his fascination with Nathan Zuckerman, then a young and enthusiastic admirer of Thomas Paine and Howard Fast's novel about the Founder. Ira was then married to Eve Frame, whose obscure Jewish origins were a favourite topic of gossip at the Zuckerman's dinner table. Having followed Ira to a rally of the presidential candidate Henry Wallace despite the misgivings of his father, Ira and Nathan became friends. The boy was increasingly fascinated with Ira's left-leaning but not openly communist ideas and Ira encouraged him in his determination to start writing radio plays with ostensibly leftist agendas. It is at this point of the conversation that Murray begins to reveal more about the misfortunes of his brother Ira. Ira used to work in the Army, where he met Johnny O'Day, an Irishman who introduced Ira to Communist ideology. In his time as a private, Ira got into several brawls, one of which injured him so severely that he eventually quit the Army. He later started to work for the radio when the producer of the left-leaning show *The Free and the Brave* discovered Ira's talent as a Lincoln impersonator. This was Ira's breakthrough and he became *Iron Rinn*, a famous radio star, which eventually introduced him into the world of artists and to the actress Eve Frame, who would become his wife. The marriage turned out to be difficult. There was Eve's anti-semitism for example. Renouncing and utterly rejecting her own Jewish origin, Eve pretended to be a Gentile and her anti-semitism was, according to Murray, one of the ways to present herself as one. Another problem was Sylphid, Eve's daughter, who saw Eve's decision to remarry again rather critical. For Ira, who had seen a lot of lowlife as a teenage ditch digger, as a worker in the Zinc mines and later as a soldier, this new life as a radio star married to a beautiful and famous actress was a revelation. Murray advised Ira against the marriage from the beginning, thinking that Eve and Ira were too different and that Eve's emotional life and the relationship to her daughter after several divorces were far too complicated. One of the marital conflicts that emerged in the course of the marriage was concerned with Eve's pregnancy and her decision, against Ira's hopes and following the demands of her jealous daughter, to have an abortion. Ira's own affairs did not help to improve

the emotional climate in the family, although it seemed for a time as though his relationship to Eve's daughter Sylphid could be repaired.

Zuckerman and Murray then begin to dwell on the more dishonest side of Ira's personality. Having been taken to some of Ira's former acquaintances from the Army, young Nathan Zuckerman witnessed a dangerous confrontation between Ira and his former comrade Goldstine. Goldstine, who was not at all pleased to see Ira again, threatened his former friend with a gun and asked Nathan to question Ira about the men he had murdered in the Army. More significantly, Zuckerman relates an important moment in his life as a young boy, i.e. the moment when he betrayed his father. Having strong suspicions about Ira's secret ties to the Communist Party, Nathan's father decided to ask Ira about his political affiliation and Ira replied with a blatant lie. He did not admit that he was a member of the Communist Party and kept his membership in the CP a secret. For Nathan, leaving a deeply wounded father behind came close to betrayal and accordingly his father felt as though he had lost his son to another man. Yet this betrayal was soon followed by other betrayals. As Nathan grew older and went to university, his faith in Ira's creed of the plight of the "common man" eroded slowly. Leo Glucksmann, one of the teachers at the University of Chicago, introduced Nathan to a completely different view of art and life. Advocating a no less radical art-for-art's-sake ideology, he utterly rejected Ira's view that art should serve political agendas and although Nathan and he parted after a heavy argument, Nathan's own views on life and art began to change. He also visited Johnny O'Day, the radical Communist who had recruited Ira. Both experiences with these two men helped Nathan emancipate himself from his youthful and idealistic notions about the cause of the "common man". In the meantime, the situation in Ira's family escalated. Having learned of Ira's affair with his masseuse Helgi Pärn, Eve gave the Grants, who were preparing Bryden Grant's candidacy for the House of Representatives and needed some positive publicity, access to Ira's secret documents. The publication of these files not only furthered Grant's political aspirations, they also got Ira blacklisted and ruined his career as a radio star. On top of that, Ira's affair with Pamela, one of Sylphid's close friends, backfired. Fearing she might be caught up in the unfolding scandal, Pamela told an already fuming Eve about the affair and claimed that Ira had been harassing her. Eve then set out to destroy Ira and sought Bryden Grant's help in writing a book about her marriage to Ira entitled *I Married a Communist*. Apart from advancing Grant's career, the book helped to ruin Ira's already damaged reputation entirely. Losing the support of many of his long-time friends and supporters, Ira ended up working at a rock dump selling cheap minerals to tourists. The disappointments increased his paranoia and the hard work exacerbated the severe pain Ira had been suffering from since his time in the Army and he was eventually hospi-

talized. In his rising paranoia and anger, Ira started plotting revenge. It is at this point in the narrative that Murray reveals the central secret from Ira's past. As a young man he had murdered an Italian anti-Semite and after Eve's betrayal his murderous impulses threatened to get the better of him again. Murray and his wife intervened and persuaded Ira to refrain from violence and so he used his old friends among the leftist press to go after Eve and her book. The journalists exposed the book as a collection of hastily concocted lies, which ruined Eve's reputation and career forever. Both Ira and Eve died several years later. The novel concludes with the reflections of an ageing Nathan Zuckerman beneath a starry sky, contemplating the failings of all these people from his own past.

Roth's portrayal of the age of McCarthy in *I Married a Communist* has received ample treatment by critics and assessments of its significance vary, not surprisingly, quite considerably. Scholars have come up with a variety of interpretations which often focus on the issue of national identity. Whereas Franziska Claudia Brühwiler claims that the novel negotiates the "question of how art serves and subverts political thinking and plans" (77), for Aimee Pozorski, it exposes the "U.S. democracy as inherently and irredeemably flawed" (62). Catherine Morley, who considers *I Married a Communist* as an inseparable part of what she calls the *American Pastoral Trilogy*, sees in the book an exploration of the "role of the writer in the construction of a mythical national identity" (8). David Gooblar regards *I Married a Communist* and the entire *American Trilogy* as an exploration of "the interaction between self and society, between the individual and his community, between self-determination and social determination". It is a novel in which the characters struggle to assert their independent selves in a deterministic world (*Major Phases* 132-33). Likewise, Debra Shostak suggests that the novel investigates how "the freedom of self-invention may be significantly hindered by the very ideological and historical conditions that prompt impersonations in the first place" (*Philip Roth* 150). And according to Ann Basu's verdict, *I Married a Communist* explores the tribulations involved in American "self-making" and deconstructs "American cultural narratives about national integrity and unity, purity and innocence" (77). For Alexander, it is a balanced representation of this troubled time which confronts the injustices of the witch-hunts as well as the failings of their leftist critics. He points out that the fifties are presented as "the age of gossip, of betrayal, of the entertainment value of disgrace and the pleasures of paranoia" (148-49). According to Kanowski, *I Married a Communist* is primarily about the betrayal of American liberal ideals in postwar America and the futility of striving for utopian pastorals in an unpredictable world (12). In a similar manner, Greil Marcus interprets the novel as an account of how little sense one can make of the historical developments unfolding in front of one's eyes and the novel

dramatizes the impact of American history on American identities (99-100). Laura Arce focusses mainly on the themes of conspiracy, paranoia and betrayal in this work of *historiographic metafiction*, suggesting that Roth associates these concepts with McCarthy's use of the mass media in order to condemn the McCarthy era (28-31). Likewise, Sorin Radu-Cucu focusses on the novel's representation of populism and its theme of betrayal, suggesting that it shows how a degeneration of public discourse leads to an elevation of betrayal and blurs the line between public and private (177-84). Ann Basu points out that Roth explores the anxieties surrounding American identity, especially authenticity, in American postwar society (83-85). And whereas James D. Bloom places *I Married a Communist* in a context of Jewish sensitivity to McCarthyism (*Gravity Fails* 30), Mark Shechner interprets the novel as a critique of the dogmatic attitudes of the Old Left political fanaticism (*Up Society's Ass* 176-78, 185). And more recently, Loeffler has interpreted the novel as a demonstration of the individual need for "historical sense-making" and as an exploration of cultural pluralism in the second half of the twentieth century (599-600).

According to Abbott, *I Married a Communist* explores forms of American populism in the 1950s, a time in which assessments of populism as a political movement became generally more negative with the onset of McCarthyism. Often understood in contrast to liberalism, the "populist ideal" celebrates self-sufficiency and egalitarianism. It is often conservative in its focus on continuity rather than progress and it usually entails attacks on potential threats to such values. After attempts to defend populism in the 1960s, it became discredited again in the 1990s. Abbott argues that all the protagonists of the *American Trilogy* recall populist movements of the past, which is why these characters all share an anger about their inability to effect change while they are subjected to painful confrontations with the American Dream (Abbott 435-40). Having chosen to set his novel in the McCarthy era, Roth associates the Ringold family crisis with an essentially "populist moment" in American post-war history. In this sense, Ira is a self-made man with Communist ties and represents "a cultural type that emerged after the Popular Front period in 1936, and was destroyed by another populist movement, led by Joseph McCarthy". In dissecting Ira's contradictions, such as his dutiful and unquestioning adoption of the CPUSA line and his indomitable faith in independent thought, Abbott shows how Roth reveals the populist anger and resentment in American society to be rooted in conflicts and tensions which originate in issues of social mobility (443-44). Yet, Abbott's argument that Ira's anger is a side effect of his phenomenal rise from a poor ditch digger to a popular radio star ignores the fact that this anger and especially Ira's violent tantrums precede Ira's ascension to the status of a famous radio star. It certainly helps to explain why Ira turns into a popu-

list who does not practice what he preaches, but Ira's anger is more irrational and probably a result of his difficult childhood. He kills a man as a youngster, in turn becomes a Communist to subvert his violent impulses and finally betrays his "progressive" ideals as he begins to experience the blessings of upward mobility in American society, not vice versa. At the same time, *I Married a Communist* can also be read as a warning against the dangers inherent in populist movements, not only to the individual but to democracy itself, albeit encouraging us to have empathy with the tragic life of Ira Ringold (Abbott 445-47).

Hornung considers the entire *American Trilogy* an elaborate and retrospective examination of American society and politics, "a social canvas of Roth's post-war years". The theme of betrayal, as in Ira's betrayal of Nathan's trust, signifies an overall sense that Americans have not succeeded in living up to the ideals of the Founders. Hornung regards the novel as a critical evaluation of the fifties which examines the repercussions of McCarthyism for Nathan's, Murray's and Ira's personal lives, i.e. their relationships and their careers (Hornung 78-81). Thus, Hornung interprets Roth's allusions to the film *I Married a Communist* as a means to evoke the Manichean rhetoric of the 1950s that pervaded American popular culture. He relates this to the climate of cultural warfare in the 1990s and especially the impeachment process that held the American public in its grip during the Clinton presidency. Considered from such a perspective, Murray Ringold speaks with Roth's voice when he condemns the political career of Richard Nixon, who is represented in the novel (especially in the funeral scene) as a forerunner of an "undemocratic spirit" that Roth sees in Republican politics in the 1990s (82-83). These novelistic reflections then form the background for an examination of human "foibles" and "fallibility" (84). Personal betrayal and public gossip about human failings are to be seen as the causes for Ira's and Murray's problems, and not so much the injustices of McCarthyism. These betrayals affect all major characters, for instance Ira's betrayal of Nathan or Eve's betrayal of her husband (85-88). The key parallel that Roth seems to draw here between the 1950s and the 1990s is that "behind all political ideology emerges the entertainment factor of public exposure or private lives and the problems resulting from human foibles". According to Hornung, Roth suggests that public and ideological representations of individuals cannot account for the complexities of the human condition and their simplicity is essentially harmful (88-89).

In a related vein, Anthony Hutchison sees the *American Trilogy* as an examination of American liberalism and in particular how it developed between the 1950s and the 1990s. With its complex theme of betrayal and Nathan Zuckerman's socialisation as a novelist, the novel examines different ideological positions represented by different characters such as Murray, Ira,

O'Day or Glucksman. American liberalism, the novel suggests, sought to define itself in the course of the Wallace campaign through an affirmation and a rejection of a Progressive Party which was infiltrated by Communists like Ira. As Hutchison shows, Nathan Zuckerman develops his "political consciousness" in successive 'betrayals' of his ideological mentors ("Purity" 319). This theme of betrayal is closely linked to the notion of fatherhood in the novel, since Nathan's political mentors are presented as father figures that are betrayed by their figurative son, one after another. Hutchison adds that Johnny O'Day can be seen as Ira's adopted parent, whereas Lincoln is the father of the nation that Ira tries to impersonate. Moreover, this theme of fatherhood also relates on another level to the historical dimensions of the novel. For both Wallace and Truman were, in a sense, contending for the legacy of Roosevelt and the *New Deal*. Hutchison explains that this "'filial' tension has its parallels in the Zuckerman family and Wallace's inability or unwillingness to see Communism as a threat, which was interpreted by many progressives in his camp as betrayal, an issue that drives a wedge between Nathan and his father. Later, it is Leo Glucksman who replaces Ira as Nathan's adopted father and makes him "betray" his affiliation to the Old Left (Hutchison, *Republic* 102-7). Yet with respect to the norms of the text, it is not only Nathan's socialisation but also Murray's development towards the close of the novel that is revealing. Hutchison suggests that the novel favours a "chastened liberalism" which approaches "moral and political purity" more cautiously (Hutchison, "Purity" 326-27).

As these examples show, critics have largely focussed on issues of national identity and American individualism. In order to appreciate Roth's use of history and his engagement with McCarthyism it is necessary to give a brief outline of the historical developments that Roth explores in *I Married a Communist*. As Debra Shostak remarks, "this novel seems more than any other steeped in the massively researched details of 'objective' history" (*Philip Roth* 250). Accordingly, the following section will illustrate some of the relations between Roth's portrayal of the American fifties and the more general history of the McCarthy era. "McCarthyism"³³ has become a meta-

³³ The following account is based on the brief overviews in Jürgen Heideking's and Christof Mauch's *Geschichte der USA* (2008), William H. Chafe's *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (2007), and James T. Patterson's *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (1996). Fried's concise monograph *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (1990), Ellen Schrecker's extensive study *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1998), as well as Storrs's more recent monograph *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (2013) have also been included. Thomas Mergel's article "'The Enemy in Our Midst': Antikommunismus und Amerikanismus in der Ära McCarthy" (2003) focusses on the ideological relationships between Americanism and Anticommunism, providing an additional perspective to the aforemen-

phor of hysteria in American politics. Whereas historians from different political camps all tend to condemn the McCarthy witch hunts, Mergel criticises that there is still little historical distance in scholarly assessments of the period, which underlines the continuing significance of the McCarthy trauma for American constructions of identity. It is an enduring trauma that is deeply intertwined with the foundational ideas of American concepts of self and Americans have only recently begun to come to terms with this chapter of their history. Historians still grapple with the question whether McCarthyism was a unique aberration in the history of American liberalism or a symptom of a more general phenomenon in American society (Mergel 237-38). As Schrecker explains, writing in the late 1990s, the pervasive fear McCarthyism has bred “reverberates to this day” (360).

The roots of the McCarthy witch-hunts are usually placed in the 1930s. Membership in the CPUSA had never been strong when anti-communist paranoia swept the American public in the 1950s. Yet, it had been strongest in the 1930s and 1940s, although the majority of members never stayed long in the Party. It grew somewhat stronger after 1935 when the global Communist movement, spearheaded by the USSR, reoriented itself to fight Fascism. For the CPUSA, this entailed a decisive change of policy, because it ceased fighting New Deal liberals and instead sought active cooperation with other political camps. Thus, the American Communist Party was able to increase its overall influence in the United States, for instance by supporting the *Congress of Industrial Organizations*. Communists began to play a key role in many other industrial unions as well and even dominated some of them, such as the *Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers*. It was the Nazi-Soviet Pact that enormously discredited the CPUSA and its Communist causes. This damage was only partly repaired by the U.S. entry into the Second World War as a Soviet ally. Although there was a widespread atmosphere of mistrust, many Americans felt fairly euphoric about Soviet Russia in the emotional climate of the Second World War. Even a conservative like General Douglas MacArthur felt obliged to concede that Soviet valour was moving. The CPUSA profited from this temporary sea change and its leader Earl Browder went as far as to say that Communism was “the Americanism of the twentieth century”. Communists openly wrapped themselves in the Stars and Stripes and CPUSA membership reached formerly unknown heights (Fried, *Nightmare in Red* 11-16). When the Second World War came to a close, many liberals were expecting a revitalization of the *New Deal* programs that had given the years before the war a fairly progressive touch. Especially the unions had profited from the *New Deal* and were experiencing rising num-

tioned works. A useful discussion of recent literature is provided by Storrs, “McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare” (2015).

bers in membership. Roosevelt's announcement in 1944 to introduce an economic "Bill of Rights" in order to address many social issues such as housing, education and healthcare further fuelled liberal hopes that post-war America would see another *New Deal* – if not under Roosevelt, then under Truman, who had promised to continue Roosevelt's political legacy. Yet Truman's actual reforms fell dramatically short of what many liberals had been expecting and they felt this betrayed the President's promising and reform-oriented rhetoric. This was mainly due to the resistance of the same conservatives who had successfully prevented Roosevelt from putting his more radical reforms into practice before the war. The 1946 elections then saw massive Republican gains and the Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The advent of a new Red Scare discredited many of the former *New Deal* measures that had still enjoyed widespread acceptance before the war (Chafe 75-77).

With the onset of the Cold War, American attitudes towards Soviet Russia and the CPUSA hardened again. In how far political leaders like Truman were shaping public opinion in this development or whether they were simply responding to changing attitudes in the American public is still a matter of controversy. In any case, the U.S. had reached an anti-communist consensus at the close of the 1940s that paved the way for the witch-hunts of the subsequent decade (Fried 11-16). Cases of espionage, such as the issues surrounding businessman Philip Jaffe and Alger Hiss, an assistant to the Secretary of State, increased suspicions that a Communist conspiracy was undermining the United States. The Hiss case was especially difficult because it kept dragging on and public accusations were mounting. It was this changing political climate that helped Republicans to wrest control of Congress from the Democrats in 1946, obtaining a mandate to investigate and purge Communist infiltration in the government. American liberals were still quite divided. Whereas it was out of the question for the majority of liberals in the Democratic Party to support Communism, in the unions and other institutions, there was still a minority that held to "progressive" ideals and considered a peace with the U.S.S.R. to be the first priority. It was this political camp that came to support Henry Wallace's candidacy in the presidential elections of 1948 (59-65), an event that plays a pivotal role in Roth's novel.

In the novel, the presidential elections of that year lead to fierce political debates in Nathan's family. Although his father desperately tries to convince his son of the futility of such an endeavour, Nathan is adamant that Henry Wallace is the only good candidate. His father maintains that by weakening the Democratic campaign Wallace's candidacy would only serve to play into the hands of the Republicans. Revaluating the events of his past, the ageing Zuckerman sees the internal division of the Democratic party reflected in the split of his own family, i.e. primarily between himself and his father. The

divided nation has its equivalent in the divided family. Ironically distancing himself from his younger self, Nathan Zuckerman suggests that this conflict with his father was not merely political in nature but equally, or perhaps rather, due to Nathan's desire to emancipate himself from his father and become a man. This is why the Ringolds and their left-leaning political views turn out to be so attractive for him (*IMC* 32). Roth thereby introduces two key themes of the novel: Nathan Zuckerman's political socialisation, a leitmotif that frames various aspects of this *bildungsroman*, and the theme of betrayal. Beginning with the day on which young Nathan turned his back on his father, the elderly Nathan Zuckerman relates different events in his life as an entire series of betrayals that form a thematic link for several different developments in the plot. Finally, the passage about the Wallace rally serves to introduce a third key element in the novel, the portrayal of the personal costs and betrayals of McCarthyism. Whereas Roth uses the rally to allude to several protagonists and events of the era such as Truman, Paul Robeson, the Taft-Hartley law and the Truman Doctrine to set the stage (*IMC* 29-30), it is in the personal dramas which unfold that the ideological norms of the text are to be found. The Wallace campaign is the starting point of Roth's exploration of postwar liberalism. According to Hutchison, it "offers a set of reference points within which Roth chooses to outline the ideological ethos that is American liberalism in the early postwar years" (*Republic* 99). The Wallace rally is presented as a political watershed that brought to light the severe divisions in American liberalism, the impact they had on individual families and the emerging spectre of anticommunism.

It was before and during the war that significant steps were taken by fervent anti-communists to combat American communism and *New Deal* liberalism. One of the most infamous institutions involved in the Red Scare of the 1950s was the *House Committee on Un-American Activities*, first established in 1938. Under Congressman Martin Dies, it rose to prominence in the late 1930s when the *HUAC* began to look into "subversive and un-American propaganda", employing "methods of defamation and self-promotion" which would later become Senator McCarthy's trademark. 1938 was also the year in which the *New Deal* ended and a conservative coalition, led by Republicans and Southern Democrats, put an end to Roosevelt's agenda. The *Dies Committee* attacked *New Deal* programs such as the *Federal Theatre Project*, which supported unemployed actors and generally people working in the theatre, many of whom were addressing social issues in their work. Dies also managed to associate Michigan's Governor Frank Murphy with communism, effectively impairing his public reputation. The *Dies Committee* enjoyed ongoing support, because anti-communist sentiment was already fairly widespread in the American public by 1939. Fears that so-called "fifth column" communists might subvert American society from within were

shared by many conservatives and liberals. In this atmosphere, President Roosevelt supported an expansion of the powers and responsibilities of the FBI, which now included investigating espionage and sabotage. Hoover had lists of suspicious individuals drawn up (the *Custodial Detention Index*) who were to be seized and arrested in case of a national emergency. According to Fried, it was in these years, long before Senator McCarthy entered the stage, that the administrative framework of the later witch-hunts was set in place.

FDR's loyalty program was a key in this emerging pattern. Implemented in 1939, the *Hatch Act* allowed the *Civil Service Commission* to sort out federal job applicants whose loyalty was in doubt. After 1943, applicants had to actively prove their loyalty if they had been members of organizations that were deemed subversive. The 1940 *Smith Act* was another essential part of this structure, because it prohibited "to interfere with or impair the loyalty, morale, or discipline of the armed services. It also outlawed teaching or advocating the 'duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing or destroying any government in the United States by force or violence,' or organizing or belonging to a group with that aim". A few years later, this law was used to legitimize arrests of CP members on the grounds that Leninist doctrine promoted violent revolution, regardless of victims' assurances that they advocated peaceful reform (Fried 47-55). Thus, the anti-communist movements of the 1930s and 1940s bequeathed the Republic a sharp rhetoric of redbaiting, a legislative structure allowing the prosecution of alleged Communists and a system that required applicants for federal jobs to prove their loyalty, if it was in doubt. It is therefore no surprise that fears of Communist subversion from within were widespread among representatives of all political camps (58).

These governmental loyalty and security programs served as models for entire waves of politically motivated dismissals that swept the United States in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. It was the implementation of such procedures at the level of government administration that would lend legitimacy to the vicious attacks on Hollywood, left-wing employees in education or other areas of public life that would follow later (Schrecker 267-72). It began in 1947 when the federal employee loyalty program was implemented, heralding an era in which sharp anti-Communist rhetoric, snooping, and suspicion would be of increasing importance. Truman revived and tightened the loyalty program, which had been in use until 1945 when it lost political funding. The congressional elections and the extraordinary success of the Republican anti-communist agenda of 1946 hardened Truman's resolve to take initiative and he re-established the program by executive order, a week after he had emphasised the importance of the international fight against Communism in his proclamation of what became known as the Truman-Doctrine. Yet, Truman's loyalty program was not enough to appease the public demand for anti-

communist measures. With the support of J. Edgar Hoover, the congressional committees spearheaded by the *HUAC* started their anti-communist campaign in the same year and investigated real and imagined Communist influence in the federal government, in the labour movement, in education, religious institutions, and the entertainment industry. Seeking pre-emptive action against potential Communists, loyalty boards punished individuals for past and present associations or views which were deemed subversive. In 1948, the publication of the General Attorney's list of potentially subversive organizations, which had been growing since 1942, exacerbated the persecution of innocents. Mere association with leftist organisations did not necessarily imply that individual members actually shared the views of these organisations. *The Washington Bookshop Association* for instance was indeed a leftist organisation, but many of its members were simply bookworms who had joined to benefit from good bargains. Since the loyalty boards sought to identify subversive thought, federal employees had to fear gossip or even outright denunciation. Now competing with Truman's loyalty program, Republicans asserted their authority through congressional institutions like the *HUAC*. Looking into a wide array of institutions and areas of public life, Hollywood was a particularly rewarding target for their investigations (Fried 66-78). Individuals were expected to reveal the names of all the people with whom they had been acquainted in supposedly subversive organisations. Refusal to cooperate and to "name names" was interpreted as contempt of Congress and thus prosecuted. Individuals who were pressed to reveal the names of their friends often "pleaded the fifth", i.e. they chose not to answer in order to protect their friends and (former) associates, but this was then often interpreted by the Committee as a confession of having been involved in illicit, subversive activities. Victims were forced to make an impossible choice between exposing their associates, which could mean prosecution, loss of jobs or social isolation, and incriminating themselves. In Hollywood for instance, where many liberals with current or former leftist inclinations were employed, invoking the Fifth Amendment and refusing to name names had severe consequences and often meant an end to their careers. Those who did not cooperate with the *HUAC* were usually blacklisted, which meant that all major studios would refuse to work with them. Thus, unemployment was a widespread fate among liberal artists, some of whom had done nothing more than toy with leftist ideas during the war for a while. These persecutions effectively stymied any open political debate and contributed to the emergence of a spirit of conformity (Chafe 92-95). Union members were especially popular targets of the purges. Apart from an individual's political affiliations, investigators were interested in a wide array of matters such as one's thoughts about Socialism, one's opinion on the *Marshal Plan* or one's attitude towards race relations. Encouraged and provided with suitable mod-

els by the government, private employers executed their own programs, relying on a political atmosphere that sanctioned dismissals of employees with politically questionable convictions. Often the victims did not even learn why they had been fired, which made it difficult to defend oneself and the principle of “guilt by association” encouraged manifold abuses (Schrecker 271-76). Communist Party membership was especially prevalent among screenwriters, many of whom had been radicalised during the Great Depression. Maintaining a critical stance towards labour agitation in general, conservatives in Hollywood were eager to testify against their more liberal or leftist colleagues. After the first Communists had been interrogated and appeals to the Supreme Court had subsequently failed, Hollywood complied with the general anti-communist mood and the blacklists were drawn up while the studios themselves began to examine their employee’s loyalty and affiliations.

The impact of these blacklists was still rather small when it began in 1947, but made itself increasingly felt until the situation exacerbated in the 1950s (Fried 69-78). Mao’s Communist takeover in China and news of the first Soviet nuclear bomb did much to intensify the already tense atmosphere in 1949 and anxieties about potential Soviet spies became more widespread. Twelve Communist leaders were tried under reference to the *Smith Act*’s sweeping allowances and the Alger Hiss trial began. Alger Hiss, who had worked for the Assistant Secretary of State under the Roosevelt administration and had been one of FDR’s advisors at the Yalta Conference, came under attack as the former CP member Whittaker Chambers suggested that Hiss was an active communist spy. Chambers accused Hiss of having passed classified documents on to him, the so-called pumpkin-papers. *HUAC* member Richard Nixon investigated the case and dug up further evidence to incriminate Hiss suggesting that the documents had been typed on Hiss’s typewriter. Hiss was eventually found guilty of perjury. Several other New Dealers were also suspected to be part of a larger Communist conspiracy, framed by Elizabeth Bentley, who was given the notorious nickname “spy queen” for being the supposed mistress of the spy ring’s leader. The Hiss case symbolically signified the demise of *New Deal* politics. To many Americans this seemed to confirm the accusations conservatives had been alleging for years, namely that the *New Deal* had paved the way for American Communism and that an anti-communist crusade was a necessity. Even most liberals had to concede that there was a real Communist threat, however small it might be (Fried 17-21, 93). The trials against Hiss and the CP leaders had an obvious didactic function and helped to enforce the overall sense of conformity, as Fried points out. This pertained also to the legal profession, because the defence attorney and several defendants were charged with contempt of court, an action that many lawyers correctly interpreted as a little

veiled threat to their profession. Afterwards, suspected Communists increasingly encountered obstacles in finding legal counsel (Fried 88-93). This heightening anti-communist atmosphere resulted in numerous purges in various institutions. The motives were often similar and rooted in internal divisions, mistrust and the feeling that a purge was necessary to ensure the survival of the institution and to protect the majority of its members. The education system soon came under fire as well. The *HUAC* demanded reading lists from university and college courses to identify subversive teachers. The *National Education Association* decided to exclude Communists from the teaching profession and the *American Federation of Teachers* went as far as to say that unwillingness to reveal one's political affiliations was enough evidence to bar a teacher from the profession (99-103). It is true that there had been Communists among the leading ranks of the *New York Teachers Union*, for example. The *Board of Education* undertook a purge in 1949 and in the following years several hundred New York teachers were dismissed or forced to resign on the grounds that they had the wrong associations or because they refused to cooperate during the hearings by disclosing their affiliations. Yet in spite of these meticulous investigations, the *Senate Internal Security Subcommittee* was not able to prove that Communist teachers had been indoctrinating the nation's youth (153). As in most areas of public life, political ambitions were often the key to understanding the motives of fervent Red Hunters (111), which is an aspect of McCarthyism that Roth dramatizes in his portrayal of Grant and Nixon. And the national obsession with educating the nation's youth is also an aspect of American cultural warfare that the novel dramatizes, especially with regard to anxieties about the content and authenticity of Americanness (Basu 83-85). However, this political climate, in which individuals shared in the "routine informer practices of the era" in order to pursue their own motivations, is epitomized in the novel by Eve Frame. Disguising her personal revenge as a patriotic endeavour, she exposes Ira as a Communist and this serves as Roth's most powerful indictment of the "betrayals and hypocrisies of the McCarthy era in America" (Lyons 128).

In Murray's encounter with the *HUAC*, Roth pays much attention to the injustices of these proceedings, giving the episode much space in the novel and providing with Lorraine, Murray's young daughter, a critical voice to denounce these civil rights violations. The *HUAC*, Nixon and his fictional stooge Bryden Grant become the central antagonists in this confrontation with American conformity. At the beginning of the novel, Murray relates how the short congressional hearing, during which he refused to answer the committee's questions, cost him his job as a teacher. Being suspected of indoctrinating the nation's youth along Communist lines, his lack of cooperation was duly interpreted as a sign of contempt and guilt, although no spe-

cific evidence for the charges was produced. This makes Murray a representative of the numerous teachers who fell victim to the purges of 1949. He has nothing but contempt for Bryden Grant, whom he suspects of pursuing a personal “vendetta” against the Ringolds (*IMC* 7). Murray presents him as a “gossip columnist” (8), a member of “Nixon’s gang”, but it is not mainly Murray’s starkly biased perspective that serves to associate Grant, and thereby implicitly Richard Nixon, with a betrayal of America’s founding ideals. It is rather the outrageousness of Grant’s own behaviour during the hearing and more specifically his reactions to Lorraine’s fierce accusations that underscore the injustices of the purges, for instance his smiling refusal to answer Lorraine’s questions, to produce anything else but vague allegations (11-12). Of course, this was a typical characteristic of many congressional hearings during the anti-communist purges. The passing reference to Nixon, a very prominent and real red-baiter, clearly alludes to his role in the Alger Hiss case and the Watergate scandal. Especially the passage in which Murray describes Nixon’s funeral in 1994 serves to criticise the striking lack of amnesia that some politicians display with regard to Nixon’s role in the 1950s witch-hunts and in Watergate (Rampton 19). As Hornung points out, Roth turns Nixon into a symbol of the “undemocratic spirit” that can be seen as today’s legacy of the 1950s (82-83). In a fictional quotation, Roth presents a Nixon not only condoning, but explicitly praising Grant’s reckless behaviour and thereby suggests that Nixon was as reckless as his stooge. This is a much subtler critique than a fictional portrayal of Nixon himself would have been and this critique is reinforced in the passage about Nixon’s funeral and in several references to Alger Hiss. As Murray explains in the context of Nixon’s funeral, “Nixon had Alger Hiss, Grant had Iron Rinn. To catapult them into political eminence, each of them had a Soviet spy” (*IMC* 277). Thus, in spite of his seeming absence in the novel as a character, Nixon is made a symbol of a severe betrayal of America’s founding ideals and Watergate becomes the seemingly logical conclusion of an age of snooping and subversion in American democracy that began in the fifties. As Anthony Hutchison points out, Murray presents Nixon as “nothing less than the betrayal of the modern American promise” and Watergate “as a defining moment in post-war political life – the juncture when liberalism itself stood on the verge of collapse” (*Republic* 130).

In official propaganda, the U.S. depicted the wartime ally as an enemy of apocalyptic proportions, allegedly bent on destroying the American way of life. In 1950, the secret *National Security Memorandum No. 68* was presented to the President and it laid out the ideological concept that would determine U.S. policies in the years to come. This document warned that the existence of the U.S.S.R. threatened to destroy not only the American Way of life and the universal values laid down in the Constitution and the Declara-

tion of Independence, but also the peace and freedom of civilisation itself. It was the Korean War that greatly accelerated U.S. attempts to put the principles formulated in this memorandum into practice (Heideking and Mauch 299-303). The document expressly stated that the United States were the Kremlin's "principal enemy whose integrity and vitality must be subverted or destroyed by one means or another if the Kremlin is to achieve its fundamental design" (U.S. Department of State, *NSC 68 IV.B*). Both powers were represented as polar opposites in a struggle over world dominion. It portrayed the U.S.S.R. in Manichean rhetoric as a "slave state" with the single purpose to "eliminate the challenge of freedom" in the world (IV.A):

Thus unwillingly our free society finds itself mortally challenged by the Soviet system. No other value system is so wholly irreconcilable with ours, so implacable in its purpose to destroy ours, *so capable of turning to its own uses the most dangerous and divisive trends in our own society*, no other so skilfully and powerfully evokes the elements of irrationality in human nature everywhere, and no other has the support of a great and growing center of military power. (IV.A, emphasis added)

The above quotation illustrates not only the sharpness of this rhetoric but also the underlying fear that the U.S.S.R. might subvert American society from within – a widespread concern that would pave the way for what would later come to be called *McCarthyism*. When the memorandum was signed by President Truman in September 1950, after General MacArthur had deployed U.S. troops in Korea, *NSC 68* became the ideological foundation of U.S. foreign policy during the following decades and its mentality reflected a more general anti-communist attitude in the American population (Heideking and Mauch 300). The war in Korea (1950-53) also played a crucial role in heightening anti-communist sentiments as well as stifling public dissent and these developments had a severe impact on the notorious Rosenberg trials. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were suspected of having passed atomic secrets to the Soviets and at least Julius Rosenberg had indeed been conducting espionage in the service of Soviet Russia. In the tense atmosphere of the Korean War, both received the capital punishment in 1953 and their trial has become emblematic of the Second Red Scare. The pace of the anti-communist crusade was accelerating. Under the shadow of the Korean War, the *McCarran Act* mandated restrictions of civil liberties such as detentions of potential spies and saboteurs in a state of emergency or forced registrations of all members of certain subversive groups on the General Attorney's list (Fried 113-117). The Rosenberg trial represents an important background of the novel. According to Kinzel, Roth not only presupposes knowledge of the case, but it is a foil for the dramatic events that unfold in *I Married a Communist*. Murray explicitly compares the Rosenbergs with the Ringolds, suggesting that whereas the Rosenberg case boosted Nixon's career, the Ringold case helped Bryden Grant to rise in American politics. Kinzel claims that the

Rosenberg case should be seen as an ambivalent symbol in this context, because the narrator Nathan Zuckerman seems to focus rather on the mechanisms of persecution than on the actual guilt of the Ringolds. For Kinzel, this signifies a reluctance on Zuckerman's part to distance himself from the leftist politics he grew up with (67-68).

It was in this political climate that Senator Joe McCarthy rose to prominence. In 1950 he boldly claimed to have obtained a list of security risks in the State Department. In truth, McCarthy had no such list, but he was trying to make the most out of an old letter from 1946, in which the former Secretary of State James F. Byrnes had stated that 79 of 285 security risks in his department had been dealt with. McCarthy simply assumed that there still had to be a great number of potentially subversive individuals in the State Department and that pretending to possess a list of names would cause a stir in the American press. He was right. Although the State Department denied the existence of such a list and even President Truman himself accused McCarthy of spreading falsehoods, his bold claim made the headlines. He later repeated some of his accusations in front of the Senate and dug out several old summaries of loyalty files the State Department had drawn up three years earlier, pretending he had new information from anonymous sources. Significantly, there were Republicans in the House who knew McCarthy's real source and understood what was going on, but the Communist issue was already a question of partisan politics and it was in the interest of both parties to call for an investigation of the Communist threat. During a first hearing in March, the Democrats questioned McCarthy, denouncing his lack of concrete evidence. Yet, they were not able to defuse the Republican allegation that the White House was trying to evade its responsibility in addressing the State Department's supposed entanglement in a Communist conspiracy. Since McCarthy did not have a list, he came up with different allegations, accusing several people who had connections to the State Department. None of these supposedly subversive individuals were unfamiliar to the public, McCarthy was simply reiterating former Republican allegations. As scepticism mounted, McCarthy accused an expert on foreign relations with Asia, Owen Lattimore, of being a Russian spy and having exerted a detrimental influence on U.S. far eastern policy. Lattimore was eventually cleared, but his reputation took lasting damage, not the least because he had made several rather apologetic remarks about Soviet terror. Yet on the whole, the case helped to improve McCarthy's public prestige as doubts about Lattimore's innocence spread.

Overshadowing the public debate, the Korean war continued to fuel anxieties, anti-communist fervour and thus what came to be known as "McCarthyism". After Truman, Eisenhower intensified anti-communist policies and refrained from confronting McCarthy openly, except on rare occasions and

only implicitly. In June 1953, he went as far as to call McCarthy a “book burner”, but he refused to discuss the matter in public. In the same year, McCarthy famously took the *State Department’s International Information Agency* under fire. Fighting for McCarthy’s cause, Roy Cohn and G. David Schine roamed through the institution’s overseas libraries in Europe and purged them from any reading material that was deemed problematic. In the heyday of McCarthyism, public discourse was beginning to define what Americans should or should not read and why. One of these authors was Howard Fast (Fried, 33-34), whose *Citizen Tom Paine* receives ample treatment at the beginning of *I Married a Communist*. Libraries felt the same public pressure. Apart from the occasional burning of books, librarians often yielded to public expectations and removed certain books from the shelves or refrained from buying books that might be considered inappropriate. This stigmatization of certain authors or subjects impinged also on the world of academics. Generally, fear led to self-censorship and the convergence of pressure and fear contributed to a mentality of conformism that determined what people felt they could read, do and think (Fried 162-64). The pervasive fear stifled American dissent and prevented many Americans from criticizing the government or from supporting parties and organizations left of the Democratic Party (Schrecker xiii). As will be seen below, Conservative preoccupations with reading and censorship are what links Roth’s treatment of the fifties to the Culture Wars of the 1990s. Roth seems to suggest that this recurring preoccupation with education is a parallel between both eras and his novel can be read as a celebration of dissent, free thinking, and the emancipatory power of literature in spite of conformist pressures in the American world of literature and education.

It was at the height of his influence in the American public that McCarthy began targeting the military, which would lead to his downfall. Together with his aides Roy Cohn and G. David Schine, McCarthy claimed that the Army had been subverted by Communist infiltration and that high-ranking representatives of the military were trying to hush it up. McCarthy’s overly fierce attack on the military, especially his verbal abuse of the much decorated war veteran and general Ralph W. Zwicker, aroused a lot of misgivings in the Army, in both parties and in the President. Eventually, the conflict came to a close in the Army-McCarthy hearings, which lasted for several weeks and produced little substantial evidence. Yet they devastated McCarthy’s public reputation and McCarthy lost much of his Republican supporters. He continued to rail, but the press quickly lost interest and his voice became increasingly insignificant. In 1955, the White House officially distanced itself from McCarthy and his colleagues, effectively ousting him. McCarthy’s downfall took place in a political climate of relaxation. The Korean war was over and Stalin’s terror regime was followed by a period of de-

Stalinization. The security apparatus, however, remained in place and while McCarthy's career was politically destroyed, other witch-hunters survived the demise of McCarthyism (Fried 123-42). Whereas McCarthy's waning star only signalled a change, it was the Supreme Court that eventually put an end to the discriminatory practices of the McCarthy era, for instance by protecting individuals invoking the Fifth Amendment and by limiting the powers of the *HUAC* (184-85). To all appearances, the legal system that had enabled an entire generation of Red Hunters disintegrated and McCarthyism came to an end, yet underneath the surface the FBI and other intelligence agencies not only continued their investigations of subversive activities but even increased their efforts (192). As Schrecker points out, it was the overwhelming success of the Red Hunters that eventually caused their own demise. At some point, there were plainly "no more witches" to hunt (298).

Apart from certain anxieties that surround the subject, the impact of McCarthyism can still be felt in American political culture. According to Schrecker, the American Left was permanently crippled in the 1950s and not only because McCarthyism removed Communism from America's political landscape. The entire "institutional and ideological infrastructure of the American left simply disappeared", which is why Schrecker considers the American 1950s to be a "lost moment of opportunity", for instance with respect to a potential expansion of the welfare state (369). Also the labour movement, especially in the form of the unions, failed to expand in the 1940s and 1950s but more importantly, anticommunism lastingly stigmatized the kind of class consciousness that had characterised the labour movement of the 1930s and 1940s. This entailed a sea change in the language of public discourse, since expressions even loosely associated with communist ideas were increasingly avoided. The popular reference to the "working stiff" for example, a now anachronistic expression that Roth repeatedly and deliberately uses in the novel (*IMC* 50, 93, 246), disappeared entirely. "Class-laden terminology" diminished in the media, in academia and even in everyday usage (Schrecker 395-96).

3.1 Dissenters in an Age of Conformity

In *I Married a Communist*, Roth explores different expressions of American individualism. The two brothers Murray and Ira Ringold are the most obvious examples and represent two different paths of individual self-assertion. But they are not the only characters in the novel pursuing their own, individual pursuits of happiness. For Eve Frame, this entails an obsessive desire to reinvent herself as an American Gentile and a betrayal of her Jewish roots. In fact, her second name may suggest that she has given herself a "false iden-

tity”, i.e. a new “frame” (Brühwiler 143). Some characters, such as Johnny O’Day, assume the role of the persecuted dissenter, while others like Helgi Pärn climb the social ladder to acquire material possessions. Some, like Sylphid, seek “absolute autonomy” in life (*IMC* 168), while others, like Lorraine, attempt to shoulder the burdens of liberal non-conformism in a world that stifles dissent. Nathan may seem to be an exception, because he undergoes so many changes in the course of the novel, but this also suggests the difficulties of self-invention at a time of political turmoil. What all these characters have in common, and perhaps Nathan Zuckerman most of all, is a deeply rooted desire to reinvent themselves as embodiments of American ideals, as representatives of age-old American myths (cf. Hornung 91). It is their successes and their failures which are the pillars of the novel’s ideological structure and which give rise to Roth’s trenchant critique of 20th-century America. As Roth has stressed himself, *I Married a Communist* is very much a novel about education (Roth, *Memory*), a *bildungsroman* in which a young adolescent, Nathan Zuckerman, experiences the struggles of growing up. This struggle involves choosing his mentors and role models, “the men to whom I apprenticed myself, from Paine to Fast and Corwin to Murray and Ira and beyond – the men who schooled me, the men I came from. All were remarkable to me in their own way, personalities to contend with, mentors who embodied or espoused powerful ideas and who first taught me to navigate the world and its claims, the adopted parents who also, each in his turn, had to be cast off along with their legacy” (*IMC* 217). Nathan states very clearly that each of these mentors and the American values they signify have not only left their impression on him, but that he has also had to come to terms with them. Nathan’s development thus mirrors the process readers undergo, who are also confronted with the different and sometimes contradicting images of America and its values. According to Basu, *I Married a Communist* can therefore be seen as a critical, “late-modernist” exploration of the genre of the *bildungsroman* (78-83) in which both narrator and reader have to “navigate” their way through a series of contrasting perspectives on American core values. This bespeaks Sacvan Bercovitch’s hypothesis that American novels are often sites of socialization into a pluralistic American society, because they engage readers in a debate about the ‘right’ American values (*RA* 29-30). This social function of the American novel is particularly relevant with respect to *I Married a Communist*, because characters like Ira Ringold or Johnny O’Day do not only embody American values, they often claim to be espousing ‘absolute truths’ about America and it is only late in his life that Nathan begins to perceive such “purity” as “petrefaction” and a “lie” (*IMC* 318).

The two brothers Ira and Murray Ringold are the key to the novel’s ideological structure, since they embody two different contrasting perspectives

on American individualism. Ira Ringold is first introduced to the reader as a radical and authentic non-conformist, blacklisted as a Communist. As Murray points out, it is these two attributes, authenticity and non-conformity, which help explain Nathan's fascination with his teacher's gargantuan brother (8). As Zuckerman puts it, "Iron Rinn wasn't just a radio star. He was somebody outside the classroom who was not afraid to say anything" (24). At the beginning, Roth introduces both Ira and Murray to the reader and suggests that their non-conformism is their most striking characteristic that distinguishes them. It is this category which guides the first stages of the reading process.³⁴

In his conversation, as in his brother's, there was no invisible line or propriety observed and there were no conventional taboos. You could stir together anything and everything: sports, politics, history, literature, reckless opinionating, polemical quotation, idealistic sentiment, moral rectitude ... There was something marvellously bracing about it, a different and dangerous world, demanding, straightforward, aggressive, freed from the need to please. And freed from school. Iron Rinn wasn't just a radio star. He was somebody outside the classroom who was not afraid to say anything. I had just finished reading about somebody else who wasn't afraid to say anything – Thomas Paine [...]. (*JMC* 24)

Both Ira and Murray are presented here as transgressive free spirits who speak their minds, seemingly unbound by social convention. For the young Nathan Zuckerman, they represent another America, "a different and dangerous world, demanding" – the alliteration places emphases on the three key words that represent this alternative "America" of the Ringolds. It is an essentially oppositional, perhaps even subversive vision of America. For Murray, this oppositional stance requires a dedication to critical thinking, the mantra that pervades the English classes Nathan has to attend (2). His non-conformism is suggested at the beginning of the novel when Murray introduces himself as a "firebrand", a teacher never behaving the way he is expected to and who confronts the *HUAC* (5-6). For Ira it is an absolute belief in Communist ideology, although in reality his own behaviour often falls short of his indomitable convictions. Nathan's fascination with Ira also stems from the fact that he comes to associate him with Thomas Paine. Like the famous revolutionary (cf. Kinzel 83), Ira represents the ideal of freedom of

³⁴ This initial introduction of the characters can be considered formative for the reader's experience, since the reading process usually involves categorizing key characters. Jannidis describes this as the "top-down process" of constructing a character in the reader's mind at the beginning of any introduction to a new character. This may often entail an early categorization of the character into certain types which is "triggered" by the first textual cues the reader is given. What then happens in this "top-down process" is an integration of any subsequent data about the character into this category until the reader stumbles upon new information that does not fit the category the reader has constructed. A "bottom-up process" follows, whereby the reader integrates the new information into an altered mental construction of the character, a "personalized" character (Jannidis 7).

speech in American culture and a confrontational, masculine resistance against the status quo. They are role models of “transgressiveness” that “can make a key social and political impact” in American society (Gregson 73). Ira’s strong association with Paine helps to reinforce the first impression of the two brothers as non-conformist libertarians. Curiously, Nathan then proceeds to explain that the ideals of his youth were strongly influenced by American heroes of two kinds: struggling baseball champions who fight for success against all odds and libertarians who oppose tyranny in their struggle for universal justice (*IMC* 25). In the course of the novel, Ira comes to stand for both of these American ideals and at the height of his achievement, he is brought down as much by his marital problems as by the political turmoil of the McCarthy witch hunts. He fails utterly in his attempt to embody the American myth of the *self-made man* in his rise from a poor ditch digger to a known radio star and the ideal of the enlightened dissenter fighting for the poor and underprivileged. Like his brother, Murray also experiences failure in the face of political injustices and a changing Newark, but unlike his brother Murray succeeds in embodying the ideals Nathan associates him with. As will be seen below, Murray manages to retain his positive connotations in spite of all his failures, because he lives up to his non-conformist principles – at least mostly – while Ira betrays his ideals and his vision of a better America. In *I Married a Communist*, Roth presents us with two brothers who represent some of the archetypal American myths and the narrative follows them on their odyssey to the ‘true’ America. The narrative structure of the novel relies on this opposition between these two kinds of individualism: Ira’s misguided, radical and failing individualism in contrast to Murray’s more moderate, pragmatic and on the whole successful individualism.

Murray represents a kind of individualism that is more positively connoted than Ira’s. As a “firebrand” teacher with a special talent for “dramatizing inquiry” and a penchant for teaching critical thinking (*IMC* 1-2), Nathan sees in Murray an embodiment of the ideal of liberty. Looking at Murray as an old man, he sees “this physique as the materialization of all that coherence of his, as the consequence of a lifelong indifference to everything other than liberty in its most austere sense” (16). This passion for liberty and non-conformism is expressed in Murray’s dedication to emancipation by teaching critical thinking (Roth Pierpont 231) and his willingness to assert dissenting opinions, for example in his work for the union or in his resistance against the *HUAC*. Murray stresses the fact that the teaching profession was very conformist in his day, which is why his struggles for better working conditions were pretty fierce at times. His resistance against the *HUAC* is the most conspicuous expression of the ideals he represents. As Gregson points out, Nathan sees in this penchant for rebellion a sign of masculinity, epitomised by Nathan’s role model Tom Paine (*IMC* 73). The narrator gives Murray’s

hearing before the commission a lot of space in the opening section of the novel, allowing the reader to get a good impression of Murray's non-conformist dissent, especially when he invokes the *Bill of Rights* (IMC 5-6). Finally, his professional desire to turn his students into critical thinkers (2) can also be considered part of Murray's political non-conformism, because he clearly associates it with the fight against ideologies (317). Like Ira, he fights for freedom of opinion (76), yet unlike his brother he manages to live up to his ideals. In the closing pages of the novel, Murray ponders whether he has made the right choices and he concludes that in spite of his best intentions he was not able to save his wife. He is convinced that his conviction of his "own goodness" has turned out to be his "final delusion". He believes that his decision to take up the challenge to educate in the face of poverty, corruption and crime turned out to be a betrayal of his own wife (317-18). Thus, even Murray's exemplary life seems to be tainted after all. It seems that his convictions were too idealistic and doomed to fail, like Ira's. But then the authoritative voice of the narrator Nathan Zuckerman makes a comment that calls Murray's bleak assessment of his own life into question:

We could have sat on my deck for six hundred nights before I heard the entire story of how Murray Ringold, who'd chosen to be nothing more extraordinary than a high school teacher, had failed to elude the turmoil of his time and place and ended up no less a historical casualty than his brother. This was the existence that America had worked out for him – and that he'd worked out for himself by thinking, by taking his revenge on his father by critical thinking, by being reasonable in the face of no reason. This was what thinking in America had got him. This was what adhering to his convictions had got him, resisting the tyranny of compromise. (318)

In Zuckerman's assessment, Murray becomes a "historical casualty" (318), a victim of the oppressive conditions of his time. He suggests that it is clearly the American status quo that is corrupted, because it punishes a man like Murray Ringold for the good that he has done. The gap between the shining ideals of American liberalism and the disappointing status quo is perhaps nowhere more explicit in the novel than in this passage. The parallelisms serve to highlight the passage, to emphasise its importance. The positive connotations that Zuckerman attributes to Murray's behaviour, "thinking", "being reasonable" and "adhering to his convictions", contrast starkly with the negative expressions that Zuckerman associates with America: "turmoil", "no reason", and "tyranny". In other words, Zuckerman evokes the image of a common man of exemplary behaviour who is brought down by an oppressive America that crushes everybody not willing to compromise in their convictions. This is the structure of an American jeremiad that praises the liberal virtues of the American Way and denounces an America that does not live up to them. Roth, speaking here with Zuckerman's voice, frames himself as a modern-day Jeremiah, calling on Americans to remember the achievements

of the American Revolution in a ritual of generational rededication. He calls on his contemporaries not to fall back to the traps of fifties conformism, but to embrace the American liberal tradition. This is what Murray Ringold's "betrayal" signifies. And Zuckerman suggests that such failures as Murray's are only natural: "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 petrification. Because purity is a lie [...]" (*IMC* 318). What remains is a shining image of Murray Ringold as the non-conformist American hero fighting the injustices of his time. This impression is also reinforced by the impact of Murray's teachings on the narrator Nathan Zuckerman. As Alexander points out, it is Murray who, among all the different teachers that seek to leave a permanent impression on Zuckerman, exemplifies a "humane literacy" and who prevails as a mentor after Zuckerman has turned his back on Ira, Leo and Johnny O'Day (Alexander 149-50). Elaine B. Safer agrees that "Murray is the novel's only fully sympathetic principal character" (*Mocking* 105). And David Brauner adds that it is Murray's "uncompromising reality and integrity" that distinguish him from other characters in the novel. He has the most enduring and most profound impact on Nathan Zuckerman's literary and political socialisation (*Philip Roth* 153). From a biographical perspective, this celebration of Murray Ringold is not surprising. Murray Ringold is a hardly veiled portrait of Philip Roth's mentor and long-time friend Bob Lowenstein, as Philip Roth has recently acknowledged in his eulogy *In Memory of a Friend, Teacher and Mentor* (2013). Like Murray Ringold, Bob Lowenstein was a teacher at *Weequahic High School* and fell victim to the anti-communist witch hunts of the 1950s. Roth and Lowenstein remained friends for life and Roth "wanted to be true to the force of his virtues" when he modelled a fictional character on him. Seen from such a perspective, *I Married a Communist* is perhaps one of Roth's most intimate novels, dealing not only with his failed marriage but being also a literary monument dedicated to his beloved friend and mentor Bob Lowenstein. Perhaps this is also the reason why Roth has repeatedly claimed that among all his publications *I Married a Communist* is his dearest novel (cf. Roth Pierpont 234).

Whereas Murray exemplifies an uncompromising dedication to critical thinking and emancipation, his brother stands for a failure of American individualism. Ira mainly represents the American ideals of the self-made man (cf. Abbott 443) and of the lonesome dissenter (cf. Hornung 79) and fails to live up to both of them, while he is at the same time a victim of his historical circumstances. He is, much like his brother, a man of humble origins with a difficult childhood. Murray does not reveal much about their mysterious father, but several hints and suggestions throughout the novel point to a rather traumatic childhood. The Ringold family background is described as

“awful” (*IMC* 111), “poor”, “cruel” (34), “explosive” and “ruinous” (87), Ira’s childhood life in his “father’s miserable house” (96) as a “shattered development” (90). This made him hate his father and his stepmother (111) and this bequeathed the “violent impulse” to him that turned him into a killer and from which he has been trying to escape all his life (292-93). Thus, his entire existence, not unlike Murray’s (cf. 318), is an attempt to liberate himself from these bleak origins, graphically epitomised by the short passage in which Ira’s father “took a crap in the middle of the kitchen [...] and painted the walls with it” before he “left without even closing the door behind him” (*IMC* 293). He seeks to gain control over his life again, to lead an independent, self-determined life in America and for a while it seems that Ira succeeds. As Murray remarks at some point, Ira’s rise from the young, violent ditch-digger to a shining radio star married to a famous Hollywood actress seems to be the American Dream come true.

He has pulled off a great big act of control over the story that was his life. He is all at once awash in the narcissistic illusion that he has been sprung from the realities of pain and loss, that his life is *not* futility – that it’s anything *but*. No longer walking in the shadows of his limitations. No longer the excluded giant consigned to be the strange one forever. Barges in with that brash courage – and there he is. Out of the grips of obscurity. And proud of his transformation. The exhilaration of it. The naïve dream – he’s in it! The new Ira, the worldly Ira. A big guy with a big life. Watch out. (*IMC* 60)

Having left home, Ira endures poverty and the hard life of the ditch digger until he joins the army, where his meeting with Johnny O’Day changes his life forever. O’Day not only teaches him Communist doctrines, he also shows him how to educate and improve himself. In his *Some Concrete Suggestions for Ringold’s Utilization* he gives him precise instructions how to keep a journal, practice reading and writing or how to improve his rhetoric (*IMC* 36-37). As Hutchison explains, Ira “represents the second-generation, working-class Jewish auto-didact”, a role model for the young Nathan Zuckerman (*Purity* 317). Ira begins his project of self-improvement in a manner similar to O’Day’s (*IMC* 35), armed with a journal to make notes and order his thoughts, a dictionary in which he reads every night and a thesaurus to expand his vocabulary (35-36). He becomes a passionate reader in turn and his project of self-education slowly comes to fruition, he transforms himself into a fairly educated young man and thus lays the foundations for his success as a polemical political orator and impersonator of Abraham Lincoln. For it is only because he is able to quote Lincoln from memory that he eventually emerges as a rising star on the radio. He then uses his fame and his Lincoln persona to speak out for his “progressive” agenda (45). According to Basu, this amounts to nothing less but a self-invention in Lincoln’s image, as an “all-American man” (88-89). And in his thorough project of self-improvement Ira follows the American ideal of the self-made man

who rises from humble origins through self-reliance, self-discipline and self-improvement. In fact, Ira's meticulous drive to educate himself may even recall Benjamin Franklin's early experiences with rhetoric. According to Franklin's *Autobiography*, the classic manual for the American self-made man, the Founder kept a journal for ordering his thoughts, he used to read widely at night, he constantly sought to improve his sentence structure and his line of argumentation, also by paying careful attention to expanding and honing his vocabulary with the help of reference works and he used to practice all this in public disputes while advocating dissenting convictions, all of which amounts to a strategy not much different from Ira's (cf. Franklin 19-25). In fact, the twenty steps in O'Day's *Some Concrete Suggestions for Ringold's Utilization* may specifically allude to Franklin's thirteen virtues (Basu 86). Likewise, Ira's behaviour can also be seen as another allusion to Abraham Lincoln, whose self-education has become part of the mythology surrounding the sixteenth president of the United States (cf. Müller 387-89; see also McDonald, "Lincoln" 398-99). Lincoln is known for having laboured hard on Samuel Kirkham's *English Grammar in Familiar Letters* night after night. And once he was finished with grammar, he became an avid reader with broad interests ranging from weekly newspapers to Shakespeare's plays, of which he was particularly fond (Burlingame vol. 1: 62-64). Ira's self-education mirrors the almost proverbial self-education of Lincoln and Franklin, thereby foregrounding Ira's aspiration to reinvent himself as the mythical American self-made man. And yet, as the quotation above illustrates, Ira's attempts at remaking himself remain only a "narcissistic illusion" and a "naïve dream" (IMC 60). In fact, his futile desire to transform himself into another person can also be observed in his knack for acting – for instance his Lincoln persona or the stage character Iron Rinn (Chodat 704). Ira is clearly proud of his rise as a self-made man and claims never to have lost touch with his humble origins: "How I ever got from my father's miserable house on Factory Street to being this character Iron Rinn, how Ira Ringold, with one and a half years of high school behind him, got to meeting the people I meet and knowing the people I know and having the comforts I have now as a card-carrying member of the privileged class – that is all so unbelievable that losing everything overnight would not seem strange to me" (IMC 96). As Gregson points out, the narration stresses repeatedly that "Ira Ringold comes to personify America" and it also dramatizes the futility of seeking to embody an American stereotype (56-57, 68).

And yet, Ira eventually fails to become a representative self-made man, because he is never really in control of his own life. Having risen high in society, he is brought down by his wife's eponymous book *I Married a Communist*. His downfall is a consequence of his failure to assert his individual self through dissent in a decade haunted by anti-communist hysteria.

Ira's dissent manifests itself in different ways. He is a rebel fighting for the "underprivileged" in American society, i.e. African-Americans, Jewish-Americans and the working class (Hornung 80). Most obviously, Ira is a real communist fighting for an "idealized American life" in the form of a "communist utopia" (Royal, "Pastoral Dreams" 196). The pamphlets Nathan is given by Johnny O'Day show very well how Communism is represented as an extreme form of American dissent in the novel. In fact, Mark Shechner sees in Ira "Roth's stick to beat the old Stalinist Left" (*Up Society's Ass* 178). The pamphlet states that "as a Communist, you will be able to fulfill, in the deepest sense of the word, your responsibility as an American", a perspective that alludes to Browder's famous claim that Communism was the "Americanism of the twentieth century". And Nathan also wonders if he should join the Communist party in order to fight for a supposedly better America. Johnny O'Day represents this kind of ideology in the purest sense and it is characterised fairly vividly in his menacing threats that in the Soviet Union "they know how to handle traitors" and that "there's going to be blood on the bricks" if he ever sees Ira again. It is only very late in the novel that Ira begins to realise that Stalinism cannot represent the egalitarian utopia he sees in Communism (*IMC* 176-77). And it is a crucial moment when Nathan decides that joining the Communist party is not the right way to fight for freedom. At bottom this desire to "revolutionize" America is an adolescent impulse to resist his parents, especially to defy his father. "Is your life yours or is it theirs?", Nathan wonders. The question is whether he should oppose his father to become more independent from his parents – to "oppose his family's expectations and battle his way to freedom" (237-38). As in *Indignation*, Roth associates adolescent rebellion with the fate of the American nation and its founding ideals. According to Medovoi, this is a typical motif in American fiction: the teenage rebel as a symbol of the national errand (23-24). But in the end Nathan does not join the CPUSA, another sign that U.S. communism is represented in the novel as an unacceptable alternative to the American way of life. Likewise, Ira's attraction to communism and his struggle for the rights of African-Americans, Jewish-Americans and the common worker is not just a desire to fight for his own vision of America, it is at bottom a deeply personal commitment to emancipate himself from his father and to become a better person (*IMC* 122-23 and 292). Murray interprets Ira's communism as a way to escape the shadow of his own biography. For him, Ira might as well have become a gangster instead of a Communist, had he grown up in the First and not in the Second Ward of Newark (66-67). Having grown up in a "ruinous" home, having murdered his first victim as a young man, Ira becomes a Communist to subvert this violent ferocity into something better. And for a while it seems that Ira regains control over a life that seemed to be spinning out of hand. But Ira does not bear

his name for no reason – he cannot control his emotions, especially his anger, and the novel emphasises Ira’s fatal inability to control himself numerous times. As Murray points out, “no one in this world [...] was worse at controlling his moods” (*IMC* 286) and it is especially dogma that exerts a firm hold on Ira’s mind (182). He loses control for the first time during the canary’s funeral, flailing his arms wildly as the tantrum overwhelms him (65–66). His uncontrollable rages and tantrums continue during his time as a young private in Iran (97). Sometimes the loss of control over his own body is so severe that he cannot move or speak anymore, a fact deeply disturbing to young Nathan Zuckerman (89–90). Even his eyes seem to develop a menacing life of their own when Ira is struggling to contain himself (98). On the other hand, it is not mere irony when Eve calls him an “artist of control” (270), a master of deceit and manipulation. Ira’s calculating lie to Nathan’s father is a good example. But Ira’s life as a young man is also determined by forces outside his reach on a more fundamental level. His transformation into a Communist is anything but an example of self-determination. Instead, as Murray explains, Ira does not choose his own path, but the path is chosen for him. According to Murray, it is a mere coincidence of geography that makes him end up as one of Longy’s henchmen (67). Ira’s failure to lead a self-determined life and to assert himself through dissent is mainly a consequence of his inability to control himself. This also stems from the fact that there is a tragic flaw of Shakespearean proportions in his personality. “There was no side of himself that he could suppress” and it is this personal flaw that sabotages his political single-mindedness (83). Murray adopts the term of the tragic flaw to explain Eve’s erratic behaviour (275), but the concept applies equally well to Ira, whose very name suggests “ire”, the tragic flaw of the Homeric hero Achilles (Lyons 127). Shostak suggests that it is Jewish self-hatred which lies at the heart of Ira’s violent impulses (*Philip Roth* 151–52). Thus, Roth establishes a suggestive connection between the conflicts in Ira’s family and the conflicts in the United States at large – the failure of the character to remake himself is a consequence of two forces thwarting his ambitions, his family and America (cf. Gooblar, *Major Phases* 140 and Brauner, *Philip Roth* 149–51). Ironically, Ira sees himself as the “great emancipator” (*IMC* 84) and venerates independence in its numerous forms. But he cannot emancipate himself from his traumatizing childhood in his father’s home, the cause of Ira’s inclination to pick fights (66), and never really gains control over his life – apart from a very short time during which he is allowed to enjoy his successes. And then he loses control over his life again and becomes an outcast in an American society that has identified him as a Communist. For Murray it is clear that Ira deceives himself. He has his “eye on the wrong menace”, which is not “imperialist capitalism” but his private life (87). For Murray, he is “blind to women, blind to politics” and

especially blind to the problems involved in his relationship to Eve, his “tailor-made blindness” in Doris Ringold’s words (*IMC* 83). Roth underscores this theme of self-deception or “blindness” ironically by giving Ira bad eyesight and alluding to this weakness from time to time (e.g. 66, 104, 297). Roth further reinforces this metaphor by drawing an analogy between Ira and *Othello*, another murderous outsider with bad eye-sight and a notorious lack of self-control. Murray explicitly mentions this association in his musings about the role of betrayal in American history. Likening the betrayals of the era McCarthy to Iago’s famous “motiveless malignity” (265), Murray compares Ira’s downfall with Othello’s. In this sense, Bryden Grant becomes a modern-day Iago, who – like the Shakespearean villain – uses betrayal and intrigue to advance his career. Murray adds another dimension to this analogy by comparing Ira and Eve to Othello and Desdemona, claiming that Ira’s marriage to Eve is “Othello in reverse” (55). These similarities are further highlighted by suggestive parallels between Ira and Paul Robeson, the first black actor who publicly played *Othello* in the United States. As Morley observes, there are several “overlapping details between Robeson and Ringold” (111-12) and Roth employs numerous “re-inventions of Shakespeare consciously” throughout the *American Trilogy* (109). These allusions to Shakespeare’s tragedy emphasize Ira’s lack of control over his life and the high degree of self-deception in his character. This thwarts his attempts to reinvent himself and to lead a self-determined life, because he allows himself to be ruled by dogma. It is only at the end that he begins to see the real nature of the Stalinist regime (*IMC* 176-77). According to McCann, this murderous impulse bespeaks a self-destructive impulse in American society. “Indeed it suggests that the very pursuit of the pastoral dream of democratic community demands the coercion and repression, and produces the resentment that will ultimately destroy it” (McCann 191). For Chodat, this futility of any attempt to reinvent oneself bespeaks a universe that is essentially deterministic. In *I Married a Communist*, people are determined by historical forces that leave little room for individual self-transformation, which suggests that individual personalities are malleable only to a small extent, also because private identities are publicly constituted in our relationships to others (Chodat 705). For Basu, it suggests the performativity of American identity while denying that there is an essential core of Americanness (99-100).

Apart from Communism, Ira also asserts his opposition to society by withdrawing from it. The novel clearly alludes to Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* in its first description of Ira’s life in the shack.

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, tramping the woods on snowshoes in coldest winter, or, on rainy days, meandering around in his Jersey car – a

used '39 Chevy coupe – talking to the local dairy farmers and the old zinc miners, whom he tried to get to understand how they were being screwed by the system. He had a fire-place out there where he liked to cook his hot dogs and beans over the coals, even to brew his coffee, all so as to remind himself, after he'd become Iron Rinn and a bit enlarged with money and fame, that he was still nothing more than a 'working stiff', a simple man with simple tastes and expectations [...]. About owning the Zinc Town shack, he used to say, "Keeps me in practice being poor. Just in case". (*IMC* 50-51)

In this passage, Roth alludes to several key images from Thoreau's secluded life in order to associate Ira's motivations with Thoreau's. Both choose a "solitary dwelling" (Thoreau 52) in the woods, next to a pond in order to experience life in its simplest form. In fact, Zuckerman's statement that "you are stripped back to *essentials*" by living "close to *the bone*" (*IMC* 72, 50; emphasis added) is not much different from Thoreau's famous intent "to front only the *essential* facts of life" and almost literally alludes to Thoreau's claim that "it is life near *the bone* where it is sweetest" (Thoreau 65, 221; emphasis added; see also Kinzel 61). Like Thoreau, Ira lives on his own, keeps in contact with the local farmers and enjoys walking through the wintry woods in snowshoes (Thoreau's have even become an exhibit in Concord Museum). The reference to Ira's beans is an aside to Thoreau's agricultural experiments with beans, which are discussed at length in *Walden*. But there is also a political impetus in Ira's and Thoreau's motivations. In his conclusion of *Walden*, Thoreau explains that "we are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty [...], you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences. [...] It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler" (Thoreau 221). Thoreau addresses an excessive materialism in American culture and proposes his experiment at Walden Pond as an alternative way of life opposed to the materialist values of Benjamin Franklin's *Self-Made Man* (cf. *AJ* 186). For Ira, it serves as a reminder of the plight of the common man, whose interests are at the heart of his Communist ideology. It is the ideal of a poor and independent pioneer life which Ira's shack represents. However, he tries to be both the poor non-conformist hermit fighting against American capitalism and the ambitious self-made man who makes it to the top. Ira's failure to embody both of these antithetic American myths is a central conflict in his life. He has made his fortune, which Nathan characterises rather deprecatingly as "enlarged with money", and still strives not to forget his simple life as a hardworking man – keeping "in practice being poor", as he says (*IMC* 50-51). Ironically, it is his mentor and long-time friend Johnny O'Day who later accuses him of having lost touch with the troubles of the common worker. Ira's impossible attempt to be both a rich radio star and a representative of the exploited working class does not work. In Thoreau's words, Ira has become, in spite of his best

efforts, a “trifler” who speaks about poverty but does not understand it anymore. Thus, the novel can also be considered an examination of the “purity” of the individual soul which Thoreau celebrates in *Walden*. Indeed, the analogy between Thoreau and Ira is very pointed: both seek out the essentials of life, both seek poverty in defiance of materialism, both seek to embody the ideal of absolute individualism and non-conformity – Thoreau celebrates this ideal and promises success, whereas Ira represents its failure (cf. Thoreau 217). This is why Murray warns Zuckerman of the utopia of the shack (*IMC* 315). And it is betraying these ideals, be it the Thoreauvian utopia of the shack or the dream of the self-made man, that is essentially human, as Zuckerman suggests (*IMC* 318).

But the “utopia of the shack in the woods” (*IMC* 315) is not only a form of personal reinvention for Ira, it is an ideal that is also very attractive for Nathan Zuckerman. He explicitly ponders why he has felt the need to buy an “upgraded replica” of Ira’s hermitage and to follow Thoreau’s “idea of the shack” (71-72). In the following passage, Zuckerman contemplates the symbolic significance of Thoreau’s shack:

How did the idea of Ira’s shack maintain its hold so long? Well, it’s the earliest images – of independence and freedom, particularly – that do live obstinately on, despite the blessing and the bludgeoning of life’s fullness. And the idea of the shack, after all, isn’t Ira’s. 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 – to decontaminate and absolve yourself of the striving. The place where you disrobe, molt it all, the uniforms you’ve worn and the costumes you’ve gotten into, where you shed your batteredness and your resentment, your appeasement of the world and your defiance of the world, your manipulation of the world and its manhandling of you. (*IMC* 72)

Thoreau’s shack becomes in Nathan’s words a symbol of independence and individual regeneration of the self, the latter idea being particularly dominant in verbs denoting change, such as *shedding*, *molting*, *disrobing*. The references to clothes as symbols of a changing identity are again a typical Rothian image that can also be found in *Goodbye*, *Columbus* and *Indignation*. Yet, this symbol of individual independence is also a signifier of the emptiness in life that such a determined pursuit of independence may bring (Gooblar, *Major Phases* 145). According to Kinzel, Zuckerman’s retreat is also an attempt to escape from many years of exacting self-exploration as a writer – a futile attempt to escape from the realisation that life itself is a narrative. This unwillingness to keep telling the story of his own life anymore is mirrored in the structure of the novel – a novel which at first seems to be about Ira’s life but which then turns out to be more closely intertwined with Zuckerman’s than expected (Kinzel 59). Both Zuckerman and Ira seek a greater degree of independence in their shacks and a relief from the worries of their complicated lives. For Ira, being “stripped back to essentials” entails

a return to his humble origins as a common worker. He takes pride in his own self-reliance, his ability to go back to the hard but independent life of the ditch digger.

In sum, Ira fails to reinvent himself as a representative American, be it a new Franklin, a new Lincoln or a new Thoreau. This failure to reinvent oneself is a central theme in Roth's fiction (Shostak, "Late Style" 165; cf. Basu 99-101). He cannot reconcile two contradictory American ideals, i.e. the American self-made man and the Thoreauvian ideal of independence. His attempts to redirect his violent impulses into non-violent dissent do not succeed, because he deceives himself and because he lets himself become a target of the McCarthy witch hunts. The novel presents Ira's communism as a misguided form of individualism, since it is through Murray's authoritative and critical voice (cf. Brauner, *Philip Roth* 155 and Shostak, *Philip Roth* 250) that the reader perceives Ira's struggle with society and with himself. On the other hand, Murray's individualism has outright positive connotations. Unlike Ira, Murray is presented as a real victim of the political circumstances in the fifties, but he still manages to live up to his libertarian ideals, whereas Ira betrays his utopian vision. Thus, the characters in *I Married a Communist* demonstrate "how individual identity embodies national identity and how the forces of history – American history, specifically – threaten to overtake personal freedom and individual agency" (Royal, "Pastoral Dreams" 187).

These two forms of individualism are the foundation of the novel's ideological structure, the jeremiad. The fifties form the background against which Roth denounces an America that has failed to deliver on its promises of individual success, of freedom and happiness, mainly because the social and political conditions of the American fifties are too deterministic and prevent American non-conformism from prospering. At the same time, the novel praises dissent and non-conformism in the heroic image of Murray Ringold and rules out radical forms of dissent in its representation of Murray's brother Ira. This allows Roth to celebrate American core values such as individualism and non-conformism as paths to the 'true' America. For Anthony Hutchison, this political perspective is "characterized by its unapologetic commitment to the idea of America and, in this way, is deeply rooted in the aspirational, optimistic, yet pragmatic politics of the founding fathers". These are the ideological norms of the text, against which postwar American history is critically assessed. McCarthyism, Communism and the neoconservative revolution in the 1990s are therefore represented as polar opposites of this traditional ideal of America (Hutchison, *Republic* 167-68).

Murray and Ira are not the only characters that represent forms of individualism in the novel. Like her husband, Eve Frame also signifies a kind of individualism that the novel represents as essentially misguided. As a popu-

lar actress on Broadway, she represents the glamour of Ira's incredible success story. Not only has he become a radio star, he has also married a famous celebrity and entered the realm of high society. When Roth introduces the reader to Ira's wife, he strongly associates her with wealth and luxury. These passages contain meticulous descriptions of Eve's rich array of clothes, such as her "two-piece wool suit of dusty pink", her "sleeves trimmed with double rings of matching fox fur", her "hat that no one in the world wore more charmingly", her "slouch-brimmed felts", her "Panama straw hats" or her "white piqué summer dress" (*IMC* 18-19). Roth keeps describing Eve's outward appearance throughout the novel and the sheer number of references to her looks creates a vivid image of her seductively attractive appearance and refined dress style. Roth also suggests in his introduction to the character that she comes from a rather humble family. It is through the ambiguous discussions in the mahjong club of Nathan's mother that the reader learns about Eve's origins. As the supposed daughter of a Jewish kosher butcher (*IMC* 20), Eve seems to have made it to the top of American society. She is another example of the ideal of the self-made man, but the success story of her ascendance from the Jewish ghetto in Brooklyn to a renowned actress on Broadway has an obvious flaw. She is supposed to have "disowned" her family when she "went to Hollywood and changed her name" from Chava Fromkin to Eve Frame. By embracing the American Dream, she leaves her Jewish identity behind and buries it entirely. This rejection of her own Jewish heritage turns into outright anti-semitism in the course of the novel. Her self-reinvention as a representative American, as a self-made man, comes at the cost of anti-Semitic self-loathing. She cannot even bear to hear her husband talk about Jews (*IMC* 152) and also her daughter Sylphid uses this against her mother when she insults her as "a kike bitch" and forces her to get an abortion (111). In a striking passage, Murray interprets Eve's anti-Semitism as a symptom of her excessive desire to reinvent herself as a 'true' American.

You're an American who doesn't want to be your parents' child? Fine. You don't want to be associated with Jews? Fine. You don't want anybody to know you were born Jewish, you want to disguise your passage into the world? You want to drop the problem and pretend you're somebody else? Fine. You've come to the right country. But you don't have to hate Jews into the bargain. (*IMC* 157)

Eve represents the American ideal of self-reinvention in the most drastic sense, "overdoing the role". This also implies that her assimilation into American society is merely a form of "impersonation" (*IMC* 157) – an act she has been playing since she left the Jewish ghetto. And her betrayal of Ira, in the form of her book *I Married a Communist*, is also a public act whereby she tries to affirm her American identity (Basu 94-96). Roth thus presents

Eve's assimilation into American society as another misguided avenue of American individualism.

Minor characters also represent different forms of individualism which contrast with Murray's and Ira's way of life. In Helgi Pärn, Roth ridicules an entirely materialist vision of the American Dream. As an Estonian working-class immigrant, Helgi Pärn's ambition is to participate in the American Way through individual self-improvement and the acquisition of material possessions. She is clearly a parody of the American Dream. "Helgi's Dream", as Murray calls it, amounts to prostitute herself for the sake of "self-improvement" in the form of jewelry, expensive dresses or a golden tooth (*IMC* 182-84). She adores America as the "land of opportunity", but considers it mainly as a quick way to materialist pleasures. Her narrative function is similar to Elwyn Ayers in *Indignation*, whose excessive love for his car is also an ironic symbol of the materialist impulse in the American success myth. At the same time, she is rather unhappy about her own situation and the class-warfare between Eve and her (184), which is why she starts to take revenge on Eve by revealing her little affair with Ira.

3.2 *I Married a Communist* and the Culture Wars

One of the most remarkable facts about Ira Ringold is his dedication to Abraham Lincoln. It is not only his physical resemblance to Lincoln, for instance his "excessive tallness" (*IMC* 178) and his clumsy "gorilla paws" (269), which mirror Lincoln's outward appearance. There is also his almost proverbial clumsiness (cf. Müller 388)³⁵ and his talent for passionate rhetoric, all of which have allowed Ira to become an impersonator of Abraham Lincoln. It is also significant that their lives are enigmatically entwined in the novel. Roth foregrounds the association between Ira and Lincoln by evoking popular images of the president. Different textual cues refer to Ira as the "patriot martyr" (*IMC* 23), the "rail-splitter" (81), the "Great Emancipator" (84), or simply as "Abe" (e.g. 45). Uncanny parallels between Ira's and Lincoln's lives suggest that Ira does not just put on an act but that he somehow becomes 'Honest Abe'. In an interesting passage, Ira's producer Artie Sokolow talks about a play based on Lincoln's life that he is writing for Ira.

³⁵ In fact, Lincoln himself was called a "gorilla" on different occasions by political opponents and critics such as the prominent lawyer George Templeton Strong, who chided Lincoln for his informal language and described him as "a barbarian, Scythian, yahoo, or gorilla" (*Burlingame* vol. 1: 63) and as the "gorilla despot" (vol. 2: 597). Even Lincoln's own general George McClellan is known for having described Lincoln as the "original gorilla" and a "baboon" (vol. 2: 196), a term that was also repeatedly used by Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War (vol. 2: 247).

I want Ira up there telling the *story*. Telling how goddamn *difficult* it was: no schooling, the stupid father, the terrific stepmother, the law partners, running against Douglas, losing, that hysterical shopper his wife, the brutal loss of the son – the death of Willie – the condemnation from every side, the daily political assault from the moment the man took office. The savagery of the war, the incompetence of the generals, the Emancipation Proclamation, the victory, the Union preserved and the Negro freed – *then* the assassination that changed this country forever. Wonderful stuff there for an actor. Three hours. No intermission. Leave them speechless in their seats. Leave them grieving for what America might be like today, for the Negro *and* the white man, if he'd served his second term and overseen Reconstruction. I've thought a lot about that man. Killed by an actor. Who else? (*IMC* 142)

It is striking how much of this description is actually ambiguous and applies to both Lincoln and Ira. Firstly, there is Ira's lack of proper schooling, because he quit school as a teenager and started digging ditches instead. Secondly, the novel refers to Ira's stepmother several times, but unlike Lincoln's "terrific stepmother" Ira describes his as "the stepmother you hear about in the fairy tales. A real bitch" (*IMC* 34). Thirdly, the Lincoln-Douglas debates are re-enacted by Ira in the novel and they become the key to his success as an actor. Fourthly, the reference to Lincoln's hysterical wife Mary Todd, which has become a central myth in popular Lincoln iconography (Donald 156), finds its parallel in Ira's marital problems with Eve Frame and her hysterical behaviour. Moreover, the "condemnation from every side" is perhaps the most obvious allusion to Ira. Then, the struggle for the "Negro" is not only Lincoln's but also Ira's, who is even called "nigger lover" by some of his comrades in the army (*IMC* 47). Finally, there is Sokolow's wonderfully ambiguous phrase "Killed by an actor", which applies not only to Lincoln but also to Ira, who is brought down by his wife, the actress Eve Frame (cf. Pozorski 72-73). In sum, the entire passage, which enumerates different stages from Lincoln's life, serves to foreground the parallels between Ira's and Lincoln's biographies. Much later in the novel, Murray reveals that the muscle pains Ira suffered from all his life were probably a symptom of "the disease that they believe Lincoln had. Dressed up in the clothes and got the disease. Marfan's. Marfan's syndrome. Excessive tallness. Big hands and feet. Long, thin extremities. And lots of joint and muscle pain. Marfan's patients frequently kick off the way Ira did" (*IMC* 178). The mysterious similarities between Ira's and Lincoln's life thus become much more explicit in the novel. Ira does not just re-enact Lincoln, he becomes Lincoln.

This ambiguous and enigmatic relationship between Ira and his mythic forebear allows Roth to establish them as key symbols in his novel. It is not only, as Kinzel points out, that Ira's impersonation of Abraham Lincoln exemplifies the fact that Communists saw themselves as the vanguard of the 'true' America (81) or that the politics of the nineteenth century is presented as "a precursor to the Red Scare", as Pozorski claims (60). Roth uses the

analogy between Ira and Lincoln also for symbolic purposes. Generally speaking, Lincoln has become a symbol of American core values, according to Peterson, a body of myth comprising five main themes: “Lincoln as Saviour of the Union, the Great Emancipator, Man of the People, the First American, and the Self-Made Man” (Peterson 27). For Müller he represents a “multifunctional icon” that has been appropriated by different political groups and interpreted differently during its long history (Müller 35; cf. Basu 88). Yet, Kammen adds that there has always been a certain ambiguity surrounding Lincoln’s status as a positive image in American memorial culture. Although he may have become a positive point of reference for American democracy, he has never managed to step outside the shadow of George Washington, his “twin” in American memory. This is mainly due to the fact that, unlike Washington, Lincoln has always remained an ambiguous figure who is not only the *Saviour of the Nation* or the *Rail-Splitter*, but also a “nation-splitter” and therefore an unsuitable symbol for evoking national cohesion (Kammen 129-130). The novel makes much of this ambiguity as Roth turns both Lincoln and his impersonator Ira into symbols of a troubled and divided nation (Basu 85n.9):

To the confused popular imagination, this [Ira] was the democratic Communist. This was Abe Lincoln. It was very easy to grasp: Abe Lincoln as the villainous representative of a foreign power, Abe Lincoln as America’s greatest twentieth-century traitor. Ira became the personification of Communism, the personalized Communist for the nation. (*IMC* 282)

Throughout the novel, Roth has been evoking images of Lincoln from the popular imagination which all possess positive connotations. The “rail-splitter” still symbolizes the self-made man and the American frontier spirit (Müller 389), the term “Great Emancipator” was used by African-Americans to celebrate Lincoln as a national hero (387) and the numerous references to “Abe” are terms of endearment. But Roth then begins to evoke Lincoln also as a villain and traitor, as a symbol of a divided nation (cf. quoted passage above and Nadel, I. 136). The issue that divides America is no longer slavery but, as the above passage illustrates, Communism and McCarthyism are now the issues that tear America apart. It is a brilliant sleight of hand to develop these strong and positive associations between Ira and Lincoln for the greater part of the novel, only to reverse them at the end in order to turn Ira (and Lincoln) into a more ambiguous, divided image. Like Lincoln, he is a self-made “rail-splitter” and an “emancipator” fighting for the rights of the subjugated and like Lincoln he is also a symbol of a divided nation.

It is this theme of the “nation-splitter” that links the two main time frames in the novel: the American fifties and the American present of the 1990s, both divided nations in a sense – the one seemingly torn apart by anti-communism, the other by the impact of the culture wars. What makes the entire novel therefore so topical is the fact that Roth presents the confusions

surrounding McCarthyism as the origins of the widely recognized culture war that in the 1990s seemed to have held the United States in its grip.³⁶ Shortly after having established Ira as a modern-day Abraham Lincoln and “as America’s greatest twentieth century traitor” (*IMC* 282), Roth confronts the reader with a remarkably topical remark by Murray Ringold:

[...] I think of the McCarthy era as inaugurating the postwar triumph of gossip as the unifying credo of the world’s oldest democratic republic. In Gossip We Trust. Gossip as gospel, the national faith. McCarthyism as the beginning not just of serious politics but of serious everything, as entertainment to amuse the mass audience. McCarthyism as the first flowering of *the American unthinking that is now everywhere*. (284, emphasis added)

In this passage, Murray draws a parallel between the political climate under McCarthyism and the political conflicts of the American 1990s. The topicality of the novel and the usage of the American fifties as a negative foil for chiding the present is nowhere more explicit in the novel than here. The novel now effectively bridges three decisive periods in American history: the American Civil War represented by Abraham Lincoln, the McCarthy era represented by Ira and finally the “now” represented by Murray, i.e. the year of 1997, in which the novel is set, and 1998, i.e. the year in which it was published. Roth draws a parallel between these three periods in American history, suggesting that national division is a constant of the American experience. It is difficult not to read Roth’s criticism of the role of “gossip” in American politics without thinking of the notorious scandal which was occupying the American media at the time of the novel’s publication. In January 1998, Bill Clinton had publicly stated during a press conference that he “did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky” and he was impeached on grounds of perjury in December 1998. The publication of Roth’s novel in the fall of 1998 could not have been timelier given these circumstances³⁷ (cf. Roth Pierpont 242). Since 1998 the Lewinsky affair and

³⁶ The seminal work on the American culture war is James Davison Hunter’s *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991). Hunter’s claim that the entire political culture of the U.S. is essentially polarized has been questioned by different scholars, for instance by Wolfe, “The Culture War that Never Came” (2006), and Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (2005). For concise overviews see Dionne Jr. and Cromartie, “Modernist, Orthodox, or Flexidox? Why the Culture War Debate Endures” (2006), or Courtwright, “Which Sides Are You On? Religion, Sexuality, and Culture-War Politics” (2007). The articles collected in *Is There A Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life* (2006), by Hunter and Wolfe (eds.), are a good introduction to the controversy.

³⁷ According to Roth Pierpont, Roth was not only concerned with the public scandal of 1998, but he also had personal reasons for having “Clinton on his mind”. Roth had written a personal letter to Bill Clinton, appealing to the president for help, because his Congolese friend Emmanuel Dongala had not been able to obtain a visa after the beginnings of the Congolese Civil War. And later that year, Roth met Clinton in person when he was awarded the National Medal of Arts (243-44).

the impeachment trial have become “enduring symbols of the culture war” (Courtwright 330) and it is this culture war that Roth targets in his novel. In fact, Murray’s passion for critical thinking can be seen as the binary opposite of the “triumph of gossip” in American politics (Kinzel 89) that Roth associates not only with the American 1950s but also with the culture wars of the 1990s.

But was or is there a culture war? Likening the political developments in recent decades to cultural warfare is still a contested metaphor. It was James Davison Hunter’s study *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* that initiated talk of a polarized America, although Pat Buchanan’s conservative rallying cry in 1992 has gained much more prominence in the American public: “It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself” (qtd. in Dionne Jr. and Cromartie 1). According to Hunter, American political culture has become severely polarized alongside different moral issues and he sees a “deeply rooted cultural conflict” at the heart of the “mainstream of American public culture”. He claims that the divisions about the meaning of the American way of life are ultimately “unreconcilable”, albeit exacerbated by the media (*Culture Wars* 33-34). Historically, cultural warfare in the United States has often been sectarian in nature and Hunter sees in anti-Catholic sentiments in the 19th century, anti-Semitism and anti-mormonism early forms of American cultural warfare which all share a common denominator: an excluded minority bent on expanding their interests on the one hand and a Protestant majority fighting to retain its cultural dominance. What makes the current struggle unique, Hunter concludes, is the new willingness to form inter-sectarian alliances. The conflict is no longer a struggle between orthodox Protestants and Catholics or between orthodox Protestants and Jews, but a struggle of orthodox Protestants, Catholics *and* Jews against a common foe (35-39). As a result of an overall “expansion of cultural tolerance” (40) in terms of politics, ideology, religion and sexuality, the new culture war is a battle over the meaning of America and a “matter of moral authority”, i.e. “the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on” (42). For Hunter, the current polarization in U.S. society originates in fundamentally different worldviews, based on ultimately antithetic beliefs about moral authority. He concedes that the majority of Americans “occupy a vast middle ground” and points out that organizations and spokespersons promoting different views dominate the struggle. These are either *orthodox* or *progressivist* in nature, i.e. either a “commitment on the part of the adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority”, for instance literal interpretations of the Bible, or “the tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life”, i.e. moral authority is allowed to change

according to contemporary prevailing beliefs – for instance by grounding tolerance towards homosexuals in Scripture (Hunter, *Culture Wars* 44-45).³⁸ Secularists are also divided along *orthodox* or *progressivist* lines, although the majority of secularists can be found in the progressivist camp. For Hunter, it is this difference between two antagonistic worldviews that is the source of a cultural conflict encompassing numerous issues such as abortion, education, homosexuality, etc. (35-48). Hunter posits that individual attitudes towards the secularizing legacy of the 18th-century Enlightenment are the historical origin of the present culture war (132). Courtwright, while generally agreeing with Hunter's statement, adds that the rise of modern capitalism was equally important, because it furthered divisions alongside "economic temperaments" which "proved to be independent of the religious temperaments" (322-23).

Hunter's theory has been widely debated in the American media, which typically thrive on conflict and which have taken up the idea of a divided nation. Its impact on media coverage of American politics has been very significant and Hunter's concept seems to explain close elections, which has led to the popular image of a red and a blue America (Fiorina 2-3). The most important challenge to Hunter's thesis has been presented by Alan Wolfe, who points out that there is indeed a cultural conflict between conservatives and liberals on numerous issues, albeit one waged mainly by political activists and construed as a national malaise by journalists. He claims that the cultural war does not embrace the vast majority of Americans (Wolfe 42) and that it is caused by political elites that "find value in staking out extreme positions on issues involving fundamental moral values". This has to do with significant changes in the American political system over the past decades which has seen a tendency of parties to become more homogenous in ideological matters, for instance because modern technologies now allow redistricting of congressional districts along partisan lines, more or less guaranteeing a fair amount of "safe seats" for both parties. This has encouraged many House members to "vote their ideology" without having to worry too much about the popularity of their decisions and it has thus increased the political importance and influence of minorities fighting the culture war. Especially the political base of the Republican Party has been leaving the political centre, providing the Republicans with good reason to continue fuelling the culture war. This is particularly important in primary elections

³⁸ Since 1991 Hunter has slightly revised his original formula. He now distinguishes between the traditional moral vision, which "seeks deliberate continuity with the ordering principles inherited from the past", aiming at realizing "the very noblest ideals and achievements of civilization", and the progressivist moral vision, which "idealizes experimentation and thus adaptation to and innovation with the changing circumstances of our time" ("The Enduring Culture War" 14-15).

with a low turnout, in which a minority of political activists with a high degree of mobilization are given “disproportionate weight” (Wolfe 49-53). In a similar vein, Thomas Frank argues that Republicans profit from keeping the culture war alive, because it allows them to direct public attention away from economic issues and to push criticisms of their neoliberal agendas to the margins of public debate (238-51). In a more recent study, Fiorina also emphasises that the culture war is merely a myth of a divided nation misrepresenting the ideological positions of the majority of Americans and regards it mainly as a struggle among polarized political elites over dominance in the public sphere (5). Her view can be seen as representative of a large number of critics who have doubted the existence of a culture war.³⁹ Hunter has addressed these criticisms and maintains that whereas the majority of Americans may occupy the middle ground in the culture war, the polarization of political and intellectual elites continues to fuel polarizing discourses in American politics. This development has in turn led to a situation in which the more moderate majority is presented with political choices between extreme positions – forcing them to take a side (Hunter, “The Enduring Culture War” 30).

Whatever the causes of the fierce ideological debates among cultural warriors, Roth makes the American culture war the centrepiece of his critique in *I Married a Communist*. He suggests that it has precedents in the Civil War and the McCarthy eras, which is not a far-fetched idea. In 1994, four years before the novel was published, Roth’s long-time friend⁴⁰ and fellow novelist Saul Bellow said in an interview with the *New Yorker* that he saw the origins of the culture wars in the political climate of the 1950s (Remnick 35-36). This observation is not uncommon. According to Fallon and Hurm, “the 1950s saw the rise of political conservatism and evangelicalism that is so evident today in American politics” (9). And Ellen Schrecker sees in the hypocrisies of the 1950s the “foundation for the widespread cynicism and apathy that suffuses contemporary political life” (413). Roth addresses this common analogy between the 1950s and the 1990s in his book, in particular with respect to the American canon war, which was one of the key battlefields on which the culture war was waged. According to Hunter, the culture war and more specifically the canon debate engaged the entire system of education on all levels. Key issues were among other things creationism, public funding for religious education and the moral content of textbooks. As institutions of socialization where national identities are forged and the meaning of the symbol “America” is negotiated, schools were key sites in

³⁹ For a more comprehensive list of the numerous critics see Hunter, “The Enduring Culture War” (2006) 17.

⁴⁰ For more information on the “literary friendship” between Bellow and Roth see Gooblar, “Lessons from the master” (2005).

the culture war. Prominent spokespersons of the religious right kept reminding the American public that the stakes were high in this struggle over the education of the youth (Hunter, *Culture Wars* 197-98). Nathan's flirtations with Communism in *I Married a Communist* would have flabbergasted leading cultural warriors like Pat Robertson, who evoked the spectre of Communism to paint a bleak picture of the state of 'liberal' education policies. In the academy, the conflict took the form of a heated debate about the boundaries of appropriate inquiry and different political camps drew these boundaries according to the frontlines of the general cultural war, i.e. issues such as gay rights, abortion, or equal representation. Neoconservatives and multiculturalists were struggling to define the content of the academic curriculum in the name of academic freedom, which also entailed a debate about the literary canon. The traditional curriculum itself became politicised as progressives attacked its lack of diversity. Affirmative action and a diversification of the canon went alongside each other and were part of a more general multicultural agenda (211-16). This debate about the American canon is what Roth addresses in *I Married a Communist*.

Whereas Roth's novel *The Human Stain* explores the relationship between aesthetic questions and culture war issues such as equal representation by investigating the fall of the classics professor Coleman Silk (cf. Hayes 228), his preceding novel *I Married a Communist* looks at the relationship between ideology and literature in more general terms by exploring different forms of politicisation in American literature. The novel traces the process of Nathan Zuckerman's literary and political socialisation through a series of confrontations that focus on this connection between literature and ideology. Nathan first encounters the didactic potential of literary study in his English classes. It is Murray Ringold who teaches critical thinking through "dramatizing inquiry" and through close readings of literary works. In his discussion of Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, the reader gets a glimpse of Mr Ringold's didactic approach and his view on literature.

"And now you know *why* you like what you like. You're way ahead of the game, Nathan. And you know it because you looked at one word, and you thought about that word he used, and you asked yourself some questions about that word he used, until you saw right through that word, saw through it as through a magnifying glass, to one of the sources of this great writer's power. He is audacious. Thomas Paine is audacious. But is that enough? That is only part of the formula. Audacity must have a purpose, otherwise it's cheap and facile and vulgar. Why is Thomas Paine audacious?"

"In behalf," I said, "of his convictions". (*IMC* 28)

Murray teaches Nathan to pay meticulous attention to the language in order to develop a critical distance to the text and avoid being manipulated by it. Prior to this passage, Murray guides Nathan's learning process in a series of questions from a feeling of awe for Paine to a critical understanding and

appreciation of Paine's "audacity" and its political intention. And only after having understood not only Paine's stylistic choice but also his political intention behind this choice, Nathan is "ahead of the game" (*IMC* 28), i.e. he can appreciate "a great writer's" language without being fooled by it. This shows that he considers teaching literature as a form of political emancipation, as pulling down the veil of ideology embedded in language, as actively fighting false consciousness. He also claims that literary "audacity" such as Paine's "must have a purpose". He sees literature and politics not only as interrelated, but he suggests that certain forms of literature need a political impetus as their justification. This view could not be farther from Leo Glucksman's who regards literature and politics as polar opposites. Moreover, Murray's knack for "dramatizing inquiry", which he demonstrates throughout the novel, for instance in his numerous analogies to Shakespeare, demonstrates that he regards the study of texts from the traditional canon as avenues to a deeper understanding of the motivations behind human action.

With respect to the culture war and the canon war debate of the 1990s, such a view concurs with a conservative perspective such as Allan Bloom's, a Jewish scholar whose views on literature can not only be considered representative for much of conservative thinking on the subject (Hayes 230), but also resemble the views in Roth's novel *The Human Stain* (Boddy 58). In his widely discussed American bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bloom claims that the study of "great books" (344) will engage the student in such a manner "that great mysteries might be revealed to him, that new and higher motives of action might be discovered within him, that a different and more human way of life can be harmoniously constructed" (337). Furthermore, he claims that university students should come to regard books as "companions", who can offer them "counsel, inspiration or joy" (62), and he is convinced that the familiarity with a classic author like Dickens is supposed to have "sharpened our vision, allowing us some subtlety in our distinction of human types. It is a complex set of experiences that enables one to say so simply, "He is a Scrooge." Without literature, no such observations are possible and the fine art of comparison is lost". Bloom laments the current state of the American high school and denounces the influence of the sixties, because "the old teachers who loved Shakespeare or Austen or Donne, and whose only reward for teaching was the perpetuation of their taste, have all but disappeared" (64-65). Apart from being a barely veiled portrayal of Roth's mentor Bob Lowenstein, Murray Ringold represents this kind of high school teacher and this kind of fifties nostalgia that conservatives like Bloom attach to them. And it is precisely this "fine art of comparison", which Bloom describes in his intervention in the canon debate, that Murray Ringold exercises when he claims for instance that Eve suffers from a tragic flaw of Shakespearean proportions or when he compares the betray-

als in Ira's family with Othello's (*IMC* 55). This is not to argue that Roth has modelled Murray on Bloom's book but that Roth's literary memorial to Bob Lowenstein partly shares in this conservative nostalgia and this veneration of the traditional canon. In fact, critics have tried to position Roth in the canon debate, usually with reference to his novel *The Human Stain*. For Kasia Boddy, Roth's novelistic intervention in *The Human Stain* should be seen as a form of "literary education" for the reader and echoes views such as Alan Bloom's (Boddy 58). Of course, the parallels between Roth and Bloom are more obvious with respect to *The Human Stain* and less striking in *I Married a Communist*. When Coleman Silk, classics professor and protagonist of *The Human Stain*, complains that some of his students dismiss classic authors like Euripides as misogynist, he echoes Bloom's complaint that modern feminism has done much harm to the classical authors, labelling "all literature up to today" as "sexist" (Bloom, A. 65). Jonathan Freedman, who has investigated Jewish-American interventions into the canon debate, concludes that interventions in canon debates have offered Jewish-American authors, often excluded from the *Great Tradition*, an opportunity to represent themselves as the last guardians of a dying tradition in American education (Freedman 216). In his nostalgic portrayal of Bob Lowenstein, alias Murray Ringold, the hero of the novel, Roth celebrates the emancipatory power of studying and understanding "Great Books" by authors like Shakespeare, Thoreau and Paine, which allows Roth to participate in a ritual of generational rededication. It is the stance of the American Jeremiah, framing himself as a representative American defending American literary traditions. In fact, Roth's engagement with American classics mirrors Nathan Zuckerman's engagement with the American literary tradition – a self-conscious evocation of literary forebears to situate oneself firmly in the American tradition. Therefore, Roth's comments on the canon brawl can be seen as an assertion of American identity, an exercise in what Bercovitch calls representative selfhood.

Yet, he also challenges this more or less conservative view of literary education. Murray exaggerates this art of "dramatizing inquiry", which scrutinises Ira's rise and fall in terms of a Shakespearean tragedy. This approach has obvious limitations and cannot produce a definite version of Ira's life. On the one hand, as McCann points out, this "tragic mode" of *I Married a Communist* contrasts well with the "epic celebrations of popular democracy that had been crucial to the Popular Front and more generally to the New Deal and to the creation of the modern presidency". Roth thereby demonstrates "a fatal cultural shallowness at the heart of the liberal ambition" (McCann 187). On the other hand, it seems almost as though Murray takes the conservative view on the didactic merits of teaching literature too literal when he applies the concept of the tragic flaw to characters from his and his

brother's biography in order to develop a better understanding of the entire narrative. A similar example is provided by Brühwiler. She interprets Ira's failed attempt to fight Eve's anti-semitism by making her read Arthur Miller's *Focus* as an exemplification of the limitations of teaching values through literature (90-91). This is the inherent irony in the emancipatory approach advocated by the Ringolds and this ironic treatment of the didactic functions of literature resembles Roth's approach in *The Human Stain*. In this novel, he also addresses the canon debate, mainly the problem of equal representation in educational curricula, and according to Hayes "Roth's satire [...] is aimed not at the ideal of democratic representation itself but at the over-literal interpretation of the ideal" (Hayes 232). Roth does not ridicule the view that studying texts from the traditional canon may help broaden the student's horizon, but he ridicules over-literal applications of this theory. Shakespeare may help to engage us intellectually and thereby hone our understanding of the human condition, but he is perhaps not so much help in conceptualising McCarthyism even if one can construe, like Murray, parallels between *Othello*, *Hamlet* or *King Lear* and forms of betrayal in 1950s America (cf. *IMC* 185).

Eleven years before the publication of *I Married a Communist*, Roth's long-time friend and literary mentor Saul Bellow wrote a foreword for Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), in which he deals with the value of studying "great books". Although he is largely in favour of Bloom's theses, Bellow points out that his novel *Herzog* ridicules "the educated American" who puts too much store in the literary advice of "the great men, the giants of thought who formed his mind. What is he to do in this moment of crisis, pull Aristotle or Spinoza from the shelf and storm through the pages looking for consolation and advice? The stricken man, as he tries to put himself together again, interpret his experience, make sense of life, becomes clearly aware of the preposterousness of such an effort." (Bellow 15-16). In this regard, the parallels between *I Married a Communist* and *Herzog* are indeed striking. Although the plight of Moses E. Herzog, whom Roth has called Saul Bellow's "grandest creation" (qtd. in Shostak, *Philip Roth* 268), and Murray Ringold's struggles are completely different in nature, both look to the traditional canon for advice and consolation: Aristotle, Spinoza, and Shakespeare. And both novels ironically suggest that, in spite of their protagonist's best efforts, studying these "great books" does not really enable them to penetrate the complexities of their difficult lives or the intricacies of American life in general. In his foreword to Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bellow explicitly associates *Herzog* with the public controversies surrounding American education. Although he "meant the novel to show how little strength "higher education" had to offer a troubled man", Bellow stresses the importance of higher education as an antidote

against “trained ignorance and bad thought” (Bellow 16-17). This is a precise statement of Murray Ringold’s faith in the emancipatory power of literature on the one hand and his attempts to identify Shakespearean themes in his troubled life.

Apart from Murray Ringold’s emancipatory views on literature, the novel also investigates the relationship between literature and ideology by juxtaposing two contrary perspectives. The first is provided by Murray’s brother Ira, who appreciates literature mainly for its usefulness as a weapon in the ongoing class struggle. This attitude shows in his literary preferences as well as in his explicit views on literature. He can recite certain lines from Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* by heart and uses them in his denunciations of the United States (*IMC* 26). He praises Nathan’s first piece of writing, *The Stooge of Torquemada*, for its severe criticism of American bigotry and for expressing what he perceives as unpopular truths (129-30). He even tries to show Nathan how to conduct serious research about social matters (203) and advises him to aim at creating the “illusion of life” as a taxidermist would (195). Thus, he clearly espouses literary realism with a political, or even socialist impetus, which explains his love of leftist authors like Jack London, Upton Sinclair or John Steinbeck (26). At first, Nathan simply imbibes Ira’s view on literature only to be confronted with Leo Glucksman’s completely opposite view later on. While Ira praises Nathan’s agitprop play *The Stooge of Torquemada* for its supposed wisdom, Glucksman is appalled by its propagandistic tone and content. Contrary to Ira’s and Murray’s views, Glucksman is convinced that good literature is never political. He convinces Nathan that art should be produced “for art’s sake” (cf. Brühwiler 92) and that its relationship to politics is antagonistic. Literature “particularizes”, while politics “generalizes” and it is because of this nature of the literary artefact that it “disturbs the organization. [...] Keeping the particular alive in a simplifying, generalizing world – that’s where the battle is joined”. And he also advises Nathan that an author should always strive for an apolitical stance, which is supposed to be the cost of “particularizing”: “You do not have to write to legitimize Communism, and you do not have to write to legitimize capitalism. You are out of both. If you are a writer, you are as unallied to the one as you are to the other” (*IMC* 223-24). In this regard, Leo Glucksman would not consider Ira’s favourite writers, for instance Upton Sinclair, good writers, because they let socialist ideas influence their works. According to Glucksman, the writer’s first duty is to the English language and not to any political affiliation. According to Brühwiler, it is Glucksman “who will finally force [Nathan] to assume the responsibilities of an independent mind” by reminding him that he should emancipate his thought from the confines of Communist ideology (83-84). However, if Ira makes Nathan a “subject of indoctrination”, as Brühwiler rightly suggests (82), Glucksman’s teachings

are no less ideological than Ira's and do not serve to emancipate Nathan (cf. Kinzel 86). Neither does the ageing Nathan Zuckerman agree with them nor do they represent Roth's authorial voice, as Brühwiler claims (93). In fact, the ageing and more authoritative voice of Nathan Zuckerman distances itself from the excitement a younger Nathan still felt for Glucksman's ideas. On the one hand, Glucksman's views are presented as essentially elitist and conservative, especially his anxieties about the decline of highbrow culture in modern mass society: "We'll soon have something in this country far worse than the government of the peasants and the workers – we will have the *culture* of the peasants and the workers" (*IMC* 218). On the other hand, it is the critical and ironic voice of the aging Nathan Zuckerman that reveals the conservative political thrust of these views as just another form of political indoctrination: "Leo hated the public, and Leo's purpose in his darkened International House room after that Friday night's concert [...] was to save my prose from perdition *by getting me to hate the public too*" (*IMC* 221, emphasis added). Rampton suggests that the entire episode is "somewhat ironic", because the seemingly "disinterested pose he strikes is undercut by his hysterical outburst in the very next scene". He adds that Roth's novel demonstrates the merits of writing historical and political fiction in itself (Rampton 15-16). And since Glucksman's apolitical opinion of literature seems to echo views expressed in Lionel Trilling's classic *The Liberal Imagination*, *I Married a Communist* can also be seen as a critique of Trilling's vision (Posnock 52). It seems that neither Ira's view of literature as a weapon nor Glucksman's negative attitude towards mass culture and his "art for art's sake" ideology hold any attractions for the elderly writer Nathan Zuckerman. Both perspectives are presented as inappropriate approaches to literature and it is rather unlikely that Glucksman's voice echoes Roth's.

Nathan's reflections on Glucksman are followed by a metatextual injunction in which the aged Nathan Zuckerman reflects on his life. He calls it a "book of voices" (*IMC* 222) to which he has been listening all his life.⁴¹ The narrator reflects on the structure of the novel, and specifically on the ongoing dialogue about literature in the book. It is no coincidence that Roth has inserted this injunction exactly at the moment when Glucksman is about to conclude his short philosophical lecture on the nature and purpose of literature, on its relationship to politics. The injunction, severing Glucksman's

⁴¹ Debra Shostak considers this metaphor a structural principle of Roth's aesthetic conception. It bespeaks a dialogical mode of composition that allows Roth to explore his subjects from different vantage points. Different and sometimes contrary perspectives among as well within the books are given a voice. It is thereby also an important instrument of "self-critique" as well as a means of evading a "fixed position". It enables him also to investigate the specific historical conditions which determine the individual subjectivity of each perspective and voice (*Philip Roth* 3-7).

argument neatly in two halves, serves to distance the reader from these conservative views. Glucksman, Zuckerman suggests, is just another voice in the book of his life, just another temporary stage in his literary socialisation (*IMC* 222), another “adopted parent” (Hutchison, “Purity” 324). He distances himself from Glucksman and from his impressionable younger self, exposing Glucksman’s lofty and allegedly apolitical stance as no less ideological than Ira’s propagandistic preaching. He concludes that all the great ideologues that have made an impression on him were all “uncompromising”, be it Paine, Ira or Glucksman (*IMC* 224) but Nathan has had to emancipate himself from each of them. Only Murray Ringold’s emancipatory teachings have had a lasting impact and still move the elderly Nathan Zuckerman to reflection (Hutchison, “Purity” 325).

To sum up, scholars have usually been discussing Roth’s intervention into the canon debate with respect to *The Human Stain*, but little attention has been paid to its role in *I Married a Communist*. It is no coincidence that education plays such a prominent role in the novel and that Roth has personally acknowledged that it constitutes a key element for him. As Patrick Hayes has demonstrated in his analysis of *The Human Stain*, Roth’s position in this debate is hard to pin down (226) and the same is true of *I Married a Communist*. Instead of arguing one position or another,⁴² Roth juxtaposes radically different views on American literature in his novel without resolving the existing contradictions in order to challenge readers to think about difficult questions relating to the American canon, the functions of literature in general and the way we read literature. This essentially constitutes a strong rebuttal of any attempts by cultural warriors to censor American reading habits. It also enables Roth to appropriate the American canon and write himself into American culture, it enables him to participate in the American symbolic system. As Catherine Morley observes with respect to the *American Renaissance*, “Roth situates his writing within this tradition but simultaneously deconstructs a national canon which has perpetuated the notion of a certain attainable and singular ‘American-ness’” and he thereby “engages, like his characters who take on the ‘American way-of-life’, with the inevitable repercussions” (Morley 86). Likewise, Posnock argues that Roth’s engagement with both the American and European canons should be understood in terms of “appropriation” rather than “assimilation” (xiv, 7-9).

⁴² For brief reviews of different positions in the canon debate see Hayes, “‘Calling a halt to your trivial thinking’: Philip Roth and the Canon Debate” (2013) and Glaser, “The Jew in the Canon: Reading Race and Literary History in Philip Roth’s ‘The Human Stain’” (2008). Lee Morrissey, *Debating the Canon: A Reader from Addison to Nafisi* (2005), is a good anthology on the subject.

3.3 Novelistic Experiments with Autobiography

The most prominent criticism of *I Married a Communist* (1998) is aimed at its autobiographical allusions. Many literary critics have commented on the fact that Roth's novel can be seen as a barely veiled riposte to Claire Bloom's outspoken condemnation of their marriage in her memoir *Leaving a Doll's House* (1996). As Elaine B. Safer claims, "*I Married a Communist* is clearly a retaliatory act" (*Mocking* 102). Writing for the *Guardian*, Linda Grant has summed up the most obvious parallels between Claire Bloom, Roth's ex-wife, and Eve Frame, the fictional character Roth has modelled on Bloom:

You like facts? Some similarities between Frame and Bloom. Frame is a Jewish actress, so is Bloom. Frame's second husband is a financier, so was Bloom's. Eve Frame has a daughter who is a harpist, Bloom's girl is an opera singer. Ira tells the daughter to move out, Roth did the same. Ira has an affair with the daughter's best friend; Roth, Bloom alleged, came on to her own daughter's best friend. Frame comes to see her husband in the hospital where he has had a nervous breakdown and gets so upset she has to be sedated – so did Bloom. And soon (sic), while the taste in one's mouth gets worse and worse. (Grant)

Apart from these fairly superficial parallels, there are also deeper or subtler allusions to Bloom's memoir in Roth's book, which seems to affirm the impression of a "vengeful agenda" between the lines. The conflict tearing Ira's and Eve's marriage apart bears an uncanny resemblance to the issues described in Bloom's memoir, as Linda Grant correctly points out. According to Claire Bloom, the central issue between her and Roth was her close and maybe "unhealthy preoccupation" (*Doll's House* 173) with her daughter Anna, who seems to have felt replaced by the new man in her mother's life (166), a man of whom she was "deeply distrustful" (163). This closely resembles Ira's relationship to Eve and Sylphid and their difficult relationship. In *I Married a Communist*, Roth is portrayed as a jealous husband who felt excluded from Bloom's close relationship to her daughter and in turn revealed himself as "a game-playing Machiavellian" seeking to manipulate her, her family and her friends (247). It is this phrase which Roth has transported almost verbatim into his fictional mirror image of Bloom's book. Like Bloom, Eve describes her husband as "Machiavelli, the quintessential artist of control" (*IMC* 270), and like Bloom she decides to teach him a lesson by publishing a book, *I Married a Communist*. Roth foregrounds these obvious similarities between Ira and himself also with subtler allusions. Anger, as Murray explains, is in fact a very common trait among Jews of their generation (*IMC* 163) and one of the most striking characteristics about Ira is his rage, sometimes expressed through absolutely uncontrollable tantrums. It is probably no coincidence that Bloom ascribes such behaviour to

Roth in her memoir as well. She portrays her husband as a man plagued by a “deep and irrepressible rage” (*Doll’s House* 158) who could instantly turn into “an uncontrollable and malevolent child in a temper tantrum” (173). Roth has endowed Ira with these attributes: he is in fact a manipulative “strategist” whose entire life is an effort to deal with the “irrepressible rage” in his heart. It is this revelation that makes Nathan question the true nature of his friend, a revelation in fact similar to Claire Bloom’s when she begins wondering “Who is that?” (*Doll’s House* 173). And there are additional parallels. Bloom describes Roth’s “life-threatening” physical disease in his back and knee (190), which of course resemble Ira’s painful sufferings. Bloom also describes how her husband took offence by her indifferent attitude towards anti-semitism and even accused her family in London of being “self-hating” Jews (190). Again, Roth integrates this element into his novel and turns Eve into a self-loathing Jew, negating her own identity. If Roth’s allusions to his wife seem not only unflattering but outright ugly, it is especially in this suggestion. Finally, Ira’s affair with Sylphid’s friend Pamela also has a parallel in Bloom’s memoir. She accuses Roth of having subjected Rachael Hallawell, her daughter’s friend, to his “sexual advances”, which Rachael is supposed to have rejected (*Doll’s House* 247). Together, these different elements all contribute in blending the fictional as well as autobiographic worlds of the novel and Bloom’s memoir.

Are Ira Ringold and Eve Frame then barely veiled personas of Claire Bloom and Philip Roth? The situation is a bit more complex. For all these similarities, Roth has created Ira not simply as an alter ego but also with a particular acquaintance from his youth in mind. As a young man, Roth admired the left-wing ex-GI Irving Cohen, who used to tell stories like Ira’s, for instance about having been beaten up while he was in the army (Roth *Pierpont* 232). Obviously, Nathan Zuckerman has always been Roth’s most important fictional alter ego and accordingly Roth further complicates matters by imbuing both Ira Ringold and Nathan Zuckerman with attributes of himself. He explicitly alludes to Bloom’s memoir, in which his work as a writer is described as monk-like, as “the life of a bitter, lonely, ageing ascetic with no human ties” (*Doll’s House* 237). In *I Married a Communist*, Roth makes much of the fact that the ageing writer Nathan Zuckerman has been seeking solitude, for instance by drawing a comparison between Zuckerman and Thoreau. Murray Ringold’s authoritative voice explicitly chides Zuckerman for his monastic lifestyle as a writer (*IMC* 320). And Roth *Pierpont* identifies more parallels between Roth and young Nathan Zuckerman in *I Married a Communist*. Zuckerman’s love for Howard Fast’s *Citizen Paine* and baseball books by John Tunis mirrors Roth’s reading habits as an adolescent. His love for Norman Corwin’s radio broadcasts mirrors the influence radio exerted on Roth’s decision to become a writer. Murray himself is

also a character that directly springs from Roth's biography, a homage to Roth's mentor and friend Bob Lowenstein as Roth has recently acknowledged (Roth, *In Memory*). Murray's passion for literature has shaped Nathan Zuckerman as much as Bob Lowenstein has shaped Roth's life, although Lowenstein was no English teacher (Roth Pierpont 230-31). In sum, Roth has poured events and themes from his own life in explicit and subtle ways into the fictional lives of both Nathan Zuckerman and Ira Ringold.

It is true that Roth's allusions to his marriage, which blend fact and fiction, are not very flattering, perhaps even insulting for his ex-wife, but it is too simplistic to read the book as a vicious counterattack attack on Claire Bloom. The ways in which Roth presents himself in the book are anything but charming. Ira, one of the Roth personas in the book, is not a hero and both Eve and Ira are caught up in the political turmoil of their time. By imbuing characters such as Nathan Zuckerman, Eve Frame and Murray Ringold with attributes from real people drawn from his own life, Roth creates an autobiographical blend of fact and fiction that is hard to disentangle. *I Married a Communist* therefore cannot be simply dismissed as a fictional and poorly executed reply to *Leaving a Doll's House*. Furthermore, the marital conflict is only one aspect of a broad theme of betrayal at the structural core of the novel, which explores the ways in which the personal and the political were connected in the American 1950s (Hutchison, "Purity" 318-19; cf. also Shostak, *Philip Roth* 252). There is undoubtedly some harsh criticism of Claire Bloom in the book, but it is rather impossible to tell where it begins and where it ends. Roth challenges his readers in this novel to explore the similarities between Nathan Zuckerman's, Ira Ringold's and his own life, to get caught up in the inextricable blend of fact and fiction. And this problem is exacerbated by the narrative structure of the book, which does not, as some critics claim, "obscure the characters' actions" (Roth Pierpont 233) or is "diluted by a wilfully oblique narrative that frames one story within another and submerges one voice within another" (Kakutani, "Manly Giant") – a "cacophony of voices" as Mark Shechner has called it (*Up Society's Ass* 181). It is true, however, that the duality of Murray's and Nathan's voices, which give the novel its peculiar structure, creates a lack of immediacy and indeed "obscures" especially Ira's and Eve's intentions. Robert Chodat estimates that almost half of the book consists of verbatim quotations of Murray's words, mostly without any interventions from the supposed primary narrator Nathan Zuckerman (689). Nevertheless, this creates a distancing effect that forces the reader to gather and assess information from different sources about Ira and his wife. It is impossible to get a better understanding of Ira Ringold without taking Zuckerman's voice into account, as well as Murray's voice, and also the voices that contradict them such as Doris's. It is up to the reader to assess the reliability of the information, especially when

the different voices in the novel formulate competing interpretations of Ira's life. According to Chodat, Murray, whose voice is the most authoritative in the novel, has to concede that the characters which populate his narrative are more complex than his understanding of them allows (701, cf. also Brauner, *Philip Roth* 155). Readers cannot help but create an image of Ira which is only half-complete. This extraordinary structure, which is in Robert Chodat's words "one of the hardest-to-miss features of the text", thus serves to support an overall sense of the past as a narrative construction. Whereas the elderly Nathan Zuckerman is trying to come to grips with his patchy recollections of his past relationship to Ira, it is Murray who contextualizes these memories and allows both Zuckerman and the reader to reconstruct this brief intersection between Nathan Zuckerman's and Ira Ringold's biographies (Chodat 698-99).

Another image that has to be pieced together by the reader is the key scene in the novel. The plot of *I Married a Communist* revolves around two events in the life of Nathan Zuckerman and the narration keeps returning to these two days throughout the novel. The one is the conversation between Zuckerman and Murray in the 1990s and the other event, more significant and mysterious, is the day on which Nathan meets Ira for the first time in his life. Significantly, the narrative returns to the events of the day numerous times, each time adding a couple of additional details to the sketchy image of what has actually happened on that day and it is only quite late in the novel that this event can be fully understood (Chodat 700). It is on page sixteen that young Nathan Zuckerman meets Ira Ringold for the first time. Ira is staying over at his brother's for reasons that are not yet revealed, but which also do not seem relevant at this early point in the narrative. Ira and Murray are just taking down the screens when Nathan happens to come by. In a long and detailed passage, Ira and Murray discuss the merits of Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine* with Nathan. It is only much later that the significance of this day is actually unveiled. About fifty pages later, the ageing Zuckerman asks the seemingly innocent question that sets the recurring narrative structure into motion:

"Do you remember the day I met Ira?" I asked him. "You two were working together, taking the screens down on Leigh Avenue. What was he doing at your place? It was in October '48, a few weeks before the election."

"Oh, that was a bad day. That day I remember very well. He was in a bad way, and he came to Newark that morning to stay with Doris and me. He slept on the couch for two nights. It was the first time that happened. Nathan, that marriage was a mismatch from the start. [...]". (*IMC* 54)

From this moment on, the narrative keeps returning to this "bad day" in Ira's life and each time the reader is told a bit more about the significant events that precede Ira's decision to stay at Murray's for two nights and which, al-

most fatefully, lead up to the first meeting of Nathan and Ira. Interestingly, Murray first dodges Nathan's question and refers only vaguely to Ira's marital problems. In the following, the reader learns a lot about Ira and Eve, but nothing about the specific events of that day or what has happened before. Thus, this passage mainly serves to supply the narrative with a frame to which it can always recur. Another detail about that day is added when Murray reveals his decision not to advise Ira that ending the marriage would be best (*IMC* 67). Shortly afterwards, the reader learns that Ira's decision to leave his home for two nights had to do with the fact that Eve was pregnant and had decided to get an abortion (70). But still the reader is left in the dark about the context of Eve's decision and Murray does not yet reveal what else had happened before Ira came over. Somewhat later in the novel, Murray again draws attention to that day and ominously refers to something significant Ira "heard that morning" but the narration of the actual event is postponed again (79). Afterwards, Murray keeps digressing for almost forty pages until he finally imparts to the reader what it actually was that shocked Ira Ringold so much that he left immediately:

"The reason Ira came to see me," Murray continued, "and to stay overnight with us the day before you two met was because of what he'd heard that morning." (*IMC* 79)

[...]

"But then that morning after Eve said that she could not have the baby, and she wept and she wept, and he thought, Okay, that's it, and agreed to take her to the doctor in Camden – that morning he hears Sylphid at the bottom of the stairs. She is giving it to her mother, really laying into her, and Ira jumps out of bed to open the bedroom door, and that's when he hears what Sylphid is saying. This time she's not calling Eve a kike bitch. It's worse than that. Bad enough to send my brother straight back to Newark. And that's how you came to meet him. It puts him on our couch for two nights. [...]" (117)

It is noteworthy that Roth still withholds the actual event at this point in the narrative. Murray only refers ominously to "what Sylphid is saying", effectively withholding this information from the reader, once more adding that it was "worse" than anything before. Yet, this time his reticence to reveal the event serves to increase the impact of Sylphid's cruel words, which are imparted to the reader a page later: "I'll strangle the little idiot in its crib!" (*IMC* 118). In the end, having related the story of Ira's rise and fall, Murray returns to the moment of Ira's and Nathan's meeting one last time. It is almost at the close of the novel that Murray reveals his final and most significant secret about Ira's and Nathan's relationship: "He meets this boy who was all that he had never been and who had all that he had never had. Ira wasn't recruiting *you*. Maybe your father thought so, but no, you were recruiting *him*. When he came over to Newark, that day, the abortion still so raw in him, you were irresistible to Ira". Murray concludes that Ira saw in Nathan the opportunity to "shield himself against his nature", i.e. to over-

come the violent strain in his personality and his rage, his tragic flaw (*IMC* 297). And this final observation explains the significance of that fateful moment in front of Murray's house, for it is no coincidence that this remark is both preceded and followed by the revelation that as a young man Ira had murdered somebody with a shovel (295, 298). This crime, with which Murray explains much of Ira's irrational behaviour, for instance his passion for Communism, is the surprising revelation at the end of the novel and it retrospectively endows that day with the significance it has been given throughout the novel. According to Shostak, the entire *American Trilogy* dwells on secrets and the difficult process of their revelation, a symbolic "corollary to the epistemological project of historical practice" (*Philip Roth* 238). This is the reason why the plot of *I Married a Communist* revolves around this day. The peculiar circular structure of the plot not only reflects Murray's digressive style of narration, it also reflects the narrator's thought processes as he is slowly coming to terms with his childhood relationship to a friend, perhaps even a substitute father, who betrayed him and was revealed as a Communist. This circular structure, which keeps returning to this significant day and reveals information about it only very slowly, allows the reader to re-enact and experience Nathan's difficult and puzzling reconstruction of his own maturation. It is an intricate strategy of reticence that dictates how the events of that day unfold in the narrative. According to Toker, systematic reticence can convey a "specific emotional climate" that is much more immediate (4). The perpetual incompleteness of the narrative chronology or, more importantly, of our image of Ira creates a fictional world characterised by indeterminacy, which suggests that it is essentially impossible to recreate the past in writing. This concurs with Robert Chodat's conclusion that the peculiar narrative structure of the novel, which is characterised by a duality of Nathan's recollections and Murray's contextualizations, dramatizes a major epistemological theme in the novel, i.e. the limitations of our knowledge. The reader perceives everything as through a thin veil and the veracity of the narrative is constantly in question. Chodat adds that Roth's preoccupation with the limitations of self-knowledge is closely connected to the American dream of self-invention, since self-transformation requires the ability to understand oneself. Hence, the novel also examines the difficulties in private self-inventions (Chodat 700-2; cf. also Marcus, G. 64-65). It is precisely this lack of self-knowledge which foils Ira's attempts to reinvent himself as a representative American.

This dramatization of the limitations of self-knowledge and historical knowledge in general is also brought about by Roth's blurring of fiction and autobiography. The numerous parallels between *I Married a Communist* and Roth's personal life, and especially his marriage to Claire Bloom, also challenge the reader to separate fact from fiction, which is inherently impossible.

Both the circular, reticent narrative structure and his autobiographical experiments of hide-and-seek with his readership compel readers to experience the impossibility of distilling the ‘true’ story from the novel. Especially these autobiographical pranks have long been part of a signature strategy in Roth’s writing. Often this is taken to be a postmodernist characteristic of his novels (Jaffe-Foger, “Autobiographical Gestures” 134) and it is of course a key characteristic of *historiographic metafiction*. It implies that a simple distinction between true and false or fact and fiction misses the point and that there is only a multiplicity of potential truths (cf. Hutcheon, *Poetics* 109-13). This blending of the fictional and the factual therefore serves as a “cognitive obstacle” challenging the reader. Especially his core readership expects a certain amount of autobiographical experimentation in his work. For decades, Roth has been grooming his readership to watch out for any autobiographical clues contained in his novels (Gonzalez 62-63). This is particularly true of Roth’s repeated use of his authorial persona Nathan Zuckerman, whose development over the course of numerous novels presents an especially hard challenge as more layers and dimensions are added to a character that is always partly fictional and partly autobiographical (70-71). Debra Shostak traces this tendency in Roth’s writing back to his early period as a writer, when he was accused of having exposed himself as a self-hating Jew in his debut novel *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), in his essay *Writing About Jews* (1963), and of course in his taboo-breaking novel *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969). Especially the latter was interpreted by some readers as “thinly disguised autobiography”. According to Shostak, these early experiences prompted him to confront these unjustified complaints provocatively by infusing his fictional worlds with autobiographical elements, and often in such a manner that it becomes impossible to separate fact from fiction. Self-invention has thus become a key theme in his fiction (Shostak, “Self-Exposure” 32-38). Shostak considers his strategy, which invites autobiographical readings only to systematically disappoint them, as a form of “seduction”. Readers are seduced with the promise of an “objective truth” without satisfying this desire to naturalize all the contradictions and gaps in the text. This encourages them to meditate an essentially “uninterpretable world” (52-53; cf. also Shostak, *Philip Roth* 183-85). In *I Married a Communist*, this entails the experience that reconstructing history involves a deep mistrust of evidence and interpretation. In fact, the novel can be said to contain a genuine postmodernist strain that seeks to explore the difficulties and complexities of historiography. Kimmage shows how Roth uses Nathan Zuckerman’s status as a Roth persona to expose the “mechanics of history”, for instance by investigating the role of evidence and “gaps in the record”. Zuckerman’s evidence, with which he tries to piece the story of Ira’s life together, is not only oral and represents the subjective view of Ira’s brother

Murray, it is also fragmentary at best. According to Kimmage, Roth “thereby demonstrates an ancient problem of historical narrative. Consciously and unconsciously, Nathan tells the stories that his sources tell him to tell” (Kimmage 152-54; cf. also Shostak, *Philip Roth* 230-31). Kimmage demonstrates that the genre of *I Married a Communist* is tragedy and he considers the novel an attempt to explore the difficult relationship between evidence, genre and narrative. Considering Hayden White’s observation that “narrative respects the dictates of genre”, he sees the struggle of the historian in Zuckerman’s attempts to reconcile the fragmentary and subjective nature of his evidence with the more general framework of the genre of tragedy. This also entails reflecting one’s own viewpoint and motivations as a narrator, which is represented by Zuckerman’s “psychological need to tell the stories he chooses to tell”. Finally, Kimmage draws attention to the novel’s suggestion that the factual narratives of historians may sometimes need to be supplemented by an exploration of the sensory dimension of history, which is the terrain of the novelist’s imagination. Kimmage concludes that the novel dramatizes the problems involved in writing history (156-59). In a similar manner, Debra Shostak argues that “Zuckerman represents the vexing epistemological project of the historian”, which illustrates the fact that investigations into historical subject matter are inextricably connected to an exploration of oneself and vice versa (*Philip Roth* 232). This metafictional aspect of the novel is typical of Roth’s fiction in general and also reinforced by numerous intertextual references which “draw our attention to the ways in which texts are constructed” (Royal, “Roth, literary influence” 26). This pertains in particular to the numerous references to Shakespeare and Murray’s understanding of history in terms of Shakespearean tragedy.

These problems are reflected in Roth’s use of voice as well. Roth establishes these issues in a concise passage at the beginning of the novel. It is the moment when the narrator introduces the reader to Murray Ringold, presenting him as a shining example of American individualism and dissent. Instead of getting “lost in the amorphous American aspiration to make it big”, Murray Ringold turns his brilliant mind to education, to teaching the value of critical thinking as a form of political transgression. Planting with his “example” the seeds of a “craving for social independence”, Murray becomes Nathan’s first and most important mentor in the novel (*IMC* 2). In a dense semantic field comprising almost half a page, Zuckerman calls Murray a “maverick”, an embodiment of the ideas of “freedom”, “independence”, “transgression”, “subversion” and a “yearning to be rational and of consequence and free” (2-3). This establishes Murray immediately as a signifier of American foundational ideals, as a shining individualist with a penchant for teaching dissent. And Roth then juxtaposes this celebration of American

ideals in the subsequent paragraph with a short but bleak indictment of McCarthyism as an era in which America betrayed these ideals.

Murray, in turn, told me everything that, as a youngster, I didn't know and couldn't have known about his brother's private life, a grave misfortune replete with farce over which Murray would sometimes find himself brooding even though Ira was dead now more than thirty years. "Thousands and thousands of Americans destroyed in those years, political casualties, historical casualties, because of their beliefs," Murray said. (*IMC* 3)

Nathan's voice gives way to the resonant words of the ageing Murray Ringold and they establish the essence of the historical drama that he will unfold in his "dramatizing inquiry" into the politics of McCarthyism and the human condition in general. The change in voice, from Nathan's to Murray's, is significant with respect to the aforementioned issues of historiography for several reasons. On the one hand, it hints at Murray's peculiar approach to historiography that applies concepts from literary criticism to the interpretation of history, for instance the "tragic flaw" (*IMC* 275) or the "master story situation of [...] betrayal" (185). This approach emphasises the essential narrativity of history itself by shamelessly treating historical facts like fictional events in a tragedy. Whereas Nathan tells the reader about Murray's passion for "dramatizing inquiry", Murray's own words then show what that actually means. He explains that "maybe, despite ideology, politics, and history, a genuine catastrophe is always personal bathos at the core" (3) and the term *bathos*, a purely technical term from literary criticism, foregrounds this peculiar aspect of Murray's approach to history. It prefigures Murray's later analogies between literature and history, all of which translate the particulars of history into sweeping generalizations about the human condition and the American experience. He thereby equates historiography with the composition of literature. On the other hand, the change in voice is a way to represent the moralizing and normative assumptions about the McCarthy era in more ambiguous terms. It is not the Roth persona Nathan Zuckerman who delivers this vicious attack on the American fifties, but Murray Ringold. And he may be a shining representative of American individualism, but he is also quite often deeply ambiguous about his strong opinions, as in the single, yet nevertheless, significant "maybe" that adds a layer of uncertainty to Murray's musings about life (3), prefiguring the world of indeterminacy that the novel is going to evoke. It is his voice that is going to dominate the narrative and by letting his half-fictional and half-autobiographical novelist persona step into the background Roth avoids identifying himself too closely with the strong condemnations of the American fifties. Whereas the ageing Nathan Zuckerman remains a fairly neutral commentator, whose words could have been taken from a standard textbook on American history, it is usually Murray who retrospectively condemns the Communist witch-hunts of the fifties as a deeply embedded issue in American culture. The following quotation is

representative of Nathan Zuckerman's neutral style of the detached historical observer.

In June, a list of 151 people in radio and television with purported connections to "Communist causes" had appeared in a publication called *Red Channels*, and it had set in motion a round of firings that spread panic throughout the broadcasting industry. [...] It didn't require much incriminating evidence – in cases of mistaken identity, it didn't require any – even for someone as unengaged by politics as Eve Frame was, to be labelled a "fronter" and to wind up out of work. (*IMC* 187)

It is typical of Nathan's style only to quote propagandistic expressions of the time and he often refrains from the strong depreciative language Murray uses when he relates the historical circumstances that form the background to Ira's story. Murray's language is much different in this respect. It is not only rhetorically much more complex but also contains many passages which discuss the American fifties in terms of fundamental questions of human morality. It is useful to compare the following passage with the one quoted above.

When before had betrayal ever been so destigmatized and rewarded in this country? It was everywhere during those years, the accessible transgression, the *permissible* transgression that any American could commit. Not only does the pleasure of betrayal replace the prohibition, but you transgress without giving up your moral authority. You retain your purity at the same time as you are patriotically betraying – at the same time as you are realizing a satisfaction that verges on the sexual with its ambiguous components of pleasure and weakness, of aggression and shame: the satisfaction of undermining. Undermining sweethearts. Undermining rivals. Undermining friends. Betrayal is in this same zone of perverse and illicit and fragmented pleasure. An interesting, manipulative, underground type of pleasure in which there is much that a human being finds appalling. [...] (*IMC* 264)

It is a dazzling array of nouns and adjectives whereby Murray evaluates the betrayals of the McCarthy era. He suggests that the pleasure of betrayal resembles not only sexual satisfaction, especially the "perverse and illicit" forms of sexual attraction, but that it is also a form of personal transgression. Murray sees in betrayal a deeply personal matter that "is an inescapable component of living" (*IMC* 265), i.e. an aspect of the human condition. Parallelism, anaphora as well as the frequent repetitions of key words such as *betrayal* (and its derivatives), *undermining*, *pleasure* and *satisfaction* mark the passage as strongly significant. Roth juxtaposes the condensed nature and artificial character of Murray's heightened rhetoric with Nathan's plainer style. Moreover, Murray suggests that the pleasure of betrayal is not only a general problem of the human condition, but that this is also an affliction which is particularly strong in American culture. Later on in the novel, he explicitly associates the political paranoia in the age of McCarthy with a deeply ingrained Puritanical impulse in American culture:

McCarthy understood the entertainment value of disgrace and how to feed the pleasures of paranoia. He took us back to our origins, back to the seventeenth century and the stocks. That's how the country began: moral disgrace as public entertainment. (*IMC* 284)

Murray's reference to the stocks recalls iconic images of Puritanism, for instance the banishments of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, or possibly the Salem witch trials of the seventeenth century. This refers to the deeply rooted anxiety in the Puritan heart that derives from the Calvinist anxiety about signs of divine election and led to strict self-examination and identification with a common venture, namely the *errand into the wilderness*. This errand was by definition unfulfilled and produced anxieties about dissenters who strayed too far from the preordained path. There is also a suggestion that this alleged paranoid strain in American culture and its obsession with "public disgrace", according to Murray a specifically American form of "unthinking", has its parallels in the Age of Revolution and in the culture wars of the present. Murray "think[s] of the McCarthy era as inaugurating the postwar triumph of gossip as the unifying credo of the world's oldest republic. In Gossip We Trust. Gossip as gospel, as national faith" (*IMC* 284). It has already been pointed out that in 1998, when the novel was published, it would have been difficult not to think of the Clinton scandal and the ensuing impeachment trial. Murray's most sweeping condemnation of American political culture is perhaps his claim that paranoia, public disgrace and an obsession with gossip have been recurring issues throughout American history. These views and such language contrast emphatically with Nathan's fairly neutral treatment of the historical subject, which is reflected in the language of both ageing men. Murray's treatment of McCarthyism is rhetorically much more sophisticated than Nathan's and contains numerous strong value judgments. With the notable exception of the final passages, in which the language of the ageing Zuckerman rises to an almost poetic, heightened quality (cf. *IMC* 322), his style is usually much simpler than Murray's and maintains a fairly neutral tone throughout. Murray's language on the other hand, often draws attention to itself, as in the two passages above. Roth also reinforces this effect by adding that this narration of Ira's entanglements in 1950s politics is the "last task" of a man approaching the end of his life (*IMC* 265). Like Marcus Messner in *Indignation*, Murray is a kind of story-person whose existential purpose is to narrate. Indeed, this dimension of the narrative is explicitly alluded to when Nathan compares Murray's powerful storytelling with Scheherazade's (*IMC* 262). It endows Murray's voice with weight and purpose, which is crucial, since he is the one who represents the ideology of the novel in its clearest form.

It is in his metafictional, autobiographical pranks and (to a lesser extent) in his explorations of the narrativity of history that Roth pushes the boundaries of his own imagination to their breaking points and thereby challenges readers to contemplate American history and American ideals. *I Married a Communist* is therefore anything but "confident" about the possibility of representing reality or history in fiction and the novel does not "locate" itself

“dans le vrai”, as Gregson has suggested (68). Roth’s ironic self-inventions, especially in the persona of Nathan Zuckerman, stand in the long tradition of self-exploration in American jeremiads. In creating the “Roth persona” in his novels, Philip Roth has not only found a way to address criticism of his work, but he also manages to represent himself as a moral authority, as a representative American. Nathan’s education in this *bildungsroman* has its analogy in the edification of the reader. Like Nathan, the reader is challenged to come to terms with the values that his different mentors Murray Ringold, Ira Ringold and Leo Glucksman represent. Nevertheless, it is the authoritative and often ironic voice of the Roth persona Nathan Zuckerman that guides the reader through the different stages of his education. It is this voice of the ageing Zuckerman that encourages the reader to distance themselves from perspectives of his former mentors Ira Ringold or Leo Glucksman and that praises Murray Ringold as the embodiment of American individualism and dissent. For Nathan Zuckerman is not an objective chronicler, not merely “an ear in search of a word” (*IMC* 222), but a narrator who judges, evaluates and criticises his former mentors. Murray Ringold is Nathan Zuckerman’s moral paragon whose individualism is supposed to represent the true America and which is contrasted with misguided forms such as Eve’s, Leo’s or Ira’s. Roth thereby aligns his literary “persona” Nathan Zuckerman with the values Murray represents, i.e. freedom of speech, individualism and a rebellion against betrayals of the Founders. It is this Roth persona that represents the Jeremiah denouncing the evils of fifties political culture in favour of a rededication to the liberal ideals of the American revolutionary tradition. It is in this dimension of the novel that the power of the American ideology is strongest. Much ambiguity surrounds Nathan, Ira and others, but there is nothing ambiguous about Murray’s shining example in an unjust world. Thus, it is the authoritative voice of the Roth persona that, for all its ambiguity, turns Murray Ringold’s life into an exemplum that transcends the time frame of the 1950s or the culture war debates of the 1990s. Murray’s dissent in front of the *HUAC*, his dedication to the mental emancipation of young Americans and his struggle for worker’s rights represent the ‘true’ America in *I Married a Communist*.

3.4 The Ideological Framework of *I Married a Communist*

In *I Married a Communist*, Roth contrasts a rather bleak vision of the fifties with foundational principles of American democracy such as individualism, liberty and success (cf. Nadel, I. 131-36). Roth explores this dimension of the American Dream by showing how characters struggle to reinvent themselves in the American fifties, to assert their individual selves, and to achieve

true independence. This is most obviously true of Ira Ringold, whose rise and fall occupies the heart of the novel's plot. But it also applies to his brother Murray, whose shining espousal of American foundational values is diminished by the historical developments that threaten to engulf him. Whereas several characters in the novel fall victim to betrayal, betray their own ideals or their friends and families, these small-scale betrayals are presented against a background of a defining historical moment in American history when America itself betrayed the ideals of the Founding Fathers. The novel paints a rather bleak portrait of the American fifties, which are denounced for the injustices of an anti-communist agenda but also praised for the remarkable feats of American dissent that they elicited – mainly embodied by the shining example of the teacher, union worker, and storyteller Murray Ringold. The fifties are also presented as a defining moment in American politics, because the anti-communist surge marks a serious rift in American liberalism on the one hand and on the other hand the demise of the Old Left. At the same time, the novel suggests that the divisions in American society, which characterized much of 1950s culture, were essentially a precursor of the talk of a divided nation with the advent of the culture wars in the 1990s.

The different strands of the novel are loosely linked by Nathan Zuckerman's development as a writer and his political socialisation. He leads the reader through different stations in a long learning process, during which he in turn adopts and emancipates himself from the political and aesthetic views of his different mentors. These successive 'betrayals' of the "men who schooled" (*IMC* 217) Nathan Zuckerman point to the role of utopian ideologies in the novel, which lead the two brothers Ira and Murray Ringold into traps of self-deception. Eve is Ira's "tailor-made blindness", as Murray's wife Doris points out, but this theme of blindness pertains also to his inability to see the crimes perpetrated in Soviet Russia. Thus, the warring ideologies of communism, anti-communism and Americanism are reflected on an individual level in the families of the Ringolds and the Zuckermans. Both families are deeply divided, which helps foreground the image of a divided nation. This central idea is reinforced by Ira's impersonation of Abraham Lincoln. Attempting in vain to recast himself in the image of the rail-splitter Lincoln, as a representative American embodying the 'true' American Way, Ira becomes the emblematic symbol of the nation-splitter – the symbol of the rift in American society. In sweeping generalizations, the novel associates the divisions on the national level with the rifts dividing individual families and the divisions in 1950s politics with the "gossip"-ridden divisions of the 1990s, when the culture wars, and most prominently the Clinton impeachment, seemed to be dividing the American nation. This connection is particularly revealing in the novel's discussions of the difficult relationship between politics and literature. Whereas Roth mocks conservative celebrations of the

powers of “great books” by exposing the flaws in Murray’s “dramatic inquiries” into history, his novel also pays homage to Roth’s own literary models and heroes, revering canonical authors like Paine or Shakespeare. Occupying a middle ground between Ira’s view of literature as a political weapon and Glucksman’s view that art should only be created for art’s sake, Roth seems to show some appreciation for Murray’s view that the American novel can be both politically meaningful and aesthetically complex. His own novel seems to accord to Murray’s view that a great writer’s power resides not only in his clever choice of words but also in the political impetus of his work.

This political thrust of the novel is somewhat mitigated by the metafictional aspects of the novel, which foreground the notion that there are severe limits to our ability of meaning-making. Firstly, Murray’s narrative is interspersed with comments about our inability to understand ourselves and each other, for instance in the critical voice of his wife Doris, who tends to question some of Murray’s more generalizing statements. She advocates a rather sceptical attitude that questions Murray’s ability to understand his brother. But this notion also resides in statements such as Murray’s that “your life story is in and of itself something that you know very little about” (*IMC* 15). Secondly, these explicit allusions to the limits of our human capacity to understand our own history are reflected on a more fundamental level in Roth’s autobiographical experiments which blur the line between fact and fiction. Alongside the novel’s preoccupation with the narrative nature of history, this bespeaks a postmodernist view of history and literature. Thirdly, this is reinforced by the narrative framework forming the background of Murray’s “dramatic inquiries”, which equally blur the lines between the literary genre of tragedy and the writing of history. On a more fundamental level, Roth writes himself into America by endowing both Nathan and Ira with his own attributes and thereby associating himself with the non-conformist values that these two characters embody. This also relates to the novel’s theme of self-invention, since Roth reinvents himself in the novel in a fictional guise. And this reinvention of himself in the autobiographical elements of the book is an attempt to probe his own limits as a writer and thereby to experiment with the American symbolic system and American representative selfhood. The Roth persona thus becomes a representative of the American Way, espousing American foundational ideals such as individualism or dissent. Whereas his self-inventions according to the image of American representative selfhood serve to challenge the constraints of his imagination and the limits of expression within the confines of the American literary tradition, this affirmation of the American Dream and of American pluralism also forestalls radical alternatives such as socialism or Thoreauvian solitude.

4. *Sabbath's Theater*: “You are America”

I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb.

Philip Roth quoting H. Melville in his National Book Award Statement (qtd. in Safer, *Mocking* 59).

Sabbath's Theater is another highly controversial piece and often ranked among Roth's most accomplished novels, it won for instance the 1995 *National Book Award* for fiction and in 1996 it was a *Pulitzer Prize Finalist*.⁴³ Whereas Frank Kermode counts it in *The New York Review of Books* “among the most remarkable novels in recent years”, *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani considers it “a novel that's sour instead of manic, nasty instead of funny, lugubrious instead of liberating” (“Mickey Sabbath”). It is an “extraordinary novel” for James Wood (246), “a masterpiece” for Claudia Roth Pierpont (190) as well as David Brauner (*Philip Roth* 145) and his “richest, most rewarding novel” for *New York Times Book Review* critic William H. Pritchard. Harold Bloom went even as far as to say that with *Sabbath's Theater* Roth has secured “a permanent place in American literature” – essentially canonizing the book (*Philip Roth* 6). This reception is well encapsulated by Morris Dickstein's verdict that *Sabbath's Theater* “is an ugly, brilliant book, a dark, paranoid book, an execration in the face of critics who had long since stopped criticizing, a gauntlet thrown down to feminists who had long since stopped caring” (228). The novel was published in 1996 and according to Claudia Roth Pierpont, *Sabbath's Theater* became the novel that initiated Roth's rediscovery of America, a novel in which he “claims America for himself” (204). As Michael Kimmage suggests, the protagonist's psychological malaise has a distinctly “historical origin” and history plays a key role in the novel (152). This claim will form the starting point for the present chapter. After a short summary of the novel, this chapter will investigate the historical time frames of the novel and their significance with regard to representations of American core values. Identifying the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* as a leitmotif in the novel, the study will then explore some of the intertextual dimensions and their impact on the structure of this jeremiad.

The protagonist of the novel is Mickey Sabbath, a lecherous old puppeteer. The novel begins with an ultimatum by Drenka Balich, the Croatian woman

⁴³ It was two years later (1998) that Roth was finally awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his much celebrated *American Pastoral*, cf. <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Fiction> [29 Jan. 2017].

with whom he has had a long and sexually adventurous love affair for many years. After years of sexual experimentation, in which they have often shared their adulterous escapades with each other, she demands fidelity for the first time, a restriction of his sexual freedom to which he is at first not willing to assent. It is cancer, the wife of the rich Croatian innkeeper tells him, which will sooner or later end their relationship and which is why she suddenly desires to have him all to herself. This revelation comes as a blow to Sabbath, who has lost several of his dearest family members in the course of his life and who defines his own existence in terms of the losses he has had to endure. During the Second World War, when he was still a boy, the plane of his older brother Morty was downed by the Japanese and Sabbath has never really been able to process this loss. It also drove his mother into severe depression and she was never the same again until she died in a nursing home many years later. He has also lost his first wife, the frail but gifted actress Nikki, when she suddenly disappeared one day without a trace – perhaps because she could not deal with her mother's death or maybe because she had discovered that Sabbath was having an affair with his future wife Roseanna. Unable neither to understand Nikki's disappearance nor to deal with this loss, he has been looking for her all his life. He later married Roseanna, but after a few happy years their marriage fell apart and his wife, who had to endure her own share of loss and abuse, became a heavy alcoholic. It was at this time that Sabbath increasingly turned to other women to satisfy his insatiable appetite for sexual pleasure. And now Drenka Balich, the woman he loves and whose licentious teacher he has been for years, is about to die and leave him as well. The recent visits of his mother's ghost, who seems to accompany him everywhere, are the first signs that the severe strains of his extremely antagonistic lifestyle and his personal losses, with which he has never really come to terms, are now taking their toll. Drenka eventually dies painfully of her terrible disease and it is her death that leads him to embark on an odyssey to revisit his own past.

Emotionally torn between a desire for life and a wish for death, he searches for meaning in his lonely and empty life. He seeks consolation in his regular visits to Drenka's grave, where he secretly masturbates at night and watches other men, other former lovers of her, come and go. Indulging in his recollections of their numerous sexual experiments and seductions, he pays her grieving husband Matija a visit, who is apparently unaware of the promiscuous life his dead wife Drenka has had. He also pays his friend Norman Cowan a visit, the former partner of the theatre producer Linc Gelman, who has recently committed suicide. Cowan, Gelman and Sabbath used to be old friends and ran Sabbath's *Indecent Theater* together when they were younger. Having worked as a street artist specialising in obscene puppet shows for several years, Sabbath opened the *Indecent Theater* in the 1950s with the help of the two producers Cowan and Gelman. In his prime,

Sabbath was a supremely talented puppeteer with a taste for the obscene, the illicit and the transgressive and the two producers discovered his gift and supported him financially. He became a theatre director at the *Indecent Theater* and it was there that he met and fell in love with the actress Nikki, his first wife. The *Indecent Theater* project fell apart with Nikki's mysterious disappearance and Sabbath has never really recovered from the blow, neither personally nor artistically. Later in life, he had to give up puppeteering when he began to suffer from serious arthritis in his hands. He worked as a university lecturer for a time until he was dismissed for improper conduct. Since then he has been relying on the financial support of his second wife Roseanna. But now Cowan tells him that their friend Gelman has died and he invites Sabbath to come back from his home in Madamaska Falls to New York to attend Gelman's funeral.

At home, he has another bout with his wife Roseanna, who has been recovering from her alcoholism for a while and whose AA meetings have become the cornerstone of her life. He ends his strained relationship with Roseanna and leaves the house without a concrete plan of what he is going to do or how he is going to support himself. He decides to accept Cowan's invitation to meet him at his home. After having a nervous breakdown and hinting at suicide, he persuades his old friend to let him stay for a while. The next day he roams the streets of New York, dwelling on the past. He remembers how he lost his job as a university lecturer, because he was involved in a public scandal, the seduction of his student Kathy Goolsbee. He recalls how his wife Roseanna tried to kill herself after she had learned the truth and was subsequently hospitalized. He then attends Gelman's funeral and afterwards Sabbath becomes acquainted with Michelle Cowan, Norman's wife, and they talk about Sabbath's past, especially his former work as a street artist. Sabbath recounts how he was arrested for indecent behaviour in the 1950s, an event that seems to have had a crucial impact on his view of sexual transgression as rebellion and of himself as a relentless dissenter. Norman is afraid Sabbath might commit suicide and wants him to arrange an appointment with his psychiatrist. The next day, Sabbath uses the opportunity of Norman's absence to search his friend's house for anything that might stir his libido. After several antic incidents at the house, he proceeds to steal one of the panties of Norman's daughter Deborah and tries to seduce his wife Michelle. Norman reluctantly decides to show Sabbath the door, in spite of his serious concerns about Sabbath's mental health. Outside, Sabbath collapses due to his deteriorating health and Norman calls the hospital as well as his psychiatrist to help his old friend. Sabbath sneaks away to avoid both, but not without taking the secret money and the explicit polaroids that he has found in Norman's house and which belong to Michelle Cowan, who has probably hidden these delicate possessions from her husband. Basking in

recollections of his childhood, when his brother was still alive, Sabbath drives to the family cemetery at the coast. He buys a plot near the graves of his family and makes arrangements for his own funeral. He even writes his own comic epitaph before he drives to his old cousin Fish, who used to visit Sabbath's family when Sabbath was still a boy. Fish is a very old man and Sabbath admires the way Fish is still clinging to his life, although he has lost everybody he once loved. He finds some of his dead brother's possessions in Fish's house and takes them with him as he leaves. The box contains a few letters, photographs and other things. There is also an American flag, for Sabbath a reminder of the flag that adorned the coffin in which Sabbath's brother Morty returned to America, and he wraps himself in it while he is sadly reminiscing in the past. He eventually drives back to his house where Roseanna still lives, hoping to reconcile himself with his wife. Waiting outside, he notices that Roseanna has a visitor. He peeks through the window and sees Roseanna in bed with Christa, a young woman from Roseanna's AA classes that Sabbath and Drenka seduced together a few years ago. The two seem to be happy without him and Sabbath, who cannot bear the confusion, the depression and the loneliness anymore, explodes. He screams and hammers on the window until it breaks, then flees the scene while the two lovers are still screaming and, having nowhere else to go, he returns to the cemetery where Drenka lies buried. He urinates on her grave, remembering how they did this to each other during one of their more extreme sexual experiments. He is caught in action by the policeman Matthew Balich, Drenka's son, who is utterly confused after having discovered that his late mother used to lead a promiscuous double life. Sabbath sees in this situation the opportunity to finally satisfy his never absent desire to end his life. He wants Matthew to shoot him for the desecration of Drenka's grave and keeps provoking the young policeman, but the confused young man just lets him go. As the police car is driving away, the novel closes with Sabbath standing in the rain, neither willing to continue his miserable life nor able to kill himself with his own hands.

4.1 The American Malaise

America has changed a lot in Sabbath's lifetime, and in his view not for the better. Throughout the novel he proves to be very sensitive to these changes and his transgressive behaviour is partly a reaction to these developments. According to Peter Scheckner, Sabbath's transgressions, which echo Shakespeare's Falstaff, serve to ridicule a "postmodernist, capitalist world", an America struck by "a post-World War II malaise characterized by alcoholism, mental depression, suicide and a general distaste for marriage, the fam-

ily, even [...] for genuine sexual passion” (Scheckner 185, 188). Whereas Kelleter sees in Sabbath a creature rebelling against “the new puritanism of the 1990s” (173), Gregson, believes that the novel demonstrates a “desire to uncover the truth of postwar American social and political history” (56). And Posnock considers *Sabbath's Theater* one of Philip Roth's most powerful novels and highlights its exploration of “the temptation of irresponsibility and abjection that mocks the proprietary logic of American individualism” (57). In any case, Sabbath's rampant individualism and antagonism are directed against particular social and political issues of his time, which will be the focus of the present section.

As in the other two novels, Roth presents his readership with several characters who represent the American core value of individualism in different forms and *Sabbath's Theater* is in some ways an exploration of the limits and costs of individualism in late twentieth-century America. This is particularly true of the central protagonist of the novel. The most conspicuous characteristic of Mickey Sabbath's individualism is his veneration of sexual liberty in all its diverse forms (cf. Pozorski 34 and Diggory 57-58). Considering sexual experimentation and extreme promiscuity heroic feats of sexual liberation, he espouses a life of “no restrictions” (ST 4) and detests the imposition of “norms” on himself or others. He ridicules even common moral norms as “Titoism”, i.e. as totalitarianism restricting the personal independence of the individual (ST 74; cf. Kelleter 185-86). “To do what you want” is Sabbath's understanding of individual freedom (ST 125), a principle with which he justifies his relentless pursuit of pleasure and the gratification of his desires. This hedonism goes alongside a radically antagonistic outlook, which is best exemplified by his two most conspicuous seductions in the novel. As Sabbath proudly explains to the Cowans, it was in the 1950s that he managed to persuade Helen Trumbull, a young woman who was watching his puppet show, to let him unbutton her blouse in full view of the rest of the audience. He was caught by a policeman who could not believe that Miss Trumbull had voluntarily played along with Sabbath's indecent scheme. Sabbath had to appear in front of a court to defend his behaviour and even years later he proudly recalls the episode and brags of his ability to make others “uncomfortable” (ST 141). It is a veneration of “a fantasy of artistic freedom”, defined as “defiance” of what is considered responsible behaviour (Posnock 44). The other incident that Sabbath proudly remembers involved one of his students while he was teaching puppetry at university. Kathy Goolsbee was not the first student from his classes that he managed to seduce, but she was the first to blow the whistle on him by telling the dean of the faculty. Sabbath eventually lost his job, but he did not cave in without publishing the transcripts he had kept and which were testimony to his amorous phone conversations with Kathy Goolsbee. Both episodes show that

Mickey Sabbath is “obsessively transgressive” and Gregson concludes that he is therefore more of a “caricature” than a complex character (73).

Sabbath⁴⁴ loves to antagonize the sentiments and morals of the American middle-class and this non-conformism is a very conspicuous characteristic of his personality, a “war with the normal” according to Mark Shechner (*Up Society's Ass* 148). Mickey Sabbath is the American “bad boy” (Posnock 57) seeking extremes and antagonizes almost everybody, taking pride in the fact that antagonizing is the fundamental principle on which his life is founded, especially since the Goolsbee scandal. He antagonizes “as though he were, in fact, battling for his rights” (*ST* 26), as the narrator explains to the reader. He is, in other words, a champion of “audacity” and sees himself as the very personification of improper behaviour fighting against “the inescapable recititude” (65; 323-24) in American society, deriving pleasure from “making people uncomfortable, comfortable people especially” (141). The target of his constant effrontery is the American middle-class and its supposed sense of decency. He seeks to break free from these dominant norms of behaviour in American life (444). According to James D. Bloom, Sabbath’s “agenda” is therefore “utopian” in the sense that his enactment of what the moral consensus considers sexual perversions represents a “sexual revolution” (*Gravity Fails* 84). This crusade against middle-class mentalities is a theme which is highlighted throughout the entire novel. He literally rails against the “educated bourgeoisie” (*ST* 331) and according to Frank Kelleter, the unspoken and underlying premise is that “bourgeois” society is supposed to be characterised by a deep-seated repression of unconscious, psychological drives. Sabbath’s sexual transgressions and indecencies are therefore directed against such repression, which is why he champions them as acts of liberation attacking the very foundations of American middle-class morality. At the same, his rampant sexuality is also a way to affirm his individual self and his authenticity, to escape from feelings of alienation. His non-conformism thus manifests itself in his crusade of effrontery against the more “decent” lives of others, as he is constantly trying to prove that these less transgressive forms of existence are neither meaningful nor satisfactory. According to Kelleter, however, Sabbath does not fight against the “bourgeoisie” for the sake of some utopian vision, it is rather a satanic and purely negative denial of life (Kelleter 167-72).

Yet Sabbath’s war against decency is also a class war at its core and his struggle against middle-class sensibilities can also be felt in his constant awareness of social status. The novel makes much of the contrast between

⁴⁴ It has been pointed out that Sabbath’s name may be inspired by Sabbatai Sevi, a 17th-century “false messiah who turned Judaism on its head, preached the counter-Torah of redemption through sin”. See Shechner, *Up Society's Ass, Copper* (2003) 152-53.

Mickey Sabbath and Norman Cowan and the former is clearly baffled by the luxuries of Norman Cowan's upper middle class lifestyle. He loves to affront and ridicule the well-off middle-class American in his "cherished home with the electrical security system and the computer-accessed long-distance services" (ST 208). He has nothing but loathing for "the dough", for "being an employee on a payroll" and for having to go to a bank to endorse his check (209). It is significant that Sabbath's remarks in these passages are juxtaposed with images of American lowlife among the homeless, suggesting that Sabbath has strong sympathies for the poor but mostly hostility for his fellow middle-class Americans. In one of the most striking examples of his distaste for middle-class mentalities, he interprets Michelle's rejection of his advances not as a result of having been discovered with her daughter's panties in his pockets but as a form of middle-class snobbery. He feels that it must be his "beggar's cup" and the "social odium" going along with it which have made her refuse his aggressive attempts to seduce her (348). This is perhaps the most explicit example of Sabbath's obsessive conviction that he is enacting a war against the dominant values of the American middle-class and rebelling against the increasing gap between rich and poor in late twentieth-century America. Indeed, he sees himself as a "dissenter" defying the conformism and conservatism of American middle-class society. He even prides himself in the fact that his "misbehaving always imperiled" his decent friend Norman, who has made it to the upper reaches of the American middle-class (309). Yet the tide has turned, as Norman Cowan reminds him, and sexual freedom is no longer the same form of rebellion that it used to be. Sabbath is indeed the "fifties antique" (347) that Norman sees in him. He believes that Sabbath's antagonistic stance is nothing but an attempt to liberate himself from the high degree as to which American society determines and constrains the individual. But Sabbath seems to reject this view. Instead he calls any explanation of his own extreme nature into question and calls himself the "debris" at the margins of society (347), which also resonates with his sympathy, albeit ironic, for the marginalized in American society. "Who", he asks Norman's wife Michelle, "of *your* social class can take seriously someone like me, steeped in selfishness [...]" (emphasis added). Norman's persistence not to look down on Sabbath, a self-proclaimed "nobody" (331), and his attempts to do everything in his power to help Sabbath is hard to grasp for an egomaniac like Sabbath and testifies to Norman's humanity, a humanity Sabbath has never known. Finally, a lifetime of defiance and amorality has taken its toll on him, which is best encapsulated at the end of the novel by his inability to end his life and his unwillingness to continue it.

A strong symbol of Sabbath's aversion to middle-class decency and middle-class values in general is the prosecutor in the Trumbull trial of 1956, in which Sabbath was accused of indecent behaviour. Sabbath presents his pro-

secutor as a crusader of decency, a moralist protecting American values at all costs (cf. *ST* 321), which even entails humiliating young Helen Trumbull, who allowed Sabbath to unbutton her blouse in public and who defended Sabbath against the policeman. A few pages later, Sabbath claims that this lawyer is just a perfect example of the American moralist and he compares him with Savonarola (324), the famous Dominican preacher who fought against the moral decline of his world, even burned pornographic material, supposedly amoral writings and pieces of luxury. Crucially, Sabbath still sees self-righteous Savonarolas of American morals everywhere, hunting down the indecencies in American culture. He draws a straight line between the fifties and the nineties, claiming that “they had it all figured out in 1956. They still have” (336). This is a little veiled allusion to the rise of a new wave of conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s which paved the way for the culture warriors of Sabbath’s present, the 1990s. For Sabbath, sexual rebellion is still on the agenda in the 1990s, still necessary to disturb middle-class sensibilities. For Kelleter, this suggests a deeply felt anxiety about the climate of political correctness in the 1990s and his status as a Jewish outsider in a predominantly Gentile America (173). Norman Cowan disagrees with Sabbath’s radical view, however, and convincingly points out that Sabbath’s cry for sexual liberation may be outdated in an age of omnipresent sexuality (*ST* 346-47). Confronted with both perspectives, it is left to the reader to agree or disagree with Sabbath’s critique of American bigotry.

Art is not only a form of dissent but also a form of self-assertion for Sabbath – a way to express himself (*ST* 92), at least as long as he is able to practice it. He used to be a very gifted artist (83) and puppeteering was his life, but since he has begun to suffer from arthritis he has not been able to perform at the international festivals anymore. He continued to work as a college teacher giving lessons on puppetry, but after the Kathy Goolsbee scandal he had to quit, and he could not work in his trade any longer (8). It is hard for Sabbath to depend for his support on his wife Roseanna, the sculptor who used to be his lover and puppet carpenter, and it is equally hard to be unable to practice his art, which used to be the most important thing in his life (85, 92, and 96). Since then his lifestyle has become an extension or replacement of his rebellious artistic endeavours. Unable to celebrate a life of transgressions in his indecent art anymore, he has dedicated his entire life to the art of transgression. It is an extreme form of reckless individualism, a reckless pursuit of happiness. He says that “the main thing is to do what you want”, which also includes the reckless manipulation of other people, even of those dearest to him, like Nikki (*ST* 125, cf. also *ST* 123). This is an individualism that does not care about the needs of others, it is hedonistic and egoistic, an excessive, almost maniac individualism that is perhaps as extreme and mythic as Ahab’s in *Moby Dick*. And indeed, in his acceptance

speech of the *National Book Award*, Roth has said about his novel that he has written a “wicked book”, deliberately alluding to Melville’s famous comment on his own masterpiece *Moby Dick* (Safer, *Mocking* 59). A “wicked book” about a “wicked boy” (*ST* 419)? In one striking passage, the narrator describes Sabbath as “reduced the way a sauce is reduced” (126) – focusing his single-mindedness on one thing: the defiant pursuit of pleasure.

Roth introduces the reader to the economic conflict at the heart of Sabbath’s transgressive crusade against the decencies of the American middle class at the very beginning of the novel. The reader is told that Sabbath turned down Jim Henson’s offer to join *Sesame Street* and “could have been inside Big Bird all these years. Instead of Carroll Spinney, it would have been Sabbath who was the fellow inside Big Bird, who had got himself a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Sabbath who had been to China with Bob Hope [...]”. It seems as though success is not important for Sabbath. Although he could have been Big Bird in Jim Henson’s *Sesame Street* and he could have had all the money and fame this would have entailed, he refused (*ST* 3-4). Sabbath has deliberately rejected the material pursuit of the American success myth and dedicates himself to the more immaterial pursuit of the transgressive, which he has come to regard as a radical form of political and social action. But although Sabbath has come to regret his self-inflicted poverty at times, he has always detested Henson’s puppetry and is still disgusted by it for its decency and its innocent optimistic outlook on life. And it is this outlook on life that still manages to enrage him. What now remains to him in his old impoverished age is satire and he satirizes and ridicules the American Way. He ridicules American self-reliance by imagining a career as a homeless beggar reciting Shakespeare (208-9), he ridicules the American dream of the self-made man by inventing hilarious quotations by the eminent Founder and epitome of the self-made man, Benjamin Franklin (196-97). He even describes himself in terms of a preacher, a Moses or a Jeremiah denouncing the base materialism of American life, having “renounced ambition and worldly possessions” (141). This is striking, since the novel suggests that Sabbath seems to have had the potential to become exactly the kind of embodiment of the American self-made man that he detests. The narrator points out that it was exactly his mixture of talent and success as an artist in defiance of his low origins that fascinated Norman Cowan and Linc Gelman when they “discovered” him (*ST* 142). But instead of using his potential for a career in the theatre, Sabbath has flouted this “ambition” (141) and cultivated being a dissenter. As the narrator points out, he has “paid the full price for art, only he hadn’t made any” (143), i.e. he has chosen the lonely and antagonistic life of the non-conformist, but as an artist he has not accomplished anything.

Yet paradoxically, Sabbath also regrets the fact that he is an economic failure, that he is not the sole “breadwinner” but depends on his wife Roseanna (*ST* 85). Stepping into Norman’s world, he fully realizes what kind of world he has rejected by turning his back on middle-class lifestyles and values. Norman Cowan, who is aptly characterised as “a connoisseur of fine living”, has fulfilled many of his dreams, at least from Sabbath’s perspective (341, 139). In fact, Norman’s “mammoth treasure of satisfied dreams” contrasts starkly with Sabbath’s disappointing and rather unsuccessful life. Yet, the fascination that both Sabbath and Cowan feel for another is mutual. Whereas Sabbath seems to be awed by the enormous degree of Norman’s success in the theatre business and the fact that he has retained his wit, sensibility and humanity for all these years, he also intuitively feels somewhat intimidated by Sabbath’s renunciation of “ambition and worldly possessions” (141). Norman admires Sabbath for the “free spirit” that he used to be in the 1950s, as his wife Michelle confesses to Sabbath (331), but the life he leads is a well-off middle-class existence. The narrator elaborately describes Norman’s luxurious lifestyle (e.g. 140, 158-62, 341), which starkly contrasts with Sabbath’s haggard appearance and his surprisingly honest observation about himself that “there is so much and [he has] so little of it”. Norman therefore embodies the materialist side of the American Dream, but in Norman’s humanity, his personification of “the ideals and scruples of humanity’s better self” (159, 341), it also shows its gentle face. And as David Brauner emphasises, Sabbath regards Norman’s “benevolence” not only as inauthentic but Norman’s lifestyle itself also as a symbol of his overenthusiastic assimilation. It is this as well as Norman’s “fundamentally patronising” attitude that trigger Sabbath’s fiercely antagonistic reaction (Brauner, *Philip Roth* 134-36).

Mickey Sabbath’s excessive pessimism in the face of human misery and loss, his conviction that “there is no protection” (*ST* 344) in the face of death and the unpredictability of the world, is both testimony to and an exploration of this more general sentiment of economic, social and cultural decline that began to pervade American society in the second half of the twentieth century. His impression to have slept through a revolution, like a modern-day *Rip van Winkle*, ironically reflects a mentality that is not unfamiliar to many Americans of the postwar generation who witnessed the dramatic changes brought about by the social and cultural revolutions of the late twentieth century. Social and cultural change accelerated on a probably unprecedented scale in various areas. Both the agricultural and the industrial sections of the American workforce declined, and the world became as urbanized as never before in human history. Women, whose numbers in the workforce had been growing for a while, became ever more important in the economy. Especially married women were entering the working world in ever greater numbers

since the Second World War, which was a dramatic change, at least compared with before the war. At about the same time, middle-class feminism experienced a powerful comeback, beginning in the 1960s, which went alongside redefinitions of traditional gender roles (cf. Hobsbawm 288-319). For many Americans of the postwar generation, the United States seemed to have entered a period of serious decline as these economic, social and also racial upheavals, such as desegregation, were changing American life significantly and permanently. No area of public or private life appeared to have been spared: the school system, life in the cities, morality, family life and the entire economy were undergoing rapid changes. Particularly pessimist observers began to claim that especially the educational crisis, which was widely perceived as a massive drop in performance, was due to a more general decline in American culture since the 1960s had introduced a new wave of "permissiveness" (Patterson, *Restless Giant* 33-34). Yet in spite of widespread perceptions, many Americans were actually better off in the 1970s and 1980s than ever before, but as the United States were increasingly and rapidly developing into a post-industrial nation, the number of pessimist voices grew. And it is true that the economy was weaker than it had been in the 1950s and especially in the 1970s. It was plagued by a new phenomenon that economists came to call stagflation, i.e. a rising inflation in a stagnating economy. And indeed, the inequality of income was also rising in the 1970s and 1980s, but especially in the 1970s these concerns were overshadowing many social reforms which actually improved the lives of many Americans throughout the country.

Although it is by no means clear that Americans were becoming more self-absorbed in the decades following the postwar boom, several very outspoken Jeremiahs such as Tom Wolfe or Christopher Lasch denounced what they perceived as the advent of the "Me Decade" (Wolfe) or a spread of hedonistic narcissism in American culture. Lasch, a popular historian, denounced what he perceived as an increasingly self-centred attitude among Americans who seemed to be putting a premium on the instant gratification of their desires. Lambasting greed became a commonplace in the American public and in 1979 even President Carter invited Lasch to the White House and repeated Lasch's thesis that many Americans were caught in an accelerating spiral of greed, self-indulgence and consumption. This lament was often accompanied by an anxiety that this entailed a loss of community among Americans (Patterson, *Restless Giant* 62-70). It is no coincidence that talk of the American "malaise" entered public discourse after one of Carter's presidential aides had used the term to sum up the White House's view of the current state of America. The term was long remembered among Americans who wanted to believe that the United States and American culture were in serious decline and that the postwar golden age, for which they har-

boured increasingly nostalgic feelings, was over (Patterson, *Restless Giant* 74, 127-28).

In *Sabbath's Theater*, Roth addresses several of these “revolutions” and the notion of an American “malaise” through the lens of Mickey Sabbath, a modern-day *Rip van Winkle*. In fact, the novel contains an explicit reference to Washington Irving’s famous short story *Rip van Winkle* (*ST* 189) and Roth establishes Sabbath as another, twentieth-century *Rip*. This allusion is a very neat device as it points to the structural framework at the heart of the novel. Whereas Irving’s protagonist sleeps through the American Revolution, Sabbath, who has left New York and retreated to the isolation of his mountain in Madamaska Falls (cf. Omer-Sherman 242), sleeps through a revolution of a different kind. The narrator describes it as “the transformation of New York into a place utterly antagonistic to sanity and civil life, a city that by the 1990s had brought to perfection the art of killing the soul” (*ST* 189). New York serves here as an emblem of the poor condition of America and of a betrayal of its promises. It is probably exaggerated to see in this revolution the “Reagan Revolution”, although the novel contains several passing references to the economic upheavals of *Reagonomics* and the social impact that these reforms have had (*ST*, e.g. 29, 294). It is rather in Sabbath’s revelatory experience with American lowlife in New York that Sabbath becomes another *Rip van Winkle* who clings to a nostalgic memory of a “bygone era” (127), i.e. the American fifties and early sixties. Throughout the novel, Sabbath is extremely sensitive to what has changed in the United States and it is in these observations that Roth paints not only an image of a deteriorated American present but also of an irretrievable past. As Norman Cowan puts it during a conversation about the current state of America, Mickey Sabbath has become a symbol of the “failure of civilization”, an assessment that is a neat summary of the novel’s portrayal of New York’s decline (346). The phrase sums up not only what Norman perceives as an unprecedented sexualisation of permissive Western society but also Sabbath’s “beggar’s cup”, which represents the emergence of homelessness as a normal fact of life in American cities. This notion of U.S. decline is juxtaposed with Sabbath’s recollections of this “bygone era” with its attraction of nostalgic longing. Sabbath himself is quite aware of the nostalgic nature of these thoughts when he reminisces about the golden age of the fifties. Sabbath was still a “gorgeous” young man at the time and so was America, the narrator seems to imply (*ST* 41). Americans were more optimistic about life in this seemingly happier and more innocent era which supposedly knew less crime and no no-go areas in the cities, as Sabbath recalls. The return of the homeless and the coming of supermarkets are symbolic signals in the novel of the end of this “old way of life” (352) that Sabbath both resents and glorifies. Likewise, Sabbath is quite sensitive to the rise of

feminism in his lifetime. His “phallic eroticism” as well as his “militant sexism” can be seen as attempts to deal with what he sees as a feminist obsession with the phallus in American society. This negative attitude towards feminism manifests itself also in his violent fantasies about Kathy Goolsbee, the student who made his predator-like behaviour towards female university students known to the public. Yet as Kelleter rightly observes, Sabbath's hatred for feminism originates more in a disgust about the language that these feminists use and less in the female sex as such. Thus, the language of feminism is for Sabbath as ideological as patriotism or middle-class decency and therefore to be rejected and attacked (Kelleter 187-89; cf. also Kaplan 77-80). Consequently, Sabbath's transgressions are also an aggressive reaction to these social, economic and political revolutions as he wakes from his metaphoric slumber in *Madamaska Falls* and returns to New York.

Nineteenth-century medicine used to classify nostalgia as a form of melancholia. Of course, nostalgia is not defined in such a manner anymore, but it is true that nostalgia is also an emotion and for Sabbath this nostalgia is a deep and sad melancholic longing for the America of his youth, when his brother was still alive. This is why he is able to harbour such ambivalent feelings for the golden age of the American forties and fifties. These years symbolize for Sabbath not only the conservative morals that he has been rebelling against all his life, or a more innocent era. They represent first and foremost the America in which he saw his brother for the last time, in which his mother was still alive and in which he used to lead a happy life with his first wife Nikki – all of whom are gone now. The traumatic experience of these losses has made him seek a retreat from American society on his mountain in Madamaska Falls, where he could remain oblivious to the changes New York has undergone in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. *ST* 126). And now that he has come back to New York, he cannot help but notice how much has changed. He is indeed another modern-day *Rip van Winkle*. Intriguingly, this revelatory character of Sabbath's experience with New York mirrors closely the experience that Roth claims to have had when he was writing the book. According to Claudia Roth Pierpont, Roth “rediscovered America” after his return from abroad and wrote *Sabbath's Theater* as he was immersing himself in American culture again. For Roth Pierpont, this explains why the novel is so deeply steeped in American ideals and myths (204), but it also explains the peculiar structure of a novel that focusses on a character who retreats from America, comes back and is often baffled by the changes, always contrasting the America he used to know with the America that he lives in. Significantly, this structure reinforces the ideological framework of this jeremiad which denounces the faults of America's past and present while at the same time espousing the values and promises that America stands for. *Sabbath's Theater* is not only a nostalgic critique of late

twentieth-century America, it is at the same time an examination of American nostalgia for the American fifties. Mickey Sabbath is indeed Roth's *Rip van Winkle*, who sees the American present through the lens of the 1950s America that he knew and who cannot help but feel that his American fifties are nothing but a sad memory – like the ghosts of his past.

What complicates this image is the fact that the apparently objective descriptions of the narrator are at times subtly underscored by a layer of ambiguity.

The side streets seemed to him unchanged, except for the bodies bundled up in rags, in blankets, under cardboard cartons, bodies encased in torn and shapeless clothing, lying up against the masonry of the apartment buildings and along the railings of the brownstones. April, yet they were sleeping out-of-doors. Sabbath knew about them only what he'd overheard Roseanna saying on the phone to the do-gooding friends. For years he had not read a paper or listened to the news if he could avoid it. The news told him nothing. The news was for people to talk about, and Sabbath, indifferent to the untransgressive run of normalized pursuits, did not wish to talk to people. He didn't care who was at war with whom or where a plane had crashed or what had befallen Bangladesh. He did not even want to know who the president was of the United States. (ST 125-26)

This is a very significant passage, not only because it says a lot about Sabbath, but also because it encapsulates the social critique of the novel. Sabbath, who does not even bother to remember the name of the U.S. president after many years in his secluded corner of *Madamaska Falls*, has little first-hand experience of the decay that is bemoaned in the novel. Contemplating the homeless people in the streets of New York, he realizes that at least some of the stories that he has heard about the current state of the United States must be true. In the passage above, it is a deceptively neutral description which provides the reader with information about the living conditions of the homeless in New York. Such non-narrative comments often contain veiled ideological positions (Bal 31-33). In this case, the long and winding parallelism in the first sentence with its lengthy noun phrases (“bodies bundled [...] bodies encased [...]”) vividly conveys this image of New York's poor. It serves to reinforce the impact of the significant pause after the isolated noun “April”, highlighting the fact that these freezing bodies are suffering human beings. The disapproval in the otherwise neutral voice of the narrator could not be more accentuated than in this single pause followed by the remark that it is April and that they are “yet” outside in the cold.

It is useful to compare this passage with another striking description of life in New York that occurs later in the novel and which serves to make the descriptions of American lowlife somewhat more ambiguous.

And that was not to speak of unmetaphorical death, of citizens of prey, of everyone from the helpless elderly to the littlest of schoolchildren infected with fear, nothing in the whole city, not even the turbines of Con Ed, as mighty and galvanic as fear. New York was a city completely gone wrong, where nothing but the subway was subterranean any-

more. It was the city where you could obtain, sometimes with no trouble at all, sometimes at considerable expense, the worst of everything. In New York the good old days, the old way of life, was thought to have existed no further than three years back, the intensification of corruption and violence and the turnover in crazy behaviour being that rapid. A showcase for degradation, overflowing with the overflow of the slums, prisons, and mental hospitals of at least two hemispheres, tyrannized by criminals, maniacs, and bands of kids who'd overturn the world for a pair of sneakers. A city where the few who bothered to consider life seriously knew themselves to be surviving in the teeth of everything inhuman – or all too human: one shuddered to think that all that was abhorrent in the city disclosed the lineaments of mass mankind as it truly longed to be. (ST 190)

At first this may seem a straightforward but rhetorically powerful condemnation of the degradations of American life in New York. The overall effect of the rich, complex and metaphoric language is more powerful than in the description of the beggars. A parallelism introduces a succession of strong images in the first sentence of this passage, setting the tone of the description. New York is associated with *death*, its citizens nothing but *prey* and *fear* spreads like a metaphoric disease. In this case, the description is coloured by Sabbath's bleak outlook on life, according to which death lingers at every corner. The sentence introduces terror and abnormality as the guiding concepts of this passage about New York. Whereas expressions such as *prey*, *mighty and galvanic as fear*, *tyrannized*, *shuddered*, *terrors* convey that New York's fear is omnipresent and almighty, numerous lexical items suggest that New York is also an abnormal city. The narrator claims that it has *completely gone wrong*, that it offers *the worst of everything*, that it is an *abhorrent* and *inhuman* place of *crazy behaviour*, *corruption*, *degradation*, *overflowing with [...] slums, prisons and mental hospitals*, inhabited by reckless teenagers, *criminals* and *maniacs*. The hyperbolic character of this long description is a circumlocution establishing New York as a *Hell* on earth, an expression that Sabbath uses a few sentences later. The final line of the passage quoted above suggests in equally powerful language that in spite of all its abnormality, New York is simply a symptom of modernity, of modern mass society. This echoes modernist anxieties about the rise of mass culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an allusion that is also foregrounded by the remark that "every great city is hell" in the subsequent passage quoted below. Written in free indirect discourse, it is impossible to distinguish Sabbath's voice from the narrator's. Together with the hyperbolic character of the description, this creates a more ambiguous portrayal of New York than in the first passage about the *Bowery bums* or the second passage about New York's degradation. This ambiguity increases as the narrator reveals that

Sabbath did not swallow these stories he continually heard characterizing New York as Hell, first, because every great city is Hell; second, because if you weren't interested in the gaudier abominations of mankind, what were you doing there in the first place?; and third, because the people he heard telling these stories – the wealthy of Madamaska Falls,

the tiny professional elite and the elderly who'd retired to their summer homes there – were the last people on earth you'd believe about anything. (*ST* 190)

The long description of New York's infernal character is revealed to be nothing but a fairytale told by a few prosperous Americans, whose views are immediately dismissed as completely unreliable. Sabbath however, whose solitary and poor life in an "icebox" is another allusion to his long absence in the manner of *Rip van Winkle*, comes to accept this view of New York as a living hell and begins to embrace the alleged abnormality of the city as something positively transgressive (*ST* 190).

What is to be made of these three passages? At first, the reader is presented with an unambiguous, yet slightly subjective voice contemplating the misery of the homeless. Then, a very subjective voice depicts New York's degradation in the bleakest terms imaginable and finally this is dismissed as just unreliable gossip. One has to suspect that this ironic dismissal of the gloomy images of New York does little to undo the effect these words actually have on the reader, especially since they reflect a widespread and strongly felt mentality of decline in American society. Clearly, the novel is not consistently ambiguous about its descriptions of poverty and misery at the margins of American society. This becomes more obvious in the episode in which Sabbath actually meets the homeless of New York. Perhaps symbolically echoing the idea that New York is hell on earth, Sabbath descends into the mound of a subway station and composes his own obituary, pretending to have died. He has metaphorically crossed the river Styx and entered the underworld (cf. Kelleter 194). What then follows is probably the most remarkable passage in the entire novel. The fictional obituary is followed by a stream of consciousness that is several pages long and that is interspersed with sections of dialogue in direct speech, in which the narrator is practically absent and which gives these passages a distinctly dramatic character. While Roth explicitly acknowledges his debt to James Joyce, he also ridicules this modernist invention by adding later that Sabbath was only "pretending to think without punctuation, the way J. Joyce pretended people thought" (*ST* 198). Having descended into subterranean tunnels of New York and having written his own epitaph, Sabbath emerges from the subway again only to roam through the streets where he eventually meets the homeless in person. The most obvious purpose of this stream of consciousness is to convey the enormous confusion in Sabbath's mind as he feels torn between "the-desire-not-to-be-alive-any-longer" (191) and his desire to see Nikki once more, his first wife that has gone missing and for whom he has been searching ever after. What structures the seemingly disorderly stream of language is Sabbath's repetition of the question *you know Nikki* that he frantically throws at the people around him (195). He then meets a poor, black drug dealer and the stream-of-consciousness-technique, which represents Sabbath's thoughts

and impressions, turns into an absurd conversation in direct speech without any interruptions by the narrator whatsoever. The seeming absence of a narratorial voice gives the dialogue an almost theatrical quality and foregrounds the notion that Sabbath is now entering the world of New York's homeless, a world that is peculiarly theatrical. He eventually meets several beggars "enacting, with effectively minimalist choreography, the last degrading stages of the struggle for survival" (204). This cynical remark immediately introduces these beggars to the reader not only as a mirror image of Sabbath's own struggle with death but also as a slice of life that transcends the confines of New York. For Sabbath's confused state of mind, the daily struggle for survival of these beggars represents a much more general statement about the human condition. On a more fundamental level, the episode foregrounds the theme of the *theatrum mundi* that is essential to the structure of *Sabbath's Theater*. It is from such a perspective that Sabbath's encounter with the beggars should be interpreted, but first it is necessary to investigate the cultural contexts of these issues.

Sabbath's encounter with the beggars suggests a ubiquity of the marginalised and impoverished underclass that subtly denounces the failures of the American Way. With *Sabbath's Theatre*, Roth presents a novel that delves deeply into the complex issue of American homelessness, identifying a number of causes and calling for a more sympathetic attitude towards the rising numbers of homeless people in American cities. The fall of Mickey Sabbath from successful puppeteer to impoverished beggar is representative of many of these issues and shows that the problem of American homelessness has political, economic as well as psychological and cultural roots. Using the novel as a medium to participate in the public discourse about homelessness, Roth manages to transcend the rather simplistic treatments of the subject that still dominated the American public in the early 1990s. Although Mickey Sabbath is a larger-than-life character on a quest for sexual transgression, he is also a symbol representing the rising numbers of homeless people populating American streets from the 1970s onwards. Roth has found in Mickey Sabbath the epitome of the homelessness crisis in late twentieth-century America. His condition neatly represents the complex bundle of causes underlying homelessness. He has no friends, no family, he suffers from certain delusions, and he is impoverished and disabled. And although he usually does not drink excessively, he even passes as a homeless alcoholic on the subway (*ST* 293, 302-3; cf. also Collins 117-23). The novel foregrounds this issue in Sabbath's encounter with the homeless. He undergoes a close encounter with several beggars whose behaviour is a curious reflection of his own. Especially one man's "clumsy effort [...] to become Sabbath's friend" encapsulates the despairingly strong feeling of loneliness Sabbath shares with the homeless in New York and which has in fact driven many

real Americans on the streets. Sabbath mistakes the friendly gesture as an aggression and violently mistreats the poor man. He then observes a strikingly similar scene in which another deluded man tries in vain to befriend a pigeon and kills it afterwards (*ST* 206-8). These absurd episodes are a reflection of Sabbath's own loneliness and his madness. They mirror the aggressive and self-destructive character of his relationships to all other people except his family. At the same time, they show that combating homelessness is not simply a matter of providing government-funded housing to help the unfortunate guy next door, which is what much of public debate of the 1980s in fact suggested. Many homeless people were struggling with deeply rooted personal issues and many of them needed professional treatment. Mickey Sabbath's severe condition is a symbol of this complex issue. The narrator states this quite explicitly: "Mickey Sabbath, of that select band of 77 million saps who constitute human history – bids goodbye to his one-and-onlyness" (*ST* 204). He suggests that there is nothing exceptional about human existence or American culture for that matter and that Mickey Sabbath's life epitomises the sometimes harsh vagaries of the human condition. Yet it is also characteristic of Roth's novel that homelessness is presented not simply in terms of victimhood to elicit the reader's pity. The cruel predicament of homelessness is instead represented by an often repulsive and sometimes even inhuman character who defies easy identification. Mickey Sabbath is both perpetrator *and* victim. He and his mirror image of the lonely *Bowery Bum* are symbols which exemplify the various issues of the American "malaise" that the novel explores. Their miserable lives contrast strongly with the extensive descriptions of middle-class luxury at Norman Cowan's house, which signify the enormous expectations of individual opportunity that the American Dream invites. "America love me" (sic), the beggar tells Sabbath (*ST* 205), which ironically expresses the stark gulf between rich and poor, between hope and misery in late twentieth-century New York. The episodes with the beggars bespeak a view according to which America has become a place that lacks solidarity and empathy for those who are less fortunate than oneself. Sabbath's own unashamedly reckless behaviour is just a strong symbol of the self-centred culture that Roth seems to perceive in some areas of American life. This concurs with Peter Scheckner's view that Sabbath's dedication to "sensuality" should be seen as an attempt to "take shelter from the emotional graveyard America had become in the mid-nineties" (185). Roth thereby participates in the discourses on poverty that had come to the fore in the decade preceding the publication of his novel.

Such discourse of an American "underclass" began in the second half of the 1970s and the term denoted a "seemingly recent phenomenon in the nation's urban ghettos: the rise of a debilitating complex of persistent poverty in conjunction with sustained unemployment and welfare dependency, fam-

ily breakdown, school failure, rampant drug use, escalating and increasingly violent crime, and high rates of teenage pregnancy". The vague term thus combined demographic aspects with definitions of behaviour and attitudes among the urban poor. What further complicated the issue was that it also carried politically explosive racial connotations. This was due to the fact that the term "underclass" usually denoted ethnic urban minorities which were either black or Hispanic (Collins 124). This public concern with poverty in American society in the 1980s and 1990s also included a conspicuous and seemingly new phenomenon that was hard to ignore: Homelessness had become a major political issue by the 1990s and the seeming suddenness, with which hundreds of thousands of homeless people had appeared in the American cities, made the issue even more urgent in the public mind. As Collins points out, this new wave of homelessness "seemed to old-timers to have appeared almost overnight" and this experience triggered nostalgic comparisons with the decades before. The expression "bag lady" entered the American vocabulary, which attests to the harrowing power of this experience. The political scandal of homelessness became a key issue in the American public of the Reagan era and was hotly debated in the media while activists were flocking to the new national cause. Although the numbers of Americans living in shelters, hiding in the subway and sleeping in cardboard boxes was rising significantly in the 1980s, they were much lower than the dramatic estimates in the media suggested. The real causes were complex and usually misrepresented in the public, which tended to focus on the image of the ordinary American next door who had simply had some bad luck or had fallen prey to substance abuse. The "system" was a popular culprit and Mitch Snyder, who was one of the most outspoken activists in the American public and an icon in the movement against poverty, famously blamed the Reagan government and the allegedly exploitative character of the American people. Whereas Snyder and many others dominated public discourse and focused on the government's failure to provide housing, analysts tended to emphasize a bundle of complex causes such as the failure in previous decades to adequately treat, institutionalize and provide for the mentally ill. About a third of all homeless people in America suffered from serious mental illness and almost a quarter had been hospitalized in a mental institution for a time. About forty per cent were former prisoners and about a third suffered from alcoholism. Another third were addicted to heavy drugs like crack cocaine. Isolation was another problem, since many claimed not to have any friends or family and most were unemployed. This was not just a stroke of bad luck that could hit anyone, homelessness had deeper roots for which simple solutions such as housing programs would not suffice (Collins 117-23). As the 1980s came to a close, American attitudes towards the issue began to change and by the early 1990s growing parts of the urban popu-

lation in the United States came to regard the homeless increasingly as a threat. Cases of serious aggression became more frequent and it became increasingly clear that there were no easy solutions to the problem. According to Collins, the failure of activists to address and represent homelessness adequately began to raise “troubling questions as to whether advocacy groups could be trusted to provide the realistic portrait of a problem that good public policy demanded in order to be effective, and whether the media actually had the objectivity and critical faculties necessary to puzzle through well-intentioned but bogus claims and explanations in relation to vexed social issues” (Collins 117-18).

The Reagan administration with its neoliberal agenda based on tax cuts, deregulation and decreases in social spending took a lot of the blame for the growing inequality gap. Yet, both phenomena, the emergence of public discourses about an American “underclass” and the rather sudden appearance of homeless people on American streets, were not national but global symptoms of economic developments that were widening the gap between rich and poor in the 1980s and 1990s. Technological progress, which decreased demand for low-skilled workers, and growing competition in an increasingly globalized world were also factors that determined the critical development of American wages and unemployment. Reagan’s policies were not the cause, but his neoliberal agenda exacerbated global developments in Western economies (Collins 132-33). Structural changes in the working world were not easy to identify as the central causes of the social and economic crisis nor was the crisis itself easily recognizable as a global economic slump, at least not without the advantage of hindsight (Hobsbawm 403-4). Likewise, the growing resentment towards those who became increasingly dependent on welfare was not a purely American phenomenon. With the end of the postwar boom, which had been fuelling the global economy in the 1950s and 1960s, economic growth could no longer keep up with the ever faster expansion of mechanization in the industries of the developed world. And as the reappearance of mass unemployment put severe strains on welfare states, hostility grew towards those who had to rely on welfare permanently. The segregated “underclass”, or even a “black underclass”, was not an exclusively American problem – although the American “ghettos” may provide a “textbook example of such a social underworld”, as Hobsbawm suggests (414-15). He adds that this development was reinforced by the cracks that had appeared in the traditional value systems that had still dominated the nineteenth and early twentieth century. When the framework of community and family as a foundation of social cohesion began to disintegrate, individualism took its place. The moral systems and institutions, such as the churches, that had defined the individual’s place in society, their rights and obligations – also towards each other – came under fire as the cultural revo-

lution of the 1960s and the following decades swept over the globe. It brought social liberalization on an unprecedented scale, but it also meant that social order and individual identity would increasingly be defined by individual choice rather than long-standing value systems or institutions. Individualism thus became as important as never before and this loss of community, kinship ties and family cohesion proved disastrous in the segregated “ghettos” where the American “underclass” came to live. Even housing projects could therefore do little to recreate a lost sense of community or kinship among the many isolated individuals who fought for survival on a daily basis in these “Hobbesian jungles” (Hobsbawm 338-42). The emergence of a so-called “underclass” and the reappearance of the homeless touched the very heart of the American identity, which has always put much store in social mobility. The widely perceived inequality gap seriously questioned the conviction that “America” was an essentially egalitarian society (Collins 131). The entire world, and the U.S. with it, was plunged into a new “sense of disorientation and insecurity” as faith in one’s own future was increasingly crumbling (Hobsbawm 416).

The harsh realities that are associated with the U.S. of the nineties are summed up by the German girl Christa early on in the novel. She seems to think that exploiting others is essentially what the “American Way” is all about (*ST* 59) and Sabbath remarks, not without irony, that the typical American is much more “exploitative” than he is (56-57). Afterwards, the narrator keeps reminding the reader of the overall bleakness and hardships of American life in the nineties, although this perspective reflects Sabbath’s of course. According to this view of the country, Americans either hate their families or they don’t have any. Sabbath’s current home town seems to be plagued by teenage pregnancies and cheap fast-food, alcoholism and violence (100). By contrast, he fondly remembers the time when there was supposed to have been less crime in America and its citizens seemed to have been less fearful (127). The entire Western lifestyle has been in decline since the 1950s, including college education and the American police, as Sabbath explains to Norman’s wife Michelle (315). For all his hatred of the now contested “innocent old ways of life”, he secretly clings to the idea that life in America used to be better. The shopping cart is another symbol of “the passing of the old way of life” and of the dawn of an America “that had virtually reversed human destiny”. But the sentiment of decline is clearly felt in this expression, the nostalgic longing for a world before mass urbanization, represented here by the symbol of the supermarket (55, 352). Mickey Sabbath is essentially one of “billions” of “ugly, old, and embittered” people in the United States, as the narrator suggests in a statement that neatly sums up the strong feeling of disappointment many Americans shared after the economic and social shocks of the 1970s and 1980s (143). In sum, Mickey Sabbath is a

representative of an American mentality that developed in the 1970s and became increasingly prevalent in the following decades. He not only represents what popular Jeremiahs such as Tom Wolfe or Christopher Lasch denounced as a “Me Decade” or a culture of narcissism and greed, but he is also a symbol of this growing mentality that America would never be again what it used to be. He is a symbol of the American “malaise” and the nostalgic sentiments that many Americans derive from it, a feeling of loss that is also symbolized by the emblematic scene at the end of the novel when Sabbath wraps himself into the flag – a symbol of the losses he has had to endure and the changes that the United States have undergone (cf. Pozorski 37). In a sense, it signifies his struggle to come to terms with a changed America that he ultimately finds alienating. As Debra Shostak points out, “donning the flag as a garment, Sabbath impersonates a patriot in acceptance of his place in the American culture that formed him, even as he reconciles himself emblematically, if with some irony, to his position as an American Jew” (*Philip Roth* 235).

4.2 *Theatrum Mundi*

Sabbath's Theater is an apt title for a novel that is so deeply preoccupied with puppetry and the theatre. According to Gregson, puppetry is the “controlling metaphor” that structures the novel, mainly in the numerous roles that Sabbath comes to embody in the course of the narrative. It also refers to Roth's role as the puppeteer who has created Sabbath and the other characters in the novel (Gregson 56). Yet, the meaning of this central metaphor has other dimensions as well. There are numerous scenes in the novel in which theatrical metaphors are employed to comment on the action. A good example is Sabbath's encounter with the homeless, ending with his applause as he starts to see the beggars as performers in a world in which street performers like him have gone begging. On his way to Linc's funeral, Sabbath “became engrossed by a small company of gifted players enacting, with effectively minimalist choreography, the last degrading stages of the struggle for survival. Their amphitheater was this acre or two of lower Manhattan [...]” (*ST* 204). Highly attuned to theatricality, both the narrator and Sabbath see in the singing beggars a drama of more general significance. The beggars are “players” and their stage is likened to an “amphitheatre”, an unusual metaphor in this context which places the troupe of beggars in the context of classic theatre. Sabbath relates the incident immediately to his own situation and interprets it as a reflection of his own bleak view of the human condition. To him, they signify man's desire to live, to stay alive at all costs, even in a world that has little to offer to its inhabitants. Being approached by one of

the poor singers, an African-American with a cup in his hand, Sabbath realizes that the songs of these beggars are a strong affirmation of life. He sees a fierce struggle against all odds that defies the harsh legacy of slavery and segregation in the United States. It is striking that Sabbath interprets the scene in such a manner. He cannot but wonder why these beggars keep struggling for survival, why they have not given up on human existence. Sabbath, who has tired of such struggles, decides that this "inexhaustibility" of life is "repugnant". Assuring himself of the essential stupidity of life, he realizes that there is nothing exceptional about himself or anybody (*ST* 204).

This episode is striking, because it places the novel in a long-standing, rhetorical tradition in Western literature. It is one of the key passages in the novel in which Roth alludes to the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* – a metaphor of the world as a stage. It is a key theme in the novel and its significance explains the peculiar title of the book. The metaphor goes back as far as antiquity and symbolically represents the world as a theatre or circus, i.e. as a stage. Plato is often credited with bequeathing the concept of the *theatrum mundi* to Western thought. He famously compares human beings with puppets in order to investigate man's dependence on the Gods, or puppeteers, and to ponder the meaning of life.

Let us look at the matter thus: May we not conceive each of us living beings to be a puppet of the Gods, either their plaything only, or created with a purpose – which of the two we cannot certainly know? But we do know, that these affections in us are like cords and strings, which pull us different and opposite ways, and to opposite actions; and herein lies the difference between virtue and vice. According to the argument there is one among these cords which every man ought to grasp and never let go, but to pull with it against all the rest; and this is the sacred and golden cord of reason, called by us the common law of the State. (Plato, *Dialogues* 210; *Laws*)

This representation of life as a form of drama or puppetry has resonated in Western literature and in occidental thought. It demonstrates how the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* probes the question of human agency in a deterministic world. On the one hand, there are the Gods who have created the puppets for inscrutable reasons and possess the power to use man as "their plaything". On the other hand, the motion and behaviour of each puppet is determined by the strings that are attached to it. These are our affections, either virtuous or sinful, and have a strong influence on our actions. There is only one cord that endows each puppet with at least an extent of free will and determination and this cord represents the human faculty of reason, guided by the laws of the state. Plato's universe is in any case fairly deterministic and man's life is determined by forces that are difficult or even impossible to comprehend or transgress. According to Richards, "Plato seems to say that life is far more like theater than theater is similar to life" (20), an argument that is also brought up repeatedly in *Sabbath's Theater*. It is equal-

ly well encapsulated in Shakespeare's famous expression from his comedy *As You Like it* that "all the world's a stage". Medieval authors were also fascinated by this concept and by the time of the renaissance, *theatrum mundi* had become a commonplace in Western thought (Link 1-3). Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, to which Roth alludes in his epigraph of the novel, is another significant drama of this tradition. Modern theatre has equally proved fertile ground for the metaphor, raising the question as to the competence or absence of the puppeteer (46).

According to Jeffrey H. Richards's study *Theater Enough: American Culture and the Metaphor of the World Stage, 1607-1789*, the metaphor of the world as a stage has deeply resonated in American culture and sometimes in peculiar ways. From its very beginnings, the concept of the *theatrum mundi* was lodged in American rhetoric and associated with notions of American exceptionalism. In this sense, Puritan tropes such as John Winthrop's *city on a hill* are part of a long tradition of theatrical metaphors going back in history as far as Plato. Puritan ministers presented America as the public stage where God would fulfil his covenant with his chosen people. This is indeed peculiar since Puritan culture in New England was strictly opposed to the theatre as an institution and art form. Yet, the rhetoric of the *theatrum mundi* was imported by the early colonists notwithstanding. Colonial New England became a country where it was not uncommon to render political discourse in theatrical metaphors, but in which theatre as such played no major cultural role. Winthrop's *A Model of Christian Charity* is the most prominent example in which theatrical rhetoric infuses Puritan thought. Albeit using only implicit allusions to an art form that was anathema to Calvinists like John Winthrop, his *city on a hill* envisions a drama of divine purpose, representing the Puritan colony as a stage, God and the world as its audience. In Puritan thought, non-conformism and exceptionalism are deeply associated with the need to be seen, which explains the value of the metaphor (Richards 101-4). "From the outset, the New Englanders look at themselves not simply as beacons of righteousness but as actors illuminated on the highest of hills by the lights of the world stage" (104). The idea of having been set on a divine stage and of having to perform according to God's true script lent justification and significance to the Puritan errand, gave a powerful motivation to each and every action of the Puritan venture (105-6). Writers such as Anne Bradstreet or Cotton Mather used the theatrical metaphor more consciously and not only as a means to denounce the vice of hypocrisy. Mather quite explicitly speaks of "the stage of the world" or the "spectacle to the angels" and represents New England as a public stage where each generation inhabiting this New Jerusalem has their entrances, their exits and their roles to play. In the 18th century, the metaphor of the world as a stage became less controversial in public discourse, as in the

sermons of Ebenezer Pemberton who explicitly speaks of the world as theatre and life as a stage. Richards observes that the metaphor was used in a much more elaborate manner when preachers invoked the Puritan errand into the wilderness. He concludes that “even without theater, even among those with a decidedly anti-theatrical ideology, New Englanders see themselves as treated frequently to shows on a grand scale, in the thaumaturgical theater of God’s thrilling displays of condemnation and mercy”. In sum, the *theatrum mundi* is closely connected to the New England jeremiad and it translates the hope for salvation into an intuitive language that casts the Puritan undertaking in terms of a play enacted before God and in front of the eyes of the world (Richards 117-25).

A century after John Winthrop and Cotton Mather had cast New England as a stage and its inhabitants as performers before a divine auditorium, public discourse abounded in theatrical metaphors. It is probably due to this Puritan legacy that 18th century uses of the metaphor of the world stage were less secularized in the New World than in the Old World. In English writing of the time, individuals were represented as performers acting on an increasingly political and secular stage. The educated public was replacing God as the imagined audience of the political stage. In 18th-century America however, God remained the most important spectator in his *theatrum mundi* (Richards 179). Public discourse in revolutionary America was suffused with theatrical metaphors reflecting an atmosphere in the colonies that was characterized by many forms of theatrical displays. Theatrical metaphors lent themselves well to the heightened rhetoric and key events of the revolutionary struggle were variously represented as great spectacles on the divine stage of world history. The Boston Massacre was such an event. Contemporary reports, such as in the *Boston Gazette*, presented the soldiers as “actors” in a “tragedy”, in a “Theatre of Blood” (212-15). Another example of the uses of theatre in revolutionary agitation is the Boston Tea Party, which not only resembled a performance of masked actors in an act of political theatre, but which was also described by contemporaries in equally theatrical terms. One contemporary satirist tellingly called it a “curious East Indian farce”, performed on an American stage and enacted “for the entertainment of the British Colonies” (qtd. in Richards 220-21). Political stage plays from the era also show that theatrical rhetoric had entered public discourse for good. American patriots used the stage metaphor to envision a world stage on which the American Revolution was played out as a cosmic spectacle and directed by the creator himself (224-26). Some of these patriots saw divine Providence at work in the American Revolution and according to Richards their use of the metaphor of the world stage illustrates very well how rhetoric of the revolutionary era can be seen as the inheritor of ancient and Puritan tropes. Consequently, “with God conceived of as the Great Director, America

as a Theater of Providence, and the war effort as the Stage of the Action, Americans could marshal their energies toward fulfilling roles in a divinely appointed Tragedy, the completion of which would leave the stage open for a Spectacle of Glory, the end of one show and perhaps the beginning of the next” (Richards 242-44; 247). In its two hundred year history in the New World, the *theatrum mundi* became a cornerstone of the American jeremiad. Both Puritanism and Republicanism developed a rhetorical form that couched the language of national mission in the theatrical rhetoric of the world as a stage. This rhetorical tradition was expanded and embellished by numerous writers over the next two centuries. As Richards adds, American fiction became an especially vibrant source of art tapping the potential of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor. Many American novelists such as Melville, Hawthorne, Twain and others were influenced by the theatrical rhetoric of these two earlier and formative periods in American history. It was and still is an attractive metaphor for authors attacking the wrongs that they perceive in American society (293). As Morley has shown, especially the influence of the *American Renaissance* is deeply felt in Roth’s body of work and he consciously weaves references to these works or themes from this tradition into his own novels (Morley 11). It is this kind of discourse that provides a central framework for the structure of *Sabbath’s Theater*, a “wicked”, i.e. Melvillean book, as Roth has described it himself in an allusion to *Moby Dick* – another quite theatrical novel. The novel approaches theatre and the metaphor of the world stage mainly in three different ways. Firstly, Mickey Sabbath’s puppetry is a leitmotif in the novel and associated with various symbolic meanings in the course of the novel. This leitmotif is essential to the metaphorical structure of the novel. Secondly, several characters in the novel engage in forms of acting and assume various roles. Mickey Sabbath himself is the best example. At times he cannot even tell the difference between the act and the real, an aspect of the novel which is crucial for the understanding of the novel’s approach to the metaphor of the world stage. Thirdly and finally, the novel contains explicit references to several plays by authors like William Shakespeare or Anton Chekhov and several allusions to the concept of *theatrum mundi*. *King Lear* and *The Cherry Orchard* are the plays which are most frequently alluded to in the novel. In the following, these three dimensions will each in turn be investigated.

Puppetry and puppets are endowed with complex symbolic meanings in the course of the novel. For Kenneth Gross, *Sabbath’s Theater* is a book about human agency. Sabbath’s obsession with puppetry and theatre originates in his desire to reanimate the ghosts of his past. And in testing the various meanings of puppetry Roth explores the freedom of Mickey Sabbath, who is both puppet and puppeteer. First and foremost, the puppets in the novel represent individual freedom and transgression, because they allow

audiences to enter the realms of the taboo or even the perverse, to transgress the common norms of decency that society has prescribed (Gross 67-69). Puppetry allows a release of fantasies that would normally be perceived as illicit or abnormal. It is this freedom, this transgressive and disconcerting power of the perverse puppet that Mickey Sabbath cherishes. Gross adds that Sabbath's puppets become a "cipher of intention" (70), a metaphor for the suspension of disbelief, for the suggestion that the puppet possesses intentions, that its actions are guided by these intentions and that the puppet is not simply an empty vessel of a puppeteer's will (75). This concurs with Gregson's view that puppetry is an ambiguous symbol of the degree as to which human beings are in control of their actions and he adds that this foregrounds the metafictional dimension of the novel as well. It suggests that the characters in the narratives are merely puppets in the hands of a narrator who has written their stories beforehand, which bespeaks a rather deterministic universe (Gregson 76). Roth's exploration of puppetry thus poses the problem of human agency and free will. Standing in front of the gravestones of his family and unable to leave, Sabbath is described as a kind of puppet himself, a "dumb creature who abruptly stops doing one thing and starts doing another and about whom you can never tell if its life is all freedom, or no freedom" (*ST* 371). It has already been pointed out that this ambiguity is central to the metaphor the world stage. Mickey Sabbath is not just a puppeteer, he is also a puppet. As in Plato's famous image, Sabbath's behaviour is directed by his desires, the invisible cords and strings of the puppet. His life is strongly determined by his inability to control his feelings. He is torn between a desire for death and a desire for life and pleasure. As in the other two novels, passions originating in the family foil the aspirations of the central protagonists to lead satisfied and independent lives. According to Shostak, Sabbath's odyssey is triggered by deaths and losses in his family: the deaths of his brother and his mother as well as the sudden disappearance of his first wife Nikki. These losses form the foundation of the novel's structure (*Philip Roth* 53; see also "Graveyards" 5). And as in *Indignation* and *I Married a Communist*, Roth employs a counter-narrative to the myth of the happy family of the fifties as an explanation for the protagonist's troubles. At the end of the novel, Sabbath has become a puppet himself. And as will be seen below, this has crucial consequences for the ideological structure of the novel.

Debra Shostak interprets *Sabbath's Theater* in a similar manner. According to Shostak, Roth investigates how individual freedom is constrained by individual desires. As other critics before her, she focusses partly on the Freudian elements in Roth's work and explains how Mickey Sabbath is driven by a dream to reinvent himself, a dream that is rooted in his sexual desire and juxtaposed with his death drive, the *Thanatos* ("Roth/CounterRoth" 119-

20).⁴⁵ She concludes that “the problem Roth poses for Sabbath, his libidinally irrepressible and death-obsessed central character, is how to invent a self in the face of desire and death”. His conviction that the instant gratification of sexual pleasure is essentially human, even if it entails radically antisocial behaviour, stems from his nihilistic philosophy. The seeming omnipresence of death necessitates a constant focus on one’s present desires. She also observes that theatre is a central signifier in the novel. Among other things, it refers to Sabbath’s ability to project his voice onto others. Nikki and Roseanna are puppet-like in the sense that they become his marionettes, mere projections of his voice, until they liberate themselves from him, as in Nikki’s disappearance or Roseanna’s attempts to distance herself from Sabbath’s influence. What motivates these manipulations is Sabbath’s reckless desire to dominate women (“Roth/CounterRoth” 122-24). As Shostak shows, “theater is the principal metaphor of *Sabbath’s Theater*, posing from the title of the novel onward the problem of self-performance”, mainly understood “as a will to power with respect to women, enacted through a combination of ventriloquism and sexual mastery” (*Philip Roth* 49). For Greenberg, this negative attitude towards women is also underscored by symbolic suggestions that Sabbath’s relationships to his puppets and his women amounts to a “creator-creation-relationship” – a dimension of the book that also gives meaning to Roth’s role as a creator of the fictional characters that inhabit his postmodern novels (98). Puppetry therefore symbolizes Sabbath’s tendency to manipulate other people, to turn them into his own creations and to use them for his transgressive machinations. This symbolic relationship between puppet and puppeteer manifests itself explicitly in Sabbath’s attitude towards women. Part of Roseanna’s attraction as a young woman was the fact that her face looked uncannily puppet-like to Sabbath (*ST* 83) and she seems to be quite aware of this, since she later accuses him of having been attracted first to Nikki and then to her because they could be manipulated easily (91). He also imagines that he has animated the ghost of his mother with his power as a puppeteer to bestow life on lifeless puppets. He believes that he has endowed her with the same kind of reality that he allows his puppets (*ST* 51). Paradoxically, he also ascribes this gift of manipulation also to Drenka, “who had a puppeteer’s power to make him speak” (30). Yet even this testifies mainly to Sabbath’s power over others. As Kelleter points out, Sabbath turns Drenka into his “female alter ego”. As a puppeteer and Sadean free spirit, he sees himself as an artist of manipulation and Drenka becomes his

⁴⁵ For other psychoanalytic readings of *Sabbath’s Theater* and its explorations of the interplay between *Eros* and *Thanatos* see for instance Kelleter, “Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Erotic in Philip Roth’s *Sabbath’s Theater*” (2003), Halio, “Eros and Death in Roth’s Later Fiction” (2005) and Mellard, “Death, Mourning, and Besse’s Ghost: From Philip Roth’s *The Facts to Sabbath’s Theater*” (2005).

greatest creation and thus his equal. "As his name suggests, Sabbath the artist gets active on the day God rests. Molding people in his own image, literally turning them into 'his creatures', the puppeteer is driven by nothing less than a will to divine power" (Kelleter 175-76). In Shostak's opinion, this tendency to manipulate people and to impose himself on others through sexual and linguistic games represents an ideology of *masculinism* that defines manhood as nothing else but power through sexual prowess. If selfhood is considered performative, i.e. constituted by performative speech acts, then Sabbath constantly defines his own self by imposing his language and his body onto others. This is why age and decay pose such an existential threat to his identity and selfhood. As he grows older and physically weaker, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to (re)invent his identity through bodily performance. His relentless drive for sexual pleasure is therefore not only a desire to assert and define his own selfhood according to a masculinist ideology, but it is also driven by an anxiety to lose that which he has made the key constituents of his identity: sex and power. His solution is to seek an escape from death by embracing an ever-more erotic and transgressive life. For Shostak, this entails a deconstruction of the masculinist ideology: Roth exposes a myth that defines manhood solely in terms of sexual performance and power. In this sense, Sabbath's body is the "theatre" in which his self-performance, understood as bodily performance, is enacted. ("Roth/Counter Roth" 124-28; cf. also *Philip Roth* 46-51).

Sabbath's emotional state is therefore a powerful constraint on the independence he craves, which underscores Roth's critique of the bleak realities of American society and the betrayal of its universal promises. Unlike the other two novels, *Sabbath's Theater* places these discourses in the more universal context of the *theatrum mundi*. The use of the metaphor casts doubt on the notion of the autonomous subject itself and thus questions the premise on which the faith in American self-making is based. Roth's bleak critique of the social and mental conditions of late twentieth-century America is therefore supported by the notion that man is rather a puppet of inscrutable historical and subconscious forces than an autonomous subject forging his own destiny. But it is not only Sabbath's inability to deal with his conflicting emotions and the social "malaise" of contemporary America that deprive him of the meaningful and satisfying life that he seems to detest and envy at the same time. It is also his attitude towards life as an essentially meaningless endeavour which further constrains his ability to pursue an independent and satisfied life like his friend Norman Cowan. This may even amount to a more or less consistent philosophy of nihilism in the novel. According to James Wood, the protagonist of the novel should be regarded a nihilist of the European tradition, a disciple of Nietzsche, Thomas Bernhard and Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Fully accepting the essential stupidity of the human condition,

Sabbath wants to commit suicide but cannot convince himself to do it. He is a Nietzschean “free spirit” who deals in the “exaggerated honesty” that his philosophical mentor demands. As a messiah of nihilism, Sabbath turns the world and its norms upside down, considering fidelity a sin, life a sickness and knowledge harmful. Sabbath also shares Nietzsche’s misogynist perspective and he sees women primarily as a means to sexual pleasure. His crusade against everything decent in human society is also part of this nihilistic vision and sex is his weapon against American sobriety. Moreover, Sabbath’s actions, which are often inhumane and which derive from his nihilistic outlook, reflect an inhumane world. The overall effect on the reader is not simply repulsion, instead the novel rather compels readers to reevaluate their conceptions of good and evil (Wood 250-58; cf. also Diggory 61).⁴⁶ This outlook is accompanied by Sabbath’s hunger for power. As Kelleter has shown, the destructive individualism of Roth’s nihilistic puppeteer is “nothing less than a will to divine power” itself (Kelleter 175-76). This manifests itself both in his desire to create as well as to control human puppets and in his boundless, transgressive sexuality. When one of Roseanna’s friends refers to Sabbath as “the great god Pan”, the narrator seems to second that remark in a curious pun: “‘The great god Pan is dead,’ a *deadpan Sabbath* informed him” (*ST* 275; emphasis added). This pun is not merely a reference to the nihilistic notion of the death of God. It also likens Sabbath’s lechery to the proverbial lust and virility of the phallic god Pan. It also implies that, having lost his appetite for life, Sabbath wishes that death shall come to him as it has come to Pan. He then remarks in a long rant on Judaism that ancient religions worshipped virility as the divine power of creation and that Jews should take pride in the fact that the Canaanite name for God, *Elohim*, is derived from *El*, an ancient and virile bull-god. It is characteristic of Sabbath that he seems to admire pagan faiths and creation myths for their veneration of the phallus, whereas he finds Jehovah’s refusal to accept any other “power beyond *His*” simply “monstrous” (*ST* 278). Sabbath clearly seems to cherish the idea of being a modern day Pan, suggesting that his feats of sexual prowess and manipulation are essentially god-like. Towards the end of the novel, he jokingly calls himself “the Baal Shem Tov-the Master of God’s Good Name” (*ST* 402), who is known as a wandering preacher, legendary worker of miracles and one of the founders of early modern Hasidism. This is very ironic, because Sabbath’s lifestyle is quite the opposite of the conservative

⁴⁶ For an analysis of how nihilism finds expression in the black humour of the novel see Neelakantan, “Sabbath’s Complaint” (2010). For a different view see Krupnick, *Jewish Writing* (2005). Mark Krupnick argues that Sabbath believes in nothing but the “incoherence of things”, which is why any philosophical concept, even nihilism, demands too much inner consistency and certainty of Sabbath, whom Krupnick conceives of as the essence of a “suffering skeptic” (25-26).

Judaism that modern Hasidism represents. But at the same time, this allusion is also fitting, because the *Baal Shem Tov* saw himself as a mediator between the mortal world and the divine (see Ben-Sasson and Rubinstein 743-45). In addition, Krupnick surmises that Sabbath's name may even recall the self-proclaimed Jewish messiah *Sabbatai Sevi*, whose provocative and charismatic actions inspired an influential messianic movement advocating redemption through sin. The transgression of Jewish ritual norms was a cornerstone of *Sabbateanism* and at one point *Sabbatai Sevi* even encouraged followers to overturn the Ten Commandments. Frankism was one of the most influential of *Sabbateanism's* offshoots in Europe and it openly upheld nihilistic doctrines. For his followers, *Jakob Frank* (1726-91) was a reincarnation of *Sabbatai Sevi* and he is known for his famous disputes with his opponents, one of whom was *Israel ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov*. Followers believed in questioning and contending with all forms of organized religion, established traditions and social order in order to achieve true freedom and redemption. (Krupnick 25-26; see also Scholem 342 and 357-58). The parallels to Mickey Sabbath are obvious and in his allusion to the *Baal Shem Tov*, Sabbath seems to acknowledge them ironically: Of course, he is not the conservative *Baal Shem Tov*, but his famous, radical antagonist – a reincarnation of the legendary antinomian *Sabbatai Sevi*. All this suggests that Mickey Sabbath's transgressive individualism and his gloomy nihilism may indeed have messianic qualities. He is the nightmarish culmination of the secularization of the American ideology. He is a villain of Shakespearean proportions, literally a prophet who represents a boundless pursuit of happiness unshackled by the moral restraints of less secularized and less materialist eras and driven by what some Americans see as an excessive hedonism of late twentieth-century America (cf. Patterson, *Restless Giant* 69-70).

These themes of determinism, nihilism and the *theatrum mundi*, are also bolstered by explicit literary allusions. *Sabbath's Theater* is a novel that is suffused with intertextual connections to other works and the most prominent among these are plays. As in the other novels, Roth blends key themes and motifs in *Sabbath's Theater* with concepts and ideas taken from Shakespeare's oeuvre. The two main parts of the novel are each introduced by references to Shakespeare. At the beginning, a quotation from *The Tempest* introduces the reader to the theme of death and the second part of the novel is introduced by a quotation from *Hamlet*. There are also allusions to Shakespeare's Falstaff in the play (cf. Safer, *Mocking* 74-75). Yet the most significant intertext is *King Lear*. Mickey Sabbath is not only an ageing puppeteer who quotes *King Lear* and a director who used to play Lear in his own production of the play, he is rather a "caricature of Lear" and he has difficulties in making clear distinctions between himself and the role he is portraying (Safer, "Tragicomic" 172). This is another allusion to the *theatrum mundi*

tradition. Both Sabbath and Lear are ageing characters at the brink of madness and struggling with the lack of vitality and power that comes with old age. Both undergo a mental breakdown on a “metaphysical heath” and both develop from misanthropes into nihilists. And both are homeless and friendless as they undergo this painful ordeal (Wood 247). The novel shares certain key themes with *King Lear*, for instance homelessness, madness, death, and ageing. In its references to *King Lear*, the novel explicitly draws attention to these parallels. But, more importantly, the concept of a *theatrum mundi* and Sabbath’s concept of nihilism converge in his madness, which is reminiscent of Lear’s. According to Link, it is the notion of the incompetence or even absence of the divine puppeteer and the meaninglessness of human existence which drive many twentieth-century expressions of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor (46). *Sabbath’s Theater* is no exception in this regard. When Sabbath remarks that “the great god Pan is dead” (ST 275), he not only refers to himself but he also expresses the nihilistic concept of the death of God. And when Sabbath symbolically turns into Lear and cannot distinguish between himself and the role anymore, until he undergoes a nervous breakdown reminiscent of Lear’s madness on the heath, this symbolizes both the meaninglessness of life and its essential theatricality. There seems to be no meaningful reality beyond the act itself. *King Lear* is the intertextual bridge that connects Sabbath’s belief that God is dead and life pointless with the notion that the world is nothing but a stage.

The intertextual dimensions of Sabbath’s homeless wanderings in New York are fairly explicit.⁴⁷ Sabbath experiences a “Lear-like breakdown” (Wood 247) in the subterranean bowels of New York’s subway system, being increasingly unable to differentiate between his own self and Lear’s (Safer, “Tragicomic” 172). Significantly, Sabbath discovers that Lear’s words give meaning to his own predicament. He is then forcibly removed from the subway and concludes that he can no longer tell fact from fiction, or the pretence of age and madness from real decay and lunacy (ST 301, 303). Sabbath’s fascination with the *Bowery bums* is juxtaposed with his denunciations of worldly possessions, which mirror Lear’s reactions in his confrontations with homelessness and poverty. In one of his most famous speeches, Lear renounces his former majestic status and embraces the life of the poor, regretting that he has never paid their predicament much attention (*King Lear* 3.4.28-36). Significantly, the encounter between Sabbath and the homeless occurs at the Bowery, where he used to perform as Lear among the *Bowery Basement Players*. Now the homeless have become the major attrac-

⁴⁷ For an investigation of the intertextual connections between *Sabbath’s Theater* and Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part One and Two* see Scheckner, “Roth’s Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath’s Theater*” (2010).

tion and it is here that he symbolically becomes Lear. He realizes how much his own situation resembles Lear's and that Lear's words, "that could have meant nothing at all to him in the theatre of the Bowery Basement Players in 1961", have finally come to give his life meaning. Not for the last time, he decides to end his life (*ST* 303).

This theme of homelessness and madness in *King Lear* and in *Sabbath's Theater* has a socio-political dimension. Sabbath's 1961 production of *King Lear* is re-enacted as Sabbath encounters the *Bowery bums*, realizes that their miserable life is nothing but a "beggar's cabaret", not unlike his own *Indecent Theater* that used to be there. He even compares their performance with the shows that he used to produce there before he metaphorically makes the Bowery his heath and turns into Lear himself. The theatre finally encroaches on the real world, turning the world into a stage, into a *theatrum mundi*. The thematic connections between the novel and *King Lear* thus serve to reinforce the theatrical metaphor that underlies the narrative framework. And this in turn suggests that the bleak portrayal of poverty and homelessness in the novel transcends the narrow context of late twentieth-century America. The reappearance of the homeless in American streets, which came as a shock to many Americans in the 1970s and which the novel dramatizes for instance in Sabbath's *Rip van Winkle*-like experience, is finally presented as a central issue of the human condition. Moreover, Sabbath's erratic and restless wanderings through New York and elsewhere bespeak a sense of quasi-diasporic displacement, which is a frequent motif in Jewish-American writing (cf. Grauer 277). As in *Indignation*, Roth employs the metaphor of the wandering Jew to integrate a Jewish literary tradition into his jeremiad. Neither Marcus Messner nor Mickey Sabbath can find solace in traditional notions of Jewish selfhood and so they are constantly on the move. For Ranen Omer-Sherman, the "theater" that the title of the novel alludes to is "the performative Jewish self", which implies a crisis of Jewish-American selfhood. Especially his longing for a lost feeling of home symbolises a loss of Jewish community and he can be seen as the embodiment of "the pariah Jew without roots or ties to the past" (Omer-Sherman 238-43). On the other hand, Sabbath's displacement can also be seen as an essential aspect of the human condition. In fact, Jewish-American writers of the second and third generation have often tried to represent the diasporic condition of the American Jew as a more general aspect of human life (cf. Zeller 9). It is therefore not surprising that Mickey Sabbath, who is in many ways a very self-centred person and often indifferent to the sufferings of others, has strong sympathies for these beggars at the Bowery. He can relate to their predicament precisely because he sees in it the mirror image of his own rootless displacement. The American desire to reinvent oneself as an agent of change in a ritual of generational rededication may go back as far as the colonial peri-

od, but it has come to be a curse for Mickey Sabbath, a symptom of his uprootedness. Like Marcus Messner, he is unable to reinvent himself as a representative American and thereby to fill the vacuum left by the loss of traditional Jewish community and communal identity.

4.3 The Ideological Framework of *Sabbath's Theater*

Roth's approach to the American fifties is different in *Sabbath's Theater*. Unlike *I Married a Communist* and *Indignation*, *Sabbath's Theater* is not set in the American fifties, although they form the backdrop against which the United States of the 1990s are assessed. *Sabbath's Theater* is also different in its treatment of fifties nostalgia, as it is a novel that embraces American nostalgia and investigates its roots. At the same time, the novel ridicules this mentality and exposes the moral bigotry of this supposedly golden age in American history. Two characters are juxtaposed at the very core of this jeremiad: Mickey Sabbath and Norman Cowan. The former is a poor, non-conformist and unsuccessful artist driven by an exceedingly selfish pursuit of happiness in the form of individual freedom and sexual pleasure. The latter is a fairly successful and wealthy producer of Broadway shows. Both are representatives of the American Dream and whereas Sabbath's reckless and self-centred self seeks to assert and reinvent itself over and over again at the expense of others, Cowan is a self-made American who distinguishes himself in his unconditional caring and concern for others. It is at this point that the novel is most affirmative of the tenets of the American ideology. Its critique of America resides not so much in an attack on the American myth of the self-made man, but rather in the conspicuous lack of caring and concern for others that is demonstrated in Mickey Sabbath's rampant individualism and the failure of American society to deal with the issue of homelessness. It is curious but maybe not very surprising that one of Philip Roth's most provocative novels is actually fairly conservative in its treatment of the American Dream. Beyond the fierce attacks on America's seemingly degraded state and its failure to live up to its promises for many poor Americans and beyond its critique of a destructive greed for instant gratification, Roth actually preaches hope and faith in the American success myth as well as confidence in America's sense of community.

It is a great achievement that in spite of Mickey Sabbath's appalling and yet compelling excesses the reader can still feel strong sympathy for this poor and miserable life. He "reminds us that not only lovable creatures experience suffering" (Safer, *Mocking* 67). As in *King Lear*, Mickey Sabbath's eminent literary ancestor, one feels a certain compassion for the character notwithstanding all his hateful actions. This allows Roth to avoid a shallow

sentimentality and a simplistic treatment of the sensitive issue of homelessness. Unlike much of late twentieth century discourse on homelessness, the novel does not encourage readers to see a homeless Sabbath, unable to support himself, as a victim of unfortunate social and political circumstances. He is as much the victim of the historical conditions in the second half of the twentieth century as of his own actions. This makes Sabbath a very suitable symbol of a spreading mentality among Americans in recent decades, according to which the United States are mainly seen in terms of malaise, decline and decay. *Sabbath's Theater* is a novel that manages to expose this mentality and its nostalgia for the American fifties as a product of a particular historical moment in the 1980s and the 1990s. For Mickey Sabbath is not the only *Rip van Winkle* who is baffled or even appalled by the side effects of the rapid revolutions that the United States underwent in the decades following the Second World War. And the novel dramatizes the emotional process that causes this longing for a bygone America quite well.

In this context, the novel also poses the question of individual agency, a theme that is actually contained in all three novels discussed in this thesis and that is crucial to Roth's critique of American individualism. Roth uses the metaphor of the world as a stage to elevate these issues, especially homelessness, from a specific American context to an exploration of the human condition. Sabbath, who associates puppets with control over others, is himself increasingly lost in the novel and himself a puppet of forces that seem to be beyond his control. Historically, it is the Second World War and the losses that his family has had to endure that have ruined his life and that continue to haunt him in his old age. Psychologically, he is unable to deal with his passions, i.e. his excessive libido on the one hand and his strong death-wish on the other hand. Like Marcus and Ira, he is fixed on the American Dream and especially the freedom and success it promises to the self-made man, but his obsession with it is strangely ambiguous. As a nihilist, he denies the normative power of American values or morals as such, but at the same time he clings to rather simple notions of liberty, dissent and even seems to regret at times that he has not used the opportunity that the American success myth seems to have offered him. What makes his attitude towards such American concepts ambiguous is the irony and cynicism with which he often talks about them. Nevertheless, he is driven by an unshakable faith in American dissent and non-conformism. Having chosen the path of the lonesome dissenter, he feels compelled always to act and to adopt roles – up to the point that it becomes more and more difficult for him to identify the “real” Sabbath behind the masks. The intertextual connections to *King Lear* and the different uses of the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* serve to highlight the suggestion that questions of human identity, agency and poverty are essential problems of the human condition.

In sum, the novel's bleak attitude towards the American pursuit of happiness is well encapsulated by the (probably fictional) article from the *Journal of Medical Ethics* that is quoted in the novel, proposing that "happiness be classified as a psychiatric disorder", because it is "statistically abnormal" (ST 280). Nobody in the novel achieves happiness. People are surrounded by death and depression, suicide and loss, and even the few material successes such as Norman's stand out from a multitude of impoverished individuals who all fail in their own ways to seek happiness. And even Norman cannot escape depression and marital betrayal, in spite of his material success and his well-meaning nature. *Sabbath's Theater* is a bleak jeremiad, but as a jeremiad it also offers its readers a glimpse of hope in Norman Cowan's humanity.

5. The Past Undetonated

After all, what they sit around calling the ‘past’ at these things isn’t a fragment of a fragment of the past. It’s the past undetonated – nothing is really brought back, nothing. It’s nostalgia. It’s bullshit. (AP 61)

In *American Pastoral*, Roth’s novel about the American sixties, the memory of post-war America is blasted into an irretrievable past. In the novel, it is the Rimrock bombing of 1968 which becomes the central symbol of the end of an era. For Swede Levov, it is like waking up from a dream and finding that life is not what it was used to be. Yet unlike Mickey Sabbath, who has slept through the revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s, the Swede is in the thick of the action: It is his own daughter who detonates the bomb and thereby sets the slow disintegration of his life in motion. Roth’s awareness of the widespread nostalgia about the supposedly golden age of post-war America cannot only be found in the words of Swede’s brother Jerry, which are quoted above, but also in the structure of the novel. The first chapter is entitled “Paradise remembered” and it contains various passages dealing with the historiographic difficulties in reconstructing an irretrievable past. The metaphorical explosion in *American Pastoral* suggests that the fifties are gone for good and that nostalgia is the only thing that remains. “Writing turns you into somebody who’s always wrong” (AP 63), says an ageing Nathan Zuckerman, almost apologetically, as if to defend the speech that he has decided not to hold at his high-school reunion in 1995. As in the other three novels, Roth undermines Zuckerman’s own narration by questioning the reliability of historiography itself.

American Pastoral may not be a novel about the American fifties, yet its subject matter and its structure reflect some of the themes and ideas that are discussed in this book. The first pages of the novel paint the image of a Newark in serious decline after the ‘67 riots, a Newark stricken by poverty and crime (24-25), and juxtapose it with a nostalgic memory of the American forties and fifties. In the speech that Zuckerman has written for his high-school reunion, he speaks of a time in which the ambitions of the American people were “limited no longer by the past – there was the neighbourhood, the communal determination that we, the children should escape poverty, ignorance, disease, social injury and intimidation – escape, above all, insignificance”. He suggests that there used to be a boundless optimism in American culture, “a big belief in life”, yet adds that this is nothing more than a nostalgic view of the past (AP 41-42). This underscores the overall impres-

sion that Roth's novels of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, and *American Pastoral* is no exception, demonstrate a certain wariness with respect to nostalgia and historiography. In *Sabbath's Theater*, *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *Indignation*, Roth decidedly seeks the analogy between past and present, although he is always careful to acknowledge the fictional character of his literary historiography. His works are therefore *historiographic metafiction*s which dramatize the peculiar presence of the past in our time. *Sabbath's Theater* testifies most clearly to this co-presence of the fifties and contemporary America in his work. This co-presence finds expression in various elements of the novels, ranging from the return of Sabbath's ghostly mother or Zuckerman's imitation of Ira's hermit-like life in the shack to the remarkable words with which Roth encapsulates the essential pastness of the present in *American Pastoral*: "Sometimes I found myself looking at everyone as though it were still 1950, as though '1995' were 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" (*AP* 46). These words suggest that the nostalgic memory of the past can be more powerful and can seem more real than the actual present – a view that Mickey Sabbath would subscribe to without hesitation. As *Sabbath's Theater* wonderfully illuminates, nostalgia for the *past* originates in a *present* state of mind. More importantly, the nostalgic vision of the past may provide the desired semblance of predictability and security in life that one may find lacking in the present. Yet it is not only in Mickey Sabbath's or Nathan Zuckerman's nostalgia that the presence of the past finds its expression in the novels.

As the present study has shown, Roth evokes the world of the American fifties in order to chide the often bleak circumstances of his time. He may be wary of nostalgia and he may actively seek to deconstruct it in novels like *Sabbath's Theater*, *Indignation* or *American Pastoral*, but he does not shun using the past for his own didactic purposes. The American jeremiad provides the ideological structure for this undertaking. In each of the novels, Roth uses the setting of the American fifties to highlight and participate in the socio-political discourses of his time. In *Indignation*, the Korean War serves as a foil against which the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and their representations in the media are assessed and denounced. In *I Married a Communist*, the McCarthy witch hunts provide the context for a critical assessment of the culture wars of the 1990s, especially questions regarding the role of gossip in American politics and the value and purpose of literature in American education. In *Sabbath's Theater*, it is the bigotry of fifties morals that supposedly returns to haunt the United States of the 1990s. And more importantly, the image of the prospering fifties becomes also an instrument for chiding the failure of American society to adequately deal with the spec-

tre of homelessness. In all three novels, bleak portrayals of American family life serve to undermine conservative utopias representing the American fifties as an era in which the conservative cult of domesticity was still an uncontested ideal of gender relations. These novels undermine the nostalgic conservative narrative of “an era when chastity was still ascendant, a national cause to be embraced by the young like freedom and democracy”, as Nathan Zuckerman ironically encapsulates this ideal in *American Pastoral* (43). This also entails that the novels criticise conservatives who have attempted to revitalise such notions of the American family since the Reagan Revolution. It is in these analogies and juxtapositions of American life in the fifties and contemporary America that the co-presence of the past in the present comes to the fore most powerfully – and most ideologically. These novels do not simply denounce the American Dream as an illusion and Roth’s novels are not simply antagonistic or subversive. Although they draw our attention to the parallels between the American fifties and the United States today in order to illuminate in what ways the American experiment may have failed its far-reaching promises, these novels are also an attempt to light the way to a better America and a better future. They uphold American foundational ideals such as individualism, dissent, equality, the freedom of speech, American solidarity and even the myth of the self-made man, while they ostensibly attack the failure of late twentieth-century America to live up to these promises. Each novel contains characters or places that become embodiments of these values and which offer a glimpse of hope in a world that stifles their aspirations and ideals.

In writing jeremiads, Roth engages in an affirmative process of acculturation. He writes himself into the American tradition by employing the rhetorical structure of the American jeremiad and by initiating a fertile dialogue between his fiction and classic works of the American canon. This dialogue comprises not just a series of various intertextual references, but Roth actually weaves central themes of these works into the fabric of his own fiction. He thereby places himself in this canonical tradition and undergoes an affirmative process of Americanisation. This process consists of a constant reiteration and reconfiguration of symbols from American collective memory, such as numerous references to the Founders, the symbolic concept of teenage rebellion as a signifier of national independence or the symbolic function of clothing as a signifier of social status and integration. His fictions reiterate and dramatize the age-old American conflict between self and society, yet they also serve to embellish these motifs and symbols by suffusing them with elements of a distinctly Jewish literary tradition such as the *schlemiel*, the *shiksa*-motif, the *Wandering Jew* of the diaspora, or even allusions to Jewish history, for instance the references to *Sabbatai Sevi* and *Israel ben Eliezer Baal Shem Tov*. Roth’s participation in the rhetorical visions of the

American Dream can therefore be considered both as a form of acculturation and as a ritual of generational rededication to the ideals of the Founders.

What complicates these ideological frameworks are different narrative strategies based on ambiguity, indeterminacy, unreliability, and metafictionality. Very often these strategies serve to foreground a key theme in Roth's fiction, the limitations of our knowledge. The notion is summed up by Nathan Zuckerman in *American Pastoral*, who observes that "the fact remains that getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It's getting them wrong that is living" (AP 35). It is, however, very doubtful whether these self-reflexive elements really deconstruct the ideological mechanics at the heart of these *historiographic metafiction*s. In *Indignation*, a narrative strategy of ambiguity and unreliability serves to create a world characterised by ontological indeterminacy. This effect is reinforced by a complex blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, especially with respect to the fictional setting *Winesburg, Ohio*. Yet for all its emphasis on the unknowability of our world, the ideological impetus of graphic descriptions of violence in the novel is hardly mitigated. Indeterminacy is also a narrative strategy in *I Married a Communist*, in which Roth experiments with autobiography. He blends elements from his own life and from Claire Bloom's memoir *Leaving a Doll's House* with the lives of several fictional characters in the novel. This is a strategy targeted at a specific type of reader, his core-readership who is familiar with the autobiographical pranks in his fiction and who has been following Roth's and Zuckerman's careers for several decades. The metafictional character of the novel thus functions most powerfully only in an interpretive community that is used to look for the numerous autobiographical hints that Roth has worked into the novel. However, the ideological impetus of *I Married a Communist*, which is established by juxtaposing the lives of Ira and Murray Ringold, is not impeded by this metafictional framework. And likewise, in *Sabbath's Theater*, the numerous intertextual references and the integration of the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* does little to mitigate the ideological thrust of the depictions of homelessness in the novel. Nevertheless, the novel manages to establish a critical distance towards nostalgic sentiments about postwar America.

Such strategies serve another purpose as well. They allow Philip Roth to challenge the "constraints" of his own imagination, allow him to flex his novelistic muscles. This self-confessed intent manifests itself for instance in his formal experiments with voice in *Indignation*, almost literally a voice from beyond the grave, in his autobiographical games of hide and seek and in his intertextual dialogue with the American canon. He also explores the question of a culturally determined identity and imagination in his investigation of historiography and especially his exploration of the ways in which the individual subject is constrained by historical circumstances.

The adversarial potential of these formal experiments and of the narrative strategies outlined above varies from novel to novel. In *Indignation*, the fictional *Historical Note* at the end of the novel effectively deprives the novel of its utopian celebration of a better America after the cultural revolutions of the American sixties. This bespeaks an interesting rejection of the American ideology that sets the novel apart from the other two works discussed in this study. Since a serious affirmation of American foundational values can only be traced in the telling contrast between the two colleges, the novel can be considered an anti-jeremiad which bends the rules of the American symbolism more forcefully than *I Married a Communist* or *Sabbath's Theater* – works which are indeed jeremiads proper. Unlike *Indignation*, they represent a much more celebratory attitude towards American core values. Especially *I Married a Communist* is the least ironic novel in its use of the ideological framework of the jeremiad, which Roth has inherited from the American literary tradition. His writing is therefore not simply antagonistic, but his fiction is structured according to a complex and uneasy balance between affirmation and resistance with respect to the American Dream. At the beginning of *American Pastoral*, Nathan Zuckerman explains that in the 1940s the Jewish community of Newark “entered into a fantasy about itself and about the world” (3). This fantasy is the promise of “America”, a promise with which generations of immigrants have had to come to terms. This is what Philip Roth dramatizes in his novels. His fictions do not simply resist this fantasy, as sites of socialisation they also help readers to explore and even embrace its collective symbolic reality.

6. Works Cited

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Abbreviations

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- 59 Bettina Fauser-Löffler: **Erzählte Gefühle – Die Verhandlung von Emotionskonzepten in der amerikanischen Erzählliteratur zwischen 1850 und 1910**
"Erzählte Gefühle" untersucht die literarische Verhandlung von Emotionskonzepten in der amerikanischen Literatur von 1860 bis 1910. Die Studie verbindet Emotionstheorien und Entwicklungspsychologie mit Theorien des Fiktionalen in einer literaturhistorischen Neubewertung der 'Gilded Age'-Ära. In nuancierten Fallstudien zu Susan Warner, Mary Wilkins Freeman und Henry James zeigt die Autorin, inwieweit sich das Verständnis und die Darstellung von Emotionen im Verlauf des 19. Jahrhunderts veränderten und im Zusammenhang mit sowohl populären als auch hochkulturellen literarischen Bewegungen gesellschaftliche Relevanz erlangen konnten.
ISBN 978-3-86821-684-4, 196 S., kt., € 27,50 (2017)
- 58 Marcus Münch: **Building Faith on New-Found Shores – Die religiöse Dimension in der Dichtung der Fireside Poets**
Im 19. Jahrhundert zählten die heutzutage fast vergessenen Fireside Poets Bryant, Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell und Holmes zu den populärsten amerikanischen Dichtern. Insbesondere während des Zeitraums vom Bürgerkrieg bis zur Jahrhundertwende wurden sie von einer großen Leserschaft, zumal aus den bürgerlichen Schichten, als geistig-moralische Leitbilder und Ikonen der kulturellen Eigenständigkeit Amerikas verehrt. Die vorliegende Studie widmet sich den bislang kaum gewürdigten unterschiedlichen religiösen, intellektuellen und gesellschaftspolitischen Ausrichtungen, die meist hinter dem rezeptionsgeschichtlich entstandenen einheitlichen Gesamtbild der fünf Lyriker als einer Institution zurücktreten. Auf der Grundlage einer ausgreifenden Textanalyse skizziert die Untersuchung die ebenso verschiedenen wie vielschichtigen religiösen Weltentwürfe der Fireside Poets, welche zugleich die krisenhaften Wandlungen der amerikanischen Gesellschaft auf dem Weg in die Moderne verdeutlichen. ISBN 978-3-86821-642-4, 248 S., kt., € 30,00 (2016)
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Since the late twentieth century, non-Caucasian segments of the US population have grown exponentially. Ethnicity "sells," and companies and ethnic groups participate in the representation and marketing of cultural and racial specificities. While demographic changes have thus facilitated the rise of ethnic marketing in recent years, paradoxically, at the same time media representatives postulate a 'postracial' or 'postethnic' society. The contributions in this collection examine the production and performance of ethnic and racial identities between representational and identity politics, economy, and consumerism. Coming from a range of disciplines, such as cultural and literary studies, ethnic studies, cultural anthropology, and history, the contributors' case studies address such diverse fields as ethno-tourism, ethnicity in visual culture, ethnic marketing and advertising, music, beauty pageants, and law enforcement. ISBN 978-3-86821-630-1, 265 S., kt., € 34,50 (2015)

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