A NEW LITERARY REALISM: ARTISTIC RENDERINGS OF ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, AND SEXUALITY IN THE NARRATIVES OF PHILIP ROTH

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2012

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This dissertation explores *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (1959), *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *The Counterlife* (1986), *The Facts* (1988), *Operation Shylock* (1993), *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995), and *The Human Stain* (2000), arguing that Roth relishes the telling of the story and the search for self within that telling. With attention to narrative technique and its relation to issues surrounding reality and identity, Roth's narratives stress unreliability, causing Roth to create characters searching for a more complex interpretation of self. Chapter I examines Roth's negotiation of dual identities as Neil Klugman in *Goodbye, Columbus* feels alienated and displaced from Christianized America. The search for identity and the merging of American Christianity and Judaism remain a focus in Chapter II, which explores the implications of how, in *The Ghost Writer*, a young Nathan Zuckerman visits his mentor E.I. Lonoff to find him living in what he believes to be a non-Jewish environment—the American wilderness. Chapter II also examines the difficulties of cultural assimilation in "Eli, the Fanatic," in which Eli must shed outward appearances of Judaism to fit into the mostly Protestant community of Woodenton. Relative to the negotiation of multiple identities, Chapter III considers Sabbath’s attempt, in *Sabbath’s Theater*, to reconcile his spiritual and physical self when seeking to avoid his inevitable death. Exploring a further dimension of the search for self, Chapter IV traces the legacy of stereotyped notions of identity, considering ways in which Roth subverts stereotypes in *The Human Stain*. The search for identity and its particular truths remains a focus of Chapter V, which explores Roth's
creation of an unstable reality through *The Counterlife, The Facts, Operation Shylock*,
and *The Human Stain*, suggesting that the literary imagination matters more than truth
in fiction. In its attention to Roth’s focus on identity, race, and narrative technique, this
dissertation contributes to the evolution of criticism addressing the social significance of
the major works of Philip Roth.
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CHAPTER I

A NEW LITERARY REALISM: ARTISTIC RENDERINGS OF ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, AND SEXUALITY IN THE NARRATIVES OF PHILIP ROTH


In his essay "Writing American Fiction," Roth says that, by focusing on the self, the writer can create an extraordinary outcome (*RMO* 189). I argue that, because Roth seeks to focus on the remarkable, he centers his work on binary oppositions: author/narrator, father/son, past/present, physical/metaphysical, fiction/fact. For Roth's narrators these juxtapositions create a reality filled with uncertainty: just as readers cannot trust any aspect of his art, so Roth questions reality in general. Anticipating a vital dimension of Roth's outlook, William Dean Howells, in *Criticism and Fiction* (1892), declares that "a story of our own life, honestly studied and faithfully represented, troubles [readers] with varied misgivings. They are not sure that it is literature….Its characters, so like their own, strike them as commonplace [and] they say they do not wish to know such people" (41). Howells thereby foreshadows concerns that I
categorize as part of Roth’s literary realism.\textsuperscript{2} Indeed, the works of Roth focus on the inability of readers to trust texts in which narrators juxtapose every idea with its antithesis; at the same time, Roth’s creation of a questionable version of reality makes it impossible for readers to determine where art ends and reality begins: the two often become inseparable in Roth’s narratives. Thus, by generating this distrust in fiction, Roth dramatizes the constructed nature of both art and life.

My investigation of Roth’s narrative technique emphasizes, as well, how Roth threatens our understanding of self. Whether his characters are negotiating what it means to be Jewish and American or struggling with concepts of physical or metaphysical, each of Roth’s juxtapositions leads to the characters’ search for identity. I argue that Roth’s juxtapositions create unreliability and cause the characters/narrators to struggle with the idea of fiction and reality as a construction. In fact, Roth’s characters are in constant search for balance, and that search translates into an attempt to define their own reality and their own version of self. Although critics note how a search for identity in Roth’s works entails struggles with the establishment of self (Jones and Nance), they do not demonstrate the pressures against which the characters struggle. Departing, as well, from Jones, Nance, and Cooper—who emphasize autobiography and fail to explore fully Roth’s focus on the artificiality of art and life—I suggest that, because Roth’s narratives stress unreliability, Roth creates characters searching for a more complex interpretation of self.

To that end, this dissertation examines the precarious version of reality evident in the binary oppositions of Roth’s narratives, illustrating how the instability of existence causes characters to pursue, and attempt to establish, their own personal (more
reliable) reality and self. The first chapter explores Roth's difficult negotiation of American and Jewish identities, ultimately concluding that his characters struggle to manage dual selves because being Jewish means that they will not always be able to experience American culture in the same way that non-Jewish persons do. One of Roth's most formidable opponents, Irving Howe, states that Roth's characters, because of the distance from their Jewish history, have been assimilated into American culture, and he faults Roth for having separated Jews from their roots. Howe fails to recognize Roth's belief that Jews have as much right to American culture as do non-Jews; nor does Howe discern that Roth brings Jews closer to their roots by demonstrating the inescapability of one's history. At the same time, I explore how Roth addresses the difficulties faced by Jews living in a predominantly Christian-American environment.

I argue, as well, that Roth presents identities in opposition because his novels contrast American and Christian values, creating Jewish characters who feel alienated and displaced from Christianized America. Roth's characters often develop better self-awareness because of their dual sense of displacement. In Shop Talk (2001), Primo Levi expresses the complexity in Roth's work for characters who live as outsiders in American culture: "don't you feel yourself, you, Philip Roth, 'rooted' in your country and at the same time 'a mustard grain'? In your books I perceive a sharp mustard flavor" (13). It is this "mustard flavor" that characterizes Goodbye, Columbus (1959), in which Neil Klugman questions his ability to have a successful Jewish experience in America because of America's investment in the Christian tradition and the Protestant work ethic. To illustrate my point, I draw upon Ralph Ellison's essay collection Shadow and Act (1953) in which Ellison details the strong Christian tradition in this country and the
difficulty of negotiating two identities. Roth and Ellison, I argue, share an idealism about the successful (even though difficult) combination of two identities—whether those are ethnic or political.³

In approaching such emphases, this dissertation addresses a previously overlooked fusion of Christian and Jewish values in "Goodbye, Columbus." Scholarship that posits "Goodbye, Columbus" as mainly the story of the Jewish boy discovering America does not begin to account for the novella's intricacy.⁴ Rather, Neil is discovering just how invested America is in Christian tradition: he attempts to deal with the difficulties faced by a non-Christian in an environment where Jews take on Christian values. In juxtaposing Neil's life in the city with that of the suburban existence of Brenda Patimkin, Klugman finds the Patimkins' Jewish experience to be very different from his own. The Patimkins live an Edenic (seemingly Christian) life of money and comfort, and Neil feels that his way of life is inferior. He is unable to reconcile the Patimkins' version of suburban paradise with his own ideas of Judaism because he believes that the Patimkins have the most American (and therefore most nearly Christian) existence. Even while he does not understand the Patimkins and questions their devotion to Judaism, Neil wishes to be more like them, for he deems their experience more American. I argue, therefore, that the book is less about Judaism than it is about the negotiation of dual religious identities.⁵

It is Ralph Ellison, though, who helped Roth navigate the difficulties of managing dual identities and fortified Roth's resolve to write with honest representations of Jewish people. After the publication of Goodbye, Columbus and Other Stories (1959), the Jewish community accused Roth of being anti-Semitic and self-hating. Roth, who was
asked to attend the convention of the Anti-Defamation League in 1962 and was then attacked for his depiction of the Jewish people, was defended by Ellison, who understood the importance of representing the arduous nature of American life for minorities. Thus, I explore the connection of Ellison to Roth and the important model that Ellison provided through works like *Invisible Man* and *Shadow and Act*.

The search for identity and the merging of American Christianity and Judaism remains a focus in Chapter III, which explores the implications of how, in *The Ghost Writer* a young Nathan Zuckerman visits his mentor E.I. Lonoff to find him living in what he believes to be a non-Jewish environment—the American wilderness. Zuckerman, I argue, ends up appreciating the ways in which Jews seek to assimilate into the western, Christian version of American life. Zuckerman, who idolizes Lonoff and his ability to cut himself off from the rest of the world, believes that Lonoff is a self-made man of the frontier: he tames the wilderness to make a place for himself; and, even as Zuckerman insists that this is not Jewish behavior, Zuckerman searches for and finds a father figure in Lonoff. In addition, as Zuckerman seeks an ideal father, he establishes Amy (who plays Anne Frank in Zuckerman's fantasies) as a Jewish martyr. Thus, Zuckerman constructs a Christian narrative to manage his own identity negotiation. Although Zuckerman does not find Lonoff's experience especially Jewish, he does admire his excessively American experience; like Neil Klugman, he unwittingly constructs a reality focused on a Christian narrative tradition.

Chapter III also explores the difficulties of cultural assimilation in "Eli, the Fanatic," in which Eli must shed any outward appearances of Judaism to fit into the mostly Protestant community of Woodenton. Eli, who has been asked by the Jews of
the community to rid the town of a yeshivah in order that the "modernized" Jews might live without the reminder of their more fanatical expressions of faith, finds that he is unable to cut himself off from this part of his Jewish history. Roth here highlights the inability to run from one's past and the difficulties of asserting a Jewish identity in a culture so focused on Christianity. Ultimately, though, both Nathan Zuckerman and Eli forget their place in Jewish history and seek answers in the transcendental categories that evoke key emphases of the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Whereas, Eli ends up slumped on the hospital floor, facing the difficulties of cultural assimilation and realizing that he can no longer run from it, Nathan runs from his historical connection to Judaism and the truth that he might discover there.

In light of Roth's focus on the difficulties of stepping outside of Christian notions of self, Chapter IV explores the difficulty Mickey Sabbath has, in Sabbath's Theater (1995), transcending the strict confines of latter-day Puritan control; nor can Sabbath liberate himself through antinomian expressions of sexuality. Rather, he constantly searches for a reason to live by rationalizing that the physical is the most significant urge and direction of human life and that physicality ultimately determines our paths and destinies. Thus emerges the juxtaposition of physicality and morality in Sabbath's Theater. Drawing on Hawthorne's construction of Arthur Dimmesdale, this chapter suggests that Sabbath's efforts to be subversive become ensnared within a lingering web of Puritan control from which he struggles futilely to liberate himself. Believing that his sexuality is where he might find freedom, Sabbath asserts his physicality in a manner consistent with the unprincipled sexuality in the writings of the Marquis de Sade. It is not that Roth advocates sadism; rather, he, like Sade, creates situations
where characters are reminded of their precarious metaphysical circumstances through the physical act of sex.

I argue that Sabbath’s Theater dramatizes the importance of the physical and the element of antinomian control, while Sabbath seeks to evade death through sexual provocation. He therefore uses sex as a way to help forget the painful death of his beloved girlfriend, Drenka, as he creates a morality based exclusively in physical desires. Although he attempts metaphysical communication with his dead mother, his reality is nonetheless grounded in the physical world because, for him, the typical notion of morality will not provide requisite gratification, either in life or death. Just as Roth’s other characters attempt to negotiate multiple identities, so Sabbath must reconcile his spiritual and physical self when seeking to keep death at bay.

Exploring a further dimension of literary dramatization of the search for self, Chapter V traces the legacy of stereotyped notions of identity, examining the ways in which Roth subverts stereotypes in The Human Stain. This chapter begins with an exploration of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s recourse to stereotype in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and progresses to challenges posed by James Baldwin to Stowe. I argue that Wright and Ellison figure in the drama of The Human Stain, which advances the importance of representing the Jewish experience honestly with all of its many flaws and imperfections because it is exactly these characteristics that link us to humanity in general.

This exploration of The Human Stain likewise moves beyond existing scholarship about Roth and race by drawing upon Melville’s “Benito Cereno.” My dissertation breaks new ground by showing the expanded range and complexity of Roth’s attraction to the works of Melville. As Coleman Silk attempts to subvert his connection to his African-
American heritage, the improbability of removing himself from his historical predicament becomes everywhere evident, ultimately suggesting that the human stain resides in the flawed quality of human nature and its resulting identity.

The search for identity and its particular truths remains a focus of Chapter V, which explores Roth's creation of an unstable reality through *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Human Stain*. Roth's ability to shroud his characters in ambiguity is especially important in *The Facts* and *The Human Stain* because in these narratives Roth intimates his narrators' unreliability, thereby calling attention to the power of narrators in both the creation of narratives and in the interpretation of so-called facts. This realization of the authority of the narrator and the author highlights the difference between author, narrator, and character, reminding us of the distinctness of each voice or persona, all of which figure in the text's instability; the resulting uncertainty produces characters hoping to find consistency through their search for self. Stated otherwise, when these narrators and their audiences fail to find a truth that makes sense, they create one.

For instance, in *The Human Stain*, Roth's narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, fills in blanks with his own imaginative ramblings while in *The Facts* Roth writes the story of his own life and then asserts the unreliability of his "true" story. Indeed, rather than tell the story of Coleman Silk, Zuckerman projects his own preoccupations—both sexual and racial—into the text. Although Zuckerman's narrative presence is evident throughout the text, it is not until the very end—when Zuckerman encounters Les Farley—that we might infer the degree to which Zuckerman has imposed his own imagined reality upon the work. *The Facts*, in turn, features Roth's most revealing use of unreliable narration,
even in an ostensible autobiography. The title itself anticipates Roth's questioning of human perception in the context of whoever chances to narrate a given outlook. In the work's opening letter, Roth explains his aim for writing this faithful version of his life. After Roth tells his story, Zuckerman (one of Roth's narrators) responds to Roth's version of events by questioning every aspect of Roth's narrative. Zuckerman accuses Roth of twisting the facts to create coherency and authenticity—the very technique that Zuckerman uses in *The Human Stain*. Himself an unreliable narrator, Zuckerman knows the fragile nature of truth and reality. This chapter stands significantly to enhance scholarship dealing with the relation between Roth's epistemology and his literary aesthetics.

Furthering this examination of the instability of life and art in Roth's work, Chapter V continues to explore the evasiveness of truth through a blurring of the line between fact and fiction in *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*. I emphasize Roth's use of synchronization to undermine faith in either concept. Helpful here is Alan Cooper's suggestion that Roth confuses readers by dissolving characters just as readers begin to identify with them. Still, I argue that the confusion of the reader goes beyond character disintegration. In these texts, Roth utilizes mirror imagining, dramatizing both the uncertainty of reality and his characters' quest for the evasive "self."

In *The Counterlife*, Roth continues his investigation of synchronicity through an exploration of truth and fiction in the life of two brothers, Henry and Nathan Zuckerman. These characters find that difficult identity negotiation is still present, even in Israel. To stress the synchronization of the text, two brothers narrate the novel and endure a complex search for self; yet their quest is entirely different: while Henry travels to Israel
to get to the core of himself, Nathan finds that he will realize his identity only with the
birth of a child. This search for self is extremely important in *The Counterlife* because in
this text, while the reader struggles to make sense out of the plot, it becomes
increasingly evident that the *truth* of this tale is less important than the imagination
behind the telling. Thus, Roth highlights the importance of the imagination for the
narrative and suggests that the elaborate matters more than the accurate in his work.

Building on the uncertainty in *The Counterlife*, this chapter likewise explores the
instability of the narrative in *Operation Shylock*, whose intricate juxtaposition of fact and
fiction renders futile the reader's capacity to posit a difference between art and life.8
Because of his insistence that the novel is true, Roth, the narrator, immediately situates
a connection to reality and creates an opposition (because of the outlandish subject
matter) with fantasy. In addition, Roth's claim to truth in such a seemingly fictitious
environment again suggests that the narrator is unreliable. I propose, therefore, that
Roth situates *Operation Shylock* somewhere between imagination and realism, with the
narrator Philip Roth searching for the character Philip Roth, thus focusing the attention
of the reader on the quest for self. Yet the character Philip Roth's journey is magnified
by the author Philip Roth's synchronization of opposites: fantasy/reality, Israel/America,
author/character. Ultimately, though, these works highlight the importance of the
imaginatively-told story, and this chapter focuses on this questioning of reality and the
final realization that imagination trumps other considerations. In its attention, therefore,
to the imaginative and synchronistic underpinnings of Roth's attention to identity, race,
and narrative technique, this dissertation contributes to the evolution of criticism
addressing the imagination and social significance of the major works of Philip Roth.
CHAPTER II
"THEY'RE GOYIM, MY KIDS": THE PROBLEM WITH GOING NATIVE IN GOODBYE, COLUMBUS

Although in Goodbye, Columbus (1959) Neil Klugman seems simply to navigate a carefree summer fling, I propose that, beneath that veneer of nonchalance, Neil subconsciously doubts his ability to have a successful Jewish experience in America—indeed, Roth's narrator struggles to manage being Jewish and American. This chapter explores Roth's arduous negotiation of American and Jewish identities, all the while examining Neil's struggle to deal with dual selves in a world where being Jewish challenges Jewish cultural assimilation in a society dominated by a Protestant work ethic for both Jews and goyim. Key to these considerations of identity and assimilation is the related thinking of both Ralph Ellison and Herman Melville.

Goodbye, Columbus treats identity in a challenging and sometimes uncomfortable manner; certainly, Roth—early in his career—came under attack from Irving Howe, who claimed that Roth's characters, because of their distressing distance from Jewish history, had been assimilated into American culture and were separated Jews from their roots. Add to that criticism the charge that Goodbye, Columbus perpetuates stereotypes of self-hatred in Jewish suburban life. Although valid in terms of the Patimkins' difficult relationship with their own Jewishness, such readings overlook Roth's supple treatment, in Goodbye, Columbus, of the challenges confronted by Jewish people in their quest to achieve the American dream. Whether one thinks of immigrants trying to achieve easy wealth or second-generation Americans simply trying to compete with their suburban neighbors, American society asks them to conform to a
predominantly Protestant ethic. Roth’s characters toil in a nation that is unwilling, rhetoric to the contrary, to accept ethnic diversity. Nor is the outcome of exclusion redemptive, for Roth highlights the emptiness in the lives of Jews who have distanced themselves from their Jewish past through a process of social assimilation that further complicates their negotiation of ethnic and national identities.

*Goodbye, Columbus* addresses the difficulties faced by such Jews—with Jewish "practice" ranging somewhere between non-affiliated, to reformed, to conservative to orthodox—living in a country heavily invested in Christian tradition. Roth recognizes that Christian ideals and hegemony have founded this country, as evidenced in his autobiography *The Facts* (1988). In this work Roth describes the hardships and tribulations of growing up Jewish in a society hostile to his Jewish neighborhood. Nevertheless, as a child Roth was willing to do whatever he could to gain access to American culture; like Neil in *Goodbye, Columbus*, Roth yearned to be closer to the American norm. He therefore befriended his gentile classmates and felt "expansively 'American'" (37) by sharing lunch with these Christians. Roth also took the example of his father, who had worked successfully with Gentiles at Metropolitan Life. Since Roth's father had received a framed replica of the Declaration of Independence after a lucrative year at work, young Philip associated the Christian executives at his father's company with the "venerated champions of equality who signed that cherished document" (*TF* 21-2). That odd confluence of religious affiliation and nationality arguably comprises a link in Roth's childhood consciousness between Christianity and America's revered founding.
Years later Roth would come to realize that the gift his father had received reflected a coercive—and institutionally ingrained effort—to endorse the connection between Protestant and truly American values. During his childhood, though, Roth's family had admired his father's boss, the "gentile-sanctioned" (TF 23), token Jew who was allowed to rise high in the ranks of Metropolitan Life; Roth's father, on the other hand, had struggled to survive in an anti-Semitic work environment that impeded professional advancement. I suggest that the ordeal of his father influenced Roth's ability to construct fictive Jewish characters who feel alienated from Judaism and Christianity as they seek a place for themselves in American culture. From this perspective, then, Neil Klugman idolizes the Patimkins because they strike him as being "gentile-sanctioned" Jews, a culture removed geographically and emotionally from the urban Jewish neighborhood of Neil's Newark family. Moreover, the Patimkins themselves embody social values consistent with the upward mobility of the Protestant work ethic. That belief extends as well to Neil's family, members of which value hard work and the dream of retirement over anything else. Pertinent to this readjustment of "Jewish" self-image is the observation that the American Jew will more than likely work a job in which his religion and ethnic background are less important to his acceptance than is his "capacity to do his job well" (Blau 120). Thus, America's investment in the Protestant work ethic, and Neil's sense that he is outside of this Christianized way of life, are central, though evasive, concerns of this often misunderstood novella.

The dilemma created by this high regard for Protestantism is also the subject of Roth's short story "Eli, the Fanatic" (1959), which highlights the difficulties of Jews living in a predominantly Christian environment. Like the Patimkins, the Jews of Woodenton
have fled to the suburbs, where they become Christianized in sentiment, feeling that they must emulate WASP culture in order to be accepted. It seems, though, that the Jews of Woodentont have forgotten their ethnic differences because, as the final phase of their assimilation, they have adopted the faith of Unitarian Judaism, something not far removed from the nominally Jewish, mainly secular community of the Patimkins in *Goodbye, Columbus.*

Max Weber, anticipating a component of these dilemmas of identity in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* (1904), describes how "business leaders and owners of capital, as well as skilled higher strata of the labor force, and especially the higher technical or commercially trained staff of modern enterprises tend to be predominantly Protestant" (1). Steven Overman comes closer to the world of the Patimkins by adding that, "In a Protestant ethic society, work becomes the central goal in life, the activity through which individuals define themselves, and give meaning to their existence" (62). *Goodbye, Columbus,* in turn, suggests that Jews can be deceived into believing that a person's religious or ethnic background matters less than his or her ability to adapt successfully to the secular work ethic of Protestant culture.

Weber uses Benjamin Franklin, whose signature Roth daily admired in his family's dining room (*TF* 21-2), as an instance of the tie between Protestantism and capitalism, inasmuch as Americans have historically believed (and the Patimkins carry on the legacy) that it is their duty to "work toward the increase of wealth" (11). Weber references the segment of *The Autobiography* in which Franklin writes that working hard is the only way to gain credit, and that time is money: "Waste nothing. Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful" (149). According to Weber, the Protestant worker
would rather provide well for his family than spend quality time with them, and he will take a higher income and sadly sacrifice his family life in order to provide optimally for them. The theme is more than applicable to the Jewish assimilationism of *Goodbye, Columbus*. While Neil's family still resides in their Jewish neighborhood and lives a blue-collar life, the Patimkins have completely severed themselves from organized religious affiliation; they are instead content to dwell in a limbo of suburban Protestant prosperity. Embodying the conflicted psychological outlooks of Jews existing in a Christianized society, Neil Klugman, I argue, eventually senses that the assimilated lifestyle of the Patimkin family allows little room for values outside of Protestant culture. Thus, Neil makes his decision to avoid the dilemma by returning to his work at the library—beyond the range of either Jewish orthodoxy or Protestant materialism.

In treating the dilemma of assimilation and identity, Roth takes a cue from Ralph Ellison, who also explores the influence of the Protestant ethic on American culture, and the two charter a commitment to confronting Christianized culture. In his essay collection *Shadow and Act* (1953), Ellison concluded that "fundamentalist Christianity" had inserted itself "authoritatively" into almost every facet of American life, asking as well, why no one had taken the time to "recognize [Christianity's] deeper relationship to the art of our twentieth-century literature" (75). Roth and Ellison discussed such matters at the Yeshiva symposium (1962), where they were asked to articulate the "crisis of consciousness in minority writers of fiction" (*TF* 125). Roth, lifeless under the hostile questions of the moderator, found Ellison coming to his defense, eloquently asserting a "virtually identical" position about the pressures on minority writers (*TF* 128). Not until *Reading Myself and Others* (1975) did Roth cogently defend his own ideas on
the subject: "keeping Jews out of the imagination of Gentiles, for fear of bigots and their stereotyping minds, is really to invite the invention of stereotypical ideas" (*RMO* 222).

He continues this thought by citing Ellison's *Invisible Man* as the work that helped whites surrender Negro stereotypes; yet at the same time, Roth admits that both he and Ellison will not change the mind of bigots. Intimating the complexities of living in a country focused on white, Protestant culture, Roth finds Ellison's writing not to be for the "blind," but for those "who are willing to be taught, and who [need] to be" (*RMO* 223).

Accordingly, Roth's work isn't meant to be read as an instruction manual. Instead, he creates texts that can and should provoke readers to assess the ills of the exclusionary nature of America's investment in Christianity, along with the self-deluding and self-denuding assimilation that it invites.

Also applicable to the social critique of *Goodbye, Columbus* is Ellison's notion that literature (in order to address the restricted nature of a culture imbued with white Protestant values) should return to the democratic spirit present in the writing of the nineteenth century. In a remark that casts light upon Roth's own investment in democracy, Ellison states that the chief significance of *Invisible Man* is its "experimental attitude, and its attempt to return to the mood of the personal and moral aim for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction" (*Shadow* 111).

Roth's works, in turn, advance ideals of social equality and accountability; he claims that the "expansion of moral consciousness…is of considerable value to man and to society" (*RMO* 207). Thus, through his return to these shared ideals of democracy, as exemplified by Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain, Roth demonstrates the identity problems of modernity and follows Ellison's lead in hoping to dramatize, via literary
expression and personae, the ethical and political underpinnings that stand to advance the prospect for equality. While Roth, like Ellison, utilizes the experimental style of the "lost generation," he can't ignore the "profound moral searching" that was so important to nineteenth-century literature and to the growth of equal access to the American dream (Ellison, Shadow 182).

A perfect example of Roth's devotion to nineteenth-century democracy—as well as to his interest in the search for, and formation of, identity in a country dominated by Christian ethos—exists in Goodbye, Columbus. While most studies of this novella explore the main character's search for self, that scholarship, by failing to move beyond a coming-of-age emphasis, falls short of discerning ways in which the negotiation of Jewish identity is complicated in a country inundated with Protestantism. Goodbye, Columbus situates Neil Klugman in a world where he fits neither the urban-lifestyle mold of his family nor the Christianized, suburban existence of the Patimkins. Like Ellison's invisible man, Neil retreats underground, to the library, seeking refuge from his own family and the Patimkins to await the more democratic option of having neither to bury his Jewish history nor assimilate into Protestant-like Judaism. Still, Roth realizes that a decision to live underground is psychologically unhealthy. In Reading Myself and Others, Roth states that Ellison's hero has repeatedly tried to interact successfully in the world, "but at the end he chooses to go underground," to live there and to wait for a more viable option of American life. And it does not seem to [the narrator] a cause for celebration" (191). Neil avoids that pitfall by seeking to fit into American culture, but he repeatedly learns that this assimilation paves an extremely difficult task in light of America's investment in the Christian tradition. Thus, Roth
creates a narrator who struggles to be Jewish and American in a country where being American entails a conversion to Christian ideals.

That is why scholarship that posits Goodbye, Columbus mainly as a bildungsroman falls short of accounting adequately for the novella's examination of Jewish family life and American culture. Nor can we rest with the coming-of-age premise that Neil is "involved in a struggle to develop and preserve an identity of his own amid different environments and conflicting impulses within himself" (Nilsen, "On Love" 79); such approaches fail to account for precisely what these different environments and conflicting impulses are. The novella is far more than a simple coming-of-age tale: Neil, I maintain, senses just how invested America is in the Christian tradition and seeks, however clumsily, to deal with the dilemmas of Jews who feel compelled to share Christian values.

In that attempt to determine what it means to be both Jewish and American, Neil explores two vastly different approaches to American life, finally determining that neither will be successful. His Newark roots seem dramatically opposed to the suburban, assimilationist lifestyle of the Patimkins, yet he feels isolated from both families because of their investment in what amounts to—or at least subconsciously approaches—a Protestant work ethic. Unable to relate to his eccentric aunt, he turns to the affluent Patimkins; yet Neil finds the Patimkins' Jewish experience based in the mainstream life of money and comfort and rather distant from whatever Jewish values have previously defined his existence. What Neil fails to grasp, however, is just how much he wishes to assimilate into the American "Protestant" norm by being more like the Jewish Patimkins. Because of his decision to leave the Patimkin's suburban paradise, Neil may
well sense, by the end, that the Patimkins live hollow lives, a reflection of a flawed Protestant work ethic. But neither will Neil be able to identify with the Judaism of his "retirement"-oriented Judaism of his relatives.

Prior to Neil's separating himself from both families in order to avoid the difficulties in managing dual selves, he must deal with the dilemma of being an outsider in his home in Newark. Although Neil seeks to mesh into the family life of his eccentric Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max, he recognizes his status as an outsider; indeed, even his cousin Doris tells him that he "'should have gone with [his parents]'" because he is not her family's "'charge'" (GC 26). Aunt Gladys believes that Neil does not work hard enough to be considered a real man because she finds his library job to be worthless and unimportant to his image or character. She tells Neil that her husband can consume vast quantities of food and soda because he has a physical job that is more important than Neil's job, which requires no valuable skills: "Max could drink a whole case with his chopped liver only. He works hard all day. If you worked hard you'd drink more" (15). By suggesting that one's job determines one's self, Aunt Gladys echoes a Protestant work ethic, suggesting that a person's worth resides in one's ability to perform physical labor.

In his attempt to determine what it means to be both Jewish and American, Neil looks to the Patimkins and their firm grip on what he believes to be the most "American" form of life. In doing so, however, he does not understand that the Patimkins are at best Jews situated within the hazy perimeters of Christianized America. As he leaves behind his Newark self and enters their world of affluence, Neil, by virtue of his being an intruder in their suburban paradise, drives past houses with lights on but windows closed. These people refuse "to share the very texture of life with those…outside" (GC
18), and the reference to social exclusion has pertinence for Neil, who reminds the Patimkins and their neighbors of the socioeconomic background that these people recognize and want to forget (GC 18). Stated otherwise, Neil acts as an unpleasant reminder of a time when they were not yet assimilated into Christianized American culture.

Still, Neil idolizes the Patimkins because their way of life seems so different (and somehow better) than his own, and he believes that to be accepted in their world will allow him to address his questions of identity. In fact, even as an interloper, Neil fancies that this journey into the Patimkins' "Promised Land" has brought him "closer to heaven" and allowed him to rise above lowly Newark (GC 18). Indeed, as he arrives at the tennis court, he notices Brenda's two "wet triangles…right where her wings would have been if she’d had a pair" (GC 21); and when he touches her back, he even feels a "faint fluttering" (GC 24). Alienated from devout Judaism and self-derived social status, Neil hopes that her wings are strong enough to carry him from his functionless life in Newark to a more heavenly existence in the assimilated setting of a "Judeo-Christian" Short Hills. Brenda, though, is not interested in being his savior; recognizing that he is a stranger in her world, she places Neil in the position of mere observer as he stands at a distance and watches her finish the tennis match. Even Brenda's tennis partner finds Neil to be out of place in the suburbs, leaving Neil worried that this disapproval might cause him problems later. He is, in sum, merely a guest in a Jewish country club, itself a parody of Christian affluence, where Jews can simply imitate the clubs that they are not allowed to join, and Neil can only indicate that he is an outsider by describing himself as "dark," immediately realizing that he is the Other in their world (GC 17). For all that, Neil
hopes—and in a way that echoes the larger sociological dilemma of Jewish assimilationism—that he is "the outsider who might one day be an insider" (GC 105).

No fruit is too expensive or too extravagant for the Patimkin household; indeed, their overstuffed refrigerator is their way of demonstrating that they have "made it" in the promised land of the New Israel of Protestant America. Thus, in his search for self within the world of the Patimkins, Neil is so seduced by their fruit that it creates a surreal effect, convincing him that, as an American, the accumulation of goods—which are significantly perishable—is what he should desire: "There were greenage plums, black plums, red plums, apricots, nectarines, peaches, long horns of grapes, black, yellow, red, and cherries...there were melons—cantaloupes and honeydews—and...a huge watermelon" (GC 53). Reminiscent of the biblical forbidden fruit, the Patimkin's arsenal of produce ends up being an elaborate metaphor for coveted materialism. Sensing that, for the Patimkins, excessive fruit is a form of middle-class status, Neil appropriates the cherished material things of a culture driven by consumerism. He even finds the "red marks [of cherry pits] on the undersides of [his] feet" (GC 66). Just like the fruit in the Patimkins' refrigerator, these people stain "everything scarlet" (GC 53). Because the Patimkins are so comfortably experiencing the surplus that accompanies their assimilationist definition of the American dream, their refrigerator is packed with excess—an overabundance of every imaginable kind of fruit.

Because Neil identifies with the Patimkins' middle-class, Protestant-American values, he subconsciously deems his more traditional Jewish family, in their urban Jewish neighborhood, as inferior, thereby challenging his ethnic identity even further. While the Patimkins have an endless supply of fresh and exotic fruit, his family in
Newark—second-generation Jews trying to "make it" in the dominant society—regard fresh fruit as a luxury. Already removed from anything resembling orthodox Judaism, Neil strives to fit in with the Patimkins in the suburbs; he is psychologically invested in a Protestant work ethic, though he remains half-hearted about pursuing it. Self-indulgent and self-delusional, he spends more time with the Patimkins, thereby distancing himself from his Newark family and, significantly, from whatever remains of their allegiance to traditional Judaism. Indeed, at the basis of Aunt Gladys's rebuke of the Patimkins as "'Fancy-shmancy'" is her belief that these people cannot be "real Jews": "Since when do Jewish people live in Short Hills?" (GC 67-68). Gladys knows that the Patimkins are not like Neil, and she worries that his spending too much time with them will make him "too good" for his Newark life (GC 87). Neil, in turn, never considers that his search for identity has caused him to rebuke what is left of his already-lax Jewish life; nor does he comprehend the extent to which the ostensibly Jewish Patimkins represent a Christianized notion of American culture.

Even though Neil's Newark family lives in an urban, Jewish neighborhood while the Patimkins dwell in the Christian-focused suburbs, both families fall victim to a country fascinated with the Protestant work ethic and ultimately exemplify Roth's disdain for the exclusionary nature of American life. Thus, in Short Hills, hard work equals hungry men and, due to his library job, Neil feels like an outsider both there and in Newark. Unlike the Patimkins, Neil's family does not eat to demonstrate their wealth; instead, they eat because they are hard workers. Max drinks lots of soda because he "works hard all day," and Gladys tells Neil that if he "worked hard [he'd] drink more" (GC 15). She even claims to show Neil's plate to Max because a "child in Europe could
make a four-course meal from what [he] leave[s] over" (GC 68). Even Mr. Patimkin, who lived a working-class life before he moved his family to the suburbs, faults Neil for failing to participate in their hedonism. While the rest of the family voraciously consumes large quantities of food, Neil, according to Mr. Patimkin, "eats like a bird" (GC 33) because in the father's eyes, Neil does not have the work ethic required to generate an avid appetite. Like his family in Newark, Mr. Patimkin views Neil's small appetite as reflecting a job that requires scarce physical activity; Neil seems to fall short of manhood because he cannot consume vast amounts of food associated with suburban affluence. Even when he eats more than he wants, Neil intimates that he "might have eaten ten times [his] normal amount...[but Mr. Patimkin] would still have considered [him] not a man but a sparrow" (GC 67). Whatever his assimilationist dream, this failure is but one manifestation of Neil's inability to conform to a consumer-driven Protestant work ethic.

To the extent, moreover, that "American competitiveness derived its rationale and much of its energy from the Protestant ethic" (Overman 93), Neil's attempts at being competitive reflect his best, if futile, effort to participate in mainstream society. Whereas Mr. Patimkin allows Julie to win at ping-pong to give her practice and confidence, Neil demolishes the youngster in a subconscious bid to feel more equal to the Patimkins. Neil fails to understand that his irrational domination of the ping-pong game is related to the indeterminate life he lives as a wandering and wavering Jew among suburban Jews enmeshed in Protestant values. He can neither be Jewish nor a Christianized Jew.
Even the narrative's reference to sports shows how invested the Patimkins are in the competition of the Protestant work ethic, yet neither a conventional Jew or an assimilated one, Neil cannot relate to the athletic side of Brenda. In fact, "sporting goods dropped from their trees" (GC 64) in Short Hills. Recall that in one of his autobiographical narratives, *The Facts*, Roth describes how baseball became a vehicle for transporting first- and second-generation American Jews closer toward "membership in a great secular nationalistic church" (TF 32). This context may well explain Brenda's attempt to integrate Neil into the Patimkins' suburban life by making him more athletic—a fundamental trait of an assimilated family. When they attend the summer league, Neil feels "a stranger with Brenda" (GC 65), so she decides that they will begin athletic training of their own. After one of their running sessions, Brenda says, "you look like me" (GC 81), suggesting narcissistically that Neil may actually have the ability to join the suburban elite and implying that this demasculinization is part of Neil's assimilation into Brenda's lifestyle. That projection is likely why Brenda starts to pay Neil the attention for which he has yearned, thereby rewarding his nascent Protestantism and leading to her claim that she loves him. Because of this encouragement, Neil takes up the other sports of the Patimkin family and is soon shooting baskets, playing golf, and kicking a soccer ball in their backyard. It isn't long, though, before Neil comes to deem their lives empty and meaningless because of his subconscious aversion to Protestantized Judaism.

Neil, I suggest, senses that the Patimkins have replaced Jewish family values with a devotion to material wealth, and the fact that he registers this substitution is Roth's way of pointing us toward the assimilated nature of these Jews. For Mr. Patimkin,
his children are more than just progeny; having invested a lot of money in the rearing of his children, Mr. Patimkin has faith in Brenda, "like in a [b]usiness" (GC 139). The Patimkins never fail to associate their daughter with money: Mr. Patimkin's nickname for Brenda ("Buck") illustrates the point; as one critic writes, "It is not enough that [Brenda] owes her appearance to the almighty dollar, now her name has a financial connotation" (Doyle 2). Thus, the Patimkins are invested in the financial standards of the dominant society that views Brenda as something of a displayable asset along the path of cultural assimilationism. It is little wonder then that with "joy and pride" Mr. Patimkin has paid dearly to have Brenda's nose "fixed," presumably to disguise her Jewish background or at least make it less conspicuous (GC 38). While improving her appearance, the Patimkins repress any reminders of their lives in their previous "Jewish neighborhood."25

By the end of the novella, Neil senses that he cannot fit into the Patimkins' life, mainly because he is unwilling to conform to the Protestant work ethic that they hold so dear. Mrs. Patimkin calls him a "'perfect stranger'" (GC 141), insinuating that Neil never had a chance of joining the Patimkin circle, while Mr. Patimkin says that "'[s]ome people never turn out the way you hope and pray,'" expressing his desire to manipulate Neil into an acceptable suburban dweller (GC 139). After Neil reads the letter from Brenda's parents, he begins to understand the extent to which the Patimkins regard him as an unwelcome outsider. To his credit, I propose, Neil finally recognizes that he will not be successful in his identity negotiation by attempting to conform to a life of hollow consumerism and competitiveness. That emerging sense of maturity may explain why Neil tries to make Brenda see that her family focuses on money as a means of fixing their problems: "'You can go home—you your father will be waiting with two coats and a
half-dozen dresses"; because she refuses to understand the emptiness of this type of materialistic existence, he must look elsewhere for ways to emerge into a more positive identity (GC 143). At some level, therefore, Neil anticipates the aversion to Patimkin existence expressed by Roth himself in *Operation Shylock*: "Brenda Patimkin dethrones Anne Frank. Hot sex, fresh fruit, and Big Ten basketball—who could imagine a happier ending for the Jewish people?" (132).

Neil's interaction with the Negro boy at the library casts light upon his failed assimilation and is Roth's way of making clear to readers that the solution to the exclusionary nature of American culture cannot be found by avoiding the problem. This young man, who is so immersed in Gauguin's art, provides an important model in helping Neil learn the truth about the difficulties of negotiating two identities in American culture. Neil admires the boy's interest in the art book, and he soon recognizes that the boy looks at the art to escape his existence in the Newark ghetto. Similarly, Neil allows Short Hills to become his "art," something that might transport him from his urban, Jewish lifestyle into an American norm somehow linked to the Negro boy's escapist vision. After all, Neil deems Brenda a "Polynesian maiden…with the last name of Patimkin" (GC 25), and he imagines Short Hills as his version of a "rose-colored…Gauguin stream" (GC 48). For Neil, Short Hills is a utopian paradise, though he finally realizes that there is "no sense carrying dreams of Tahiti…if you can't afford the fare" (GC 132). Though Neil directs this sentiment toward the Negro boy, it applies no less to himself.

Given that emphasis in *Goodbye, Columbus* on the impossibility of escapism, the possibility emerges of a Melvillian gloss on the futility of Neil's "jumping ship" from
Newark. Tommo's incessant leg pain, in *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), may serve as a backdrop to Neil's voracious appetite for the Patimkins' fruit throughout *Goodbye, Columbus*. Whereas Melville's narrator experiences leg pain each time he seeks to join the Typees in their cultural traditions, Neil is never able to shake feelings of hunger that accompany a futile quest to distance himself from his class, religion, and national heritage. Neil, like Tommo, experiences a physical reminder of the difficulties of "going native," for while never fully comprehending the source of his anxiety, Neil cannot fit in with either the Typees or the Happars—in his case, the suburban world of the Patimkins or the urban lifestyle of his Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max. Because of the confining nature of both choices, neither option lends itself to viable self-definition. While the lives of the Patimkins are vacant, he finds his existence with his Aunt Gladys to be stifling. Even though he knew that the library would not be his "lifework" (*GC* 42), he decides to return there because in this quiet and uncritical place, he can hide.

Neil's first significant step toward self discovery occurs at Harvard Yard, which he has "never seen before" (*GC* 146). Catching a glimpse of his reflection, he wants to "catch whatever it [is] that" looks "through those eyes" and get to the core of himself (*GC* 147). He knows immediately what he must do: he has to return to Newark, but this time with new rules. The train arrives in Newark "just as the sun [is] rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year" (*GC* 148); like Jake Barnes at the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, Neil recognizes the reality of his life: rather than head home to celebrate the Jewish holy days with his aunt and uncle, he goes to the library to work, associating with neither the affluent suburban Jews of Short Hills nor his urban Jewish family. He is "just Jewish" and must determine for himself what that means and how his future can
and will work in a culture that seems to have little positive regard for that fact (GC 99). Thus, Roth ends the novella with no real cause for celebration because this character, like Ellison's *Invisible Man*, exists in a culture that is indifferent to variation.

In *Great Jewish Short Stories* (1971), Saul Bellow states that Jewish stories are characteristically a combination of laughter and trembling; the characters of Jewish stories "appear to invite or encourage trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter" (12). This sentiment captures the charm of *Goodbye, Columbus*, the serious elements of which occasionally find relief through laughter. As he searches for his identity, Neil finds himself in one humorous situation after another. However, Roth still dramatizes the difficulty of dealing with life as a Jew in America. Far from "not know[ing] how to be true to himself" (Israel 7), Neil has a challenging time coming to terms with his identity because of the unreasonably complicated way that American culture either excludes or assimilates Jews. Thus, Neil is an outsider in both families—the urban life of his family in Newark and the assimilated Jewishness of the Patimkins. Just as Ellison said that his struggle was to "be both Negro and American and to bring about the condition in American society in which this would be possible" (262), so Roth illustrates the plight of Jews seeking to navigate the shoals of America's Protestant ethic.
CHAPTER III
THE ART OF JEWISH IDENTITY: "ELI, THE FANATIC" AND THE GHOST WRITER

In "Eli, the Fanatic" (1959) and The Ghost Writer (1979), the two main characters, recalling Neil Klugman in Goodbye, Columbus (1959), question their ability to have a successful Jewish experience in America. The current chapter argues that, while Neil finds that being American means conforming to the values of the Protestant work ethic, Nathan Zuckerman and Eli Peck confront the challenge of being Jewish in a Christian-centered country and realize the peril to Judaism posed by cultural assimilation. We shall observe that both Nathan and Eli, in the course of dealing with Jewish self-shame, forget their place in Jewish history and subconsciously find solace and momentary tranquility in something approaching a transcendental connection with nature and art, even as they discover the futility of finding authenticity of selfhood in an outdated religion of nature or a religion of culture or art.

Nathan's and Eli's difficulties in understanding their Jewish identities demonstrate America's exclusion of any culture or ethnicity outside of the Christian norm; thus, their religious and ethnic backgrounds (a key component to the understanding of self) cannot exist without their reliance on art. For example, in "Eli, the Fanatic," Eli feels frustrated by the presence of a yeshivah in his suburban community because he worries that these orthodox Jews will be too conspicuous to their Protestant neighbors. Because of a push from his Jewish friends, Eli seeks to rid the community of this yeshivah yet ends feeling empty and alone, trapped by his inability to find a voice in the stifling environment of the suburbs. Thus, Eli asserts a new identity by wearing the clothes of the greenie. But Eli, I propose, feels alive only in Hawthorne's intertextual world that
connects his life with that of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel having a heroine who is otherwise a subject of lurid interest on the part of Roth's narrator Smitty in *The Great American Novel* (1973). Unlike Hester, whose forest scene with Dimmesdale results in a chapter titled "A Flood of Sunshine," Eli realizes that nature can provide only temporary and illusory relief, for he eventually finds himself outside of Hawthorne's forest and withered on the floor of the hospital, overcome by guilt and shame.

Just as Eli struggles to navigate his search for self utilizing the divinity of nature, as exemplified in Hawthorne's writing, so Nathan Zuckerman has recourse to art in *The Ghost Writer*, in which he navigates his own experiences of Jewish identity in nature. As a writer, Nathan is committed to art and imagination, but by the end of the novel, Nathan still struggles with his understanding of what it means to find a voice for himself in a Jewish community. And even though he experiences less physical distress than Eli in his attempts to negotiate his own search for an authentic self, Nathan nevertheless hides behind his writing, his art, and is reluctant to understand his Jewish identity. Thus, while Eli ends up limp on the hospital floor, having confronted the difficulties of asserting his identity in a community overcome with Judeo-Christian roots, Nathan chooses to keep running from his past, thereby asserting a similarly negative ending for both characters' attempts to assert an authentic self.

Because of the difficulties Nathan and Eli have in asserting a voice in a Christian culture, Roth's work examines how American Jews have long dealt with the push to assimilate to Christian traditions (Karp 9). Even though the term "melting pot" was not used until the twentieth century, American society has continuously demanded
assimilation from its immigrants. European Jews arriving in this country were expected to adapt their ethnic heritage to the customs of gentile, American culture. Thus, being Jewish became something that, in less orthodox circles, people acknowledged during an occasional worship service but did not practice consistently in their lives. In fact, one sociologist, who wonders whether a flight from Jewish identity functions in America, senses that America's idea of a "melting pot" means that all people, on some level, must conform to the middle-class ethos, which is largely based on Protestant Christianity (Karp 9). In a related vein, Roth's friend and colleague, Ted Solotaroff, references the exclusion of Jews from American culture as: "the feeling of being different, outside of and threatened by a society that proffered freedom and opportunity but remained exclusively Christian and mostly WASP in its culture" (xvi). Thus, in The Ghost Writer and "Eli, the Fanatic," Roth calls attention to this cultural problem, and his work highlights the difficulties for assimilated Jews who cannot express authentic selves invested in their ethnic history.

Roth does so, in part, because of the influence of his father, who experienced the exclusion of Jews from mainstream America. In Patrimony (1991) Roth writes about his father's recognition of the difficulties of growing up Jewish in Christian America: "these kids grew up, they had a tough life, the slums, no money, and they always had an adversary. The Christian religion was an adversary. They fought two battles. They fought because they were fighters, and they fought because they were Jews" (PT 203). Roth's father realized the influence of a Christian-centered culture damaging the Jewish definition of self. Because this limiting characterization of identity affected his father's adolescent experiences, Roth's own understanding of self was surely influenced.
Whether through subconscious learning or conscious design, Roth creates characters who seek to evade their identities in a society focused on Christianity. As summarized in *Operation Shylock*, "Assimilated Jews built a structure of humanistic values and looked out on the world from it. They were certain that they were no longer Jews and that what applied to 'the Jews' did not apply to them. That strange assurance made them into blind or half-blind creatures" (OS 113). Therefore, just as Roth’s father and his friends fought to be Jewish *and* American, so Roth's characters, bent on assimilation, do not assert a voice outside of America's investment in Christian thought.

Through his emotional struggle, Eli demonstrates the problems of Jews hoping to find a place for themselves in the Protestant suburbs, where his inability to be both Jewish and American highlights the identity crisis faced by Jews in American culture. Eli’s identity search has been arduous because he has been compelled to blend into the Protestant suburbs in order to live peacefully.31 Eli, though, suspects that both Jews and Gentiles have given up some of "'their more extreme practices in order not to threaten or offend'" ("EF" 276). Still, he perceives the Jews as being guests in the Promised Land of suburbia: Eli gloats to the yeshivah’s headmaster, Leo Tzuref, that, by diluting their Jewish practices, the Jews have been allowed "'to buy property'" in "'the home of the well-to-do Protestants'" ("EF" 276), and because Eli wants to keep a peaceful existence in the Protestant suburbs, he feels the weight of being asked by the Jewish members of the community to rid Woodenton of the Jews of the yeshivah: "The stores along Coach House Road tossed up a burst of yellow—it came to Eli as a secret signal from his townsmen: 'Tell this Tzuref where we stand, Eli. This is a modern community, Eli, we have our families, we pay taxes'" ("EF" 263). Eli feels quite simply "burdened by the
message" that he must deliver to Tzuref ("EF" 263) because he soon realizes that his strained position as the voice of authority means that he must ensure that the Jews blend seamlessly into this community, where being overtly Jewish is deemed indecorous and troublesome. Mostly, Eli finds himself regretting his own ethnicity; rather than speaking for the Jews of Woodenton, he wishes "he were pleading for the other side" ("EF" 268). This proclivity to deny one's "self" emerges from Eli's sense that the Protestants in his community are merely tolerant of well-behaved Jewish "guests." Thus, "Eli, the Fanatic" illustrates the "melting pot" mentality of assimilationism where Jews must hide any outward showing of their ethnicity in order to fit into the Protestant community of Woodenton.32

I contend that the merging of American Christianity and Judaism is of key importance to the exploration of identity in The Ghost Writer. There, a young Nathan Zuckerman visits his mentor, E.I. Lonoff, and examines the way Jews attempt to belong to the western, Christian version of American life. To Zuckerman, Lonoff is a self-made man of the frontier: he finds a place for himself in the isolated suburbs, and he lives among his gentile family without any problem. While Nathan idolizes Lonoff's ability to find peace in nature, he doesn't recognize the difficulties of assimilation that Lonoff has in the gentile suburbs. Since Nathan fails to see the intricacies of Lonoff's assimilated life, Nathan dreams of this peaceful existence in suburban nature for himself. More importantly, Nathan believes that nature will allow him, just as he believes that Lonoff has done, to assert some distance between himself and the complications of living in Jewish Newark and facing the Jewish community that has criticized his work. Thus, Nathan ultimately tries to fit into American culture by separating himself from his Jewish
heritage, and he turns to his writing as a way to construct an identity outside of his ethnicity. In his efforts to find a place for himself in American culture, Nathan negotiates being American the only way he knows how—through the lens of Christianity. Therefore, Nathan posits Amy (Lonoff's student and mistress) as Anne Frank in his fantasies. By placing Amy in the position to make the ultimate sacrifice so that Nathan might be cleansed of his sins, Nathan creates a Christ figure in order to navigate his own misconstrued sense of identity. Because Nathan so desperately yearns to find a place in American culture, he constructs a reality focused on a Christian narrative tradition, and through his story of Amy's sacrifice for him, Nathan attempts to hide from his ethnic past. Here, too, Roth creates a narrator who struggles to be Jewish in a country where being anything other than Christian is a constant challenge.

Because Nathan fails to recognize the complexities faced by Jews in American culture, his search for self does not include a careful look at his Jewish heritage, and that lack of understanding culminates in a fight with his father because Dr. Zuckerman realizes the hardships for Jews and tries to make Nathan acknowledge that their "good Christian friends" will only see his son’s literary endeavors as being about "Kikes and their love of money" (GW 94).33 Nathan, though, believes that writing this story is not damaging because he is simply demonstrating universal truths about human behavior. And while his parents want him to feel connected to the Jewish suffering that occurred not so long ago in Europe, Nathan considers himself completely removed from the violence of the Holocaust. In fact, he tells his mother that, as an American, his experience with cruelty is much different than that of the Jews of Europe. "[P]hysical violence done to the Jews of Newark," he says, can be seen at "the office of the plastic
surgeon where the girls get their noses fixed” (GW 106). Nathan therefore acknowledges no connection to the Jews who suffered throughout Europe, and his father believes that, because of his son’s suburban comfort, he cannot possibly understand the ways that American culture demands assimilation from anyone outside of the Christian norm. Thus, Dr. Zuckerman fails in his attempts to educate his son about the historical link between Jews and their history because Nathan wants to be simply American and not associated with the difficult past of the Jewish people.34

Since Nathan’s family won’t allow him to forget his past, Nathan turns to Lonoff, who offers the most effortless picture of what it means to be Jewish and American. Nathan’s struggle for an authentic self is extremely complicated because, for him, art replaces an affiliation with formalized religion or ethnicity, and it is through Lonoff that he learns about this way of life. Lonoff, after all, lives in apparent peace with his gentile family and friends, and he also seems to escape Jewish suffering through art, just as Nathan hopes to do. Unlike the picture of Jewish social responsibility that Nathan’s father presents to him, Lonoff’s version of American life is free from such complications. Whereas Dr. Zuckerman preaches the futility of using art as a replacement for Jewishness, Lonoff appears to thrive beyond a Jewish neighborhood and is part of what Nathan considers to be the "real" America. For Nathan and Lonoff, Lonoff is an artist first and a Jew second. Nathan therefore envies Lonoff for not dwelling on a painful Jewish past and for having assimilated into gentile suburbia.

For all that, however, people in the community find Lonoff to be outside of Protestant suburbia, both geographically and culturally: "the game warden,” says Lonoff, "tells me that there are some more up in these woods besides me" (GW 51).
Stated otherwise, as he would the presence of hunted animals, the game warden monitors the presence of the Jews in the Christian suburbs. Oblivious to this threat, Lonoff continues to dwell amongst these Gentiles. Like a typical frontier man, he hopes that this is the place where he can achieve true American freedom. He has even "married the scion of an old New England family" and moved her to the "goyish wilderness of birds and trees where America began" (GW 4). Nathan believes that because of Lonoff's ability to adapt to the suburbs, Lonoff is more fully experiencing American life than do the urban Jews Nathan knows in Newark. To Nathan's discredit, Nathan admires Lonoff for finding a place in the suburbs.

Nathan and Eli's struggles with Jewish identity resonate with dilemmas that Roth himself experienced; indeed, in The Facts, Roth explores his attempts to assert a place for himself as a Jew in America, and he highlights his efforts to manage the self-hatred that accompanied his own identity crisis. Growing up in a country where "religious Orthodoxy was…seriously eroded by American life" (TF 31-32), Roth found that instead of being simply Jewish, he allowed his ethnic traditions to play second fiddle to his ability to assimilate to the Christian norm. Rather than remain both Jewish and American, Roth, like Nathan and Eli, felt the pressure to make a decision about which identity he would choose. Along with that decision came the guilt of separating from either one's ethnicity or nationality: "You rebel against the tribal and look for the individual, for your own voice as against the stereotypical voice of the tribe's stereotype of itself. You have to establish yourself against your predecessor, and doing so can well involve what they like to call self-hatred" (TF 172). Thus, Roth's struggle to assimilate encompassed the shame of privileging Protestant values over Jewish heritage.
While both Nathan and Eli feel shame, Eli more overtly and painfully experiences the effects of his guilt, thereby highlighting the distress and self-doubt associated with assimilation. He fervently yearns to be accepted by mainstream society; yet just beneath his calm exterior, Eli is frustrated by a sentiment he can’t quite explain. He feels overwhelmed by his job where he finds that "being a lawyer surrounded him like" so that "he couldn't get his breath" ("EF" 268); in fact, he feels the "grievances, vengeances, and schemes of his clients" ("EF" 266) who want him to rid Woodenton of the yeshivah so that they might remain a "progressive suburban community whose members, both Jewish and Gentile…live in comfort and beauty and serenity" without the yeshivah’s reminder of a past everyone had hoped to forget ("EF" 275-6). He therefore projects his feelings of self-shame onto the yeshivah Jews who refuse to conform. And while Eli "is committed to the ability—indeed the necessity—of minority groups melting anonymously into the fabric of mainstream America" (Pinsker, "Bashing" 87), such observations overlook Eli’s frustration with the obstacles to assimilation. Nor do such readings account for Eli’s embarrassment over the way that Jews living at the yeshivah represent a reminder of Eli’s separation from Jewish history. Because the greenie has endured Holocaust atrocity, Eli hides his ethnic identity in the Protestant suburbs, feeling shame and guilt. Unable to articulate these feelings, he instead blames the yeshivah Jews for their own painful experiences and goes so far as ludicrously to suggest that, had the yeshivah Jews—and those like them—rid themselves of fervent Jewishness, the Holocaust "'could not have been carried out with such success'”; possibly it "'might not have been carried out at all'" ("EF" 276). In short, Eli believes that these Jews are responsible for their own suffering because they refused to assimilate. Thus, Eli builds a
protective barrier to manage relentless shame over his discredit of the Jewish suffering in Europe and of Jewish history. My point here goes beyond a conventional self-shame reading of the text since I suggest that Eli flees from his past in order to forget his passive role in Jewish history.

Part of Eli's shame comes from the fact that he realizes that the headmaster, Tzuref, is aware of the negative feelings Eli has about his own Jewishness and his lack of involvement in Jewish history; however, Eli's attempts to find authenticity of self through his miniscule understanding of what it means to be Jewish will ultimately be unsuccessful. Tzuref attempts to demonstrate Eli's link to his Jewish identity by telling him that all Jews are the same and that they share the same history. Yet Eli is quite uncomfortable with Tzuref's association of the suburban Jews of Woodenton with the Jews of the yeshivah who, according to Eli, brought the Holocaust upon themselves. Eli feels removed from these Jews simply because associating himself with them means that he must explain why he did not suffer at the hands of the Nazis, as they did. Therefore, Eli focuses on his American individuality and his transcendental self-reliance: "I am me. They are them. You are you" ("EF" 281). Tzuref tries to tell Eli that it is Jewish history that unites all Jews, and, because Tzuref realizes the sacrifices that come with assimilation, he even points out that the Jewish townspeople sadly hope to blend in so that they might "hide their shame" ("EF" 280). Eli, though, cannot acknowledge the importance of an authentic Jewish self. Rather than face the hardships of Jewish history, he keeps "his eyes on the lights of Woodenton" ("EF" 267) because the "lights" of suburbia keep him from peering into what Melville, echoing Jude 1:13, would have
called "the blackness of darkness" (Melville, *Moby* 12) or, in this case, Eli’s Jewish self-shame.\(^{35}\)

While Eli hopes assimilation in Woodenton can protect him from Jewish history, his guilt over trying to escape his Jewishness never subsides; he therefore continues to struggle between the darkness that he experiences at the yeshivah and the lights of Woodenton. Whereas the Jews of the yeshivah remind Eli of his relation to Jewish history and the Holocaust, the lights of Woodenton become a beacon of safety and hope for Eli, cloaking him, as well, from Jewish self-shame. When he sees the greenie in town, Eli is uncomfortable because the greenie's presence, as a "deep hollow of blackness," makes it too difficult for Eli simply to forget his own ethnic past and live in the ease of the light ("EF" 267). In fact, when Eli attempts to approach the greenie, panic over their proximity causes Eli to hurry back "toward the lights" and safety of the community where he is happy to let the light blind him to his ethnicity ("EF" 267).

As Eli's dealings with the yeshivah continue, he finds himself constantly overwhelmed by the blackness he experiences there, and he can't help but think of the history that he has, until then, conveniently ignored while in the company of these devout Jews. Even visiting Tzuruf's office was like walking down a "dark tomb of a corridor" ("EF" 266); and instead of being a reminder of his faith, Tzuruf's skullcap looked to Eli as if the crown of Tzuruf's head had been replaced by only blackness. It is this blackness, like a dull pain, that makes Eli feel lost and alone and reminds him of his own guilt over separation from the Holocaust. Only when Eli receives the suit of the greenie does he notice that he is no longer blinded by the overpowering lights of the community: Eli feels at that moment the "shock of having daylight turned off all at once"
In fact, as Eli takes the suit out of the box, he realizes that this blackness wasn't something he should fear—"For the first time in his life he smelled the color of blackness: a little stale, a little sour, a little old, but nothing that could overwhelm you" ("EF" 299). Thus, Eli discovers that his past, the black spot on his consciousness, should not be completely overpowering because it is something that he must attempt to face if he ever hopes to find his authentic self.

While Eli discovers the difficulties of separating from his Jewish history, Nathan, in *The Ghost Writer*, attempts to find an authentic self in the solace of Lonoff's home. Hoping that art can replace his religious affiliation, he sees in Lonoff a type of spiritual guide who can rescue him from his overbearing family. For Nathan, art is a way to forget the pain of the past, and he desperately yearns to be an artist because creative expression means that he will have a spiritual value to his life. In fact, when Nathan sees Lonoff for the first time, Nathan is shocked that Lonoff doesn't make a great entrance, as should a man stepping down "from the high altar of art" (*GW* 4). Thus, rather than turning to a rabbi in his quest for identity, Nathan looks to the artist who has no specific religious agenda. Moreover, Lonoff's diluted Jewishness causes Nathan to admire him all the more for his ability to live successfully in the Protestant suburbs. Still, even as Lonoff acts as a spiritual and artistic guide, Nathan's father urges him to look at the larger value of literature because, to Dr. Zuckerman, Jewish literature should vivify rather than lobotomize the Jewish people. Nathan, however, wants nothing to do with this way of thinking because, for him, art is not about glorifying the Jew; instead Nathan's art is a way for him to distance himself from his ethnicity and "all of the Jewry gratuitously disgraced and jeopardized by [his] inexplicable betrayal" of his heritage.
(GW 96). Thus, with his art, Nathan distances himself from his relation to Jewish history and yearns to be outside of that traumatic past.

Nathan's interest in Lonoff, then, like Eli's experience with Tzuref, becomes important in light of his wish to separate himself from the responsibilities of life in his Jewish neighborhood; Nathan admires Lonoff's lifestyle in nature because Nathan believes that it is here, in this sequestered American pastoral, that he can disconnect himself from his Jewish ancestors.37 Nathan sees that Lonoff has successfully (or so Nathan believes) managed to carve out a place for himself outside of a Jewish neighborhood. Lonoff is, after all, living in the secluded backwoods with his gentile wife, and Nathan thinks, "This is how I will live" (GW 5). He yearns to be like Lonoff because he believes that Lonoff's existence is much more American than his own. He idolizes Lonoff's apparent ability to live untouched by Jewish history. Nathan finds that Lonoff, unlike his parents, is thereby immune to reminders of Judaism. Because Lonoff presents the picture of transcendental existence in nature, Nathan yearns to live this way; and since Nathan has already granted Lonoff the ability to be his spiritual guide, Nathan imagines Lonoff as having the identity of a priestly father, proffering "rites of confirmation" (GW 180). Thus, in Nathan's desperation to be outside of Jewish history, he romanticizes Lonoff's life in the suburbs and attempts to fit into this gentile world so that he can separate himself from the hardship of facing Jewish history.38

In the process, Nathan becomes something of a parody of the American transcendentalist, hoping thereby to experience a God separate from his Jewish religion (arguably mirroring the escape from historical Christianity undertaken by the American transcendentalists) and develop an identity detached from his ethnicity. And just as Eli
felt free in nature, so Nathan believes that being closer to a "transcendent calling" (GW 5) makes him more in tune with art; he therefore finds the wilds of nature a "marvelous, a miraculous gift" (GW 30) and supposes that in this isolation he can truly experience "freedom and renewal" (GW 37) from his painful Jewish past. This secluded existence is what Nathan yearns for because it is here that he believes he can practice his art fully and completely without having to consider the pertinence of his stories for the Jewish community.

This attempt to replace his ethnicity and formalized religion with art suggests that Nathan not only feels guilty for his actions toward his Jewish family, but that he also desperately yearns to fit into a country where being American means conforming to a Christian narrative tradition. That is why, through the character of Amy, Nathan constructs something of a Christian-Anne-Frank narrative and determines that, like the power of Jesus to save Christian believers with his death, Anne's only real authority in life will be "if she were believed to be dead" (GW 145). He bestows upon her the "power to teach" the masses (GW 145), and he gives her the ability to lead others to enlightenment through radical self-sacrifice. More importantly, though, through that somewhat twisted reconfiguration of the Crucifixion, Amy (as Anne) is able to save Nathan from the terrible indictments of his parents that he doesn't "really like Jews very much" (GW 108). In his subconscious mind, as expressed through his artistic creativity, she acts as proof that Nathan does indeed care for the Jewish community because, in Nathan's story, Anne's way of sacrificing herself for Nathan is to marry him. Nathan imagines that when his father finds out that Nathan will marry Anne Frank, Dr. Zuckerman will proclaim: "Oh, how I have misunderstood my son. How mistaken we
have been!” (GW 159). Nathan assumes that, Jesus-like, Amy will wash Nathan clean of all of the sins that he has supposedly committed against his community and that the Jews will "exonerate [him] before [his] outraged elders" because "[w]ho dares to accuse of such unthinking crimes the husband of Anne Frank!" (GW 171). Amy’s presence is a way for Nathan to deal with his current situation, and the Christian myth that he creates around her is a way for him to bridge the distance between his world as an urban Jewish son and a young man who wants desperately to fit into mainstream America; thus, through this Christological transformation of Anne Frank, Nathan further attempts to use art as a way to alleviate the guilt he feels for turning his back on his Judaism.41

In the process of constructing that contorted typology of personal identity, Nathan comes to regard Lonoff’s study as something like an altar of artistic and spiritual creation. For all that, however, Lonoff’s ability to hide from his Jewish friends and family and to assimilate into the wilds of nature, Lonoff’s guilt over having abandoned his Jewish past still lingers in his writing. Lonoff’s work is, after all, often centered on a hero who is "more often than not a nobody from nowhere, away from home where he is not missed, yet to which he must return without delay" (GW 14). Thus, by the end of the novel, Nathan recognizes, similar to Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, who found that she could not live in the confines of her Puritan community, that Lonoff’s attempts to reside in the Protestant suburbs and replace ethnicity and formalized religion with art have been difficult and empty.

In the same way that Nathan attempts to find freedom in the pastoral, Eli also tries to deal with his Jewish identity, yet Eli suffers shame over his desire to assimilate and only seems to experience freedom from guilt, even if briefly, in the forest; as Eli
participates (albeit unknowingly) in a synchronistic world of Hawthorne's art, he finds that away from the stifling Christian suburbs, he can assert an identity liberated from his link to Jewish history. Just as Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale feel "trammelled" (sic) by the social system and "its regulations, its principles, and even its prejudices" (Hawthorne, \textit{Scarlet} 580), so Eli feels constrained by the limits for Jews in Protestant America. In an attempt to escape this forced assimilation, he enters the forest, dons the clothes of the greenie, and for the first time, feels unrestricted by the strict confines of Protestant America. This experience becomes for Eli an attempt to express himself through art: he wears clothes that make him feel especially Jewish, and as he unknowingly enters Hawthorne's literary world of nature, he attempts to articulate an identity in terms of the literature of the transcendentalists. Eli, like Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, only finds the ability to express himself fully in this liminal space where he isn't expected to assimilate to the Christian norms of American society. After visiting Tzuref's office (where the menacing darkness of Jewish history threatened to envelope him), Eli runs for a "distant glade of woods, and when he reached it he did not stop" ("EF" 282-3) because it is only in this space that he believes he can be both Jewish and American. In the forest, Eli feels free from pressure of the townspeople to assimilate; nor does he have a reminder of the darkness at the yeshivah. Like Hester and Dimmesdale, Eli, upon entering the forest, experiences the "exhilarating effect—upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart—of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region" (Hawthorne, \textit{Scarlet} 581-582). Eli can be completely free, and this intoxicating freedom makes him feel "so dizzied that the trees seemed to be running beside him, fleeing not towards Woodenton
but away” ("EF" 283). And just as Hester felt the "burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet* 582) in the forest, Eli, for once, isn't suffocated by the pressure of assimilation and the guilt that accompanies that integration. Thus, Eli finds the illusion of freedom in Hawthorne's world, and he believes—at least for a moment—that he will be able to replace his Jewishness with transcendental philosophy.

Yet, even in the forest Eli still is unable to assert an authentic self: but just as he blindly follows the advice of the townspeople in Woodenton who counsel him to conform, he also realizes that he cannot escape his guilt and replace his Jewishness in the safety of Hawthorne's universe. Before entering the woods, Eli proclaims "'God helps them who help themselves'" ("EF" 302); by entering the forest, he seems to be asserting his wish to do just that. Thus, he affirms his belief that the forest is possibly where he will find freedom from his guilt over forgetting his Jewish past. After Eli puts on the suit of the greenie, he steps out in the "full sight of the trees, the grass, the birds, the sun" and reveals himself to Hawthorne's version of transcendental nature; in Woodenton, however, these clothes for Eli are merely a "costume" because in the town he does not feel confident in this attire ("EF" 302), for it is solely in the forest that Eli can reveal his changed self. Thus, like Hester Prynne, Eli seeks answers to his questions in the solitude of nature; like Nathan, Eli hopes that art and nature can calm his ethnic anxiety. However, kin to Hawthorne's Hester, who discovers that the forest cannot conceal her shameful scarlet letter forever (*Scarlet* 588), Eli soon realizes that "nature had nothing to say to him" ("EF" 302), and that he will have to leave this liminal space to find the answers he so desperately wants. Eli finally determines that even nature cannot
alleviate the guilt he feels over having turned his back on his Jewish history, and the forest will not help him answer his questions of identity.

Relative to this disenchantment with nature, Eli experiences an inversion of transcendental theology. The transcendentalists believed in living close to the pastoral. They advocated a personal relationship to God rather than institutional religious affiliation, for nature was the place where one could experience divinity. While Hawthorne's tie to transcendentalism was an important part of his own identity, he (like his own Hester Prynne) seemed to sense an unfulfilling quality to a life cut off from social institutions. After all, Hawthorne participated, though, with an emotional ambivalence suggested in *The Blithedale Romance*, in the transcendental community of Brook Farm. Similarly, Eli and Nathan later discover that living in the idealistic world of the forest can be impractical. And just as Hawthorne's Blithedalers overlook the power of blackness in their dealings with one another, so Nathan and Eli must confront the blackness of self-shame over their own personal history.

Because he must leave the forest and assimilate into a Christian environment, Eli finds that, outside of the forest in the greenie's suit, his Protestant suburb only further reminds him of his distance from Jewish history, and he realizes that he can't assert an identity in this suburban landscape because living in the world of the Protestants requires him to blend in and sacrifice his authentic, Jewish self. For the first time Eli, in the greenie’s clothes, feels the weight of history on his shoulders; in fact, Eli realizes what Tzuref meant when he said, "You are us, we are you" ("EF" 279) because he now understands the difficulties of living as a Jew in America. Because the people of Woodenton can't understand why Eli would not want to assimilate into the gentile
suburbs, the community doesn't understand Eli's personal change. Eli's wife tells him that he doesn't have to dress like that because he fails to "have to feel guilty" ("EF" 311). In short, Miriam tries to convince Eli that they live outside of Jewish guilt in the safety of Protestant suburbia; but by wearing the greenie's clothes, Eli faces (for the first time) his own shame at trying so hard to be accepted by the gentile community. However, while Eli comes to acknowledge his shame over separation from his ethnicity, he remains powerless to change the assimilated Jews around him because he is negotiating his identity in a world where exhibiting traits outside of Christian thought is deemed un-American. Thus, Eli ends up withered on the hospital floor, and even while the drug that the intern gave him "calmed his soul," it still could not touch "down where the blackness had reached" (GW 313). Indeed, Eli recognizes, for the first time, the importance of Jewish history and the paralysis that can come from negotiating two identities.

Just as Eli found the forest unresponsive, so Nathan discovers the impossibility of replacing ethnicity and religious affiliation with art. In the end, Nathan, who creates a sentimental, Christian narrative to negotiate his life, realizes that his martyr fantasy is just a flight of the imagination. He sees the miserable existence of Lonoff's life in the suburbs with his gentile family, and he sees that Lonoff's forest has not provided any answers to his questions of identity. Nathan realizes, like Eli, that this type of existence is unsuccessful, and he envisions Lonoff as "the magisterial high priest of perpetual sorrows" (GW 180). Thus, both men find that their secular or Christian-centered approaches to Judaism cannot resolve their problems of identity.
Roth is not the only writer to deal with the struggle to be both American and ethnically different. James Baldwin also explores the difficulties of assimilation and the need to replace the reminders of a painful past with art. In "Sonny's Blues" (1957) Baldwin creates a character through Sonny who must deal with being African-American in a white culture. Sonny deals with his shame over his past through his music; yet, like Eli and Nathan, he discovers that, through the process of art, the past is still a black spot on his consciousness because of the inescapability of history. Art for these men becomes the process of understanding and coping with the elements of the self that are beyond language; and as these characters search for faith and self, they find that, because of their inability to be inside of American culture, they can't answer the questions of identity that they seek so desperately. Even as Nathan and Eli use art to replace their Jewishness, they find that art cannot trump Christianity, which is so much a part (for Roth at least) of American culture. As Roth writes about himself in The Facts, these men are confronted with "the choices of rising up out of an ethnic group" and trying to fit in amongst gentile America (164). These stories demonstrate the way Jewish self-shame mutilates the search for an authentic, ethnic self and the pain that arises from that injury.
CHAPTER IV
AMERICAN MORAL CONFINES: MICKEY SABBATH’S FAILED ANTINOMIANISM

Just as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) exposes the psychological barriers of racism, so *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995) captures enslavement to tyrannical codes of moralism. Although Mickey Sabbath pays little heed to traditional social norms, he is still unable to transcend barriers that confine human creativity and the emergence of selfhood. Sabbath's laudable effort, however, entails his rejection of consensus morality governing sexual freedom; but with Puritan rigor, Sabbath, while appearing to be antinomian, utilizes control, the backbone of conventional virtue, to redefine sexual mores and to seek personal immortality. That failure to bypass Puritanical order renders futile his attempted emancipation. By dramatizing the psychological disposition to dominate, the novel challenges even Roth's most liberal reader to reexamine the difficulties of escaping the moral legacy of Puritan sanctification.\(^{45}\) In that regard, we shall observe that Roth identifies Sabbath with Hawthorne's Dimmesdale, who likewise fails to liberate himself from the heritage of Puritan control.\(^{46}\)

The moralistic undertones of *Sabbath’s Theater* coincide, beyond *The Scarlet Letter*, with issues germane to the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-38.\(^{47}\) The antinomian movement, led by Anne Hutchinson and John Cotton, questioned the prevailing clerical doctrine that sanctification necessarily evidenced justification—that is, that one's worldly behavior served as an index to one's state of salvation or damnation. The ministers of the time claimed that anyone who was truly saved would perform good deeds because only a true Christian could present a persistent appearance of
goodness. However, the so-called antinomians, or those "against or opposed to the law" (Hall 3), posited homage to sanctification as something of a Catholic work ethic that had entered through the back door of a Protestant establishment supposedly devoted to Lutheran *sola gratia*, or non-contingent free grace. Thus, the antinomians believed that they were either consecrated by God or not and that their daily actions had nothing to do with salvation in a world where even the most repugnant hypocrite could perform acts of seeming goodness. Moreover, acts of sanctification served as vehicles of social control for a theocracy that, truth be known, stood in fear of the antinomian tendencies of a popular and unfettered devotion to free grace.48 It seems, then, that Roth, through Sabbath, creates a character whose sexual antinomianism is similarly balmed by more authoritarian moral strictures that suggest the inevitability of the will to dominate and coerce.

Indeed, in response to the Antinomian Controversy, the more traditional Puritans realized even more need to maintain social norms. The Puritan clergy looked to the Bible to help restore order to the community, and they hoped to reestablish the "fundamental Puritan precept: "control thyself" (Morone 17)—and with Old Testament scripture such as the account of Adam and Eve, punished for having violated a moral covenant of works. With recourse, as well, to the Exodus narrative, the early settlers believed that they had been chosen as models for the world: in Winthrop’s words, "the eyes of all people [were] upon" them in their "city upon a hill" (49). Winthrop, therefore, valued the order and control implied by a moral way of living that suggested the propensity to deem sanctification an evidence of justification. Morality became the business of the community since, like Adam and Eve, the entire covenant would reap
the judgment and the punishment for those who could not maintain control over their vices. As a result, the Puritans established the legacy of order and control that in many ways, though through federalist refraction and reinterpretation, continues to define what it means to be American.  

Consider, in that regard, the way that Benjamin Franklin, following Cotton Mather's *Bonifacius: An Essay Upon the Good*, compounded the Puritan emphasis on demeanor in a neonomian autobiography asserting the importance of social order and virtue. That context provides a useful frame of discussion for Sabbath's entrapment in control. Franklin admonishes his readers to "be always employ'd in something useful" (111) because there is nothing more important than adding to the virtue of the community. Franklin does not just insinuate that it is every person's moral and social obligation to be virtuous in all things. He goes so far as to say that "it was, therefore, every one's interest to be virtuous who wish'd to be happy even in this world" (120). Thus, Franklin equates virtuous behavior with ultimate happiness, confident that "God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice" (124), or as Tocqueville would later remark, "the whole destiny of America is contained in the first Puritan who landed on these shores as that of the whole human race in the first man" (279). Culturally, we are still bound to the moralistic ideas that the Puritans instilled in American thought; that legacy extends to William Bennett, who, in the late-1990s, in *Death of Outrage*, says "our moral streak is what is best about us" (17) and whose *The Book of Virtues* (1993) calls morality an "anchor" that people should use to continue the "task of preserving the principles, the ideals, and the notions of goodness and greatness" (12). Thus, the "anchoring" values of morality are what Americans count on to avoid anarchy; in the
wake of public outrage over the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, American devotion to moralism is indisputable. Here, then, is the legacy of the encroachment of moralism upon piety that helped to shape an American culture iminical to the psychological complexities of Mickey Sabbath, for *Sabbath's Theater* suggests the futility of efforts to stunt psychological antinomianism.\(^5^0\)

Likewise suggestive of the cultural heritage that shapes the complex and antithetical outlook of Mickey Sabbath are categories implied by Jonathan Edward's *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765), which argues that people delude themselves with pretentions to virtue, exercising a mere pantomime of virtue unless they are imbued with the Holy Spirit. Edwards, nonetheless, holds that even those who are not elect should be held accountable to moral judgment. Holding that "true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God" (Edwards 14), and that any person who lives an immoral life and does not attempt to listen to the calling of the Holy Spirit "would infer the most universal and greatest possible discord" (101), Edwards makes Calvinistic goodness mostly about the individual relationship to God and draws a direct relationship between sinfulness and morality. The implication is that if a person does not have a direct relationship with God, then this individual, lacking the disinterested benevolence that comes exclusively through the agency of the Holy Spirit, will end up wallowing in depravity. For Edwards, therefore, our vices and apparent virtues are not that different, simply because it is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that our selfish impulses become transfigured into the unconditional general love of divine morals. Similarly, through Mickey Sabbath, Roth invites us to examine our vices and consider that these sins are not that different from our virtues because, even as Sabbath acts with increasing offense, he ultimately
employs the same moralistic principles of control that Americans have acquired from a Puritan heritage aligning what that heritage defines as virtue and vice.

*Sabbath's Theater* is not Roth's first attempt to examine the difficulties of living a life surrounded by oppressive standards; in fact, several of Roth's works demonstrate a focus on the struggles to make sense of conventional morality, thereby suggesting that he has long dealt with the legacy of American Puritanism.51 *The Human Stain* (2000), for example, examines America's focus on and devotion to Puritan morality, since Coleman Silk feels frustrated by "American Puritanism," or "America's core values" and their "widespread jurisdiction" (THS 153). Like Sabbath, Coleman is aware of the oppressive force of American Puritan morality and the inability to assert a self outside of this oppression. Consider, as well, *When She Was Good* (1966), one of Roth's "Midwestern" novels that centers on Lucy, who is so attentive to her own moral standing that she causes this motivation to rule her life, wishing above all to be considered virtuous by those around her. Lucy's downfall is her belief that she is morally superior to the other characters, and it is this feeling of high moral character that ultimately ends her life. Lucy, then, allows her eccentric devotion to moral codes to govern and eventually destroy her. In response to Lucy's difficult situation, Roth writes, in *The Facts* (1988), that Lucy's tale was an attempt to "discover the origins of that deranged hypermorality" and "come to some understanding of this destructive force" (TF 145), and while Roth causes us to question this damaging energy, he also mocks the hopelessness of living in American morality. Roth depicts Sabbath's inability to move outside of moral ideas of control so that we might see the frustration of living within such constraints and develop a momentum to step outside of these boundaries.52
*Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) further demonstrates the difficulties of attempting to assert an identity outside the confines of morality; Portnoy partakes unsuccessfully in immoral behavior in an effort to escape the stifling morality of his parents because he finds his life "moral to the bursting point" (*PC* 123). In a 1969 interview, Roth explains that Portnoy is "obscene because he wants to be saved….Portnoy's pains arise out of his refusal to be bound any longer by taboos which…he experiences as diminishing and unmanning" (Roth, "Philip Roth's Exact" 38). Therefore, similar to Sabbath's experience with physicality, sex, for Portnoy, takes on a greater meaning than a simple physical encounter; he uses his sexual transgressions as a way to assert his masculine identity and "[c]onquer America" (*PC* 234) and the strict moral code of American culture.

Ultimately, though, Roth's characters who struggle with moral confines end up frustrated and defeated because, as Roth explains, "the subject of restraints and taboos…reveal[s] the possible consequences of banging your head against your own wall" (Roth, "Reading" 71). With this statement, Roth reveals an understanding of the devotion that we have to those boundaries. Thus, these works demonstrate Roth's investment in creating characters interested in exploring moral thought and struggling against borders that seem impossible to break.53

This focus on morality, beyond influencing our understanding of American cultural identity, penetrates so deeply as to affect our understanding of art and challenge the belief that literature and its criticism should be exclusively moral. John Gardner, who fails to account for the complexities present in breaking from social confines, asserts the commonly held belief that literature and its criticism should be exclusively moral because morality, according to Gardner, is the highest purpose of art
and therefore life. Thus, Gardner conflates morality and art by arguing that "true art seeks to improve life, not debase it" (5). Further, he goes on to say that the problem with writers who are no longer moral is that they "pointlessly waste our time, saying and doing nothing, or they celebrate ugliness and futility, scoffing at good" (16). Yet, his argument does not allow for the intricacies at work in Sabbath's Theater, as Roth attempts to analyze the methodology behind morality; in fact, Roth's seemingly corrupt novel demonstrates the problem with acute moralism. Sabbath's Theater debases life in order to show the futility of the moral structures—Puritan or modern—to which society so rigorously adheres.

However, critics who have difficulty accepting the novel as an attempt to challenge our cultural understanding of art have further sided with Gardner. Even though Sabbath's Theater received a National Book Award, the book's risqué subject matter shocked a New York Times reviewer who failed to see the text as Roth's effort to challenge traditional morality. In her review, she calls the book "distasteful and disingenuous," declaring the narrative to be nothing more than the "depressing gropings of a dirty old man," and oddly claiming that it "fails to open out into a larger comment on society or our shared experience of mortality" (Kakutani, "Books"). To the contrary, Sabbath's Theater dramatizes ways in which death and morality figure in cultural and social regulations, along with the difficulty of venturing beyond those boundaries.

Relative to these concerns, Hawthorne's depiction of Arthur Dimmesdale casts light on Sabbath's failed attempts to be different.54 Faced with the need to find order in the New World, the Puritans created "a series of interlocking covenants that transformed congregational polity from an instrument of rebellion to one of control"
(Bercovitch, *Rites* 33). It was this policy of control that Bercovitch believes to have continued to dominate writers well into the nineteenth century, despite their apparent radicalism (Bercovitch, *The Office* 114). Dimmesdale, in *The Scarlet Letter*, seems to step outside of this limiting notion of self; and while he is at first wrapped in confining notions of American Puritanism, he is (unlike Sabbath) able to free himself from these strict confines both in "A Flood of Sunshine" (Chapter XVII) and in "The Minister in a Maze" (Chapter XX).

Even though Arthur Dimmesdale feels "trammelled" (sic) by the social system and "its regulations, its principles, and even its prejudices" (Hawthorne, *Scarlet* 580), he is still more successful than Sabbath in his attempts to break free from the confines of Puritan society. Still, Colacurcio complicates an antinomian reading of Dimmesdale by noting how Dimmesdale's hypocrisy evidences John Cotton's assertion that sanctification, or public demeanor and moralism, may disguise perfidy rather than reflect a person's justification or redemption. Dimmesdale is hardly the holy minister he appears to be, for he remains conflicted by the moral superiority that he publically presents. Toward the end of the narrative, however, Dimmesdale escapes the hypocrisy and is free in ways that even Sabbath is not. While Dimmesdale presents a weak and troubled character throughout the novel, he eventually becomes strong enough to face death without regret. Though he is a sinner, Dimmesdale finally understands (at least to his own antinomian satisfaction) that his particular acts of sin do not matter in a covenant of free grace, which, whether rightly or wrongly, he appropriates to himself. Unlike Sabbath, however, he finally liberates himself psychologically from Puritan control.
While Dimmesdale finds freedom in his antinomian behavior, Sabbath finds himself stifled in every relationship (those both real and imagined), and this oppression is especially evident through his connection to his mother. In his efforts to break free from traditional morality, Sabbath struggles with his mother, his moral educator, and his construction of her ghost suggests a need to redefine his moral code; thus, Sabbath believes that by creating and controlling his mother, he might be able successfully to establish an identity unencumbered by moralism. Sabbath's mother "was with him, watching him, everywhere encircling him" (ST 17); she was "regularly at his side, in his mouth, ringing his skull, reminding him to extinguish his nonsensical life" (ST 106). Sabbath's creation of his mother suggests his inability to escape the person whom society established as the mouthpiece of reason and moral valuation. Moreover, in an effort to escape her control, Sabbath turns the biggest influence in his life into "another of his puppets, his last puppet, an invisible marionette flying around on strings, cast in the role not of guardian angel but of the departed spirit making ready to ferry him to his next abode" (ST 111). Thus, Sabbath's construction of his mother as the person to lead him through his struggle with morality and death further demonstrates Roth's suggestion that, whether because of Judaism or Protestantism, American society is too mindful of either moralism or the delusion of transcending it.

Just as Sabbath yearns to be free from those social norms, his profession as a puppeteer certainly demonstrates his interest, at least on some level, in control. When working with puppets, Sabbath experiences firsthand the power inherently present in control and the ways in which he can manipulate a captive audience. Sabbath commands the audience's reaction to constructed situations; his mastery of the puppets
gives him the authority of endless possibility to create environments of his choosing, scenarios filled with sexual energy, focusing on "the fantasy of endlessness" (ST 31). He is committed to this profession because, as a puppeteer, he is a "master of guile, artifice, and the unreal," and he knows that when his mastery over his artful craft goes "he would be dead" (ST 147). Thus, Sabbath attempts to use control as long as possible in order to subvert the cycle of life, and his job gives him the power, at least temporarily, to use control as an art form. The problem lies, however, in Sabbath's devotion to control as the way to manage his journey toward death and his inability, despite his sexual provocativeness, to escape the enforced morality of Puritan America. Puppets may let him escape and imagine himself to be beyond traditional morality, but he ultimately utilizes the power of control to attempt to make sense of reality through his delusionary antinomianism.

Whether in rebellion or in agreement with consensus thought, Sabbath, by virtue of his theatrical profession, evokes Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation, including the isolation and alienation experienced by those who seek to escape cultural norms. Just as Sabbath's Theater challenges the reader's sense of propriety, so Brecht believed that theater should "expose the hidden contradictions within...society" (Carlson 384). That discomfort calls further attention to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of attempting to live outside of social structure and moralism, and Brecht's ideas about isolation are key to Roth's construction of Sabbath. Brecht's concept of Verfremdung instituted the idea that "[t]o alienate an event or a character is simply to take what to the event or character is obvious, known, evident and produce surprise and curiosity out of it" (Brecht 14). In Sabbath's Theater Roth creates Sabbath as a struggling character who, despite his
prurient eccentricities, is ultimately surprised by America's (and his own) devotion to Puritan morality. Consistent with Brecht's ideas of *Verfremdung*, Sabbath attempts to separate himself from American culture: his mother comments on his choice of lifestyle, telling him, "You should have led a normal and productive life. You should have had a family. You should have had a profession. You shouldn't have run away from life" (*ST* 160). Yet, the narrative highlights the impossibility of separating entirely from one's culture—in this case, its vehicles of social control. However, as Roth points out, through Dr. Klinger in *The Professor of Desire* (1977), "one oughtn't to underestimate the pain, the isolation, the uncertainty, and everything else unpleasant that may accompany" what he terms "moral delinquency" (*PD* 69), for this is the antinomian behavior that Sabbath painfully labors to achieve; however, even as Sabbath tries to break free, he continues to exploit control in an effort to be different.

However, as Sabbath's profession as a puppeteer demonstrates a reliance on control, he soon realizes that this grasp on order has diminished as a result of his arthritic hands; this loss of his once-youthful self helps to remind him that his pleasure in control, much like his attempts at subversive behavior, will eventually end. Although Sabbath believes himself to be stepping outside of convention, in his role as puppeteer, he ultimately exploits principles of control to achieve this goal. As Sabbath's physical body begins to betray him, the restricted movement in his fingers causes him to feel the passing of his vitality. Even in contemplating death, Sabbath subverts the daring phallicism of his craft—"[i]n the fingers…there is always a reference to the penis" (*ST* 122)—through a wish to hide behind his puppets because "[f]or a puppeteer particularly there is nothing more natural: disappear behind the screen, insert your hand, and
instead of performing as yourself, take the finale as the puppet" (ST 443). Behind the safety of his puppets, he can hide from reality and control his response to it. This indulgence in control mirrors Sabbath's life, which, stage-by-stage, has succumbed to convention despite the appearance of radical and subversive behavior.

Sabbath further uses his profession as a puppet master to control and alienate those around him as he attempts to develop a sexual life that frees him from the boundaries of society. As a young person, Sabbath put his faith in his body, and through his focus on sexuality, he attempts to escape death because he believes that as long as his physical body functions, then he can keep death at bay. However, as his body starts to falter, he realizes that the control he has had over his physical self, much like the aging and incontinent Nathan Zuckerman in Exit Ghost (2007), is fleeting and ultimately useless. Similarly fleeting is the efficacy of moral valuation: at the beginning, it appears that Sabbath is removed from moral standards by virtue of his licentiousness. He looks at women as sexual creatures with whom anything goes. He even makes the young daughter of his one remaining friend, Norman, the object of his sexual desire. Sex has gotten Sabbath into some abhorrent predicaments; but whether he is under arrest for exposing a woman's breasts or getting caught masturbating on Drenka's grave, sex is still a dominant and dominating force in Sabbath's thoughts because it gives him the appearance of power and control over his physical self. Nor does he liberate others, since, through sexual conquest, Sabbath ultimately controls and commands the women in his life. He even believes that through this control he can achieve every sexual desire: "[t]he core of seduction is persistence. Persistence, the Jesuit ideal. Eighty percent of women will yield under tremendous pressure if the pressure is persistent" (ST
That persistent enslavement of himself and others renders illusory Sabbath's belief in his freedom from social norms. Thus, while it seems that Sabbath's fascination with sex places him beyond conventional morality, he ultimately cannot escape the social strictures that encourage control. Such control is evident, moreover, in the way Sabbath seeks to manage his physical decline to maintain a firm grip on his distance from death: as his physical body fails, he focuses on suicide, but even that antinomian act becomes a vehicle of control—in this case, the act intimates how he would manage his exit from life. So even here, Sabbath perpetuates the status quo.

In thus seeking to expose the problems of traditional morality, Roth draws on ideas about sexuality from the Marquis de Sade, who, in the eighteenth century, also attempted to shock his audience in order that they might re-evaluate cultural norms. Demonstrating an interest in Sade's work, Roth mentions Sade in such works as *Reading Myself and Others* (1975), *The Professor of Desire* (1977), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), *Sabbath's Theater* (1995), and *Everyman* (2006). In a famous critique of Sade's work, Simone de Beauvoir writes, "In choosing eroticism, Sade chose make-believe. It was only in the imaginary that Sade could live with any certitude" (32). Like Sade, Roth seems intent on creating characters who try to live in fantasy and hide from the oppressive disappointments of society, the conventions of which they ultimately mimic. Moreover, it is from Sade himself that we see a close link to Roth's ideas about morality, sex, and death: just as many of Roth's characters question moral oppression, Sade wrote that "[a]ll moral principles are idle fancies" (qtd. in Beauvoir 35); yet Sade himself spent his life attempting to debunk these notions of morality. It seems, then, that Sade was also a victim of the difficulties of overcoming moralism. Similarly, even as
Sabbath wishes to step outside of cultural constraints, he is ultimately incapable of sustaining that social abandonment. In Sabbath's Theater, Norman's wife, Michelle, compares Sabbath to Sade, yet she also recognizes Sabbath as a failed antinomian: "As much as he wants to be the Marquis de Sade, Mickey Sabbath is not" (ST 332). Indeed, as much as Sabbath wants to break cultural boundaries, he is unable to free himself from these confines.

Pertinent, as well, to Sabbath's futile efforts to liberate himself from social norms are the ideas of Michel Foucault, whose writing concerns itself with the difficulties of stepping outside of those boundaries. In fact, much of Foucault's work centers on an examination of the ways in which "modern puritanism imposed its…edict of taboo…and silence" on Western culture, and on the "considerable cost" that it will take to free ourselves from "modern sexual repression" (Foucault 5). Just as Roth points to the difficulties of stepping outside of cultural boundaries, so Foucault examines the repressive qualities of a culture that demands restrained social behavior. Thus, Foucault anticipates the larger cultural problems that Roth explores through his characters, such as Sabbath, who experience a series of obstructions in their existential quests for freedom.

Sabbath, through unacknowledged homage to Puritan control, believes that maintaining a firm grasp on his physical body will give him the ability to keep death at bay. Sabbath, who finds sex to be the main indicator that he is a living being and experiences sex as the "driving force" of human life (ST 153), laments that his sexual power is fading, and he is beginning to realize that his control over his body is empty and will not keep death away. Moreover, as his sexual vitality diminishes, he fears the
inevitable consequence of the ending of life. Thus, he acts out sexually in order to attempt a last-ditch effort to save himself. Sabbath's friend Norman best expresses the loneliness and isolation that Sabbath's efforts cause: "The investment of everything in eroticism. The final investment of everything in sex. And now you reap the lonely harvest" (ST 346-7). Thus, Sabbath's efforts to escape morality through sexual indulgence ultimately leave him alone to confront the inescapable, unable to assert an identity beyond the Puritan convention because of the certitude of death, on the one hand, and the vehicles of morality and social control learned from youth onward, on the other. Perhaps helping to explain his very surname, Sabbath struggles in vain to escape Judeo-Christian paradigms of moral rectitude.

Related issues about sexuality, death, and moralism recur in several of Roth's other novels in which Roth's characters fear the aging process and the destruction of the body simply because this ending signifies a loss of control. As Roth writes in The Counterlife (1987), it is impossible to "separate the mind from the body. The body and the mind are one. The body is the mind" (CL 46). Like Zuckerman, in The Counterlife, Sabbath believes that the body and the mind are the same, and he attempts to maintain control over his body so that he can ultimately have power to decide when and where his life will end. In The Dying Animal (2001), the body is just as important as the mind because without the body there is no way to keep death away. In the novel, Kepesh finds himself "scared witless about death" (DA 153) because of the loss of control and finality associated with this event. It is through The Dying Animal, though, that Roth reasserts the ideas he explored in Sabbath's Theater: in this novel, Roth explores how the scripted version of morality dictates that we live a certain way, in compliance with
social norms; yet Kepesh argues, in a way that Sabbath could not, that this prescribed version of life is the most unthinking way we could live. However, while Sabbath attempts to control death away, Kepesh mourns the imminent loss of his life because he knows there is no way to escape the cycle. He thereby bows to convention, as did Sabbath. Consider, as well, the main character in *Everyman* (2006), who examines "life's most disturbing intensity[...]death" (169); he finds that there are "only our bodies, born to live and die on terms decided by the bodies that had lived and died before us" (*EM* 51). Moreover, in *Exit Ghost* (2007), Zuckerman experiences a loss of control over his body (through his incontinence) and ultimately fears senility more than he fears death because this loss of control means a virtual death of the self. He seeks experiences that might bring "the virile man...back to life" (*EG* 104). Therefore, while Sabbath tries to escape death through a subversiveness that ratifies moralism, the later novels explore the reality of life and death and the fear of facing this ultimate loss of self through obeisance to socially sanctioned codes of righteousness.

Even Sabbath's attempt at suicide renders futile his effort to control his destiny. Sabbath spends considerable time reading about death: he "read book after book about death, graves, burial, cremation, funerals, funerary architecture, funeral inscriptions, about attitudes toward death over the centuries, and how-to books dating back to Marcus Aurelius about the art of dying" (*ST* 88). Rather than have death take him unannounced (*ST* 306), Sabbath seeks the freedom to exit on his own terms and spends days obsessing about dead people and suicide. Yet, when it is his chance to utilize ultimate control and follow through with the act, he realizes the hopelessness of it all: "with no one to kill him except himself. And he couldn't do it" (*ST* 451). Thus, in the
final moments of the novel, Sabbath finds that the control that he thought would save him was instead stifling. He ends up "wrapped in the American flag," signifying his cultural restraint, and unable to end his existence (ST 413). In his final moments the visible image of the flag represents the confines of a moralistic inheritance and ideology that subverts his various attempts at antinomianism, whether those express themselves through sexuality or nihilism. Indeed, Sabbath desires a break from moral and sexual order but finds himself bound up by that order. *Sabbath's Theater*, though, is about more than just the stranglehold that Judeo-Christian moralism has on American culture; with this novel, Roth asks us to instigate a change, a new antinomianism where one can utilize control in the course of affirming personal identity and individualism.

As Roth has intimated in an epigram to *Letting Go*, where he quotes Thomas Mann, "it is morality itself that…forbids us to be true to the guileless unrealism of our youth." (qtd in Roth, *LG*, epigram). This quote aptly glosses the ideas at work in the text: morality provides the control that keeps us in line during the wild abandon of our youth, and this control of self is exactly what the Puritans, despite their emphasis on redemptive free grace, hoped to perpetuate through their example. In *Sabbath's Theater*, therefore, Roth demonstrates the difficulty of stepping outside of morality and its precept of control, moving his reader to sympathize with Sabbath's underlying sense that life cannot be boxed into a corner; as Merry remarks, in *American Pastoral* (1997), life "is just a short period of time in which you are alive" (*AP* 248).
CHAPTER V

THE LEGACY BEHIND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AND IDENTITY

IN *THE HUMAN STAIN*

All novels of a given historical moment form an argument over the nature of reality and are, to an extent, criticisms each of the other.

*Ralph Ellison*

Compounding Roth's investment in the complexities of identity, *The Human Stain* (2000) protests the limiting cultural definition of self in the late twentieth century; the novel depicts flawed human nature as an imputed human "stain" and calls attention to the inescapability of history. This solemn examination of human identity ends up challenging representations of the human condition in several other novels, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Roth joins Stowe in taking a position on race and the inherited complexities of identity; unlike Stowe, however, Roth confronts the problem of race without recourse to stereotypes. He moves beyond the "Uncle Tom" stereotype by asking readers to recognize the difficulties of living beyond cultural labels. To help them navigate that dilemma in *The Human Stain*, Roth builds upon ideas concerning race and human nature advocated by Herman Melville in "Benito Cereno," and by Richard Wright in *Native Son*. Because *The Human Stain* affirms the limits of stereotype outside of Stowe's reductive categories, Roth situates himself, as well, with Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin in challenging racial discrimination and stereotyping.

Roth's narrative avoids the dangers of oversimplified constructions of self that abridge the complexity of American culture. Given Roth's investment in the politics of
identity and ethnic/racial heritage, one critic not surprisingly sees Roth as examining a "wider arena wherein race itself is defined, described, performed, negotiated, and deconstructed: America itself" (Franco, "Introduction" 83). Roth also realizes that American writers have not always been attentive to the intricacies of race as they seek to outrun stereotypes.

In *The Human Stain*, Roth challenges stereotypes and, through Coleman Silk, demonstrates the difficulties of living beyond these confines. Recognizing the complexity of this novel, Stanley Crouch writes that "Roth has been at war with stereotypes and the limits of assumed good behavior throughout his career," and in this novel he has "hit one out of the park." Crouch, one of the only critics to appreciate Roth's attempt to move beyond reductive categories in *The Human Stain*, recognizes Roth's assault upon stereotypes and the dangers that arise when people define themselves exclusively within these categories. Roth's exploration of the complexities of selfhood calls attention to the limiting cultural myths associated with race and identity and to obstacles to stepping beyond these boundaries.

The history of the word "stereotype" helps explain ways in which American culture views categories of identity. French printer Fermin Didot originally devised the word in 1794 after realizing he could speed up the printing process by creating duplicate molds to produce multiple plates, or stereotypes, of the same image. Using this idea of reproductions of sameness, Walter Lippman, an American journalist who first applied the concept of stereotyping to a cultural context in 1922, asserted that stereotypes are vital for contemporary society because the modern world is "too big, too complex, and too fleeting" (60). He argued that Americans are not "equipped to deal with so much
subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations," and that "we have
to reconstruct [life] on a simpler model before we can manage it" (61). Thus, Lippman's
understanding of the stereotypical categories of identity assumes that his American
audience is confused, needing basic models of identity to manage a convoluted and
challenging world. Roth, however, avoids stereotypical constructions; evading types, he
examines the complications of race and ethnicity, demanding that readers think about
human nature rather than about race per se.

In his depiction of flawed human characters who resist stereotypical
constructions of self, Roth dramatizes the difficulties of characterization. Early in his
career as a writer, he had similarly refused, when writing about Jews, to fabricate
stereotyped characters. Roth spoke of the furor of his Jewish audience of the 1950s and
1960s, specifically that of Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, who claimed that Roth had
"distorted images of the basic values of Orthodox Judaism" (RMO 205). Furthering
Rackman's criticism, a reviewer in The New Yorker claimed that Roth's work would do
"irreparable damage to the Jewish people" and questioned why The New Yorker, being
of "fine reputation[,] should publish such a work which lends fuel to anti-Semitism"
(RMO 216). Rackman worried that, by creating Jewish characters with human faults,
Roth had encouraged gentile readers to find these less-than-perfect individuals
representative of all Jewish people. Still, these critics failed to realize that Roth's
negative portraits of human nature, including that of Jews, implied an innate humanness
that stereotypical representations (whether good or bad) disallow. Thus, in doubting
Roth's assessment of identity in general, Roth's critics do not appreciate his creation of
real people—resistant to stereotypical construction.
Rather than making his Jewish characters appear as negative representatives of their tribe, Roth provides an honest perspective on the human condition as possessing both good and bad qualities. In contrast, Roth offers up Leon Uris, a writer who creates overly positive, stereotyped characters. Uris, who calls himself a pro-Jewish author, claims that part of his goal with *Exodus* was to make the Jew a hero (*RMO* 194); yet Roth argues that, even through such positive constructions, Uris still relies on limiting definitions of identity. Roth recognizes the danger in this type of category of identity because "there is not much value in swapping one simplification for the other" (*RMO* 194). With this statement, Roth asserts his belief that creating characters with reference to stereotypes is flawed, whether the person be hero or villain. Roth claims that his construction of identity comes down to the simple question of "who is going to address men and women like men and women, and who like children" (*RMO* 224). To construct non-stereotyped characters, Roth humanizes his characters, imbuing them with postlapsarian complexity.

Thus, in his treatment of human nature, Roth moves beyond Stowe, who in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, succumbs to stereotypes, easy formulas, and sentimentality. Whether through the inexplicable devotion of Uncle Tom or the romanticized Christian faith of Little Eva, Stowe creates these characters to elicit an easy emotional response. While the novel moved readers to tears, their response recognized Uncle Tom less as a human figure than as a helpless victim needing stewardship. Implying that black people are emotively different from whites, Stowe describes "the instinctive affections of that race" as "peculiarly strong. Their local attachments are very abiding. They are not naturally daring and enterprising, but home-loving and affectionate" (Stowe 93). Here,
Stowe reinforces negative stereotypes of identity and presents her audience with an easily manipulated people "essentially unlike the hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race" (xvii). This failure to move beyond categorical representation renders her argument about slavery more problematic than Roth's understanding of racial identity and the human condition generally.

Highlighting the importance of his attempts to create a novel about race outside of sentimental confines, Roth allies himself with James Baldwin, who, by bringing to light valid concerns about Stowe's stereotypical constructions of self and the ease with which she manipulates her audience, challenges the reductive qualities of Uncle Tom's Cabin and other books focused merely on protest. Baldwin disdains any "formula created by the necessity to find a lie more palatable than the truth" (Notes 16). The comfort of lies forces the writer to draft characters inside the margins of racial differences, whereas authors who override categorical distinctions break our "sociological and sentimental" preconceptions, leaving readers "panic-stricken" and "betrayed" (Notes 25). He asserts that characters who do not adhere to stereotypes make the audience uncomfortable, an observation that applies to Roth, whose Jewish critics seemed to experience betrayal since Roth creates human characters and not merely positive Jewish stereotypes. From such a perspective, one might conclude that Roth's early critics were more comfortable with delusions about identity and with living in the safety of an overly sentimental and dishonest world. As for the dangers of mistaken stereotyping, Baldwin adds that the "failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended" (Notes 23).
Reflection like this seems applicable to Roth’s ability to transcend and recreate categories, penning novels of social protest that still address the positive and negative qualities of individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Perpetuating a tradition of authors who have attempted to reinvent social constructions of identity, Roth builds on authors like Richard Wright, who in *Native Son* (1940) challenges stereotyping by creating, through Bigger Thomas, an illustration of the danger of constructing race within the confines of stereotype. Unlike Stowe, Wright does not use an oversimplified idea of race to evoke an emotional response; rather, he draws ironically upon stereotypical constructions to highlight the violence and peril associated with those categories. In fact, American culture’s stereotypical ideas about young black males so constrain Bigger that he turns to violence as a means of escaping that prison. Unlike Roth’s Coleman Silk—who simply attempts to move beyond cultural notions about what it means to be African-American and assert an admittedly difficult identity, until the end—Bigger is unable to find his true voice. Wright declares that Bigger’s "emergence as a distinct type was inevitable" ("How ’Bigger’" 859); thus, we see through Bigger a character so damaged by his lack of freedom in American culture that he can claim an identity only through hostility. Wright traps Bigger in these categories, or this "test-tube," to demonstrate the dangers of living in a "stereotyped situation" ("How ’Bigger’" 875). For Wright, Bigger is not just a character, but an example of the problems of race in this culture—problems that Roth also finds difficult to resolve.

Wright enhances the discussion of stereotypes by protesting the limiting definition of race through Bigger, who claims he wants only to assert an authentic self.
Rather than falling into the sad existence of Uncle Tom, Bigger wishes to be "treated...like a man" (NS 844); in the end, though, he finds himself trapped within categories anticipated by Harriet Beecher Stowe; because he does not know how to step outside of those oppressive categories in a positive manner, he turns to violence and murders Mary and Bessie: "I was always wanting something and I was feeling like nobody would let me have it. So I fought'em" (NS 845). Wright's main protest, then, is about the absolute dangers of perpetuating stereotypes, and Bigger represents a potential outcome for an individual trapped in that system of judgment.69 Bigger nonetheless gains an identity by adhering to American culture's notion of what it means to be a black man—full of anger and aggression. Wright, however, aiming to accomplish something more important than stereotypical constructions, says that he places Max, the lawyer, "in Bigger's cell at the end of the novel to register the moral...the horror of Negro life in the United States" ("How 'Bigger'" 880). By challenging social constructions of identity, Wright establishes Bigger as a character imprisoned by stereotypes.

Ellison, on the other hand, having affected Roth's own ideas about writing,70 builds upon the ideas of James Baldwin, suggesting that stereotypes of any kind convey a negative representation of American life. Roth and Ellison discussed the dangerous and limiting categories of identity at the Yeshiva symposium (1962), where they were asked to articulate the "crisis of consciousness in minority writers of fiction" (TF 125). Roth, at a loss to respond to the hostile questions of the moderator, found Ellison coming to his defense, eloquently asserting a "virtually identical" position about the pressures on minority writers (TF 128). Not until Reading Myself and Others (1975) did Roth cogently defend his own ideas on the subject: "keeping Jews out of the
imagination of Gentiles, for fear of bigots and their stereotyping minds, is really to invite the invention of stereotypical ideas" (RMO 222). Roth continues this thought by citing Ellison's *Invisible Man* as the work that helped whites surrender Negro stereotypes; yet Roth also admits that both he and Ellison will not change the minds of bigots. Since Ellison influenced Roth by standing up for him when Roth's Jewish critics attacked him for depicting Jews as being human and having faults, we can see the beginning of a personal and intellectual rapport that may figure in Roth's treatment of race and stereotyping in *The Human Stain*. Roth writes that, just as many of his Jewish critics have found little value in his work, so "there are Negroes...who feel that Mr. Ellison's work has done little for the Negro cause and has probably harmed it" (RMO 223). Like Roth's critics, these people do not value the importance of avoiding oversimplifications of identity; however, just because "many blind people are still blind does not mean that Ellison's book gives off no light" (RMO 223).

Joining the discussion about stereotyping, Ellison, who wants to move beyond the conceptual trap in which Wright placed Bigger Thomas, reasserts the idea that stereotypes are inherently debilitating. Ellison believes that part of the problem with *Native Son* is that "Wright began with the ideological proposition that what whites think of the Negro's reality is more important than what Negroes themselves know it to be" (*Shadow* 121). Thus, Ellison suggests that Wright's stereotyped world does nothing to educate his readers; instead, the work merely places more power in the hands of white culture. Ellison believes, unlike Stowe, that stereotypes do not have a positive role in literature, finding that they are "malicious reductions of human complexity which seize upon such characteristics of color, the shape of a nose, an accent, hair texture, and
convert them into emblems which render it unnecessary for the prejudiced individual to confront the humanity of those upon whom the stereotype has been imposed" (Ellison, "Very Stern" 117). Thus, according to Ellison, both Stowe's simplified constructions of Uncle Tom, as well as Wright's attempts to empower stereotypes through the lesson of Bigger Thomas, prohibit the reader from understanding these characters' human characteristics.

Establishing a foundation that gave Roth the confidence to challenge the discussion of stereotyped characters, Ellison finds that one can see the biggest problem with stereotypes through the degrading portrayal of minorities. He points specifically to the problem associated with the image of the American Negro, for the negro is not "drawn as that sensitively focused process of opposites, of good and evil, of instinct and intellect, of passion and spirituality" (Ellison, Shadow 43). Instead, Ellison believes that writers craft an "oversimplified clown, a beast or an angel" (Shadow 43). In Invisible Man (1952), he asserts that assuming a stereotypical identity creates invisibility for that individual, calling attention to the difficulties of that invisibility as well as to the identity crisis of anyone outside of white, Christian culture. Invisible Man features a narrator who tries to move beyond stereotyping; like Coleman Silk, the narrator of Ellison's novel seeks to find a self with both positive and negative attributes, all the while hoping to express an individual self unencumbered by race. The advice in Invisible Man given to the narrator by his grandfather, who suggests that the narrator always be agreeable, becomes the notion that shapes the early experience of the narrator. He must—like Coleman, who seeks to move beyond the shadow of his father and brother—figure out how to escape these racial traps, an endeavor that proves formidable. At the beginning
of Ellison’s novel, the narrator is quick to mold himself to the demands of the white world; not until the last section of the book does he begin to realize the difficulty of doing so. By relying on the ideas of his grandfather, the narrator realizes that he has only reinforced his feeling of invisibility because his grandfather's views do not allow him to realize a self outside of the stereotypes established by whites. Like Coleman, who realizes his supposed personal freedom after the death of his father, Ellison’s narrator sees that the only way to exist, to not be invisible, is to present to the world a picture of self that is both imperfect and real.

Drawing on the legacy of flawed, yet realistic characters, *The Human Stain*, with its connotations of human shortcomings, avoids stereotypical constructions of identity, as does Herman Melville's model of race in "Benito Cereno" (1855). In its attentiveness to human depravity, even among slaves, this short story challenges categorical constructions of identity. Published only three years after Stowe's *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Melville's "Benito Cereno" presents a much more sophisticated examination of race in Amasa Delano's experience of boarding the lost and seemingly disabled *San Dominick*, a slave ship in disarray. While Delano believes that the ship has suffered from storms and disease, it is actually the captive Africans, led by Babo, who have taken control of this vessel. Even though Delano appears to want to help Benito Cereno (the captain of the *San Dominick*), Delano is characterized neither by valor nor insight; on the contrary, Melville enables readers of the time to intimate, through Delano’s stereotypes, their own racist thinking. In essence, Amasa Delano, who fancies himself an open-minded Northerner, is the mouthpiece for his culture's racism, for he has a difficult time comprehending the events unfolding on the *San Dominick*, since he cannot make sense
of a world in which slaves are intelligent enough to have staged a rebellion and initiated a pantomime of subordination and compliance. Rather than perceiving the slaves as human because of their capacity for deceit, Delano merely thinks of black men as Uncle Tom figures. Upon watching the slaves, Delano is reminded of his own experiences with black people:

At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of color at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty, and half-gamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (Melville, "Benito" 209)

Thus, Delano views these men just as Stowe's sympathetic readers might have viewed the slaves in her novel: Delano's slaves are not human but a species needing humans to rule over them.

Anticipating Roth, Melville challenges readers to abandon racial caricature and stereotyping. At the same time, Melville foreshadows Roth's outlook on the pitfalls of human nature by dramatizing in Babo, the black leader of the revolt, unmitigated ruthlessness. Nor do his comrades in revolt possess the blind devotion of Uncle Tom: they are willing to deceive, fight, and kill for their freedom and dignity. Readers should recognize this resistance as a distinctly human, even if sometimes vengeful trait. "Benito Cereno" therefore dramatizes the shortcomings of all people: for better or worse, the shared stain of human nature defies stereotypical constructions of identity.
Roth, who mentions Melville several times in his fiction, clearly admires the writers of the American Renaissance and uses Melville's notion of human depravity to create characters outside of the confines of stereotype. In fact, Roth's character, Peter Tarnopol, in *My Life as a Man* (1972), declares that Melville's "words were with [him] frequently" (52), thereby suggesting Melville's influence on Roth, who elsewhere creates Ahabian characters, most notably in the ire of Gil Gamesh in *The Great American Novel* (1973) and in "the Ahabian defiance of Herman Roth and Walter Winchell in The Plot Against America" (Duban, "How to Hate"). Located chronologically between those works, *The Human Stain* reverberates with a different, but no less important, Melvillian emphasis, specifically in the way human nature and its faults comprise an indelible birthmark transcending ethnicity and stereotype. Indeed, while Roth's characters yearn to live outside of race, the character of Coleman Silk demonstrates the difficulties of doing so.

*The Human Stain*, the culmination of Roth's exploration of identity and race, reveals the difficulties of constructing a new self in a culture dominated by categorical constructions. Nathan Zuckerman, who is at the center of Roth's concerns with identity negotiation, narrates the novel and expresses "the thrill of leading a double life" (*HS* 47) simply by watching Coleman Silk attempt to assert an identity that, in its rejection of black affiliation and in its appropriation of Jewish ethnicity, is based on an attempt at individual choice rather than on an alignment with dominant social categories. The book's events occur in the middle of Bill Clinton's impeachment, and Zuckerman feels frustrated by the overt morality of American culture. Rather than condemn the president, Zuckerman dreams of a "mammoth banner, draped Dadaistically like a Christo wrapping
from one end of the White House to the other and bearing the legend A HUMAN BEING LIVES HERE" (HS 3). Choosing not to judge Clinton harshly, Zuckerman wants the public to remember the president's human qualities, which make him far from perfect, reflecting the human shortcomings that frustrate social expectations and identity classification.

In his related imperfection, Coleman Silk remains apart from this world in which racial categories define a person's self; however, his avoidance of these traps is precisely what causes problems for him in his classroom at Athena College. Coleman asks his class if the absent students are merely "spooks" (HS 6). Later hearing about Coleman's remarks, those absent students, African-Americans, interpret his language as a racial slur by their seemingly Jewish white professor. Little do they know that Coleman has spent his life hiding his own African-American heritage in order to move beyond stereotypical constructions of self. That avoidance of his race creates a lifetime of secrets, hiding, and fear; thus, while Coleman desires freedom beyond racial classification, he is hardly free from cultural restraints, as evidenced by what may subconsciously have been a slur that projects his own racial insecurity onto the identities of the students.

It is indeed possible that Coleman's labeling of these students with this racial term reflects his own personal shame over being African-American. When summoned to the dean's office, Coleman claims that he was referring to a "'specter'" or a "'ghost'" and had "known perhaps fifty years ago but had wholly forgotten that 'spooks' is an invidious term sometimes applied to blacks" (HS 6). It is difficult to believe that Coleman, who as a youth found himself so distraught after having experienced the pain of racial slurs,
could ever forget these racially charged words and the way that they made him see that his position as a black man was severely limited by society's assumptions about him. In his youth, Coleman's father had protected him from the racism and blocked this "great American menace" from his life; but when Coleman leaves home for college, and someone calls him "a nigger to his face" (HS 106), Coleman does not react with anger. He instead turns his feelings of shame inward; he starts to see that "there was something of the nigger about him" (HS 106) and thereafter erases his racial heritage by adopting a new identity.

That effort to create his own identity leaves Coleman confused; rather than finding solace in the power to redefine himself, he feels shame over the person he has become. Coleman wants to live outside of stereotypical constructions of identity, finding that his "art was being a white man" and that his identity was his "singular act of invention" (HS 345). He felt that living outside the confines of his race was the only way that he might be able to assert his individuality. What Coleman fails to realize is that, while he might have been able to be "'more white than the whites'" (HS 345), he is unable to separate himself completely from his racial affiliation. In fact, even in his own shame over racial slurs, he still (in a moment of anger and frustration) falls back on his connection to his life as a black man. After a particularly heated discussion with a colleague over the incident in the classroom, Coleman said, "'I never again want to hear that self-admiring voice of yours or see your smug fucking lily-white face'" (HS 81). While the comment baffles Coleman's co-worker, who finds this an odd utterance, the sentence reveals Coleman's own uncertainty about where he belongs. On some level, Coleman's remark demonstrates dissatisfaction with his chosen identity and suggests
his discomfort with his own skin, since he can identity positively with neither African-Americans nor Caucasians.

Refusing to navigate his own connection to his racial and historical identity, Coleman delusively believes himself to be an individual first and yearns to live beyond stereotypical constructions by defining his identity in terms of his human characteristics rather than on the basis of pigmentation: "from earliest childhood on" he had wanted only "to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free" (HS 120). Loathe to be a black man, Coleman wants permission to live outside of these confines, and it is not until his father and brother are absent that he finds the approval that he needs in the world around him to live life as he wishes. When he leaves for college, Coleman (whose childhood has been closely managed by the strong presence of his father) discovers that "like it or not his father…had been making up [his] story for him; now he would have to make it up himself" (HS 107). Indeed, Coleman soon realizes that "[w]ith both bulwarks gone—the big brother overseas and the father dead—he is repowered and free to be whatever he wants, free to pursue the highest aim, the confidence right in his bones to be his particular I" (HS 109). Thus, deciding not to live as a black man but to adopt a new Jewish identity for himself, he reaffirms his desire to define himself by his individuality rather than by racial heritage, and he enhances his power of self-recreation with assumed Jewishness. Coleman thereby fancies himself "the greatest of the great pioneers of the I" (HS 108) and believes that it is only through shedding his racial affiliations that he can have the freedom "to go ahead and be stupendous" (HS 109).

Still, in a world overcome by stereotyped thinking, his efforts to move beyond his racial
identity reinforce the challenges of transcending a new self, unencumbered by stereotype.

Free from the overbearing identity of his father and brother, Coleman finds power in the seduction of the American dream and its suggestion that there he can be whatever he chooses. Because he believes that he can be more successful as a white Jew than as a black man, Coleman proffers new identity for himself, but without considering his own debt to the historical importance of race. Broaching a related topic, Toni Morrison, in Playing in the Dark (1993), writes, "Whatever the reasons, the attraction was of the 'clean slate' variety, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to be born again but to be born again in new clothes, as it were" (34). This freedom is precisely what Coleman desires in life; he yearns to be free of the "raiment of self" (Morrison 34) that he feels has held him back and experience the power and success of creating a new persona. Morrison, highlighting the potential of instigating a new identity, writes, "Power—control of one's own destiny—would replace the powerlessness felt before the gates of class, caste, and cunning persecution….One could be released from a useless, binding, repulsive past into a kind of history-lessness, a blank page waiting to be inscribed" (35). Coleman seeks this power and authority to assert himself as an individual. Desperately seeking to free himself from the racial snares of his culture, he nonetheless gains limited control over the effort to outrun his past.

While Coleman seeks a life unencumbered by racial restrictions, it is the illiterate Faunia Farley who, because of her understanding of the human stain, verbalizes the power in constructing one's own identity and deciding what identity to present to the world. Faunia describes humans as "inevitably stained creatures," full of "[i]mpurity,
cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen…. The stain that *precedes* disobedience, that *encompasses* disobedience and perplexes all explanation and understanding…. it's inescapable" (*HS* 242). Thus, the stain represents what makes us human, flawed, and unique. That base human reality is what solidifies Faunia and Coleman's implausible bond. Faunia's insight bonds the two, despite seemingly insurmountable differences. However, Faunia and Coleman might be more alike than either of them realizes: while Faunia appears to be "a wordless illiterate" (*HS* 47), she, like Coleman, has a secret (more educated and literate self) that she hides from the world. Just as Coleman wants to have the power to decide what identity he would present to the world, Faunia fakes her illiteracy because pretending not to read "spices things up" and allows her the potential to be whom she chooses (*HS* 297).

Dramatized in these two characters, flawed human nature embodies the unfeasibility of denying one's link to human heritage. As Coleman evades stereotypical constructions of African-American identity, he does not seem to be aware of implicit links to his past. Rather than seek another set of racial identifiers, Roth suggests that Coleman should have focused more on his personal heritage. Still, Faunia is acutely aware of the difficulties associated with trying to evade historical affiliations, and this is possibly what draws Coleman to such an unlikely partner. She reminds him of human imperfection and of his place within his own historical circumstances. Thus, the stain functions as a way to reconceive race along the lines of formulaic thought. Even the name "Coleman Silk" is laden with racial overtone and ambiguity, representing a lesson in the impossibility of forgetting the past, all the while highlighting human shortcomings that defy easily defined categories.
Here we may speculate about Ellison’s pertinence to Roth, as Ellison points to the difficulty of living in a world where race and historical connection to race is inescapable. Ellison writes that it "is not skin color which makes a Negro American but cultural heritage as shaped by the American experience, the social and political predicament" (Ellison, Shadow 136). Thus, Ellison, like Roth, asserts the difficulty, if not impossibility, of escaping cultural heritage. Unable to run from an imperfect past, Americans still have tried to flee and "suppress, if not forget, troublesome details of the national memory" (Ellison, Shadow 243). These ideas of escaping the past are especially important in terms of Ellison's own writing and his later connection to Roth's Coleman Silk, for Coleman's effort to escape the troublesome details of his past brings to mind Ellison's belief that one can sidestep neither culture nor humanity.

Through Coleman, Roth suggests the difficulties that stereotypical constructions have imposed on the self-realization of minority groups while, at the same time, pointing to the importance of valuing cultural heritage as an indicator of self. Rather than understand his connection to historical circumstance, Coleman attempts to escape and devalue his background. When he spends his first year at Howard (the college his father had chosen for him), he realizes that the "raw I was part of a we with all of the we’s overbearing solidity, and he didn't want anything to do with it or with the next oppressive we that came along" (HS 108). Failing to find commonality with the other African-American students, Coleman feels their oppressive presence in his life as a constant reminder of his inability to be anything other than "a Negro and nothing else" (HS 108). For Coleman, heritage is anything but a positive experience:
"You can't let the big they impose its bigotry on you any more than you can let the little they become a we and impose its ethics on you. Not the tyranny of the we and its we-talk and everything that the we wants to pile on your head. Never for him the tyranny of the we that is dying to suck you in, the coercive, inclusive, historical, inescapable moral we....Instead the raw I with all its agility." (HS 108)

Thus, Coleman believes that the only way he can experience self-discovery is to disconnect himself from his background and redesign his life. He thereby fails to realize Ellison's message about the value of heritage.

While Coleman yearns to define himself outside of the painful reminder of his past, he feels the burden of stereotypical constructions of race and longs to live beyond that pain, believing that identity outside his race will allow him to avoid "all that his father had ever had to endure. The impositions. The humiliations. The obstructions. The wound and the pain and the posturing and the shame—all the inward agonies of failure and defeat" (HS 109). Thus, Coleman sees only the negatives associated with living inside African-American culture and attempts to find a life where he can divorce himself from his own ethnicity. Still, like Faunia's crow, who "doesn't know how to be a crow" (HS 243), Coleman sees only the negative stereotypes associated with his race and ethnic heritage.

In this regard, Coleman can relate to Delphine Roux, his French colleague, who struggles with her own identity crisis and finally decides that the only way she can be successful is to become "the author of [her] life" (HS 273). Like Coleman, she hopes to turn her back on her past and construct herself "outside the orthodoxy of [her] family's given" (HS 273). Refusing to use heritage as a source of identity, these characters
(partly because of the dangers of stereotypical constructions) are unable to escape the reality of themselves and ultimately realize the painful reality of attempting to live outside of the "given." Coleman's family, however, feels betrayed by his decision to remain disconnected from his culture: "In it for himself, Walt used to say. In it always for Coleman alone. All he ever wanted was out" (HS 324). In the end, Coleman's attempt at separating himself from his past is a selfish concern, though one instigated by society's stifling categories. Thus, the event in the classroom inspires Coleman to remove himself even further from his cultural heritage. His only means of escape from the stereotypical constructions of self are his "accidental" death—that is, his suicide. Like Ellison's narrator, who simply goes underground, Coleman arrives at a freedom synonymous with death, thereby highlighting the difficulty, if not impossibility, of subverting categorical distinctions of race. In "The Purifying Ritual" (Chapter 5 of HS), in which Coleman meets his end, his demise is tantamount to cleansing. Yet Coleman's unlikely partner, Faunia, smartly asserts that the stain simply cannot be escaped and that all this "cleansing is a joke" because we should all be "[r]econciled to the horrible, elemental imperfection" of being human (HS 242). Stated otherwise, human nature, rather than racial affiliation, is the source of imperfection. Coleman may have known that death is the only way to evade racial traps: "The stupendous decimation that is death sweeping us all away….The ceaseless persisting. What an idea!" (HS 209). With Faunia's help, Coleman understands that, save through death, he cannot cleanse himself of his historical connection.

*The Human Stain* thusly dramatizes an effort to evade Lippman-like prescriptions of self. Even as Zuckerman has fallen victim to these snares, he says (after learning
about Coleman's background) that he "couldn't imagine anything that could have made Coleman more of a mystery" than "this unmasking" (HS 333). In fact, Zuckerman finds Coleman's truth to be especially confusing because he believes that now Coleman is an "uncohesive person" (HS 333), suggesting that it was his racial identity that ultimately stood to make him cohesive. Roth calls further attention to the difficulties faced by Coleman in Zuckerman's concluding comments: acknowledging the problems attendant upon subverting strict perimeters of identity, Zuckerman, who considers writing a book about Coleman, says that "Writing personally is exposing and concealing at the same time, but with [Coleman] it could only be concealment and so it would never work" (HS 345). Thus, Coleman's "exposing" highlights the struggle that he endures as he attempts to subvert the strict cultural confines of racial identity.

Refusing to create characters susceptible to positive Jewish stereotyping, Roth focuses on human qualities, whether Jewish or Gentile. Acting as a possible voice for Roth critic Irving Howe, in The Ghost Writer (1979), Nathan's father asks a Jewish judge to write a letter to Nathan after the negative reception (in the Jewish community) of Nathan's first book. The judge, who tells Nathan that "the artist has a responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice" (TGW 101), mimics Howe's claim that Roth should be supportive of his Jewish audience. Roth, in his own person, appears to have found such injunctions untenable and stereotypical. Roth's commitment is to American culture in general—to represent an honest portrayal of his characters. By refusing to work within categories of identity, Roth confronts his place in society by aligning himself with Ellison's belief that the "real guilt of Jewish intellectuals lies in their facile, perhaps unconscious, but certainly unrealistic,
identification with what is called the 'power structure.' Negroes call that 'passing for white'" (Shadow 132). Roth, then, refuses to "pass" and instead dramatizes the stains of human fallibility that link Jew and Gentile, black and white.
CHAPTER VI
THE CHALLENGE OF THE VENTRiloQUIST: "PERVASIVE UNCERTAINTY"
IN THE WORKS OF PHILIP ROTH

In *The Counterlife* (1986), *The Facts* (1988), *Operation Shylock* (1993), and *The Human Stain* (2000), Roth demonstrates the fluidity of truth and identity. Just as readers cannot trust any aspect of his art, so Roth's fiction asks them to question reality in general. Roth thereby challenges our understanding of truth through unreliable narration that induces an unstable construction of self for his characters. Ultimately, Roth establishes a new genre in American literature by creating a postmodern tradition of high art and American realism that calls attention to the importance of the imagination in a world where art and life become inseparable.

Because imaginative force is the most important aspect of an artistic endeavor, the idea of the novel as fact falls to the wayside. Anticipating a vital dimension of Roth's outlook on the importance of the imagination in art, William Dean Howells, in *Criticism and Fiction* (1892), declared that "a story of our own life, honestly studied and faithfully represented, troubles [readers] with varied misgivings. They are not sure that it is literature" (41). Howells thereby foreshadowed concerns crucial to Roth's career: Roth would have his readers sense that his characters are not realistic; rather, it is the art of storytelling and the importance of imagination that are significant. Roth's works focus on narrators who juxtapose every idea with its antithesis, thereby eliciting skepticism from readers. At the same time, Roth's questionable representation of reality makes it impossible for readers to determine where art ends and reality begins: the two,
however, are inseparable in Roth's narratives since the former needs the latter to survive. One critic takes this idea further by providing a definition of the novel that distances the genre from reality: in the novel "[n]o identifiable marks distinguish for certain a fictional statement from a real one. This makes lies possible, as well as perjury, irony, jokes, wordplay, and other features of everyday spoken and written language. It also makes literature possible, as a specific, historically situated, institution or cultural form in the West" (J. Hillis Miller, Literature 152-153). Roth's novels encourage readers to forego truth, since truth is not as important as imagination. For example, in The Facts, Roth asserts that his imagination has allowed him to not only be a good writer but also to survive difficult issues in his life: "The only experience worse than writing it, however, would have been for me to have endured that marriage without afterward having been able to find ways of reimagining it into a fiction with a persuasive existence independent of myself" (TF 152). Thus, Roth attempts to demonstrate the imaginative power in his writing and in his life, and with this focus his narratives challenge readers to realize the constructed nature of both fact and fiction and the blurred lines between the two.

Roth has long enjoyed toying with the reader's ability to buy into the reality of his narrative, and part of the pleasure of reading his work resides in exploring the connection between truth and fantasy. In The Breast (1972), a book indebted to Kafka's The Metamorphosis (1915), David Kepesh wakes up one morning to find that he has taken on the identity of a human mammary gland. Yet, Roth says that he wanted the "fantastic situation to be accepted as taking place in what we call the real world" (RMO 67). Roth asserts that part of the satisfaction of writing this book was about "deciding
what sort of claim to make on the reader’s credulity” (RMO 66) and trying to figure out what sort of claim the reader will accept. Thinking about his complicated relationship with Nathan Zuckerman, Roth asserts that the key to the imaginative force behind his work is impersonation: "I am a writer writing a book impersonating a writer who wants to be a doctor impersonating a pornographer—who then, to compound the impersonation, to barb the edge, pretends he's a well-known literary critic" (Roth, "The Art" 166-7). It is this impersonation that critics have overlooked and misjudged as merely a recounting of his life. While Roth's critics have become disenchanted with his use of his own life, Roth himself finds the altering of the "truth" of his life to be the most interesting part of his job: "Making false biography, false history, concocting a half-imaginary existence out of the actual drama of my life is my life. There has to be some pleasure in this job, and that's it….To pretend" (Roth, "The Art"166-7). In short, there is no "truth" in the life that Roth presents to his audience because he seeks to write good fiction.

Roth's ostensible attention to his personal life as a subject for his fiction demonstrates the importance of the imagination in his narratives. Rather than viewing his texts as a representation of the truth, Roth asserts that writing is a multifaceted process involving both fact and fiction. In the end, the mind "turns the facts over to the imagination….The butcher, imagination, wastes no time with niceties: it clubs the facts over the head…slits its throat, and with its bare hands, it pulls forth the guts….Eventually, there’s a novel" (Roth, "PW Interview" 220). Thus, Roth challenges his readers to examine his work not for the truth that might be found there, but for the imaginative force of his story.
However, Roth frequently struggles with critics who fuse Roth the author with the characters he creates and assume that Roth himself is no different than Zuckerman, Portnoy, or Kepesh. After the publication of Portnoy's Complaint (1969), Roth said that he could tell that "in the popular imagination, and in the media, Roth and Portnoy were about to be fused into the same person" (Roth, "Talk" 103). Indeed, Roth found the response to the book "unnerving because it led to a new and disheartening awareness of literature as something that could be used in ways that have nothing to do with the writer's intentions" (Roth, "Philip Roth: Should" 117). While Roth wanted audiences to recognize his novel for his storytelling, Portnoy's Complaint only heightened many critics' charge that he was writing and rewriting his own life. In a 1977 interview, Roth explained the misunderstanding as follows: "suppose you were Edgar Bergen and you went out into the street and somebody tried to drive a nail into your head because they thought you were Charlie McCarthy and your head was made of wood. You wouldn't like it" (Roth, "Talk" 105). Roth may sometimes be a ventriloquist, but his characters also take on lives of their own.

For good reason, Roth believes that his books should be "'read as fiction, demanding the pleasures that fiction can yield'" (Roth, "The Ghosts" 121); he understandably charges readers with laziness for apprehending his works autobiographically: "This is the easiest possible way to read. It makes just like reading the evening paper. I only get annoyed because it isn't the evening paper that I've written" (Roth, "A Confusion" 192). In fact, he not only refutes the presence of his life in his work, he also questions the importance of even reading that way: "'The relationship between my life and my work doesn't interest me the way it interests some readers, and
frankly it's a pain in the ass. Suppose Roth did every single thing in every single book that he's written? So then what?" (Roth, "PW Interview" 217). What Roth ultimately asks his audience to ponder is the uncertainty and fluidity of truth in his fiction.

In Roth's obscuring of the "truth" of his life, he also suggests the evasiveness of identity. In *Operation Shylock* (1993), he presents an American Philip Roth who encounters an Israeli Philip Roth, with the line between the two Roths becoming increasingly blurry. Advancing a similar flexibility of identity, *The Counterlife* (1986) sets the stage for the identity crisis experienced by Nathan Zuckerman, who finds empowerment in surrendering "the artificial fiction of being [him]self for the genuine, satisfying falseness of being somebody else" (*CL* 69). In its alternative plots, *The Counterlife* draws the line separating fiction and reality and explores the different paths that Zuckerman might have taken in his identity negotiation. Most importantly, though, the book implies that, just as truth should not always be trusted, identity, too, is fluid. *The Counterlife* also advocates that this blurring of lines is an especially American conceit: "America is full of…Chicanos who want to look like Texans, and Texans who want to look like New Yorkers, and any number of Middle Western Wasps who, believe it or not, want to talk and act and think like Jews" (*CL* 146). Roth asserts, then, the importance of the unfixed variables in life: after all, Zuckerman "object[s] to people clinging to an identity just for the sake of it" because he believes that "your 'identity' is just where you decide to stop thinking" (*CL* 301). Thus, these works highlight Roth's investment in the unpredictable nature of life and "self."

Beyond blending the lines between fact and fiction, Roth emphasizes narrative ambiguity by shrouding the motives of his characters in an unreliable narrator and
asserting that the art of storytelling is the most important feature of any narrative. What we see in Roth's work is a focus on imagination and an interest in artistry. Moreover, by reading Roth's work, we can see him dealing with the frustration of an audience that demands truth and privileges autobiography. Still, *The Human Stain*, *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*, and *Operation Shylock* are Roth's subordinate fact to the imaginative act of storytelling. In *The Human Stain*, Roth calls into question the overall authority of the work in the last few pages by making the reader aware of the narrator's unreliability. In the end, Zuckerman demonstrates that a well-told story is more important than truth. In *The Counterlife*, Roth, through the voice of Zuckerman, puts the imagination to work in a story where, rather than deconstructing someone else's experience, Zuckerman is the actor; what at first seems a concrete version of events, in the end produces uncertainty. The same feeling of uncertainty is overwhelmingly present in *The Facts* where Nathan Zuckerman questions the authenticity of the entire text and charges Roth with having failed to bring imagination into his work. With Zuckerman's questioning, Roth suggests the presence of, and need for, imagination in every account, whether it is labeled fact or fiction. Similarly, in *Operation Shylock*, Philip Roth (the author) writes about Philip Roth (the character), and the result is a complicated mind game for the audience. It is hard to determine who and what one can trust in this work, especially since Roth has spent most of his career telling readers not to think of his characters as representatives of himself. Ultimately, then, we see Roth using his imaginative force, all the while reacting to the critics who did not learn from Zuckerman's message in *The Facts* that fact and fiction are inseparable.
Irving Howe did not value Roth's investment in narrative and suggested that Roth merely rewrites his own experience. Howe found Roth's use of an "unreliable' first-person narrator" troubling because what usually follows in "such first-person narratives [is] a spilling-out of the narrator which it becomes hard to suppose is not also the spilling-out of the author" (72). Howe charges Roth with "literary narcissism" and asserts that Roth's narrators are frequently tangled in his own "raucous, self-aggrandizing" and controlling authorial voice (72). What Howe fails to realize is that this awareness of the authority of the narrator and the author actually highlights the difference between author, narrator, and character, reminding us of the distinctness of each voice or narrative persona. In Roth’s work, these three individuals collaborate in the text's instability: the resulting uncertainty produces characters hoping to find consistency through their search for self. Stated otherwise, when these narrators and their audiences fail to find a truth that makes sense, they create one.

An example of this created reality exists in The Human Stain, where the imaginative ramblings and unreliable narration of Nathan Zuckerman highlight Roth's focus on the untrustworthiness of the narrative; yet by the end we see that Zuckerman's truthfulness is less important than is his creativity. At one point, Zuckerman comprehends that he will never know the whole truth of the story because "[t]oo much truth was still concealed" (TF 315). However, Zuckerman is himself responsible for most of this concealing. Just after realizing, with what seems like a touch of surprise, that he has no firsthand knowledge of most of the events and is "forced to imagine" what happened (HS 213), Zuckerman, who appears to have only this brief moment of uncertainty, continues telling his story as if only he is privy to the absolute truth of these
people’s lives. Yet he feels frustrated that "the world is full of people who go around believing they've got you or your neighbor figured out" (TF 315); however, what Zuckerman does not admit to is that, by telling this story for Coleman and by inventing the details of his life, Zuckerman is one of these very people who invests in this "figuring out" of others.

Critics of this novel have heretofore failed to realize how Zuckerman commandeers the narrative and instead focuses on analysis of race, class, and discrimination. Indeed, rather than tell the story of Coleman Silk, Zuckerman projects his own preoccupations—both sexual and racial—into the narrative. Although Zuckerman's narrative presence is evident throughout the text, it is not until the very end—when Zuckerman encounters Les Farley—that we might infer the degree to which Zuckerman has imposed his own imagined reality upon the work. One critic finds that, since Zuckerman (at the end of the book) meets Farley in his "'secret spot'" where Farley spends time communing with nature, we can see that Farley is a "guardian of secrets" (Posnock, Philip Roth's 234-235). Yet, while Posnock assumes that Farley's secret is that he is a vicious killer, he never considers whether the major secret of the narrative lies with Zuckerman, who, by the end of the text, seems to be prone to exaggeration. Roth, in a New York Times Book Review article, says that the crux of this novel is that it gives the idea that "you had the illusion that you were suddenly able to know this huge, unknowable country" (Roth, "A Bit" 1), and this is exactly what seems relevant in the novel—the idea of knowing and the challenge of discovering the absence of that knowledge.
It is this absence of knowledge that makes the reader question the validity of Zuckerman's version of events, yet that also allows Roth, through Nathan Zuckerman, to create a narrator who seems aware of the challenges the reader faces when reading this book. In fact, Zuckerman even admits the difficulties of trusting this narrative: "I at first couldn't bring myself to believe in it either" (HS 20). With this comment, Zuckerman aligns himself with a reading audience that struggles to figure out the meaning of his story. Roth here calls into question the truthfulness of the narrative as Zuckerman recounts his story, all the while making it clear that Zuckerman does not have any real awareness of the events; however, all of this unknowing is acceptable because, as Zuckerman points out, no one really knows anything: "What we know is that, in an unclichéd way, nobody knows anything. You can't know anything. The things you know you don't know. Intentions? Motives? Consequences? Meaning? All that we don't know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing" (HS 209). Instead of valuing Zuckerman's tale for his reliability, we should appreciate his effort to make the story more creative and ultimately realize what fiction is really about: "For better or worse, I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know. I imagine. I am forced to imagine. It happens to be what I do for a living" (HS 213). Without this statement, Zuckerman asserts the importance of the imagination, and he suggests that the audience should value his story less for truthfulness than for originality.

Indeed, Zuckerman's story is original, and by the end, Zuckerman himself seems confused about whether or not he tells the truth. After Zuckerman's long and tangled tale, his one-sided telling of Farley's story suddenly becomes visible. After Zuckerman has described his account of Farley as a vicious, insane killer, Zuckerman, while driving
to meet with the Silk family following Coleman's death, sees Farley's truck parked on the side of the road and cannot help but stop to investigate. Zuckerman, who finds Farley ice fishing, constructs a story about Farley's being a ferocious man. Zuckerman discovers Farley sitting peacefully on the pond, fishing and feeling, in Farley's own words, "[c]lose to God" in this idyllic landscape where he can enjoy being away from the "hustle and bustle" of everyday life (HS 347). Zuckerman finds himself stunned by Farley and his "fluency—because it was the last thing [he] was expecting" (HS 350). Ultimately, Zuckerman has a difficult time realizing the improbability of his "truth" and has convinced even himself that the maniacal version of Farley, the supposed killer of Faunia and Coleman, is without question the true representation of this man.

As the two men converge on the ice-fishing pond, Zuckerman's fear of Farley contrasts with the calm man there and demonstrates the untrustworthiness of this narrative. As Farley quietly explains the art of fishing, Zuckerman's heart is "racing with fear" because Zuckerman believes that at any moment the evil Farley will surely emerge (HS 348). Zuckerman, though, who continues crafting an imaginative story, wonders why Farley would try to trick him with this seemingly benign behavior: "Conning me. Playing with me. Because he knows I know. Here we are alone up where we are, and I know, and he knows I know. And the auger knows" (HS 354). Thus, rather than admit that his depiction of Farley may have been inaccurate, Zuckerman persists in deeming Farley a madman, further highlighting the impressive power (even for the narrator) of a well-crafted story. However, while Zuckerman puts on a notable display of fear and doubt about Farley, Zuckerman's story is based in imagination. Zuckerman demonstrates what seems like genuine surprise that Farley "didn't take a pause and
stare [him] down. Didn't give [him] an especially threatening look. Didn't jump up and go for [his] throat. Just smiled a little, more good nature in the smile than [Zuckerman] could have believed [Farley] had in him to show" (HS 354). This Farley is a quiet fisherman who does not seem intent on harming anyone. Thus, Farley, the madman that Zuckerman crafted throughout the novel, hardly appears that crazy. Hence, Zuckerman sacrifices his reliability for the sake of an inventive narrative.

In the last pages of the text, Zuckerman, who has created large chunks of the novel around the terror of Les Farley, challenges his own account by presenting a Farley who is not a screaming madman. Since we see no irrationality in Farley that day at the lake, Farley's calm demeanor casts doubt on the validity of Zuckerman's narrative by representing a tranquil man who is not worthy of anyone's fear. When Zuckerman sees Farley at Coleman's funeral, he cannot believe how Farley "muscled on undisturbed…[,]manufacturing that crude reality all his own, a brute of a being colliding with whomever he liked however he liked for all the inner reasons that justified anything he wanted to do" (HS 315). Thus, even after obsessing about Farley's harmlessness, Zuckerman still asserts the danger of this man. In an ironic twist (or in an attempt to further confuse the reader), Zuckerman says these words without ever realizing that it is he himself who is manufacturing a crude reality for the story of Les, Faunia, and Coleman. In the final pages of the book, Zuckerman leaves the reader with a final image of Farley, but this image is one of peaceful tranquility: "Only rarely…does life offer up a vision as pure and peaceful as this one: a solitary man on a bucket, fishing through eighteen inches of ice" (HS 361). Zuckerman has filled the entire work with a raucous version of this man, yet Zuckerman, who leaves the reader with this image, only
highlights that it is his imagination (with no basis in trustworthiness) that has created his tale.

Building on this importance of the imagination, *The Counterlife* offers a look at Roth's constant challenging of reality and evasiveness of any form of truth. Ultimately, Roth's investigation undermines faith in either concept, and with this novel, he demonstrates that life and art have "a lot of beginnings, a lot of middles, and a lot of endings" (Roth, "PW Interview" 214). Roth here synchronizes plot lines to dramatize both the uncertainty of reality and his characters' quest for the evasive "self." In a 1987 interview, Roth clarified what he had hoped to do with the novel: "There are really five discrete versions of the book. The rug is pulled out from under you once, then again, but you don't know it at the time, and then it happens a third time, and then you get to the end, and you see that there is no rug, there's no floor" (Roth, "PW Interview" 216). Thus, Roth attempts to make his reader see that truth does not exist in fiction; one cannot and should not look for certainty in a place where nothing of the sort can be found. Rather than trust that Roth writes about his own life and his own experiences, he suggests that fiction will never be real.

In this same vein, *The Counterlife* investigates synchronicity by focusing on dual identities, highlighting how the narrative itself is an attempt to play with the binary oppositions dramatized in his work. Two brothers narrate the novel and endure a complex search for self; yet their quest is entirely different: while Henry travels to Israel to get to the core of himself, Nathan finds that he will realize his identity only with the birth of a child, and the story unfolds in a contradictory manner. With this text, one event occurs and then we discover that the event never really took place: Henry is dead.
in one chapter only to be alive and unscathed in the next; a hijacking occurs and then never really happened. Nathan dies rather than his brother. Eventually, the book highlights Roth’s main interest in storytelling: "So much for sincere, straight-from-the-shoulder storytelling. People who want to know what really happens in a work of fiction will find themselves bewildered. Only one incontestable fact exists: The Counterlife got written" (Roth, "The Varnished" 203-204). This text, then, is a celebration of narrative structure; the reader should not attempt to interpret any truth because none exists.

Indeed, through Henry's frustration with Nathan's chosen profession and the freedom that it allows him, this novel explores Roth’s assertions about the difficulties for a writer to manage truth and fiction. Not only does Henry find Nathan’s work frivolous and unimportant, but he also believes that Nathan merely spends his life rehashing the past and overanalyzing what he sees there. In section two of the novel, where Henry does what he considers to be the important work of making sense of his life in Israel, he accuses Nathan of being interested only in a "hollow intellectual game," where the brain can be "divorced from reality" (CL 140). Yet Henry admits later that this power to escape reality is exactly what people envy most about the writer: unwilling to be trapped by reality, the author can indulge "the slipping irresponsibly in and out of his skin, the reveling not in 'I' but in escaping 'I'" (CL 210). On some level, though, Henry resents Nathan because of Nathan's ability to lash "out from behind a fortress of fiction, exerting his mind-control right down to the end" (CL 231). However, Henry’s frustrations arise out of his own inability to move beyond truth. Ultimately, Henry's preoccupation with truth, in a narrative where no truth really exists, results in frustration for this character. Henry acts as a mouthpiece for Roth's critics who have felt exasperated by his effort to make a
clear distinction between life and art. In Henry's attempts to understand his brother's work, he finds that one can never know what is "real or false with a writer" because this "obsessive reinvention of the real" is part of the art of Nathan's life (CL 247). Henry ultimately fails to realize the importance of the story itself; Nathan, in turn, feels overcome by his own imaginative power, as if he has "written [him]self out of life" (CL 188). It is this imaginative force that is of real importance, as suggested by Nathan's remark: "Isn't it true that, contrary to the general belief, it is the distance between the writer's life and his novel that is the most intriguing aspect of his imagination?" (CL 210). Through the voice of Nathan, Roth asserts here that fiction should not be treated as fact, and vice versa; ultimately, he succeeds in blurring the line between the two.

Despite this concern about the distinction between life and art, Roth's characters also experience doubt about their identity. Nathan, who struggle with identity, attempts to explain to Henry that this fluidity is a normal function of life and offers an imaginative explanation of events: "The treacherous imagination is everybody's maker—we are all the invention of each other, everybody conjuring up everyone else. We are all each other's authors" (CL 145). As a result, Nathan demonstrates for Henry the inability to be oneself: "Being Zuckerman is one long performance and the very opposite of what is thought of as being oneself. In fact, those who most seem to be themselves appear to me people impersonating what they think they might like to be, believe they ought to be, or wish to be taken to be by whoever is setting standards" (CL 319). In the end, then, the blurring of fact and fiction extends to identity itself.

Roth therefore challenges the link between truth, fiction, and identity; he also asserts that he is not writing autobiographically because his own life does not contain
such impossibilities: "I thought that if I had Zuckerman die it might enlighten, if only momentarily, the sages who insist that I write only about what has happened to me....Now I only hope I don't kick off before the book comes out—otherwise the wisdom will be that I based Zuckerman's funeral on my own" (Roth, "To Newark" 199). The Counterlife therefore manifests Roth's frustration with readers who maintain that his work is nothing more than repeated self-exploration. The narrative challenges our notion of fiction and clearly situates Roth's writing in a world where truth matters less than the craft of narration, with the characters merely demonstrating the flexibility of truth. To highlight the confusion of fact and fiction in The Counterlife, Henry reveals the layering effect of Roth's narrative as he discusses his brother, Nathan, who is "using [Henry] to conceal himself while simultaneously disguising himself as himself" (CL 226). By creating a work that has little reality, Roth highlights the separation between fact and fiction and ultimately suggests the instability of both.

Roth raises the bar on his challenge to truth and narrative representation in The Facts, in which he invites readers to abandon the concept of truth in reality and to realize the value in a well-crafted story. Not only does Roth highlight the use of the unreliable narrator in this work, he also calls attention to the tenuous border separating fact from fiction. The title itself anticipates Roth's questioning of human perception in the context of whoever chances to narrate a given outlook, even if that deals with the perceived facts of one's own existence. From the book's opening correspondence, Roth explains his aim for writing this faithful version of his life: he hopes to demonstrate "the structure of a life without the fiction" because, as he writes, "If this manuscript conveys anything, it's my exhaustion with masks, disguises, distortions, and lies" (TF 6).
He thus purports to move beyond the "masks" that he wears in his fiction and report the truth. Roth then tells the story of his childhood in Newark, his troubled marriage to Jose, as well as his reaction to the negative response to his work, constructing a narrative that is utterly believable. In the process, Roth asks a question that becomes vital to his work: "who can distinguish what is so from what isn't so when confronted with a master of fabrication?" (TF 111). Roth, who has been the "master of fabrication" throughout his career, does not let us forget, even in a discussion of his life, that the storyteller has had a hand in these events. However, Roth does not end his biography with the professed facts of his life; instead, he again challenges his reader's thinking about the existence of truth in the hypothetical autobiography.

With this memoir, Roth challenges our understanding about "truth," and he highlights the delicate balance between fact and fiction in an unexpected text—his own autobiography. After Roth tells his story, Zuckerman responds to Roth's version of events by questioning every aspect of the narrative. Zuckerman accuses Roth of having had to twist the facts to create coherency and the semblance of authenticity, the very technique that Zuckerman uses in The Human Stain. Yet, Zuckerman also charges Roth with an even greater crime—eliminating the imagination from the text. He asserts that, in order that Roth might represent his life, he has removed an important and necessary element—the imagination that characterizes Roth's more conventionally fictive narratives. Ultimately, Zuckerman charges Roth with having stripped the narrative of its interest and imagination. Himself an unreliable narrator, Zuckerman commences his critique of Roth's work thusly: "I am not a fool and I don't believe you" (TF 168). He then claims that, rather than writing with imaginative force, Roth has ignored this
powerful part of his voice and has "tied [his] hands behind [his] back and tried to write it with [his] toes" (TF 169). Just as Zuckerman told Coleman that "writing personally is exposing and concealing at the same time, but with [him] it could only be concealment and so it would never work" (HS 345), so he now accuses Roth of the same crime of concealment, even in an autobiography.

Zuckerman therefore creates uncertainty about the reliability of autobiography. Because of his interest in crossing the line between fact and fiction, Roth finds the book incomplete "without a Zuckerman casting serious doubt on autobiographical objectivity as an attainable goal" (Roth, "What Facts" 234). Zuckerman feels that his presence in the novel is what saves it from complete failure because it is here where Roth hands "the facts over for imagination to work on" (TF 184). Zuckerman finds Roth, "without his imagination" (TF 185), and lacking a fictional narrator, hollow and uninteresting. Thus, Zuckerman's mere existence in the text suggests that Roth's autobiography must, and always will, include fiction, just as his fiction includes fact. Zuckerman's presence highlights the inability to separate the two and suggests that one cannot be apart from the other. As Zuckerman says,

…the only person capable of commenting on his life is his imagination. Because the inhibition is just too tremendous in this [autobiographical] form. The self-censorship that went on here is sticking out everywhere. He's not telling the truth about his personal experience. In the mask of Philip he is not capable of doing it. (TF 191)

Zuckerman here verbalizes the crux of the issue in much of Roth's work: the autobiographical leanings that Roth's critics have charged him with are simply false.
because, while these works may contain some factual foundations, Roth ultimately fills them with fictional, imaginative interest. Zuckerman challenges the notion that accurate autobiography is even a possibility since imagination has the real power over the text.

Zuckerman likewise notes the "countertext" in Roth's fiction and the way that this creative side of Roth's work actually controls the narrative. In his analysis of Roth's life story, Zuckerman points out that "strip[ping] away the imagination to get to a fiction's factual basis is frequently all that many readers really care about," and he wonders "Why is it that when they talk about the facts they feel they're on more solid ground than when they talk about the fiction?" (TF 166). Zuckerman therefore wonders why Roth's readers do not value the story Roth tells and want instead to make the story factual. In *The Facts*, though, Zuckerman believes that Roth has tried to give his audience a foundation to stand on but should actually be providing them with a look at the "countertext" of his life (TF 172). Ultimately, Zuckerman, claiming that Roth has played it safe, finds Roth's narrative lacking the imaginative force: he tells Roth that "you try to pass off here as frankness what looks to me like the dance of the seven veils—what's on the page is like a code for something missing" (TF 162). By the end, it is the importance of storytelling and the beauty and interest of the imagination that Zuckerman finds important in, and missing from, Roth's autobiography. In Roth's other works, Zuckerman finds that the beauty of these texts has been to "intertwine the facts with the imagination," but in this autobiography Roth does the opposite by "intertwining them[,]...peeling them apart[,]...peeling the skin off [his] imagination, de-imagining a life's work, and what is left even they can now understand" (TF 167). Zuckerman, then, posits as unavoidable the manipulation of the facts in any literary form, including
autobiography. He charges Roth with having presented partial truth in *The Facts*, and he suggests that Roth does not have the "heart—the gall, the guts—to do in autobiography" what Roth would consider "absolutely essential in a novel" (*TF* 183). Zuckerman implies that "there is mystery upon mystery to be uncovered" once Roth abandons "the disguises of autobiography" (*TF* 184), highlighting the value of the imagination in Roth's work.

Almost in response to Zuckerman's insistence that imagination is the most valuable aspect of any work, Roth, throughout *Operation Shylock*, explores the inventive yet unstable quality of narrative, and the way a juxtaposition of fact and fiction renders futile the reader's capacity to posit a difference between art and life.\(^9^0\) Roth complicates matters by using his own name in the text.\(^9^1\) In fact, Philip Roth, the author, even uses the subtitle "A Confession" for the work to establish the link of the text to reality. Moreover, Roth's claim of truth in such a seemingly fictitious environment suggests again that the narrator is unreliable. Roth begins the text by talking about his drug addiction to Halcion and his attempts to overcome that problem. In this discussion, Roth wonders who he is, asking, "Where is Philip Roth….Where did he go?" (*OS* 22). With this comment, Roth asserts his own confusion about the likelihood of this tale really having taken place. Not only does Roth question the validity of the book, but he also doubts his own identity. Through this work, Roth situates the novel somewhere between imagination and realism, with the American narrator Philip Roth searching for the Israeli character Philip Roth, thus focusing the attention of the reader on the quest for self. Yet the author Philip Roth magnifies the journey of the narrator Philip Roth through the synchronization of opposites: fantasy/reality, Israel/America,
author/character. Thus, the examination of narrative strategy in terms of synchronization stands significantly to augment scholarly conversation about identity negotiation in Roth's works.

In the preface to the novel, Philip Roth the novelist spends time convincing his audience that what follows is a true version of events so that he might call attention to the instability of life and art and cause the reader to question the blurring of the two. He writes, "The book is as accurate an account as I am able to give of actual occurrences that I lived through during my middle fifties and that culminated, early in 1988, in my agreeing to undertake an intelligence-gathering operation for Israel's foreign intelligence service" (OS 13). With this statement, he asserts the validity of the text as a work of truth and spends the rest of the book presenting specific names, places, and conversations so that he might situate his work in the factual realm. Roth nonetheless calls this text a novel, but only at the insistence of his Israeli foreign intelligence agent, Smilesburger, who hopes to protect those involved. What, in the beginning, was a strict assertion of truthfulness, by the end seems to have Roth adding to the confusion by asserting that possibly none of this transpired. Roth therefore plans to send his manuscript to Smilesburger to "confirm that what I was reporting as having happened had, in fact, taken place" (OS 360). However, as Roth seeks to confirm these events, his "true confessions" become another way to blur the line between fact and fiction. He admits that "if I had not invented Operation Shylock outright, a novelist's instinct had grossly overdramatized it" (OS 360). Roth here suggests the tenuous line between fact and fiction as he realizes his ability to discern between the two is implausible; and, ultimately, the reader has similar difficulty making sense of the narrative. This text also
inverts the assumptions of Roth’s critics who have insisted that he must be writing his own life by creating an utterly unbelievable "true confession."

In *Operation Shylock*, Roth highlights the instability of life and art through his use of doubling to call attention to the search for identity while seeking to make sense of the world. In fact, upon meeting the Israeli Philip Roth, the narrator Philip Roth decides that he should begin calling himself "Pierre Roget," a "barely transmogrified name of the nineteenth-century word cataloger who is known to virtually everyone as the author of the famous thesaurus" (OS 40). His very name, then, calls attention to the doubling in the text as the Israeli Roth meets his own "synonym" and finds himself bewildered by "the spellbinding reality of his unreality" (OS 70). In an attempt to understand his double and their "synchronistic phenomena," the narrator Philip Roth and the Israeli Philip Roth set up meetings in which they heatedly discuss the unlikely situation (OS 79). However, the Israeli Philip Roth seems aware of his counterpart's untrustworthiness in relaying events to the reader: "It's a cozy universe you've got going—you're the truth-telling Philip and I'm the lying Philip, you're the honest Philip and I'm the dishonest Philip, you're the reasonable Philip and I'm the manic psychopath" (OS 193). This passage highlights the blurred line between fact and fiction as each Philip Roth comes to represent a version of the story. As the narrator Philip Roth deals with the "other one. The double. The imposter" (OS 115), the writer Roth establishes a conflict between good and evil as the double acts as an archetypal doppelganger embodying Roth’s "evil fantasies" of himself (OS 115). Thus, as Roth causes the reader to question exactly who is good and who is bad in this text, he also merges fact and fiction since reality
becomes "a baffling and disappointing nuisance" (OS 348) compared with the wonder of the imagination.

It is the narrator, though, who feels the heavy burden of attempting to discern what truth is, and he longs for a return to a simple life of certainties: "I never longed so passionately…for my life before impersonation and imitation and twofoldedness set in, life before self-mockery and self-idealization (and the idealization of the mockery; and the mockery of the idealization; and the idealization of the idealization; and the mockery of the mockery)" (OS 218). In this work, almost nothing can be explained, and the narrator’s attempts to justify his confusion only add to the level of uncertainty in Roth’s "truthful" recounting of events. Furthering the level of confusion about the truthfulness of the book, Roth thinks longingly of the time "when what was outside was outside and what was inside was inside, when everything still divided cleanly and nothing happened that couldn't be explained" (OS 219). Yet the reader becomes aware that nothing in this book can be explained. In what seems like an effort to convince himself, Roth wonders "if it might be best to present the book not as an autobiographical confession that any number of readers…might feel impelled to challenge on the grounds of credibility, not as a story whose very point was its improbable reality…[but] as a fiction…whose latent content the author had devised" (OS 361). Thus, the reader accompanies the writer on his attempt to make sense of it all and assert an identity in which even the narrator Philip Roth can believe.

To add to the confusion of the reader, the author Philip Roth continues to highlight the perplexity of this novel in the interviews surrounding the work. He challenges his reader to disbelieve what he has written and maintains that he has
provided his critics what they have wanted from him since the beginning—ultimate and unashamed truth. In a 1993 interview, Roth asserts the validity of what occurred in the novel, also reminding the interviewer of the pressure from Smilesburger to call the work fiction. However, during the entire interview, Roth never abandons his claim that the novel should be read at face value. In a discussion of his critics, Roth's ultimate motive with this novel becomes quite clear: "when I wrote 'Portnoy's Complaint,' everybody was sure it was me, but I told them it wasn't. When I wrote the 'Ghost Writer' everybody was sure it was me, but I said none of these things ever happened to me. I made it all up. And now when I tell the truth, they all insist that I made it up. I tell them, 'Well, how can I make it up since you've always said I am incapable of making anything up?' I can't win!" (Roth, "Philip Roth Sees" C13). More to the point is the fact that, in *Operation Shylock*, Roth further blurs the line between fact and fiction, relative to a superbly crafted story.

Indeed, Roth wants his audience to value a well-crafted story; by illustrating the importance of the imagination, Roth highlights the interchangeability in fact and fiction, suggesting that the audience should ignore demands for "truth": "If someone cared only about whether this or that in *David Copperfield* had really happened to Dickens, he would miss much of the charm of that book" (Roth, "Talk" 103). In sum, the relationship between art and life is something that cannot be defined; what ultimately matters is the well-crafted story.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

In *Operation Shylock* (1993) Roth best expresses his investment in his craft: "I left the front stoop on Leslie Street, ate of the fruit of the tree of fiction, and nothing, neither reality nor myself, had been the same since" (219). Indeed, Roth's devotion to writing has changed his own experience in the world, but it has also altered the face of American literature. Roth illuminated challenges to identity inherent in American culture, all the while emphasizing the stifling elements of that same culture. Ultimately, Roth suggests that identity and reality are not fixed concepts; they are unreliable and fluid because no one form of "truth" can encompass reality. Roth's narratives illustrate the point, replete as they are with uncertainties, suggesting that truth matters less than an imaginatively told tale. He demonstrates the impossibility of outrunning one's own historical circumstances and the need to question the "truth" or the so-called "fact."

Chapter II of this dissertation established the foundation of Roth's focus on the difficulties of managing dual identities in a culture invested in the Protestant work ethic. Although the Patimkins of *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) wish to live outside of their history and their own ethnic origins, they do not want to be read as Jewish; they yearn to be free from all cultural restrictions without allegiance to ethnic identity. Neil Klugman, in particular, feels pressured to adhere to Christian values. Neil nonetheless becomes caught between two possibilities: the emptiness of the Patimkin world and the stifling life of his family in Newark. Realizing that neither option is viable for him, Neil, like Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man*, chooses a life for himself beyond both alternatives. It would
appear that the "dual necessity of coming to terms with the self in the process of resisting what others perceive one to be is central in Roth's fictions" (Jones and Nance 11). This duality, with which Neil struggles in Goodbye, Columbus, as he attempts to figure out what it means to be Jewish in a world resistant to his ethnic traditions, highlights the difficulties of negotiating two selves and signals the first major expanse of Roth's long-term interest in identity negotiation.

In turn, Chapter III explored, with reference to "Eli, the Fanatic" and Ghost Writer, the results of this challenge to assert an identity when living with two selves. Eli and Nathan Zuckerman feel that they cannot have a successful experience in America; but unlike Neil, who gets to decide if he wants to participate in this reformation of self, Eli and Nathan must assimilate and adopt the hollow life represented by the Patimkins in Goodbye, Columbus. Eli and Nathan seek to escape their identity repression by turning to the transcendental notions of art and nature; ultimately, though, they understand that they can run neither from their historical backgrounds nor their essential identities.

Building on Roth's exploration of identity negotiation, Chapter IV examined the difficulties Mickey Sabbath confronts when seeking to transcend the barriers that confine human creativity and expressions of self. While it appears that Sabbath is a free-wheeling sex maniac unencumbered by traditional notions of morality, he in fact feels burdened by the Puritan control that orders American existence. Sabbath's Theater illustrates an important component of Roth's work and his focus on identity: as Sabbath tries to assert a self outside of Puritan restraint, he desperately uses that control to keep death at bay. Roth, in a 1969 interview, best summarizes the hardships of escaping the complex American tendency for sexual freedom, all the while
negotiating the Puritan ideals that are so much a part of our cultural identity: "Walking about in a fallen world, with these two Edens warring in their heads, modern Americans are made borderline schizophrenics" (Roth, "Portnoy's Complaint by" 25). Throughout Sabbath's Theater, a confusion of identity and morality intimates Roth's concern with the conflicting quality of the American self.

Chapter V, in turn, considered the way identity itself is a limiting cultural factor. Establishing a legacy of stereotyped constructions of self, the chapter demonstrates that, through Coleman Silk in The Human Stain (2000), Roth suggests that one cannot escape history or the stain (flawed human nature) that links us all. In The Facts (1988), for example, Roth accounts for the importance of one's past: "To me, being a Jew had to do with a real historical predicament into which you were born and not with some identity you chose to don after reading a dozen books" (TF 126). Unlike Coleman Silk, who believes he can shirk off one identity for another, Roth accounts for the difficulties of adopting a new persona in light of the historical circumstances and the imperfections that unite human existence. Nor does Roth resort to stereotypical constructions of identity; he suggests that identity should exist beyond stereotype. At the same time, he asserts the need for the elements that link us all as humans (our imperfections) to replace these limiting definitions of self. Roth therefore creates characters with flaws; he does not try to create perfect Jewish personae because he finds that even positive stereotypes are, with regard to the complexity of human nature, reductive.

As a conclusion to the dissertation's examination of identity and narrative, Chapter VI explored the fluidity of self and the ways in which this uncertainty introduces questions about reality. The Human Stain, The Counterlife (1986), The Facts, and
Operation Shylock illustrate the importance of the narrative structure rather than the "truth" of the story. Because Roth has so long been accused of writing and rewriting his life, in these works, he challenges critics who search for autobiographical facts in his fiction. Because identity is so fluid, these works imply that reality is not as important as an imaginatively told story. More than anything, Roth wants his reader to value the narrative structure and appreciate it as a work of art—not an example of ultimate truth. Because art and life are different, Roth's art should be appreciated for its imaginative force.

The construction of "self," rather than "truth" or "the facts," is ultimately what matters to Roth. Roth explores identity, morality, and narrative in a Jewish-American context because his ethnic ties are what he knows best. While Roth's critics have focused on his harsh treatment of the Jewish people, Isaac Singer best expresses the importance of writing within one's experience: "'Shall I write about Spanish thieves and Spanish prostitutes? I write about the thieves and prostitutes that I know'" (Singer 84). As Singer points out, then, Roth focuses on Jewish-American life because this is what he understands, and it is exactly this "knowing" that establishes a distinct literary voice. Ultimately, then, Roth focuses on the memories and experiences that he can most eloquently turn into fiction. Ralph Ellison, whom Roth greatly admires expresses the importance of writing about "the myths and rites...functioning in our everyday lives" (Shadow 174), and Roth undeniably sees the advantage of focusing on the narrative of one's identity and the aspect of "knowing" that Singer categorizes as vital to a meaningful writing career. And because Roth is interested in how tradition fits into one's experience, he also asks us to think about how the past is useful in recognizing
what shapes cultural identity. Roth, reflecting on the difference between his work and that of other American writers, says, "Updike and Bellow hold their flashlights out into the world, reveal the real world as it is now. I dig a hole and shine my flashlight into the hole" (Roth, "Conversations" 154). Indeed, Roth looks into the past and how that past has helped shape American identity. He explores the significance of this past by highlighting the inescapable importance of our history for the present.

Because Roth is preoccupied with the past, his attention to history has been a main concern of this dissertation. Text and historical context merge in "Eli, the Fanatic," The Ghost Writer, The Human Stain, and Patrimony (1991) in which Roth tells the story of his father's death, linking past, present, and future. We have seen the details of his father's life echo his father's investment in the past as guides to the present and future. Whereas Nathan Zuckerman challenges the reality of Roth's life in The Facts; and, whereas, Coleman Silk, in The Human Stain, seeks to escape his heritage, in Patrimony Roth demonstrates the inescapability of one's history and the importance of that history in shaping the present. In the last sentence of Patrimony, Roth writes, "You must not forget anything" (238) because memory—our inescapable past—is the true definer of the self.

Just as Patrimony set a precedent for Roth's focus on the importance of memory and the mind, so Roth's more recent works epitomize the fear of the loss of the self through death. Roth, even in his seventies, writes prolifically, perpetuating many of the concerns of identity and narrative that he explored early in his career. Still, part of what he has focused on in the last ten years is the demise of the self. In The Dying Animal (2001), Roth takes a step to further what he began in Sabbath's Theater: while Sabbath
feels the pressure of death and attempts to do what it takes to avoid death, it is really David Kepesh, in The Dying Animal, who asserts Roth's concerns in a twenty-first century America—the failure of the body and the inability to escape that destruction because in "every calm and reasonable person there is a hidden second person scared witless about death" (DA 153). In this text, then, Roth begins what will be a decade-long examination of the value of the body by suggesting that the body is just as important as the mind. As disease destroys Consuela, David's love interest, Roth asks the reader to consider what will become of her mind; and ultimately Roth explores Kepesh's fear of death and the destruction of the body and the self.

Roth, who spent the early part of his career considering the difficulties of asserting an ethnic identity, turns his focus in The Dying Animal toward the destruction of that self through deterioration of the physical. He moves from an investigation of the inner-thoughts of his characters and their own existential dilemmas to an examination of the significance of that which physically sustains identity. In the last decade, then, Roth's characters face the end of their lives not by negotiating dual selves, but by contemplating the failing body. In Everyman (2006), for example, Roth focuses on death, "life's most disturbing intensity" (169). The title of the book suggests the universal certitude of finality. As he opens the narrative with the funeral of the narrator and then looks back at the sad events of the narrator's life (recounting not only his struggles with illness and physical turmoil but also his inability to assert an identity of his own choosing), Roth implies that reader and character alike share the same susceptibility to death. The latter is just a tad ahead.
Exit Ghost (2007) and The Humbling (2009) likewise explore the vulnerability of the mind as the body fails, and these characters seek to prolong life through sex. In Exit Ghost, Zuckerman struggles with the prostate cancer that has ravaged his body and details the frustrations he suffers as he loses even his ability to maintain continence. In this book, though, Zuckerman still experiences the sexual urges he did as a young man, and he feels the “bitter helplessness of a taunted old man dying to be whole again” (EG 67). Through Zuckerman's struggle, Roth asserts that the physical expression of sex is a way for Zuckerman to remember that he is alive, and without the ability to feel alive physically, his self (his mind) is restricted and dying. To add to his exploration of facing the end of one’s life, The Humbling presents a main character whose gift in life, his craft of acting, is failing him; because of this failure, his identity is tenuous and uncertain. As an attempt to reassert his physical and mental self, Simon Axler seeks fulfillment in sexual encounters that might help disguise the loss of his creative outlet; in short, he attempts to restore physical desire (when his mental craft flops) and finds peace by taking charge of his own death through suicide.

Roth's recent work also explores the death and weakness of the physical self for young people. Indignation (2008) focuses on a young man who commits a defacto act of suicide by allowing himself to be expelled from college and drafted into the Korean War. Like Roth's other current fiction, the book continues Roth's interest in death, the importance of memory, and the stifling nature of morality. Similarly, Roth's most recent work, Nemesis (2010), explores a young man as he faces the deterioration and weakness of the physical body through disease. Bucky Cantor, devoted to bodily strength in his job as a physical education teacher, watches as his students suffer and
die from polio. What is clear in this novel, though, is the changing of the mind due to the body's vulnerability. When Bucky contracts polio himself and his physical being becomes weak and disabled, his entire demeanor changes. Ultimately, his life is never the same because of the devastation of his physical self. Through this text, we see this young man struggle with the weakness of his physical being, suggesting Roth's interest in the difficulties of escaping the destruction of the body and the ultimate obliteration of the self that results.

For all of Roth's investment in an exploration of the self, he nonetheless explores cultural experiences and how those encounters have helped shape his writing. Although many of Roth's critics know him primarily as a Jewish writer, he still credits the way American experience has influenced his career: "America is the place that I know best in the world. It's the only place I know in the world. My consciousness and my language were shaped by America. I'm an American writer in ways that a plumber isn't an American plumber or a miner an American miner or a cardiologist an American cardiologist. Rather, what the heart is to the cardiologist, the coal to the miner, the kitchen sink to the plumber, America is to me" (RMO 128). He writes narratives that probe the difficulties of life in contemporary American society, and he recognizes the responsibilities attendant upon dramatizing the American experience. Ultimately Roth asks us to think about the meaning of American culture and being American.94

Finally, there are those who challenge Roth's allegiance to his Jewish identity. These critics fail to realize that Roth is devoted to both his Jewish and American identities: "being a Jew and being an American are indistinguishable, the one identity bound up and given shape by the other" (Roth, "What Facts" 231). Thus, even as his
critics attacked him for not writing glorified tales of Jewish life, Roth stuck by what he believed and wrote about what he knew. Saul Bellow points to Roth’s honest portrayal of Jewish life: "It is entirely clear that he is not satisfied with what Jewish life in the United States has become and though his criticism is usually made laughingly there are moments when it isn't possible to laugh" ("A World" 8). Yet, what is clear from reading Roth's work is his devotion to the craft: "It's what I have instead of religion…. [S]ome people believe in God, and I believe in the reader" (Roth, "Philip Roth Sees" C13). In sum, writing is what keeps Roth's mind alive so that his creative self can flourish; as he asserts the importance of the past and the difficulties of declaring dual identities, one cannot help but recognize the bravery behind his brutal honesty as he takes on questions of identity, reality, and narrative.
1 Many critics of Roth’s fiction, such as Judith Paterson Jones and Guinevera A. Nance, rely heavily on Roth’s biography as a significant basis for argument. The most obvious example of this use of autobiography is evident in the 1996 work of Alan Cooper, *Philip Roth and the Jews*. In this text, Cooper makes many points about Roth, yet he fails to carry them to any real conclusion. He hints at Roth's ability to toy with reality: Cooper asserts that Roth enjoys confusing his critics by making it impossible for them to believe any aspect of what he writes. Thus, it seems that Cooper suggests, just as I do, that Roth's version of reality should not be trusted. However, Cooper makes this argument in the context of Roth's autobiography. While Cooper proposes that Roth's life is the reality to trust, I will argue that even the autobiography that Roth presents to us is fiction and that his writing creates an unstable version of events that affects both his characters and his reader. While critics like Milowitz and Wade have touched upon Roth’s characters' search for self, they do not explore that emphasis in sufficient detail or in relation to Roth's aesthetic probing of such concerns. And while Cooper glosses these themes in *Philip Roth and the Jews*, he regrettably labels as "cliché" (11) the struggle of Roth's characters' to understand freedom and deal with their own realities. I aim, therefore, to supplement previous examinations of Roth's work by evoking new contexts and categories to reassess the social concerns and artistic achievement of Roth’s fiction.

2 In his work *Criticism and Fiction*, W.D. Howells contrasts the American novel with the English novel. He finds the American novel to be more honest and true to real life than the English novel. His examination of the American novel is especially interesting in relation to contemporary authors such as Roth. Howells discusses the ability of the American novelist to work "without [an] inwardly" (58) focus because American writers "concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than the social interests" (62).

3 In *The Fiction of Philip Roth*, John N. McDaniel states that Roth is a "social realist who...sees around him no smiling aspects of American life" (3). I would argue, however, that Roth deeply values American culture. He sees the flaws of American society, and he represents them in his work. Moreover, Roth's characters are extremely involved in American culture. Although Roth is a social realist, I see in his writing a devotion to American identity. He has dedicated much of his career to exploring the themes of American life; in fact, one could argue that in the work of Philip Roth, America represents another multifaceted and complicated character.

4 Hermione Lee, in his book *Philip Roth* (1982), argues that the novella is about Neil's coming of age in America.

5 See "F(r)ictions of Identity in *The Human Stain,*" in which Kral believes that Roth's attempts to deal with dual identities is not stifling but vitalizing: "Roth does not overlook the trauma linked to the experience of minority positions, but shows how it can become
empowering. Belonging to two cultures provides two sets of interpretative tools that allows the individual to transcend the 'given'...[and] to understand the challenges of a new world geography" (54).

6 James M. Mellard's article "Death, Mourning, and Besse's Ghost: From Philip Roth's \textit{The Facts} to \textit{Sabbath's Theater}" focuses on the issue of death and grieving in the text. Mellard uses examples from Roth's supposed autobiographies to highlight Roth's consideration of death and dying in his career and life. In "Portrait of the Sexist as a Dying Man: Death, Ideology, and the Eroticism in Philip Roth's \textit{Sabbath's Theater}," Frank Kelleter claims that the overly erotic nature of the novel is based not in the writings of the Marquis de Sade, but in Roth's criticism of an exceedingly repressed middle class culture. Probably the most useful article on this novel, however, is "Roth/Counter Roth: Postmodernism, the Masculine Subject, and \textit{Sabbath's Theater}." In this piece, Debra Shostak declares that \textit{Sabbath's Theater} causes readers to face the "brutal facts of physical decay and death" ("Roth/Counter Roth" 119). Shostak makes an important point, but she does not take her assertion about death any further. In fact, the most vital aspect of her argument lies in her discussion of Sabbath's attempt to make his life, like his work, a performance. Thus, I believe that this angle fits in nicely with the previous chapters of my dissertation. Because of my prior discussion of Roth's characters' search for self, it is important to note that Sabbath, then, attempts to establish a self based solely in this act.

7 See \textit{Reading Myself and Others} where Roth writes, "A quotation from Melville began to intrigue me, from a letter he had sent to Hawthorne upon completing \textit{Moby-Dick}. I pinned it up along with the other inspirational matter on my bulletin board. 'I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb'" (87).

8 Paule Levy, in "The Text as Homeland: A Reading of Philip Roth's \textit{The Counterlife} and Operation Shylock," questions Roth's artistic allegiances. While he does suggest that Roth plays a narrative game in these works, he does not explore the Jewish search for self in terms of American and Jewish identity.

9 See Howe's scathing criticism of Roth ("Philip Roth Reconsidered"). In this review, not only does Howe attack Roth's work (claiming that it is vulgar and predictable), but he also attacks Roth personally by stating that Roth's "[u]nfocused hostility often derives from unexamined depression" (73). Howe originally reviewed the novella in 1959 in "The Suburbs of Babylon," in which the worst thing that Howe could say about the text was that it was formulaic. He even praised Roth for having "a unique voice, a secure rhythm, a distinctive subject" (17).

10 See Sanford Pinsker's "Bashing the Jewish-American Suburbs."

11 Hirsch suggests that Jews are alienated not from American culture (because they have successfully assimilated) but from Jewish culture (48). I would propose, though,
that Jews, especially Roth's protagonist in *Goodbye, Columbus*, are alienated from both cultures. In the end, though, Klugman finds that neither culture is feasible for him.

12 Karl finds problem with the notion of being Jewish-American because, even with the integration of the American identity, Jews still remain outsiders—the Other (378). While I agree with Karl's idea that Jews are often seen as the outsider in American culture, I will take his notion one step further by examining why Jews are "Othered."

13 Blau's book examines the traits of American life, which are heavily invested in the rights of the individual over the rights of society. He points to the ideas of our forefathers who pushed individuality and self-reliance, and he focuses on the ideas of Thomas Jefferson, who asserted that each generation restructures society and owes to its predecessors no responsibility to pass on the values of the past (Blau 21-45). This idea is especially important in the novella considering the Patimkins' wish to restructure their present situation so that the past becomes unimportant.

14 Leo, the disgruntled lightbulb salesman whom Neil meets at Ron's wedding, is a perfect example of this aspect of the Protestant work ethic. He provides for his family each day, but he scoffs when his wife asks him to return from work early so that he might "play with the kid" (GC 126). He says that he can't be a good husband, a good father, and a good worker because he is "'no movie star'" (GC 126). Following the ideas of competition inherent in the Protestant work ethic, Leo is extremely jealous of the Patimkin family. He sees what they have, and he wonders why he cannot also be so lucky because, as he says to Neil, he works just as hard as Mr. Patimkin, and he has "'more brains in his pinky than Ben got in his whole head'" (GC 128). Even though Leo is not as successful as the Patimkins, he has still adopted the beliefs of the Protestant work ethic. He competes with his own family, and he feels dissatisfied with life because his financial life is not thriving like the Patimkins'.

15 This chapter is the not the first mention of the connection between Roth and Ellison. Graham briefly mentions the connection between Ellison and Roth by suggesting that Roth's "authentic hero" is Ellison's Invisible Man. Parrish's article ("Ralph Ellison: The Invisible Man in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*") deals with the link between these two authors in great detail, though with exclusive attention to *The Human Stain*.

16 I here take issue with Kazin, who says that Roth casts a "cold eye on Jews as a group" because he wants only to be "free" from the past (Bright 145). While Roth does look to the future with his writing and stays constantly on the cutting edge of cultural discourse, he is undeniably focused on and fascinated with history and with the past (both American and Jewish). Despite their best efforts, his characters are unable to escape their past simply because their failure to escape highlights Roth's sense of the importance of Jewish history.

17 Most articles, and some books, devoted to *Goodbye, Columbus* posit the novella as a coming-of-age story. See Lee, Jones and Nance, Nilsen, and Israel.
France finds the controlling image of the text to be "directly related...to the Patimkins' successful struggle to distance themselves from their past, to establish membership in the national, largely Gentile, elite" (84). Nilsen refers to the Patimkins as "respectfully Puritan" ("On Love" 80). Difference seemed to be the very thing that the Puritans feared, and this apprehension seems firmly rooted in suburban America, especially in Short Hills, where the Patimkins seek to blend in with the gentile elite.

France states that Neil "identifies God with the emoluments of upper class commodity culture" (84), and he also relates Neil's climb into Short Hills as a heavenly ascent.

While Neil finds Short Hills heavenly, he believes that Newark is far from his notion of heaven. He imagines his "Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max sharing a Mounds bar in the cindery darkness of their alley, on beach chairs, each cool breeze as sweet to them as the promise of afterlife" (19). Neil believes that the inhabitants of Newark can only dream of the afterlife because they do not experience it on a daily basis like those living in the suburbs of Short Hills.

For the Puritan appropriation of the New Israel, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, Redeemer Nation (1980).

Given Roth's sundry references to Hawthorne in his fiction and interviews, the suggestion of a particular Protestant fall from grace seems inviting at this juncture. For Roth's several references to Hawthorne, see Duban's "Being Jewish in the Twentieth Century," who points, as well, to a merging of Jewish and Christian values in "Eli, the Fanatic," and who finds the dilemma of Hawthorne's Parson Hooper to be similar to that of Eli Peck.

Shostak states that the Patimkins "impersonate Americans by excelling at consumption" ("Roth/Counter Roth" 118). I would suggest, however, that they are able only to "impersonate" Americans in every aspect of their lives. Outwardly they perform American (mostly Christian) values, but they are not quite able to do more than just stage this identity. They join a Jewish country club, and they remove any Jewish traits from their children. They want to be free from the complexities of being Jewish in America.

See Overman for more information on the importance of sports in the Protestant work ethic.

Baumgarten and Gottfried find the union of Brenda and Neil to be a positive endeavor because their coming together can "bridge the values of the immigrant Jewish past and the American future" (37). Still that suggestion seems to ignore the ending of the novella where, as Roth proposes, "there is no real cause for celebration" (RMO 191). After all, Neil decides by the end of the novella that neither option is viable for him, and he can only find solace in the library.
France suggests that no alternative exists to the hollowness of the 1950's commodity culture and that Neil's only choice is to return to the library. I agree that Neil feels that the materialistic culture of the Patimkins is no choice for him, yet I argue that he returns to the library not because it is his only choice but because it allows him to go into hiding until American culture has widened to include non-assimilated people. See Searles's comparison of Neil and the Negro boy.

As first suggested to me by James Duban, Stern argues that Tommo experiences leg pain as the consequence of his disassociation from Western culture and his unsuccessful attempt to join the Typee's culture.

Shostak (Countertexts) suggests that Neil, upon seeing himself reflected in the window at Harvard Yard, realizes that he is the Other. She argues that Neil recognizes that he is in an excluded position and will remain there no matter his material possessions. I would add that Neil recognizes that he is on the outside of mainstream culture and that he cannot fit in with the Patimkins (who will do whatever it takes to fit in).

Lee states that Neil does not return to his Aunt Gladys's house to celebrate or to the Patimkin home to ask for forgiveness because he realizes that his life's happiness will be found in "books and art" (30). Walden suggests that Neil is "faced with himself, existentially, literally" (6). Jones and Nance propose that part of Neil's problem is that he is torn between wanting a literary vocation and unrestrained self-gratification. However, it seems that, while Neil might be tempted by this duality, in the end he must go underground to await a better option, which hardly seems self-gratifying.


Aarons finds that, in order to be middle-class Jews, Eli and the Jewish citizens of Woodenton have exchanged their Judaism for a "wished-for Gentile (and genteel) respectability" (8). In addition, Alan Cooper states that these Jews want to escape from the roots of their religion.

Duban points to a merging, as well, of Jewish and Christian values in "Eli, the Fanatic," finding the dilemma of Hawthorne's Parson Hooper to be similar to that of Eli Peck ("Being Jewish"). He situates his argument on the difficulties of liberal Protestantism and reformed Judaism to accept the valid insights of orthodoxy concerning the shortcomings of human nature. My argument likewise recognizes Roth's connection to Hawthorne but suggests that Eli's synchronistic universe entails more than an attempt to deal with the difficulties of orthodoxy; his search is also about his effort to forget his past and seek a self outside of religion or assimilation in nature.

Dr. Zuckerman's ideas are especially interesting in light of Rubin-Dorsky's argument that Nathan's father grounds his ideas on a principle "that Roth himself readily acknowledges, namely that literature does not exist independently of social spheres and therefore always has political consequences" ("Philip Roth's" 170). This idea is
important in light of my overarching concern with Roth's method of negotiating problems of identity in these two texts.

34 See Pozorski for an in-depth look at the connection between Nathan's fight with his father and his fantasy of marrying Anne Frank.

35 In Chapter 2 ("The Carpet-Bag") of Moby-Dick Melville references the Biblical passage Jude 1:13, which states "raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

36 See Hendley for a discussion of what he terms Nathan's exchange of "Judaism for art" (95). Although without reference to transcendentalism, Hendley focuses on the "modern, college-trained artist" (87) and the difficulties for this modern figure to experience a coming of age.

37 Wade, whose reading focuses mainly on Lonoff, writes that this book is about "directing a reading towards our undermining of the conventional 'classic' status of withdrawal, self-sufficiency and Wordsworthian closeness to nature that is found in the Walden spirit" (94).

38 See Milowitz, as well as Baumgarten and Gottfried, for further discussion of Lonoff's attempt to escape the Nazi terror of the twentieth-century in the wilds of America. In addition, Rand suggests that the "ghost" in the novel is Zuckerman's attempt to deal with his survivor's guilt.

39 Karl points to Nathan's fantasy of Anne Frank as a way that he attempts to assert himself and his Jewishness. While I agree with Karl that Nathan attempts to find himself through this exploration of Anne Frank, I will argue that his creation of her is about constructing a Christian narrative to manage his own identity negotiation.

40 Ravvin suggests that Zuckerman identifies with Anne through an attempt to deal with the difficulties of the Holocaust and in turn "come to terms with where he comes from" (84).

41 See Oostrum, who suggests that the reception of Anne Frank's diary is similar to the sentimental literary tradition utilized by Harriet Beecher Stowe in Uncle Tom's Cabin. While Oostrum proposes that Roth is using the same technique as the nineteenth-century school of sentimentalism, he is reluctant to examine Roth's motives.

42 For more on this, see David Van Leer's article entitled "Hester's Labyrinth: Transcendental Rhetoric in Puritan Boston."

43 See Chapter 19, "The Child at the Brook-side" in The Scarlet Letter (1850), for further examination of Hester's disappointment with the forest's inability to hide her shame.
See The Blithedale Romance (1852) for a fictional account of Hawthorne's impressions of Brook Farm and its inhabitants. For a review of the critic's ideas about Hawthorne's investment in transcendentalism, see Rosa, 114-45.

Shechner (Up Society's) examines how Roth encourages his audience to surrender the last vestiges of American Puritanism; however, he does not explore Sabbath's own devotion to that moral system.

My study here benefits from categories suggested by Colacurcio.

On the Antinomian Controversy, see Hall.

Miller summarizes the words of Governor Winthrop: "all those who enter a civil society...no longer have the right to exercise their impulses to evil, but are now committed...to obeying the authority which is set over them for their own good, and to only doing that which is inherently good, just, and honest" ("Preparation" 255).

See Morone's historical outline of America's devotion to Puritan values. Kagan likewise makes a strong argument for the overt morality of American culture.

See Royal's thoughts about the "puritan, sanitized nature of American society" (Philip Roth 170) and about how Sabbath, while disgusted with stifling culture, is too vital to fade away. I argue, however, that Sabbath attempts to step outside of those boundaries; but because he utilizes the very notions of American morality that Royal sees Sabbath disgusted by, Sabbath is unable to succeed in his efforts.

In I Married a Communist (1998), Zuckerman's high school English teacher tells him that "the moral system" causes nothing but "loss" and "entropy" (318), and it is this painful process of repression that Roth delves into in his work.

Sabbath's Theater is not Roth's only attempt at satire; Our Gang (1971) anticipates this dimension of Roth's artistry.

See Mathews' assertion that Kepesh equates the state of the world and the conservative attitude of this country with his own death. Additionally, in The Dying Animal (2001), Roth links Puritan ideology to American culture. Kepesh finds that we, as Americans, learned from the Puritans to shield and protect our youth from sex; he also asserts, "[o]ur earliest American heroes" were the American Puritans or the leaders of this "virtuous utopia" (DA 62) where order ruled strongly.

For Roth's reference to Hawthorne, see The Great American Novel, 36-38.

See Safer (Mocking) for Sabbath's control of women in his life.

For Rabelaisian (1494-1553) readings of Sabbath's Theater, see Safer (Mocking) and Shostak ("Roth/Counter Roth"). A few critics make cursory mentions of the connection
of Roth to Sade. Greenham briefly references a tie to Sade; in addition, see Kelleter, who maintains that Roth "saves his characters from the monotony of Sadean eroticism" (6).

57 See Reading Myself and Others (300), The Professor of Desire (31), The Anatomy Lesson (171), and Everyman (34) for Roth's other references to the Marquis de Sade.

58 See Le Brun for an in-depth analysis of how Sade "derealizes the external world by making it into a vast puppet theater in which his persecutors are the marionettes" (105). In this section, one sees a clear connection to Sabbath who also attempts to control the external world through marionettes.

59 Halio asserts that, in both Sabbath's Theater and The Dying Animal, the main characters use sexual activity as a "means of defying death and asserting life" (201). Problematic, however, is Halio's suggestion that Roth writes about sex and existence because he (as an ailing man) has suffered through it. Thus, Halio resorts to an autobiographical reading, despite Roth's previously asserted ideas about truth and fiction.

60 Cherolis argues that Kepesh tries to avoid social norms by shunning commitment because he feels that it is an "entrapment that infringes on [his] freedom" (15).

61 See Wood's discussion of Sabbath's attempts to deal with his death. Wood addresses the struggle, but in isolation from the issue of Hayman who, in an interview with Roth, makes cursory mention of the "moral undercurrent" present in Roth's work (Roth, "Philip Roth: Should" 118).

62 Roth does not mention the work of Wright. For further mentions of Melville in Roth's work, see RMO (87), LG (38), CL (178), and GAN (41-45).

63 Parini examines the novel as social satire and finds stereotypes present in the novel. Parini's analysis of stereotypes does not include a look at race and identity, though. His article focuses, instead, on professorial stereotypes.

64 See Posnock (Philip Roth’s), Matthew Wilson, Elam, Shechner for discussions of these emphases. Matthew Wilson argues that Roth's novel can be tied to the work of Charles Chesnutt: if these authors "can demonstrate that the passing 'black' character is no different from the white character in social and cultural attainments, and most importantly in feeling, then the writers of these texts hoped that they could begin to show that the racial binary was little more than a "'social fiction'" ("Reading" 138). This "social fiction" is especially important in The Human Stain. Franco ("Being Black"), Brett Kaplan, and Omer-Sherman tie the novel to the Nella Larson novel Passing (1929). While Kakutani ("Confronting"), Moore, Podhoretz, Posnock (Philip Roth’s), Brett Kaplan, Tenenbaum, Shechner, Safer ("Tragedy"), and Omer-Sherman relate the novel to the critic Anatole Broyard (1920-1990), Roth comments, though, that this critic had no connection to the novel: "There was much talk at the time that [Coleman] was based on
a journalist and writer named Anatole Broyard. I knew him slightly and I didn't know he was black. Eventually, there was a New Yorker article describing Anatole's life written months and months after I had begun my book. So, no connection" (Roth, “Philip Roth Serves”).

65 See Chapter 1 in Ewen and Ewen for further information on the history of the word.

66 Stowe "was the first to maintain that in writing [Uncle Tom's Cabin] she was less concerned with producing a work of literature than with the urgent need to persuade people...that slavery was wholly immoral" (Kazin, Bright ix).

67 Baldwin also criticizes protest fiction because it puts the "good of society...before niceties of style or characterization" (Notes 18). He finds that the authors of protest fiction should remember that the work must be literary.

68 Baldwin, who found Stowe's look at race wildly unsuccessful, likewise deems Bigger Thomas as problematic: to "present Bigger as a warning is simply to reinforce the American guilt and fear concerning him" (Notes 43).

69 See Baldwin's comments on Wright's book where he calls the ending of Native Son "the dream of...liberal men" (Notes 45) and asserts the problem of creating stereotypical characters in attempts to effect positive change.

70 See both The Facts (125-128) and Reading Myself and Others (191, 222-223) for Roth's take on his connection to Ellison and the Yeshivah Symposium where they first met in 1962. Parrish, in "Ralph Ellison: The Invisible Man in Philip Roth's The Human Stain," makes a connection between the two men. Also, see Chapter I of this dissertation for a related discussion.

71 Two critics link Roth to the writers of the American Renaissance in HS. Shechner calls Coleman Silk Roth's "modern Dimmesdale" ("Roth's American"152). Posnock links Roth to Melville's Moby-Dick, finding Coleman to be "distributed between the monomaniacal Ahab and the melancholy, insouciant, 'gamesome' sole survivor Ishmael" (Philip Roth's 223).

72 Omer-Sherman refers to Coleman as "Roth's most persuasive apologist ever for the American Dream" (Diaspora 259).

73 While several critics link Roth's stain in this book to human shortcomings, none finds that the stain functions to help Roth reinvent protest fiction. Medlin mentions that Roth's human stain is a "powerful metaphor for the blemish of human fallibility" (90). Shostak asserts that the stain provides evidence of the "fallen state [that] we feel compelled to hide from the view of others" (Philip Roth 260). Parrish ("Becoming Black" and "Ralph Ellison"), Brett Kaplan, and Omer-Sherman relate the stain to be human weakness.
Posnock calls the novel's focus on passing about "self-imposed purification," which conflicts with Faunia's assertion that there is no way that one can be purified (Philip Roth's 203).

Pertinent here is Irving Howe's rather different treatments of Roth's and Richard Wright's varied approaches to ethnic identity. In his first review of Roth's book Goodbye Columbus and Five Short Stories (1959), Howe criticized Roth for writing with a moral sharpness: "All of his stories use their subjects as targets; all drive openly to moral conclusions, hammered out with aggressive intent…some of them are too easily absorbed in the 'points' they make, leaving little to contemplate except these 'points'" ("The Suburbs" 18). However, while Howe lambasted Roth, he championed Richard Wright's exploration of identity in Native Son. Howe admires Wright's attempts to bring to light the problems of Negro life in America, and he even criticizes the "generation of intellectuals soured on the tradition of protest" ("Black Boys"). How contradictory that Howe excoriated Roth for challenging the same stereotyped notions of identity. Ultimately, then, Howe seems comfortable with stereotyping as long as it is inside a stereotype.

While Geoffrey Bakewell ties the work to Oedipus, his ultimate claim that the novel is a fitting conclusion to Roth's trilogy because it "reflects not only our cultural ideals and aspirations, but also…the high costs involved in embracing them" is a good one (46). This statement underscores the important cultural work that Roth is doing in the novel.

Irving Howe ("Philip Roth") charged Roth with writing and rewriting his. However, more recent critics have also accused him of leaning too heavily on the story of his life. See Justin Kaplan, Lehman-Haupt, Kakutani ("Of a Roth"), and Halkin. For a more literary discussion of Roth, see Brauner, Tuerk, Goodheart ("Writing"), and Shostak.

Many critics, in writing about Operation Shylock and The Counterlife, emphasize Roth's attempt to write the Jewish experience in Israel. Furman explores Roth's depiction of the Arab "other" in both Operation Shylock and The Counterlife, while Paule Levy investigates Roth's look at identity through the Jewish "homeland." Lehmann explores the connections in Operation Shylock "between American and Israeli Jewish identity…by utilizing, inflating, and mocking historical stereotypes" (85). Shostak ("The Diaspora") and Fishman expound upon Jewish American identity in Operation Shylock. Parrish ("Imagining"), Royal ("Texts, Lives"), and Safer, who also investigate identity, consider the importance of the "doubling" in Roth's text and the postmodern effects of these countertexts. For further information on synchronicity in Roth's work, see Duban's, "Being Jewish in the Twentieth Century."

Franco ("Being Black"), Brett Kaplan, and Omer-Sherman tie the novel to the Nella Larson novel Passing (1929), while Kakutani ("Confronting"), Moore, Podhoretz, Posnock (Philip Roth's), Brett Kaplan, Tenenbaum, Shechner, Safer, and Omer-Sherman relate the novel to the critic Anatole Broyard (1920-1990). Parini examines the novel as social satire. Bakewell links the work to Oedipus. In addition, D.A. Boxwell
emphasizes culture wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. See Posnock (Philip Roth's), Matthew Wilson, Elam, and Shechner for a discussion of the elements of passing in the novel. Shechner and Posnock link Roth to the writers of the American Renaissance in HS. Medlin briefly mentions that Roth's human stain is a "powerful metaphor for the blemish of human fallibility" (90). Shostak asserts that the stain provides evidence of the "fallen state [that] we feel compelled to hide from the view of others" (Philip Roth 260). Parrish ("Becoming Black" and "Ralph Ellison"), Brett Kaplan, and Omer-Sherman hold that the stain illustrates our human weakness. While Kakutani ("Confronting"), Moore, Podhoretz, Posnock, Brett Kaplan, Tenenbaum, Shechner, Safer, and Omer-Sherman tie the novel to the critic Anatole Broyard (1920-1990), Roth comments that the critic had no connection to the novel: "There was much talk at the time that [Coleman] was based on a journalist and writer named Anatole Broyard. I knew him slightly and I didn't know he was black. Eventually, there was a New Yorker article describing Anatole's life written months and months after I had begun my book. So, no connection" (Roth, "Philip Roth Serves").

80 Safer, who also writes about the ending, notices "incongruities" in the text (Mocking 129) but finds those conflicts to be about whether or not Farley, rather than Zuckerman, is telling the truth. By the end of her chapter, she does suggest that there is a problem with the reliability of the narrative, but she only touches on this idea as an afterthought. Instead, she questions "whether Lester is consciously lying to Zuckerman about all his personal history or whether he is so crazed by the trauma of Vietnam...that his memory is faulty" (Safer, Mocking 129).

81 James Duban shared his ideas about Zuckerman's unreliability at the end of the novel during the drafting of my dissertation proposal. See, for a related emphasis, his upcoming article on American Pastoral.

82 Goodheart writes about Roth's postmodern approach to The Counterlife, asking if "postmodern writing can qualify as realism?" (449). Matthew Wilson ("Reading") looks at the novel as Roth's examination of the importance of history. Shostak, in "This Obsessive Reinvention of the Real": Speculative Narrative in Philip Roth's The Counterlife," sees at the structure of the novel deconstructing the self. Pinkser, in "Imagining American Reality," says that this novel yearns to be read as an exercise in deconstruction. Royal, in "Postmodern Jewish Identity in Philip Roth's The Counterlife," sees the book as the "starting point in Roth's exploration of postmodern ethnicity" (423).

83 This search for truth is extremely important, especially in light of the search for self that I explore in Chapters I and II. In The Counterlife Henry must negotiate the meaning of being both Jewish and American. What is unique about this search, and adds to the first two chapters of the dissertation, is the emphasis on Roth's negotiation of being an American Jew in the Jewish homeland of Israel. Like many of Roth's other characters, Nathan and Henry experience the frustration of seeking to be authentically Jewish in America and Israel, finding that this is an almost impossible feat.
84 Bailey calls attention to the fictionality of Roth's autobiography, saying that it should be called "autobiografiction" (211). In this article, Bailey compares the autobiography of Roth, John Updike, and Tobias Wolff, asking why none of these authors seems that invested in writing "truth." Kauver explores the relationship of fact and fiction in The Facts, finally asserting that life, for Roth, consists "not of synthesis but because of contradiction" (444).

85 Roth does have a second autobiographical account, Patrimony: A True Story (1991), where he details the last days of his father. In this text, Roth relies significantly on memories to construct the identity of himself and his father.

86 Dodd, anticipating Roth's autobiographical fiction in The Facts, writes about Roth's investment in blurring the lines between fact and fiction in My Life as a Man. He makes the claim that Roth creates this uncertainty because it "allows him to make the self—and particularly the self of the artist—solely the product of art" (64). In addition, Pinsker, in "The Facts, the 'Unvarnished Truth,' and the Fictions of Philip Roth" looks back at the works that led up to the publication of Roth's autobiography and reads Roth treatment of his autobiography as a response to self-hatred.

87 Wirth-Nesher writes about Roth's autobiography as an attempt to explore his relationship with the reader as well as cement his Americanness.

88 Gooblar finds that Roth does reveal himself in his writing, and he argues that we should not question the validity of his truthfulness. Instead, he finds that Roth's autobiographical writings explore "the ethical ramifications of writing" (33).

89 Paule Levy questions Roth's artistic allegiances. While he does suggest that Roth plays a narrative game in these works, he does not explore the Jewish search for self in terms of American and Jewish identity. Royal ("Texts, Lives"), Parrish ("Imagination") and Safer (Mocking) explore the relationship between art and life; however, none of these texts considers the importance of imagination for Roth's writing. Safer focuses on placing Roth in a postmodern timeline of fragmented literature, while Parrish examines the diasporan assimilation of Roth's characters. Royal, who also draws on the conflict of life and art, suggests that the doubling in Roth's texts has to do with ethnic identity and the implications of Roth's own negative feelings about his Jewish identity.

90 Roth uses his own name as the main character in The Plot Against America (2004). In this text, Roth also creates a story that closely matches the life of his family, yet his imagination plays an important role in the work as he alters the events surrounding America's involvement in WWII.

91 See 1993 interview with Fein where Roth says, "I'm not trying to confuse you. Look, let me tell you something that a lot of people have trouble believing. This happened. I stepped into a strange hole, which I don't understand to this day. There are many people who say they don't believe this and I tell them: 'I'm not going to quarrel with you. That's not why I was put on earth.' But I can tell you that, in substance, this happened. It
was necessary to make changes, as I said in the introduction, but they don't affect the substance of the book” (Roth, “Philip Roth Sees” C13). In the same interview, Roth also says, "The book is true…As you know, at the end of the book a Mossad operative made me realize it was in my interest to say this book was fiction. And I became quite convinced that it was in my interest to do that. So I added the note to the reader as I was asked to do. I'm just a good Mossadnik" (Roth, “Philip Roth Sees” C13).

92 See Roth's "A Bit of Jewish Mischief." In this short article, Roth writes that the Philip Roth imposter "forged an astonishing affinity between myself and the audience that has long considered me exactly what I considered him: deformed, deranged, craven, possessed, an alien wreck in a state of foaming madness—someone, in short, who isn't really human at all. Those whom I've offended should be happy to hear that I now have more than a faint idea of why they have wanted to kill me and of what, rightly and wrongly, they have been through" (1).

93 In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison wanted to write about myths that function in everyday life because of his admiration of T.S. Eliot. Ellison observed that Eliot was writing about the significance of ancient myths and rituals and how this folklore might be a way for the world to be saved from modernist woes. However, Ellison realized that if Eliot found importance in the traditions of long ago, there might also be some value in our current cultural context. Roth, who admires Ellison, also takes these myths and rituals and demonstrates how they help us understand our past. For more information on Roth's connection to Ellison, see Chapters I and IV.

94 See Scott's article for the *New York Times Book Review* "In Search of the Best." On that list, Roth is only one of two authors to have multiple books listed. However, while Cormac McCarthy has two entries, Roth has six works on the short list of 22 important books.
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