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Philip Roth and the “Jewish Body”

Joshua Lander

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School of Critical Studies
College of Arts
University of Glasgow

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Abstract

In the wake of Donald Trump's presidency, American and European readers turned to Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) in an attempt to understand how such a tyrant could have risen to power. Trump's ascension, combined with Roth's death last year, generated a renewed interest in the author's literature and his explorations of what it means to be an American.

This thesis foregrounds Roth's examinations of Americanness by thematising the "Jewish body" in his fictions. I explore how Jewishness has been racially codified through the body, and how Roth's fiction subversively responds to and resists antisemitic racial binaries that sought to distinguish the "Jew" from the "American". In its investigation of the "Jewish body", the thesis examines how Jews in America were re-racialized after the Second World War and the Shoah, noting the ways in which Jews' entry into "whiteness" affected conceptualizations of Jewish gender differences.

In its discussion of race and gender, the thesis confronts Roth's problematic representations of women and the masculinist focus underpinning the author's fictions. In doing so, the thesis expands beyond Roth's treatment of masculinity and male desire that has dominated Roth scholarship. Instead, I bring into focus Roth's representation of Jewish matriarchs, nationality, sexuality, and race, using the "Jewish body" as the thematic kernel to interlink each chapter. The thesis argues Roth undermines racism and antisemitism, and considers to what extent the author risks replicating the sexism underpinning America's racist social structures.

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Abbreviations

<i>AP</i>	<i>American Pastoral</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>The Anatomy Lesson</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>The Counterlife</i>
<i>EF</i>	“Eli, the Fanatic”
<i>GW</i>	<i>The Ghost Writer</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>The Human Stain</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Portnoy’s Complaint</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Sabbath’s Theater</i>
<i>TF</i>	<i>The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography</i>
<i>ZU</i>	<i>Zuckerman Unbound</i>

Introduction: Jews that Matter

Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?

– William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew. – Sylvia Plath, “Daddy”

Reading Roth and Others

At my first conference in America I was told by the co-organizer that I looked like a Jew, but did not sound like one. A few years later, I attended the Vilnius Yiddish Institute, where a classmate informed me that I had the look of a Philip Roth scholar, and very recently, at the “Philip Roth Remembered” conference, a well-meaning professor observed that I resembled Philip Roth himself. This last comment was particularly disconcerting.

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to examine and answer the following questions: what does it mean to look and sound Jewish, and how do these distinctions of Jewish difference translate transnationally? How is the body used to define and distinguish Jews from non-Jews? Who gets to determine what a “Jew” looks like? What is at stake in the act of identifying and distinguishing a Jew from a non-Jew based on bodily differences? How are these physiognomic distinctions established, and how are these somatic variations defined through concepts of “race” and gender? Finally, how have antisemitic conceptualizations of Jewish bodily differences influenced Jewish and non-Jewish perceptions of Jews?¹

The thesis attempts to answer these questions by looking at the fiction of Philip Roth. As Sander Gilman highlighted in their seminal work *The Jew’s Body* (1991), “the fear of sounding different, [or] sounding too Jewish [...] haunts Roth’s work” (11). Developing from Gilman, I offer a reassessment of Roth’s fiction and the ways his work explores how antisemitism has influenced and shaped Jewish identities within America. I have chosen Roth because his work unpacks the complex ways Jewish Americans internalize and negotiate antisemitic conceptualizations of “Jews” that centre on the body. Roth’s fiction shows a

¹ Throughout the thesis, I use “antisemitism” rather than the conventional “Anti-Semitism.” There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the term “Semite” is fallacious; there is no such thing as a Semite or a Semitic people. Secondly, as I discuss later, the phrase was used to try to justify anti-Jewish discriminations through pseudoscientific claims, and I do not wish to legitimize the phrase in any way. Thirdly, I follow Deobrah Lipstadt’s argument that the term “doesn’t deserve the dignity of capitalization, which in English is reserved for proper names” (25).

repeated interest in exploring how the body operates as a contested site of meaning in which Jewish religious, racial, and gendered differences are created and maintained.

The question of how Jews in America and Europe navigate public and private spaces has become an important issue. Antisemitic incidences have increased sharply in both continents. In France there was a 74% reported rise in antisemitic offences committed against Jews last year (2018); elsewhere, in the UK antisemitic hate crimes increased 16%, and in Germany there were 1646 antisemitic acts reported in 2018, the highest level of anti-Jewish incidences in the last decade.²

In America, per the Anti-Defamation League, there were 1,986 antisemitic incidents throughout 2018, a 57% increase from the previous year (*Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2018*). On October 27 2018, a white gunman walked in to a Pittsburgh synagogue and killed eleven people, and on April 27 2019, another white male shooter entered the Chabad Poway synagogue with a gun, injuring three and killing one.³ On the 11th and 12th of August 2017, a white supremacist rally took place in Charlottesville, Virginia. Dubbed the “Unite the Right Rally”, members of the alt-right, neo-confederates, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Klansmen, and other militias came together to march through the streets of Charlottesville. Their chants included “Jews will not replace us”, “Blood and soil”, and “White Lives Matter”; one counter-protester was murdered, whilst two state troopers died in a helicopter crash.⁴

² Information sourced from the following articles: *Anti-Semitic Hate Incidents “Rise by 16%.”* 7 Feb. 2019. www.bbc.co.uk. See also Jon Henley’s, “Antisemitism Rising Sharply across Europe, Latest Figures Show.” *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2019. www.theguardian.com.

³ Information sourced from the following articles: Matt Pearce and Sarah Wire’s, “11 Dead in Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting; Suspect Hinted at Anti-Jewish Attack 17 Days Ago on Social Media.” *Latimes.Com*. See also Ray Sanchez and Artemis Moshtaghian’s *Synagogue Shooting Leaves 1 Dead, 3 Wounded in Poway, near San Diego - CNN*.

⁴ VICE’s documentary on Charlottesville is particularly illuminating in revealing the insidious logic of America’s white supremacy movement. See, VICE. *Charlottesville: Race and Terror – VICE News Tonight on HBO. YouTube*.

The unsettling increase of antisemitism in America and Europe demands critical interrogation. It is vital to examine how anti-Jewish persecutors have identified and discriminated against Jews, and the ways in which contemporary discriminations parallel and differ from other ethno-racial persecutions. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance to examine the ways in which antisemitism has pervasively influenced Jewish lives, and how Jewish cultures have responded to the myriad antisemitic conceptualizations of Jews.

One of the best ways to do so is through the medium of fiction. For Ruth R. Wisse, modern Jewish literature serves as “the repository of modern Jewish experience”, contending it “is the most complete way of knowing the inner life of the Jews” (4). Whilst I am wary of hailing any kind of art form in such grandiose terms, I believe Roth’s fiction is greatly useful in exploring how antisemitism has impacted what it means to be Jewish. Almost all of Roth’s thirty-one novels study the issue of Jewish American identity in post-World-War II society, and are almost universally occupied by the tensions induced from existing as a Jew in an American space that is predominantly occupied by non-Jewish peoples.

Since Donald Trump’s presidential election in 2016, there has been a renewed interest in Roth’s fiction, particularly his novel *The Plot Against America* (2004). This book has been termed a “touchstone work” (Bryant) of the Trump era, whilst David Remnick credits Roth for anticipating “the rise of a Trump-like figure in the form of Charles Lindbergh in his book *The Plot Against America*” (Remnick). Whilst I am sceptical of crediting Roth with visionary powers, the novel has assumed a renewed importance as a critique of far-right nationalisms that has entered into mainstream discussions of Trump’s presidency.⁵

⁵ The book was initially read by certain reviewers as a critique of George W. Bush’s presidency. Michiko Kakutani suggests the novel serves as a “warning about the dangers of isolationism or a warning about the dangers of the Patriot Act and the threat to civil liberties” (Kakutani). Roth rejected this suggestion, but there is a distinct political astuteness in Roth’s surveillance of the American scene that is reflected in the telling demand to read Roth in both the Bush and Trump era.

The book's examination of antisemitism has given it a particularly weighted importance in today's current climate. Brittany Hirth suggests that reading Roth's novel in the Trump era "offers its readership an insight into America's uncomfortable history of oppressing minority groups, a historical past that has rhetorically reemerged through the political platform of President Trump" (71). Developing from Hirth, I consider how Roth's other novels helps us understand the ways in which antisemitism has perniciously impacted both Jewish and non-Jewish American conceptions of Jews' somatic differences.

The issue of how to identify Roth's Jewishness has been a continuous point of consternation within critical and literary discussions. Roth himself expressed an uneasiness at being labelled as a Jewish author. Instead, he preferred to be called an American, sharing Saul Bellow's belief that the term "Jewish author" is used to "set [...] you aside" (Kakutani). Speaking in Israel, Roth defined himself "as an American writer who happens to write about Jews" (Parrish 127). However, in their essay "America: Toward Yavneh", Cynthia Ozick provides a powerful counterargument in favour of the term: "[t]he Jewish writer, if he intends himself really to be a *Jewish* writer, is all alone, judging culture like mad, while the rest of the culture just goes on *being* culture" (25, italics in original). Ozick's use of the word "culture" is rather unclear here, but I suggest it serves as a strawman symbol for "white America". In Ozick's view, Roth's desire to be recognized as an "American" signals an unconscious yearning to be included within white American culture, one that seeks to expunge Jewish religious and cultural differences. To submit to the neutral, non-hyphenated "American" serves as a kind of purification: "to say 'I am not a Jewish writer; I am a writer who is a Jew,' [...] turns out to be wind; it is precisely those who make this distinction whom Diaspora most determinedly wipes out" (Ozick 26). The tension stressed between the triptych of authors represents a broader anxiety about being identified as a Jew in America.

This issue of how to identify Roth has spilled into the academic discourse of Roth studies. In *The Fiction of Philip Roth* (1974) John N. McDaniel resists using the term “Jewish author”, favouring the label “humanist” instead. McDaniel argues the former label narrowly creates a “religious evaluation of his fiction” (34) which threatens to overlook the social realism of Roth’s novels. As I discuss later, Roth sharply veered away from the social realism McDaniel identifies here, but what is noteworthy is the way in which religious identity is earmarked as delimiting. To read Roth as a Jewish novelist would, in McDaniel’s view, somehow risk closing off a social realist reading of his fiction. Why, I ask, are the two diametrically opposed?

Unlike McDaniel, Alan Cooper’s *Philip Roth and the Jews* (1996) attempts to situate how Roth engages with Jewishness on a literary and personal level. Cooper explores the outrage Roth’s fiction produced (a matter I will return to later) and the ways Jewish receptions influenced Roth as a novelist. Cooper contends writing “for Roth is how he begins wrestling with the problems of his times, [it …] becomes a character’s engagement and ultimately a people’s memory” (290). Cooper links the act of writing directly to Roth’s religious identity as a Jew, a problematic claim given the stereotype associations that has defined Jews as a “People of the Book”. Furthermore, Cooper risks over emphasizing Roth’s Jewishness here by neglecting the American influences in Roth’s life and literature.

Elsewhere, Steven Milowitz’s *Philip Roth Considered: The Concentrationary Universe of the American Writer* (2000) states that the “Holocaust moves across Roth’s work like an anamorphic design in a painting, hidden at first, but with the turn of the head and the focusing of the eyes it is readily apparent, huge, overwhelming” (20). Milowitz provides a number of excellent close readings from which I build, but the key argument that the Holocaust is central to Roth’s fiction proves not to be the case. The book ends rather curiously, as “Nathan Zuckerman”, a recurring character of Roth’s fiction, makes an

appearance and writes Milowitz in the postscript, “I must resist your attempt to make the Holocaust Roth’s central concern, the raison d’être of his writing. There is no doubt it’s there, but perhaps not as the central locus as it is for, let’s say, Elie Wiesel” (202). Both Cooper and Milowitz create too narrow a methodology in their attempt to focus on how Roth’s Jewishness pervasively informs his writing, overlooking and underrepresenting other important facets that have influenced Roth’s depiction of American Jews.

More recently, there has been a shift in focus within Roth scholarship away from the subject of Jewishness. Rather, the theme of Jewishness supplements other kinds of discussions centred on masculinity, ideas of selfhood, satire, and more recently, American politics.⁶ Aimee Pozorski’s *Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later works (1995-2010)* (2011) explores Roth’s treatment of America’s fratricidal and traumatic history in order “to point up the relevance of Roth’s fiction not only to his generation of writers and intellects, but also to young readers everywhere who have an interest in history and democracy” (x). Likewise, in *Philip Roth’s the Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* (2006), Ross Posnock seeks to move beyond the issue of “Roth and being Jewish in America” (xiii), and look at how Roth’s literature fits within what Posnock terms America’s “republic of culture” (xiii). Rather than focus on the question of identity, Posnock places Roth’s novels in dialogue with a broad range of novelists and philosophers such as Ralph Ellison and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The issue surrounding Posnock’s work is the intentional deviation away from what it means to be Jewish in America. Jewish identity plays an integral role in Roth’s

⁶ For discussions on Roth and satire see Elaine B. Safer’s *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth* (2006), Sanford Pinsker’s *The Comedy that “Hoits”* (1975), and Jay L. Halio’s *Philip Roth Revisited* (1992). Ann Basu’s *States of Trial: Manhood in Philip Roth’s Post-War America* (2015) provides an excellent overview of masculinity in Roth’s fiction, as does Maggie McKinley’s *Masculinity and the Paradox of Violence in American Fiction, 1950-75* (2015). Finally, Andy Connolly’s recent book *Philip Roth and the American Liberal Tradition* (2017) examines the American liberal tradition that pervasively influences and informs the ways Roth writes Jewish American subjects within his fiction.

fiction, and I see no reason why Jewishness cannot be considered in discussing America's "republic of culture" (Posnock xii).

As Timothy Parrish asks in "Philip Roth is Sitting on Your Face: America in the Late Novels", "why must Roth's so-called Jewishness be explicitly excused from consideration before such a discussion can begin?" (838). Parrish highlights a disconcerting trend in Roth studies to "see past Roth's Jewish subject matter to recognize his artistry" (838). My interest here is to bring into conversation Roth's treatment of Americanness and Jewishness synthetically, without creating a distinct division between the two. There have been a number of critics who have successfully produced criticism that meaningfully merges the issue of Jewishness with other philosophical and theoretical concerns.

Parrish cites David Gooblar's *The Major Phases of Philip Roth* (2011) as an example of scholarship that "resists the impulse to segregate Roth from his Jewishness while still paying attention to Roth's many aesthetic achievements" (840). Gooblar offers an excellent overview of Roth's literature and the author's varied thematic excavations. Gooblar does so by exploring Roth's treatment of how "the self is constructed and understood and in the ways in which the self is affected by the world 'out there,' by culture, but also by history, by other people" (Gooblar 6). Likewise, David Brauner's *Philip Roth* (2007) offers a similarly extensive and thorough investigation of Roth's literature, highlighting the importance of paradox within Roth's writing, "both as a rhetorical device of which Roth is particularly fond, and also as an organising intellectual and ideological principle that inflects all of his work" (Brauner 8). This methodology is particularly effective in encapsulating the nuances of Roth's novels, and Brauner deftly links Roth's interests in Jewishness within a literary

context, paying attention to the ways his fiction connects to authors such as Tim O’Brien, Howard Jacobson, and Jonathan Safran Foer.⁷

Although Debra Shostak’s *Countertexts, Counterlives* (2004) offers a narrower reading of Roth’s fiction, this book is one of the most important publications on Roth to date. Shostak examines how Roth explores “the process of how one comes to rest at a position, how one thinks about what one really thinks, by tracing the journey of imagined selves through a series of subject-positions” (7). Shostak’s Lacanian psychoanalytic readings of Roth are enormously illuminating, and throughout the thesis I return to this particular text. Indeed, Shostak shares my interest in how Roth foregrounds the body as a site of meaning, but tends to limit their focus to masculinity and desire, which stems in part from the Lacanian psychoanalytic methodology employed throughout the book. Nevertheless, Shostak successfully highlights the ways in which Roth’s “books talk to one another, often by conceiving of such representations in terms of oppositions and displacements – of attitudes, or belief, or character, or type, or genre, or tone” (3). Crucially, Shostak succeeds in interlinking Roth’s treatment of masculinity, sexuality, and Jewish difference.

Brett Kaplan’s *Jewish Anxiety and the Novels of Philip Roth* (2015) is yet another significant work in its treatment and discussion of Jewishness within Roth’s novels. Kaplan examines how Roth’s books “teach us that Jewish anxiety stems not only from fear of victimization but also from fear of perpetration” (Kaplan 1). This important and illuminating work underscores the ways in which Jews inhabit a “doubled view of America” (Kaplan 10) that is perpetually marked by the “specter of Nazi occupation, the threat of the Holocaust, [which …] haunts numerous characters and heightens the sense of the doubled America” (Kaplan 11). Kaplan’s excellent selection of textual evidence creates a very compelling argument that importantly connects Roth’s fiction to W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black*

⁷ For another excellent overview of Roth’s literature, see Mark Shechner’s *Up Society’s Ass, Copper* (2003).

Folks (1903). Du Bois hypothesized that African Americans were “born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world [...] One ever feels this twoness, – an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (2). Kaplan uses this framework to great effect in considering how Jews in America are possessed by a doubleness that links them to a history of persecution and violence that they managed to avoid, but have to live with and remember.

The thesis enters into dialogue with these works to highlight Roth’s foregrounding of the “Jewish body” within his literature. I argue throughout that Roth’s fiction helps us understand America’s racially charged political climate because his novels repeatedly examine how racial prejudice influences Jewish lives. Reading Roth enables us to see the ways in which Jews in America have had to alter their identities via their bodies, as-well as their religious and cultural practice in order to assimilate and be accepted as Americans. The thesis uses Roth to explore the racial and gendered evolutions of what I call the “Jewish body” in America, and the ways in which Roth resists transnational antisemitism and racism through his fiction.

Roth’s fiction of resistance centres on his aesthetic commitment to “Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness” (“After Eight Books” 111). Roth has frequently employed satire and parody as a way of deconstructing antisemitism, misogyny, and racism. I use Stephen E. Kercher’s definition of satire as a “humorous expression that, by definition, deploy[s] irony to criticize vice and raise awareness. Spurred often by anger or scorn and informed by serious moral concern, satire is humor with a social purpose – protest” (1). Essential to Roth’s satire is its acerbic, and often vitriolic, attack against that which it satirizes. As Matthew Hodgart explains, satire “contains an element of aggressive attack and a fantastic vision of the world transformed: it is written for entertainment, but contains sharp and telling comments on the problems of the world” (12).

Yet Roth carefully eschews an aesthetic of diatribe by enmeshing his satire with parody. I use Linda Hutcheon's definition of the term as an "ironic 'trans-contextualization' and inversion, [a] repetition with difference. A critical difference is implied between the background text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signalled by irony" (32). Roth parodies a plethora of novelists within his novels, including writers such as Franz Kafka and James Joyce. Roth is not attacking their works, but engages with and departs from these writers by ironically inverting their writings as a way of attacking America's racial and gendered oppressive social structures. However, in Roth's repeated reliance on satire and parody, his work often runs the risk of reifying that which he seeks to undermine, and this is especially true regarding his depiction of male sexism. If satire or parody is not read or understood as satirical or parodic, does the work cease to function as critique and become culpable in its reproduction of that which it seeks to mock? This question remains a pertinent point of consideration throughout the thesis, and though I offer no clear or distinct answer, I raise it as a way of re-considering Roth's notoriety for transgression, particularly regarding his provocative portrayal of women.

Roth's fiction has always sparked outrage. Initially, however it was his representation of Jews that caused indignation, particularly within America's Jewish communities. *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), Roth's first publication, was frostily received by certain corners of America's Jewish readership for its supposedly offensive portrayal of Jews. One reader wrote Roth accusing him of having "done as much as all the organized anti-Semitic organizations have done to make people believe that all Jews are cheats, liars, connivers" ("Jews" 160). Another asks, "[w]hy don't you leave us alone? Why don't you write about the Gentiles?" ("Jews" 150). Roth's focus on Jewish lives awoke Jewish anxieties of being connected to those antisemitic stereotypes that had been used to justify anti-Jewish persecutions, which of course included the Holocaust.

The hostile and almost violent response Roth's collection of short stories convinced him to give up writing on Jews entirely. In 1962, Roth, who was teaching at the University of Iowa, accepted an invitation to speak at Yeshiva University in New York. He was immediately suspicious of the symposium's title, "The Crisis of Conscience in Minority Writers of Fiction", and his worries were well founded. The moderator's first question set the tone for the day: "Mr Roth, would you write the same stories you've written if you were living in Nazi Germany?" (Pierpont 14) Roth found himself in a room full of people who despised him, and he actually had to remove himself after an audience member became aggressive towards him. The inflamed participant charged Roth with being "brought up on anti-Semitic literature", and screamed that all "English literature is anti-Semitic literature!" (Pierpont 14). By writing fiction, therefore, Roth had unwittingly contributed to furthering antisemitism.⁸

The two subsequent novels Roth wrote, *Letting Go* (1962) and *When She Was Good* (1967), focused on "Gentiles", as per the reader's request, but were not well received, critically or commercially.⁹ For Cooper, the works fail because "Roth did not really know how these Gentiles sounded in their everyday conversations, in their sectarian bickerings, in the small talk that might reveal life rather than just echo clichés of Middle America" (89). Roth, perhaps aware of how poorly the novels fared both critically and commercially, returned to the subject of Jewish identity in America in the most explosive way possible. *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) was outrageous for its time: its graphic depictions of masturbation, sexual desires, and ceaseless self-deprecating Jewish jokes made Roth inordinately wealthy, and turned him into an enfant terrible of American literature.

⁸ See Claudia Roth-Pierpont's *Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books*, p.14.

⁹ Halio describes *Letting Go* as a "mistake" (37), whilst Robert Alter dismisses *When She Was Good* in their wittily entitled review, "When He is Bad". Recently however, Rachel McLennan has reappraised *When She Was Good* by contextualizing its engagement with the Vietnam war. The article, "At Least Associated: When She Was Good and the Vietnam Years", is set to be published by *Philip Roth Studies* and is currently in press.

The novel's satirical depiction of Jewish American lives vis-à-vis a singular psychoanalytic session produced an impressive backlash from literary critics. Irving Howe famously wrote that the "cruellest thing anyone can do with *Portnoy's Complaint* is read it twice" (Howe). Marie Syrkin condemned Roth by suggesting there is "little to choose between [Joseph Goebbels] and Roth's interpretation of what animates Portnoy" (333). That is, Alex Portnoy is equivalent to the stereotypical "Jew" Nazi Germany propaganda had promulgated throughout Europe. The philosopher and Kabbalist Gershom Scholem goes even further, declaring:

with the next turn of history, not long to be delayed, this book will make all of us defendants at court. ... This book will be quoted to us – and how it will be quoted! They will say to us: Here you have the testimony from one of your own artists [...] an authentic Jewish witness (qtd. In Cooper 110-11).

The anxiety Roth's work produced tellingly articulates the various fears surrounding how Jews wished to be seen. For Scholem, Roth's novel runs the risk of validating antisemitism's pernicious stereotypes, and serves as an authentic testimony of Jewish degeneracy.

Yet Roth would not be cowed into silence. In his essay "Writing About Jews" (1963) Roth declares "[f]iction is not written to affirm the principles and beliefs that everybody seems to hold, nor does it seek to guarantee the appropriateness of our feelings" ("Jews" 151). Writing on Roth's transgressive literary approach, Robert Greenberg states that "transgression enables Roth to penetrate resistant domains and to go where he feels excluded psychologically and socially" (82). Greenberg's use of the word "penetrate" is rather revealing. Roth's literature is awash with men seeking to transgress social, religious, and racial orders. Often, these men's rebellions centre on fantasies of non-Jewish women that are, more often than not, sexually motivated. Roth's playfulness is key here: his use of irony, parody, and satire creates a narrative distance between himself and his narrators. Nevertheless, the repetitious sexualisation of women has complicated his literary legacy.

In 2011, Roth received the International Man Booker Prize, which led to judge Carmen Callil's resignation. Callil bemoaned Roth's repetitiousness and lack of imagination: "he goes on and on about the same subject in almost every single book. It's as though he's sitting on your face and you can't breathe" (Flood). This wonderful response perfectly encapsulates the visceral reaction Roth invokes, and Calill's argument is not baseless. Roth does lack a certain degree of variety: his novels almost always focus on issues of masculinity, Jewishness, and American identity. His fiction is almost always narrated through the first person, and his narrators are usually Jewish artists of some variation, many of whom are struggling to come to terms with the limitations of their masculinities. The inward, self-reflective nature of Roth's (masculinist) fiction has repeatedly produced two intertwining criticisms of his literature: that Roth is a narcissist and a misogynist.

The former contention reflects the author's direct willingness to disturb the dichotomy between fiction and reality that beleaguered interpretations of Roth's earlier work. *Portnoy's Complaint* turned Roth into a national icon. Humorously, however, Roth's novel was frequently misread as an autobiographical confession. Jacqueline Susann commented on *The Tonight Show* that she would very much like to meet Roth, but would not shake his hand, as though his hands, like Portnoy's, would be covered in semen (Pierpont 64). As Roth himself observes in "Imagining Jews", *Portnoy's Complaint* was "a novel in the guise of a confession [that] was received and judged by any number of readers as a confession in the guise of a novel" ("Imagining" 218).

Portnoy's Complaint inadvertently gave birth to "Philip Roth" – a fabricated media invention many believed was as sexually wanton as his monster, Alexander Portnoy. Yet the media's invention of "Roth" inspired the author to explore Jewish visibility in American

culture in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Shoah.¹⁰ In *The Ghost Writer* (1979), for example, Nathan Zuckerman's short story incenses his family and community for its unflattering depiction of American Jews, which undoubtedly draws from the hostile reception *Goodbye, Columbus* received. Elsewhere, the same author in *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981) rages against "Milton Appel" after his withering review of "Carnovsky", which was clearly inspired by the fierce reaction *Portnoy's Complaint* elicited in Irving Howe's scathing critique of Roth's "thin personal culture" (Howe). Vivian Gornick, whose own attacks on Roth feature in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), criticises Roth for his "preoccupation with the question of self-worth", arguing the author "is writing, helplessly, about himself. Not drawing upon the materials of his life to create a fictional world: just talking about himself" (196).¹¹

Roth's inwardness does become an emblematic focal point of his fiction, as he admits: "John Updike and Saul Bellow hold their flashlights out into the world, reveal the world as it is now. I dig a hole and shine my flashlight into the hole" (qtd. in McGrath). The self-reflexivity of Roth's fiction is intentional; he examines what it means to be an American-Jew in post-World-War II America, and the Jewish American male is the main tool Roth chooses to use in this explorative literary odyssey. Following the publication of *The Counterlife* (1986), a novel fixated on the performative nature of the self, Roth published four books in which "Philip Roth" features as the narrator (*The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* [1988], *Deception: A Novel* [1990], *Patrimony: A True Story* [1991], and *Operation Shylock*:

¹⁰ In *My Life as a Man* (1974) Roth uses his own (sour) experience of psychoanalysis to frame much of his fiction through, and even the narrative's rather poisonous marriage echoes Roth's own struggles with his wife, Margaret Martinson Williams. See Jeffrey Berman's "Revisiting Roth's Psychoanalysis" in *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, pp.94-111.

¹¹ Gooblar highlights how in 1976 "the *Village Voice* published an issue with pictures of Roth, Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, and Henry Miller laid out on the cover. Under the photos screamed the boldface headline: 'Why Do These Men Hate Women?'" (10). In seeming response, the title is recycled in *The Anatomy Lesson*, as Zuckerman muses, "[t]hose girls meant business – they wanted blood" (AL 418).

A Confession [1993]). Each one's title is followed by a colon that offers a descriptive clue as to the text's purpose: "A Novelist's Autobiography", "A Novel", "A True Story, and "A Confession". Each of these descriptions unravels as Roth interrogates the divisions between fiction and non-fiction through the fictional-non-fictional figure of "Philip Roth."¹² With the exception of *Patrimony*, Roth seems to be baiting critics who have repeatedly decried his work for being self-indulgent, albeit in a quintessentially Rothian manner.¹³

The issue of Roth's narcissism resurfaced following his death. Dara Horn laments the author for only being "curious about Philip Roth", and takes particular issue with his portrayal of women, attacking him for his misogyny and lack of empathy (Horn). There are, without any doubt, problematic representations of women and LGBTQIA individuals within his literature. Quite simply, neither group is at the forefront of Roth's works. The issue of Jewish masculinity infatuates him: his protagonists are almost always heterosexual men driven by their libidinous desires, almost all of whom pursue a mythical mode of masculinity that often rejects or resists Jewishness and favours a fictionalized form of American masculinity. Yet as Roth observed in an interview with *The New York Times*, his fiction has always centred on "masculine power impaired" (Sandstrom).

Roth repeatedly rejected claims his work was motivated by a hatred of women. Roth claims misogyny "provides my work with neither a structure, a meaning, a motive, a message, a conviction, a perspective, or a guiding principle" (Sandstrom). Yet there are a number of misogynistic characters in Roth's literature, many of whom are given voluminous space to express their vile hatred against women. *My Life as a Man* is the most obvious example: it is a novel that very much echoes (in a deeply unfortunate manner), Norman

¹² See Gooblar's "The Truth Hurts: The Ethics of Philip Roth's 'Autobiographical' Books." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2008, pp. 33–53.

¹³ For an excellent critical analysis of Roth's self-referencing see Shostak's "Philip Roth's Fictions of Self-Exposure." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 19 no. 1, 2000, pp. 19-39.

Mailer's *An American Dream* (1965). There is a nasty putridity coursing through the text that is, contrary to the author's proclamation, fuelled and informed by his protagonist's profound hatred of his wife, Maureen Tarnopol. Maureen exists only as an object of ire in the text, a foil and aggravator against Peter. Because of the first person perspective, Roth complicates the ways we perceive Maureen. We see her through Peter's point of view, but this very same narrative structure enables us to recognize the narrator's biases and inconsistencies.¹⁴

Roth's willingness to write from the perspective of misogynistic men has meant that critics have tended to conflate the narrator with the author, which given the above is somewhat understandable, and has thus fuelled accusations of Roth as misogynist. In the aftermath of his death, the question of Roth's misogyny remained a pertinent focus of discussion. Writing for the *Huffington Post*, Sandra Newman argued women's bodies are eternal punchlines in Roth's fiction (Newman). Elsewhere, Gornick compares the (apparent) misogyny in Roth's writings to "lava pouring out of an active volcano", and contends both Roth and Saul Bellow's fiction "was a literature that screamed '[d]on't tell me I don't run things around here!' – only it was screaming it at the women its authors slept with" (118, 124, italics in original).¹⁵ This analysis accurately reflects the disharmonious relationship many of Roth's protagonists have with their sexual partners and female family members, but problematically equates the author with the narrator in an attempt to shrink the critical distance Roth maintains from many of his protagonists (including his alleged alter ego,

¹⁴ Sally Robinson highlights how Roth's novel "empties out the woman's position and installs Peter in it. Maureen marks Peter as the embodiment, quite literally, of a dominating and destructive masculinity, even as she criticizes him for being less than a man" (96). See also McKinley's article, "'I wanted to be humanish: manly, a man': Morality, Shame, and Masculinity in Philip Roth's *My Life as a Man*".

¹⁵ On the 26th of May, Barbara Ehrenreich tweeted, "Is it too soon to say that Philip Roth was the epitome of male narcissism?" gaining an impressive one thousand likes and eighty-five retweets (at the time of writing). The day prior, Dara Horn wrote a damning article entitled "What Philip Roth Didn't Know About Women Could Fill A Book" for the *New York Times*, whilst Sandra Newman, writing for the *Huffington Post*, challenged the outpourings of positivity with their article, "Stop Treating the Misogyny in Philip Roth's Work Like a Dirty Secret".

Nathan Zuckerman). Furthermore, Gornick's argument that "the women are monstrous because for Philip Roth women are monstrous" (125) can easily be reversed: men are monstrous because for Philip Roth men are monsters.

Yet within Roth's thirty-one books, there has only been one female protagonist. Lucy Nelson, the hero of *When She Was Good*, stands alone in Roth's oeuvre. Despite the negative reviews of the novel, Roth is surprisingly adroit and proficient in his portrayal of Nelson, a woman facing the upheavals and injustices of an American society that discriminates against her by denying women's bodies the same privileges offered to their male counterparts.¹⁶ In their discussion of *When She Was Good*, Mary Allen is attentive to the complexities and proficiencies of Roth's fiction, highlighting how the women within his literature "are by no means inferior in stature to his men, but they are less likeable" (77-8). Allen praises Roth for the convincing ways in which his characters interact, and emphasizes the percipience Roth demonstrates in deconstructing the social structures that derail Lucy Nelson into becoming "one of the most monstrous bitches [in American literature]" (95). Yet Allen concludes by attacking Roth, stating his heroes "lack the quality that seems most important to him – genuine goodness" (95). Allen claims Roth's fiction creates a didactic framework in his portrayal of women, but such a reading does not fully reflect the complex ethical ambivalences the author presents. Furthermore, if Roth's women do indeed lack this myopic "genuine goodness", one would be hard pressed to find any Rothian male that would be worthy of such a description.

Women are neither "good" nor "bad" in Roth's fiction; none of Roth's characters fit into such narrow binaries. Yet as Gooblar points out, "the favorite critical conception of Roth's failure to fairly represent women has been the dichotomy, presenting Roth's women as either one thing or another, with neither sufficiently producing an adequate sense of

¹⁶ See Robert Alter's "When He is Bad." *Commentary*, November 1967.

reality” (8). In their introductory essay for the *Philip Roth Studies* special issue on “Roth and Women”, Gooblar highlights how critics such as Sondra G. S. Bleich, Anne Roiphe, Julia Keller, and Michiko Kakutani have read Roth’s women as opposing dualities.¹⁷ “Roth’s women,” Bleich writes, “either materialize out of a Dewing landscape, so ethereal as to be unattainable, or lunge at us from a De Kooning abstract, so gross as to be totally undesirable. In either case, they are unreal” (Bleich). Bleich claims Roth’s fiction operates through an oppositional structure in his depiction of women, obscuring women’s “reality” into a false “unreality”.

Roth, almost exclusively, writes from the male gaze. His novels assume a position which Laura Mulvey describes (in relation to film) as “a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (11).¹⁸ Roth’s protagonists and narrators repeatedly objectify and position women as sexual objects for their own pleasure. Yet Roth’s favoured first-person perspective unsettles the gendered binary Mulvey highlights. The narrative voice is always suspect enough in a Roth novel that the reader is afforded the opportunity to scrutinize, laugh at, and analyse the gazing male protagonist. The subjectivity of the text means that “reality” is never objectively accurate or intended to be so. The narrators are untrustworthy, as Roth constantly invites his readership to interrogate and question their perspectives, especially in terms of how women are conceptualized.

¹⁷ See Sondra G.S. Bleich’s “Eat Those Words, Philip Roth.” *The New York Times*, 26 July 1981. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/26/nyregion/eat-those-words-philip-roth.html>; Julia Keller’s “Philip Roth Hates Women*.” *Tribunedigital-Chicagotribune*, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-06-01/features/0605310232_1_philip-roth-american-novel-characters. Accessed 1 Sept. 2018; and Michiko Kakutani’s “A Postwar Paradise Shattered From Within.” *The New York Times*, 15 Apr. 1997. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/15/books/a-postwar-paradise-shattered-from-within.html>.

¹⁸ See James Bloom’s *Reading the Male Gaze in Literature and Culture*, particularly chapter 5, which analyses the male gaze in Roth’s fiction.

Women tend to be unrealistic within Roth's literature because his male protagonists see these women as fantastical objects. That is, they are fetishized because they embody a mythical form of Americanness. Non-Jewish white women are especially revered because they represent a make-believe escape from their Jewish identities. Conversely, Jewish women are often depicted as representative of a Jewish gendered and racial difference that is castigated by Roth's protagonists. Alexander Portnoy, Nathan Zuckerman, and Seymour "Swede" Levov, (to name but a few) all attempt to flee their Jewish identities by "conquering" or "claiming" the *shiksa's* (a derogatory term for non-Jewish women) body.

More important, perhaps, are the ways in which Roth's male characters fail to realize their fantasies, which are, more often than not, centred on their own bodily impairments. Hermione Lee calls Roth "the novelist of orifices and blockages, of frustrated gratification" (14), and the bodily yearnings and frustrations come to represent his characters' attempts to extend beyond their religious identities as Jews. From as early as "Goodbye, Columbus" to *Nemesis* (2010) (Roth's final novel), the body is a contested site in which Jewish difference is located and negotiated. Some of Roth's characters exhibit a fierce pride in their bodily appearance, whilst others express shame and disgust at the fact that they "look Jewish". In order to understand how such conflict arises, I will explore the racial histories of the "Jewish body" in the following section. By doing so, I contextualize the various histories of anti-Jewish imagery that have centred on the Jew's corporeality, and how Roth's fiction subverts and/or deconstructs such imagery by rewriting (and rehumanizing) the "Jew" through his metaphoric bodies.

Jewish Matters

My use of the term "Jewish body" develops from Gilman's *The Jew's Body*, which explores how "certain myths reflect basic cultural and psychological ways of dealing with the difference of the Jews" (4). Gilman traces the ways in which Jewish difference was mapped

onto the Jew's various body parts. For example, Jews were thought to "speak differently" as they were said to have a language of their own; the Jew had a "Jewish gait" as Jews purportedly possessed neurological disproportions. Additionally, the Jew's nose was tied to Jewish sexual deviancy, whilst the Jewish mind was said to be prone to hysteria, madness, and genius. Gilman uses the word "Jew" rather than Jewish because he focuses on how Jews were corporeally conceptualized. My use of the word "Jewish" signals my intention to deviate from Gilman by examining Jewish subjects within Roth's fiction, and the ways his novels interrogate how racist stereotype conceptions have influenced Jewish American lives.¹⁹

Although almost all the stereotypes Gilman outlines are mythological fantasies that hinged on pseudoscience, Gilman highlights how there are "'realities' of the Jewish body, such as the practice of infant male circumcision, which also become part of the social construction of the Jew's body within the mythopoesis of Western culture" (4). Jews have stereotypically been defined as "the People of the Book", yet as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has highlighted, there has been a corporeal turn in Jewish studies that has sought to stress the role of the body within the religion.²⁰ In their introduction to *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (1992), Howard Eilberg-Schwartz highlights how the stereotype of Jews as a "People of the book" threatens to privilege "certain dimensions of Jewish experience at the expense of others" (1). The collection of essays brings into focus the embodied existence of Jewish religious and secular cultures.

¹⁹ Melvin Konner's *The Jewish Body* (2009) offers another analysis of how the body operates in Jewish lives and cultures. Although Konner's discussion of Israel is problematic (Konner states that "without muscle, there would have been no Israel" [143], which threatens to create a rather reductive narrative of Israel's foundation), their discussion of the "Jewish nose" in Chapter 14 is particularly illuminating, as they bring Andy Warhol, Philip Roth, and Cynthia Ozick into dialogue.

²⁰ See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "The Corporeal Turn." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 95, no. 3, 2005, pp. 447–461.

The body is a symbolically contested site used to define “real” and “imaginary” Jews. Whilst Judaism’s ritual of circumcision marks and defines the (male) body as Jewish, external forces also use the body as a means of conceptualizing the “Jew” as a figure of otherness. The Jew’s corporeality is weaponized to racially, religiously, and biologically create a conceptual Jew that is fundamentally different. By doing so, racists create a prototypical “Jew” that serves to demonize and separate the Jews from non-Jews.

The strategy of differentiation through the body became prevalent as ethnic-nationalism developed within the modern era. Jon Stratton highlights how “the modern nation was considered to be made up of a single people, manifested in one culture, one language, and limited in membership to one race, identified usually by colour and physiognomy” (119). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jews in Western Europe and America began to achieve equal rights.²¹ The integrative process, born from the slow and tumultuous adoption of emancipation, enabled Jews to enter into political and cultural areas from which they had historically been excluded. David Feldman highlights how in “western and central Europe Jews acquired, broadly speaking, the same political, civil and legal rights as other subjects and citizens” (172). Subsequently, Jews in Western Europe and America flourished as lawyers, scientists, journalists, artists, and as musicians. In Britain and France, Jews began to enter into the political arena.²² In other words, the emancipatory period brought about a newfound prosperity and cultural flourishing that saw an evolution in Jewish cultures and identities.²³

²¹ Jacob Katz, in their discussion of the late eighteenth century, importantly highlights how the “process of naturalization was interrupted and even reversed; rights that had been given to the Jews were limited or cancelled” (2). It is useful to note the political strife and varying degrees to which Jews were granted an emancipated status in society, oscillating according to their geopolitical positions.

²² For more specific examples of Jewish political and cultural expansion in Western Europe, see Thomas Laqueur’s *A History of Zionism*, p.26.

²³ Yet as Calvin Goldsneider and Alan S. Zuckerman state, “modernization created new forms of Jewish cohesions as it destroyed old forms. In particular, the socioeconomic

Nevertheless, Jewish entry into Western society was perceived as threatening, because the secularisation of Judaism meant Jewish “differences” were increasingly obscured.²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman writes that “[m]odernity brought the levelling of differences – at least of their outward appearances [...] Differences had to be created now, or retained against the awesome eroding power of social and legal equality and cross-cultural exchange” (58). Jacob Katz’s observation on this very matter is well worth quoting here, too: “[m]odern anti-Semitism”, Katz remarks, “was born not from the great difference between groups but rather from the threat of absence of differences, the homogenization of Western society and the abolition of the ancient social and legal barriers between Jews and Christians” (3). The body was essential for the creation and maintenance of differences. In *On Freud’s Jewish Body: Mitigating Circumcisions* (2007), Jay Geller illuminates the ways scientific discourse was used to create and maintain social and racial hierarchies. “[S]cientific disciplines”, Geller writes, “endeavoured to administer the increasing overlap of the gender-differentiated bourgeois order and racially differentiated imperial order by affixing an identity to the body, especially to the body of those menacing others” (7). Modern antisemitism was a distinct form of anti-Jewish prejudice that sought to transfix Jewish difference as immutably biological.

The term “antisemitism” is itself a modern phenomenon, which Albert Lindemann defines as “a potent mixture of fantasy and reality, of crude caricatures of Jews constantly nourished by daily perceptions and often accurate portrayals of them” (11). The word was invented in 1873 by Wilhelm Marr “as part of the scientific discourse of race in the redistribution of Jews continued to distinguish them from non-Jews and create conditions of ethnic solidarity” (80). *The Transformation of the Jews* (1984) highlights the ways in which Jewish cultural differences evolved, and did not merely disappear, despite the secularism of the period.

²⁴ Albert Lindemann explains that white Christian Europe’s concern regarding the surge in Jewish involvement in western Europe’s culture and politics was because “Jews were in truth encroaching on arenas that had previously been exclusively Gentile, and Jews were helping to make life as those Gentiles had traditionally experienced it difficult or impossible” (12).

nineteenth century” which, Gilman adds, “was used in Europe and European colonies specifically to categorize the difference between ‘Semites’ and Others” (5).²⁵ The “Jewish body” became an integral source for producing and maintaining a myriad of racist conceptions of Jewish differences that “scientifically proved” not only the Jew’s inferiority, but their foreignness. Jews could not belong to the nation because they were fundamentally (i.e. biologically) different.

The pseudoscientific markings of difference were structured around ideas that Jews were social degenerates, diseased, and deviant.²⁶ In 1903 Otto Weininger published *Sex and Character*, an enormously popular work of pseudo-science that proposed the human body was made up of male and female chemical elements. Weininger stated the masculine was responsible for morality, decisiveness, and complex thinking, whilst the feminine comprised passion and emotions. Subsequently, Weininger contends, “the woman of the highest standard is immeasurably beneath the man of the lowest” (302). The “Jew”, Weininger argues, is “saturated with femininity to such an extent that the most manly Jew is more feminine than the least manly Aryan” (306). Weininger’s text was enormously influential and was read by intellectuals and writers such as Sigmund Freud, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein.²⁷ The book’s scientific language meant *Sex and Character* was perceived as a legitimate text that was used to justified prejudices against Jews because Weininger’s book proved they were an inferior “race”.

²⁵ See also Gavin I. Langmuir’s *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, particularly “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism”, pp.311-353.

²⁶ Gilman highlights the ways in which “Christian” and “Jew” are racially charged appellations that “reflect the ideology of the science and race” (6); the term I adopt, “Aryan”, follows from Gilman, as it more forcefully points to the transitory scientific racism against the Jews that most firmly stresses the ways in which “Jewish difference” was racially created through such language.

²⁷ For more on Weininger and his influence see Richie Robertson’s “Historicizing Weininger: The Nineteenth-Century German Image of the Feminized Jew.” *Modernity, Culture and “the Jew”*, edited by Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, Polity Press, pp.23-40.

The use of scientific rhetoric to validate anti-Jewish ideologies was a common strategy in the modern period. Jean Martin-Charcot, a French neurologist considered to be one of the most significant researchers of hysteria, believed the “Jew” was susceptible to the condition because of their genetics; the “Jew” was feminine, and “females” were prone to hysteria.²⁸ Gilman highlights how “the etiology of the Jew’s hysteria, like the hysteria of the woman, was to be sought in sexual excess” (76).

The Jew’s excessive desire linked to ancient stereotypes pertaining to Jewish avariciousness traceable to the medieval period. Gilman contends that “[t]he perversion of the Jew [...] lies in his sexualized relationship to capital” (124). The Jew’s relationship to money has been a wellspring of anti-Jewish stereotypes. William Shakespeare’s Shylock in *Merchant of Venice* is the most obvious example, as Jews have stereotypically been associated with moneylending. Recently however, Julie L. Mell has contested the common historical narrative of the Jew-as-moneylender, stressing the ways in which this became a philosemitic narrative in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a way of responding to political antisemitism.²⁹ Whilst the moneylender myth may be a “metanarrative” (Mell 6) within Jewish studies, the stigmatic associations that have linked Jews with money and power remain deeply embedded in antisemitic conceptualizations of Jews. The Jew-as-moneylender became a prominent stereotype following Thomas Aquinas’s decree that Christians could not partake in usury. Subsequently, Jews became associated with the collection of loans, fuelling racial stereotypes that the Jewish people, who famously rejected Christ as their saviour, were immoral. As Gilman writes,

²⁸ For more on Charcot see Jay Geller’s *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity*, pp.233-256.

²⁹ William D. Rubinstein and Hilary L. Rubinstein define philosemitism as “support or admiration for the Jewish people by non-Jews, and which can reasonably be regarded as the reverse of antisemitism, hostility to or dislike of Jews” (ix). This admiration is based on the same pernicious stereotyping of Jews found in antisemitic prejudices.

Jews, in taking money, treated money as if it were alive, as if it were a sexualized object. The Jew takes money as does the prostitute, as a substitute for higher values, for love and beauty. And thus the Jew becomes representative of the deviant genitalia, the genitalia not under the control of the moral, rational conscience (124).

The “Jew” comes to be defined as a figure of corruption whose ethics exist outside of the Christian doctrine and are thus deemed deviant. The connection between the “Jew” and prostitute is unclear here, but Mia Spiro usefully explains how both “Jews and prostitutes allowed men to imagine themselves, and their relationship to their property (including money and wives), as virtuous” (151). The “Jew”, in contrast, was greedy and selfish; the wealth they procured they kept for themselves, and this meant that the “Jew” was seen to be a social pariah that would not contribute to the wellbeing of Christian societies. “By extension,” Spiro writes, “Jews were depicted as ‘polluting’ art and culture because they challenged a social order based on the separation of beauty (static, contained) and desire (infinite, out of control)” (151).

The same insidious logic influenced how Americans perceived their Jewish citizens. For example, in his travel book *The American Scene* (1905) Henry James expresses a deep anxiety regarding the mass-influx of Jewish immigrants present in New York. James observes that it

was as if we had been thus, in the crowded, hustled roadways, multiplication, multiplication of everything, was the dominant note, at the bottom of some vast swallow aquarium in which innumerable fish, of over-developed proboscis, were to bump together, for ever, amid heaped spoils of the sea (94).

James strings together an impressive number of antisemitic stereotypes to bemoan the excessive and overwhelming presence of Jews in New York. James plays on the stereotype of the Jew’s nose and greed for money, but most insidiously positions the “Jew” as a threat to America in their ceaseless multiplicities. As Larzer Ziff observes, the imagery used conveys “James’s consciousness of the New York Jews as not just massed but proliferating uncontrollably. America is being drowned” (271). James’s eloquent antisemitism stresses the

very same anxieties articulated by the Charlottesville marchers. Both fear that the “Jew” will infiltrate, overwhelm, and corrupt America’s people and culture.

The anxiety regarding Jewish presences in America’s public spaces can be seen in terms of how higher educational institutions discriminated against Jews. In 1922, Harvard proclaimed there to be a “Jewish Problem” as 20% of their students were believed to be Jewish (Marcus 139). Consequently, Lisa Marcus writes, “the university instituted new admission criteria, including photographic identification (as Columbia had done) in order to stem the ‘flood’ of Jewish students” (139-40). The notion that Jews will “flood” America ties back to James’s consternation regarding the seemingly out-of-control densities of Jewish populations in America’s cities.

This porous influx of Jewish immigrants into America was also regarded as threatening to the nation’s most beloved sport, baseball. In 1919 it was discovered that the World Series match between the Chicago White Sox and the Cincinnati Reds had been fixed, and the scandal involved the Jewish gangster Arnold Rothstein. Subsequently, Steven A. Riess writes, the scandal “provided fodder to Jew-haters like Henry Ford, who fanned the growing flames of anti-Semitism by blaming underworld Jews for the Black Sox scandal” (124). Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, was a relentless antisemite whose newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, demonized Jewish bankers, lawyers, and public service workers. In *Henry Ford’s War on Jews and the Legal Battle Against Hate Speech* (2012), Victoria Saker Woeste highlights how Ford’s newspaper “carried on the ignoble tradition, developed in the nineteenth century, of demonizing Jews in an effort to pressure the state to disavow its relationship with them” (50). Between 1919 and 1927 (when the paper was forced to close because of its anti-Jewish propaganda), Ford’s readership had peaked at nearly seven hundred thousand readers (Woeste 3). His paper tirelessly promulgated the idea that the “Jew” in America was a devious and degenerate within American society.

Despite the Declaration of Independence's proclamation "all men are created equal" Jews, along with many other racial and ethnic minorities, faced social restrictions based on their religious and ethnic difference. Depending on the geopolitical space, Jews were barred from entering into certain hotels, clubs, and even townships (Barnett 251) until the end of the Second World War. Christina Jarvis usefully connects America's antisemitism with American anti-black discriminatory laws, but notes that although anti-Jewish discriminations were "not nearly as pervasive as the Jim Crow system of segregation against African-Americans, anti-Semitic policies positioned Jews as outsiders to American mainstream white culture" (137-8).³⁰

Yet in the aftermath of the Second World War, anti-Jewish legal barriers were lifted, and Jews "reshaped their identities after World War II in a social milieu full of crosscurrents" (Brodkin 140). No longer delimited by quotas, Jews were able to enter into American universities and businesses, blossoming into one of the "most affluent ethnoreligious group in the country" (Lipset & Raab 27). Consequently, this had a knock-on effect in terms of how Jews were identified within America. Joost Krinjen contends that there was a "[g]reater acceptance by American society and the simultaneous decline of anti-Semitism went hand in hand with increasing degrees of assimilation, accompanied by steeply rising rates of intermarriage" (87). Yet there were two particularly distinct developments in recent Jewish histories that ensured Jewish lives in America were, in some abstract sense, detached from the non-hyphenated "American" experience: the Holocaust, and the establishment of the state of Israel. As Karen Brodkin observes, "Jews could become Americans and Americans could be like Jews, but Israel and the Holocaust sets limits to assimilation" (140). Both the Holocaust and the establishment of the Jewish nation-state brought American Jewry's

³⁰ Likewise, Eric J. Sundquist highlights that although Jews faced "punitive immigration laws [...] anti-Semitism was [never] formalized as a practice of the state, even if it was sometimes expressed by government institutions and legal constraints" (20). Conversely, anti-black racism was legally encoded in America's judicial system.

difference to the fore, reminding both non-Jewish and Jewish Americans that Jews possessed unique cultures, religions, and ethnic identities that set them apart from their “white” Christian neighbours.

The point here is that Jewishness retains, even in the most abstract way, a difference, an otherness. Indeed, this intangible Jewish difference became a source of anxiety for American Jews, which they came to articulate through artistic mediums (such as literature and film). Brodkin highlights how American Jews were wary about how “real” America’s embrace of their presence was, but also how Jews “were ambivalent about Jewishness itself, about being too Jewish” (139).

The fear of being “too Jewish” is a profoundly important anxiety that courses throughout the fiction of Roth. So many of his characters exhibit this exact concern that their Jewish difference becomes visible in America. As Gilman observes, the “Jew who sounds Jewish, for some American Jews, represents the hidden Jew within, the corrupt Jew of the gospel, the mark of difference which offends even after the Jew is integrated into the mainstream of American culture” (28). The Jew’s difference is identified through the body, meaning that the mark of Jewish difference cannot be transcended or escaped.

Yet Jewishness is not racial or biological; it is an identity that does not easily fit within the common rubrics used to define identities. As Laura Levitt points out, categories such as “race”, class, gender, sexuality, and religion fail to adequately encapsulate what it means to “claim a Jewish position” (810). Jewishness is a symbolically unstable and slippery modality that lacks a distinguishable set of characteristics that enables Jewish difference to be clearly defined. Consequently, Daniel Itzkovitz contends, “Jewish difference is a difference with no context, or more exactly, with a fluid and ever-shifting content that cannot mark Jewishness as distinct” (179).

In post-World War II America, Jews became virtually indistinguishable from white Americans, but this sameness was threatening precisely because the lack of essential details distinguishing the “Jew” from the “American” threatened to deconstruct the concept of national identity entirely. The tension created here becomes a vital focal point for Roth’s novels, whose literature focuses on what Levitt terms American Jewry’s “complicated legacy of impossible assimilation” (808) that continues to revolve around the Jewish body.

By highlighting the ways in which the body operates as a signifier within Roth’s writing, I weave several theoretical approaches together. I focus on Roth’s representation of Jewish mothers in Chapter 1 and the ways Roth depicts the Jewish mother’s body. I look at *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Anatomy Lesson*, stressing the ways in which Judaism’s matrilineal tradition becomes emblematic of a Jewish gender and racial difference that is considered undesirable in post-World-War II American society. In Chapter 2, I examine Roth’s representation of Israel and the intersecting gender body politics of Israeli, American, and English nationalisms, using *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Counterlife* as my points of focus. Chapter 3 assesses Roth’s use of the pastoral in *American Pastoral* (1997), concentrating on the way women’s bodies are positioned as metaphors for America itself. Finally, Chapter 4 analyses the ways the Jewish body was constructed as “black” in Europe, and how this racial difference transnationally appeared in American antisemitism. By doing so I bring into focus the racial body politics of “Eli the Fanatic” (1959) and *The Human Stain* (2000), examining how the Jewish and Black body is racially codified in American society.

The thesis looks at how Roth’s works are animated by an endless fascination and desire to undermine what Bauman calls the “conceptual Jew –a semantically overloaded entity, comprising and blending means which ought to be kept apart” (39). Roth transforms the body’s ejaculations, excretions, secretions, and expulsions into symbolic tools that represent the porosity and fluidity of the Jewish self. By doing so, Roth undermines and

deconstructs antisemitism's racist endeavours to create bodily distinctions between "Jews" and "Aryans". Roth weaponizes the corporeality of bodies to create a fiction that celebrates Jewish embodied presences in America, one that throws categories of identity into crisis.

Chapter 1: Mother is Matter, Too.

The writer is someone who plays with his mother's body [...] in order to glorify it, to embellish it, or in order to dismember it, to take it to the limit of what can be known about the body – Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

all my life, I think, I had been going to my mother – Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*

They'd had endlessness. He'd grown up on endlessness and his mother – in the beginning they were the same thing. – Philip Roth, *Sabbath's Theater*

Mother's Flesh

“But where, by the way, is the mother?” (*TF* 168)? Nathan Zuckerman asks this question of his author and creator toward the end of the spuriously titled, *The Facts: A Novelist’s Biography* (1988). What I ask in this chapter echoes and responds to Zuckerman’s inquiry, tracing the ways in which Roth depicts Jewish mothers in *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969) and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983). In my discussion of the mother, I compare and contrast how Roth positions the father figure in relation to the mother. By doing so, I examine how Roth satirizes and parodies antisemitic stereotypes surrounding Jewish excess. Roth’s fiction subversively uses the Jew’s excess in his depiction of mothers and fathers as a way of highlighting the sexist imbalances of Jewish assimilation into American white society.

I begin this chapter with a close reading of *The Facts* as a way of establishing how Roth’s fiction has been influenced by psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the mother. My interest here is to focus on how the maternal characters of Roth’s fiction are constructed as representative embodiments of Jewish gender and racial difference. Roth, I show, is interested in how the matrilineal traditions of Judaism are disrupted and/or rejected by his Jewish male protagonists’ assimilation into American society. I focus on Roth’s representation of mothers and how the maternal is symbolized through bodily excess.

By examining how Roth uses the body to establish the mother’s Jewish difference, I consider to what extent Roth replicates, rather than subverts, sexist and racist stereotypes pertaining to Jews and women. Roth’s attempt to satirize antisemitism risks reproducing, rather than undermining, certain facets of antisemitism, namely the exclusion and erasure of Jewish women. Antisemitism has frequently delineated Jewish men as “effeminate”. As Ann Pellegrini highlights, antisemitic conceptualizations of Jews “overlapp[ed] layers of blackness, effeminacy, and queerness”, and in doing so, interlinked race and sex as “constitutive features” of Jewish differences (108). Subsequently, Pellegrini contends, “the

collapse of Jewish masculinity into an abject femininity appears to ‘disappear’ Jewish women” (51). Given Roth’s willingness to satirize antisemitism within his novels, it is important to consider to what extent Roth “disappears” Jewish women from inhabiting a meaningful place within his literature. If the mother exists as a marginal but symbolically key figure in Roth’s fiction, it is worth considering why, and what is at stake in the author’s neglect of the Jewish mother as a literary topic.

The Facts is a useful way of beginning this chapter’s discussion of the Jewish mother because the text features a poignant description in which Roth recalls his intimate and profound connection with his mother, Bess:

the link to my father was never so voluptuously tangible as the colossal bond to my mother’s flesh, whose metamorphosed incarnation was a sleek black sealskin coat in which I [...] the pampered papoose, blissfully wormed myself whenever my father chauffeured us home to New Jersey [...] the unnameable animal-me bearing her dead father’s name, the protoplasm me, boy-baby, and body-burrower-in-training, joined by every nerve ending to her smile and her sealskin coat, while *his* resolute dutifulness, *his* relentless industriousness, *his* unreasoning obstinacy and harsh resentments, *his* illusions, *his* innocence, *his* allegiances, *his* fears were to constitute the original mold for the American, Jew, citizen, man, even for the writer, I would become. To be at all is to be her Philip, but in the embroilment with the buffeting world, my history still takes its spin from beginning as his Roth (*TF* 18-19, emphasis added).

The physical bond to Bess is codified through the external object of the “sleek black sealskin coat” (*TF* 18) that paradoxically emphasizes a separation between mother and son. Philip suggests he is “joined by every nerve ending to her smile and her sealskin coat” (*TF* 18), but this conjoining is unsettled by the conjunction “and”, as Roth reiterates that the bond to his mother is constructed through the coat. The mother’s jacket represents a protective, warm, and insular space; it operates as an external, makeshift womb for the doting son.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the object displaces the unity the writer posits, as Philip’s connection to his mother is only identifiable and expressed through two externalities: Bess’s smile (a symbolically unstable and indeterminate pose), and a coat, the warmth of which covers, hides, and makes invisible the mother’s body. Yet as Tony Fong points out in their

excellent close-reading of this very passage, “Bessie’s power over him is tangible and absolute: her body’s plenitude asserts a protective presence over her young son” (66).

Whilst the mother’s relationship to the son is positioned as corporeally coalesced, the father is framed solely as a figure of externality. Philip claims to emerge from his mother as an “unnameable animal-me” (*TF* 18) in a pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic ecstasy of homogenized unity, and identifies the father’s presence as a disruption between mother and son. The mother embodies an unblemished purity; the narrator is “her Philip” (named after her father). The forename precedes the father’s surname, symbolically positioning the mother as prior-to the father. Herman, the figure of “history”, marks him out as “his Roth” after Bess imprints or expels herself out/onto him. Herman marks himself upon “her Philip” with his dutifulness, industriousness, stubbornness, resentfulness, illusions, innocence and allegiances. The seven iterations of the word “his” positions Herman Roth as God in Genesis, moulding Philip in his image through his seven idiosyncrasies.

Despite the protoplasmic connection Philip feels between himself and his mother, the patriarchal voice dominates and overwhelms the matriarchal body, diminishing Bess into a symbolic void, a mere coat. The lack of detail describing Bess’s personality or character is stark when contrasted with the overwhelming figure of Philip’s father, who assumes a biblically almighty presence. As Nathan Zuckerman tells his creator, “aside from that sealskin coat, there is no mother [...] the fact remains that your mother has no developed role in either your life or in your father’s” (*TF* 168). Through Nathan, Roth self-deprecatingly addresses his text’s failure to grant the mother a voice within the book, yet despite the mockery, the mother remains a mute figure of otherness.

Bess’s absence from *The Facts* reflects how the mother is excluded from the symbolic order Roth identifies as his father’s “spin” (*TF* 19). Roth’s depiction of his severance from Bess seems to satirize (and reproduce) Sigmund Freud’s Oedipal complex. Freud famously

hypothesized that every young boy possessed sexual wishes for the mother and a desire to kill the rival father. “To punish the boy for these wishes”, Alison Stone writes, “he is threatened with castration, either by the father or by others invoking the father’s name” (2-3). The mother must be abandoned so the child can assume a “proper” subjectivity. For Freud, the (female) mother represents the castrated body, meaning they cannot possess the phallus because they literally lack a penis. Thus the mother occupies a paradoxical symbolic status within Freudian psychoanalysis: she is an object of desire and love, but is simultaneously to be repudiated and rejected. For psychoanalyst and literary theorist Julia Kristeva, the mother’s body must be spurned by the child so that they can assume their own identity: “[f]or man and for woman, the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to autonomy. Matricide is our vital necessity, the *sine qua non* of our individuation” (38). For the individual to become an autonomous subject, the mother must be figuratively murdered (i.e. excluded) from the symbolic order psychoanalysis has historically identified as belonging to the symbolic and literal father (i.e. the patriarch).

The mother’s exclusion from the symbolic means she is denied or delimited a subjectivity. The mother is “the impossible subject”, write Rosalind Mayo and Christina Moutsou in their introduction to *The Mother in Psychoanalysis and Beyond* (2017). The maternal figure “is part object and part subject who stands as the gateway to sanity and becoming a mature adult, according to Western philosophical theory and psychoanalysis, or as the cause [...] of her children’s madness and even criminality” (Mayo & Moutsou 7). The mother’s indeterminacy stems from the maternal body, which the child recognizes as a pre-symbolic site in which subject (i.e. the child) and object (i.e. the mother’s breast) are indistinguishable. The maternal body is always positioned as an object that is relational to the child; the mother lacks a subjective presence. This relationality is, as Marianne Hirsch has highlighted in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, a fundamental component of psychoanalytic

theories (167). The mother, Hirsch contends, only exists “in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function, she remains an object, always distanced, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified [...] through the small child’s point of view” (167).

Roth’s fiction, particularly his early works, has shown a profound interest in utilizing Freudian psychoanalytic theories to explore the human condition. As psychoanalysis does, Roth’s fiction prioritises the (male) subject’s point of view, and frames the mother as a distanced object of desire/denigration. Roth himself underwent psychoanalytical treatment, and concedes in an interview with *The Paris Review* that the process was instrumental in the writing of *Portnoy’s Complaint*, *My Life as a Man*, and *The Breast* (Lee).

The psychoanalytic influences in Roth’s fiction have been a wellspring of scholarly interest: Jeffrey Berman’s *The Talking Cure* looks at Roth’s representation of psychoanalysis and connects the author’s own therapeutic experiences to his fiction, and Bruno Bettelheim offers a withering response to *Portnoy’s Complaint* vis-à-vis a psychoanalytic reading of the text itself.³¹ Debra Shostak’s formal analysis of Roth in *Countertexts*, *Counterlives* utilizes psychoanalytic theories to deconstruct Roth’s fiction. Shostak draws on Jacques Lacan, Peter Brooks, and Hillel Halkin to interrogate Roth’s depiction of male subjectivity, and this thesis seeks to expand Shostak’s exemplary scholarship by looking beyond Roth’s male subjects. I focus on the distant and symbolically unstable figure of the mother because the maternal character, although marginal, is key in the formulation of Roth’s characters’ Jewish identities.

By assessing the ways in which the mother’s body is constructed in Roth’s fiction as a leaking and uncontrollable entity, I look beyond Freud and Lacan’s conceptualizations of

³¹ See Jeffrey Berman’s *The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis*, pp.239-270, and Bruno Bettelheim’s “Portnoy Psychoanalyzed” in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Philip Roth*, pp.13-23. See also Berman’s “Revisiting Roth’s Psychoanalysis” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, pp.94-111.

women as lacking the phallus. Instead, I consider to what extent Roth's Jewish mothers' viscous bodies threatens and engulfs social order that has been schematically structured through America's stereotypical sexual categorizations (Grosz 203). In doing so, this chapter question how the mother's body interlinks with the semantically slippery identity of "Jewishness", and to what extent Roth attempts to foreground an aesthetic that destabilizes identity rubrics pertaining to gender and "race". The mother's absence/silencing has a profound meaning in Roth's fiction that links to the loss and rejection of a Jewish heritage and identity.

The chapter reconceptualises Roth's Jewish mothers by placing *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Anatomy Lesson* in conversation with Kristeva's theory of the abject. In *Powers of Horror* (1980) Kristeva defines abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect border, positions, rules" (2). According to Kristeva, "the maternal body is the place of a splitting" (238), and the disruption of the subject's unitary solidity is perceived as threatening precisely because it disturbs the illusion of symbolic cohesion. Writing on Kristeva, Rachel Sharpe and Sophie Sexon contend that the female body's "reproductive capacity produces substance that bring the internal to the external; birthing, bleeding and breastfeeding. In socio-cultural terms, these traits cast the mother figure as an abject monster: that which dissolves the borders between the flesh and the world" (3). Though the maternal body itself is not abject, its propensity for symbolically and literally rupturing is threatening because it unsettles the notion of subjective unity. Hence the necessity of the child's rejection of the mother's body. As Christine Bousfield observes, the abject "is impossible to bring into the Symbolic [...] because it is the 'precondition' of that order. In identifying with the place of the father, we abject the function of the mother or place of the mother, strictly the mother's body" (330).

In this conception, the mother's body repulses and repels because it signifies the symbolic breakdown of the subject's individuation; it represents bodily dissolution. Paradoxically, the maternal body "shapes the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of this differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted" (Kristeva 72, italics in original). Judaism is a matrilineal religion; the Jewish mother's body literally shapes the subject into a Jewish territory.

Within Roth's fiction, the mother comes to embody Jewish heredity itself. I question how the novelist's symbolic positioning of the maternal connects to Kristeva's theory of the "abject" within *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Anatomy Lesson*. The mother's body, and Jewishness itself, represents an overflow of boundaries that threatens Roth's protagonists' attempt to formulate identities beyond their religious appellations. Roth's mother represents what Bauman terms as the "conceptual Jew [...] a semantically overloaded entity, comprising and blending meanings which ought to be kept apart" (39). Both Alexander Portnoy and Nathan Zuckerman seek to purify themselves by rejecting the mother (and thus, Jewishness) as an abjection. The maternal body negatively represents a gendered and racial Jewish difference that is unclean and improper in relation to the white Christian American. Before I discuss these two texts, I will contextualize the ways in which Jewish mothers were represented in Jewish American culture before the publication of the seminal *Portnoy's Complaint*. It is important to understand how perceptions of Jewish mothers changed as Jewish entry into mainstream society became more normalized, and the ways in which Jewish mothers were reconceived in the aftermath of the Shoah.

Prior to the Second World War, Jewish-American writers tended to portray Jewish mothers as complex and sympathetic beings trapped by their social surroundings and gendered socio-political conditions. Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* (1934), Michael Gold's *Jews*

Without Money (1930), and Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925) featured nuanced Jewish mothers who struggle to live and adapt in the "New World" of America. Paula Hyman defines these figures as stereotypical "Yiddishe Mammas" "who managed to prepare her children for life in an America to which she remained a stranger who joined in American Jewish literature by women who symbolized the dark side of Americanization" (129). *Call it Sleep*'s Mrs. Schearl is the most obvious example of the Yiddishe Mamma Hyman refers to. Faced with the threat of her violent and abusive husband, David's mother provides comfort and security in spite of their impoverished and often violent surroundings. She represents an Old World Jewishness that is comforting and enabling when faced with the "Brave New World" of America and the tyranny of David's father.³²

As the Yiddishe Mamma's sons and daughters transformed from "greenhorns" into "Americans", a new image of the Jewish mother appeared in Jewish fictions, films, televisions, and memoirs.³³ The realist portrayals mentioned above were displaced, as the Jewish mother came to represent a religious and cultural backwardness that was undesirable for second-generation Jewish-American immigrants. This shift in attitudes was born from a number of complicated social and economic factors. Brygida Gasztold contends that "the most dramatic change in regard to the female role in a Jewish family happened in the 20th century, when Jews began to leave the ethnic ghetto and join the American middle classes" (163). Jewish mothers were not integrating into American society in the same socio-economic ways their husbands and sons were. As Hyman writes, Jewish women's "primary role [was] within the family rather than the workplace [, which] shielded them from

³² For more on the figure of the Yiddishe Mamma and the evolution of the Jewish mother in American literature and culture, see Melvin J. Friedman's "Jewish Mothers and Sons: The Expense of Chutzpah" in Irving Malin's *Contemporary American-Jewish Literature: Critical Essays*, pp.156 – 175. See also Bygida Gasztold's "Self-Sacrificing and/or Overbearing: The Jewish Mother in Cultural Imagination." *Scripta Judaica Cracovinesia*, 2013, Vol. 11. pp. 161-174.

³³ See Joyce Antler's *You Never Call! You Never Write! A History of the Jewish Mother.*

immediate demands to abandon traditional Jewish practice to learn a living and achieve social mobility” (131). Subsequently, Jewish mothers came to represent a religiously inflected cultural “backwardness” that was inherently tied to their Jewishness.³⁴

After the Second World War, America’s discriminatory laws wavered, enabling Jews to be more socially and economically mobile.³⁵ However, Antler writes, this wealth created “guilt as well as pleasure”, as the Jewish mother was “[p]aradoxically held responsible for her offspring’s incomplete assimilation as well as for their success in achieving the fruits of American materialism” (8). Consequently, Antler adds, the Jewish mother “became a vessel into which the cultural contradictions of a society grappling with ethnic, gender, class, and racial tensions were poured” (9). *Portnoy’s Complaint* explores the intersectional ways gender and “race” informed Jewish difference in post-World-War II America. Roth uses the Jewish mother’s body to illuminate the ways in which Jewishness is constructed as a racial and gendered other through the objectifying gaze and speech of the son.

Mama the Monster

Portnoy’s Complaint begins and ends with the Jewish mother: its epigraph contains a fictionalized clinical definition of “Portnoy’s Complaint” as a “disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature”. According to Dr Spielvogel, the psychoanalyst in Roth’s book, “many of the symptoms can be traced to the bonds obtaining in the mother-child relationship” (*PC* 1). Framed as a psychoanalytic session, Alex Portnoy uninhibitedly vents about his overbearing mother, supposedly weak father, and tumultuous relationships with non-Jewish women. As David Brauner has argued, “*Portnoy’s Complaint* is not simply a prolonged dirty joke, but rather a comic rebuttal of psychoanalysis and a Freudian analysis of its own comic strategies”

³⁴ See Martha A. Ravits, “The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture.” *MELUS*, Vol. 25, no. 1, 2000, pp.3-31.

³⁵ I return to this matter in the final chapter of the thesis.

(64). Developing from Brauner, I consider to what extent Roth replicates, rather than rebuts, psychoanalysis's tendency to objectify the mother as an object of the subject's desire. For Alex, Sophie Portnoy (his mother) represents a Jewish past that is inescapable, and ties him to a racial and gendered otherness that prohibits him from realizing his fantasy of becoming the singular "American" man.

Sophie's importance has been well documented in Roth scholarship. Melvin Friedman, for example, sees the mother-son confrontation as the text's thematic kernel (171); Shaun Clarkson's "Liver, Lobster, and the Law" identifies the ways in which Sophie controls and regulates her son's diet, and how this comes to influence the ways in which Alex perceives women. Elsewhere, cultural anthropologists such as Riv-Ellen Prell and Joyce Antler have highlighted the ways in which *Portnoy's Complaint* defined and influenced societal conceptions of Jewish mothers. Antler, for example, laments Roth's novel for its "misogynist message that coded unacceptable behavior as female rather than Jewish", arguing "Roth [...] projected onto the Jewish mother the negative features of 'Otherness' – Old World backwardness, loudness, vulgarity, clannishness, ignorance, and materialism" (143). Though Antler conflates author with narrator here, the analysis is otherwise sound: Portnoy sees in his mother a degenerate form of Jewishness that subverts gender norms, and thus threatens his fantasy of becoming an "American" by confining him to Judaism, which he views as an abjection.

The chapter enters into conversation with Brauner and Dean Franco's discussions of Sophie Portnoy as a figure of monstrousness. I argue Alex redefines his mother as an abject monster in his attempt to project himself as an American rather than as a Jew, and uses Sophie's body as a way of creating his monster. Analysing two key scenes that centre on Sophie's lower body, this chapter highlights the ways Alex disregards his mother by projecting her as an abjection. I reveal the ways in which the narrator transforms his mother

into an abjection in order to maintain a “distance” from Sophie Portnoy that illuminates his insecurities and anxieties over his masculinity, which Roth ties to his character’s “racial” difference as a “Jew.”

Scholars such as Franco have read Alex as a defiler of Sophie’s ordered cleanliness. Franco describes Sophie as a mother “obsessed with purity and cleanliness, while Portnoy is committed to a defilement, a dialectic internalized and performed in Portnoy’s adult social and professional life as well” (91). This may be accurate, but Alex’s defilement also centres on his desire to reinstate and re-inscribe gender norms he perceives his parents’ Judaism to have exceeded and scrambled. Alex’s quest is not only centred against purification, but also a masculinist mythology that reinstates self/other binaries and reinforces gender norms. In other words, Alex wants to purify himself of his mother’s Judaic rituals and culture.

Sophie threatens Alex because she lacks a stable identity the narrator connects to her bodily excess. Sophie is described and remembered by Alex, meaning the mother’s lack of symbolic cohesiveness stems from the fact that she exists as an infinity within his psyche. The novel’s first chapter is entitled “THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTER I’VE EVER MET”, and begins with Alex Portnoy recalling his childhood impressions of his indomitable mother. Sophie Portnoy, Alex tells Dr Spielvogel, “is so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise” (*PC* 3). Alex identifies Sophie as a figure of excess, meaning that she lacks a stable identity within the narrative, spilling out into every facet of his life. He seeks to expose his mother’s supernatural capabilities, but notes how “it was always a relief not to have caught her between incarnations”. Alex fears he “might have to be done away with were I to catch sight of her flying in from school through the bedroom window, or make herself emerge, limb by limb, out of an invisible state and into her apron” (*PC* 3-4). The mother has no inherent stable body, but tellingly enters the symbolic order

through the material “apron”. Alex’s mother is hyper-visible but paradoxically invisible, present yet absent, human but inhuman. Sophie represents a limitlessness that Alex identifies as fatal to his subjectivity. The mother’s formless body is central to Alex’s childhood anxieties, as Sophie’s physical lack within the material world is counteracted by her paranormal excess Alex connects with their Jewish heredity.

Yet whilst the mother is posited as a figure of excess the Jewish father is a symbol of masculine absence. For Roth’s narrator, Judaism represents a distortion of sexual and gendered norms that harks back to antisemitic conceptions of Jewish bodily differences. As I discussed in the Introduction, Jewish men were alleged to be endowed with an excessive femininity. Roth satirically subverts this stereotype through his character, Alex, and his recollection of his parents. For Roth’s narrator, Judaism represents a distortion of sexual and gendered norms. Alex laments his parents for the “mix-up of sexes in our house!” (*PC* 4), identifying his father, Jack, as the symbolic unmanly “Jew.” Jack’s unmanliness is exemplified by his un-American behaviour, which Alex connects with his foreign “Jewishness.” For example, Alex tells Spielvogel how his father drinks mineral oil and magnesia, “not *whiskey like a goy*”, and in the same passage stresses how “[h]e suffered [...] from his constipation [...] my father reading the evening paper with a suppository up his ass” (*PC* 4-5, italics in original). Alcohol, specifically whiskey, is identified somewhat reverently by Alex as a drink the “goyim” consume, whilst Jack drinks nothing but fluids centred on alleviating his congested bowels.

Furthermore, Jack is identified as a sufferer: twice Alex repeats how his father is a victim of constipation, and the identification of the Jewish patriarch as victim becomes an important correlative with Jewishness later in the novel. To be a victim, in Portnoy’s view, is to be effeminate. Alex decries Judaism’s history of persecution that he laments as feminine: “Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew!” he rages, “[i]t is coming out of my ears already, the saga of the

suffering of the Jews! Do me a favor, and stick your suffering heritage up your suffering ass” (PC 76). The six iterations of the word “Jew” evokes the haunting memory of the Holocaust and the six million Jews who died. Alex contemptuously identifies Jewishness with victimhood and suffering, two nouns he denigrates as unmanly and un-American. According to Peter Novick, the image of the Holocaust victim “evoked at best the sort of pity mixed with contempt. It was a label actively shunned. The self-reliant cowboy and the victorious war hero were approved (masculine) ideals” (121). Novick’s last sentence underpins the gendered body politic underpinning Alex’s anxiety surrounding the suffering he associates with Jewishness, which centres around his father’s phallic lack/absence.³⁶

Jack, like the victims of the Holocaust, is incapable of asserting himself like the American self-reliant cowboy or victorious war hero; he is perceived as passive and weak. As Clarkson points out, this means Jack cannot “exercise any control over his family, becoming an absence in the house” (23-4). The father of the house is unable to expel himself, and is therefore perceived as being incapable of asserting himself as the patriarch, both figuratively and metaphorically. Rather, Alex’s father is the one who is penetrated vis-à-vis his suppository, and when Alex rages against the Jews and their suffering, he suggests here that Jewishness is a kind of queerness, which he equates as unmanly and thus un-American.³⁷ Therefore, Alex degrades his father’s need of a suppository and identity as a Jew because

³⁶ Prior to the trial of Adolf Eichmann and the publication of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1960), Holocaust victims were not given any public platform to speak of their experiences. During the 1940s and 50s, Alvin Rosenfeld writes, “little public attention was paid in [America] to those people who had managed to survive the Nazi assault against European Jewry” (136).

³⁷ Harry Brod claims “[w]hen Jewish men are viewed as powerless, as victims, they are seen as effeminate in our culture. And effeminacy here signals homosexuality” (150). Though Brod’s claim surrounding “our culture” is problematically ambiguous, Brod supports my argument surrounding the ways in which victimhood was identified as unmanly.

both represent an effeminacy that negates the phallic penetration the patriarchy is supposed to possess.³⁸

Jack's failure to be a man means he cannot be an American. Roth shows his readers Jack's "foreignness" when he takes his son out to play baseball with him for his birthday. Alex's father is hopeless at the sport, which reflects Jack's inability to perform his duty as a father and as a man:

"Okay, Big Shot Ballplayer," he says and grasps my new regulation bat somewhere near the middle – and to my astonishment, with his left hand where his right should be. I am suddenly overcome with sadness: I want to tell him, *Hey, your hands are wrong*, but am unable to, for fear I might begin to cry – or he might!" (PC 11, italics in original).

The capitalization of "Big Shot Ballplayer" stresses the incongruity between the voice uttering the expression and the speech expressed, highlighting Jack's Jewishness and lack of familiarity with American idioms. Alex desires to correct his father's handling of the phallic-shaped bat, reversing the desired father-son family roles Alex wishes for. In having to educate Jack on how to hold the American baseball bat, Alex mourns the patriarchal absence in his life. The improper body position Jack adopts reveals the father's physical inadequacy in the eyes of the son, as though Jack were incapable of correctly holding or controlling his own penis. The fear of crying further reveals Alex's desire to maintain proper gender divisions; men, in his view, should not cry. The crying man signifies weakness which is far removed from the idolized self-reliant cowboy Novick identified as so distinct from the victim of the Holocaust. In other words, the cowboy signifies a desirable "American" identity, whilst the victim is disparagingly associated with Jewishness. Warren Rosenberg writes Jack "cannot be an *American* hero for his son, given that he's a failure in business, a

³⁸ Recent Jewish studies scholarship has highlighted the ways in which Jewishness and queerness resonate with one another. See *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (2004). Within Roth scholarship, Brauner illuminates the homosocial discourses that circumvent much of Roth's fiction, challenging the heteronormative readings Roth's fiction frequently produces. See Brauner's "Queering Philip Roth: Homosocial Discourse in 'An Actor's Life for Me,' *Letting Go*, *Sabbath's Theater*, and the 'American Trilogy'".

failure in learning and imagination, and, perhaps most damning for an American boy, totally inept at baseball" (192, italics in original).

The interactions between Alex and Jack parody Sigmund Freud's reflections of his father in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Alex sees Jack as a failure because he is not like the American sportsmen he admires, as Roth illuminates in the passage below:

[“]Come on, Big Shot, throw the ball,” he calls, and so I do – and of course discover that on top of all the other things I am just beginning to suspect about my father, he isn’t “King Kong” Charlie Keller either (*PC* 11).

The scene parallels Sigmund Freud's reflections on his father's failures. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's father Jakob recalls a moment where a Christian accosted him on the streets, knocking his kippah from his head. Freud asks his father how he responded, to which Jakob replies: “I went into the road and picked up my cap,” which strikes Freud “as unheroic conduct on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand”. Freud ends this anecdote by contrasting Jakob's actions with the general Hamilcar Barca, observing that “[e]ver since then Hannibal has had a place in my phantasies” (97-98).³⁹ Both Freud and Portnoy lament their father's unheroic conduct: Freud's father does not confront or defend himself when faced with antisemitism, whilst Alex's father cannot engage in American sports. Neither men are able to enact the masculinist behaviour their sons expect. Disillusioned by his father's actions, Freud, Paul Breines points out, “turned instead to a Hannibal, to a tough Jewish fantasy” (29). Likewise, Alex turns to Charlie Keller, a famous American baseball player. Alex retreats to a tough Jewish fantasy of America centred on the restoration of gender norms where men and women behave according to the gendered binary Alex romanticizes.

³⁹ For more on Barca see Britannica Academic's entry, "Hamilcar Barca." *Britannica Academic*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 22 Jul. 2014. academic-ebs-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/Hamilcar-Barca/39021. Accessed 24 May. 2019.

If Alex's father fails to live up to the masculine myth Roth's narrator fetishizes, Sophie Portnoy is threatening precisely because she is too masculine. Sophie is boundless: she can "accomplish anything" (*PC* 11). Alex's mother possesses an uncanny ability to predict the weather ("[w]hat a radar on that woman!" [*PC* 11]), and Sophie is like a "hawk" when monitoring the butcher to ensure their meat remained kosher (*PC* 11). Alex describes, at length, the invasive medical procedures his mother would administer in order to keep him healthy:

For mistakes she checked my sums; for holes, my socks; for dirty, my nails, my neck, every seam and crease of my body. [...] A medical procedure like this (crackpot though it may be) takes time, of course; it takes effort, to be sure – but where health and cleanliness are concerned, germs and bodily secretions, she will not spare herself and sacrifice others (*PC* 12).

Alex's body becomes a site of meaning for both the Jewish mother and the son. For Sophie, keeping Alex clean and healthy is synonymous with keeping him "Jewish", as she regulates what he ingests and expels in order to ensure he maintains his kosher diet in accordance with Jewish religious practice. Alex's resistance to his mother's panoptic domination over his body is reflected in his language: the word "my" is repeated five times, stressing Alex's intention to claim ownership of his own body. Yet Sophie repeatedly lurks over his every move, operating with surgeon-like precision to inspect every molecule of Alex's body.

Alex rebels against his mother's (Jewish) cleanliness by consuming non-kosher meats such as French-fries and hamburgers. When she discovers her son's religious betrayal, Sophie chastises him, uttering the word "hamburgers" as bitterly "as she might say *Hitler*" (*PC* 33, italics in original). The allusion to the Nazi leader stresses the hyperbolic severity of the situation for Sophie: her son's consumption of American fast food represents the cultural death of Judaic traditions, signifying the realization of Hitler's "Final Solution" (i.e. the eradication of Jewish life and culture). Although Sophie's hysterical outburst is comically

absurd, Brett Kaplan highlights how the reference to Hitler reveals “the proximity of the Holocaust to the consciousness of these characters” (29-30).

Yet the immediacy of the Shoah is simultaneously marked by its distance from American Jewry’s experiences, a distance made more apparent by the literature published during the 1960s and the testimonies given during the Eichmann trial. For America’s Jews, the Holocaust could only be consumed through literature, television, film, or art, marking a very significant gap between their European counterparts whose suffering had been commodified into a media production. The Jewish survivor of the Holocaust became an iconic symbol, the ultimate figurehead of victimhood whose varied experiences of trauma overwhelmed America’s imaginations. Arthur Hertzberg claims “the underlying message that Jews were getting from what came to be called the ‘Holocaust industry’ or ‘Shoah business’ was that Jewish identity involved suffering” (382). As discussed earlier, Alex internalizes the synthesis between Jewishness and victimhood, but does not valorise or glamorize their collective “suffering”. Sophie’s hysteria and obsessiveness, combined with his father’s physical weakness, represents a Jewish identity that Alex identifies with “suffering”, which for Roth’s narrator represents a racial otherness and an abject femininity. Alex begs Dr. Spielvogel to “[b]less me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me *whole!*” (*PC* 36-7). Bravery, strength, and an ability to penetrate exemplifies an American masculinity Alex craves. As Shostak observes, “[t]he goy is manly, consuming, and acting; fearing to act or consume, the Jew is morbid, hysterical, and weak” (116).

Alex attempts to become “whole” by repudiating the Jewish traditions his mother and family observe. Alex violates his family’s kosher diet as a renunciation of Judaism, but also uses sex as a means of trying to claim this mythic masculine identity. After being confronted with the Hitlerian hamburger, Alex bolts to the bathroom (“[w]here else” [*PC* 33]):

I tear off my pants, furiously I grab that battered battering ram to freedom, my adolescent cock, even as my mother begins to call from the other side of the bathroom

door. “Now this time don’t flush. Do you hear me, Alex? I have to see what’s in that bowl!” (PC 33).

Alex’s rage is comic, but violent. The words “tear”, “furiously”, “battered” express an uncontrollable anger that is directed at his mother, whom Alex identifies as a barrier prohibiting him from “freedom.” Alex seeks to reverse Walt Whitman’s famous proclamation, “Unscrew the locks from the doors! Unscrews the doors themselves from their jambs!” (“Song of Myself” 48). For Alex, freedom means keeping the doors screwed in their jambs, and the locks secured. Within the solitary confinement of the bathroom, Alex is able to do what his father cannot: excrete himself; or, to adapt yet another Whitman line, celebrate himself (“Song of Myself” 29).

Alex masturbates in an attempt to re-inforce the borders his mother seeks to violate; that is, by taking hold of his penis and locking out the overbearing feminine figure, Alex seeks to maintain a gendered separateness that is inherently tied to the negation of his Jewish identity. Alex’s semen assumes a symbolically significant role for the disobedient son. As Elizabeth Grosz states,

[s]eminal fluid is understood primarily as what it makes, what it achieves, a causal agent and thus a thing, a solid: its fluidity, its potential seepage [...] is perpetually displaced in discourse onto its properties, its capacity to fertilize, to father, to produce an object (199).

For Alex, ejaculating semen represents a patriarchal solidity that affirms his masculinity, reifying his place within the symbolic order as a “man.” Ironically however, Alex’s constant need to masturbate as a means of affirming his manliness ties him to an antisemitic stereotype of the oversexed Jew, most famously adopted by James Joyce in his depiction of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* (1918). Bloom masturbates whilst watching Gerty MacDowall in the “Nausicaa” episode, but quickly realizes (after he’s orgasmed) that Gerty has a physical disability: “Leopold Bloom (for it is he) stands silent, with bowed head before those young guileless eyes. What a brute he had been ! At it again?” (*Ulysses* 350). Alex is always “at it”

in *Portnoy's Complaint*. However, the Jew's excessive sexuality was tied to antisemitic conceptualizations of the Jewish male as a kind of woman.⁴⁰ In other words, Alex's efforts to separate himself from his Jewish family, whom he laments for confusing gender roles, replicates antisemitic conceptualizations of the male "Jew" as an overflowing "woman." Furthermore, Sophie's call from outside the bathroom door reminds Alex his body remains bound to a Jewishness that is symbolized both by his own circumcised penis and his mother's loud, excessive voice.

Sophie repeatedly threatens Alex's sense of masculinity through her invasiveness. In one of the novel's most iconic scenes, she stands over her son with a breadknife in order to ensure he eat all of his remaining dinner. She asks: "[w]hich do I want to be, weak, or strong, a man or a mouse?" (*PC* 16). Manliness is inherently tied to strength, whilst the mouse represents weakness, inhumanity, and an animalistic "otherness." Shostak points out that for Sophie, "the man/mouse choice exists wholly within the frame of Jewish manhood", whilst for Alex, "[t]he goy is man and the Jew is the mouse, where 'Jew' comes to stand for the forces of repression and renunciation" (86). Within Nazi Germany, the mouse was frequently used as an image that defined "Jews": verminous, greedy, and full of disease, "Jews" were frequently depicted as rodents.⁴¹ Sophie's question thus threatens Alex with emasculation that fundamentally ties Jewishness to an abject victimhood. Sophie unknowingly reinforces Alex's internalization of antisemitism: if Alex refuses to eat his meals, he risks becoming the weak, inhuman, and verminous "Jew" Nazi Germany envisaged.

⁴⁰ See my discussion of Gilman in the Introduction on page 25.

⁴¹ Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980) utilizes the animalistic imagery of Nazi Germany in his extraordinary memoir detailing his father's persecution. Elsewhere, Thomas Doherty highlights how Joseph Goebbels' Reichsministry and Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* depicted "Jews as hook-nosed, beady-eyed *Untermenschen*, creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human and vermin". Thus, "the Jews are linked with vermin, to be eradicated, like plague bearers, from the Fatherland" (74). See also Jay Geller's *Bestiarium Judaicum: Unnatural Histories of the Jews* (2017).

While Alex's ingestions and secretions are the focal point of Roth's novel, there are two episodes in which the Jewish mother's body dominates the text, and represents what Kristeva defines as the "abject." The first of these scenes occurs in the toilet, an important arena within *Portnoy's Complaint*; it is a site in which the male characters struggle with their masculinities through their bodily expulsions and/or secretions, and has received much critical attention in terms of Roth's exploration of Alex's masculinity. I wish here to turn our focus to Roth's portrayal of Sophie Portnoy's menstruating body, and the ways in which Alex fears menstruation as a symbol of feminine difference. Alex recalls an incident wherein Sophie frantically calls for her son's help, demanding he run to the drugstore and buy her tampons/sanitary napkins. Returning home, Alex "[b]reathlessly handed the box to the white fingers that extended themselves at me through a narrow crack in the bathroom door . . ." (*PC* 43).

Alex's panting may well reflect his fatigue at having to run to aid his mother, but could equally reflect his feeling of anxiety and dread at the possibility of glimpsing his mother's bleeding body. The closed bathroom door once again serves to separate the mother and son's bodies, but the small rupture represents a fragility in the edifice of the framework that threatens to collapse the boundary between Alex and Sophie. The fingers, separately demarcated from the hand, torso, or body itself, are defined as "white". The joints' skeletal colouring seems to represent the threat of death itself. If so, does Sophie's menstruating body represent a fatality to Alex's conception of himself as a "man"? Alex's anxiety is most aptly symbolized in the final moment of the passage, ending in an ellipsis. This suspension point signals an omission or rupture from speech or language, an unspeakable thought or fear that words cannot articulate.

The ellipsis used here represents Kristeva's "abject". In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues the maternal body threatens patriarchal social order as it produces bodily fluids that

transgress boundaries. The abject, Kristeva writes, “disturbs identity, system, order” and “draws [...] toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). The ellipsis here signifies the very breakdown of language; confronted by the mother’s porous, flowing body, the symbolic order Alex constructs himself and his mother through fails him. For the briefest of moments, Alex is finally silenced.

Though the colour “white” is referred to here, there is no mention of blood or redness. The mother’s body is made invisible, absent; she is erased from language. The door remains closed, as it were. As Tyler Imogen writes, “when the maternal is no longer recognizable as a body and thus as a subject [then] it/she becomes abject” (86). For Alex, menstruation represents a gendered difference that must be excluded.

Sophie’s expulsions represent a danger to Alex. Kristeva writes “[e]xcrements and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (71). Alex is confronted by his mother’s menstrual blood, that which very obviously signifies a “feminine” outside, and one that is fundamentally tied to the maternal body.

Alex’s anxiety regarding his mother’s menstruations lead him to believe that Sophie should have bled out rather than ask her son for help:

Better she should have bled herself out on our cold bathroom floor, better *that*, than to have sent an eleven-year-old boy in hot pursuit of sanitary napkins! Where was my sister, for Christ’s sake? Where was her own emergency supply? Why was this woman so grossly insensitive to the vulnerability of her own little boy – on the one hand so insensitive to my shame, and yet on the other, so attuned to my deepest desires! (PC 44).

In asking where his sister is, Alex seeks to maintain and preserve sexual binaries through gendered roles; the young man should not be charged with buying goods solely meant for the female body, as such an act threatens Alex’s “vulnerable” masculinity. Thus, the menstrual

blood exuding from his mother signifies the death of the masculine self. Christine Bousfield writes that the abject is “located wherever there is ambivalence, ambiguity, the improper or the unclean, the overflowing of boundaries, fusion and confusion” (331). Sophie’s menstrual breakdown signifies a bodily overflow that distorts the gap between the masculine and feminine, as the boundary between mother and son threateningly appears to be in jeopardy of being breeched. Alex’s narcissism dismisses the mother as a subject: Sophie’s body, in its most vulnerable, bare, and human form, is almost made visible to Alex, distorting his entire production of Sophie-as-monster whilst simultaneously threatening to rupture his masculinist efforts to maintain this fatuitous division between the “masculine” and “feminine.”

Yet Alex’s final reflection that his mother is attuned to his “deepest desires” parodically returns to Freud’s Oedipal complex. After Alex’s detailing of his mother’s menstrual sufferings, Portnoy recalls a moment in which “I am so small I hardly know what sex I am” (*PC* 44). This proclamation serves to make central the carnal uncertainties of Roth’s narrator, immediately highlighting the ways in which Sophie influences the young boy’s sexual self. Basking in the attention of his adoring mother, Alex is “absolutely punchy with delight” as she asks, “[w]ho does Mommy love more than anything in the whole wide world?” (*PC* 45). The narrator is aware his mother “sleeps with a man who lives with us at night and on Sunday afternoons. My father they say he is” (*PC* 45). The father is positioned as a stranger in which others name and identify him as the patriarchal figure. This outsider is deferred to with little affection, as Alex describes how “[t]his man, my father, is off somewhere making money, as best he is able. These two are gone [Alex’s father and sister], and who knows, maybe I’ll be lucky, maybe they’ll never come back . . .” (*PC* 44). Roth parodies Freud famous argument that the son “regards his father as a rival in love” (217) for the mother, but uses the Oedipal complex to underscore the racial and gendered uncertainties of Jewish identity in post-World-War II America. Alex’s desire for his mother combined with

Sophie's flirtatious responses to her son's affections threatens the gendered and familial divisions between mother and son.

Alex perceives Sophie to be overwhelming because of her "feminine" excessiveness that exceeds and disrupts the gendered borders Roth's narrator fetishizes; this gendered excess closely interlinks with Jewishness. As I discussed in the Introduction, Jewishness was conceptualized as excessive, eluding and or disrupting categories such as "religion" and "race", and Roth's psychoanalytic narrative undoubtedly leans on this stereotype. The book's protagonist and of all its characters are cartoonish exaggerations. Marie Syrkin laments that for "all the broad caricature and abundant visual realism, Portnoy never becomes a human being" (334). Whilst Alex's inhumanness affronts Syrkin, I find Sophie Portnoy's representation to be the most problematic element of the text, and Alex's inhumanity a brilliantly effective satire of antisemitism.

Portnoy's Complaint also satirizes Freud's psychoanalysis, and by doing so, Roth hollows out Freud's Oedipal Complex into farce. Sophie greets her son on the phone by describing him as "my lover" (PC 97), and when the four-year-old Alex is caught admiring his mother's body, Sophie invites him to touch her:

"Feel."

"What?" – even as she takes my hand in hers and draws her body – "Mother" "I haven't gained five pounds," she says, "since you were born. Feel," she says, and holds my *stiff* fingers against the swell of her hips, which aren't bad . . ." (PC 46, emphasis my own).

The invitation to fondle his mother's body instigates a shock, signified by the dashes, that disturbs the familial relationship between mother and son. Alex attempts to maintain boundaries by iterating the title "Mother" (PC 46), seeking to resituate her within a recognizable and familiar positon. Yet when she allows him to further explore her body, Alex's fingers are described as "stiff" (PC 46), comically hinting at the young boy's erection. Freud's essay "Medusa's Head" is useful here, as the psychoanalyst highlights the ways in

which Medusa's head becomes a kind of castration complex. Yet as Freud notes, "becoming stiff means an erection" (273), and for Alex, his stiff fingers amplify the sexual imagery Freud's reading of the Medusa head articulates. Sophie's body is a Medusean symbol of terrifying possibilities, possessing a transgressive, sexual potentiality that literally and symbolically makes Alex erectly freeze.

For Freud, the erect penis "offers consolation to the spectre: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact" (273). Alex's stiff fingers signify an apparent attraction to his mother, but simultaneously articulates the two's separateness. Within patriarchal society, Arthur Brittain contends, "man is only a man in so far as he is capable of using his penis as an instrument of power" (47). Such a definition precariously creates a fallacious definitive identification of "man" as unitarily tied to the erection, whilst woman is immutably bound by their body (i.e. the womb). This arbitrary (or, to put it another way, "floppy") definition of difference between "man" and "woman" centres not merely on the body, but on the speech that marks bodily differences.

Roth explores his protagonist's struggle to maintain the division between "man" and "woman" through the mother-son relationship. As Alex learns to separate himself from his mother, he becomes disgusted by Sophie's exhibitionistic behaviour. Alex complains that after twenty-five years, his mother "still hitches up the stockings in front of her little boy", pondering whether or not his father would act if

there in the living room their grown-up little boy were to tumble all at once onto the rug with his mommy, what would Daddy do? [...] Would he draw *his* knife – or would he go off to the other room and watch television until they were finished? (PC 46, italics in original).

The uncertainty aroused by the potential act of incest now enrages and disturbs Alex. In considering what his father would do in the event of the mother and son actualizing their strange sexual parlour game, Alex wishes his father would reinforce his phallic and patriarchal power over the mother. His desire for Jack to unsheathe his italicized knife

stresses Alex's desperation to restore a patriarchal and masculinist order, wherein the mother's physical body is made proper through a potentially violent penetrative act. Yet the dash and subsequent consideration of Jack departing should such an act of incest occur reaffirms the masculine absence Alex sees in his father; Jack's lack of masculinity is once again overcompensated by the voraciousness of the Jewish mother.

In satirizing Freud's Oedipal complex, Roth's novel undermines and deconstructs the psychoanalytical framework that conceived of a very bodily and sexual divide between "man" and "woman." Roth invalidates the Freudian projection of the mother as an object of desire and repulsion by highlighting the performative ways gender and "race" are constructed. Through satire, Roth re-enacts the castration and oedipal complex in order to demean the Freudian therapy model. By doing so, Roth highlights the ways in which psychoanalysis serves to perpetuate patriarchal misogyny that others the mother into an objectified body.

Yet *Portnoy's Complaint* is limited by its satire. Roth's parody reproduces Freud's own failures in his production of the maternal figure as a Jewish literary topic. Sophie's anxieties over her son's physical and spiritual wellbeing seem to be intimately concerned with the Holocaust and the loss of Jewish religious and ethnic culture. Yet her anxieties are brushed off by the repulsive narrator as mere by-products of her monstrousness. In failing to provide a view of Sophie which extends beyond Alex's perspective, the novel ensures the Jewish mother remains as a dehumanized object, a monster of Jewish and thus racial otherness that is endless and inescapable. In sum, *Portnoy's Complaint* fails to find a way in which the mother can speak or take up a subject position; Roth cannot envisage a way in which the mother can be symbolized beyond abjection.⁴²

⁴² See Imogen Tyler's "Against Abjection." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 10, no.1 Apr. 2009, pp.77-98. Sage Journals.

“A breast, then a lap, then a fading voice”

The Anatomy Lesson, like *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Facts*, begins with the mother. The novel orients around Roth’s oft-used narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, who is beleaguered by an undiagnosed spinal pain that prohibits him from writing. Zuckerman reflects on the familial breakdown his fictions have produced, particularly with his father, who died in the preceding novel, *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981). In *The Anatomy Lesson* Nathan mourns for his recently deceased mother, and in a desperate attempt to re-invent himself, journeys to the University of Chicago to pursue a medical degree. Critics have tended to focus their research on the bodily pain Roth’s narrator suffers, often overlooking the mother or displacing her spectral presence as a by-product of the son’s impairment.

In *The Anatomy Lesson* Roth intended Zuckerman’s pain to be unsymbolic. As he explains in an interview with *The Sunday Times*, the book is “about not knowing. Look, diagnoses abound in this book. Everybody *else* knows. [...] This book is *crammed* with people who know what’s wrong with Zuckerman” (“London” 137-38, italics in original). Ironically, the unsymbolic pain does have meaning in Roth’s novel. I suggest Zuckerman’s inability to articulate the pain he suffers mirrors both his mother’s unknowable subjectivity and the collective traumatic Jewish histories. This section develops from scholars such as Pia Masiero, Donald Kartiganer, and Laura Muresan, all of whom have connected Roth’s representation of physical pain with Elaine Scarry’s work, *The Body in Pain* (1987).⁴³ Scarry argues pain “has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything” and subsequently “resists objectification in language” (qtd. in Masiero, p.84, italics in original).

⁴³ See Masiero’s *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld*, pp.82-95; Kartiganer’s “Zuckerman Unbound: The Celebrant of Silence.” *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, edited by Timothy Parrish, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.35-52, and Muresan’s “Writ(h)ing Bodies: Literature and Illness in Philip Roth’s Anatomy Lesson(S).” *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 75–90.

Whilst the scholars above focus on how Zuckerman's pain represents a breakdown in language, I look at how Selma Zuckerman, Nathan's mother, exists outside the son's symbolic order. The mother in *The Anatomy Lesson* symbolizes an otherness that Nathan cannot conceptualize. Like Sophie Portnoy, Selma Zuckerman is an object to the son, but Selma's alterity is symbolized as an absence, rather than an excessiveness. Selma is silently separate from Nathan and his father's arguments regarding the former's representation of Jews in his literature. However, once Victor Zuckerman passes away, Selma's complexity as a human being emerges.

The Anatomy Lesson begins after the death of Selma. The novel focuses on Nathan recalling his mother's dying moments, in which Selma's hidden subjectivity emerges. Unlike *Portnoy's Complaint*, the mother is not repudiated by the impaired narrator, but mourned. As Nathan's physical and mental wellbeing collapses, so too does the symbolic order through which the writer constructs his reality. Subsequently, Nathan finds himself haunted by his mother's ghost, whom Roth connects with the Holocaust.

This section interrogates the ways Roth binds the Jewish mother with the Shoah, and asks what is at stake in the author's correlation between the two. At the beginning of this chapter, I stressed Judaism's matrilineal tradition, and its importance in understanding the role of the mother in informing how Jewish identities are constructed. Whilst *Portnoy's Complaint* erratically explores Alex's anxiety regarding his overbearing Jewish mother and her symbolic connection to Jewishness vis-à-vis excess, *The Anatomy Lesson* is a far more considered novel, particularly regarding the issue of the Shoah. If the (Jewish) subject is, as Kristeva suggests, territorialized by the maternal body, then how, Roth asks in *The Anatomy Lesson*, does the Jewish mother corporeally write the subject into Judaism's vast and complex history? Before discussing this question, I first need to contextualize the two texts

that preceded *The Anatomy Lesson*, as both *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound* have an important bearing on *The Anatomy Lesson*'s thematic focus.

The Anatomy Lesson is the last in the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy, and marks a significant thematic shift from the prior two texts. Both *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound* centre on Nathan Zuckerman's struggle against the Jewish patriarchy after his controversial literary depictions of Jews in his fictions. In the former, for example, Nathan writes a story based on a family dispute over money. Nathan's father protests its publication because the story, "as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing and one thing only. [...] It is about kikes. Kikes and their love of money" (*GW* 68). Nathan retreats to his literary idol E.I Lonoff in order to escape from his father and Judge Leopold Wapter, the latter of whom writes Nathan a letter asking "[w]hy in a story with a Jewish background must there be (a) adultery; (b) incessant fighting within a family over money; (c) warped human behavior in general?" (*GW* 74). The anxiety surrounding Nathan's story echoes the same concerns Roth's first publication produced in *Goodbye, Columbus*. Certain individuals within the Jewish American communities were concerned that Roth chose to portray his Jewish characters as cheaters, liars, and fanatics. Both Roth and his creation Zuckerman are pressured to purify Jewish lives in American literary spaces in order to appease their white American readership.

The tribulations Zuckerman faces are within the city, which comes to represent a claustrophobic space in which patriarchal figures such as Nathan's father and Judge Wapter seek to delimit the writer's literary freedom. In contrast, Lonoff's home is out "in the country" – that is to say, in the *goyish* wilderness of birds and trees where American began and long ago had ended" (*GW* 4, italics in original). Nathan's retreat to the "goyish wilderness" represents a flight into nature that is removed from the consternations of Jewish

identity politics. Nathan resents his father's efforts to purify his literature, but ironically seeks to purge himself from the strife his fiction has produced within the Jewish community.

Zuckerman seeks the purifying simplicity of life as an "American", immersed in the historyless absoluteness of the woodlands that is interlinked to Lonoff the writer. Lonoff is Zuckerman's literary idol, whom he seeks out for "patriarchal validation" (*TGW* 7). Several critics have noted the ways in which Lonoff resembles Bernard Malamud, Henry Roth, and even Philip Roth himself.⁴⁴ Yet I find Gilman's analysis particularly compelling. Gilman contends Lonoff is "all Jewish writers for Zuckerman. He becomes (in Zuckerman's analogy) Kafka as well as Babel" (22). Lonoff represents a literary other-worldliness that exists outside of the political tumult Nathan's father symbolizes. To Zuckerman, Lonoff is an aestheticist divorced from the political. So in his retreat to the wilderness and to Lonoff, Nathan seeks to escape the social complexities of Jewish life as a novelist. The woodlands and Lonoff represents a womb-like retreat for Nathan; Lonoff's home and its surrounding symbolize a space in which (religious) difference elides and is subsumed by serenity.⁴⁵

Conversely, Nathan's actual mother is simply an appendage in his struggle against the patriarch in *The Ghost Writer*. Selma plays a subordinate role in the text, working fruitlessly as a peacemaker between the warring father and son, given little to no textual space to develop or materialize as a character. Instead, the novel centres around the fantasy Nathan fashions from his encounter with Amy Bellette, i.e. Lonoff's research assistant and lover. Nathan creates a fictitious story in which he imagines Bellette to be Anne Frank, who has, in

⁴⁴ Robert M. Greenberg suggests Lonoff is "a combination perhaps of Bernard Malamud and I.B. Singer [...] who] represents restraint and scrupulousness" (88), whilst Martin Tucker states "Roth's portrait of Lonoff in *The Ghost Writer* is now accepted (though not legally verified) as that of Bernard Malamud" (38). Recently, Steven Kellman has challenged this assumption by examining how *Exit Ghost* (2007) connects Lonoff's character to Henry Roth. See Steven G. Kellman's "A Tale of Two Roths: Philip and Henry." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, July 2015, pp. 31–38.

⁴⁵ Chapter 3 considers the pastoral imagery in Roth's novels more closely, reading Roth's novels through Anette Kolodny, whose work informs this particular analysis of the pastoral in *The Ghost Writer*.

Nathan's fantasy, survived the concentration camps and gone into hiding. For Roth's Bellette/Frank, the diary "restore[s] in print their status as flesh and blood ... for all the good that would do them" (GW 105). The bodily viscosity of the diary is significant; Bellette's remarks on Frank's journal suggestively represent Roth's own view of the text's significance. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is an actual piece of literature that details a young girl's physical experience of hiding in an attic. Yet as the ellipsis suggests, the diary is a metaphor for loss, a symbolic stand in for the victims of Nazi ideology that dehumanized those Jewish lives.

Yet, as I will discuss below, the diary also lacks the physical violence that haunt other Holocaust memoirs. This is, of course, circumstantial: Anne Frank, her family, the van Pels, and Fritz Pfeffer hid, and the diary details their lives in the attic; the text does not, nor can it, detail the violence Anne or the others experienced. Anne's last entry was written on Tuesday, August 1, 1944. Three days later, all eight people hiding in the annex were arrested. Anne Frank and her sister Margot died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The only member to survive was Otto Frank, Anne's father, and in 1947 Otto Frank published Anne's diary in Holland. Three years later the diary was published in America, and became an international best-seller.

The success of the diary, both commercially and critically, has been a particular source of interest for academics in literature and Holocaust studies. "[T]he diary evolved", writes Judith E. Doneson, "from a European work written by a young Jew hiding from the Nazis in Holland to a more Americanized, universal symbol; indeed, it became one of the first enduring popular symbols of the Holocaust" (124). Why did Anne Frank's diary generate so much attention within the public domain? Why has the diary become such an enduring and popular symbol? Ruth Amir and Pnia Rosenberg contend "[i]ts extraordinary reception can be accounted for by three distinctive qualities: namely, its retained relevance, its dynamic and evolving contexts, and its adaptions to diverse media and audiences" (xvii).

Elsewhere, Lawrence Langer suggests the lack of horror within Frank's text accounts, in part, for its popularity.⁴⁶

Bruno Bettelheim sees the diary's success and uncritical celebration as a desire to deny and "forget the gas chambers" (186). Anne Frank, however, was well aware of the gas chambers, and within the diary there is a palpable feeling of despair, anxiety, and dread. At one point, Frank considers "whether it wouldn't have been better if we hadn't gone into hiding, if we were dead now and didn't have to go through this misery, especially so others could be spared the burden" (307). Yet the diary's most famous and oft-quoted line is a positive proclamation that is full of hope: "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart" (332). Frank's optimism here has become emblematic of the diary itself, despite the complex mediations the rest of the text possesses. Indeed, the diary's final entry, rather sadly, ponders "what I could be if . . . if only there were no other people in the world" (336).

Anne Frank's final bleak reflection was overlooked, however, as she became a symbolic figurehead of the Holocaust, and as a consequence, was transformed into a purified martyr; a universal symbol of hope. The universalization of Frank, Alvin Rosenfeld contends, "sanitized [...] any realistic sense of her life and death" and subsequently "de-Judaized" the Diary (208). "Thanks to Broadway and Hollywood," Rosenfeld explains, "Anne Frank [...] has come to resemble the sweet and lovable girl next door, hers is a story that renders the worst aspects of the Holocaust in grossly understated terms" (209)

The Ghost Writer takes place after Anne Frank's diary is released as a Broadway show, and seems to respond to the de-Judaification of Frank's Diary. *The Diary of Anne Frank* became the first mainstream play that focused on the Holocaust. The play was

⁴⁶ See Lawrence. L Langer's "The Americanization of the Holocaust on Stage and Screen." *Anne Frank: Reflections on her Life and Legacy*, edited by Hyman A. Enzer and Sandra Solotaroff-Enzer, University of Illinois Press, 2000, pp.198-203.

celebrated critically and publically, winning the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and the Tony Award. Despite the critical success the production enjoyed, it was not without its controversy. Author Meyer Levin had originally secured permission to adapt the diary into a play, but Otto Frank, Anne's father, rejected their version, in part because of how Levin had focused on the family's Judaic differences. Frank eventually allowed Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett to turn the diary into a play, and their production centred on universalizing the Frank family's suffering to appeal to American mainstream audiences. Consequently, the play ends with Anne's now infamous proclamation discussed earlier. The decision to end the play with Frank's optimistic claim relieves us, Bettelheim contends:

It explains why millions loved play and move, because while it confronts us with the fact that Auschwitz existed, it encourages at the same time to ignore any of its implications. If all men are good at heart, there never really was an Auschwitz; nor is there any possibility that it may recur (189).

The retreat to Frank's hopeful pontification symbolizes a collective desire to forget the horror of Auschwitz. The universalist aesthetic de-Judaified the Frank family, and was witheringly condemned by Cynthia Ozick, who attacked the production for appropriating Anne Frank as an American symbol of hope despite the fact that "Anne Frank's story, truthfully told, is unredeemed and unredeemable" (79). In "The Misuse of Anne Frank's Diary" Ozick highlights a number of passages full of Anne's anxiety and terror in the face of her impending doom, noting how these diary entries repudiate the play's moralizing final message that retreats from the bleak reality that Anne Frank's life was brutally brought to an end.

The Ghost Writer asks what is at stake in hollowing out the Diary's bleakness. The Broadway play focuses on the heroism of the victims, and by doing so, chooses to ignore aspects of the Diary that reveal the harrowing traumas antisemitism and the Holocaust induced. Yet in Roth's novel, the Broadway production is exulted for its sympathetic

portrayal of Jews. Wapter, in a letter to Nathan, writes “P.S. If you have not seen the Broadway production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, I strongly advise that you do so” (GW 74). Likewise, Nathan’s mother encourages Nathan to placate both the Judge and his father by going to see the production:

“You could tell him you went to see *The Diary of Anne Frank*. You could at least do that.”

“I didn’t see it. I read the book. *Everybody* read the book.”

“But you liked it, didn’t you?”

“That’s not the issue. How can you *dislike* it? Mother, I will not prate in platitudes to please the adults!” (GW 77-8, italics in original).

The Broadway production and the Diary itself become tools of appeasement. For whom though? According to Nathan, no one can take a critical or dismissive position on the diary; it is universally likable. For Selma, the Broadway production represents the “right” kind of Jewish art, one that depicts Jews as sympathetic, tragic, and virtuous. Thus, the Broadway show, and by extension the diary, are propaganda pieces that serve to highlight the positive “qualities” of the Jews in America.

Conversely, Nathan’s stories are seen as threatening because the artist does not “leave anything out” (GW 62). In other words, Nathan’s stories are too truthful, and risk affirming certain negative conceptions non-Jews might have of their Jewish neighbours. Consequently, Nathan finds himself being asked by his mother whether he is an antisemite (GW 78).

Nathan’s choice to write about a Jewish family’s squabbles is condemned because the Jews in his tale are perceived to be unheroic and unflattering representatives of American Jewry. Essentially, for Victor and Selma, their son’s art serves to represent the collective American “Jew”; whilst for Nathan art’s function is far less specific and intentional. Nathan’s refusal to see the Broadway production serves as his symbolic refutation of the idea that art can redeem life. Neither the Broadway production nor Nathan’s literature can influence or impact antisemitic conceptions of Jews.

However, Nathan's transformation of Amy Bellette into Anne Frank articulate the same desire for redemption his mother and father seek. Nathan fantasizes that Amy is Anne as a way of imagining his reacceptance in the Jewish community. His fantasy of redemption very much parallels the way his parents adoringly perceive the Broadway production of Anne Frank's Diary. Thus, Roth's choice name of "Amy Bellette": its approximation to "belles lettres", which means writing in French, represents how Frank now only exists as a symbolic text, who will continuously be re-written within America (and beyond).

In the novel's fourth and final chapter, Nathan envisages himself marrying Amy/Anne and telling his family the news. Nathan's hijacking of the Frank narrative displaces the "actual" subject of Amy Bellette as a means of placating the patriarch he simultaneously seeks to repudiate:

Throughout breakfast, my father, my mother, the judge and Mrs Wapter were never out of my thoughts [...] I kept seeing myself coming back to New Jersey and saying to my family, "I met a marvelous young woman while I was up in New England. I love her and she loves me. We are going to be married." "Married? But so fast? Nathan, is she Jewish?" Yes, she is." "But who is she?" "Anne Frank" (TGW 113).

By marrying Anne Frank, Nathan hopes to be redeemed in the eyes of his mother and father. Frank embodies a saintly kind of Jewishness that is heralded in America. Yet Roth seems troubled by the holiness of Frank in America. Quite simply, Anne Frank (a dead Jewish victim of the Holocaust) is the most acceptable kind of Jew in post-World War American society. Both Nathan's fantasized marriage and the Broadway production represent how Jewish lives in America have been distorted by American antisemitism. The Anne Frank of America (within the time Roth writes, at least) is celebrated because she represents a de-Judaified Jew; her Jewishness is barely visible on the American stage, and is therefore acceptable and even desirable.

Amy Bellette does not, of course, save Nathan Zuckerman from his father's outrage, and in *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), the author's filial struggles sprawl into America's

mainstream culture. Following the publication of *Carnovsky* (a parallel of Roth's *Portnoy's*), Nathan becomes an American celebrity, embodying the same enfant terrible status Roth himself assumed in the aftermath of *Portnoy's Complaint*. Unlike Roth, however, Nathan remains in New York and finds himself harassed and threatened by his admirers, haters, and readers alike. Nathan and his father are estranged at this point, but the tyrant son returns to his father in his dying moments. With his dying breath, Victor utters his final word to his son: "Bastard" (ZU 270). There is little ambiguity for whom the word is intended toward, representing a severing between father and son. Nathan, seeking to retreat from the pain of his father's rage, muses for whom the word was meant for: "Lyndon Johnson? Hubert Humphrey? Richard Nixon?", before sadly realizing Victor Zuckerman was "looking [...] into the eyes of the apostate son" (GW 270).

Henry, Nathan's brother, dispels any potential ambiguity by accusing his brother of murdering their father: "you killed him, Nathan. With that book. *Of course* he said 'Bastard'. He'd seen it! He'd seen what you had done to him and Mother in that book!" (ZU 287, italics in original). Both *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound* centre around the aspiring author's struggle against patriarchy, both societal and familial, as Nathan (much like Roth) explores ways of making Jews visible in American fiction in the aftermath of the Shoah and the Second World War. In Henry's diatribe against Nathan, the mother is placed after the father, symbolizing how both sons position the mother as a secondary figure. This question of visibility and presence centres on patriarchal figures: the father is the quintessential centre against whom Nathan struggles; this is a total reversal from *Portnoy's Complaint*. Ironically, though, the Jewish mother becomes invisible and/or a figure of alterity throughout this explorative literary journey.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Erik Zakim highlights how "Zuckerman can't write about anything else because nothing else creates the type of hurt that the Jews elicit in him, and this hurt in turn becomes the arousal" (23). I would only add that the pain induced from writing is centred on the father,

In both *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound*, the mother is a marginal figure, and as Kate Wilson rightly points out, “although Zuckerman’s life is full of father-son conflicts, mother figures are hardly objects of desire” (112); there is no Oedipal drama unfurling in Roth’s trilogy. Instead, Roth questions the ways in which Jewish writers inscribe themselves into American fiction and popular culture. In *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound*, Roth examines the ethical challenges of representing Jewish lives in the aftermath of the Holocaust. It is noteworthy that Victor Zuckerman is usually the one voicing concerns regarding his son’s artwork; the mother only ever echoes and parrots her husband. Yet in *The Anatomy Lesson*, Roth examines the ways in which the Jewish mother is identified almost exclusively through the body, and how Nathan’s identification reflects the Jewish mother’s status in American society.

The Anatomy Lesson begins, as does *Portnoy’s Complaint*, with the mother: “[w]hen he is sick, every man wants his mother; if she’s not around, other women must do” (AL 297). Unlike Alexander Portnoy, however, Nathan desperately seeks his mother’s presence, as Zuckerman is paralyzed by a mysterious “hot line of pain that ran behind his right ear into his neck, then branched downward beneath the scapula like a menorah held bottom side up” (AL 298). The upside down menorah metaphorically represents the discombobulated connection Nathan struggles with in terms of his Jewish identity. Nathan’s Jewishness is essential to his being as a man and as a writer; it is very much the spine of his literary creations and the root of his identity. Paradoxically, Nathan’s Jewishness has been central to the pain and suffering he and his family have endured as a consequence of his literary depictions of Jews.

Nathan’s pain and suffering makes him want his mother, but Selma has been dead for three years, so Zuckerman seeks out maternal care from four different women. Jenny, Diana, Gloria, and Jaga nurse the crippled writer, whose pain prevents him from being able to write, and not necessarily the mother, whose reflections and concerns regarding her son’s writings are disregarded as symptomatic of Victor’s anxieties.

work, read, or move. Consequently, Nathan goes to a children's furniture store and purchases "a soft red plastic-covered playmat" (*AL* 302), from which Nathan is fed, serviced, and sexually pleased by his four women. "On his back he felt like their whore", Roth writes, "paying in sex for someone to bring him the milk and the paper. They told him their troubles and took off their clothes and lowered their orifices for Zuckerman to fill" (*AL* 303). Nathan is an infant here, lying on his back seeking the return of the maternal authority as symbolized by the milk and the lowering of the genitalia. Milowitz contends this moment reveals Nathan's desire to "recapture the Edenic bond of the mother and the child" (101). As Nathan sucks away at the metaphoric teat of these four women, he strives to escape his bodily present (full of pain), and return to the (past); to the safety and security of his mother's womb.

Nathan's desire to retreat to the metaphorical womb has been read by Wilson as a continuation of "his ceaseless frustration [which] has always been with 'fathers' and their influence on what he writes" (112). Yet this analysis overlooks and (mis)diagnoses the mother as a mere by-product of Nathan's struggle against his father. *The Anatomy Lesson*, I argue, is Roth's most meditative fiction on how the mother is defined through the body.

Nathan reflects on how Selma existed in his eyes as a

breast, then a lap, then a fading voice calling after him, "Be careful." Then a long gap when there is nothing of her to remember, just the invisible somebody, anxious to please, reporting to him on the phone weather in New Jersey (*AL* 328).

The triptych of images reconstructs Selma through her materiality: the breast provides Nathan with sustenance, growth, and nurturing; the lap is a site where Nathan can sit, observe, play, and learn; and finally, the disappearing voice signifies the blossoming of the boy's independence as he masters walking, playing, and functioning beyond his mother's body. The pubescent years are signified by the gap of nothingness, for as Nathan becomes a "man", the mother, in the eyes of the oblivious son, becomes an "invisible somebody" (*AL*

328). The unseen Selma is thus made into a figure of otherness for Nathan, to whom he offers banal platitudes (regarding the weather, for example) as a means of appeasement.

The mother is marked entirely by her bodily function in relation to the son's, and when she is no longer required, Selma Zuckerman becomes obsolete and invisible. According to Nathan, Selma did not partake in the political, ideological or historical discussions that engage Nathan's morally outraged father. Instead, it is the father and son who are immersed in a Jewishly inflected historical dialectic: "a first-generation American father possessed by the Jewish demons, a second-generation American son possessed by their exorcism: that was his whole story" (*AL* 324). But what of the mother? Is Selma Zuckerman not also possessed by the same first-generation Jewish demons that plague Nathan's father? The mother is required only when the son becomes unwell, but in her absence Nathan comes to realize his mother has remained an enigmatic figure of absence. Her invisibility starkly contrasts the loud, visible, and overwhelming father for whom Nathan toiled against almost all of his adult life.

Roth connects the mother's unknowability with the Holocaust. The year following Nathan's father's death, Zuckerman's mother develops a brain tumour. Asked by the neurologist to write down her name, Selma takes the pen, "and instead of 'Selma' wrote the word 'Holocaust', perfectly spelled" (*AL* 324).⁴⁸ Nathan keeps this article, instilling the paper and its contents with an inflated meaning that signifies the mother's unknown alterity. Kartiganer contends this scene "transform[s] her [Selma's] death by brain tumor in a Miami hospital into the mass executions in Europe thirty years earlier" (48). Selma's identification with the Holocaust is a metaphorical transformation that represents the searing distance

⁴⁸ According to Roth Pierpont, "[t]his inventive little parable was not invented". The story was told to Roth by his lifelong editor and friend, Aaron Asher, whose mother, a European Jewish immigrant, had made the very mistake Selma Zuckerman makes (130).

between Nathan, Selma, and indeed Roth, from European Jewry's experience of the Holocaust.

Roth interweaves the unknowability of the Holocaust with the mother's body, and this literary act of intertwinement is not without risk. As Cooper points out, “[m]any readers will find it easier to hate Nathan (and Roth) for confusing – or at least associating – such seemingly disconnected, sometimes sacred, ideas as the Holocaust [and] the passing of post-immigrant Jewish America” (203). In having Selma identify herself as the “Holocaust”, Roth questions the ethical and gendered structures underpinning American Jewry’s remembrances of the Shoah.

Selma’s message challenges Nathan’s prejudiced assumptions that his mother wrote nothing but “recipes on index cards, several thousand thank-you notes, and a voluminous file of knitting instructions”, as he realizes “that before that morning she’d never spoken the word aloud” (AL 324). Alex identified his mother by her kitchen apron, and Nathan recognises Selma via her cooking recipes and knitting directions; both women’s subjectivities are unimaginable to the tyrannical sons. For Alex, Sophie remains trapped in the Freudian paradigm he has reinvented her through, yet Selma’s subjectivity explodes from within; the tumour, Nathan reflects, “forced out everything except the one word. That it couldn’t dislodge. It must have been there all the time without their even knowing” (AL 324). The cancerous tumour kills Selma but reveals the mother’s inferiority to the son; Nathan reads his mother’s writing that extends beyond that which he previously identified her through.

The “Holocaust” note shatters the language through which Nathan objectified her, enabling him to reconsider Selma as a subject beyond the “maternal.” Yet Roth’s symbolization of Selma’s cancer and the Holocaust immediately fails, both in relation to its depiction of cancer and in its relationship to the Holocaust. In *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), Susan Sontag dismisses cancer metaphors as “crass” and adds that “modern disease

metaphors are all cheap shots” (85). In choosing to adopt the cancer image in relation to the Holocaust, Roth stresses the impossibility of representing the Holocaust as an American novelist. The Holocaust is not like cancer; it is unimaginable for a Jewish American, and cannot be objectified into a concrete form of language. As Michael Rothberg points out, Roth’s fiction explores “the unbridgeable distance between the Holocaust and American life – and the inauthenticity of most attempts to lessen that distance” (53).⁴⁹

Yet there is another comparison that has gone unnoticed in these discussions: the metaphorical connection between the Jewish mother and the Holocaust. Why does Roth link the two? Judaism’s matrilineal tradition has given the mother’s body a weighted symbolic function, as Judaism descends from the maternal rather than patriarchal body. Thus, the Jewish mother and her body is symbolically tied to a Jewish history that includes the Holocaust and the suffering the Shoah induced.

Yet both Nathan and Alex seek to escape the mother precisely because they identify the maternal with Jewishness. For Kristeva, the rejection of the mother as abject is central to the self’s proclamation of independence from the maternal. As Bousfield explains, when “the child [...] feels threatened by the abject, she abjects the maternal body in order to separate, to maintain her clean and proper body from non-difference” (331). In Roth’s fiction, however, the abjection of the mother is intertwined with a rejection of Jewishness in an attempt to (re)create the male self as an “American.” Alex seeks to separate himself from his mother to restore gendered divisions and negate the mother’s gendered difference inherently connected to recent Jewish suffering. For Nathan, the mother is gone, and the absent body of the abjected Selma Zuckerman becomes desirable because Roth’s character seeks to escape his present, away from the strife and pain he symbolically and literally suffers. However, the

⁴⁹ See Emily Miller Budick, “The Holocaust in the Jewish American Literary Imagination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, pp. 212-30. Elsewhere, Rachel McLennan discusses the ethical implications of this comparison in *Representations of Anne Frank in American Literature: Stories in New Ways*, p.37.

abjected mother, like the Holocaust, cannot enter into the Symbolic order; both resist any kind of objectification into language and signify the collapse of meaning.

Therefore, whilst the father, even in death, is visible, knowable, and identifiable, Selma Zuckerman is indeterminably marked; a spectral figure who haunts the unruly son. Steven Milowitz makes a similar and compelling observation: “[t]he mother resides always within both worlds, shuttling forever and unpredictably between the two, never becoming one or the other. The father is a knowable entity, who rarely contradicts his code while the other is fraught with contradiction” (98). Thus, Nathan’s question, “Mama, where are you?” (*AL* 327), reflects his desire to (re)discover, (re)locate, and (re)materialize the mother from beyond the grave. In other words, Nathan seeks a restoration and return to the mother before abjection.

When Nathan discovers Selma’s book of knitting instructions, stained with what he suspects is his mother’s breast milk, he closes his eyes and “put[s] his tongue on the page” (*AL* 342). Writing on the indeterminacy of woman’s bodies, Iris Young highlights how “[f]luids, unlike objects, have no definite borders; they are unstable, which does not mean that they are without pattern” (qtd. in Grosz, 205). Nathan seeks to conjure the mother here and make her into a solid, stable object by tonguing the material of her book, as though the milk itself can summon her back to the mourning son. Yet as David Coughlan has already observed, Selma is “just a step beyond [...] so close and yet uncontactable, communicating nothing” (99).

Yet Selma does in fact communicate with Nathan. She appears before the son in two drink and drug induced dreams. The first envisages the mother nakedly posing on a platform for an art class, “her face obscure, her age indecipherable except for the youthful breasts, grotesquely high and spherical and hard” (*AL* 459). The maternal returns with the promise of life, as signified by the youthful breasts, but remains incomprehensible to the son. The

mother appears in an art class, a noteworthy setting as the artist can only conceive of Selma through an aesthetic pedagogical prism; Selma poses, awaiting her son to re-imagine and re-draw her. Her body is grotesque, obscure, and unrecognizable, which metaphorically reflects the disconnection Nathan feels for the mother he once knew, and simultaneously underscores the impossibility of Nathan's regenerative fantasy of self-recreation. The second dream, too, underlines the disconnection Nathan feels for his mother.

She flew into his room [...] as a dove, a white dove with a large round white disc, toothed like a circular saw, whirling between her wings to keep her aloft. "Strife," she said, and flew out through an open window. He called after her from where he was pinned to his bed. Never had he felt so wretched. He was six and calling, "Mamma, I didn't mean it, please come back" (AL 459).

Like Noah's dove, Selma returns to him here with the promise of life.⁵⁰ Yet the innocence of the image is sinisterly reconceived: the circular saw is castrating in its threat, and the frantic whirl of its beating wings suggests a struggle, reflecting perhaps the familial conflict Nathan's literature induced. Indeed, the dream-like mother explicitly underpins this with the single utterance of "[s]trife" (AL 459). Selma's monosyllabic proclamation seems to serve as her very own accusation against her son. What does the word refer or relate to? Is Selma here speaking of her own suffering at seeing her son and father conflict? Or does the utterance reveal the mother's unspoken and undetailed struggle as a Jewish-American living in the shadow of the Holocaust? The mother does not give us an answer; instead, she exits out of the window. The scene calls to mind the nightmarish opening of *Portnoy's Complaint*, as Sophie flies through the window, yet Nathan does not seek to excommunicate his Selma from his being; rather, he feverishly seeks her return and forgiveness. Zuckerman's call for his "mamma" seems to hark back to Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (1913), as Marcel longs for

⁵⁰ "He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth" (New International Version Bible, Genesis. 8:6-12).

his mother's goodnight kiss. Likewise, Nathan "pinned to his bed" (AL 459), craves his mamma's return.

The mother assumes a ghostly role that represents the paradoxical position she assumes in his life as an absence/presence. Selma haunts Nathan, as he realizes, "[s]he's with me here" [...] his mother's ghost had tracked him down. He wasn't being poetic or mad. Some power of his mother's spirit had survived her body" (AL 459, italics in original). The identification of the mother as a ghost signifies a disruption, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle observe, "[g]hosts disturb our sense of the separation of the living from the dead" (133). The splitting between spirit and body ruptures a unitary whole Nathan understood his mother as. The ghost, Karin De Boer writes, "intimates a possibility that cannot be reduced to either presence or absence, while we [...] recoil from the summons of the ghost to let this possibility occur, and seek refuge in an ontological domain informed by fixed oppositions" (30). Nathan flees toward "a second life" (AL 435) that signals the author's refusal of the ghost and the symbolic possibilities it represents. That is, Nathan seeks an ontology rooted in rigidified oppositions, one that rejects the distortions between the living and the dead the ghost represents.

Nathan attempts to flee the ghosts of his past by disavowing the art of writing. For Zuckerman, the act of the "second life" (AL 435) centres on the repudiation of fiction: "I'm sick of raiding my memory and feeding on the past"; Nathan tells his surgeon and former college-roommate, Bobby, "I'm sick of channeling everything into writing. I want the real thing, the thing in *the raw*, and not for the writing but for itself. Too long living out of the suitcase of myself" (AL 442, italics in original).⁵¹ Nathan separates writing from reality in an effort to create a division between the "past" and "future". Fiction is not "raw" but artificial

⁵¹ Posnock observes how Zuckerman's desire for the real aligns him with a "long line of American authors who find the single-minded pursuit of art an estrangement from life" (127); it is ironic then that Nathan seeks to flee the art of writing, but finds himself enacting the same patterns of behaviour that have dominated American literature.

and empty; writing induces endless loss that is symbolically fluid and unstable. The image of Nathan living out of the suitcase of himself reflects the narcissistic dislocation Nathan feels fiction has induced in his life.

Nathan flees from fiction writing and chooses to become an obstetrician because all there is is the “bilge, the ooze, the gooey drip. The stuff. No words, just stuff. [...] No more words!” (*AL* 369). The surgeon’s life represents a rigidity that cannot allow for the abstract; for Nathan, being a doctor signifies a life of absolutisms that would remove him from the life of abstractions novel-writing involves. The return to the womb here is made very literal: it signifies the death of language, a return to the self prior to speech or text; the raw existence Nathan craves. Wilson reads Zuckerman’s decision as the author’s attempt to atone for the symbolic murder of his father and to “bring forth life, rather than putting an end to it” (112).⁵² Yet Nathan’s actions reflect his craving to return to the maternal body, wherein he can literally re-enter into the mother’s womb. This fantasy represents a will toward self-annihilation that resists the spectre(s) of his mother; Nathan does not seek unification with the haunting memory of his mother, but wants to escape the ghostly multiplicities that haunt him. Bobby’s life represents an existence of absolutism: “Life vs. Death. Health vs. Disease. Anesthesia vs. Pain” (*AL* 440) – a life free of moral obscurities, a world without the complexities and obscurities language produces.⁵³ In the surgeon’s world, the ghost cannot exist; there is only life and death, with nothing in between.

The second life Nathan envisages (i.e. the return to the womb) wills towards the death of his mother’s ghost; Zuckerman seeks to extinguish the disruptive absence-presence of the

⁵² Brauner highlights how Zuckerman’s unhinged state “reveals the extent to which he has accepted the legitimacy of the charge [of murder] and internalised the guilt of the crime” (38).

⁵³ Laura Muresan writes that for Zuckerman, “being a writer means being continually faced with one’s own limits, as writing is always open to interpretation. Medicine is an exact science, or so he thinks, that will allow him to exert control over events and make decisions that will not necessarily concern his own person” (85).

ghost and restore order. “Time is out of joint” for Nathan, and like Hamlet, he seeks to set it right. Yet unlike Shakespeare’s hero, Nathan will not listen to his ghost; instead, Zuckerman flees from the spirit before it can even speak. The ghost of Selma Zuckerman never materializes; it is a spirit rather than a ghost in that sense. A ghost without a body, a mother without a voice. This reading differs but compliments Coughlan’s, who claims “this ‘burning to begin again’ [...] is no different to a ‘burning end’” [...] This desire to throw himself into a future of pure life is, at root, no different from the fear of falling into a dead past” (102). Nathan abandons his mother’s ghost.

The novel ends with Zuckerman, fuelled by Percodan and alcohol, breaking his jaw in a calamitous and raucous episode in which he attacks his former room-mate’s father. In the novel’s penultimate scene, Nathan assists Bobby’s father to his wife’s grave. Roth returns Nathan to the mother’s grave, but it is Bobby’s mother Nathan visits, not his own. Such an act symbolizes the displacement of Nathan’s mother and the son’s refusal to confront her ghost; his actions further serve to eradicate the haunting spirit of his mother.

Nathan’s visit to the grave, in spite of his intentions, returns him to the patriarchal conflicts he suffered with his own father. As Mr. Freytag stands at the graveside, he laments Bobby and the disobedient son:

Everything we gave him, trapped like that in Bobby’s genes, while everything we are *not*, everything we are *against* – How can all of this end with Gregory? Eat shit? To his *father*? – I’ll break his neck for what he’s done to this family! I’ll kill that little bastard! I *will!* (AL 483, italics in original).

Mr Freytag’s agitation echoes the same patriarchal troubles Nathan has with his own father; Jewish identity is loftily heralded as a prestigious and proper identity that is being desecrated by the unruly grandson. Mr. Freytag’s accusations echo the charges of antisemitism Nathan faced following his publications. Incensed by the memories of his supposed treachery, Nathan lashes out against Mr. Freytag, and attempts to strangle him. As Brauner observes, Nathan’s attack against Mr. Freytag echoes “his murderous feelings toward his own father”

(39). His attempts to strangle and suffocate the Jewish father signal a desire to silence the Jewish patriarchy, reversing Mr. Freytag's threats against his grandson. Yet the violent attack subtly underscores the physical presence of the father. Bobby's mother is in the grave, whilst Selma Zuckerman is a spectre from whom Nathan flees. Both mothers remain invisible and physically absent, whilst the patriarchal father is materially present and embodied. For Nathan, the father is definable and thus attackable, whilst the mother represents an alterity that cannot be reconciled or symbolized.

Nathan's attack against Mr. Freytag ends in farce: he falls onto a tombstone and breaks his jaw. Consequently, Nathan is hospitalized, his mouth is wired shut, and he is entrapped within his body, becoming infant-like yet again. Zuckerman, as he does in the novel's beginning, seeks his mother's care. Ironically, Nathan can only communicate this desire through writing: "WHEN HE IS SICK EVERY MAN NEEDS A MOTHER" (AL 489). The novel ends with Nathan still determined to submit himself to medical school; even after all he has endured, the fantasy of self-reinvention continues to compel the beleaguered author. The novel ends with Nathan roaming

the busy corridors of the university hospital, patrolling and planning on his own by day, then out on the quiet floor with the interns at night, as though he still believed that he could unchain himself from a future as a man apart and escape the corpus that was his (AL 505).

Zuckerman seeks to continue with the fantasy of self-reinvention centred on the negation of the mother. His corpus is tied to his mother's; the two are inescapably entwined, even as Nathan seeks to escape his own bodily presence. Roth's Jewish mother represents a suppressed Jewishness that has no voice, no visibility, and no presence. The mother symbolizes an unrecognizable rupture Nathan cannot contend with; thus, Selma Zuckerman remains locked in the margins of *Zuckerman Unbound*, haunting all three novels in her absence/presence.

Nathan may never speak or write his mother's ghost, but Roth's fiction repeatedly resummons the spectre of the Jewish mother in his fiction. For the most part, the maternal signifies a Jewish loss that Roth symbolizes through a bodily absence. The Jewish son in a Roth novel seldom gazes upon the Jewish mother; rather, the male gaze looks away, toward the "American" woman's body. The Jewish mother becomes synonymous with a past full of strife, whilst the *shiksa* is celebrated as the embodiment of a future. Yet as I discuss in the next chapter, the fantasy of assimilation in America is complicated by the newly established nation-state, Israel.

Chapter 2: The Jew Also Rises

But inside every Jew there is a *mob* of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. – Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession*

Jews and the Nation-State

This chapter looks at Roth's representation of Israel in his fiction, and the intersecting gender body politics of Israeli, American, and English nationalisms. The chapter begins by examining how Leon Uris's novel *Exodus* (1959) and the Six Day War influenced American attitudes toward Israel in order to better understand how Roth's fiction can be read as a response to the political shifts in America. Thereafter, I give a brief historical overview of Zionism and consider the gendered body-politic underpinning the Jewish nationalist movement. By doing so, I contend that *Portnoy's Complaint* rejects Zionist American valorisations of the "muscle Jew" (a term I will unpack later) through the cartoonish figure, Alex Portnoy. In line with Debra Shostak, I consider how "Portnoy's fantasy of nondifferentiation" (92) morphs into a Jewish nationalist "dream" (*PC* 253) that is erotically centred around the Israeli woman's body. Thereafter, I contextualize the role of the body within Zionist ideologies in order to highlight how gender stereotypes have underpinned Zionism's conceptualizations of Israel as a nation-state. In doing so I provide a new reading of *The Counterlife* (1986) that focuses on the gendered body politic of the text. By exploring the ways Roth's male characters position female bodies as metaphors for the countries they dwell in, I bring attention to how Roth's Jewish men use women as a way of assimilating and becoming part of the nation-state.

Before I contextualize representations of Israel in American culture, I first want to unpack the terms "nation," "nationalism," and "nation-state" in order to better understand Roth's critique of American Zionist writers such as Leon Uris. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (15). Nations are visualized through a particular set of images and cultural markers. As Homi K. Bhabha explains, the "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative

performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects” (297). Both Bhabha and Anderson stress the symbolic instability of the nation; its imagined conceptualization necessitates the need for repetition. Nationalism serves to maintain the conceptual coherency of the nation, transforming what Bhabha terms the “rags of daily life” into symbolically weighted representations of a particular nation’s cultural identity.

Anita Shapira provides two definitions of nationalism: the first is born from the French Revolution, “based on the secular and rationalistic traditions of the Age of Enlightenment, and the views the state as an entity founded on the notion of a social contract, expressing the will of its citizenry” (6). The second is conceived around the “organic notion of society deriving from blood ties and common ethnic origin, culture, and history. Usually, it is linked geographically to a specific territory where the nation arose and evolved its system of values”. As such, Shapira explains, the nation “constitutes a mystic bond whose origin lies in a common past” (6-7). The mysticism of the nation, culturally codified and reinforced by nationalism, is legally and institutionally upheld as a “state”.

The state gives the nation its legal (and thus, “legitimate”) validity. As Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak write, the “state signifies the legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory [...] Hence, the state is supposed to serve the matrix for the obligations and prerogatives of citizenship” (3). The construction of a territory creates a border, a separation that divides who does and does not belong to the nation-state. Butler and Spivak suggest “if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain vision of the nation forcibly, if not powerful, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes” (4-5). Culturally different peoples from “foreign” nation-states can and have been positioned as threats because they represent the symbolic instability of the mystic nationalism Shapira highlights. Diasporic peoples are thus threatened with banishment if they do not adhere to the nation-state’s given cultural and legal praxis.

The pressure to conform and erase one's difference to become part of the nation-state is particularly evident in the aftermath of the Second World War in America. In 1959 Leon Uris, a Jewish American novelist, published *Exodus*, a historical fiction about the founding of the State of Israel. Set after the Second World War, Uris's hero is Ari Ben Canaan, who frees a group of Jewish refugees from Britain's detention camp in Cyprus and brings them to Palestine. Canaan leads his fellow Jews to victory by defeating the Palestinians, whom Uris depicts through denigrating racist stereotypes, and romantically wins the affection of the American female love-interest, Katherine "Kitty" Fremont. *Exodus* became America's biggest bestseller since *Gone With the Wind*, and remained number one on the New York Times bestseller list for eight months following its publication.⁵⁴

The story was popular with white American readers because the Jews' struggle against the British seemed to echo America's fight to emerge as its own nation beyond British colonial rule. Former vice-president Henry Wallace observed in *The New Republic* how "[m]any Americans feel sympathy to the fight that the Jews are carrying on in Palestine. They feel that in some respects it is like the fight the American colonies carried on in 1776" (qtd. in Medoff, 136). Uris's novel told a Jewish story of self-determination that was written for an American readership. As Ashley Kaplan observes, "*Exodus* projected a Jewish revolt against the British empire that was identifiably American [...] Americans could recognize their own history in biblical cadences resonating with the contemporary Cold War" (878).

Uris's novel attempted to show American readers that the Jew was just like the gentile. Uris rejected stereotypical images of Jews as weak and effeminate, but also vehemently repudiated Jewish American authors' willingness to adopt such stereotypes within their fiction. Although Uris does not name Roth directly, he seems to conjure him in his attack against Jewish writers

⁵⁴ Information sourced from Jill Hamilton's *Gods, Guns and Israel: Britain, The First World War and the Jews in the Holy City*, p.290.

who spend their time damning their fathers, hating their mothers, wringing their hands and wondering why they were born. This isn't art or literature, it's psychiatry. These writers are professional apologists. [...] I wrote *Exodus* because I was sick of apologizing – or feeling that it is necessary to apologise. [...] I set out to tell a story of Israel. I am definitely biased. I am definitely pro-Jewish (qtd. in Gooblar, 21).

Uris's response was to write a novel about Jews who were tough, proud, and heroic. Yet as Andrew Furman observes, Uris "merely substitutes one stereotype for another as he portrays the *sabra*, Ari Ben Canaan, as the stolid and tough hero so familiar in the popular American western movies of the 1950s and 1960s" (45). To Roth, Uris's novel was lamentable in its attempt "to make the Jew and Jewishness acceptable, appealing, and attractive", and works "to remove from the nation's consciousness [...] the memory of the Holocaust itself, the murder of six million Jews, in all its raw, senseless, fiendish horror" ("New Jewish" 145). Uris's desire to create a proud and self-assertive Jewish novel represents a yearning to be undifferentiated from the mythic American "gentile." Yet this yearning threatens to erase the Jewish difference Roth sees as part of his identity as a Jew, which (tragically) includes Jewish stories of persecution.

For all its popularity, Uris's novel did little to alter American conceptions of Israel in political terms. Nor, for that matter, did Jewish American perceptions regarding Israel radically alter. David Biale claims "American Jews paid little attention to Israel; few visited it as tourists and fewer still emigrated there. Leo Uris's popular novel, *Exodus* [...] awakened a certain pride in Israel among American's Jews, but it had no political ramifications" (184). The turning point for American Jewry was the 1967 Six Day War, in which Israel fought and defeated Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq.

Israel's speedy victory was significant for a number of reasons. When Israel won the War of Independence in 1948, it had been backed by international bodies such as the United Nations and the Soviet bloc. Here, however, Israel was left alone, and faced a far greater threat in terms of military strength. Subsequently, Jews throughout the diaspora feared the

Six Day War would result in the extinction of the Jewish people in the Middle East. As Stephen J. Roth observes, the Six Day War “poignantly revived all the memories of the Holocaust” (xvi). The significance of the victory surpassed any other moment in recent Jewish history. As Paul Breines explains, “[n]either the Holocaust, nor the founding of Israel, or the *Exodus* phenomenon, separately or in combination, exerted an impact on American Jews comparable to that of the Six Day War” (58). The Six Day War was hugely important in terms of its political impact for both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans’ perceptions of Israel.

The military strength and fortitude displayed by Israel in its defeat of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon generated enormous support from America. In the American presses, the Six Day War was represented as a modern day version of David versus Goliath.⁵⁵ Israel was David, whilst the Arab nations were pitted as the monstrous Goliath. The military might of Israel was cheerfully celebrated by the American media, garnering the Jewish nation-state a significant ally. Ironically, it was through power and strength that the Jews, a “race” and “nation” stereotyped for their timidity and effeminacy, gained the support of America. As Peter Grose highlights, “[n]either the early Zionists nor their early American supporters anticipated that it would be as soldiers and not as dreamers, that Jews would capture the imagination of the Gentile world” (309). Israel’s military success proved that the “Jew” could be tough, just like the “American.” Elie Lederhendler contends that “the Six-Day War was for Israel what the War of 1812 was to the United States: a continuation of the nation’s war for independence” (1). This analogy highlights the ways American and Israeli national narratives intertwined and complemented one another, stressing the close affinity America began to feel toward its blossoming Jewish ally.

For American Jews, the military force Israel displayed revolutionised how they perceived the Jewish nation-state. Tivnan proclaimed the Six Day War “changed the

⁵⁵ See Deborah Dash Moore’s “From David to Goliath: American Representations of Jews” in *The Six-Day War and World Jewry*, pp.69 -81.

American Jewish community forever [...] turn[ing] millions of American Jews into Zionists” (qtd. in Breines, 59). The dread of a Middle Eastern Holocaust brought America’s Jews together, creating an almost entirely unified support for the Jewish nation-state.⁵⁶ Biale writes that “the fear that Israel might be annihilated opened up a floodgate of associations with the Holocaust and a much greater sense of identification than had been true in the period since the establishment of Israel in 1948” (200). The might of the Israeli army and the subsequent success of the Jewish nation-state was heralded by America’s Jews because it represented a realization of the Zionist fantasy: Jewish men had become “tough”, and were capable of owning and defending their own land.

Like All Other Men

Daniel Boyarin has called Zionism “the most profound sort of assimilationism, one in which Jews became like all the nations, that is, like Aryans (*Oedipus*), but remain Jews in name (and complexion)” (276). Boyarin’s contentious but profound argument is extremely useful in terms of understanding how Zionism evolved as a response to antisemitism. Anti-Jewish racism radically influenced the ways Jewish men understood themselves as “other” both in terms of race and gender. Zionism, Boyarin contends, was a Jewish nationalism that sought to prove Jews could “be like all other men” (277).

Modern Zionism is largely recognised as beginning with Theodore Herzl’s 1896 publication of *The Jewish State*, which culminated in the first Zionist congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland. Yet Leo Pinsker’s 1882 “Auto-Emancipation” predates Herzl’s treatise, with a very similar premise: Jewish assimilation is an impossible fantasy; antisemitism is an incurable illness that cannot be overcome, and the Jews must build their own nation in order

⁵⁶ Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen* (1967) examines how Israel’s Six Day War influenced American Jewry’s perception of the newly formed nation-state. For an excellent discussion of Potok’s representation of Zionism and Israel, see Andrew Furman’s *Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination*, pp.109-127.

to escape Europe's chronic Jew-hatred.⁵⁷ Both envisage resolving the conflicts of the "Jewish Question" through the establishment of a Jewish nation.⁵⁸ As Pinsker contends, "the misfortunes of the Jews are due, above all, to their lack of desire for national independence [...] we must prove that *they must become a nation*" (184, italics in original).⁵⁹ Jews are at fault because they have not identified the problem clearly; they have failed to understand that assimilation is an impossibility. Herzl makes a similar argument: "[w]e are a people – *one* people. [...] We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die" (209, 225, italics in original). The nation-state fantasy Herzl envisages is born from a messianic secularism that positions the ideal of the nation rather than assimilation as the ultimate saviour for the Jewish people.

Both Pinsker and Herzl's ideologies were born from antisemitic events.⁶⁰ The former, a Russian graduate from Moscow University recognised by the Russian government for his

⁵⁷ Although Pinkser and Herzl's works were the most instrumental in terms of creating a meaningful political movement, Laqueur writes that both of these works "gave concise expressions to issues that had been discussed for years; their basic ideas had been in the air" (53). For more on the history and development of Zionism prior to Herzl's *The Jewish State*, see Laqueur's *A History of Zionism*, pp.40-84.

⁵⁸ I follow Geller's definition of the "Jewish Question" as "how to identify (with) the foreign body (*Fremdkörper*) *Judentum*, whether by introjection or abjection [...] Here, in this new Jewish question, it is not the question of a greater or smaller measure of political rights for the Jews, but of the whole human being, his intrinsic essence" (6). In other words, Jewish assimilation into European society raised new questions over what distinguished Jews from Christian Europeans, and how such differences could be highlighted when Jewish differences were becoming increasingly more difficult to detect.

⁵⁹ Quoted from Arthur Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, p.184.

⁶⁰ In *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*, Thomas Laqueuer makes a similar point: "Zionism is a response to antisemitism [...] [P]olitical Zionism as distinct from mystical longings would not have come into existence but for the precarious situation of central and east European Jewry in the second half of the nineteenth century" (590). The distinctions between political and theological Zionism will be outlined in the following sections, but it is important to highlight the significant impact antisemitism had on the Zionist dream that would eventually lead to the formation of the Jewish State. The turn toward a Jewish-state developed through desperation. As Shapira argues, "[t]he awakening of *active* national feelings among Jews [...] was accompanied by a sense of deep humiliation – the mortification felt by someone who wished to be an accepted member of the nation and had been spurned" (5, italics in original).

services in the Crimean War, had previously been a staunch proponent of assimilation. Pinsker became disillusioned with Jewish integration following the Odessa riot of 1871, and then, in 1881, yet another pogrom took place, affirming his doubts that the Jews would ever be accepted in Christian society. Similarly, Herzl, working as a journalist for the *Neue Freie Presse*, witnessed the now infamous Dreyfus Affair, in which French candidate officer Alfred Dreyfus was tried and convicted for treason, accused of passing on military information to the Germans. According to Albert S. Lindemann, “the events following Dreyfus’s arrest seemed to change everything [...] transform[ing] the issue of anti-Semitism in the modern world” (93). For Herzl, the Dreyfus affair was a turning point that symbolized the impossibility of assimilation.

Zionism was an atypical form of nationalism, simultaneously secularistic and profoundly rooted in Jewish mysticism. Arthur Hertzberg describes Zionism as

the heir of the messianic impulse and emotions of the Jewish tradition, but is much more than that; it is the most radical attempt in Jewish history to break out of the parochial molds of Jewish life to become a part of the general history of man in the modern world (20).

Rabbinical Judaism identified exile (or *galut* as it is known in Hebrew) as a divine punishment from God. Jon Stratton explains that “Jews should not look towards a return, or actively seek it, but rather accept their exile circumstance until such time as the Messiah comes” (146). Yet Zionism sought to expand beyond the religious interpretations of exile in order to try and overcome what Boyarin describes as an “abjection of ‘manliness’” (304).

Modern antisemitism’s conceptions of “Jewish difference” pervasively informed ideas about Jewish masculinities, especially for Jews themselves. Boyarin writes that “it was [an] abjection of ‘manliness’ [...] that produced their identity. In the colonial/postcolonial moment, the stereotyped other becomes the object of desire, of introjection rather than abjection, and it is the stereotyped self that is abjected” (304). The stereotyped other is the “manly Aryan”; the stereotyped self (“the Jew”) is internalized as a wretched figure. For

those Jews seeking to reproduce the object of desire (that is, to become the “manly Aryan other”), modernity’s masculinized nationalism was essentially a platform which some Jews sought to replicate through a Jewish nationalism.⁶¹

The shift toward a Jewish secularist mode of nationalism was partly born from Herzl and his contemporaries’ internalization of antisemitic prejudices. Secularist intellects such as Herzl saw in Judaism and its religious practices archaic relics of the premodern era that had no place in the emancipated epoch, where religion, in theory at least, was now separate from the state. According to Boyarin, “Herzl has nothing but disdain for the two-thousand-year-old tradition of postbiblical Jewish literature and culture” (303). Yet Herzl’s indifference and hostility toward Judaism was simultaneously shaped by his own prejudices against Eastern European Jews (known as the *Ostjuden*).⁶²

⁶¹ Rabbinical Judaism had always understood the Land of Israel as a messianic space that belonged to God. W.D. Davies writes “obedience to the Law becomes the condition of occupying the Land [...] And when, through the violation of that Law, Israelites have profaned themselves, they can no longer remain in the holy-clean Land; either the Land itself ejects them [...] or the Land suffers under the wrath which they have brought upon it” (14). Modern Zionism shifted away from the symbolical understanding of Judaic *galut*; Herzl proposed Argentina or Palestine as a possible location for the Jewish State to be created, signalling their lack of concern or consideration for the theological significance of the land of Israel. Modern Zionism was seen as a pragmatic attempt to solve the “Jewish Question” through a secularistic nationalism that had been defined and shaped, ironically, by western European nationalism that had excluded Jews as foreigners.

⁶² John Murray Cuddihy studies the ways in which Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Claude Lévi-Strauss experienced “Jewish emancipation, assimilation, and modernization [...] as a single, total phenomenon. The secularizing Jewish intellectual”, Cuddihy writes, “as the avant-garde of his decolonized people, suffered in his own person the trauma of this culture shock [...] and the] focus of his concern, often unacknowledged, was the public behaviour of his fellow Jews, the *Ostjuden*” (4). Although Cuddihy problematically singularizes emancipation, assimilation, and modernization into a unified experience, their analysis highlights the significant tensions the secularist Jewish intellect faced when confronted by their eastern European Jewish counterpart, whom many felt represented a backward time that reaffirmed antisemitic logic that the “Jew” was incapable of being part of any given Christian European nation.

The Russian pogroms that took place in the late nineteenth century sparked a huge wave of Jewish emigration.⁶³ This massive population movement significantly impacted the ways in which the “Jew” was perceived, varying, of course, enormously depending on the country’s socio-economic, political, and geopolitical conditions.⁶⁴ For assimilated Jews, however, the mass influx of Eastern European Jewry was a significant symbolic reminder of their own “otherness.”⁶⁵ Although many adopted Russian and Polish languages, the majority of Eastern European Jewry only spoke Yiddish, were poorly educated, and often unwilling to integrate or acculturate. Consequently, Sam Johnson writes, “the imprint of Jewish otherness, or perhaps even of Jewishness itself, found its most obvious representation in the *Ostjude*, of Jewishness itself” (183); the *Ostjuden* was a figure of Jewish otherness that could not simply be assimilated.

Western Jews tended to distinguish themselves from their Eastern counterparts by ossifying the *Ostjude* as a distinct “race”. Herzl, Boyarin explains, “went so far as to write explicitly that the *Ostjude* was of a different ‘race’ from the ‘evolved’ German Jew” (267). Yet Zionism’s key aim was to show that Jewish differences, both physiognomic and psychological, are not biologically predetermined but a consequence of social conditions. Max Nordau, one of the most influential figures of the early Zionist movement, contended that Jews were incapable of forming their own nation-state, but could, if they remoulded themselves in the image of the Aryan. As Todd Samuel Presner explains, Nordau believed

⁶³ It is worth noting that the historical narratives that have defined Jewish emigrations have been re-considered by Jewish studies scholars. For instance, Scott Ury highlights how “Jewish flight from persecution in Eastern Europe has consistently been framed, explained and justified as part of a much larger narrative of Jewish transition, emancipation, and ultimately, redemption via the adoption of Western, ostensibly liberal versions of modernity” (6). Consequently, Jewish lives in Eastern Europe have been oversimplified or overlooked, creating a rather reductive methodology that is now being challenged and re-evaluated.

⁶⁴ For a comprehensive overview of the varying ways in which Ashkenazi Jewry’s experiences varied in the emancipatory period, see *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, ed. by Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katzenelson.

⁶⁵ Stratton makes a similar observation that the “presence of the *Ostjuden* produced a fear that their own relative acceptance would be challenged” (3).

“Jewish men [...] were supposedly not strong enough, healthy enough, and fit enough – as measured by the European benchmark – to build a modern nation” (12).

Nordau’s solution was to toughen Jews up. Nordau sought to reconstruct and redefine the “Jewish body” as strong and muscular, which he called muscular Judaism. According to Jay Geller, “[Nordau saw] Jewishness [as] artificial or conventional and not a matter of a people [...] Nordau evokes Jewish identification to exemplify how religious designations enforce what are in fact artificial differentiations among people” (216). The hysteria and physical frailty of the “Jew” that modern antisemites believed to be racial was, in Nordau’s view, a by-product of their socio-economic position that was hindered by the archaic Judaic religious culture. “[H]is idealized figures of Jewish success are shot through the spectres of the degenerate Jew, who is fashioned in their anti-image”, Marilyn Reizbaum writes, “Nordau would claim that oppression made him do it, or made Jews what they are, and he would write them out of the discourse of degeneration as a strategy of recuperation” (131). Nordau accepted the “Jew” was degenerate in the Diaspora, but could be redeemed from their cultural and social degeneracy if they formed their own nation-state.

For Nordau, Zionism was the best possible opportunity for European Jews to escape antisemitism and simultaneously belong to the nationalist impulse so prevalent at the time. Nordau argued Zionism’s “sole purpose [... was to] normalize a people which is living and suffering under abnormal conditions.”⁶⁶ Zionism sought to give the Jews a ‘normal’ social status that moved them beyond their perceived “otherness.” This desire for normalcy hinged on resituating the effeminized Jewish male as a figure of masculinity. As George Mosse contends, “Zionist and assimilationists shared the same ideal of manliness” (42), whilst Boyarin pushes further, identifying Zionism as a form of assimilation (277).

⁶⁶ Quoted from Arthur Hertzberg’s *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, p.243.

To reimagine the Jew's body was to reconceive of the "Jews" as a nation. "[I]t is little wonder", Shapira writes, "that ideas about building a Jewish state based on a European model were bound up with the concept of creating a new type of Jew, similar physically and mentally to his tall and powerful neighbors" (14). Nordau believed the "Jew" could assimilate, evolve, and "normalize" by developing their muscles; in other words, the Jews needed to prove themselves physically in order to assert their masculinity and therefore, their capability as a nation. The redevelopment of the male "Jewish body" linked to the creation of the Jewish state. By reinventing conceptions of Jewish masculinities through the (male) body, Zionists sought to create a new Jew that "derived from the image of manliness and restraint which together make the civilized man" (Reizbaum, 131).

Israel as Wonderland

Alex Portnoy's journey to Israel enables Roth to satirize Nordau's ideal of the muscular Jew, as his narrator seeks to become a civilized man capable of exhibiting sexual restraint. The Israeli land, Alex hopes, is far removed from the disorientation of his sexual excessiveness in the diaspora, which he delineates as unmanly. By fleeing to the nation of Israel as a cure for his perceived ailment, Portnoy correlates nationhood with masculinity, control, and power; exile, on the other hand, is entwined with effeminacy, powerlessness, and sexual delinquency.

Alex travels to Israel to fulfil his ultimate ambition of being "brave", "strong", and "whole" (*PC* 37). The latter ideal of uniformity is key to understanding Alex's journey, as is made apparent upon his arrival: "I am in a Jewish country. In this country, everybody is Jewish" (*PC* 253). Portnoy seeks out an abstract fantasy of normalcy that he equates with homogeneity, expunging Israel's Palestinian population.

Roth's three fictions that feature Israel all fail to truly engage with the subject of Israel and Palestine in a meaningful way. In part, this seems to stem from Roth's intense

focus on what it means to be a Jewish-American rather than a Jewish-Israeli. Even though *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993) is largely set in Israel, Roth still seems absorbed by the unanswerable question of what it means to be a Jew. The setting of “Israel” functions as a metaphorical space that enables Roth to create dialogues between caricatured cartoonish versions of various “Jews” as a means of interrogating the performativity of Jewish identity. The conflict ensuing between Israel and Palestine is only useful for Roth in that it creates another kind of “Jew” to imagine (that is, the “Jew” as oppressor).⁶⁷

Alex’s desire for power is what motivates his journey to Israel. For almost the entirety of the novel, Portnoy has chased the impossible assimilatory fantasy of becoming an American, which he positions as a “whole” and unified mode of being that is separate from his Jewish family life and his mother, as I discussed in the previous chapter.⁶⁸ Portnoy’s journey to Israel centres on the same idealized fantasy of becoming “whole”. His remark upon arriving in Israel tellingly reflects his desire to be part of the dominant norm: “[h]ey, here we’re the WASPs!” (*PC* 254, italics in original). Portnoy seeks to purify himself of his “Jewish difference” by immersing himself in the land of Israel, and in doing so, hopes to “rediscover” his masculinity by exhibiting sexual restraint. Only in Israel, Portnoy naively believes, will this be possible.

⁶⁷ For a fuller exploration of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation, see Joe Sacco’s graphic comic, *Palestine* (1997).

⁶⁸ As Dan Colson observes, “[m]uch of the criticism surrounding *Portnoy’s Complaint* has focused on liberation of different types from different oppressions and through different means” (132). Colson outlines various differing critical perspectives regarding what Portnoy is trying to liberate himself from, stressing the ambivalence of Portnoy’s quest to be “free”. Colson posits that “[t]he plot of the novel is structured around Alex’s efforts to free himself from sex” (134), which somewhat disagrees with Alan Warren Friedman’s argument that Portnoy struggles to liberate himself from his family (through sex). Both are correct, as Alex’s quest for liberty is initially centred around his carnality, but by the novel’s end Portnoy renounces his sexual misdemeanours. Portnoy’s pseudo-Zionist turn is predicated on his attempt to escape his sexual excess, which is tacitly linked to antisemitic stereotypes of conceptual male “Jewry” as discussed in the opening of this chapter.

Alex fails spectacularly. Roth's protagonist is unable to control his sexual urges, but in a humorous twist, is no longer able to obtain an erection, much to the sex-addled narrator's fury: "*I couldn't get it up in the State of Israel! How's that for symbolism, bubi?*" (PC 257, italics in original). Alex seeks to re-assert his masculinity in Israel, but in his eyes his flaccid penis signifies a failing, an inability to affirm himself as a "man."

Portnoy encounters Naomi, "[t]he Jewish Pumpkin, The Heroine, that hardy, red-headed, freckled, ideological hunk of a girl!" (PC 258). Instantly infatuated, Alex quickly begins to wonder if he shouldn't make Aliyah, marry Naomi, and "go up to that mountain and start a new life?" (PC 259). Portnoy intertwines the land with Naomi's body (whom he also compares with his mother and sister!), synchronizing both as a regenerative force that will reify his (masculine) power.

Again, though, this proves false: Naomi rejects him, both verbally (she berates Portnoy's "ghetto humour", rebuffing his suggestion that it is an inherent facet of Jewish culture), and physically, kicking him "full force with that pioneer's leg, just below the heart" after Portnoy attempts to rape her (PC 265, 270). To Alex, Naomi exists as a caricaturized Zionist settler whom he fetishizes as the embodiment of Israeli hardness. Sexually conquering Naomi would represent a triumphant affirmation of Alex's manhood that would make him "whole". It is crucial therefore, that Alex cannot rape Naomi. Yet as Warren Rosenberg points out, "there is something essentially masculine about violence that attracts him, and a closer look at his fiction reveals how central that fascination is to the development of his work" (189). Alex's fantasy of sexual empowerment through national belonging hinges on dominating the females he encounters, and this becomes an important motif Roth returns to in *The Counterlife*.

Portnoy, as he clings to Naomi's leg, begs her to "at least let me eat your pussy. I know I can still do that" (PC 270). Alex fails to reaffirm his masculinity in his journey to

Israel; his final outcry centres on proving himself through oral stimulation. Portnoy literally lowers himself to Naomi's genitals as a way of exhibiting his masculinity. The dream of Israel as a masculine idyll evaporates with Naomi's kick and condemnation of "Pig!" (*PC* 270). In this moment, Naomi defines Alex as the quintessential unkosher animal, simultaneously stripping him of his Jewishness and humanness. Alex's attempt to re-create himself as a controlled and measured man has failed so spectacularly that he is now reduced to an unclean and "un-Jewish" animal.⁶⁹

In Naomi's Zionist view, Diasporic life in the "ghetto" explains Portnoy's sexual degeneracy. Ironically, Portnoy would appear to agree, as his entire journey to Israel centred on curtailing his sexual excessiveness. Roth, then, swiftly eviscerates Alex's Zionist impulse. The satirical deconstruction of the Zionist Jew at the end of *Portnoy's Complaint* serves as a critical commentary on the "tough Jew" Leon Uris envisaged and celebrated. The ideal of masculinized toughness Alex (like Uris) fetishizes is brutally dismissed as an absurd, dangerous, and toxically masculine fantasy.

Portnoy decries all of his misfortunes are part of "[t]he Monkey's Revenge" (*PC* 271), and subsequently imagines himself under trial for "DEGRADING THE HUMANITY OF MARY JANE REED TWO NIGHTS RUNNING IN ROME. AND FOR OTHER CRIMES TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION INVOLVING THE EXPLOITATION OF HER CUNT" (*PC* 272). He is found guilty by his own make-believe judge, and is sentenced to "A LIMP DICK" (*PC* 272). The trial, brief as it is, calls to mind the "Circe" episode in Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which Leopold Bloom, in a hallucinatory series of events, is put on trial after being "[c]aught in the act" (430). Bloom is accused by several women of sexual indecency, and his defence attorney, J. J. O'Malley, cites his "race" as a means of defence:

⁶⁹ In Deuteronomy the pig is described as "unclean for you. You shall neither eat of their flesh nor touch their carcass" (Deuteronomy 14:8).

“[h]is submission is that he is of Mongolian extraction and irresponsible for his actions. Not all there, in fact” (439).⁷⁰

Bloom’s Jewishness is defined as “Mongolian” (439), ascribing him to a foreign Asian group that colonialist Britain racialized as “inferior” and sub-human.⁷¹ This, coupled with O’Molloy’s detailing of Bloom’s supposed mental instabilities, further draws on antisemitic conceptions of Jewish hysteria that were equated with psychological weakness. One of his accusers demands to “[t]hrash the mongrel within an inch of his life.⁷² The cat o’-nine tails. Geld him. Vivisect him” (443). Whilst Bloom escapes the violent reproaches of the mob and his accusers (becoming, in a wonderfully bizarre series of events, the “King of the Jews”) Portnoy remains an impotent, powerless “Jew”. Portnoy’s limp, flaccid penis represents the fragility of the male body and the instability of the binary between “power” and “powerlessness” that Alex uses to distinguish between “male” and “female” bodies.

Portnoy goes to Israel to reassert his masculinity but is physically overpowered by Naomi. Alex’s failure represents the impotency of his hypermasculinized vision of national belonging. Brett Kaplan insightfully contends that Portnoy “loses his masculinity in the face

⁷⁰ Dale Barleben writes that “Bloom and his counsel attempt to place Bloom outside the stereotypical confines created by nationalistic Britain” (357), yet this defence paradoxically rests on recycling and reusing antisemitic stereotypes, as O’Molloy defends Bloom’s innocence on the grounds of his intellectual inferiority as a Jewish man.

⁷¹ Ironically, O’Molloy also defends Bloom by proclaiming him to be “the whitest man I know” (*Ulysses* 440). The paradox of the defence acutely surmises the contradictory position the “Jew” inhabits: the “Jew” is indeterminably foreign, but is identifiably and visibly “white,” obscuring and undermining the racial “science” used to alienate and isolate Jews as foreign. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that Bloom does not speak for himself in this moment. The fact that O’Molloy speaks for Bloom in a court of law, a site in which the nation-state’s law and legislation applies to its national citizens, reflects stereotypes of Jews as “foreigners”. The “Jew”, as I discuss later in this chapter, has long been considered to possess a speech that does not belong to the given nation “they” dwell in.

⁷² The Jew as a “Mongoloid” was a racial construct that sought to further prove the “Jews” weakness and inferiority to white Europeans and Americans; it was also a way in which antisemites sought to highlight the dangers of Jewish integration into European society as they would “contaminate” the white “purity” of Western Europe and America. See Robert Singerman’s “The Jew as Racial Alien: The Genetic Component of American Anti-Semitism”, pp.103-129 in *Anti-Semitism in American History*.

of the extravagant powers of the state” (33). Kaplan outlines how Portnoy’s impotency in Israel contrasts with his (hyper) virility in America, commenting that “[his] wilting member functions as a metaphor for the incompleteness of the very project of the Jewish Homeland” (33). The incompleteness of Israel as a nation thus destabilizes Portnoy’s illusion of Israel as a pastoral space capable of transforming him into a “complete” self. Alex’s vision of Israel is pure fantasy created from the same kinds of American propaganda from which Uris’s novel developed.

Portnoy’s vision of Israel is constricted by his skewed (mis)conception of the “Jewish nation” which is derived solely from stereotypes. The nation-state is depicted by Portnoy as a homogenous paradise for Jews, grossly oversimplifying Israel’s complex diversities and racial politics. Through Portnoy’s misappropriation of Israel, Roth explores American Jewry’s projections of Israel as a nation-state. This metaphorical landscape enables Roth to examine the ways Israeli and American Jewry imagine one another, often through caricatures and racially prejudiced stereotypes, as evinced by Naomi’s own misconceptions of American Jewry.⁷³

The brevity and sparsity with which Israel is described in *Portnoy’s Complaint* critiques Portnoy’s distorted and limited vision of Israel as a homogenous nation-space consisting that solely consists of Jews. To quote H.M. Daleski, “[t]he short Israeli section of about fifteen pages is glaringly tacked on the novel” (82). Yet the pithiness Roth affords the Israel scene reflects the ways Portnoy obscures and delimits Israel as a fantasy-space. There

⁷³ Naomi is no more an accurate representation of Israel than Alex Portnoy is of American Jewry. Her rejection of Portnoy’s “ghetto humour” (*PC* 265) too forcibly overlooks the rich culture of Diasporic Jewry that has developed through the very “ghetto humour” Naomi separates from Jewish identity. Neither character accurately reflects the countries they are from; instead, both Naomi and Portnoy are inflated caricatures of extreme, polar opposite ideologies: the former is a cartoonish Sabra Zionist settler, the latter a parody of the self-hating Jew.

is no detail here because Portnoy cannot see beyond his own Jewish (American) self, which (of course!) centres on escaping the oedipal complex of his American-Jewish home life.

Portnoy's misappropriation of Israel as a fantastical site of escape away from the American Diaspora is a theme Roth returns to in *The Counterlife*. In opposition to Boyarin's concept of Zionism-as-assimilationism, Ranen Omer-Sherman contends that "in Israel [Roth] found a setting whose external geography nearly met the storms of his own internal consciousness, a place where, unlike the complacent haven of America, the Jews were still Jews" (209).⁷⁴ Israel allows Roth to explore the varying ways Jews perform their Jewishness depending on which nation-state they live in, and what this instability says both about Jewishness and nationality as identity markers. Omer-Sherman's comment that Israel is a site where "Jews were still Jews" (209) is problematic, as it implies Israel's Jews are more "authentically" Jewish than Jews in the Diaspora, which suggests Roth creates a false binary between Diasporic and Israeli Jewry. This thesis argues otherwise: it posits Roth's fiction attacks essentialist ideas of Jewishness. Portnoy's disastrous journey to Israel exemplifies this, as his fantasy of a homogeneous Jewishness fails spectacularly; Alex's failure reflects Roth's hostility to the idea of a "pure" Jewish being.

Portnoy's Complaint signals Roth's early interest in exploring American Jewry's conceptualizations of Israel as an imagined nation-space. As Daleski points out, "if Israel could wreak such havoc, [if it] could inflict the kind of defeat never experienced in America, it would need at some point to be studied at greater length and in greater depth" (82). *The Counterlife* expands what *Portnoy's Complaint* begins to unpack, exploring how antisemitic conceptions of Jewish difference have been used to separate Jews from nation-states, and the ways Jews themselves have adopted similar nationalistic strategies to create and maintain the

⁷⁴ In their interview with Roth for *Roth Unbound*, Pierpont highlights how "Israel was the moral and historical subject that Roth had been looking for: not somebody else's Warsaw or his childhood Atlantis or totalitarian Prague but the land the Jews had truly bought a part of with their nickels and their lives" (147).

nation-state of Israel. In the next section I focus on how Roth interrogates the hyper-masculinity of Zionism both within an American and Israeli context, stressing the ways the nation-state, like the gendered body, is constructed and maintained through narrative strategies.

Gender Trouble(s) in *The Counterlife*

The narrative structures of *The Counterlife* have been a particular source of interest within academic discussions of the text, as critics have tended to focus on the novel's experimental form.⁷⁵ Debra Shostak, for example, concentrates on how Roth "thematises structure [...] shattering narrative conventions, deconstructing the unitary self by multiplying stories about the self, and opening the fiction out to contemplate its own making in a process of endless speculation" (205). Whilst I agree with Shostak, I find *The Counterlife*'s narrative to be intriguingly repetitive and consistent, too. The stories produced are not so radically different that they are structurally incoherent. In fact, as I will discuss, they are yoked together quite precisely through their exploration of male impotency. Elsewhere, Ross Posnock argues, "*The Counterlife* scrambles the hierarchy that honours the real and devalues the invented, and also rewrites the mimetic contract between author and reader that functions as the enabling condition of realist fiction" (130). The hierarchical value system Posnock hypothesizes is questionable in its diagnosis. Roth does upset what Posnock terms the "mimetic contract between author reader" (130) but I am wary of the assuredness that such a contract even exists, even within the dubiously titled "realist fiction" (130). For Elaine B. Safer, Roth's willingness to disrupt the novel's form creates an intentional conflict: "the 'sheer playfulness' of postmodernism and metafiction comes into direct contrast with the 'deadly seriousness' of

⁷⁵ Both James Newlin and Sanford Pinsker have read *The Counterlife* as a postmodern novel. Newlin's "Living on the Edge: Deconstruction, the Limits of Readability, and Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*" highlights the ways in which Roth's novel parallels Jacques Derrida's *Deconstruction and Criticism*. See also Sanford Pinsker's *Bearing the Bad News: Contemporary American Literature and Culture*, pp. 137-153.

such issues as the meaning of the Jewish self" (24).⁷⁶ Yet Roth has consistently shown a willingness to mesh the playful and the serious to unpack Jewish identity. Moreover, using the term "postmodern" could be problematic in its short handedness for a set of various aesthetic attributes traceable to innumerable periods within literature and art.

The focus on *The Counterlife*'s formalistic experimentation is vital in terms of understanding Roth's interrogation of the (Jewish) self. My interest here, however, is to highlight the continuities and linearities of Roth's text that centre around the Jewish male body. I examine the Zuckerman brothers' impotency, and the ways in which women's bodies are fetishized. Both men's impotency represents a social and racial powerlessness Roth connects with their identity as Jews. I interrogate the ways Roth's male protagonists equate the nation-state with the woman's body as a means of assimilating and thus moving beyond their Jewish identities.

For both Henry and Nathan, potent male bodies equal autonomy, stability, and a mode of being that represents an ideal unitary (male) self. The idyllic notion of autonomy as being ensconced in stability is an impossibility, as Judith Butler contends, "the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and violence. [...] The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (21). Roth is aware the body belongs to the public gaze, and is interested in examining how public perceptions of difference delineate and distinguish the "Jew" as other. Roth's protagonists seek to escape such otherness through their bodies. Specifically, they do so by attempting to prove and/or maintain their virility. Kaplan notes that the obsession over male sexuality "is utterly unsurprising in the Rothian imagination, but [...] expresses a more general anxiety about American Jewish masculinity that the construction of Israel did much

⁷⁶ For other excellent analyses of *The Counterlife* see David Brauner's *Philip Roth*, pp. 46-122, and Jane Statlander's *Philip Roth's Postmodern American Romance* (2001), pp.55-91.

at once to assuage and complicate” (58). Kaplan’s observation underpins the fundamental concern of Roth’s text that is centred around the Jewish body as male.

Yet in *The Counterlife*, Roth moves outside of America to examine the various ways Jewish difference has been created and maintained through gender and “race”. In *The Counterlife* Roth highlights the methods in which nationalities are defined and determined depending on the nation-state. Both *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Counterlife* explore the ways in which Jewish identities are differently articulated depending on the given nation-state they perform their Jewishness within. By doing so, Roth interrogates to what extent Israel itself has been shaped by antisemitism, and how the Jewish nation-state has internalized the same racist and gendered discourses historically used to demarcate Jews as outsiders.

The Counterlife begins with the happily assimilated Henry Zuckerman, a successful dentist and family man, who had been living blissfully in the suburbs of New Jersey, until discovering a potentially fatal heart condition. The subsequent medication he takes renders him impotent, meaning he is no longer able to carry on his affair with his dental nurse, Wendy. Subsequently, Henry opts to undergo multiple bypass surgery, and dies.

Henry’s identity as an American Jewish man is not directly addressed in the first sixteen pages, and this absence reflects the ways Jewish Americans have become invisible by performing whiteness. Karen Brodkin insightfully highlights how Jewish American men “constructed a male-centred version of Jewishness that was prefiguratively white, and a specifically Jewish form of whiteness” (139). The whiteness Jewish Americans have produced and proclaimed as their own is infused with a racial and gendered power dynamic that defines Jews as “off-white” (Boyarin, 262).

Jewish American males have been empowered by their close proximity to America’s masculinist “whiteness” mainstream culture, a culture which Jews themselves have helped

shape and inform.⁷⁷ *The Counterlife* interrogates the ways in which Jewish performances of “whiteness” destabilize the solidity of the nation-state as a homogeneous entity. Roth effectively returns to the question Bloom is posed in *Ulysses*: “do you know what a nation means?” (Joyce 317).⁷⁸

As does Joyce, Roth questions and undermines the structural wholeness of the nation-state as a concept by exposing the ways nations are constructed through narratives. Crucial to this deconstruction is the combination of *The Counterlife*’s form and the subject of male impotency. Henry’s sexual powerlessness is symbolically weighted because it radically challenges his national, racial, and gendered identifications that inform what it means to be an American man. Roth uses Henry to expose the fragile structures that Jewish American male hegemony is constructed through, as his impotency destabilizes his sense of belonging. This is most clearly exemplified when Henry envisages his (unfortunate) mistress being surrounded by erections:

He was plagued by mental images of outlandish cocks and by the fantasies of Wendy with all those other men. He imagined her sucking them off. He imagined himself sucking them off. He began to secretly idolize all the potent men as though he no longer mattered as a man himself. Despite his dark good looks and tall, athletic physique, he seemed to have passed overnight from his thirties to his eighties (CL 11, italics in original).

⁷⁷ Jews created iconic figures such as Superman and the Barbie Doll, both of whom represented the ideal image of Americanness Jews envisaged and desired (Brodkin 171). American Jews (literally and metaphorically) (re)produced American whiteness, selling it as an idealized aesthetic mode according to how they perceived American “gentiles”, which American mainstream audiences voraciously consumed. In other words, American Jewry produced American whiteness by contrasting stereotypical concepts of “Jews” with idealized visions of “white Americans.”

⁷⁸ *The Counterlife* seems to implicitly return to *Ulysses*’ “Cyclops” episode, wherein Bloom is asked to define the meaning of a “nation”. The citizen even asks Bloom, “[w]hat is your nation” (*Ulysses* 317), highlighting the “Jew’s” foreignness within the nation-state of Ireland. Despite Bloom replying “Ireland”, Joyce highlights how Bloom’s religious identity overshadows his nationality, interrogating the constructional instabilities of national identity formations that the citizen so ardently tries to assert and maintain by explicitly questioning and implicitly denying Bloom’s identity as an Irishman.

The passing Henry envisages from youth to agedness illuminates a hierarchical power dynamic that is rooted in “race,” gender, and sexuality. Henry is no longer capable of performing heterosexual intercourse with Wendy (via his own member at least), and thus believes that he no longer matters (literally). Such self-hatred takes on a deeper meaning, as not only does Henry envisage Wendy being surrounded by “outlandish cocks”, he too imagines himself “sucking them off” (*CL* 11). This vision is drenched in self-loathing and anxiety, marking Henry’s anxieties as deeply misogynistic and homophobic. Henry enviously identifies male heterosexuality in positive terms, negatively marking women and homosexuals as the (white) male’s social and economic inferior. Through Henry, Roth exposes America’s hierarchized social structures, showing his readership how American Jewry has assumed its privileged position by adopting and (re)producing a hegemonic system of values that privileges white male heterosexuality and hypermasculinity.

Before setting out the theoretical context that justifies the above reading, I offer another example that highlights the interconnection Roth draws between “race” and sex vis-à-vis power relations. Henry’s impotency removes him from the patriarchal position he has enjoyed. Subsequently, he becomes violent toward Wendy, whom he views only as an object of sexual desire. Henry orders her “*to be a black twelve-year-old girl named Melissa*” (*CL* 14, italics in original), commanding her to “*strip and crawl on her knees across the floor, and when she obeyed he struck her*” (*CL* 14, italics in original). The pretence Henry instructs Wendy to undertake serves as a desperate attempt to restore and reclaim the power he once felt he possessed over her.

In having Wendy pretend to be a black child, Henry correlates sex with “race” as a means of reasserting his masculinity and phallic power. Henry’s actions reflect Ann Pellegrini’s view that “[r]acial difference [...] helps to set limits between self and other, precariously identifying where the ‘I’ ends and unknowable other begins” (7). In having

Wendy pretend to be a black child, Henry seeks to redefine the limits between himself and the female other. In other words, Henry attempts to restore his white maleness in opposition to Wendy's "black" womanliness that he positions as childlike, denying her any kind of agency. His failure to penetrate Wendy signals the disruption and breakdown of the heteronormative position Henry has assumed, and thus threatens and/or questions his status as a "man." However, it is important to note that the sexual fantasies described above are the imaginations of Nathan, Henry's brother. The italicized first sixteen pages of the novel are discarded words Nathan writes as a failed eulogy for his recently deceased brother. By usurping the story's authenticity by revealing that the events are Nathan's reimagining, Roth returns us to the importance (and unreliability) of narrative in the formation of the (gendered) self.

Nevertheless, Nathan's version of Henry enables Roth to highlight the mutually informative ways "race", sex, and gender have defined Jewish-American masculinities in correlation with their national identities as "Americans." Elisabeth Badinter writes that "[t]o be a man signifies *not* to be feminine; *not* to be homosexual; *not* to be effeminate in one's physical appearance or manners; *not* to have sexual or overtly intimate relations with other men; *not* to be impotent with women" (qtd. in Walsh, 115, italics in original). Stereotypically, the "Jewish man" has historically been situated as a figure of effeminacy, homosexuality, and sexual excess. Pellegrini writes that the "Jew" was "[a]t both poles – hybridization (exogamy) and conservation (endogamy) – Jews were conceptualized as exceeding the norm. They were a 'people' too much of extremes" (21). Paradoxically, the "Jew" was threatening because they allegedly lacked masculine restraint.

Henry's impotency threatens to align him with the stereotype of the castrated "Jewish" male. As discussed in the "Introduction", the Jew's effeminacy and homosexuality was often recognised with their circumcised penis, which Freud identified as the key facet

driving antisemitism's prejudice against the "Jew".⁷⁹ The conceptions of Jews as different centred in opposition to the "positive qualities" demarcated to the Christian/Aryan. In other words, the conceptual "male Jew" was posited as the antithesis of the "modern man."⁸⁰

In America, Jews occupied a rather different "racial" (and thus, social) identity bracket. In their impressive survey of American Jewish manhood, Sarah Imhoff explores the unique position Jews in the United States occupied in relation to other minority groups: "[g]iven the presence and the greater racial 'otherness' of Native Americans, Latinos, and African Americans in the West and Southwest, Jews and non-Jews alike considered Jews to be anglo" (140). In other words, American Jews appeared "white enough" to be marked differently from other racially profiled groups.⁸¹ The whitening of the "Jew" in America subdued Jewish religious culture, separating Judaic practices from the public sphere. Eric L. Goldstein explains that as "Jews integrated into the white mainstream, they were expected to keep expressions of group difference at a level that would not offend the sense of unity and homogeneity from which whites of the postwar era drew their confidence and stability" (194). In the aftermath of the Second World War, Judaic difference was isolated to the home, reifying the peculiar "insider/outsider" status American Jews have been seen to occupy.⁸²

⁷⁹ In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud posits antisemitism can be explained, in part, from the Jewish ritual of circumcision. Freud writes: "[circumcision] reminds them [antisemites] of the dreaded castration idea and of things in their primæval past which they would fain forget" (147). The idea here is that Judaism's rituals are rooted in a primal mode of being that European Christians believe to be obsolete, barbaric, and reflective of Judaism's cultural and religious degeneracy.

⁸⁰ Stereotypical images of the "Jew" and the "homosexual", George Mosse writes, "are still those of the countertype to modern masculinity; here ideas of sickness and health have not changed, nor, for that matter, have ideas of beauty and ugliness" (73-4).

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis of the racial discourses that permeated the United States regarding Jewish differences in the modern era, see Robert Singerman's "The Jew as Racial Alien: The Genetic Component of American Anti-Semitism", in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber, pp. 103 – 129. Singerman identifies the decline of eugenicist distinctions of Jewish difference as early as 1924 (120), further highlighting the significantly different experiences American and European Jews experienced prior to the Second World War.

⁸² Hana Wirth-Nesher writes that in "the 1950s Jews could carve out a comfortable place for themselves in the American landscape as white European children of immigrants who

The racial discourse that defined Jewish men as other was not as endemic or systemic compared to European antisemitism. Nevertheless, American Jewry internalized and acknowledged the figure of the effeminated “Jew” as separate from white American masculinities. “Whiteness”, Patricia McKee writes, “maintains the properties of media productivity without maintaining properties of physical objects. This removal from the realm of the visible [...] has been crucial to whites’ domination of visuality in Western culture” (11). McKee’s discussion of race relates well to this analysis of Jewish masculinity in America, as the visibility of the Jewish male’s difference became pronounced through satirical literary and cinematic representations of Jewish men. Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* (1977) and the Coen brothers’ *A Serious Man* (2009) draw attention to the feminized figure of the male Jew through a satirical adoption of the schlemiel figure.⁸³ The satire of both films highlights the ways in which American Jewish masculinities differ from dominant cultural conceptions of “American masculinity.” In doing so, the filmmakers make whiteness elusive and invisible, whilst highlighting Jewish difference through the male body.

For Roth, the emasculated male body of the American Jew highlights what Laura Levitt insightfully defines as a “complicated legacy of impossible assimilation”, one in which the male Jew’s effort to assimilate results in “an excess that always marks the subject as other” (809). Developing from Levitt’s analysis, Mia Spiro observes that “[w]ithin the discourse circulating around the conceptual Jew, the social reality of the actual Jew is placed in a void that virtually obliterates Jewish histories and experiences” (147). Spiro highlights an important concern surrounding Diasporic life for American Jewry: how can Jews in America

practiced Judaism” (218). The divide between the “Old” and “New Worlds” is articulated through a separation of Judaic practices, enabling America’s Jews to “become white.”

⁸³ My use of the term “schlemiel” adopts Ruth R. Wisse’s definition: “The schlemiel is a character of folklore and fiction whose life-style is the sum of these techniques. He stands in the age-old company of fools, embodying the most outstanding folly of his culture: its weakness” (x). See Ruth R. Wisse’s *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (1971).

produce or maintain a narrative that goes beyond the stereotypes of Jewish difference, without simply returning to or recycling different stereotypes (as Uris does in *Exodus*).

The Counterlife tackles this issue by expansively investigating Jewish experiences in Israel and in England in order to ask an important question: is it possible for Jews to define themselves beyond racialized stereotypes that posit Jewish men as effeminate, weak, and nation-less? For Henry, the answer to this question lies in Israel: only in the Jewish state, he imagines, can Jews be “authentically” Jewish. Only in Israel can the Jewish male go beyond the gender troubles that have undermined Henry’s Jewish manhood.

Goodbye, America

Henry, like Alexander Portnoy, identifies the Jewish nation-state with a masculine power that is removed from the sexual and material excesses both men blame for their moral and bodily failings. As Paule Levy observes, “*The Counterlife* dramatizes the quest for a territory where the (Jewish) self might reach a sense of authenticity, unity and plenitude” (62). The “Jewish self” Roth writes through is gendered as male, and the unity and authenticity Henry searches for is rooted in a sexualized vision of Israel-as-female, one that enables Henry to escape the metaphorically impotent life in the American Diaspora. *The Counterlife* draws on the sexualized language Zionism envisaged Israel through. As David Biale explains, “Zionism promised an erotic revolution for the Jew: the creation of a virile New Hebrew Man [... and] [t]his erotic vision was closely bound up with images of the land of Israel as a lover” (283-4). In both of Roth’s books, Israel is perceived by his protagonists as a sexually invigorating site that enables the male characters to recreate themselves as valiant Hebrew men that position the land itself as metaphorically female.

Israel’s fertile landscape is very quickly emphasized in the chapter’s opening, as Nathan Zuckerman finds himself challenged by his friend, Shuki, and his father, regarding the fertility of Jewish life in America. “‘See that tree?’ he said. ‘That’s a Jewish tree. See

that bird? That's a Jewish bird. See, up there? A Jewish cloud. There is no country for a Jew but here”” (CL 56). The natural imagery is pitted as Jewish, which underscores the fecundity of Jewish culture in Israel, as the repetitious attention toward sight underscores the visibility of Jewishness in Israel. Jewishness, Shuki and his father forcibly suggest, is literally and metaphorically rooted in the land. In stark contrast, Mr Elchanan proclaims Zuckerman to be living in an American museum: “[w]e are living in a Jewish theater and you are living in a Jewish museum!” (CL 56). Israel is the future, whilst America represents the past. Only in the former, Mr Elchanan and his son suggest, can the Jews prosper as Jews. Israel is virile, ebullient, alive, and full of drama (literally), whilst America is saturated, impotent, and lifeless.⁸⁴

The fecundity of Israel’s landscape entrals Henry and inspires him to reject what he perceives to be his sexually indulgent American life. Henry submits himself to the collective “we” of Israeli Jewishness as a rejection of the American-Jewish “I.” As he explains to Nathan,

I am nothing, I have never been *anything*, the way that I am this Jew. I didn’t know this, had no idea of it, all of my life I was swimming *against* it – then sitting and listening to those kids outside that cheder window, suddenly it *belonged* to me. Everything else *was* superficial, everything else *was* burned away. Can you understand? I may not be expressing it right, but I actually don’t care how it sounds to you or to anyone. I am not *just* a Jew, I’m not *also* a Jew – *I’m a Jew as deep as those Jews*. Everything else *is* nothing. And it’s that, *that*, that all these months has been staring me right in the face! The fact that that is the root of my life! (CL 65, italics in original).

The essential difference Henry identifies between American and Israeli Jewish life is the “rootedness” of the latter in the Jewish nation-state. The unitary Jewishness Henry envisages within Israel contrasts with the fragmented dualism of his American-Jewish identity. Henry recognises his Diasporic life with frivolity which (we the reader know) was centred on

⁸⁴ Shuki’s father’s proclamation of Israel as an idyllic Jewish land that is both natural and fertile is undermined by his very claim of it being a “theater” (CL 56), suggesting that the nation-state itself is performing as a Jewish space. The proclamation foreshadows Nathan’s own arguments, which I discuss later in this section.

libidinous pleasure and sexual power. Henry believes his Zionist “turn” dispenses with such “frivolous” pursuits. As Mark Shechner argues, “Henry [...] has submitted himself to a collective identity and turned against all that Nathan stands for: psychiatry, soul-searching, irony, self-dramatization, the purely personal – his diaspora abnormality” (225). Henry tells Nathan, “[t]here’s a world outside the Oedipal swamp, Nathan, where what matters isn’t what made you do it *but what it is you do* – not what decadent Jews like you think but what committed Jews like the people here *do!*” (*CL* 144, italics in original). Action is valorised over thought, sexual excess is lampooned and lamented as decadent, and philosophical introspection is dismissed as irrelevant and frivolous; the “Jew” Henry aspires to be is one of action, not thought, very much echoing the “muscular Jew” Nordau envisaged.

Yet Henry’s Zionist “turn” is rooted in the same sexual desires that underpinned his affairs in the first chapter. Henry’s masculinity is central to the Zionism he assumes, evinced through his (and Nathan’s) obsession over the symbolically weighted gun Henry carries with him at all times. As Shuki observes,

Henry must find it very romantic [...] The American Jews get a big thrill from the guns. They see Jews walking around with guns and they think they’re in paradise. [...] The beards [...] remind them of saintly Yiddish weakness, and the guns [...] reassure them of heroic Hebrew force (*CL* 79).

According to Shuki, American Jews romanticise and celebrate Israeli military might because it represents an osmotic synthesis of American and Jewish masculinities. The beard represents the “Jew” of the past, the passive submissive Ashkenazi who has been piously celebrated as a victim in the post-Holocaust era. Yet the gun signifies an adoption and embrace of American masculinized cultural norms. The gun is a symbol of phallic power and force, a sexualized icon of Jewish militancy that represents an empowerment that evolves beyond impulsive victimhood. The beard and the gun represent the amalgamation of two disparate cultures: the effeminacy of rabbinical Judaism, centred on passivity and study, and the “heroic Hebrew force” (*CL* 79), rooted in a muscular, militarization of the Jewish body.

Israel, as a symbolic Jewish nation-state, promises the possibility of reaffirming Henry's sense of masculinity.

Yet Nathan, whom Roth uses as a means of interrogating Henry's Zionist transformation, undermines this regenerative fantasy of self-renewal. Henry becomes "Hanoch", supposedly affirming his Hebraic transformation. Yet when Nathan meets Mordecai Lippmann, Henry's mentor, he highlights his brother's childlike fondness for Lippmann's youngest son Yehuda, noting how "they grinned at each other while they sang, as though between them there were some joke about the song, the occasion, or even about my presence at the table. Many years back I exchanged just such grins with Henry myself" (*CL* 122). Henry's infantile playfulness illuminates an ideological naiveté that undermines the seriousness of his Aliyah. Indeed, his adoption of Israeli culture and language requires him to return to a school where he and his fellow students sit "in a half-circle around their teacher's chair" (*CL* 101). In Nathan's eyes, Henry/Hanoch's avowal to dismiss the trivial concerns of his American life are fatalistically tied to the same sexual motivations that drove him into his affairs.

Lippmann assumes a father-like role for Henry/Hanoch, as Nathan wryly points out to his brother: "strip away the hambone actor and the compulsive talker, and we could have been back at the kitchen table in Newark, with Dad lecturing us on the historical struggle between the goy and the Jew" (*CL* 142). Lippmann's radical Zionism is theatrical, absurd, and anxiously paranoid. He predicts another Holocaust, this time in America, in which the "goyim" will "permit the resentful blacks to take all their hatred out on the Jews" (*CL* 128). Nevertheless, the unhinged apocalyptic visions he envisages are coupled with astute observations regarding the enduring legacy surrounding antisemitic conceptions of Jewish difference.

Lippmann, as the name suggests, is an articulate wordsmith. Bombastic and unapologetic, he makes apoplectic proclamations regarding the goy's hatred of the Jews: “[f]irst it was Jewish passivity that was disgusting, the meek Jew, the accommodating Jew, the Jew who walked like a sheep to his own slaughter – now what is worse than disgusting, outright *wicked*, is Jewish strength and militancy” (*CL* 133, italics in original). Lippmann is astute in his observations, highlighting the excessiveness and slipperiness of the conceptual “Jew” that exceeds and denies categorical definition. Yet Lippmann’s solution centres on an adoption of Jewish strength and militancy, an absolutist logic that seeks to extinguish Judaism’s diasporic culture in order to survive and prosper.

Lippmann’s grandiose rhetoric moves Henry/Hanoch because it appears to expand beyond the individualistic anxieties that imbued his American suburban life, catapulting him into more “serious” concerns surrounding the question of Israel: “[w]hat matters isn’t Momma and Poppa and the kitchen table, it isn’t *any* of that crap you write about – *it’s who runs Judea!*” (*CL* 144, italics in original). Life in America, Henry/Hanoch contends, is inconsequential when compared with Jewish life in Israel, where the nation’s own identity is continually being questioned and debated as a matter of life and death.

Yet the “Oedipal swamp” (*CL* 144) of Henry’s American life pervasively informs the Zionism he has embraced. His adoption of “Hanoch”, his fetish for the phallic gun, and his studies of the Hebraic language articulate an anxiousness over Henry’s masculinity. The Hebrew language and gun represent an Israeli culture for the American Henry, which Roth highlights as being performative. Henry represents the impotent disembodied diasporic Jewish male, whilst “Hanoch” is the idealized virile, Israeli: a powerful man rooted in the land and nation of Israel. As Brauner observes, Henry’s flight to Israel “represents not an escape from self, but a bid to reassert his sense of self” (167). Yet Henry’s transformation

into “Hanoch” results in a regressive, childlike submission to the radical teachings of his father-like figure, Mordecai Lippmann.

The facile nature of Henry’s transformation into “Hanoch” lies in the performance of his Zionism. For Zuckerman, and one suspects for Roth, too, “Hanoch” is an American impersonation of an Israeli. *The Counterlife* highlights the parodic qualities of Henry/Hanoch’s Zionism in order to interrogate the instabilities of “Jewishness” that reflect the broader insecurities of “race” and nationality. Henry’s connection to Israel is, in his brother’s view, a performance; an act that underscores the instability of the self and the nation as sites of affiliative identification. For Nathan, Henry’s fantasy of self-regeneration is flawed because it relies on a binary that delineates the “Jews” from the “gentiles”, a false dichotomy that obscures and diminishes the complexities of Jewish experiences in the Diaspora. Lippmann and Henry’s delineations between the “Jew” and “gentile” ironically reinforces modern antisemitic racial constructions of “Jews” that sought to separate Jews as racial “outsiders.” Roth’s disparaging depiction of Henry’s evolution into “Hanoch” reflects Boyarin’s view that “[t]he Jews, as Zionists, constitute themselves both as natives and as colonizers. Indeed, it is through mimicry of colonization that the Zionists seek to escape the stigma of Jewish difference” (303).

The rigidness of Henry’s ideology is countered by Nathan, who in a letter to Henry, posits “we are all the invention of each other, everybody a conjuration conjuring up everyone else. We are all each other’s authors” (*CL* 149). In Nathan’s view, Israel is “a whole *country* imagining itself, asking itself, ‘What the hell is this business of being a Jew?’” (*CL* 149, italics in original). Henry sees in Israel a nation, a solid and stable autonomous space and place infused with a rich Jewish history, where he is able to anchor his identity into the nation’s cultural fabric and become part of the Hebraic “people.”

For Nathan (and indeed, Roth), Henry's transition into "Hanoch" represents the reproducibility and instability of the "nation" as a performative construction. Henry's actions (including his adoption of the name, "Hanoch") reflects the "double-time" of nationality Homi K. Bhabha details in "DissemiNation". "[T]he people," Bhabha writes, "are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*" (145, italics in original). Henry's Zionist "turn" is based on the pre-given constituted origins the "Jewish people" have historically in the land of Israel, one that seemingly enables Henry to adopt and assume the nationalist pedagogy Lippmann proclaims. Yet as Bhabha points out, "the people are also the subjects of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity" (145). The historical landmarks that affirms the subject's belonging to the "nation" must be performed in the present. Their lives, customs, rituals, and culture thus comes to represent the "nation" itself, which has been established and defined in another epoch, beyond the present through which the "nation" is articulated.

"In the production of the nation as narration", Bhabha adds, there "is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporarily of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern site becomes the site of *writing the nation*" (145, italics in original). The "nation" seeks to present itself through a unified and linearized narrative, yet such homogeneity is ironically only capable of being maintained and expressed through performative strategies that are inherently unstable and slippery.

Thus, Henry's essentialist conception of Israel as a "nation" is called into question through Nathan's very direct proclamations that "we are all the invention of each other" (CL 149). Roth sees the inherent instabilities surrounding the narrative of the Israeli nation, and

uses Nathan to deconstruct and question Henry's essentialist framing of Israel. Both Lippmann and Henry's Zionism is centred on creating a stable, solid, and strong mode of Jewishness that is entwined within the "nation". Their vision of Israel accords with Boyarin's observation that Zionism equates to assimilationism.

Israel affords Henry the possibility of creating a counterlife centred on a fatalistic idealism, one that enables Henry to become more "manly", and remain Jewish. Yet as Nathan writes his brother in a letter, "[Zionism] was a species of fabulous utopianism, a manifesto for human transformation as extreme – and, at the outset, as implausible – as any ever conceived. A Jew could be a new person if he wanted to" (*CL* 151). Yet *The Counterlife* does not simply identify this fabulous utopianism as Zionist; instead, Roth juxtaposes Henry's Aliyah with Nathan's own counterlife that centres on living in the idyllic English countryside with his fiancé, Maria. Through this juxtaposition, Roth interrogates how Jewish American masculinities have responded to and internalized antisemitic constructions of Jewish difference that have historically positioned them "outside" the nation-state's "inner" narrative.

Gloucestershire: Where the Grass Couldn't Be Greener

In the final two chapters of *The Counterlife*, Roth examines an altogether different Jewish assimilatory fantasy. This time the nation-space in question is England, and it is Nathan, not Henry, who seeks to recreate a new life for himself in an entirely foreign land. The fourth chapter, entitled "Gloucestershire," begins in a similar fashion to "Basel", except here it is Nathan, not Henry, who is suffering from impotency. Zuckerman self reflectively asks, "[i]f for Henry there's Wendy, who is there for me?" (*CL* 186). The answer, Roth reveals, is Maria, a married Englishwoman whom Nathan seeks to devote himself to, as he declares: "[i]f the uxorious husband and devoted paterfamilias dies for clandestine erotic fervour, then I shall turn the moral tables: I die for family life, for fatherhood" (*CL* 186). The parallel

between the two Zuckerman brothers articulates both men's fantastical visions of sexual and physical regeneration that entwines the female body with the nation.

Nathan identifies Maria as a natural part of the land that he discovers: “[w]hen I found you,” Zuckerman observes, “you were hanging ripe, ready for plucking” (*CL* 187). Nathan's mythologizing of Maria positions her as a fruit, an object of the land to be taken. This metaphor articulates the gendered imbalance of power relations that (re)situates the (English) land-as-woman. Maria is a consumable commodity that Nathan takes nourishment from. Nathan's mythologization of Maria echoes Henry's misogyny in the way he defines Wendy. Both men posit women as sexual objects that are correlated to the land, whom they seek to penetrate as a means of reifying and restating their identities as “men.”⁸⁵

Yet whilst Wendy is the symbolic “American” woman, Maria represents an inflated vision of Christian Englishness. *The Counterlife*, like so many of Roth's fiction, takes great delight in its use of caricature. Henry decries this as “[e]xaggeration. Exaggeration, falsification, rampant caricature – everything, thought Henry, about my vocation to which precision, accuracy, and mechanical exactness are absolutely essential, overstated, overdrawn, and vulgarly enlarged” (*CL* 240). Yet this exaggerated use of caricature is precisely what makes *The Counterlife* such an effective critique of Jewish masculinities and the ways Jewish American men have positioned the non-Jewish woman-as-land. Maria, whose name resembles Mary, mother of Christ, represents the ultimate figure of Christian gentility. As Bonnie Lyons observes, the name “Maria” “is a word standing for the Jewish man's desired non-Jewish woman, the *shiksa*” (121), but it seems Maria represents a specific form of non-Jewishness.

⁸⁵ Omer-Sherman suggests “[t]he bodily health of Roth's individual protagonists is always linked to the waning vitality of the collective” (213), yet this view ultimately overlooks the gendered politics that infuses and underlies much of *The Counterlife*'s narrative structuring. The novel is replete with critiques of gendered body politics that repeatedly highlight the ways in which men define and construct national and gendered identities through ownership and subjugation of female bodies.

In the character of Maria, Roth creates a Christian English woman far removed from the American melting pot where Jewishness is far more prevalent in popular mainstream culture. Claudia Roth-Pierpont describes Maria as “the ideal English maiden” (154), and her Englishness is rooted in the idyllic English landscape of Gloucestershire, “where the grass couldn’t be greener” (*CL* 199). Nathan’s journey to the English idyll of Gloucestershire in hope of claiming male sexual regeneration is presented as fatalistic by Roth. Nathan’s last words in the fourth chapter underpin the fatalism of his desires: “I now must move beyond the words to the concrete violence of surgery” (*CL* 209). Nathan, like Henry, dies from the surgery, which serves as a comment on the fatalism of male-centric fantasies that posit the female-as-land.⁸⁶

Roth ties both men’s fantastical aspirations of re-imposing their masculinities over women as a negation and suppression of their Jewishness. In the fifth and final chapter, “Christendom”, Nathan has survived heart surgery, and is happily married to a pregnant Maria, living in the pastoral landscape of Gloucestershire. The idyllic bliss Nathan enjoys is rudely interrupted following an unpleasant encounter with Maria’s sister, Sarah, who informs Nathan that their mother, “Mrs Freshfield”, is an antisemite.⁸⁷ The religious, cultural, and “racial” differences between Nathan and Maria become problematic when the former accuses a woman of antisemitism after she repeatedly and aggressively complains of a smell in the restaurant. The woman stares at Zuckerman, leading Nathan to acerbically surmise, “I am that stink” (*CL* 295, italics in original).

⁸⁶ In the next chapter I discuss Anette Kolodny and Leo Marx’s discussions of what the former defines as the “pastoral impulse” (8), which I argue is an essential focus of Roth’s fiction that he attempts to undermine through satire.

⁸⁷ According to Pierpont, “Roth lifted the name ‘Freshfield’ from Milton’s ‘Lycidas’” (154) which he misquoted, as the line reads: “fresh woods”. Nevertheless, the point remains: Mrs. Freshfield is an exaggerated reflection of bourgeoisie Englishness, with a particularly “old school” form of antisemitism that is thinly veiled.

Zuckerman believes the woman is recycling an old antisemitic stereotype in which the “Jew” possess a unique smell or “stench”. The Jew’s smell, otherwise known as the *foetor Judaicus*, has a long and complex history in anti-Jewish imaginations that historians have traced as far back to Marcus Aurelius.⁸⁸ The *foetor Judaicus* was particularly significant for modern antisemitism’s racialization of the “Jew.” As Gilman writes, the Jew’s odour “acquires importance as a marker of sexual difference for the racial biology of the period. [...] Acquired characteristics become part of the essence of the Jews, thus their smell is a sign of the [...] difference attributed to them” (30). This difference, Jay Geller writes, “betrayed the Jew. [...] Hence to speak of a particular Jewish odour was to evoke the primitive, the sexual, the feminine” (72, 74).

The Jew’s smell was rooted in an animalistic primitivism that marked the “Jew” as a racially inferior being, driven by (sexual) instinct rather than intellect, and thus recognizably sub-human. By invoking the *foetor Judaicus*, Roth focuses on how Zuckerman’s Jewish masculinity (and humanity) is redefined in England; Nathan’s otherness is heightened outside of the comfortable familiarity of Newark, where Jewishness and Americanness have hybridized. Nathan’s Jewishness separates him from England and thus, from Maria. As he explains at the novel’s end, “England’s made a Jew of me in only eight weeks” (*CL* 328). In Nathan’s eyes, this woman’s incredulity regarding the stench in the restaurant is fundamentally antisemitic, reducing Nathan’s Jewishness to a conceptualization which threatens to strip him of his humanity. Maria, perplexed and befuddled by the scene Nathan makes, demands to know, “[w]here is the insult?” (*CL* 295, italics in original). Maria cannot see how or why Nathan understands the intoxicated woman’s comments as racially charged, and Roth is careful to give credence to Maria’s composed suggestion that “[s]he is just a ridiculous woman who thinks someone has on too much scent” (*CL* 295).

⁸⁸ See Jay Geller’s *On Freud’s Jewish Body*, pp. 72-80.

The woman never utters the word “Jew”, even when Nathan confronts her directly by threatening to have her removed. The racial element of the insult is left ambiguously unspoken. Only Nathan (and perhaps, the reader) perceives and defines the woman’s comments as antisemitic. Roth leaves the scene sufficiently ambiguous to give both Nathan and Maria credibility. This episode is key because the woman’s outburst drives a wedge between Nathan and Maria that sparks the text into a larger discussion of Jewish difference in England and America.

Maria protests that Nathan is obsessed with his identity as a Jew, and rashly posits a deeply unsettling distinction between American and English Jewry:

English Jews are beleaguered, there are so few of them. On the whole they find the thing rather an embarrassment. But in the U.S. they speak up, they speak out, they’re visible everywhere – and the consequence, I can assure you, is that some people don’t like it, and say as much when Jews aren’t around (*CL* 303).

Any sympathy the reader felt toward Maria during the restaurant episode erodes quickly. In Maria’s eyes, American Jews are too loud because they sound too Jewish, and thus make themselves too visible, which affronts and offends her English sensibilities. In England, the “Jew” is quiet, submissive, and embarrassed by his own Jewish difference. American Jewry, in Maria’s view, has assimilated improperly, having failed to recognize that their Jewishness should be quietly (and thus, privately) articulated, if spoken of at all. Maria sees Nathan’s Jewishness so vividly because Nathan repeatedly articulates himself through his Jewishness, as Henry adroitly quips in the previous chapter, “[t]he poor bastard had Jew on the brain” (*CL* 232).

Nathan’s willingness to vocalize his Jewishness makes him stand out as a Jew, which Maria finds disturbingly excessive. Roth recycles yet another antisemitic stereotype of the “Jew who sounds too Jewish”. This stereotype is a particular favourite of Roth’s, as Mickey Sabbath declares in *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995), “[s]houting is how a Jew *thinks things through!*” (*ST* 95, italics in original). In *The Counterlife*, too, Shuki highlights how Jews are

perceived to be fond of shouting: “[h]ave you ever noticed that Jews shout? Even one ear is more than you need. Here everything is black and white, everybody is shouting, and everybody is always right” (*CL* 68). This trope, Gilman writes, is “a stereotype within the Christian world which represents the Jew as possessing all languages or no language of his or her own [... who] is unable to truly command the national language of the world in which he/she lives” (12). Roth uses the improper sounding “Jew” to attack the ways in which Jewish bodies have been marked as impure and dirty in relation to the “gentile” body.

The excessive sounding Jew has been adopted as a satirical tool elsewhere in Jewish American art. Woody Allen famously utilized the excessive sounding Jew in *Annie Hall* (1977). Like Roth, Allen seeks to highlight the disparities between the “Jewish” and “gentile” families of his characters, Alvy Singer and Annie Hall. Alvy meets Annie’s family for Easter dinner. In the stage directions, Allen writes that “[t]he sun is pouring through a big picture window, shining on a large, elegantly laid out table”.⁸⁹ The gentility of the Hall’s dinner is further highlighted by the decorous silence that is undercut only by the sound of quiet chewing. The conversations that ensue are banally polite, as Grammy Hall “stares down the table at Alvy; [with] a look of utter dislike.” Alvy next appears “dressed in the long black coat and hat of the orthodox Jew, complete with mustache and beard.” This, the viewer understands, is what Grammy Hall perceives when she looks at Alvy. Alvy may look “white”, but his sense of humour combined with his nasal New York accent accentuates his “Jewish difference”. In other words, Alvy sounds “too Jewish” to “pass” in the genteel Hall household.

Allen, like Roth, playfully adopts the stereotype of the “Jew who sounds too Jewish” as a means of interrogating the remaining racial tensions undermining the “whiteness” Jews

⁸⁹ All quotes referring to *Annie Hall* are taken from, *Annie Hall Script by Woody Allen*. http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/annie_hall.html. Accessed 16 May 2017.

have adopted. Alvy turns to the camera and decries, “I can’t believe this family. [...] [T]hey really look American, you know, very healthy and ... like they never get sick or anything. Nothing like my family. You know, the two are like oil and water.” Thereafter, the screen splits in half, as Alvy’s family have their Passover meal. In the stage directions, Allen writes that “[Alvy’s] mother, father, aunt and uncle-busily eating at the crowded kitchen table. They eat quickly and interrupt one another loudly. On the left the Halls in their dining room. Both dialogues overlap, juxtaposed.” The Singer family’s dialogue is filled with exclamatory punctuation marks, fractured speech, as the family interrupt one another, eat off each other’s plates, and skip from one conversation to another. And although the stage directions indicate that the screen is “split”, it is noteworthy that the Singer family’s dinner sequence dwarfs the Hall’s screen space, reflecting the “Jewish” excessiveness of the Singer family that so strongly contrasts with the quiet gentility of the Hall’s Easter meal.

Annie Hall positively asserts (through satire and irony) a loud self-deprecating Jewish-American voice that celebrates and flaunts Jewish difference’s presence in America. *The Counterlife*’s ending promises something similar: a celebration of Jewish difference as a rejection that refuses to deny the Jewish voice its place in the world. Thus, when Maria asks Nathan, “[c]an’t you ever forget your Jews” (*CL* 318), Maria is really asking Nathan to be quiet about the Jews. Nathan’s readiness to confront the issues of his Jewish identity collide with Maria’s quiet gentility in the pastoral landscape of Gloucestershire, where she admits, “[d]isgusting as you’ve discovered my Englishness to be, I’m *not* really wedded to it, or to any label in the way that most of you Jews do persist in being Jewish” (*CL* 318, italics in original). Maria sees her English identity as an irrelevancy, and thus fails to understand the significance and/or complexity of Nathan’s Jewishness.

Nathan’s question, “[c]an’t there be a Jewish variety of Englishman?” (*CL* 306) has a simple answer in Maria’s view: yes, but the “Jew” must not speak of their Jewishness. To be

an “Englishman,” to metaphorically enter into the pastoral landscape, Nathan must let go of his Jewishness, and let go of all the struggle, strife, and tumult that Jewishness represents. In other words, Nathan must mute his Jewish difference. As Maria herself observes, Nathan seeks “to be innocent of innocence at all costs, certainly not to let me, with my pastoral origins, cunningly transform you into a pastoralized Jew” (*CL* 322). Maria’s “pastoral origins” become the focal point of the novel’s finale, as Maria literally and metaphorically “leaves” the book (*CL* 316). Maria’s ability to exit the text perhaps reflects her privileged position as a white woman. Maria’s Englishness is defined as unmarked, whilst Zuckerman’s Jewishness is contested precisely because of how many narratives surround Jewish differences. It is rather befitting, therefore, that Nathan is left alone in the text, as it serves as a reflection of how minorities such as Jews are encoded into society through the white gaze. In a letter to Nathan, Maria attacks Nathan for the “literary surgery being performed experimentally upon those I love” (*CL* 317), highlighting the fictionality of Maria as a construct of Nathan’s imagination. In other words, Maria and her family are an outlet, a vehicle for Roth to explore Nathan’s own insecurities and anxieties over his Jewish masculinity.

Nathan’s final rejection of Maria’s pastoralism is predicated on the underlying understanding that “[b]eing Zuckerman is one long performance the very opposite of what is thought of as *being oneself*” (*CL* 323, italics in original). The performance of the “self”, or in this case the “Jewish self”, is fraught, unstable, and chaotic. Both Nathan and Henry’s intertwining narratives are unified by their effort to retreat from performing the “Jewish” self. Henry’s affair with Wendy and his retreat to Zionism mirrors Nathan’s pursuit of Maria in that both centre on the fantasy of escapism. Roth represents Henry’s Zionism and Nathan’s pursuit of Maria as a form of pastoralism, which in the novel’s final moments, Nathan rejects.

Zuckerman discards the pastoral because “at [its] core is the idyllic scenario of redemption through recovery of a sanitized, confusionless life” (*CL* 326). Zuckerman instead embraces his Jewishness because the Jewish act of

[c]ircumcision is everything that the pastoral is not and, to my mind, reinforces what the world is about, which isn’t strifeless unity. Quite convincingly, circumcision gives the lie to the womb-dream of life in the beautiful state of innocence prehistory, the appealing idyll of living “naturally,” unencumbered by man-made ritual. To be born is to lose all that (*CL* 327).

For Nathan, the “womb-dream” (*CL* 327) represents the fantastical unification of “man” and earth that is essential to the Zionism’s nationalist fantasy. The idyllic nature of this fantasy is rejected in a celebration of the act of circumcision, one of the most significant symbolic rituals of Judaism that marks the Jew as Jewish. This key moment in *The Counterlife* represents a turning-point not only in the book but in the Zuckerman-saga, as Nathan finally embraces and celebrates his Jewishness. As Erik Zakim has argued, “[e]scape no longer means a gentile existence in England; it now signifies a Jewish intellectual existence on the margin” (36).

If the pastoral demands a rejection of Jewish identity, then Zuckerman’s celebration of circumcision reaffirms his commitment to Jewish histories and his identity. As Matthew Wilson observes, the act of circumcision enables Nathan to unite “the narratives of family and of history, the narrative of family and continuity and the narrative of Jews in history symbolized by the same letting of blood” (53-4). Nathan, to return to Roth’s “Imagining Jews”, “find[s] inspiration in a conscience that has been created and undone a hundred times over in this century alone” (“Imagining” 245-6). Circumcision represents Jewish difference, and Jewish difference is essential for Roth in creating and engaging with a Jewish literary and cultural history that furnishes and fuels his literary creativity.

For Roth, Jewishness is a performance, but this does not diminish or delimit what it means to be a “Jew.” As Zuckerman surmises, he is “[a] Jew without Jews, without Judaism,

without Zionism, without Jewishness [...] just the object itself, like a glass or an apple" (*CL* 328). Yet the Jewishness Nathan celebrates is gendered as male. Nathan upholds the circumcised penis as a rejection of the Christian pastoral tradition that is tied to purity. Zuckerman's erect penis represents rejuvenation and hope for the father-to-be; it represents an affirmation of Jewishness that is nascent and blossoming. Yet this is Philip Roth: Nathan's buoyant optimism in these final moments reads hollow and false. In choosing to end on the erect, circumcised penis of Nathan, Roth undermines the narrator's commitment to his Judaism. It hopelessly centres on the male body, and Roth's fiction has insistently shown that the body itself is chaotic, unstable, and will inevitably collapse. For Roth, Zuckerman's rhapsodic sermonizing of Jewishness will inevitably fall apart, because the erection cannot hold.

Chapter 3: Almost Like Gentiles

Heroism [...] is almost ashamed of its body. What shall it say, then, to the sugar-plums and cat's-cradles, to the toilet, compliments, quarrels, cards, and custard, which rack the wit of all society. – Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Heroism”

It is very early in life, and I am out in the grass. The sun flames and swells; the heat it emits is its love, too. I have this self-same vividness in my heart. There are dandelions. I try to gather up this green. I put my love-swollen cheek to the yellow of the dandelions. I try to enter into the green. – Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*

Entering into the Green

Eugene Henderson's journey to Africa in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) centres on the buffoonish protagonist's desire to "enter into the green" (283). Entering into the green is Bellow's metaphor for the pastoral; it represents Henderson's desire to reinvent himself by claiming (and penetrating) a virgin land that has not yet been colonized or discovered. Bellow's Henderson chases what Annette Kolodny calls "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between men and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine" (4). Henderson's quest is predicated on a desire to return to what Kolodny terms a "primal harmony with the Mother" (4). Entering into the green thus represents a return to the pre-Oedipal stage in which the subject's body is indistinguishable from the mother's; in other words, entering the green returns to the pre-symbolic in which subject and object are indivisible.

According to Kolodny, Henderson seeks "redemption through wholehearted and erotic regression, attempting to get back a sense of intimacy he remembers once experiencing" (145). Kolodny defines this fantasy as the "pastoral impulse" (8), importantly illuminating how white men perpetually produce American pastoralism in an attempt to reify and re-impose their dominance and power over the Old and New Worlds (153). In *Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1984), Kolodny claims Bellow recycles an American literary trope that defines the land as metaphorically female, in which men "[long] both to return to and to master the beautiful and bountiful femininity of the new continent" (139). For Henderson, Africa represents a prelapsarian space, which enables him to enter "the real past" that he distinguishes from history and "junk like that" (Bellow 46).

The desire to escape the present-day tumult of American life also initiates Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997). The novel begins with Nathan Zuckerman recalling

Newark Jewry's collective fetishization of Seymour "Swede" Levov during the Second World War. The Swede's sporting prowess, Aryan appearance, and muscular body is celebrated for his perceived unity with the American landscape, which represents his separateness from Newark's other Jews. Zuckerman believes Seymour's strength represents a mode of freedom that elevates him into a mythological symbol of Americanness predicated on his unconscious repudiation of Jewishness, which enables him to enter into the American green.

This chapter focuses on the role of myth in Roth's novel and the gendered imagery that imbues the Swede as a figure of the American pastoral. David Houston and Joseph Darda have, amongst others, been attentive to Roth's dismissive attitude toward the pastoral itself, but my interest here centres on the gendered body politic of *American Pastoral* and its relation to the pastoral-impulse Kolodny outlines.⁹⁰ Those that have approached the issue of gender have tended to limit their focus to the Swede, and have subsequently overlooked the importance of women's bodies in *American Pastoral*.⁹¹

This chapter remedies this gap by asking how Zuckerman wields his power as a mythmaker to deconstruct the Swede's pastoralism. I contend that in Zuckerman's re-telling

⁹⁰ See David Houston's, "Counterpastoral." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, May 2014, pp. 125–39, Joseph Darda's "The Visual Apologetics of Philip Roth's Pastoral America." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 11 no. 2, 2015, pp. 77-94. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/586924. Ross Posnock's *Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* features a chapter on *American Pastoral* which is particularly noteworthy in its analysis. Posnock highlights how the novel "examines the seduction, delusion, and power of antitragic 'utopian thinking' – in this case, its function as the motor of American faith in war triumphalism" (103). Elsewhere, David Brauner defines Roth's use of the term pastoral as "an ahistorical, Utopian dream world in which man lives in harmony with nature, his fellow man (and woman), and himself" (149). This is an especially useful definition that I carry forward in my consideration of how women, like the land itself, are transformed into mythological objects that help maintain the illusion of the utopian fantasy.

⁹¹ Alex Hobbs' "Reading the Body in Philip Roth's American Pastoral." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010, pp. 69–83 is particularly excellent in its discussion of the body and the gender politics underpinning the elevation of Seymour into the mythic "Swede". See also Carina Staudte's "Athleticism and Masculinity in Roth's American Trilogy and *Exit Ghost*." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, July 2015, pp. 55–66.

of Seymour's life, the Swede reduces his wife and daughter to figures of alterity.⁹² By stressing Seymour's othering of Dawn, Merry, and Rita, I make connections between *American Pastoral* and John Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost*. Developing from Lee Morrissey's "Eve's Otherness and the New Ethical Criticism", this chapter contends that the Swede, like Milton's God and Adam, fetishizes Dawn into an Eve-like figure of his paradise.⁹³ In doing so, I highlight how the Swede denies Dawn a voice and autonomy by ossifying her into an Eve-like figure of perfection. By focusing on how Zuckerman recreates the Swede's relationship with his wife, daughter, and Rita Cohen, I consider how the Swede's pastoral is representative of the American dream, and to what extent America's pastoralism is predicated on the oppression and control of women's bodies. Before considering how Roth's novel fits within Kolodny's theory, I want to explore the definitions and traits of America's pastoral. Doing so helps contextualize Roth's engagement with the literary form, and better understand the ways in which *American Pastoral* illuminates the racial and gendered body politics underpinning American mythologies surrounding its lands.

Terry Gifford outlines three broad distinctions the term pastoral alludes to that revolve around myth, the countryside, and the fabulous shepherd figure. The pastoral, Gifford

⁹² This chapter works with and departs from Aliki Varvogli's "The Inscription of Terrorism: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2007, pp. 101–13. Varvogli contends that there is a "certain degree of identification between the narrator and the terrorist character" (103). By stressing the moral ambiguities of the novel, Varvogli complicates earlier readings of the text that positioned the Swede as the sympathetic hero. Likewise, I seek to stress the Miltonic complexities of Merry as a Satanic figure whose terrorism reads as a reaction to the patriarchal oppressiveness of the Swede's American Eden. See also Marshall Bruce Gentry's, "Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth's '*American Pastoral*'." *Shofar*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2000, pp. 74–83. Gentry highlights the ways in which women "seem to win a battle over the dominant male voice of its main character Swede Levov, the narrator Nathan Zuckerman, and even, to some extent, Philip Roth himself" (76).

⁹³ Morrissey stresses how Adam turns "Eve into an other with repeated insistence that she is like him, but perfect". By doing so, Adam "leaves Eve with few alternatives for showing him that she is not what he thinks she is. In order to break through this otherness, Eve would need to show Adam that she is neither like him nor perfect" (336). My reading of *American Pastoral* borrows from Morrissey's. Dawn is very much like Eve in Roth's novel, fetishized into a figure of perfection whose voice and complexity is repeatedly denied and repressed.

writes, “is a historical form with a long tradition which began in poetry, developed into dramas, and more recently could be recognized in novels” (1). Secondly, the “pastoral refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban” (2), and finally, it is “usually associated with a celebratory attitude towards what it describes, however superficially bleak it might appear to be” (2). According to Gifford, the pastoral aggrandizes the countryside into a mythological space that is radically distinct from the cluttered city. As Lawrence Buell observes, pastoralism “celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the two or city” (23).

Likewise, Don Scheese highlights how the “pastoral as a literary type harks back to ancient Greece and the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, featuring herdsmen (typically shepherds) in a bucolic setting caring for their animals and singing of the benefits of rural urban life” (4). Yet as Harold E. Toliver points out, “pastoralists in the main tradition usually suggest that paradise is beyond the reach even of poetry” (13). The pastoral explores the impossible ideal of a synthetic unity between man and nature that cannot ever come to pass. The imagined, mythologized land remains mythic in its formation.

At the centre of the pastoral is the figure of the herdsman. In an attempt to switch focus away from the landscape onto the human, Paul Alpers highlights the symbolic importance of the shepherd, who “emerge[s] as representative, both of the poet and of all humans” (138). Yet within the texts Alpers studies the shepherd is distinctly male, meaning that maleness becomes representative of humanness, erasing and/or silencing women from occupying a subjective place as poets and even as humans.

Upon its discovery, America was imbued with the same gendered pastoralist imagery that defined the male as a pioneering figure who sets out “to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent!” (Marx 3). The key distinction Kolodny and Leo Marx outline between European and

American pastoralism is the latter's tangibility. As Kolodny aptly surmises, “*this* paradise really existed” (5, italics in original). Unlike European pastoralism, America “holds at its very core the promise of fantasy as daily reality” (Kolodny 7). However, the same gendered language structured the pastoralist fantasies of America. As Kolodny contends, “the New World had been given over to the fantasies of men”. Consequently, “the psychosexual dynamic of a virginal paradise meant [...] that real flesh-and-blood women – at least metaphorically – were dispossessed of paradise” (Kolodny *The Land Before* 3). The New World was imagined and narrated by white men who defined the land as a metaphorical woman. According to Marx, America was defined through two disparate narratives; it was conceived as both a garden and a wilderness, an Eden virgin-land and a place of chaos and deviancy.

Both these contradictory images were gendered in their formulations. As Henry Nash Smith observes, the “master symbol of the garden embraced a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth, all centering about the heroic figure of the idealized frontier armed with that supreme agrarian weapon, the sacred plow” (123). The frontier’s phallic plough is a symbolic penis, and the land, positioned as a symbolic vagina, is to be penetrated to bring new life for its “heroic figure.”

Yet as Marx, Kolodny, and others have shown, America was also conceived of as a “howling desert” and “hideous wilderness” (Marx 48, 47). Yet the supposed lack of social order within the discovered land represented an opportunity for its male discoverers. As Richard Slotkin highlights in *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973), the New World’s most distinct quality

was the relative absence of social restraints on human behavior, the relative ease with which a strong man could, by mastering the law of the wilderness-jungle, impose his personal dream of self-aggrandizement on reality. In Europe all men were under authority; in America all dreamed they had the power to become authority (34).

The promise of self-reification centred around the fantasy of mastery. That is, the man, through brute strength and determination, could impose his masculinist fantasy of controllership over the lawless wilderness. In *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1959), R.W.B. Lewis highlights how “the American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race” (5). The discovery of America created opportunity for renewal that was directly connected to male empowerment that positioned the land-as-female.

The reclamation of authority vis-à-vis the land relies on a gendered mythos of America-as-female. As Kolodny observes, the “European discovery of an unblemished and fertile continent allowed the projection upon it of a residue of infantile experience in which all needs – physical, erotic, spiritual and emotional – had been met by an entity imaged as quintessentially female” (153-4). The land-as-female metaphor is paradoxical in that it positions the acreage as a site for sexual regeneration in which the (male) self is able to regrow and reproduce. Yet the discovered lands were also codified as a return “back into the realm of the Mother, in order to begin again, and then an attempted (and not always successful) movement out of that containment in order to experience the self as independent, assertive, and sexually active” (Kolodny 153).

The fantasy of self-renewal is a staple of Roth’s fiction that has repeatedly centred on the rejection of Jewishness vis-à-vis the penetration of a woman’s body. For Alexander Portnoy, the land is not just female; rather, the female-is-land. As Sam Girgus observes, “[t]he gentile women in the novel are not merely Americans; they embody America” (130). For Alex, the *shiksa*’s Americanness, like the land itself, can be conquered through the act of penetration:

I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds – as though through fucking I will discover America. *Conquer* America – maybe that's more like it. Columbus, Captain Smith, Governor Winthrop, General Washington – now Portnoy (*PC* 235, italics in original).

Alex's identification with Columbus, Smith, Winthrop, and Washington signals his desire to possess a colonialist power typically disassociated from Diasporic Jewish cultures. For Alex, the act of sexually penetrating a woman's body represents a masculinist power that is equivalent to political sovereignty; "sticking it up their backgrounds" is an empowering act that affirms the male subject's masculinity and Americanness. Thus, the white woman's body becomes a metaphor for the American land itself, enabling Alex to re-forge and remove himself from his Jewish heredity, and begin anew as an "American man." Portnoy famously begs Dr. Spielvogel to "[b]less me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me *whole!*" (*PC* 36-7, italics in original), as he chases a mythical and illusory ideal of "manhood" centred on a rejection of his identity as a Jew.

Yet in *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman's fantasy of self-renewal is orientated around an actual body; the Swede is the brave, strong, "whole" Portnoy has been fatalistically pursuing, and the tangibility of the Swede echoes the pastoral fantasy of America itself. The Swede's body is for Zuckerman what America was for its first explorers: a perceptible, real site that makes possible the fantasy of self-renewal.

Zuckerman's Jewishness is an important factor in Roth's reconstitution of the pastoral-impulse narrative originally outlined by Kolodny. Roth's narrator seeks to "enter" into the body of another man rather than the "maternal womb" of the land itself. The disparity points to an underlying foreignness felt by Zuckerman, one that stems from his Judaic heritage. As I discussed in Chapter 1, a metaphorical return to his mother's womb would maintain Nathan's connection to Judaism, which he sees as disconnected from America. The conceptualized "Jew" has historically been a signifier of displacement and exile; a perennial wanderer, the Jew has repeatedly been defined as nationless. If the Jew has no nation to impose their

dominance or power over, then they are excluded from partaking in the “pastoral impulse”. Therefore, the stereotype denies Jews mastery over any land, as they are a landless people. The typecast dispossessed “Jew” influences Zuckerman’s perception of his own connection to America as he feels alienated from the “gentiles”. The Swede, however, is able to transcend the schism that haunts Zuckerman through his physique and non-Jewish appearance.

To be self-assertive and virile, Zuckerman (and the other Jews of Newark) fetishizes the body of the Swede as a way of experiencing life as “Americans” rather than as Jews:

through the Swede, the neighborhood entered into a fantasy about itself and about the world, the fantasy of sports fans everywhere: almost like Gentiles (as they imagined Gentiles), our families could forget the way things actually work and make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes. Primarily, they could forget the war (*AP* 3).

The twice-repeated “fantasy” ameliorates the Swede with a mysticism that centres on his separateness from the Jewish community, enabling Newark’s Jews to temporarily “forget the way things actually work” through his sporting prowess. The metaphorical retreat into the life and body of the Swede signals a collective desire to escape from the tumult and terror of American reality during the Second World War. The desire to imagine themselves as “gentiles” is animated by a collective uneasiness surrounding their identity as Jews, and it this apprehensiveness that fuels their yearning to “forget the war” (*AP* 3) and begin again.

Essential to this renewal is the reinvention of the Jewish body to be more like the “gentiles”. The Swede is ardently fetishized because he is so stereotypically non-Jewish looking. As Nathan observes:

The Jewishness that he wore so lightly as one of the tall, blond athletic winners must have spoken to us too – in our idolizing the Swede and his unconscious oneness with America, I suppose there was a tinge of shame and self-rejection (*AP* 20).

The Swede’s athleticism and physical strength correlates with the masculine ideal that was particularly prevalent during the Second World War in America, but separates him from

certain pernicious anti-Jewish stereotypes that represented the “Jew” as weak and effeminate. “The topos of the Jewish man as a sort of woman”, Daniel Boyarin explains, “is a venerable one going back at least to the thirteenth century in Europe, where it was widely maintained that Jewish men menstruate” (210). The myth was born from the Jewish man’s circumcised penis, which was, Boyarin writes, “interpreted as feminizing” (211). Zuckerman recognizes his Jewishness as shameful because his circumcised penis represents a masculine “lack” that denigratingly delineates him as a symbolic “woman.”

The Swede, however, is a strong, athletic “winner” (*AP* 20), whose non-Jewish appearance and “marvelous body” (*AP* 20) renders his Jewishness (and thus, “femininity”), unidentifiable, leaving Nathan to wonder, “[w]here was the Jew in him? You couldn’t find it and yet you knew it was there” (*AP* 20). The Swede’s appearance “hides” his Jewishness, which enables him to metaphorically penetrate the American landscape and “escape” the shameful stigma of being Jewish.

For Zuckerman, the Swede is a metonym for the American pastoral itself, as his hyper masculine body enables Nathan to imagine mastering “the beautiful and bountiful femininity of the new continent” (Kolodny 139). Thus, when Nathan hears Seymour has married Dawn Levov, a former Miss New Jersey model, he considers the Swede’s meteoric ascent complete: “[a] shiksa. Dawn Dwyer. He’d done it” (*AP* 15). The punchy, ironical brevity in these three sentences underpins the finality and significance of Seymour’s momentous marriage. The meaning of the word “it” is not hard to discern: the Swede’s marriage, in Zuckerman’s skewed vision, cements Seymour’s erasure of his attachment to his Judaism. Daniel Itzkovitz insightfully contends that “the Jew’s performance of whiteness – the self-erasure of the Jew’s Jewishness [...] enables his or her smooth assimilation: to assimilate is to take on not only a new nation and culture, but also [...] a race” (184). The Swede, Zuckerman envisages, can only complete this assimilative fantasy by marrying a “shiksa” (a derogatory Yiddish word

for non-Jewish woman), which Zuckerman believes re-constructs the Swede not only culturally, but also racially. Thus, for Zuckerman (and presumably the Swede, and most certainly for Alex Portnoy) America can be symbolically entered through the white woman's body.

The non-Jewish, white American woman as an elusive symbol of "gentility" has been a staple of Roth's fiction. Yet the transcendental reverence and loathing Alex Portnoy insidiously imbues the "shiksa" with is absent here. Dawn is a "real" woman, and the Swede's marriage signifies a sacred moment that ceremoniously secures Seymour's ascension into the mythical plains of "Americanness." The name "Dawn" symbolizes the beginning of a new time, one that explicates the Swede's regeneration as an "American" and signifies a primordial entry into the American land. Thus, when Zuckerman wryly observes that "*Swede Levov's life, for all I knew, had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore just great, right in the American grain*" (AP 31, italics in original), Roth is tacitly returning to a pastoral ideal that orientates the land-as-female. The word "grain" (AP 31) connects the Swede's unification with Dawn to the land itself; without her, the Swede's life could not be the pastoral ideal Zuckerman envisages it to be. Through Dawn, the Swede is able to "grow" within the American land, obliterating his connection to Judaic history and culture, much to young Zuckerman's admiration and envy.

Dream, dream, dream

The Swede's supposed freedom from his Jewish identity makes him, in the eyes of Zuckerman, what R.W.B Lewis defines as the American Adam, "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race" (5).⁹⁴ Yet the Swede's purification from history and the identity politics

⁹⁴ See Brian McDonald's "'The Real American Crazy Shit': On Adamism and Democratic Individuality in 'American Pastoral.'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-), vol.

associated with family, ancestry, and “race” creates a subjective vacuity, as Zuckerman discovers upon re-acquainting with his hero. Roth ties Seymour’s (supposed) lack of character with the pastoral itself, and by doing so, uses the fairy-tale of the Swede as a way of commenting on the shallowness of America’s pastoral mythos.

Roth highlights the Swede’s alleged lack of subjecthood in the novel’s opening chapter, as Nathan describes Seymour as an “*instrument* of history” who “walked about the neighborhood in possession of all that love, looking as though he didn’t feel a thing [...] the love thrust upon the Swede seemed actually to *deprive* him of feeling” (*AP* 5, italics in original). Seymour’s dense, thick body seems to lack any emotive depth, operating as a passive tool rather than as a person. Seymour’s apparent lack of complexity is made evident when Zuckerman and the Swede have dinner together after running into one another at a baseball game. As the two eat, Roth’s narrator wonders “what did he do for subjectivity? What *was* the Swede’s subjectivity? There had to be a stratum, but its composition was unimaginable” (*AP* 20, italics in original). The Swede’s grandiose superfluity, once tantalizingly unimaginable, now seems vacuous and hollow to Roth’s beguiled narrator, who seeks to locate in his former idol a shred of humanity.

The Swede’s superhuman imperviousness that was once so mesmeric to Nathan is now tedious and shallow. Zuckerman observes that the Swede “is not faking all this virginity. You’re craving depths that don’t exist. This guy is the embodiment of nothing” (*AP* 39). Seymour’s apparent subjective absence is connected to Zuckerman’s mythologizing of him. Roland Barthes contends “[t]he function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a hemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence” (143). Zuckerman empties the “reality” of Seymour by creating “the Swede,” and in doing so, the

23, 2004, pp. 27-40 for an extensive overview of the ways in which *American Pastoral* critiques the American Adamic tradition.

subjective reality of Nathan's hero is made absent, as he is mythologized into a fetishized object of Zuckerman's desire.

The myth of the Swede perniciously centres on an unconscious collective yearning to efface Newark Jewry's identity as Jews. The transformation of Seymour into the "Swede" enables Zuckerman to realize "the strongest fantasy I had of being someone else" (*AP* 88). Barthes highlights how myth functions as "a type of speech defined by its intention [...] much more than by its literal sense [...] and that in spite of this, its intention is somehow frozen, eternalized, *made absent* by this literal sense" (124, italics in original). Subsequently, the Swede becomes a frozen, eternalized emblem of a fantasy, but is deprived of any knowable or identifiable subjectivity; he exists beyond the realms of possibility for Zuckerman, which is precisely why Seymour is so ardently fetishized.

However, the myth of the Swede as superhuman proves false. During a school reunion, Nathan learns from Jerry Levov, the Swede's brother, that Seymour's life was not as idyllic as Zuckerman had assumed: "[h]e had a big, generous nature and with that they really raked him over the coals, all the impossible ones. Unsatisfiable father, unsatisfiable wives, and the little murderer herself, the monster daughter. The monster *Merry*" (*AP* 67, italics in original). Jerry obliterates the fantasy Zuckerman had of the Swede's perfect existence, divulging Seymour's recent demise from prostate cancer, and that his daughter Merry blew up a post office and killed a man in protest against the war in Vietnam. During their dinner together, the Swede reveals to Nathan he had suffered from cancer, but seems to lie when he tells Zuckerman the operation went "just fine" (*AP* 28). Seymour's deceptiveness regarding his health combined with Jerry's revelations regarding Merry and Dawn re-humanizes the Swede, destroying the mythological invincibility Seymour seemed to possess.

The fallibility of the Swede inspires Zuckerman to re-write Seymour as a tragic hero who tries and fails to understand the motivations of his terrorist daughter and adulterous wife.

Merry and Dawn transgress the Swede's Eden in an attempt to formulate their own subjectivities that are free from Seymour's influence. Zuckerman dreams a "realistic chronicle" (AP 89) that centres on the Swede's inability to comprehend his wife and daughter's subjectivities, parodying Nathan's own failure to conceptualize Seymour. The parodic function of the chronicle is what Barthes calls an "*artificial myth*", which undermines and satirizes his childhood idolization of the Swede which was predicated on Jewish self-hatred. "[T]he best weapon against myth", Barthes writes, "is perhaps to mystify in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?" (135, italics in original). In order to undo the myth of the Swede as a fetishized figure of the American pastoral, Zuckerman ironically wields his power as myth-maker, creating a Miltonic mock-epic centred on the Swede's fall from the idyllic hamlet of Old Rimrock.

"Sublest beast of all the field"

"The Fall" of *American Pastoral*, the second section of the novel, begins by introducing the enigmatic figure of Rita Cohen, whose inexplicability stems from her indeterminate bodily appearance. Roth describes Rita as a "tiny, bone-white girl who looked half Merry's age but claimed to be six years older", who was so "ineffectual-looking that he [the Swede] could barely believe she was at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business and Finance [...] let alone the provocateur who was Merry's mentor in world revolution" (AP 117). Seymour struggles to specify Rita's age, and underestimates her intellectual prowess based on how small and pale she is. Rita's indeterminate appearance enables her to deceive Seymour into believing that she is a research student wanting to write a paper on his glove factory. At the end of the tour she reveals who she really is by telling Seymour, "very softly, '[s]he [Merry] wants her Audrey Hepburn scrapbook'" (AP 132). The deceptive mystery of

Rita's character is a recurrent motif that repeatedly leaves the reader wondering who Rita is and whether or not she actually knows Merry.

Rita is a semantically overloaded character whose ambiguity and lack of symbolic cohesiveness threatens the Swede's indomitability. She summons him to a hotel room, demanding he bring ten thousand dollars in cash, and it is here that Rita sets the Swede his challenge. She will only take him to see his daughter if he has sex with her. Rita mimics Merry's speech impeded voice as she attempts to lure him into bed. ““Let’s f-f-f-fuck, D-d-d-dad”” (*AP* 143), Rita says, as she exposes herself to the Swede, “rolling the labia lips outward with her fingers, expos[ing] to him the membranous tissue veined and mottled and waxy with the moist tulip sheen of flayed flesh” (*AP* 145). Merry’s voice becomes inescapably entangled with Rita’s genitalia here, as the latter metaphorically assumes the role of the Swede’s daughter, and looks to have Seymour enact a fake form of incest. Just as Milton’s Satan enters into the mouth of the sleeping serpent “[l]ike a black mist” (IX. 180), Rita transgresses her embodied subjectivity by demonically parodying Merry’s stutter. In doing so, she returns him to a particular memory (that Zuckerman has created) in which father and daughter share a passionate kiss after Merry begs Seymour to “kiss me the way you k-k-kiss umumumother” (*AP* 89).

Rita (and Merry) serve as Zuckerman’s Miltonic serpent, as they, like Satan, attempt to entice Roth’s Adam and Eve into committing sin. Rita is compared to an “imp of upheaval” (*AP* 146), which connects her to Milton’s Satan, who transforms into “[t]he subtlest beast of all the field. [... A] Fit vessel, fittest imp of fraud, in whom/To enter, and his dark suggestions hide/ From sharpest sight” (IV.86-89). The chaotic instabilities of Satan’s bodily transformation centres on his becoming invisible, as his entering into the serpent enables him to hide from God’s vision. The Swede struggles to clearly “see” Rita, as her age, appearance, and actions repeatedly deceive and confound him. The excessive visibility of

Rita's flesh is contrasted by her hidden and unknowable subjectivity that remains invisible to the hapless Swede. Like Satan, Rita disrupts subjective borders through her demonic slipperiness (both symbolically and literally) as she attempts to remove Seymour from what she describes as his "dead center" (*AP* 146).

Rita's body and sexuality threatens the Swede's "good" life in its perverse female excessiveness: "[h]er dark child's eyes. Full of excitement and fun. Full of audacity. Full of unreasonableness. Full of oddness. Full of *Rita*. And only half of it was performance" (*AP* 146). Rita is a hypersexual woman entrapped in a child's body; she overflows with contradictory meanings that are so extreme she seems paradoxically vacuous in her excess. I contend that Rita's sexual exorbitance inverts the metaphor of "the land-as-woman" that Kolodny recognizes in America's pastoral-impulse. Instead of an idyllic garden or Eden, Rita's body is presented as a site of uncultivated chaos. "Step right up and take a whiff", she commands the Swede, "[t]he swamp. It *sucks* you in. Smell it, Swede" (*AP* 146, italics in original). The pernicious fatalism of Rita's dysfunctional sexuality seems to echo Milton's Hell, "A universe of death, which God by curse/ Created evil, for evil only good,/ Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,/ Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things" (II. 621-625). Her directives to "smell" and "whiff" centre on Seymour's mouth, an orifice she seeks to penetrate through the primordial scent of her genitalia. By comparing Rita's vagina to a bog, Roth presents Seymour with a bountiful body that is uncontrollable and impossible to master; Rita represents a "wild" femininity that seeks to penetrate man, rather than be penetrated.

Rita's excess represents what Marx calls America's "counter force". In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Marx examines two contradictory chronicles that shaped Elizabethan perceptions of America: one defined America as an unspoiled garden capable of realizing and hosting "a pastoral retreat" (36), whilst the other depicted America as a savage site without

order or civilization; a “hideous wilderness” (Marx 43). The Swede’s “pastoral retreat” (Marx 36) collides with what Marx defines as the “*counterforce*”, “bring[ing] a world which is more “real” into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision” (25, italics in original). Ironically, the “realness” of Rita’s counterforce is steeped in an unreality that Nathan fashions through his dreamlike “realist chronicle”; to deconstruct the myth of the Swede, Zuckerman constructs a new fable centred on the monstrous bodies of Rita and Merry.

In *American Pastoral*, the female body becomes the counterforce, which opposes the pastoral impulse Seymour harbours. The “hideous wilderness” (Marx 47) overruns the Edenic wonderland the Swede fetishizes; Rita’s infinite, sexual abundance becomes a grotesque nightmare for the Swede. Roth reverses a pastoral trope of American literature that Marx outlines in *The Machine in the Garden*: “the machine [is] a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction”, Marx writes, “[i]t invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape” (29). In *American Pastoral*, the interconnection between the land-as-female and the sexual tenderness of the landscape Marx posits as being traditional of American literature is skewed. Rita’s body, intertwined with the wilderness of the American land, is symbolically positioned as an aggressive counterforce to the Swede’s pastoral, which is defined as an ideological fantasy of idyllic satisfaction, upholding pernicious narratives of the American land-as-female.

Zuckerman’s Rita disrupts the wholeness that the Swede represented for Nathan as a child. The immaculate unity of the Swede’s masculine body is penetrated by the overwhelming smell of Rita’s vagina. As Seymour hovers over her, Rita begins to “reach inside herself with her hand”, and then extends the very same hand upward, as “[t]he tips of her fingers bore the smell of her right up to him. That he could not shut out, the fecund smell released from within” (AP 146). Rita collapses the divisions between the bodies’ interior and

exterior that simultaneously disrupts the fantasy of the Swede as an absolute figure of masculinity. Rita, whom Seymour identified initially as weak and insignificant, manages to violate Seymour through her genitalia; it is she who seizes power by penetrating the Swede's passive and powerless body.

The sexual disempowerment Seymour feels destabilizes him from his "dead center" (*AP* 146), and creates a conflict that perversely centres on paradoxical emotions of disgust and desire. Seymour, Roth writes, "was bursting so with impulse and counter impulse that he could no longer tell which of them had drawn the line that he would not pass over" (*AP* 147). The explosive language suggests a sexual desire here, one that is affirmed by the word "impulse", as the Swede has an ashamed urge to submit to his tormenter. Yet in the final moments of this climactic scene (pun intended), Rita

slipped each finger between her lips to cleanse it. "You know what it tastes like? Want me to tell you? It tastes like your d-d-d-daughter." [...] Here he bolted the room. With all his strength. [...] Faced with something he could not name, he had done everything wrong (*AP* 147).

The word "slipped" appropriately reflects the transgressive fluidity of bodies here, as Rita and Merry's orifices spill out from Rita's mouth in a borderless heap. Seymour flees the moment his daughter's insides are prolapsed by Rita. The Swede, one suspects, is still erect when Rita reveals that she has had sex with his daughter, and is overwhelmed by the shame and terror of being aroused the moment his daughter's vagina is verbally externalized. The contradictory feeling of disgust and desire, combined with Rita's performance as his daughter, confounds the Swede, whom Roth, through Zuckerman's earlier hypothesis, positions as a figure of singularity. That is, Seymour is a "good man" faced with a grotesque figure who attempts to eviscerate the Swede's pastoral fantasy life. The Swede's world is defined as a whole; a completed American model of living that is singular, solid, and unified, reified by Roth's emphasis on the Swede's muscular frame. Rita's grotesqueness destroys Nathan's childhood fantasy of Seymour's godlike solidity, as Zuckerman imagines Seymour

becoming undone when faced with the abject and unruly female body that symbolizes the counterforce of the American pastoral.

The Monster *Merry*

Like Rita, Merry acts as a counterforce to the Swede's pastoral. Nathan Zuckerman's reconstruction of Merry Levov heavily borrows from Jerry's description of her as a "monster daughter" (*AP* 67). I am interested in how Merry's monstrousness connects her with Milton's Satan, and the ways in which she influences Dawn's decision to abandon the Swede. Jerry informs Nathan that

Seymour was into quaint Americana. But the kid wasn't. He took the kid out of real time and she put him right back in. My brother thought he could take his family out of human confusion and into Old Rimrock, and she put them right back in (*AP* 68).

Jerry's summary of the struggle between Merry and her family animates Nathan's retelling of the story, as Merry, like Rita, assumes a Serpent-like role in destroying Seymour's Edenic life in Old Rimrock. I read Dawn and Merry differently from Catherine Morley, whose salient analysis posits the latter as a Miltonic Eve, who "sends the Adamic Seymour spiraling towards the Fall, unleashing a complicated anger at the nation and its unfulfilled promises" (103). I suggest, however, that Merry's bomb is the cataclysm that instigates Dawn's desire to transgress from the Swede, which is the turning point in Seymour's fall from "quaint Americana" (*AP* 68).

The comparison between Merry and Milton's Satan may seem incongruous at first particularly given the latter's infamy for his eloquent soliloquies. In Book Nine of *Paradise Lost*, Satan is compared to "some old orator renowned/ In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence/Flourished" (IV.670-672), and "his words replete with guile/Into her [Eve's] heart too easy entrance won" (IV.733-734). The guileful, considered eloquence of Satan's rhetoric is essential to the Fall of Adam and Eve, as Katherine Cox concisely points out, "[f]or the Fall to occur, the serpent must speak" (234). Merry, in contrast, suffers from a speech

impediment, and repeatedly struggles to articulate her political dissonance to her rather bewildered family. I contend that both Merry and Satan's speech is connected by their transgressive desires. As Christopher Eagles has observed, Merry's speech impediment serves as a symbolic form of protest against the formalistic structures of American English the Swede uses to create his Eden-like fantasy. Eagles reads this impediment as a "refusal to conform to her family's perfectionist demands [...which allows her to resist] gender and generational expectations" (21). Thus, when Merry tells the Swede, "I want to be f-f-f-free!" (AP 106), the dragging repetition of the consonant "f" underscores her unwillingness to conform to the normative standards of American language and culture, but simultaneously affirms her inability to break free from the social and linguistic structures she is bound by.⁹⁵ Merry's resistance to America's political and social hierarchies is illuminated when Merry and her grandfather debate the ensuing war in Vietnam. The latter, in an attempt to appease his granddaughter, sends Merry copies of letters he wrote to President Johnson in protest against the war in Vietnam. Unimpressed by her grandfather's actions, Merry tells Lou, "He's not going to s-s-s-stop the w-w-war, Grandpa, because you tell him to" (AP 288). He retorts with an impassioned defence of American democracy: "[h]oney, we live in a democracy. Thank God for that. You don't have to go around getting angry with your family. You can write letters. You can vote. You can get up on a soapbox and make a speech" (AP 289). The two's ideological disparities are illuminated within this telling scene. Lou, a democrat and stout proponent of American liberalism, fails to see beyond the social edifices he has successfully advanced through, ignoring the racial inequalities of American society.

⁹⁵ See also Sarah Bylund's "Merry Levov's BLT Crusade: Food-Fueled Revolt in Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, June 2010, pp. 13–30. Bylund highlights how Merry's excessive consumption of food serves to "dismantle the complacent pastoralism of the bourgeoisie American dream" (14).

Merry, on the other hand, seeks to destroy those institutions Lou celebrates. By bombing the post office in Hamlin's store, Merry ideologically retorts against her grandfather's letters. By destroying a place where letters (and thus, language) are sorted, catalogued, and disseminated, Merry is rejecting the racist American "democracy" her grandfather advocates. In other words, Merry destroys the unified, coherent, racially exclusionary American language her grandfather supports; her bombing of the post office is an extension of her stuttering voice, marking out her unwillingness to conform to the regular political and social processes she is expected to exist within.

Merry's body, like Rita's, threatens the Swede's idyllic existence through its abject excess. After receiving a tip-off from the mysterious Rita Cohen, Seymour rediscovers his daughter in a desolate hovel. Merry has become a Jain, devoting herself to a life of purity. She refuses to speak in anger or lie; renounces any form of sexual pleasure; repudiates any kind of material or emotional attachment, and rejects any form of killing (*AP* 239). Rita's extremes, her unaccountability, unknowability, and excessive sexuality, are superseded by Merry's excessive material negation; Seymour's daughter becomes a unified, singular non-being by abandoning herself to an extreme ideology centred around a grotesque ideal of selflessness.

Merry's uncleanliness initially makes her unrecognizable to the Swede. Confronted by his daughter, whom Roth describes as "not a daughter, a woman or a girl; what he [the Swede] saw, in a scarecrow's clothes, stick-skinny as a scarecrow, was the scantiest farmyard emblem of life, a travestied mock-up of a human being" (*AP* 239). Twice compared with a scarecrow, Merry is defined as a nightmarish reversal of the pastoral, a non-living stick figure that barely resembles a human. She is neither a daughter, a woman, or a girl in Seymour's eyes, but is instead defined as a scant emblem of life, a half-formed, half-alive mutilated mock-up of the Swede's daughter. Merry's physical collapse marks the breach of the border

between Self/Other, a dark and violent revolt, beyond the scope of the Swede's understanding: Merry is defiling the logic of existence by willing herself toward self-destruction.

In a telling act, the Swede attempts to take control of his daughter's body by grabbing open her mouth, symbolizing his facile effort to reassert his authority over his unruly daughter and her body. Nevertheless, when he opens her mouth he is overwhelmed by the stench of her breath:

[W]hat he smelled now, while pulling open her mouth, was a human being and not a building, a mad human being who grubs about for pleasure in its own shit. Her foulness had reached him. She is disgusting. [...] Her smell is the smell of everything organic breaking down. It is the smell of no coherence. [...] A spasm of gastric secretions and undigested food started up the intestinal piping and, in a bitter, acidic stream, surged sickeningly onto his tongue, and when he cried out, "*Who are you!*" it was spewed with his words onto her face (*AP* 265-6, italics in original).

The embodied humanness of Merry's foulness is what Seymour finds most horrifying. The return to a primordial mode of being, the negation of order in favour of incoherent mess and madness – this is what Seymour is faced with when he opens his daughter's mouth. The intoxicating stink is a grotesque opening into the abject where every facet of post-War American wholesomeness is eviscerated by the disturbing stench emanating from his daughter. Ann Basu rightly highlights how “[t]he Swede's revulsion at Merry's embodiment of this uncontrollability, this breaching of boundaries, leaves him unable any longer to contain his own bodily reactions” (69-70), but his vomit, in Kristevan terms, also marks his desire to re-affirm his own subjectivity. As Julia Kristeva explains, “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3, italics in original). The Swede's act of vomiting is doubled: it exhibits his disgust, but affirms his subjectivity. The Swede's outcry of “*Who are you!*” synthesizes with his vomiting. By interlinking the question of Merry's identity with the Swede's expulsion of

himself, Roth highlights how Seymour, faced with the abject, attempts to recreate and redefine the borders between him and his daughter.

Seymour abandons Merry in an attempt to preserve his fantasy life in Old Rimrock. He leaves his daughter in the hovel, rather inexplicably, at Merry's request. The Swede realizes

[t]his was his daughter, and she was unknowable. This murderer is mine. His vomit was on her face, a face that, but for the eyes, was now most unlike her mother's or her father's. The veil was off, but behind the veil there was another veil. Isn't there always? (AP 266).

Seymour's use of the word "this", an indeterminate pronoun, marks the ambiguous space Merry occupies, existing between subject and object, human/nonhuman, daughter/stranger. There is a Zuckerman-inflected reflexivity in this passage that stretches beyond the intellectual capacity Roth grants Seymour, which is particularly prevalent in the final two lines regarding Merry's veil. The last question is too epistemologically laden to belong to the ideologically naïve Seymour; Zuckerman's presence is explicit in this passage in order to forcibly underscore the parallels between hero and monster.

Both the Swede and Merry are defined through their obscured faces. Zuckerman compares the Swede's face to a "Viking mask" (AP 3), and Merry's veil symbolically echoes her father's cloaked appearance. The pair are ideological opposites, yet they are intertwined. As Ross Posnock observes, "Merry [...] is at once her rational, orderly father's nightmare opposite but also a grotesque version of his own project of purity" (112).⁹⁶ The Swede recognizes his daughter; he understands that she belongs to him, and thus he chooses to abandon her, because she is both his daughter and his monstrous foe. In forsaking Merry, he

⁹⁶ Likewise, Chris Gair highlights how Merry's "vow of purity, while apparently offering a 'renunciation' of her earlier actions, are in fact an extension of them, representing a symbolically murderous twist to Whitman's language of democratic freedom that, as we have seen, seeks to preclude the forms of human empathy upon which Whitman's America depends" (247).

attempts to re-enclose his Eden, but as I have highlighted, it is Dawn, not Merry, who finally instigates the Fall from Old Rimrock.

Through Eden took their Solitary way

Unlike Eugene Henderson's pastoral drama, the Swede's fantasy of "entering into the green" (Bellow 283) is centred in America, which focusses around the pastoralist house in Old Rimrock. Despite his father's remonstrations regarding the historic proximity of the Klu Klux Klan, Seymour naively equates his purchase of the house with the expeditions of the first settlers in America:

Next to marrying Dawn Dwyer, buying that house and the hundred acres and moving out to Old Rimrock was the most daring thing he had ever done. What was Mars to his father was *America* to him – he was settling Revolutionary New Jersey as if for the first time. Out in Old Rimrock, all of America lay at their door (*AP* 310, italics in original).

The correlation Seymour makes between his marriage to Dawn and the American landscape startlingly resembles Alexander Portnoy's puerile proclamation, "through fucking I will discover America." (*PC* 235). The latter explicitly connects the non-Jewish woman's body to his own subjective identity as a man and as an American. Portnoy jests, but the desire to belong as an American rather than as a Jewish American is a real and serious point of concern for Roth's beguiled narrator. As such, Portnoy identifies the non-Jewish woman's body as a means of making himself into the mythologized version of the "American" he fetishizes. The Swede, albeit more meekly and less obscenely, makes the same correlation. The marriage to Dawn and the purchase of their home in Old Rimrock enacts the same American endlessness Portnoy envisages in the "shiksa".

The Swede's fantasy of being an "American" is not as aggressively or directly predicated on conquering the female body; rather, his American fantasy is rooted in the myth of Johnny Appleseed, whom Seymour envisages himself as being:

Wasn't a Jew, wasn't an Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestant Christian – nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American. Big. Ruddy [...] a great walker was all Johnny Appleseed needed to be. All physical joy. Had a big stride and a bag of seeds and a huge, spontaneous affection for the landscape, and everywhere he went he scattered the seeds (*AP* 316).

The Swede creates a false binary: separating history and myth, failing to understand the ways in which the two are inseparably bound together. Thus, the Swede seeks to remove himself from the complex histories he associates religious identities with, aspiring instead to live in an alternate, mythologized version of America he envisions through the figure of Johnny Appleseed. The oversexed explicitness of Alexander Portnoy's rhetoric is absent, but the same carnal, malignant desire underpins the Swede's fantasy. His fetish for Appleseed's "physical joy" stems from the latter's freedom to spread his seeds across the land of America; the language is manifestly bodily: "big stride", "bag of seeds", "huge", and "scattered" (*AP* 316) are all pervasively sexualized and suggestive, exhibiting the over-masculinized rhetoric inherent in the myth Seymour defines America through.

Dawn is central to the Swede's Appleseed identification. Her name, as I discussed earlier, signifies a new beginning, and closely correlates with the Hebrew word for Eve (Chavah), which means "Mother of all life." Both women are constructed in relation to their male counterparts: Eve is constructed from the rib of Adam, whilst Dawn is imagined and reconstructed as the wife of Swede; her origins and life are told in relation to Zuckerman's fallen hero. Following Merry's bombing of the post office, Dawn has a mental breakdown, and accuses the Swede of objectifying her and holding him responsible for her hospitalization: "[h]ow have I wound up *here*? You, that's how! [...] You were like some *kid!* You had to make me into a *princess*. Well, look where I wound up! In a madhouse! Your princess in a *madhouse!*" (*AP* 178, italics in original). Dawn unravels not only because of her daughter's actions, but because of the pain induced through her newfound critique of the

Swede's ideology. She recognizes the ways in which her husband has objectified her into a sublimated figure of his pastoral drama, a princess for his Americana fantasy.

Dawn's outburst against the Swede, and her repudiation of her work as a beauty pageant model are vehemently blotted out by the doting husband: “[i]t was a great help to him, driving home after one of those visits, to remember her as the girl she had really been back then” (*AP* 180). The Swede refuses to confront his wife's feelings by remembering Dawn as he wishes her to be: a perfect, happy and young girl whom he was enraptured with. The Swede effectively others Dawn. Just as Milton's Adam loftily heralds Eve as his a “woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,/And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,/So fit, acceptable, so divine,” (X.138-139), the Swede denies Dawn her own subjectivity by returning to his version of Dawn's experience during the pageantry, obscuring and outright denying her a voice.

Like Eve, however, Dawn refuses to conform to the patriarchal authority. Merry's bomb serves the same function as Satan's acoustical charm: to enable man's Fall. Both Milton and Roth's Eve seek knowledge to no longer be “low and ignorant” (IX.704), and both women's transgressions are framed through their bodily desires. After the Serpent tempts Eve with the promise that she will be “[o]pened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods” (IX.708), Milton heavily sexualizes Eve's gaze upon the Tree of Knowledge:

Fixed on the fruit she gazed [...]
An eager appetite, raised by the smell
So savoury of that fruit, which with desire,
Inclinable now grown to touch or taste,
Solicited her longing eye (IX.735-744).

The word “fixed” returns us to the first moment in Milton's epic in which Eve sees herself. In Book IV, Eve finds a lake and sees her reflection in the water which has “answering looks/Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed/Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire” (IV.464-466). The word “fixed” suggests a stiffness, as though she were “erect” at the sight

of herself, whilst “desire” elucidates Eve’s fancy for her own likeness. The yearning for her own reflection symbolizes her longing to assume her own subjectivity, which would free her from the patriarchal authority of Adam and God. Milton employs the same carnal language when Eve gazes upon the fruit. She is inflamed with sensory desires. Her mouth, eyes, and nose are all enticed, as Eve’s appetite “raises her”. On the one hand, Eve feels uplifted by the possibilities of the fruit and the knowledge it possesses, but I suspect there is a playful secondary meaning here: the fruit empowers Eve with the possibility of possessing the phallus which would symbolically enable her to be “raised” and thus erect.

Dawn’s act of transgression is imbued with the same bodily desires that underpins Eve’s consumption of the fruit. After Merry’s bomb, Dawn begins to reinvent herself: “[t]he heroic renewal”, Roth writes, “began with the face-lift at the Geneva clinic she’d read about in *Vogue*” (*AP* 187). Conjunctively, Dawn begins to “build a small contemporary house on a ten-acre lot the other side of Rimrock and to sell the big old house” (*AP* 188), as she reveals to their neighbour and architect Bill Orcutt that she had always hated their house (*AP* 189). Dawn seeks to re-create her body and home, both of which symbolically serve as a refutation of the Swede’s pastoral. Like Milton’s Eve, Dawn’s “longing eye” (IX.744) is set on erecting a space for herself away from her Adam.

Ironically, Seymour cannot “see” his wife’s emotional complexity. When Dawn chooses to have a facelift, the Swede naively believes his wife has fully recovered from the ordeal of Merry’s bomb:

“He [the plastic surgeon] did a great job [...] Erased all that suffering. He gave her back her face.” No longer does she have to look in the mirror at the record of her misery. It had been a brilliant stroke: she had got the thing out from directly in front of her (*AP* 298).

The Swede fails to grasp the complexities of the trauma he and Dawn still suffer and struggle with; his gross oversimplification of Dawn’s emotional depth mirrors Zuckerman’s misidentification of the Swede, and accurately reaffirms his superficial understanding of

Dawn's subjectivity. Moreover, it is the almost invisible mother, Mrs. Levov, who observes that Dawn's pain is still viscerally present: "[m]aybe you erase the suffering from the face, but you can't remove the memory inside" (*AP* 298). Of course, the Swede only conceptualizes his wife through her exterior, and therefore believes "[s]he's fine" (*AP* 299).

The turning point arrives when Seymour sees his wife with Bill Orcutt, standing tightly together shucking corn, leaving the unwitting husband to ponder, "if he was only helping her learn to shuck corn, why, beneath the florid expanse of Hawaiian shirt, were his hips and his buttocks moving like that?" (*AP* 335). The shucking of the corn is emblematic of Dawn's intentions to strip herself away from the Swede, which has a dual meaning, as Seymour sees the bare desires and intentions of his wife for the first time.

At last the pastoral fantasy has been upturned, as the Swede reflectively declares to himself: "[t]he outlaws are everywhere. They're inside the gates" (*AP* 366). His Eden has been corrupted by the transgressive desirousness of his wife, whose disobedience was born from the Satanic actions of his daughter, Merry. Rita, Merry, and Dawn's sexually porous bodies disrupt and perturb the gender roles Seymour conceptualizes his Johnny Appleseed mythology through, which ties into the novel's final setting.

The climactic moments of the text are set during a dinner in which Roth explores the evolving political, moral, and cultural landscape of America. The conversation focuses on Watergate and the pornographic film, *Deep Throat*, and are predominantly driven by the over-emphatic Lou, the alleged moralist, Bill, and the provocateur, Marcia Umanoff, who provocatively proclaims, "[w]ithout transgression there is no knowledge" (*AP* 360). Umanoff is referring to the story of Adam and Eve, mockingly satirizing Lou's understanding of the tale that "when God above tells you not to do something, you damn well don't do it" (*AP* 360). Lou accepts the commandments and their authenticity in terms of authority, but

Umanoff, as her name suggests (you-man-off!), seeks to resist and rebel against the absolutism of patriarchy; she, like Rita, Merry, and Dawn, refuses to submit.

Roth correlates the unruly female body with the American landscape in the novel's concluding moments. As the Swede dreams of his daughter walking through "the lovely Morris County countryside that had been tamed over the centuries by ten American generations" (*AP* 419), Lou Levov is stabbed in the face by the drunk Mrs. Orcutt. The Swede's reverie of the "tamed" landscape is violently overthrown by the untameable Mrs. Orcutt. She strikes out after Lou attempts to spoon feed her, telling him, "*I feed Jessie*" (*AP* 422, italics in original). Mrs. Orcutt seeks to reclaim her authority and autonomy over her body by violently stabbing the face of the Levov patriarch, which symbolically serves as a refutation of the Swede's reverie of the tamed countryside. The novel ends with Roth's female characters lashing out against American patriarchy that has posited the land-as-female. Dawn is set to leave Seymour; Marcia loudly (and proudly) protests against Lou's patriarchy; Jessie, perhaps aware of her husband's infidelities, drinks herself into a stupor and violently attacks Lou; and Merry, the symbol of resistance, seems to have finally broken down her father's pastoralist dream: "the breach had been pounded in their fortification, even out here in secure Old Rimrock, and now that it was opened it would not be closed again. They'll never recover" (*AP* 423).

The women in *American Pastoral* break down what Kolodny calls "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine" (4). In the final two lines of the novel, Zuckerman's voice returns, satirizing the innocence of his own Swedian fantasy that the book began with: "what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" (*AP* 423). The seraphic purity of the Swede's harmonious existence is obliterated by Nathan's chronicle, as the ironic inflections of his questions signify a rupturing

from the Swedian innocent that echoes the end of *Paradise Lost*. Nathan, in rewriting the Swede, goes hand in hand with his hero, wandering steps and slow, but “Through Eden took their solitary way” (XII.649).

Chapter 4: Black Skin, Jewish Masks

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. – Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows – a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? – Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me. – Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

The Jewish Stain

Thus far, the thesis has analysed the Jewish body in Roth's fiction and its approximation to American and European constructions of whiteness. Each chapter has acknowledged and examined the racial ambivalences of Jewishness in America, but the ambiguous racial position the "Jew" occupies in Roth's fiction is usually in relation to bodies inscribed as "white" rather than "black". This final chapter focuses on Jewish blackness in Roth's literature and how this blackness is etched, performed, and articulated through the Jew's body. It is important to note that I am not discussing Roth's representation of African Americans in his works, nor do I use the term blackness in reference to the culturally diverse constellations of peoples who identify as black. Rather, I seek to understand how blackness was constructed somatically by white European and American racists as a way of dividing peoples into racial categories that maintains the racial "purity" of whiteness. I am particularly interested in examining how European antisemitism conceptualized the "Jew" as "black", and how this racial discourse transnationally emerged and evolved in non-Jewish and Jewish American imaginings of Jewish bodies. My focus here is on how Roth resists white racism through the symbolic Jewish body: Roth's fiction focuses on the corporeal porosity and leakiness of the body, symbolically undermining white racism's attempt to maintain racial differences that positions whiteness as a somatically unified, structural and biological whole.

Roth's interest in this symbolic blackness can be seen as early as *Goodbye, Columbus*, and I begin this chapter by giving a brief close reading of his short story, "Eli the Fanatic". In doing so, I underscore the ways in which Roth illuminates how "race" is inscribed through the body. Thereafter, I contextualize the interrelations between blackness and Jewishness, and how Roth explores the indeterminacy of "race" in America through his symbolical bodies. Finally, I offer an extensive close reading of *The Human Stain* that connects Coleman's Emersonian quest to become the "raw I" (HS 108) through the psychoanalytical works of

Frantz Fanon. Coleman dismissively identifies women as sexual objects, literally and metaphorically penetrating their bodies in order to make his blackness invisible. I question the sexist objectification of women in *The Human Stain* and how the novel's problematic phallocentric focus on women's bodies illuminates and potentially reinforces America's patriarchal social structures. I end the chapter by examining how whiteness represents death in *The Human Stain*, and question how Roth fictionalizes a Jewish difference that resists what Melville's Ishmael calls the "dumb blankness" of whiteness (228).

Set in the fictional suburb of Woodenton during the 1950s, "Eli the Fanatic" examines the ways in which American nouveau-riche Jews sublimated into whiteness by rejecting their "blackly" inflected Judaic past. Eli Peck is the protagonist of this parable-styled tale, who is set the task of closing down a Yeshiva school that has established itself in the suburb. Eli finds himself embroiled in a battle of wills against the school's headmaster, Leo Tzuref, who refuses to acculturate within America. The body is at the centre of this story, as Roth explores how American Jewry has acculturated into whiteness, and what is at stake in this collective assimilation.

Tzuref and the Yeshiva students threaten Woodenton's assimilated Jews because their religious attire distinctly marks them out as Jewish. When Tzuref turns his back to Eli, "he revealed the black circle on the back of his head. The crown of his head was missing!" (*EF* 187). Tzuref's body is presented as incomplete, severed, and marked by the skullcap which itself symbolizes Judaism's history that is encircled by a metaphoric blackness. According to Eli, Tzuref and his school endanger the assimilated Jews of Woodenton because they have only recently been allowed to purchase land in the area. "For this adjustment to be made", Eli writes in a letter to Tzuref,

both Jews and Gentiles alike have to give up some of their more extreme practices in order not to threaten or offend the other. Certainly such amity is to be desired. Perhaps if such conditions had existed in prewar Europe, the persecution of the Jewish people [...] could not have been carried out with such success – in fact, might not have been carried out at all (*EF* 195).

The mark of religious difference Tzuref represents, and indeed embodies, symbolizes an extreme mode of Judaism that endangers America's Jewish community because they may potentially offend their gentile neighbours. What “extreme” practices” did the Gentiles have to give up, Roth asks? Why is it that orthodox Judaism is labelled as radical and offensive? Eli’s alarming willingness to blame the victims of the Holocaust rather than the perpetrators underpins an anxious desire to make their religious differences invisible in order to acculturate, assimilate, and safely exist in the blankness of white American suburbia.

Whilst Tzuref serves as a dissenting voice that remains committed to Judaism, the almost mythical figure of “the greenie” signifies a bodily form of Jewishness that haunts the Woodenton suburbs. The Greenie emerges from “a deep hollow of blackness”, dressed in “a black coat that fell down below the [...] knees”, whose beard “hid his neck” and whose “face was no older than Eli’s” (*EF* 190). The name refers to “Greenhorn”, an idiom denigratingly used to define a recently arrived immigrant, which delineates the Chasid as an “outsider.” Roth troubles the Chasidic Jew’s foreignness however by connecting Eli to the “Greenie” through their facial appearance. The men’s similarities in terms of age highlight how Eli’s circumstances could have been radically different had he been born in Europe and not America. The “Greenie” is marked as a figure of otherness, but his alterity is defined solely through his religious attire and facial hair. As Brett Kaplan points out, the Greenie’s “blackness is not exactly racialized, and yet does it only trope religious fanaticism?” (26). I suggest the blackness of the Orthodox Jews represents the performative and thus precarious fluidity of Jewishness that operates between the racial labels of “black” and “white.” Though Eli and his fellow suburbanites seek to extinguish their religious difference through

assimilation, Tzuref and the Yeshiva remain committed to their religious identity. As Kathryn Bloom observes, the Greenie is “the despised *shtetl* greenhorn [...] remind[ing] assimilated American Jews of their post-Holocaust survivor guilt” (69). The Greenie embodies a racial, religious, and cultural otherness that terrifies Woodenton’s American Jews because they see the *Ostjuden* as an unassimilable figure whose presence reminds white American Christians of their Jewish neighbours’ foreignness. The Yeshiva staff express their Judaism both performatively (the children’s speech is derisively marked as a “babble” [EF 188] that seems likely to refer to Yiddish rather than Hebrew) and through performance, as demonstrated by Tzuref and the greenie’s religious attire. Eli, of course, does neither: his religious identity is neither spoken of, nor performed; he and the suburban community seek to make Judaism invisible within the white space of Woodenton.

Woodenton Jewry’s anxiety of not being accepted as “Americans” centres on an urgent desire to be visibly recognized as “white” rather than as “Jewish”. As Victoria Aarons insightfully points out, the orthodox Jew’s “presence in the town is a measure and felt reminder of what suburban Jews have feared all along: that they will never be accepted, never made members of the club, so to speak” (14). The body operates as a site for them to perform their adapted whiteness by dressing and appearing as white Americans. In other words, they repress and reject anything they consider “Jewish looking.” Eli demands that the religious activities of the Yeshiva school remain confined to the Yeshiva grounds, and that the Yeshiva staff “are attired in clothing usually associated with American life in the 20th century” (EF 196). To this, Tzuref concisely replies, “[t]he suit the gentleman wears is all he’s got” (EF 196). The suit becomes a metonym for Jewishness itself; the religious garbs symbolize a lost culture and heritage, precariously existing in a country where antisemitism remains committed to extinguishing Judaism’s cultural heritage.

Ironically, however, whiteness is initially associated with lightness in “Eli the Fanatic”. After his first encounter with the Yeshiva staff, Eli flees, “hurry[ing] towards the light” (*EF* 190) of his suburban home. The Christian-like image positions Woodenton as a salvation-like space from the gloomy darkness of the Yeshiva school. Yet as Steven Milowitz observes, “[w]hite becomes associated with falsity, with impurity, with the lie, and black with honesty, resilience, and strength” (170). “Eli the Fanatic” positions whiteness as a toxic kind of purity that manifests and controls bodies by constructing racial binaries seeking to obliterate and distort religious and cultural differences. Woodenton’s Jews, like the white racists of American society, fear the Yeshiva boys will “spill [...] down into town”, and potentially go “after our daughters” (*EF* 193). The word “spill” suggests an overflow, a porous, uncontrollable leak that positions the orthodox Jews as a sexual and racial threat for Woodenton’s assimilated Jews. In Roth’s rather acerbic portrayal of American Jewry, the nouveau riche fathers seek to protect their daughters from Orthodox Jews, presumably hoping their offspring will marry gentiles or assimilated Jews. They strive to preserve the “purity” of their family’s identities and continue to reconstruct themselves as “white” (Jews).

Through the character of Eli, Roth examines what happens to those American Jews that refuse to exist in this sublimated white suburbia: what becomes of the Jew who returns to Judaism in 1950s America? In the Rothian universe, they are committed to a mental asylum. The story dramatically unfurls when Eli, in an attempt to appease both the suburban Jews and Tzuref, sends one of his green suits to the Greenie. Much to Woodenton Jewry’s delight, he dons the uniform and strolls through the streets, but in exchange sends his orthodox garb to Eli. “Inside the box”, Roth writes, “was an eclipse” (*EF* 212), and this imagery signifies the obscuration of Eli’s subjectivity; the division between himself and the Greenie is occulted in an almost mystical moment in which the two’s bodies yoke together.

Eli's transformative return to Jewishness is symbolically realized when he puts on the Greenie's outfit. Eli lays the contents of the box onto the dining room table, noting how the jacket, trousers, and vest "smelled deeper than blackness" (*EF* 212). Seemingly overcome by the religious apparel he has been given, Eli dons the costume and heads to the hospital to be with his newly born son, and feels "those black clothes as if they were the skin of his skin – the give and pull as they got used to where he bulged and buckled" (*EF* 217). Though Eli imagines the clothes to have synthesized with his flesh, the religious garb remain separate from him. The clothes can be shed from Eli's body, which signifies a gap between Judaism's past and white American Jewry's suburban present. As Aarons points out, "[d]onning the clothes becomes an allegory for the impossibility of embracing the past in any simple or single way" (17). The spuriousness of Eli's embrace of the past is further complicated by his mental health: Eli has had two nervous breakdowns, and when he dons the Greenie's suit, his family and friends presume him to be having yet another mental collapse.

The story ends with Eli being castigated by the community, stripped of his clothing, and sedated by two interns in white suits (*EF* 220): "[i]n a moment they tore off his jacket – it gave so easily, in one yank. Then a needle slid under his skin. The drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached" (*EF* 221). Eli's jacket is torn from him in a flash, showing the abrupt ease with which Jewish religious culture has been stripped and destroyed by white racism. Eli's religious "turn" is positioned by his family as a medical matter, meaning his agency and autonomy are manipulatively denied him.

The ending is somewhat optimistic in that the needle fails to reach the symbolic blackness that exists within Eli. Milowitz offers a compelling reading of the story's climax, arguing that "[b]lackness is not a disease to be erased, and whiteness is not a cure; the dark that cannot be touched by modern medicine is Eli's individuality" (171). If Eli's fanaticism represents an individualism entrenched in Jewish difference, then Roth's story ends by

affirming Jewishness as a means of resisting whiteness and its racial and religious cultural purification. Yet the blackness Eli feels is shrouded in an ambivalence that is never properly elucidated; it remains obscure, abstract, and impossible to define, emptying its promise as a means of resistance. If this blackness cannot be touched or seen, can it be spoken? Can the blackness of Jewishness and/or Judaism be reclaimed and celebrated as a marker of difference that unsettles and displaces the categories of “race” and religion? If so, how does Roth utilize this metaphorical blackness within his fiction? In *The Human Stain* (2000), Roth writes a novel that explores the racial ambiguity of Jewishness, and the ways in which the heterogeneity of Jewishness can be used as a means of resisting the purifying whiteness that reduces Eli to a fanatic.

The Blackness of the Jewish Body

Unlike so many of Roth’s early works which examine male desire, “Eli, the Fanatic” considers how the body operates as a site of social inscription. This becomes an important thematic motif within Roth’s later works, particularly in *The Human Stain*, which specifically concentrates on the interrelationship between Jewishness, blackness, and the body. Before I examine the novel, I first need to clarify the racial symbolism I have discussed here. “Eli the Fanatic” intentionally draws on antisemitic stereotypes that, as Sander Gilman has shown, positioned Jews as black. Before discussing *The Human Stain*, I first must unpack how blackness has been racially constructed in opposition to whiteness, and how the body operates in this racialized binary.

In the seventh chapter of *The Jew’s Body*, Gilman asks an important and telling question: “[a]re Jews White?” (169). The significance of the question will become evident as I examine the racial ambiguities of Ashkenazi Jewry, but what is telling is how Jewishness is

approximated in relation to whiteness rather than blackness.⁹⁷ My focus is on how white American racism constructs blackness in opposition to whiteness, and the ways in which Jewishness has likewise been positioned as a threat to white identities. Gilman's research is hugely important because it examines "how the category of race present within Western, scientific, and popular culture, has shaped Jewish self-perception" (170), and the ways in which the Jews' body has been constructed both symbolically and literally as "black." Gilman illuminates a pattern within nineteenth century scientific literature that connects the black, Jewish, and diseased body: "[b]y the mid-century, being black, being Jewish, being diseased, and being 'ugly' come to be inexorably linked. All races, according to the ethnology of the day, were described in terms of aesthetics, as either 'ugly' or 'beautiful'" (Gilman 173). The body determined and imbued individuals with a socio-economic value, as physiognomies of ethno-racial groups were hierarchized based on stereotypes that were constructed somatically.

Essentially, Gilman states that Jewishness was racially defined as black: "[t]he general consensus of the ethnological literature of the late nineteenth century was that the Jews were 'black' or, at least, 'swarthy'" (171). Recently, Ran HaCohen has challenged this claim, contending Gilman's readings of certain sources are from mistranslations. Essentially, HaCohen argues that the "notion of a pervasive 'Jewish blackness' from early times to the twentieth century thus seems to rely on an undifferentiated conceptual framework and inattentive reading of the source" (7).⁹⁸ HaCohen's challenge of Gilman raises important

⁹⁷ Jewish studies scholarship has until recently overlooked black Jewish lives. The blackness of the "Jew" is analysed as a metaphor, or is considered in terms of antisemitic conceptualizations of Jewishness. My research likewise examines antisemitism's depiction of Jews as "black", but I feel it necessary here to address the dangerous potential of erasing Jews of colour. See Tudor Parfitt's *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas* (2013) as an example of recent scholarship that works to highlight black Jewish lives.

⁹⁸ See Parfit's "The Color of Jews", pp.1-13 in *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas*, for a fuller exploration of how Jews were conceptualized as "black" and the correlations made

questions concerning the overarching argument regarding Jewish blackness, particularly regarding the distinctions between racial conceptualizations of the Jewish and Black body.

My interest here is how the Jewish body in America was distinctly marked out, and how this racialization compared with how Black bodies were constructed.⁹⁹ In *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (2016), George Yancy highlights how the “Black body has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted materially, psychologically, and morally invested in to ensure both white supremacy and the illusory construction of the white subject as a self-contained substance” (17). As Gilman’s work has shown, modern antisemitism used the Jew’s body in an almost identical manner, conceptualizing Jewish difference somatically to construct the white European subject as a separate and “beautiful” entity. Yet within an American context, the Jew’s body is racially abstracted in a way that is distinct from the corporeal racialization of the Black body.

Daniel Itzkovitz highlights how Jews in modern America were both “White and racially other, American and foreign, deviant and normative, vulgar and highly cultivated [...] all of which made them seem at once inside and inescapably outside of normative White American culture” (38). The “Jew” signifies instability; their bodies are uncannily similar to conceptualizations of “whiteness”, but as Itzkovitz points out, “Jewish difference is a difference with no content, or, more exactly, with a fluid and ever-shifting content that cannot mark Jewishness as distinct” (179-80). The “Jew” is positioned as a threat because Jewish difference cannot be defined within the parameters of “race” or even religion.

The “insider/outsider” status Jews inhabited in American society imbued Jewish people with a particularly distinct socio-economic position in that they were legally

between Black and Jewish bodies. Parfit builds and develops from Gilman and gives a more expansive account of how Jews were corporeally conceived of as “black”.

⁹⁹ My capitalization of “Black” follows from George Yancy, whose work has hugely influenced this chapter; it is a small gesture to bring to focus how Black Lives Matter, and the racial inequalities inherently present within American and European social structures.

recognized as “white”. The concept that Jews (or indeed any other group of peoples that migrated from Europe) “became” white has recently been challenged by sociologists Philip Yang and Koshy Kavitha. They examine the US censuses, and highlight how these European minorities were always able to identify and bracket themselves within the category of “white.”¹⁰⁰

Whilst I am wary of promulgating the notion that Jews have always been “white” given the socio-economic barriers Jews have faced in American society, I raise Yang and Kavitha’s research to underscore an important distinction between Jewish and Black bodies.¹⁰¹ Within the context of America, the Jewish body has not been posited in opposition to whiteness; instead, whites feared Jews precisely because their bodies were uncannily approximate to conceptions of whiteness.

However, as Frantz Fanon and George Yancy have shown, the Black body has been positioned into an antithesis of whiteness. “The structure of whiteness is binary,” Yancy writes, “[w]hiteness requires the so-called degraded and dangerous Black body. It is this structural requirement that reveals both the social constructed nature of whiteness and its deep fragility” (xiv). Yancy’s *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (2016) explores how the “white gaze” (de)constructs black bodies into monstrous figures of otherness, highlighting the ways in which America’s legal system sought to separate white and black bodies. The “one drop of blood” rule exemplifies the ways in which racial differences are legally codified. If an individual has any “trace” or “mark” of African American lineage, they are marked and

¹⁰⁰ See Philip Yang and Kavitha Koshy, “The ‘Becoming White Thesis’ Revisited.” *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*, pp.1-27. The argument seems to overlook the symbolism of whiteness referred to by scholars such as Roediger and Brodkin. The very idea of “becoming” white is inherently impossible because whiteness itself is a social construct that is not fixed or stable.

¹⁰¹ Despite often being considered “white”, Jews were institutionally discriminated against. Antisemitism flourished in universities across America, particularly within the Ivy League schools. See Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005) and Eunice Pollack’s *Antisemitism on the Campus: Past & Present*. Academic Studies Press, 2011.

defined as “black”.¹⁰² As Neil Gotanda contends, “[t]he metaphor is one of purity and contamination: [w]hite is unblemished and pure, so one drop of ancestral Black blood renders one Black. Black is a contaminant that overwhelms ancestry” (qtd. in López, 20). Jews were likewise positioned as contaminants and threats, but the racial ambiguity of the Jewish body meant that Jews were able to “hide” their differences from the view of whites. Yancy contends that the fundamental difference between the Black and “European immigrant” was the way in which the law was used to separate white and Black bodies: “[a]nti-miscegenation laws and the so-called one-drop rule kept [... racial divisions] firmly in place for Blacks, while for Irish or Italian immigrants their alleged ‘essence’ might be said to dissipate eventually through assimilation” (19).

Whilst the Jewish body in America threatens whiteness because of its somatic instability, the Black body has been trapped by the “white gaze” that seeks to transfix blackness into whiteness’s opposite: “the Black body has been confiscated to serve the needs of whiteness. The white gaze has fixed the Black body within its own procrustean frame of reference” (Yancy 4). In other words, the white gaze immobilizes Black bodies within a particular category of presumed racist stereotypes, whilst the Jewish body threatens precisely because it seems to resist categorical immobilization. As Yancy observes, “[t]he Black body [...] is by nature criminal, because the white body [...] is by nature innocent, pure, and good” (37, italics in original).

Yancy’s work follows Frantz Fanon’s ground-breaking text, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), a psychoanalytic exploration of “race” that unpacks the ways in which colonized

¹⁰² The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (1896) is the most cited example of the “one drop of blood” rule. Plessy was 7/8 white and 1/8 Black, and contended that he should be allowed to sit on the whites-only railroad car. Plessy ultimately lost the case and was demarcated as “Black”. Yancy contends that ultimately the “white gaze as a racist socio-epistemic aperture will “see” a threatening Black body in white” (31). That is, the Black body is transfixed by the dangerous stereotypes associated with Blackness, even if the body identified as “Black” seems to be “white”.

identities are constructed through white gazes. Fanon, following Jean-Paul Sartre's essay, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, argues, “*it is the racist who creates his inferior*” (93, italics in original). Ann Pellegrini explains that “the colonizer generates the fiction of his self-identity by displacing difference elsewhere, onto the colonized, who became the placeholder of absolute difference” (70). The displacement of the colonized subject imprisons them within an objectified space that robs them of their autonomy.

Fanon is particularly interested in examining how the individual becomes representative of their racial category. “Caught in the white gaze”, Pellegrini contends, “the black is always *only* a race-woman or a race-man, always *only* a representative type of her or his group. The individual-as-such does not exist” (92, italics in original). In the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon recounts a moment in which he is racially abused:

“Dirty nigger!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro!” I came into the world imbued with the will to find meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. [...] I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together by another self (109).

The command “Look” underpins the ways in which “race” is conceptualized through a visual ontology; the Blackness of the body is constituted as both abject and inhuman through the utterance of the racial slur etched onto the skin. Racism destroys Fanon, annihilating his aspirations to uncover meaning in the world that centred on an understanding of himself as a human being, a subject. The racist appellation aimed at his body blows him up, reducing him into an object that represents a collective racial group. Fanon writes later that the “corporeal schema crumbled, its place was taken by a racial epidermal schema” (112). The subject is replaced by a racial body that begins with the flesh being marked as “Black”, as Fanon contends, “with the Negro the cycle of the *biological* begins” (161, italics in original).

Fanon’s work is concerned with the individual’s struggle to assert themselves against a system of identification that categorizes individuals within racial castes that dehumanizes

and destroys subjects. Fanon ends *Black Skin, White Masks* with a powerful proclamation and prayer that seeks to move beyond racial classifications:

At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness.

My final prayer:

O my body, make of always a man who questions! (232).

Fanon desires mutuality: his Whitman-inflected call to see the open door of humanity's collective consciousness seeks out a world that does not castigate bodies into static categories. The construction of "race", or rather the process of racialization, imbues bodies with social and economic values. In American society, Pellegrini contends, "[w]hiteness dissimulates its own race relations; [...] Whiteness produces itself as the unmarked, the universal term by projecting the burden of difference onto other bodies" (92). In other words, the white, unmarked body is symbolically clean and untouched. The Black (or indeed, Jewish) body is literally marked out and thus made into a racialized "stain".

The Human Stain

Like Fanon, Roth is deeply invested in examining bodies that are marked as different, as racially "other." In *The Human Stain*, Roth explores how the racialized body is made monstrous and abject, and follows Fanon's examination of how the marked body can resist, deconstruct, and surpass colonialism's racial schema. *The Human Stain* develops from "Eli, the Fanatic" in terms of how Roth explores the ambiguous racial position of Jewishness and its approximation to conceptualizations of Black and white bodies. In *The Human Stain*, Roth's bodies are deceptive, unstable, and porous, signifying a symbolic resistance to the crystallization of subjects within the specific category of "race". Roth transforms the porosity and volatility of the body into a symbolic site of meaning that disturbs social divisions that rely on bodies to be cohesive and orderly. Leaking orifices assume a significant symbolic function in *The Human Stain*, representing "sites of cultural marginality, places of social

entry and exit, regions of confrontation or compromise” (Grosz, 193). I look at how Roth’s bodies rupture the rigidity of categorical markings by stressing the intersecting links Roth creates between sex and “race” in America’s social structures.

My reading of Roth’s novel draws from Mary Douglas’s influential *Purity and Danger*, which highlights how concepts of pure and impure are relative relationally to certain socio-cultural groups. Douglas contends that “rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience” (2) which fosters a sense of social cohesion that is centred on assigning meaning to different bodies and bodily functions. *The Human Stain* explores the intersectional ways “race” and sex are used to create distinctions between pure and impure bodies. The novel asks whose lives matter in America? How are American lives measured and valued, and how does “race” and sex influence the ways in which American lives are defined as “American” and as “human”?¹⁰³

In *The Counterlife* Nathan Zuckerman proclaims we are “the invention of each other, everybody a conjuration conjuring up everyone else. We are all each other’s authors” (*CL* 149). *The Human Stain* continues *The Counterlife*’s exploration of how subjects are constructed through a constellation of narratives, but expands its subject to the matter of “race” in America that includes and develops beyond the multiplicities of Jewishness. Through the characters of Coleman Silk, Nathan Zuckerman, and Faunia Farley, Roth explores how individuals are invented and reinvented through the imaginations of others, and what is a stake in this collective (re)conjuring when bodies are defined in terms of “race” and sexuality.

¹⁰³ In “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, Judith Butler asks “[w]ho counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what *makes* for a *grievable life?*” (10, italics in original). These questions underpin the chapter’s focus on Roth’s novel, and the ways in which bodies are positioned as “grievable”.

The Human Stain is, as the title suggests, a novel about humanness.¹⁰⁴ The universality of the word “human” posits a shared site of identification, yet simultaneously invites questions as to who or whom can be considered “human.” Who is marked out as “non-human” and why? How is humanness categorized, defined, and understood in relation to the non-human, the animal, or the inanimate object? Furthermore, the determiner “the” grounds humanity within a singular frame that is recognizable and distinct (in this case, “the human”). Yet the object “stain” is ambiguous, both in terms of its own symbolic or literal meaning and in relation to “the human”. Is humanness inherently connected to a figurative or literal kind of marking? How then might we distinguish between human stains and non-human stains?

The Human Stain is set during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, in which President Bill Clinton was almost impeached after lying to Congress over his affair with his secretary, Monica Lewinsky. The affair was made public after the President’s semen was discovered on Lewinsky’s blue dress, and the title of Roth’s novel seems to allude to this very stain. The affair signifies a threat to America’s social order; it becomes a focal point for the nation that becomes obsessed by the president’s act of indecency. Narrated by the isolated and impotent Nathan Zuckerman, the novel begins shortly after Clinton’s failed impeachment, which Roth’s narrator defines as “the summer when a president’s penis was on everyone’s mind, and life, in all its shameless impurity, once again confounded America” (*HS* 3). For Roth, the obsession with Clinton’s penis represents a continuation of what Nathaniel Hawthorne called “the persecuting spirit” (*HS* 2) of America. The affair between the two represents an act of immorality that is categorized as “dirty”. Grossz contends this symbolic dirt “signals a site of possible danger to social and individual systems, a site of vulnerability insofar as the status of dirt as marginal and unincorporeable always locates a site of potential threat to the system”

¹⁰⁴ I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Jane Goldman for sharing their lecture on *The Human Stain*, which inspired this close reading of the novel’s title.

(192). The affair creates a moralistic frenzy in which “some kind of demon had been unleashed in the nation and, on both sides, people wondered “‘Why are we so crazy?’” (*HS* 3).

The stain on Lewinsky’s blue dress represents her and Clinton’s vulnerability as human beings. “I myself,” Zuckerman observes, “dreamed of a mammoth banner, draped dadaistically like a Christo wrapping from one end of the White House to the other and bearing legend *A HUMAN BEING LIVES HERE*” (*HS* 3). The reflexivity of the first person pronoun highlights the separateness Nathan feels in relation to the rest of the American public, many of whom he describes as “confounded” (*HS* 3) by Clinton’s libidinous recklessness and potential abusiveness. The Dadaist banner reflects the absurd excessiveness of American outrage, but the underlying message is potentially problematic in its unapologetically sympathetic treatment of Clinton given the numerous sexual assault allegations against the former president.¹⁰⁵ Anthony Hutchison has argued that “*The Human Stain* is a novel not so much concerned with Bill Clinton but with the values of an age in which he could emerge as such a divisive figure” (136). Hutchison is quite correct in their observation, but I think it fair to highlight the simple fact that Roth’s choice of Clinton as a metaphor has aged poorly. Clinton does not represent a debased and democratic humanity; rather, he symbolizes the corruptibility of white male power and privilege. Nevertheless, for Roth, the hysteria surrounding Clinton is tellingly reflective of America’s fetish for cleanliness centred on the purification of the body.

¹⁰⁵ Bill Clinton was accused of sexual assault and sexual harassment on numerous occasions. Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, sued Clinton during his presidency for allegedly exposing himself to her when he was governor. Kathleen Willey claimed Clinton fondled her in the Oval office in 1993, and Juanita Broaddrick accused Clinton of rape during his 1978 campaign for Arkansas governor. Sourced from Dylan Matthews’ article, “The Rape Allegation against Bill Clinton, Explained.” *Vox*, 6 Jan. 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/6/10722580/bill-clinton-juanita-broaddrick>.

The Persecuting Spirit

The Human Stain is a continuation of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of its exploration of how bodies are marked as pure or impure. Mark Shechner calls *The Human Stain* a "moral romance, a *Scarlet Letter* about race" (188), and this neatly encapsulates the ways in which Roth's novel interlinks Hawthorne's exploration of sexual politics with Fanon's examination of "race".¹⁰⁶

At the centre of *The Human Stain* is Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's hermit-like writer who remains committed to a life of isolation and separation in a two-room Berkshire cabin. Zuckerman returns to the "goyish wilderness" (*TGW* 68) he fled to in *The Ghost Writer*, but instead of seeking the validation of E.I. Lonoff, Nathan abandons himself to nature and his writing. The monasticism of Zuckerman's isolation is apoplectically extirpated by the inconsolably rancorous Coleman Silk, who bursts into Nathan's home following the death of his wife, Iris, demanding Zuckerman write Coleman's story in order to clear his name and repudiate the charges of racism.

The initial discussion between the two instigates one of the text's central concerns: the interdependencies of individuals to be seen, heard, and thus recognized as human beings. *The Human Stain* asks how individuals are defined as "Americans," and what happens to those that are excluded from this national identity.¹⁰⁷ Roth's grandiose exploration begins with the microcosmic "spooks" episode, where Coleman is publically disgraced and labelled as a "racist" after asking if the two absentee students "exist or are [...] spooks?" (*HS* 6). The two students transpire to be African American, and register a complaint against Coleman for

¹⁰⁶ For more on Hawthorne's influence on *The Human Stain*, see Gabrielle Seeley and Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky's "'The Pointless meaningfulness of living': Illuminating *The Human Stain* through *The Scarlet Letter*" in *Philip Roth: American Pastoral, The Human Stain, The Plot Against America*, pp.93-111.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Maslan saliently observes that "*The Human Stain* is only nominally about an individualists' struggle against the group; it is essentially about an American's struggle to realize his nationality" (379).

using a racial slur. The incident tarnishes Coleman's reputation as a respected academic who had been instrumental in the radical restructuring of Athena College that brought in its first African American professor.

Rather ironically, Coleman is the target of antisemitism when he first arrives at Athena. Coleman, Nathan explains, "was one of a handful of Jews on the Athena faculty and perhaps the first of the Jews permitted to teach in a classics department in America" (5). Furthermore, Coleman was the only Jew to ever serve as dean of faculty, and during his tenure he became a target of antisemitism because, "he brought in competition, he made the place competitive, which, as an early enemy noted, 'is what Jews do'" (*HS* 9). The antisemitism Coleman faced is illuminated to show how he has faced racial prejudice, and perhaps make doubtful his alleged racism. Of course, this is not to suggest that Coleman is immune to intolerance because he has experienced antisemitism, but the inclusion of this scene serves to trouble the accusation.

Nevertheless, Coleman is branded a racist, and is effectively denounced and isolated by his colleagues and peers, many of whom he hired. Friendless and widowed, Coleman seeks out Nathan to write "the story in all of its absurdity", because if he were to write the tale on his own, "nobody would believe it, nobody would take it seriously" (*HS* 11). Coleman's reliance on Nathan seems in part to stem from his position as a "professional writer" (*HS* 11), as the accused academic seeks to undo the charges of racism. In effect, Coleman wants to write a new narrative of himself that corrects the "false image of him" which "had not merely misrepresented a professional career conducted with the utmost seriousness and dedication – they had killed his wife of over forty years" (*HS* 11). Coleman's story underpins the dangerous underside of *The Counterlife*'s thesis that "[w]e are all each other's authors" (*CL* 149).

Unlike *The Counterlife*, there are no “postmodern” parlour games here; the dead stay dead in *The Human Stain*. Ira Silk’s death is fatal and final, not farcical, leaving Coleman to mourn and rage against those who have wronged him. The collapse of the imperious dean is a spectacle for Nathan, who admits “[t]here is something fascinating about what moral suffering can do to someone who is in no obvious way a weak or feeble person” (HS 12). Coleman’s extravagant unravelling is likened to a decapitated chicken: “[h]is head had been lopped off [...] and what I was witnessing was the amputated rest of him spinning out of control” (HS 11). Coleman is effectively castrated. The power he once possessed as an academic and former dean is ruthlessly cut from him, and what Nathan is confronted by is a flailing, headless carcass. Though tragic, Nathan finds Coleman’s collapse captivating, and almost comedic in its calamity.

Unlike the tragic Ira Ringgold of the preceding novel, or the hapless Swede of *American Pastoral*, Coleman is able to reinvent and remove himself from the controversy he is mired by. Two years after the “spooks” episode, he reveals to Nathan that he is having an affair with Faunia Farley, a thirty-four-year-old janitor who is illiterate. After Coleman tries and fails to write his own account of the “spooks” saga, which he laments as a “parody of the self-justifying memoir” (HS 19), he appears to be liberated. “Now that he was no longer grounded in his hate, we were going to talk about women. This *was* a new Coleman. Or perhaps an old Coleman [...] the Coleman contaminated by desire alone” (HS 20, italics in original). Unfettered by rage and grief, Coleman is unbound, and singularly defined by his “desire” which is inherently connected to Faunia’s body. Yet the unitary insulation of Coleman’s desire seems suspiciously approximate to the “spooks” encounter in terms of how Zuckerman relays the events. As Peter Brooks highlights, desire is rooted in “a desire to possess, and also a desire to know” (11), and it seems Coleman’s yearning for Faunia remains rooted in his wish to be seen and recognized as he demands.

Faunia, I suggest, is encoded politically; her body represents a kind of canvas for Coleman to express himself through. As such, Coleman's fetishization of Faunia threatens to overlook her subjectivity by sexualizing her into a fantastical object. Coleman reveals to Nathan that he has nicknamed her as "Voluptas" (*HS* 34), the name of the daughter born from Cupid and Psyche whose name means "pleasure." She assumes a problematically mythic quality within the text itself, verging (in a similar manner to Merry Levov) on the unrealistic, the unbelievable. Indeed, Nathan compares Coleman to "Aschenbach feverishly watching Tadzio" (*HS* 51), affirming the crazed excess in which Faunia's body is metamorphosed into a site of sexual desire. Faunia is presented purely in terms of how both Zuckerman and Coleman see her: she is defined and described by the gazing Zuckerman, whose interpretation of her is greatly influenced by Coleman.

In a particularly telling scene, Coleman and Nathan visit Faunia at her place of work, the Organic Livestock whose produce is heralded in the local paper as though it were a "redemptive religious rite" (*HS* 46). The farm itself becomes a tantalizing space for Roth to examine the entwining images of "pure" and "impure" here, and the ways in which Faunia's body is enmeshed as an almost biblically central figure monastically herding and milking the cows within the field:

There was, at first glance, little to raise unduly one's carnal expectations about the gaunt, lanky woman spattered with dirt, wearing shorts and a T-shirt and rubber boots, whom I saw in with the herd that afternoon and whom Coleman identified as his Voluptas. The carnally authoritative-looking creatures were those with the bodies that took up all the space, the creamy-colored cows with the free-swinging, girderlike hips and the barrel-wide paunches and the disproportionately cartoonish milk-swollen udders, the unagitated, slow-moving, strife-free cows, each a fifteen-hundred-pound industry of its own gratification, big-eyed beasts for whom chomping at one extremity from a fodder-filled trough while being sucked dry at the other by not one or two or three but by four pulsating, untiring mechanical mouths – for whom sensual stimulus simultaneously at both ends was their voluptuous due. Each of them deep into a bestial existence blissfully lacking in spiritual depth: to squirt and to chew, to crap and to piss, to graze and to sleep – that was their whole *raison d'être* (*HS* 47-48).

There is nothing flattering or sexual in Nathan's description of Faunia here; instead, she is described as haggard and spindly in height. Yet it is precisely this imperfection that both men find so captivating. Faunia exists here as an exulted figure of the impure; the pastoral-shepherd of "crap and piss" (HS 48) that is the absolute antithesis of the Swede's Johnny Appleseed. She immerses herself in the dirtiness of life, surrounded by cows whose lives revolve around bodily excretions and secretions, digestions and expulsions. The peculiar romanticism of this scene places Faunia as a symbolic matriarch of sexual and spiritual virility. As Derek Parker Royal rightfully contends, "[t]he associations of feminine or maternal wholesomeness give emphasis to Coleman's newfound vivacity and what it might represent to the aging novelist" (130). Yet Faunia's femininity is far removed from the biblical innocence of Maria in *The Counterlife* or the Eve-like immaculacy of Dawn in *American Pastoral*. Faunia's vivaciousness seems to stem from her willingness to embrace the shitty, impurities of life.

Coleman and Faunia's relationship instigates Nathan's return to the material world of sex, the body, and sexual desire. As Coleman and Nathan discuss the former's libidinous past affairs, Coleman directs Nathan to "[c]ome on" and "[g]et up" (HS 25), an ironic set of commands given the author's incontinence and impotence. Nevertheless, Zuckerman acquiesces, and the two dance the fox trot together, with Coleman assuming the lead position:

There was nothing overtly carnal in it, but because Coleman was wearing only his denim shorts and my hand rested easily on his warm back as if it were the back of a dog or a horse, it wasn't entirely a mocking act. There was a semi-serious sincerity in his guiding me about on the stone floor, not to mention a thoughtless delight in just being alive, accidentally and clownishly and for no reason alive – the kind of delight you take as a child when you first learn to play a tune with a comb and toilet paper (HS 26).

Coleman's warm, naked back creates for Zuckerman a "delight in just being alive", enabling Nathan to embrace the adventitious, comedic absurdity of life that almost returns to him an infant-like state of "delight" (HS 26). I agree with Debra Shostak's contention that "the dance

is the sign of Nathan's renewed receptivity to human contact [... that signals] his willingness to *engage* with others" (45, italics in original). Coleman assumes the lead role here, paternally and sexually leading Nathan back to the world of infantile delight that sex and play initiates.

Coleman's virile "rebirth" (*HS* 27) enthrals Roth's narrator so much that he wets himself: "I'd been so engaged by Coleman and his story that I'd failed to monitor myself" (*HS* 36).¹⁰⁸ Nathan's urinary "accident" symbolically registers a letting go of his solitary life, as Coleman's revelations unravel the author's reclusive existence. "The idea of soiling oneself," Grosz writes, "of dirt, of the very dirt produced by the body itself [...] is a 'normal' condition of infancy, but in the case of the maturing woman it is a mark or stain of her future status" (205). Yet here Nathan's urinary accident does not simply represent finality; rather, it represents the return of the material, the acceptance of life as porous, unpredictable, and chaotic that is fundamentally tied to the body.

Nathan's asexual existence is obliterated by the intrusive and abrupt entrance of Coleman Silk, who despite first appearing as severed and impotent, comes to possess a penetrative sexual power that pierces Nathan's solitary and sexless life. In other words, Coleman destroys Nathan's equilibrium (*HS* 37) and returns him to the matter of bodily desires: "[h]ow can one say, 'No, this isn't a part of life,' since it always is? The contaminant of sex, the redeeming corruption that de-idealizes the species that keeps us everlastingly mindful of the matter we are" (*HS* 37). Sex is positioned as a pollution, a sullyng act that symbolizes an impurity that refutes the possibility of purification. For Nathan (and Roth), the corruptive de-idealization sex signifies grounds human beings within their bodies and thus redeems us from the pollutive corruptibility that purification represents.

¹⁰⁸ Brauner makes a compelling case that "Nathan's urinary emission stands, symbolically, for the sexual ejaculation that he is no longer capable of having; the urine stains on his trousers are the counterpart to the infamous semen stains on Monica Lewinsky's blue dress" (21).

Prior to meeting Coleman, Nathan had attempted to foster a purified existence that is removed from bodily desire. Coleman's sexual awakening with Faunia contaminates Nathan's self-imposed exile on account of his bodily impropriety, but Coleman disregards bodily propriety in favour of carnal pleasure. "Without Viagra", Coleman explains, "I could continue, in my declining years, to develop the broad impersonal perspective of an experienced and educated honourably discharged man who has long ago given up the sensual enjoyment of life" (*HS* 32). There is a prescribed social role here for Coleman to follow that involves a disavowal of the libido. Nevertheless, as Zuckerman observes, Coleman wish[es] to let the brute out, let that force out – for half an hour, for two hours, for whatever, to be freed into the natural thing [...] At seventy-one you're not the high spirited, horny brute you were at twenty-six, of course. But the remnants of the brute, the remnants of the natural thing – he is in touch now with the remnants. [...] It's not family, it's not responsibility, it's not duty, it's not money, it's not a shared philosophy or the love of literature, it's not big discussions. No, what binds him to her is the thrill. Tomorrow he develops cancer, and boom. But today he has this thrill (*HS* 32-3).

The twice-repeated "brute" evokes a primordial animalism that signifies a separation from the Coleman Silk of the past, the academic family man whose life centred on shared philosophies, love of literature, and "big discussions." Nathan sees Coleman's libidinousness as an absolute return to the body itself, an apolitical, non-racial, non-ideological affair based on nothing but the "thrill" itself. One has to wonder though, given the excessive use of the word "brute" (which itself denotes a violent primitivism), to what extent Coleman's rather aggressive sexual language is predicated on a masculinist reclamation of phallic empowerment? Should we as the reader be wary of taking Coleman (and Nathan) at face value given the biases imprinted within the narrative?

Coleman and Faunia are Roth's prelapsarian Adam and Eve, but with a significant twist. Their naked, bodily commitment to one another centres on an exclusion and/or rejection of epistemology and language itself. Faunia, Coleman tells Nathan, is illiterate. She demands Coleman promise he never try to teach her how to read, effectively dismissing the

power of language and knowledge. Unlike the biblical or Miltonic Eve, Faunia has no desire to taste the Tree of Knowledge, and has no desire to assume any kind of authority the enlightenment of learning might provide: “[d]o anything you want with me, anything [...] Bad enough having to hear people speak. Start teaching me to read, force me into that, push reading on me, and it’ll be you who push me over the edge” (*HS* 34). Coleman replies by telling her “I’m going to fuck you [...] for just what you are” (*HS* 35). The two seek to create a relationship that dispenses with language and form a connection solely based on bodily pleasure. As Zuckerman observes of the two in a later scene, “[t]hey are, together, a *pair* of blanks” (*HS* 213, italics in original). Both Coleman and Faunia attempt to exist outside of language, away from the politics of being marked and labelled within categories that create and maintain social order. Ironically, however, the “blankness” the two seek is identified and detailed by Zuckerman, affirming the inescapability of the mark or stain language inevitably imprints on the body.

The two’s attempt to exist away from the politics of being categorized or marked is confounded by Delphine Roux, the current dean of faculty who sends Coleman an anonymous letter denouncing him for sexually exploiting Faunia:

Everyone knows you’re
sexually exploiting an
abused, illiterate
woman half your
age (*HS* 38).

Faunia is stripped of her subjectivity and becomes an “abused, illiterate woman half [Coleman’s] age” (*HS* 38). The enjambment of the first and fourth line ends on “you’re” and “your”, stressing the direct accusatives of the letter that firmly focuses on Coleman’s role as abuser. Conversely, the accuser (Delphine Roux) places “abused” and “illiterate” alone, which singularly defines Faunia as a victim, as the last line again places emphasis not on Faunia’s subjectivity, but her age in relation to Coleman’s.

The words “Everyone knows” creates the impression of a universal understanding, a complete and shared knowledge that Coleman is a perpetrator and Faunia is a victim; the accusation is dependent on the absolute certainty that Coleman’s age and social status makes him an exploiter of Faunia. Delphine’s letter reduces Faunia to a victim of abuse who Coleman has manipulated in his assumed position of power. The accusation effectively dismisses and/or denies Faunia’s agency. All that matters here are the identity markers: Coleman and Faunia’s disparity in age and class signifies an unequal and unacceptable social relation that must be “fixed” through public condemnation. I want to return to the question Butler poses of whose lives matter here as an ending point, because at this moment Faunia, positioned as victim, seems to be the figure of priority here. Delphine’s letter claims to privilege and serve to protect Faunia from the exploitative Coleman, yet in reality the letter seems to suggest that their lives only matter in that they exist outside of societal norms. What matters then, is that social order be restored through a collective and public shaming.

The Raw Singular “I”

Thus far, my focus has been limited to the novel’s opening and the sexual politics of Coleman’s relationship with Faunia. In order to expand on the intersectional links between sex and “race” in *The Human Stain*, I must clarify the novel’s rather striking narrative structure, and explain how Coleman’s stories belong to Nathan. Adam Kelly contends that “*The Human Stain* has the structure of an observer-hero narrative”, which Lawrence Buell defines as a “genre [that …] may be defined in brief as a story told by a dramatized first-person narrator about a significant relationship or encounter he has had with another person” (93). However, Kelly’s description risks oversimplifying Roth’s text, as the novel’s first three chapters’ flit between Zuckerman’s first person observations of Coleman, and the third-person perspectives of Coleman, Faunia, Les, and Delphine that extend beyond the hero-observer framework. Kelly highlights how the third and fourth chapter disrupts the “realism”

of the first three sections of the text, but the story's cohesiveness is dislocated as early as the second chapter (43).

At the beginning of the novel Zuckerman identifies Coleman as a Jew, describing him as "the small-nosed Jewish type with the facial heft in the jaw, one of those crimped-haired Jews of a light yellowish skin pigmentation who possess something of the ambiguous aura of the pale blacks who are sometimes taken for white" (*HS* 15-6). Coleman's body is identified and demarcated as Jewish here based on a physiognomic and stereotypical set of characteristics. Furthermore, Coleman tells Nathan his father was "one of those Jewish Saloon keepers" who died in his final year of high school, and that he was the only child – "[t]he adored one" – who wasn't even allowed to work in the saloon (*HS* 22). Right from the novel's beginning then, readers are to understand that Coleman and his family are Jewish.

Yet ten pages into the second chapter, the novel diverges from Coleman's account of his upbringing quite jarringly. The narrative flashes back to Coleman's childhood where Dr. Fensterman, a Jewish physician, attempts to bribe the Silk family to allow their son Bert to finish above Coleman in school because universities had placed quotas on how many Jewish applicants they would take in. "Dr. Fensterman knew that prejudice in academic institutions against colored students was far worse than it was against Jews", Roth writes, "[h]e knew the kind of obstacles that the Silks themselves had had to overcome to achieve all that distinguished them as a model Negro family" (*HS* 86). The passage above creates a rupture from the story Coleman provided earlier in the text. Intuitively the reader understands that the Silk family are not African American Jews; rather, Fensterman, a Jew, is bribing the non-Jewish African American family to allow Bert Fensterman to become the class valedictorian and finish above Coleman. Fensterman's remark that he knows how the Silk family has struggled is not only hollow sounding, but highlights a separation between the two families. The Fensterman and Silk families are not united by a shared racial experience, as

demonstrated by the father's rather shameless appraisal of the Silks as a "model Negro family" (*HS* 86). In other words, Fensterman is attempting to appease the Silks with an empty and manufactured empathy centred on their mutual experiences of racial exclusions as Jews and as African Americans. Additionally, the scene highlights how Coleman's father had owned a failed optical shop that had gone bankrupt in the Depression. The biographical details Coleman tells Nathan earlier in the book are suddenly thrown into question, inviting the reader to question who Coleman Silk really is.

The incongruity between the two stories is not explained until the fourth chapter, after Coleman and Faunia have been murdered. At the former's funeral, Zuckerman meets Coleman's estranged sister, Ernestine. As Jerry Levov does with the Swede, Ernestine reveals the "truth" to Nathan. Coleman had been born an African American and after his father died, Coleman decided to pass as Jewish, eventually marrying Iris Gittelman and abandoning his family altogether. Nathan is "seized by his story, by its end and by its beginning, and, then and there, I began this book" (*HS* 337). The preceding chapters and the events that transpired turn out to have been reinvented works of fiction by the transfixed Zuckerman. As Calvin Hoovestol points out, "Zuckerman's twice-told tale about Coleman supposedly repeats information or gossip he heard from Coleman's sister Ernestine and from his own fictional characters" (45). The story has been repeated, retold, and reconstructed through the figure of Nathan-the-novelist, bringing into focus the ways in which individuals' lives are constructed as narratives.

If we are in fact each other's authors (*CL* 149), as Nathan contends in *The Counterlife*, then the authorial (re)writing each of us enacts is always recognized in Roth's American Trilogy as being subjective. As Zuckerman observes in *American Pastoral*, "[w]riting turns you into somebody who's always wrong" (*AP* 63). The letter Delphine sends to Coleman that claims "Everyone knows" (*HS* 38) is challenged here by the narrative form

of the text itself; that which the reader assumes and understands as an objective portrayal of events is actually a subjective re-interpretation. For Nathan, “[w]hat we know is that, in an unclichèd way, nobody knows anything. You *can't* know anything [...] Intention? Motive? Consequence? Meaning? All that we don't know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing” (*HS* 209). Unlike Delphine, whose letter proclaims and propounds an epistemological certainty, Nathan embraces the unknown enigma of Coleman's character, and transforms this lack through writing.¹⁰⁹

Nathan transforms Coleman into a tragic hero that attempts to realize the entrenched American ideal of self-reinvention: “[t]o become a new being. To bifurcate. The drama that underlies America's story, the high drama that is upping and leaving – and the energy and cruelty that rapturous drive demands” (*HS* 342).¹¹⁰ The dramatic impulse Nathan sees as distinctly American once again centres on the symbolic penetration of the land-as-female, metaphorically embodied by the white (non-Jewish) woman's body. For Coleman, however, a man born as an African American, it is the Jewish woman's body that symbolically finalizes the possibility of being “free” from the racial borders of “black” and “white.” *The Human Stain* follows and disrupts *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The Counterlife*, and *American Pastoral*, as Coleman's fantasy of Americanness centres on a heteronormative penetration of the (Jewish) woman's body. Roth uses Coleman to examine the intersections between sex and “race” in American society by considering how Jewishness is couched between

¹⁰⁹ Connolly is salient in observing how “the work of imagination occupies the void that opens from the knowledge that ‘nobody knows anything’ by breathing new energy into life's desiccated ‘facts’” (176).

¹¹⁰ Mark Maslan challenges the way Roth grounds the concept of self-reinvention as a distinctly American phenomenon. Maslan argues that calling imaginative identification “an American activity requires us to identify those doing it as an American beforehand, which means that the basis for such identification must lie elsewhere” (389). Compellingly, Maslan calls into question the inherency of American self-reinvention and its supposed particularity to American culture. Likewise, I am troubled by Roth's portrayal of Coleman, but particularize my focus on the sexist objectification of women's bodies in Coleman's attempt to create a new identity for himself.

blackness and whiteness, and what this racial indeterminacy reveals about American “race” and class.

For Nathan, Coleman’s pursuit of self-reinvention is a heroic form of individual artistry: “every day you woke up to be what you had made yourself” (*HS* 345). Coleman is able to achieve what Nathan could only dream of: escaping his family and reinventing himself, it is hardly surprising Roth’s narrator is so enamoured by Coleman’s triumphant story given the events that transpired in “Zuckerman Unbound”. Yet Coleman’s performance of Jewishness is not self-affirmed. He requires others to accept his identity as a Jewish man, and selfishly exploits Black and women’s bodies to ensure his passing is unquestioned. Quite simply, Coleman is depicted by Nathan as a self-hating sexist, whose pursuit of individuality is selfish and destructive, and yet his actions are not entirely condemned. Coleman remains tragic and at times, deeply sympathetic: he is, as so many of Roth’s protagonists are, a morally ambiguous figure with a profoundly unhealthy attitude toward women.

Before I discuss Coleman’s sexist objectification of women and his mimicry of white racism, I first need to unpack the term “passing” as a literary and social term. Roth scholarship has frequently defined *The Human Stain* as a text concerned with the idea of passing. Dean J. Franco calls *The Human Stain* “a novel about a black man passing as white” (89); likewise, Elaine B Safer describes Coleman as “a black man passing as white” (241).¹¹¹ Additionally, Larry Schwartz identifies Roth’s text as “a narrative of passing” but contends rather contentiously that “race is ‘whited out’ not because Coleman wills its disappearance, but because Zuckerman creates Coleman in his own image” (66). What then does it mean to “pass”, and to what extent is Schwartz correct in their assessment that Zuckerman’s presence whitens and thus erases Coleman’s authority/autonomy within the narrative?

¹¹¹ As will become clear in the following section, I share Brauner’s interest in examining the distinction Roth carefully draws between being “white” and being “Jewish” in America, which Franco and Safer seem to overlook here.

Patrice D. Rankine defines “passing” as “the possibility of race change, the individual’s escape from what at times amounts to a deterministic, social blight. It might be said to allow the individual to succeed despite the odds against him or her racially” (101). Rankine’s definition invites further questioning, specifically regarding the term “race” and the idea that an individual can “change” their racial category. Linda Martín Alcoff explains that “racial identity is not a product of ‘race’ – as if this were a natural phenomenon [sic] or meaningful biological category – but is historically evolving and culturally contextual, and thus it is not clear to me that racist hierarchies are necessarily entailed” (195). “Race” is a concept: it relies on speech, repetition, and visual affiliations to make visible the notion of racial differences. Yet as Alcoff points out, identifying “social groups through their visible racialized features (that is, features in which race is thought to inhere) seems arbitrary, and at the very least, inherently dangerous” (195-6). Passing exposes and undermines the flimsy instability of racial divisions.

Because “passing” unsettles the conceptual wholeness that supposedly divides Black and white bodies, the act has typically “been treated as an exclusively African American phenomenon” (Belluscio 1). Of course, as “Eli, the Fanatic” has shown, this is not the case; Jews, amongst other ethno-racial groups, have had to pass as white to escape racial and religious prejudices. This is hardly surprising given that whiteness is imbued with a social, racial, and even economic positivity that is constructed as a diametric opposite to blackness. As Yancy observes, “[w]hiteness is that according to which what is nonwhite is rendered other, marginal, ersatz, strange, native, inferior, uncivilized, and ugly” (20). Contrastingly, whiteness is clean and unmarked, and as such, Catherine Rottenberg explains, “[t]he invisibility of the mark of whiteness is exactly the mark of its privilege” (438). Blackness signifies an aberration, whilst whiteness is marked as desirable, or at the very least normative.

The individual that passes will seek to pass as “white” because whiteness promises the most in terms of social mobility and socio-economic privilege.

Of course, the privilege white bodies assume is radically challenged by the passer, whose ability to be visually recognized as “white” silently ruptures the authenticity and purity of whiteness. “For the very ‘problem’ of identity,” Amy Robinson contends, “a problem to which passing owes the very possibility of its practice, is predicated on the false promise of the visible as an epistemological guarantee” (716). The disruptive propensities enacted by passing creates ruptures, breaches, and dramatic tensions that unfurl social orders which are maintained by the implicit understanding that “race” (like gender or sex) is absolute; it is “biological.” As Pellegrini concisely observes, “[r]ace’ is thus thinkable as a kind of speech act” (98); the passing novel thus exposes and explores the semiotic instabilities used to maintain the construct of “race”.

The Human Stain is a novel about the act of passing and its consequence. Elaine K. Ginsberg states that the passing narrative explores how an “individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary – indeed *trespassed* – to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other” (2-3, italics in original). Coleman Silk seeks to pass in order to assume a social status deprived to him as an African American, abandons his family in order to do so, and forges a new life for himself as a professor of Classics at Athena College.¹¹² Significantly, though, Coleman never reveals his secret: he dies and thus refuses to fulfil the promise of revelation and reconciliation; *The Human Stain*, as is often Roth’s wont, ends by refusing to provide a happy ending. As Jonathan Freedman observes, “[a]lthough he fully participates in the passing genre, Roth seemingly will have none of its return to the racial

¹¹² Roth scholarship has highlighted the correlations between *The Human Stain* and other passing narratives. See, for example, Matthew Wilson’s “Reading the Human Stain through Charles W. Chestnutt: The Genre of the Passing Novel”, and Donavon L. Ramon’s “‘You’re Neither One thing (N)or The Other’: Nella Larsen, Philip Roth and The Passing Trope”.

under the sign of sentiment. Instead, his character Coleman cleaves to the bitter and unsentimental end to the passing project” (169).

Coleman’s passing is rather unique in that he chooses to assume an identity as Jewish rather than white. How wonderfully ironic is it that in a Philip Roth novel Jewishness is desirable! Jewishness represents a separation from the black-white binary of American racism and that separateness signifies a unique form of freedom. In an almost Swede-like proclamation, Zuckerman’s Coleman denounces both blackness and whiteness: “[a]ll he’d ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white – just on his own and free” (*HS* 120). For Coleman, freedom means to exist beyond the racial appellations of “black” and “white”, finding in Jewishness an identity that does not easily fit within either rubric.¹¹³

Coleman’s decision to pass as Jewish is explained by his sister, who tells Nathan about the Silk family’s life in East Orange. Her version of events shapes much of what we read, but it is Nathan’s imagination that brings Coleman’s story to life. The Jewish male’s influence on Coleman is rather substantial, and it seems rather befitting (and problematic) that Coleman’s story and life is re-written by a Jewish author. Dr. Fensterman, for example, teaches Coleman the value of his own intellect. Fensterman’s three-thousand-dollar bribe signifies for Coleman his intellectual uniqueness: “[y]et another record-breaking triumph for the great, the incomparable, the one and only Silky Silk!” (*HS* 88). The offer signifies Coleman’s ability to rupture and dislocate America’s social structures, as Roth (via Zuckerman) writes, “Dr. Fensterman’s proposal meant no more to him than that he was of the greatest importance to just about everyone. The larger picture he didn’t get yet” (*HS* 88).

¹¹³ Timothy Parrish and Eric Sundquist both connect *The Human Stain* to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Parrish contends Roth’s text “can be read as a sequel to Ellison’s novel” (422), whilst Sundquist connects the theme of self-masking and self-making with the two novelists. Elsewhere, Brett Kaplan (somewhat infamously now) examines the parallels between Coleman and the literary critic, Anatole Broyard.

Coleman is too young to understand the racial inflections of Fensterman's proposal; all he can see is his own intellectual value being affirmed here by the Jewish doctor's bribe.

Whilst Dr. Fensterman shows Coleman the value of his intellect, it is Doc Chizner, Coleman's boxing teacher, who educates him how to "move" both as a boxer and more broadly within racial categories. Chizner teaches Coleman "how to stand and how to move and how to throw the punches [...] How to move his head. How to slip punches. How to block punches. How to counter" (HS 90). The bodily movement essential to boxing initiates Coleman's journey into slipping away from his identity as an African American. As John G Rodwan Jr. observes, "[b]oxing teaches Silk the pleasures and uses of concealment" (87).

Chizner starkly contrasts with Coleman's own father, whose affinity for English and the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens teaches Coleman the importance and meaning of language: "[t]hey learned things had classifications. They learned the power of naming precisely" (HS 93). For Clarence Silk mastering the English language (and its white, canonical male authors) is vital. In learning the importance and nuances of language, Clarence's father hopes his children (and their friends) can metaphorically assume an approximate position of whiteness.

Clarence's efforts to control the language of the colonizer bring us back to *Black Skin, White Masks*, as Fanon underlines how important it is for the colonized to learn the colonizer's language:

To speak a language is take on a world. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is. [...] Historically, it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago. In the Antilles Negro who comes within this study we find a quest for subtleties, for refinements of language – so many further means of proving to himself that he has measured up to the culture (38-9).

Clarence Silk is Roth's American Antillean: he wants his children to be adroitly proficient in their usage of English to become resplendent representatives of the African American

community. Roth (or rather, Zuckerman) extensively details Clarence's commitment to teaching his children American literature, art, and theatre: “[i]n the Silk family they had read all the old classics. In the Silk family the children were not taken to prizefights, they were taken to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see the armor” (*HS* 93-4). Clarence seeks, as Fanon would say, to have his son become “a complete replica of the white man” (36) by mimicking and perfecting a culture that has colonized, oppressed, and dehumanized Black bodies.

Chizner, on the other hand, appreciates the power of moving precisely. When Chizner takes Coleman to a boxing match at West Point, he tells Coleman not to mention to an interested coach that he is black. Importantly, Chizner does not tell Coleman to lie about his “race”, but just to avoid the subject altogether. By not stating his “race”, Chizner explains, the coach will automatically assume he is Jewish: “[y]ou look like you look, you’re with me, and so he’s going to think you’re one of Doc’s boys. He’s going to think that you’re Jewish” (*HS* 99). Chizner has no interest in language and the particularities of speaking precisely. Yet he, like Clarence, seeks for Coleman to mimic or replicate the Jewish body here; by saying nothing, Chizner intends for Coleman to assume a new identity as a Jew. In doing so, Coleman makes his blackness invisible, and discovers an autonomy and power in his body that is markedly distinct from the English (i.e. colonizer’s) language that seeks to delineate individuals within a particular identity.¹¹⁴ Coleman believes he has found a way to slip the punch of white America’s violent racism by silently “becoming” a Jew, without realizing that his replication of Jewishness remains within the racial schema that wordlessly denounces blackness as a negative.

¹¹⁴ Joe Holroyd makes a similar observation, noting how boxing “enables Silky to discover the possibility of emotional release through physical action”, which allows him “to see through a more objective, dispassionate lens the challenges posed to his will to self-determine, such as his father’s antagonism” (64).

Coleman's father forces him to stop boxing with Chizner, and sends him to Howard, the African American university, "to become a doctor, to meet a light-skinned girl there from a good Negro family, to marry and settle down and have children who would in turn go to Howard" (HS 102). The social ascension Coleman's father fantasizes is centred on a blackness that is "light", highlighting Clarence's internalization of American racism that positions blackness as undesirable.

The implications of remaining "black" in America are very quickly made apparent. Coleman and his roommate, "a lawyer's son from New Brunswick" (HS 102), are on their way to see the Washington Monument when they stop in Woolworth's to get a hot dog, and are racially abused in the store:

he was called a nigger. His first time. And they wouldn't give him the hot dog. Refused a hot dog at Woolworth's in downtown Washington, on the way out called a nigger, and, as a result, unable to divorce himself from his feelings as easily as he did in the ring. At East Orange High the class valedictorian, in the segregated South just another nigger (HS 102).

Coleman and his roommate's educational achievements and family's professional position grants them a particular degree of social privilege within the African American community. Yet their identities as intellects and academic achievers are obliterated by the violent singularity of the word "nigger", which freezes the slippery Coleman, suspending the fluid, transgressive boxer into a solid object. "In the segregated South", Roth writes, "there were no separate identities, not even for him and his roommate. No such subtleties allowed, and the impact was devastating. Nigger – and it meant *him*" (HS 103, italics in original). Coleman's sliding, slippery subtleness is violently denied in the segregated South. Like Fanon, Coleman is obliterated and reconstructed by racism, rooted in a word that denies and projects meaning onto his body that is entirely beyond his control.

Coleman is frozen into a racial appellation that denies him any autonomy. Boxing enables a masculinist kind of movement that grants Coleman power through his body, but

when he is called “nigger”, his body is turned against him. Like Fanon, Coleman’s subjectivity is brutalized by the realization that he is defined in the South as a “black” object. Despite how successfully Coleman has replicated whiteness through his institutional achievements, he is racially disregarded as an abjection. Clarence’s attempts to mimic whiteness through education is violently undermined here, further enhancing Coleman’s disillusionment with his father. In a particularly revealing scene, Coleman recalls a moment in which his father was confronted by a racist: “[w]hat happened, Dad?” Coleman would ask. But, as much out of pride as disgust, rarely would his father elucidate. To make the pedagogical point was enough. ‘What happened,’ Coleman’s mother would explain, ‘is beneath your father even to repeat’” (*HS* 103). Clarence’s passivity, signified by his silent inactivity, represents the same masculine failure that Alex Portnoy sees in his father’s inability to play baseball. Clarence cannot even speak of the event; it is his mother that informs Coleman of his father’s passivity. Racism violently strips Clarence of agency; he becomes, in Coleman’s eyes, a castrated, powerless, inanimate object.

Coleman laments his father’s culpability in enabling American racism to impose itself against the Silk family. Coleman, Roth writes, “finally recognized the enormous barrier against the great American menace that his father had been for him” (*HS* 102). The very language Clarence celebrates for its articulacy and nuance serves as a violent weapon used to deprive African Americans of their humanity. Clarence, in the disenfranchised son’s view, enables American racism to maintain the socio-racial barriers that denigratingly ossify African Americans into racial objects. Clarence’s failure to act signifies a masculine lapse; he is, unlike Doc Chizner or Dr. Fensterman, incapable of action when faced with American racism. Fensterman’s social mobility, and Chizner’s physical slipperiness, symbolizes American Jewry’s ability to “slip” and “slide” past America’s institutional racism, a feat Clarence Silk cannot achieve. Coleman seems attracted to the metaphorical Jew’s

slipperiness that I discussed in the Introduction. The conceptual “Jew”, as Bauman outlined, puts categories into crisis.

When Clarence dies, Coleman sees his father’s passing as his opportunity to reinvent himself beyond the prescribed social role his father had constructed for him. Clarence’s passing eventually represents an “exhilarating” (*HS* 107) opportunity for the disobedient son, as he realizes that the patriarchal authority that dictated his life has finally been removed:

He saw the fate that was awaiting him, and he wasn’t having it. Grasped it intuitively and recoiled spontaneously. 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. [...] Instead the raw I with all its singularity. *Self-discovery – that* was the punch to the labonz. Singularity. The passionate struggle for singularity. The singular animal (*HS* 108, italics in original).

Racial categorization appals Coleman because it means being subjected to institutional racism; to be imposed upon by any particular group and become a “we” creates a division that enables racial divisions to be sustained and upheld. Coleman refuses to succumb to any kind of “we” group-think politic and chooses instead to create himself as an individual. He does this by becoming what he (or rather, Nathan) calls the “raw I with all its singularity” (*HS* 108). Raw represents an unblemished and unprocessed life: a life free from the determinations of others seeking to impose their bigoted ideologies upon Coleman and his body. To live as a “singular animal” (*HS* 108) is to exist alone, free from the social structures governed by group-think ideologies.

Coleman’s quest for singularity and isolation indelibly links to the American Renaissance writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson. I contend the “raw I” (*HS* 108) reads as a homophonic allusion to Emerson’s transparent eye-ball in his essay, “Nature”. As Emerson wanders through the woods, he envisages a subliminal moment in which he becomes detached from his very body:

Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part

or parcel of God (39)

Roth strips the Emersonian spiritualism away here; the transparent eyeball is torn out from its naturalist context and placed within the discourse of “race” in America. The naked, transparency of Emerson’s eye is sought after by Coleman, whose Black body has been brutalized by the language of racism; Coleman seeks to make himself into a “nothing” (39) by refuting racial markings. Yet whilst Emerson’s transparent eyeball is stripped of its materiality (in part, because of Emerson’s whiteness), Coleman’s “raw singular I” (*HS* 108) is pure flesh. Indeed, I read Coleman’s capitalized, singular, erect “I” as a literal erection. To become transparent and immaterial, Coleman immerses himself into the flesh of others. His body becomes the primary force and function in which he attempts to return to an unmarked “nothing” (Emerson 39).

The Big White Thing

Coleman’s quest for singularity repeatedly positions women as objects of desire, in a manner that strikingly parallels Fanon’s sexist objectifications. Gwen Bergner contends Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* positions women “almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relationships with men; feminine desire is thus defined as an overly literal and limited (hetero)sexuality” (77).¹¹⁵ Within *The Human Stain*, women operate in an almost identical manner. As I discussed in the previous chapter, women in Roth’s fiction are usually positioned as objects of male desires, meaning that their characterizations tend to be limited. Having said that, Roth critically interrogates his characters’ provocative sexualisation of women through his satire, parody, and narrative strategies that ensures a critical distance between the narrator and author, and continues to do so in *The Human Stain*.

¹¹⁵ See Gwen Bergner’s “Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.” *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 1, 1995, pp. 75–88. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/463196.

For Coleman, women represent what Luce Irigaray defines as “fetish-objects”.

Women are made into symbols of male-worth through “the circulation of a power of the Phallus, establishing relationships of men with each other” (183). For Coleman (and Portnoy, and Zuckerman, and Levov), women’s bodies become sites in which their masculinities and heterosexuality are recognized and affirmed, serving to accredit them within what Bergner calls the “homosocial matrix” (81). Whilst Roth certainly does not endorse his protagonist’s attitudes, and Zuckerman is used as a narrative device to interrogate both the Swede and Coleman’s characters, there is a recurring trope within his fiction of men attempting to claim a position of power vis-à-vis the penetration of women’s bodies.

As Bergner has contested in their excellent analysis of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon likewise positions women as fetish objects. For Fanon, the phallus is white, and if the Black man wishes “to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*” (63, italics in original), they can only achieve this through the acceptance of the white woman. “When my restless hands caress those white breasts”, Fanon writes, “they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (63). Fanon’s hands are grasping, restless, insecure; there is a knowing diffidence here as Fanon recognizes the impossible divide that separates his Black hands from the white woman’s breasts. For as Pellegrini explains, “[w]hiteness dissimulates its own race relations; white men and, in another way, white women can strike the pose of realness, of individuality” (92). Fanon seeks to become an individual, an autonomous subject, through the white woman’s body, but in doing so, Bergner explains, he silences women, “rendering their sexuality spectacular – in sum, excluding them from occupying a place as subjects within the scopic systems of signification” (79).

Coleman, like Fanon, denies women subjectivity by fetishizing their bodies into symbolic spaces that represent social and economic mobility. Whilst reminiscing with Nathan about his sexual endeavours in New York, Coleman declares “[i]t was like fishing down

there. Go down into the subway and come up with a girl” (*HS* 21). Women are consumable objects for him to swoop down and hunt, and my word choice of “swoop” is quite intentional, as it is used to describe him by his former lover, Steena: “[y]ou were incredibly good at swooping, almost like birds do when they fly over land or sea and spy something moving, something bursting with life, and dive down – or zero in – and seize upon it” (*HS* 24). Coleman is sexually predatory in Steena’s recollection, gushing with a sexual vitality that positions him as forceful, tactical, and potentially dangerous. In Zuckerman’s narrative, Coleman’s younger years are defined by the sexist way he treats women as consumable objects that help him shape and determine his own social and racial status.

The first relationship Coleman has is with Steena Palsson, “an eighteen-year-old exile from Minnesota” (*HS* 23). Coleman first mentions her in the novel’s opening chapter, describing her as an “[i]ndependent girl from Minnesota. Sure-of-herself girl, or seemed so. Danish on one side, Icelandic on the other. Quick. Tall. Marvelously tall” (*HS* 23). Intriguingly, Coleman uses the same nickname for Faunia as he did for Steena: “[u]sed to call her Voluptas. Psyche’s daughter. The personification to the Romans of sensual pleasure” (*HS* 23). For Coleman, both women’s white bodies represent a racial site of difference inherently tied to Coleman’s own phallic empowerment. What separates the two women, however, is the way Coleman uses Steena’s white body to promote himself within American patriarchal society.

Coleman, like Fanon, attempts to “grasp civilization” (63) and reform himself as “white”. Whilst I am aware Coleman explicitly rejects the very binary of “black-white” identities, his attempt to exist as a pure, unmarked body represents a whiteness in itself, and his relationship with Steena only further accentuates Coleman’s unspoken and perhaps unintentional desire to become “white”. Steena unknowingly writes Coleman’s body into whiteness through her poetic portrait of him:

He has a body.

He has a beautiful body –
the muscles on the backs of his legs and the back of his neck.

Also he is bright and brash.
He's four years older,
but sometimes I feel he is younger.

He is sweet, still, and romantic,
though he says he is not romantic.

I am almost dangerous for this man.

How much can I tell
of what I see in him?
I wonder what he does
after he swallows me whole (*HS* 112).

Steena's letter operates as a mirror for Coleman, enabling him to see himself through her gaze. Steena's lack of description or detail here in her recreation of Coleman is instructive: the body is unmarked; it is pure and beautiful precisely because it lacks any kind of categorical imprint. The absence of racial signifiers gestures towards a whiteness in itself that erases or makes invisible Coleman's blackness.

In the second last verse, Steena declares herself a danger to Coleman. The line is alone: separated and singularized, it represents a rupturing of the poem's stream. Its suddenness suggests a momentariness, a fleeting realization that is vague and uninformed. Does Steena sense Coleman's secret? Does she realize that he is hiding his "race" from her? If so, the danger she conceives of is rooted in the unspoken, unseen, and unheard racial dichotomy silently orchestrating the two's relationship. Fanon explains the danger Steena stumbles upon: "[w]e know historically that the Negro guilty of lying with a white woman is castrated" (72). As Yancy has highlighted, the Black body represents a violent threat to whiteness. Coleman and Steena's relationship signifies a rupture to racially drawn divisions; their coupling threatens the absoluteness of whiteness, as it is no longer separated from the "black" body.

The last stanza reflects Steena's uncertainty regarding her position in relation to Coleman. She muses over what she is capable of communicating to him, and envisages him swallowing her whole, as though he were a predator and she his prey. The irony of course is that Steena's poem is greatly revealing for Coleman. By failing to identify or mark Coleman out as "black", Steena authenticates Coleman's identity. The additional irony is that Steena feels as though Coleman is swallowing her, without realizing how much agency and power she has over him. Coleman relies on Steena to see and define him as a "body", creating a power dynamic within the relationship that Steena is entirely unaware exists. Coleman misreads the third line of the poem, believing Steena writes "negro" instead of "neck" (HS 112). The connection Coleman makes between the words "negro" and "neck" reveals the extent of his vulnerability; it is as if Steena's poem strips him bare, and threatens to strangle or submit him back into the racial schema he is fleeing.

Steena's whiteness gives her a power and authority over Coleman that is indeterminately marked through her body. As the two listen to the radio together, Steena, as Faunia does later, dances for Coleman: "[p]rompted by a colored trumpet player playing it like a black torch song, there to see, plain as day, was all the power of her whiteness. That big white thing" (HS 115).¹¹⁶ What does the noun refer to here? What is Steena's thing? Is it her vagina, or her breasts, or her body writ large? The word "thing" refers to an object that has no specific name, and by naming Steena's body (if it is in fact her body that is being referred to) as an undetermined "thing" Coleman effectively dismisses Steena as an object. Does Steena's life matter here to Coleman? It seems unlikely. There is a very clear correlation between Coleman's sexism here and the racism he has endured: both Black and women's bodies are

¹¹⁶ Sinéad Moynihan highlights how "Steena's dance evokes the endlessly interrelated forms of cultural exchange and appropriation that have taken place between black, white and Jewish Americans" (120); this is an important observation that underpins the myriad of racial tensions underscoring *The Human Stain*, tensions that remain unresolved and vividly ever-present.

positioned as non-human objects. The white woman's body is commodified into a metonym for whiteness, whilst the Black body symbolizes an abject, monstrousness.

Coleman's sexism is part of his attempt to make himself into the singular raw I he strives to be. He attempts to follow Doc Chizner's advice, "if nothing comes up, you don't bring it up" (*HS* 118), but Coleman's plan is foiled when Steena meets his family. Moments after they leave the Silk household, Steena flees from Coleman, crying "'I can't do it'" (*HS* 125). Here we have yet another indeterminate marker: "it" – the third person singular pronoun that is supposed to refer to something easily identifiable. Steena cannot be with Coleman because he is black and she is white. When she meets his family and sees Coleman's mother and sister, she re-recognizes him as "black." This scene affirms Fanon's proclamation that he is "a slave not of the 'idea' others have of me but of my own appearance" (116); or in this case, Coleman is a slave to the idea others have of his family's appearance. The severing of the relationship represents the limits of Coleman's autonomy as the author of his own subjectivity. Steena's rejection of the ambiguous "it" (*HS* 125) returns Coleman to a racial category that he does not identify with; he remains a slave to America's racial schema.

If Steena is "too white" for Coleman then Ellie Magee, his next partner, is "too black". Coleman does not hide his family's racial past from Ellie, as he believes they have a mutual understanding based on their shared identity as African Americans. He tells her about his family, his trouble at Howard, and his willingness to allow others to identify him whichever way they see fit. Initially, Coleman revels in the easiness of the relationship: "[i]n the beginning, he luxuriates in the solution to his problem. Losing the secret, he feels like a boy again. The boy he'd been before he had the secret" (*HS* 135). The return to childhood for Coleman symbolizes his rejuvenation in releasing himself from the secrecy and deception that he undertook in his relationship with Steena. Yet the easiness with Ellie becomes

problematic for Coleman precisely because it is too comfortable, and disrupts the illusion

Coleman harbours of himself as an American pioneer.¹¹⁷

Shortly after meeting Ellie, she points out other African Americans who are passing as white. Ellie's revelations throw into question Coleman's self-assuredness that centred on his uniqueness. ““You're wrong,’ Coleman tells her, ‘he can't be.’ ‘Don't tell me that I'm wrong’ – she laughs – ‘*you're* blind”” (*HS* 134, italics in original). If, as I have argued earlier, Coleman's “I” is a metonym for the Emersonian transparent eyeball, then Coleman's blindness represents a phallic lack that suggests his singularized raw identity is not as absolute as he thought. Coleman's failure to see or recognize other African Americans that “pass” represents his flaw: in pursuing the raw singular I he so desperately craves Coleman fails to recognize other African American experiences. In fact, he actively seeks to deny or shut out and make black lives invisible.

Coleman ends his relationship with Ellie because, he claims, “some dimension is missing. The whole thing lacks the ambition – it fails to feed that conception of himself that's been driving him all his life” (*HS* 135). The lack of ambition and failure Coleman fears in his relationship with Ellie silently stems from the shared experience both have as having lived as African Americans. For Coleman, their relationship accords with America's social and racial order, as Ellie threatens to make visible Coleman's blackness. Effectively, his autonomy and individualism is vulnerable in the presence of a self-identifying African American. In other words, the relationship with Ellie threatens to codify Coleman racially, which would deny his attempts at self-authorship.

If Steena is too white, and Ellie is too black, then Iris, a Jewish woman, is “just right.”¹¹⁸ Iris's character arc has all the markings of a typical Rothian protagonist: “Iris

¹¹⁷ Coleman's affinity for reinvention seems to correlate with Alex Portnoy and Seymour “Swede” Levov, particularly about how he positions himself as a pioneering figure.

Gittelman [Gittel is a Yiddish word, which translates to “good”] had grown up willful, clever, furtively rebellious – secretly plotting [...] how to escape her oppressive surroundings” (*HS* 127). Iris’s family are aggressively atheistic (“[they] spat on the ground when a rabbi walked by” [*HS* 127]), and significantly, “called themselves what they called themselves freely, without asking permission or seeking approval from what her father contemptuously described as the hypocritical enemies of everything that was natural and good – namely, officialdom, those illegitimately holding the power” (*HS* 127). Clarence cannot speak out against the racism he suffers from, but passively seeks for his children to live within the parameters of their racialized identities, but Iris’s father represents a new modality for Coleman. He understands the racism of America, and enables his children to resist by allowing them freedom to self-identify as they wish. The self-authorship Iris’s father encourages starkly contrasts the rigidity Coleman grew up with, and Iris’s Jewishness, indeterminate and loosely defined, is enticing to the self-inventing Coleman, who sees in the Gittelman’s religious identity a category as open to his own fluid self.

There has been a tendency to highlight the ways in which Zuckerman valorises Coleman as a heroic figure for his self-reinvention. Parrish, for example, contends that for Roth, “Coleman’s choice [...] gives him a life, viewed from an individualist perspective, as complicated and as courageous as choosing to be known as black would have given him” (439). Nevertheless, Coleman remains a complex Rothian protagonist. Coleman tends to fetishize women into commodities that represent social capital, which enables him to mobilize himself beyond the racial appellation of blackness. In other words, Coleman transfers the racism he suffers onto women’s bodies in order to escape the racial oppression he faces.

¹¹⁸ Coleman seems to be Roth’s (or rather, Zuckerman’s) sexist Goldilocks here, looking for a partner who is racially “just right”.

The categorical separation Coleman creates between himself and Iris is predicated on his sexist desire to maintain his “raw singular I”. Coleman lies to Iris by telling her that he too is Jewish, even though he intuitively knows she would be entirely accepting of his decision to pass: “[t]o be two men instead of one? To be two colors instead of one? [...] To her there was nothing frightening about such deformities” (*HS* 130). Yet in refusing to “reveal” himself to Iris, Coleman attempts to singularize himself into a solid, staid entity. He seeks to escape what W.E.B Dubois called the African American’s “double consciousness”: “[t]he Negro is a sort of seventh son”, Dubois writes, “born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world [...] One ever feels this twoness, – an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (2). Coleman seeks a singular modality that erases this twoness, but in his attempts, Coleman reinforces America’s sexist patriarchal social structures. Indeed, he passes to benefit from the social mobility his identity as a Jew assumes. As Godfrey observes, Coleman seeks “not to transgress social conventions but to benefit from them” (247). Crucially, Coleman’s commitment to social convention maintains patriarchal structures that transfix women’s bodies into objectified socio-economic commodities.

Coleman fetishizes Iris’s body, or more specifically her hair, for its sinewy curliness that represents the racial ambiguity of Jewishness:

Her head of hair was something, a labyrinthine, billowing wreath of spirals and ringlets, fuzzy as twine and large enough for use as Christmas ornamentation [...] Iris’s hair, that sinuous thicket of hair that was more Negroid than Coleman’s [...] all that he had ever wanted from Iris Gittelman was the explanation her appearance could provide for the texture of their children’s hair (*HS* 129, 136).

Coleman sees in Iris’s hair his opportunity to create a labyrinth that will enable him to metaphorically hide his racial identity. In other words, Coleman intends to make himself invisible through Iris’s Jewish body. Dean Franco argues that “[b]eing Jewish for Coleman is finally a way of trading in one set of assumptions, rigid, and dichotomous, for another, fluid

and malleable. Jewishness is finally an *ethnicity* subsumed within the larger black-white racial sphere" (94, italics in original). However, the socio-economic fluidity Jews enjoyed in America meant that they became closer in proximity both culturally and "racially" to whites than Blacks. In other words, I read Coleman's decision to pass as "Jewish" both as a subversion of racial structures and as a commitment to America's racially inflected social order.

Coleman conceptualizes his passing purely to promote his own desires. "While seemingly subversive," Posnock argues, "passing is actually a salient instance of self-imposed purification, a subjection of the core self to a disciplinary project of control and subtlety" (203). The act of passing cannot be considered as a universal action; instead, it must be considered in its specific context, meaning that the reason for passing will vary depending on the circumstance. However, Posnock's claim is entirely accurate in terms of Coleman's decision to pass. His decision to assume a Jewish identity culminates in the symbolic murder of his mother. The relationship with Steena teaches him that he cannot adopt an identity if his family remain visibly present; in order to pass as Jewish, Coleman must fully remove himself from his family in a purifying act of sacrificial "murder" that exceeds Doc Chizner's logic of passive silence. Coleman "murder[s] her on behalf of his exhilarating notion of freedom!" (HS 138), but this matricide is hardly definitive or as final as Coleman would like. Coleman's mother accuses him of "think[ing] like a slave [...] You're as white as snow and you think like slave" (HS 139). The twice-repeated "slave" operates as a reaffirmation of Coleman's doubled identity; it reminds him of his blackness that he has chosen to hide, and the instability of his Jewishness that he has chosen to assume. Ultimately, Coleman's secret

transfixes him within the singular phallic “I” that represents a negation of his own complex humanness.¹¹⁹

As other critics have noted, the “spooks” episode represents the return of his racially repressed past.¹²⁰ In defining the two absentee students as spectres, he conjures his secret other racial identity into being. It seems befitting and intentional that Coleman is referring to two African American students as ghost-like. After all, Coleman’s pursuit of the singular “I” is predicated on a desire to eradicate the DuBoisian doubleness thrust upon him by America’s racial schema. Kaplan makes a salient observation, highlighting how “*The Human Stain* argues against itself: while it glories an ‘I’ free from the cloying groupthink of the ‘we,’ its characters continually prove that the external demands of the historically determined ‘we’ – especially that of race – cannot be jettisoned by sheer acts of will” (104). The inherent contradictory logic of the novel is perhaps what makes the text so tragic, as Coleman’s efforts are so obviously futile. He is haunted by his own doubled identity that he has attempted to repress, hide, and violently singularize.

Writing in the Dark

The “spooks” episode is the moment in which Coleman is supposed to reveal his racial identity; it affords him the chance to expose himself to his friends, family, and community and render the charges of racism ridiculous. However, Coleman refuses to reveal his secret, and resigns from the institute in a commitment to his singular “I.” Upon exiting the university and initiating an affair with Faunia, Coleman removes himself from the social order he has

¹¹⁹ Pierpont counters by contending “Silk has escaped his race not because he longs to be white but because he longs to be unrestrictedly human” (245), yet this is perhaps the very problem of the racial schema Coleman attempts to resist. Racism denies Black bodies the fundamental identity as “human”, meaning that Coleman can only be unrestricted by assuming an identity that closely approximates with whiteness.

¹²⁰ Shechner is most adroit in surmising “[i]t would not have been lost on Roth, that old Freudian, that in uttering the word ‘spooks’ when he did, Silk meant just what everyone thought he meant. If ever there was a classic return of the repressed, there it is” (191).

blissfully existed within. Whilst Coleman's passing is a fraught deconstruction of racial hierarchies, he remains committed to linearly ascending through the social ranks. The affair with Faunia signals a rejection of society altogether; it extends beyond Coleman's singular Emersonian "I", towards a hybridized multiplicity that very visibly and publically violates social structures.

As I discussed in the previous section, Coleman calls both Steena and Faunia "Voluptas".¹²¹ Yet whilst the former's identity is marked almost exclusively by her racial genealogy and the social value her whiteness represents for Coleman, Faunia represents an abjection.¹²² "Faunia has nothing", Coleman tells Nathan,

she began life a rich, privileged kid. Brought up in a big sprawling house south of Boston. [...] But she's dropped so far down the social ladder from so far up that by now she's a pretty mixed bag of verbal beans. Faunia's been exiled from the entitlement that should have been hers. Declassed. There's a real democratization to her suffering (*HS* 28).

Faunia's life has been stripped and emptied of the privilege and wealth she once had. In a sense, Faunia is Coleman's direct opposite: she begins her life within the confines of white privilege, but is flung into a life of abject poverty, violence, and abuse. Coleman narrates her suffering to Nathan: Faunia was sexually abused by her step-father, eventually flees home, meets and marries Les Farley, a Vietnam veteran who physically and mentally abuses Faunia. The two's marriage disintegrates as their dairy farm financially crumbles, and their two children die in a house fire.

For Coleman, Faunia is a nymph-like figure of sexual pleasure, but is positioned solely in terms of her body: "[i]n bed nothing escapes Faunia's attention", he tells Nathan,

¹²¹ Parrish likewise highlights the correlation between Faunia and Steena: "Faunia can be seen as the return of Steena to Coleman – a chance to resolve before death the specific conflict that ultimately clinched his choice to pass for white" (454).

¹²² Luminita Dragulescu adroitly highlights how "Faunia deconstructs the class element of her identity by renouncing her upbringing and passing for an illiterate janitress" (100). Faunia attempts to remove herself from the social structures entirely, mirrors Coleman's effort to "pass" as Faunia creates a new guise for herself. Unlike Coleman, however, Faunia's re-invention of herself is centred on a desire to evade rather than exploit social hierarchies.

“[H]er flesh has eyes. Her flesh sees everything. In bed she is a powerful, coherent, unified being whose pleasure is in overstepping the boundaries. In bed she is a deep phenomenon. Maybe that’s a gift of the molestation” (*HS* 31). In bed, Faunia’s flesh becomes Emerson’s transparent eyeball: her body becomes a site of sublime pleasure that has an other-worldly autonomy and power. The last line is the most striking and unsettlingly revealing: it underpins the troubling sexual politics of their relationship that Coleman is publically denounced for, and almost authenticates the damaging claims laid against him. Faunia, Coleman implies, is only recognizably human when she is having sex.¹²³ Faunia’s symbolic lack is what defines her in the eyes of her lover Coleman and the narrator, Zuckerman. For the former, her rejection of societal statuses excitingly represents a libidinous return to the enthralling empowerment being “Silky Silk” induced for Coleman. For Zuckerman, Faunia becomes a far more symbolically weighted figure, particularly after the two die.

In the fifth and final chapter of the novel, entitled “The Purifying Ritual”, Zuckerman attends Faunia and Coleman’s funerals, and is perturbed by the myriad of counter-narratives being constructed about the two. Faunia, for example, is eulogized by Sally, the manager of the dairy farm, whose encomium Zuckerman snidely refers to as an “environmentalist Rousseauism” (*HS* 286), a banal speech imbued with reverences harking back to Faunia’s fondness for the farmyard. Smoky Hollenbeck (Faunia’s manager and former lover) also delivers an uninspiring eulogy that recalls her proficiency as a cleaner. On the “Athena fac.discuss [sic] news group” (*HS* 288) an anonymous poster accuses Coleman of physically and mentally abusing Faunia. They suggest Coleman intentionally drove into the river to commit suicide and kill her “[s]o as to annihilate not only the two of them, but, with them, all trace of his history as her ultimate tormentor” (*HS* 293). Nathan meets Faunia’s father and

¹²³ Hoovestol argues “Faunia’s body might be her only power or weapon in the cruel, patriarchal world of her lived experiences, but she appears, at least according to Nathan, to use it with adroit dexterity” (49). The point stands, of course, but risks overlooking the problematic ways in which Faunia’s character is positioned purely through her as body.

step-mother, and learns she kept a diary, and that her illiteracy was in fact an act. He attempts to convince the step-mother to give him the journal, but she dismisses Faunia's words as "[f]ilth! There is a record of filth there!" (*HS* 301). Nathan is unable to retrieve the diary, meaning that Faunia's memories, emotions, and version of events is lost: her life can only be retold and reimagined through the fictional reinvention of Zuckerman. Faunia is disregarded as waste, an abjection symbolizing defilement that should be disregarded.

Faunia is rejected by her step-mother and father because she represents an aberration, a sullyng force that has stained the lives of those around her. At Coleman's funeral, his family attempt to purify their father's reputation by re-constructing a new narrative of him as a tragic fallen hero. The act of re-writing the deceased is the purifying ritual the chapter alludes to: Coleman and Faunia's lives are purified of the symbolic "dirt" that they lived as, and both lives are re-written by their friends, family, and associates. Coleman's colleague, Herbet Keble, delivers the eulogy at his funeral. He was the first African American whom Athena hired under Coleman's jurisdiction and refused to defend Coleman during the "spooks" episode. Keble repents, and compares Coleman to America's Renaissance writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau, declaring him "an American individualist who did not think that the weightiest things in life were the rules" (*HS* 310-11).¹²⁴ Disgusted, Zuckerman decries him for this public act of self-righteousness: "Herb Keble was just another one out trying to kosher the record [...] and so I thought, on Coleman's behalf, Fuck him" (*HS* 312). This koshering represents a cleansing to Zuckerman, a purifying eulogy for a man vilified and demonized by the very people now commemorating and celebrating him.

Essential to the cleansing of Coleman's reputation is the erasure of Faunia's very being from his life. Shortly after the funeral, Jeffrey and Michael (Coleman's sons) tell Zuckerman "Faunia Farley's was a name they never wanted to hear again". Jeffrey tells

¹²⁴ Ironically it seems Zuckerman seems to adopt Keble's eulogy for his own narrative, constructing Coleman as an Emersonian figure in quest to become the singular "I".

Nathan “[s]he is not the ideal woman to have linked with our father’s legacy”, whilst Michael viciously decries her as a “cheap little cunt [that] has nothing to do with anything” (*HS* 308). The use of the word “cunt” (*HS* 308) disparagingly dismisses Faunia as a commodified body; the son dismisses Faunia as a mere sexual orifice that “cheapens” their father’s esteemed reputation as the fallen hero of Athena.¹²⁵ The passages that we read describing Faunia prior to these scenes were written in the aftermath of the events that transpired, and were transcribed by Zuckerman. Claudia Roth Pierpont laments the portrayal of Faunia, contending Roth “tries too hard to make Faunia an interesting woman” (249). I agree, but argue Faunia’s character is being aggressively reclaimed by Roth’s Zuckerman, who seeks to dramatically mythologize her as a figure of the impure, a fictional tool resisting America’s persecuting and purifying spirit.

Faunia is arguably the hero of the narrative: she is the central figure who almost sermonically proclaims the novel’s title. Furthermore, her name is porous with meaning; it signifies a multiplicity that offers a number of interpretations. Rankine suggests Faunia’s name connects with “Faun” (108), a Greek and Latin demigod that has a male torso and head, but also possesses a goat’s legs and cloven hooves. Typically, the Faun was associated with a powerful sex drive that was usually found in the woodlands, which does to a certain degree link with the way Roth depicts Faunia.¹²⁶ Gustavo Sánchez Canales, however, contends the name links to the roman goddess of fertility, Fauna. “This goddess,” Canales explains, “was worshipped throughout Italy as a bestower of fruitfulness on people and fields, serves as an embodiment of life; Faunia, however, [...] serves as an embodiment of disgrace and death”

¹²⁵ Godfrey highlights how the erasure of Faunia and Les’ antisemitism serves to “rest[ore] both Coleman’s unsullied character and his whiteness” (251), an astute observation that underlines how American racism and antisemitism is repressed to maintain the illusion of American innocence.

¹²⁶ Soured from Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock’s *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*. Ashgate, pp. 233-236.

(115). Both Canales and Rankine provide two meaningful interpretations that reflects Faunia's symbolic indeterminacy. Her very name represents a destabilization of symbolic order.

Hence, Faunia's affinity for Prince, the crow at the Audubon society that has been raised by humans and has subsequently been rejected by the other birds: “[h]e doesn't have the right voice. He doesn't know the crow language. They don't like him out there” (*HS* 242). The crow's inability to mimic and adapt to the proper “culture” has been read by some as a doubling of Coleman. Posnock, for example, contends “[i]f Prince is a strutting, black category mistake – described as a ‘crow that doesn't know how to be a crow’ – Coleman Silk is a human version, a black man who won't be a black man” (220). Posnock's argument is particularly compelling considering Prince, like Coleman, seeks to make invisible his past by ripping apart newspaper clippings that detail the crow's history: “[h]e didn't want anybody to know his background! Ashamed of his own background! Prince! [...] You're ashamed of your notorious past?” (*HS* 240). Additionally, Roth creates a triptychal connection between Faunia, Coleman, and Prince, as all three are unable to exist within the parameters of their given identities.

For Faunia, Zuckerman, and Roth, humanness begins not with purity, but impurity; the human condition is fundamentally chaotic, unstable, and disorderly. Faunia reflects that what happened to Prince is “what comes of being hand-raised, [...] That's what comes of hanging around all of his life with people like us” (*HS* 242). The touch of the human hand on Prince leaves a mark that corrupts, deforms, and destabilizes Prince's identity as a crow. Humans, the third-person narrator (presumably Zuckerman) asserts, “leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen – there's no other way to be here” (*HS* 242). The impure, unclean, dirty, violent, filthiness of human bodies is what for Faunia and Zuckerman defines us as human: this is Roth's ode to the

abject.¹²⁷ The inherency of mess, Zuckerman contends, makes the concept of purity an absurdity:

The stain [...] precedes disobedience, that encompasses disobedience and perplexes all explanation and understanding. It's why all the cleansing is a joke. A barbaric joke at that. The fantasy of purity is appalling. It's insane. What is the quest to purify, if not *more* impurity? (HS 242, italics in original).

The body begins as a leaking messy viscous entity that is entrenched in impurity; thus, humanness begins with stains. In other words, humans begin life as porous, leaky entities; to live as human is to exist impurely. For Roth the very concept of racial or sexual purity is inherently impossible because the subject always begins as a porous instability that renders categorization of the human body farcical.

Roth connects the act of categorization and the desire for purity through the isolated figure of Les Farley, the alleged murderer of Coleman and Faunia.¹²⁸ Les is a self-described “loyal American who’d served his country with not one tour but two, who’d gone back [to Vietnam] to finish the goddamn job” (HS 64). Les serves America: he is loyal to the singular nation-state ideal of his country inherently connected to the same racist schema Coleman resists. Farley’s racist logic creates a separation between “us” and “them” which is weaponized in the army: “you see the enemy, you kill the enemy”, and “the enemy” is racially demarcated as “fucking gooks” (HS 69). Les laments the multiculturalist diversity he perceives has changed America’s cultural solidity:

He serves his country and he can’t even get a doctor who fucking speaks English. All round Northampton they’ve got Chinese restaurants, they’ve got Vietnamese restaurants, Korean markets – but him? If you’re some Vietnamese, you’re some Chink, you make out, you get a restaurant, you get a market, you get a grocery store,

¹²⁷ Pozorski calls Faunia’s “reflection on the fate of the crow [...] a religion of the stain, of impurity” (51). I agree but see Zuckerman’s voice as quite distinct within this particular passage; Faunia’s speech is highlighted by the quotation marks, but the mythic-like soliloquy that follows seems to belong to the voice of Nathan rather than Faunia, though of course Faunia’s speech is itself Zuckerman’s creation.

¹²⁸ The name Les Farley seems to link with the word “Farleigh”, which refers to a woodland clearing. Therefore, Les Farley may well be a synonym for “the woodlands”, symbolically linking Les (and his whiteness) with the land itself.

you get a family, you get a good education. But they got fuck-all for him. Because they want him dead (*HS* 69).

The expansion of ethnic minorities into America threatens Les: the polyphony of voices and cultural nuance of these various constellations is reductively obliterated into racial appellations such as “Chink” (*HS* 69). Les seems transfixed by the logic of war: the enemy remains a threat to him, and he is still trying to wage his war against them. Unsurprisingly, Les decries his wife’s relationship with Coleman because he is “a two bit-kike professor [...] Jew bastard” (*HS* 70). Every other group whom Les identifies as non-white is racially marked out with a vicious appellation that dehumanizes them into threats, enemies that must be killed.

Les Farley is an isolated figure: like Coleman, he exists as a singular “I”, but his singularized subjectivity is a violent one, motivated by a desire to exclude minorities and maintain American culture as unified and “pure”. Pozorski convincingly argues that Farley’s separateness from the rest of the characters stems from the narrative structures that detail his character: “starting from the moment Les’ voice is heard on page 64,” Pozorski argues, “the monologue reads very much like stream of consciousness” (92). The stream of consciousness style breaks semantic forms and Pozorski argues Zuckerman would not “betray the rules of paragraphing in this way” (92). Pozorski’s reading is particularly compelling when read alongside Hoovestol’s analysis of Farley. Hoovestol compares Farley to Shelley’s monster, highlighting the ways in which both authors position their monsters as alone, surrounded by the wintry snow and ice.¹²⁹ Farley stands alone in *The Human Stain* because he must, because he represents the deathly destructiveness of whiteness.

¹²⁹ See Calvin Hoovestol’s “Secret Sins, Honest Hypocrites, and Secular Sermons: Hawthorne’s Human Stain in Philip Roth’s Twice-Told Tale.” *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, Apr. 2016, pp. 33–52, p.41.

At the end of *The Human Stain*, Nathan and Les confront one another in a “pristine” setting that Zuckerman imagines being “what the world was like before the advent of man” (HS 345). Roth seems to return us to what Toni Morrison has identified as a recurrent motif within the American tradition: “the snow”, Morrison explains, “is the wasteland of unmeaning, unfathomable whiteness” (58). Zuckerman describes himself as having “trespassed” (HS 345) upon this space, again affirming his commitment to sully the very ideal of purity itself. The two make idle chitchat, as Zuckerman anxiously attempts to wheedle out a confession from Farley, all the while facing his auger, “a metal shaft about four feet long ending in a wide, cylindrical length of corkscrew blade, a strong, serious boring tool” (HS 346). The impotent and incontinent Nathan stands against Les and his threateningly penetrative weapon used fertilely to break the ice and fish.

The Human Stain ends with Zuckerman leaving Les alone on the ice, promising to send him a copy of his forthcoming novel upon its release. Les is left on his bucket, surrounded by

the icy white of the lake encircling a tiny spot that was a man, the only human marker in all of nature, like the X of an illiterate’s signature on a sheet of paper. There it was, if not the whole story, the whole picture. Only rarely, at the end of the century, does life offer up a vision as pure and peaceful as this one: a solitary man on a bucket, fishing through eighteen inches of ice in a lake that’s constantly turning over its water atop an arcadian mountain in America (HS 361).

The X becomes the metaphor for the human stain that Roth links with the “illiterate” figure of Faunia, signifying a blotch that spoils the purity of the Arcadian ending. The simile brings us back to the impure figures of Coleman and Faunia, whose presence haunts and upsets the pristineness of the peaceful serenity Farley seeks. *The Human Stains* ends by reflecting on the immutable deathliness of purity that Roth connects with whiteness. “Whiteness, alone, is mute,” write Morrison, “meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable” (59). For both Morrison and Roth, whiteness represents a purification of the body that is not only senseless, but violent, deathly, and violating.

Conclusion: The Life and Death of a Male Body

Philip Roth

“Did Nothing for Israel”

Self-Hating Jew, Antisemite

Sodomist, Misogynist,

Destroyer of Morals, Ensnarer of Youth

Congestive Heart Failure

1933 – 2018¹³⁰

The epitaph above, borrowed and distorted from *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995), serves as a counter-memorial to the un-Rothianly mundane engraving the novelist chose for his grave.¹³¹ Whilst Roth is no longer regarded as an antisemite or self-hating Jew, the matter of his alleged misogyny remains a contentious issue. Roth’s legacy is a complicated and messy one. Yet the disarray of his patrimony is rather befitting for a writer whose fiction has frequently oriented around the body’s expulsions, secretions, and ejaculations. Roth’s willingness to embrace humankind’s murky immorality is what makes his fiction so compelling.

For Roth, impurity seems to be the foundational wellspring of writing itself. As his narrator, “Philip Roth”, declares in *Deception*:

As though its *purity* that’s the heart of a writer’s nature. Heaven help such a writer! As though Joyce hadn’t sniffed filthily at Nora’s pants. As though in Dostoyevsky’s soul, Svigrigailov never whispered. *Caprice* is at the heart of a writer’s nature. Exploration, fixation, isolation, venom, fetishism, austerity, levity, perplexity, childishness, *et cetera*. The nose in the seam of the undergarment – *that’s* the writer’s nature. *Impurity* (*Deception* 99, italics in original).

The doubling of “Roth” as the speaker means we the reader must be cautious in taking this quotation too seriously; its stately rhetoric is called into question by the narrative structures

¹³⁰ Adopted from *Sabbath’s Theater*, p.376.

¹³¹ Roth’s tombstone reads “Philip Roth 1933 2018”. See Ruth Epstein’s *Stonemason Creates Tombstone for Author Philip Roth / Connecticut News / US News*.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/connecticut/articles/2018-08-13/stonemason-creates-tombstone-for-author-philip-roth>.

that imbues the impure as the natural starting point of literature itself. Ironically, of course, this proclamation encapsulates the spirit of Roth's novels that centres on the impurity of human desires; for Roth, writing serves as an act of resistance against those seeking to establish social orders based on purified racial hierarchies. Roth's fiction attempts to encapsulate the impure messiness of life as a human being. Nevertheless, the passage above returns us to the issue of Roth's playfulness: the gendered imagery here reminds us that within Roth's writing, women's bodies are fetishized sites of impure desires, and the human subject Roth envisages is almost always a Jewish male.

The thesis has attempted to highlight the gendered body politics within Roth's fiction, and the ways Roth explores how the "Jewish body" has been used to define Jewish differences within America and Europe. The thesis questions the ways Roth's literature destabilizes racist conceptualizations of Jewish bodies, and has done so by incorporating a considered analysis of Roth's gendered imagery. I have argued that Roth's fiction undermines racial concepts of Jews-as-different.

Equally, Roth highlights how antisemitism has perniciously influenced Jewish men's conceptualizations of Jewish women. Jewish mothers are marginalized within Roth's fiction, problematically reflecting the ways in which Jewish women were disregarded as Jewish men assimilated into American society. Within the texts discussed here, non-Jewish white women are fetishized because they represent a racial and social form of "Americanness" that is regarded as superior to Jewishness. Despite the fact that Roth fails to imagine a Jewish woman as a literary subject, his novels serve as powerful critiques of how Jewish men have become embroiled in a culture of racial and sexual classifications, as they sought to establish themselves as "white" in post-World-War II America.

The thesis' discussion on Roth has its limitations. I recognise the narrowed concentration on a single author foreclosed the possibility of creating intersectional

discussions with other Jewish novelists and artists. Writers such as Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Anya Ulinich, and Michael Chabon would make interesting points of comparison in terms of how their works subversively engage with antisemitic conceptualizations of Jewishness.

Indeed, looking forward I have two particular interests that I am eager to further explore.

Firstly, I think the theoretical approach adopted here has potential to be unpacked in more detail through a monograph. I would like to consider the gender body politic of Roth's work elsewhere, particularly with regard to the Kepesh trilogy and *Sabbath's Theater* (1995). I am interested in taking the thesis's focus of the "Jewish body" and examining the medium of comics, as I feel the issue of bodily representation in a visual field may be a fertile site for critically interrogating how Jewish artists and writers have responded to antisemitic caricatures of "Jews."¹³²

The issue of how Jews inhabit literary and cultural spaces is an important site of study. Reading Roth's novels offers an intricate excavation of how Jews have mobilized in terms of race, gender, and class, and the ways Jews have overcome and been made to confront antisemitism. My work has only begun to address these areas of interest, and I remain firmly committed to exploring and studying an aesthetics of resistance against antisemitism and racism. Roth is an important (and problematic) writer; he is a significant figure of American letters because his work repeatedly confronts, confounds, and undermines antisemitism. I suspect Roth will always be remembered as a "satirist of the clamoring body [...] a writer who broke taboos, fucked around, indiscrete, stepped outside that stuff deliberately" (*CL* 223), only without the "sanitized death" (*CL* 222); which is rather fitting for such a capriciously devious writer.

¹³² This is an emerging subject within Jewish studies scholarship that I am eager to engage with. See Matthew Baigell's *The Implacable Urge to Defame: Cartoon Jews in the American Press, 1877-1935*, and Sarah Lightman's *Graphic Details: Jewish Women's Confessional Comics in Essays and Interviews*. McFarland & Co, 2014.

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