

Philip Roth, Henry Roth and the History of the Jews

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**Timothy Parrish,**  
**"Philip Roth, Henry Roth and the History of the Jews"**  
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**Ed. Gustavo Sánchez-Canales and Victoria Aarons**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Philip Roth, Henry Roth and the History of the Jews" Timothy Parrish argues that while Roth's status as a Jewish American writer has been a pressing issue since his career began and that while in recent scholarship Roth's achievement as a US-American writer is stressed, the durability of Roth's work depends more on its implied submission to a Jewish tradition. From "The Conversion of the Jews" (1959) to *Nemesis* (2010), his characters challenge endlessly the ethical and moral constructs of their Jewish community to acknowledge the fact that they exist inside of it. One might choose any of Roth's late works to explore this claim, but *Exit Ghost* (2007) is compelling in particular because it asks us to consider Roth's career in the context of the life and work of his critically overlooked predecessor and literary counter-ego, Henry Roth.

## Timothy PARRISH

### Philip Roth, Henry Roth and the History of the Jews

In Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet," the narrative raises the question of what makes a great writer's work cohere and come alive for readers of disparate experiences and expectations. In each writer's work lies concealed a "figure in the carpet" that the discerning reader comes to recognize even if there is no one passage that reveals it. James teases us with the prospect that a writer's work contains an almost secret, enduring meaning and that meaning, even if it cannot be specified, is what gives the writer's work life. The hard truth about literature, however, especially for critics and scholars who make their living talking about it, is that an enduring work of literature in some basic, stubborn sense exists independent of what critics say about it. If a work lasts to be encountered by a succession of readers born after the death of the author of the work, then the work's reception will inevitably be an accounting of the different premises held by subsequent generations. Some works, like James's *Turn of the Screw*, so successfully establish the terms of their engagement with their readers that the history of their criticism is remarkably consistent. You can pick up something someone said about that story in 1896 and feel in conversation with them. Other works, like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry*, somehow jump the track laid down between author and its original readers. The Concord Public Library committee member who argued for banning Twain's novel because of its alleged immorality would be surprised that a hundred years later readers still wanted to ban the book, although for different reasons (Hearn lxxvi-vii). The novel's words had not changed, but readers' expectations about what was offensive had.

James's "Figure" acknowledges that the thrill of reading any writer's collected works is in the encounter the reader has with the writer's work. Authors such as James, Twain, or Roth yield pleasure in part because of how their books seem to fit (or not) together like a puzzle. Roth is well aware of this pleasure and has organized his work into different categories as if to structure it for the reader. Such "bureaucratizing" of his oeuvre seems like cheating, however. The encounter between a reader and an author's body of work is after all a collision between everything the reader brings to the work and everything that the writer has put into it. The "everything" reader and writer each bring is never identical and their collision becomes the basis for the reader's experience of what this work means.

Like Twain, Roth's work has provoked collisions. His early stories in *The New Yorker* about the transformation of Jewish cultural mores in the face of rapidly changing post-World War II US-American society enraged conservative Jewish readers who believed that Roth was holding the Jews up to goyish ridicule. Some of these readers were enraged when Hannah Arendt published what would become *Eichmann in Jerusalem* virtually on top of the Roth stories. Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial and Roth's "Conversion of the Jews" and "Defender of the Faith" were notable in defining Jewish experience in broad human terms rather than parochial ethnic terms. Both Arendt and Roth received death threats and readers wanted to tear them to shreds. As Roth relates in *The Facts*, rabbis accused him of being a Nazi sympathizer (127). Arendt, who fled Hitler's camps and spent years helping Holocaust survivors repatriate to Israel, suffered similar accusations. Arendt remains a controversial figure. Roth does not. Perhaps this is because he is a fiction writer. Unlike a philosopher, a fiction writer need not defend his/her work on the basis of an agreed upon notion of "truth" that exists in the world beyond the one the fiction creates. When Roth was attacked by Jewish readers, he defended himself on the grounds of the artist's right to make his art however he can according to his own aesthetic capacities. Artistic sovereignty was good enough for James Joyce and Ralph Ellison, so why not Roth too? Neither was Roth above nationalist claims. He suggested that his modernist definition of the artist's duty to art was, for a US-American writer, patriotic. In *The Facts* he speaks of the Declaration of Independence as a work that justified his youthful dreams of growing up to express himself however he saw fit (21). Yet, Roth's fiction, certainly the fiction that made him famous, reflected his origins in the cultural experience of Jewish immigrants and their children. Roth's desire to express himself could be understood to be Jewish and US-American at the same time. The terms need not conflict, but Roth's fiction seemed to speak to two opposed sets of readers: those who read as Jews and those who did not.

Roth's Jamesian claim that art is art is never uncomplicated. What is a Jewish book? What is an Irish book? Is Joyce an Irish writer or has he escaped the nightmare of history to ascend to a textual paradise where all questions are about art? No book knows the ethnicity of any book's author. The words on the page are available to be shaped by anyone who knows them. "A novel is not evidence," Zuckerman says in *Exit Ghost*: "A novel's a novel" (265). Roth's novels, however, risk an entry into history with all of its twists and turns and forever unresolved arguments. This is not to say his novels

are not marvelous performances. They are. Unlike *The Turn of the Screw* or "The Figure in the Carpet" or even *Ulysses*, Roth's work requires that readers assess their relationship to their society and its history as the price for the vicarious pleasure they yield. Roth may link his aesthetic experimentation with an ideology of US-American freedom, but the context of his work is more deeply rooted in the diaspora than it is in the American Revolution.

"The Figure in the Carpet" asks us to consider what a reader needs to know to "get" a writer's work. It also asks us whether a writer's work can create a reader on its own terms, regardless of what a reader knows outside the works in question. We might call this speculation a modernist fantasy. We can call it the inevitable consequence of a literary movement that was so committed to experiencing reality, replacing reality, history, whatever you want to call it, with an aesthetic ordering. Who is the reader Roth's fiction creates? That depends on which Roth you are reading. Roth began his career as a modernist against nineteenth-century realism. It is fair to say that Roth wanted us to read his early stories, *Portnoy's Complaint*, the first Zuckerman trilogy, probably everything through *Operation Shylock* through a modernist (even postmodernist) logic. Now, after his retirement, Roth is likely to refer to himself as a realist. Roth, especially in his early career, emphasized his admiration for James. Possibly Roth's best novel, *The Ghost Writer*, takes imaginative flight when its protagonist, Nathan Zuckerman, literally stands on top of a James story. The tale that emerges raises difficult, unanswerable questions about Jewish identity history since it concerns the fate of Anne Frank and the legacy of the Holocaust. That book is about Zuckerman's quest to become a writer, a Jewish writer like Isaac Babel or the fictional Lonoff, but one with blood in his penis. Zuckerman, like his creator, has suffered slings and arrows from his Jewish readers and has claimed (possibly more to himself than to others) the requisite modernist defense authored by his heroes Joyce or Thomas Mann. You do not have to be a Jew or be familiar with Jewish cultural history in the twentieth century to understand and enjoy *The Ghost Writer*. But it helps.

Roth's career begins with a recalcitrant Jewish boy holding his community hostage. The first Zuckerman trilogy anatomizes the period of Roth's career when he seemed to rise over the objections of his Jewish readers. In retrospect, we can see how it was a misapprehension to think that Roth was attacking the Jewish community from a perspective outside of the community. From "The Conversion of the Jews" to *Nemesis*, Roth said repeatedly, even in moments of seeming rejection: invent myself as I will, make up any story I want or can, I cannot exist without the Jews. His characters endlessly challenge the ethical and moral constructs of their Jewish community to acknowledge the fact that they exist inside of it. Yet, the more intensely they push against these boundaries and the more critically they disassemble these mores, the more they become conscious that they are enwrapped in them. The Roth protagonist is what he attempts to undo. Unlike Satan who rises to fall, Roth sees that the Jew is always falling, over and over again, but through this eternal sequence Judaism endures and allows Philip to exist as mightily as Moses or Abraham.

As Roth became more "realist" in his aesthetic practice, his fiction's depiction of history also became less playful. As Roth and many critics have noted, his works such as "The American Trilogy" and even the counterhistory *The Plot Against America* engage US-American history, playing with the line that supposedly divides history from fiction, only to reassert its primacy. It is hard to imagine Roth writing a novel now where Anne Frank comes back to life. I would say this is because Roth is now more aware of the finality of her death and what it means to him as a (Jewish) writer. His later work has brought him more acclaim as a US-American writer. For many, the Trilogy created a safe space where post-Vietnam readers could claim the word "America" without irony or shame. Arguably, however, these works have been more Jewish since they refuse the classic US-American claim that is history is ours to invent as we will. Roth's later works assume a kind of collective, cultural identity at odds with the striving, solitary artist-Jew of his earlier fiction. *The Plot Against America* is a story of Jewish triumph in the U.S. such as his earliest critics might have wanted him to write.

Through *Operation Shylock* "history" or "society" was usually hostile to Roth's protagonists. Most of his protagonists were obligated to remake its threat into a personal (read: aesthetic) triumph. They had to see history as malleable to stay sane. *American Pastoral* marked a shift where history became something objectively known and respected. You cannot make it up anymore. In *The Human Stain*, Coleman Silk may hide from history, but history may be more powerful than his ability to invent himself. As we now can look back over the full scope of Roth's career, perhaps it is time to admit that Roth's claim to write like a modernist was always overstated, a strategic maneuver to keep his most dangerous, that is to say, most literal-minded, readers at bay. Roth's fiction, when it has not been primarily about sex, has been in its core an engagement with history through art, not an attempt to escape history through art. "The Figure in the Carpet" imagines something inherent within a writer's work that is impervious to history and accessible to any reader capable of illumination. James seems

to suggest that a writer's work contains an ineffable essence that separates that writer from all other writers and makes their work unique. By reading an author's collected works, the reader may discover this secret essence. The notion that there is a hidden key, a secret, that reveals the essence of an author's work is enticing in part because it implies that there is a spirit that makes the books' materiality come alive and the text itself might be the sole source of illumination. Does Roth's work have a figure in the carpet? Is there something that animates it in a way generations of readers will continue to seek even if they cannot name it? A writer's figure in the carpet will not matter unless readers continue to exist who want to look for it. Currently, Roth is revered in the United States by the literary elite, *New Yorker* readers, and subscribers to the latest releases for The Library of America. In the long run, however, his most loyal readers may resemble his earliest detractors more than his current celebrants. This is not to say Roth will be reviled, but that from the perspective of Jewish history his early works tell the same story as his later ones. His future as a writer has most likely already been revealed in his beginning.

In *The Ghost Writer* Nathan Zuckerman cannot begin his career as a Jewish writer without coming to terms with his family's incomprehension of his work. Roth readers have sometimes framed this novel as Roth's Holocaust novel, as *Mr. Sammler's Planet* was Saul Bellow's Holocaust novel, but for Roth, as for all Jews since Hitler, the Holocaust was there all along. What potentially stifles Zuckerman as a Jewish writer is not his boorish family, but his knowledge of the Holocaust. At the outset of a journey that would find him in nine Roth books (not counting *My Life as a Man*), Zuckerman must confront the meaning of Anne Frank, just as the Roth family in *Plot* would have to face Hitler. Roth is not obviously a Holocaust writer, unless you want to say that after the Holocaust all Jewish writers are Holocaust writers. Frankly, it is difficult to argue with such a claim. Perhaps the only response is to acknowledge that Jews existed before and after the Holocaust. The Holocaust, monumental and incomprehensible as it is, is part of an ongoing Jewish story. So is Roth. The figure in Roth's carpet, like the figure in any great writer's carpet, is unspeakable. So is the Holocaust. Nonetheless, I am going to give Roth's figure a name. Call it Henry Roth.

The possibility of course comes from *Exit Ghost*. Before Roth started writing novels in which Roth was a protagonist, readers were inclined to associate him with Nathan Zuckerman. In *The Counterlife* Roth imagined something that most of his loyal readers probably did not want him to imagine. He let us think Zuckerman was dead. Zuckerman's death did not last the novel, but those readers who liked to contemplate the meaning of his creator through his creation grasped the tacit corollary. Roth was not going to write uninterrupted forever either. With *Exit Ghost*, Roth finally bid Zuckerman farewell. He did not kill his alter-ego: he let him escape into the anonymity of the city. Zuckerman did not exit without a final summoning of his Jewish ghosts. Thus, in this final Zuckerman novel, Nathan comes to New York to confront his decaying body and encounters the living memory of Lonoff, the imaginary Jewish writer who, along with Anne Frank/Amy Bellete, presided over Zuckerman's self-initiation into literature. By this time Lonoff has been dead for many years. He has left behind an unpublished manuscript and, apparently, a family secret concerning incest. In *The Ghost Writer*, Lonoff was a gate he was passing through to his future as a writer. In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman's career is all but over. Lonoff appears not as an invitation to make his future but as a reminder that his career soon will no longer be his to make. Who Lonoff may be said to be matters less than that he provoked Zuckerman to ask of himself his duty as a Jewish writer. Lonoff is a reflected version of Zuckerman, just as Zuckerman is a reflected version of Roth. Thus, at the end of the Zuckerman saga, one that had taken him from Newark to Prague to London to Israel and back to New York in his quest to be a Jewish writer, Roth through Zuckerman sees the many faces of the Jewish writer he is, has been, and may become. Behind, beneath, and alongside the conclusion to the Zuckerman series one finds the specter of Henry Roth.

In this gesture, Roth is not telling us that Henry Roth's most famous novel, *Call it Sleep*, remains the most powerful novel written about the Jewish experience in US-America. Nor is it unlikely that he is expressing his admiration for Roth's late masterpiece, the multi-volume *Mercy of a Rude Stream* in which Roth finally completed a sequel of sorts to *Call it Sleep*. According to Steven G. Kellman, Roth pronounced two of the four volumes to be masterpieces (326). *Exit Ghost* refers to the most sensational aspect of Henry Roth's return to literary fame: his alleged incest with his sister Rose. *Mercy* portrays unflinchingly the incestuous relations Ira Stigman, the book's protagonist whose story seems a continuation of David Schearl's, has with his sister and cousin. At the same time, Henry Roth gave interviews claiming the fiction was based on his own real life relationship with his sister, Rose Broder (née Roth). After the publication of *A Diving Rock*, Rose denied the charges and demanded legal compensation. She settled with her brother for ten thousand dollars and the promise that the scenes depicting Ira's sexual relations with his sister would be cut in the remaining volumes (Kellman 312).

To some, Rose Broder's public repudiation confirmed the veracity of what the fiction portrayed. One reader who apparently took Rose's denial as a confession was Philip Roth. According to Kellman, Roth contacted the editor of Henry Roth's papers to interview him about the material and what he might know. The purpose of the interview was to explore the possibility of writing a novel that would use the older Roth's incest as the background to its story. Instead of writing a full-fledged Henry Roth novel, Roth grafted his story on to Lonoff's legacy. Roth gives to Lonoff Henry Roth's obscurity and his secret. It may be that Roth is preparing us for some dark secret of his own past that will be revealed after his death. Unquestionably, the novel is hostile to elevating a writer's personal scandal—"the retribution of biographical inquisition" (*Exit* 275)—over his aesthetic achievement. More compelling than any biographical connection, however, is the fact that Philip Roth links Henry Roth's story to Anne Frank's story. Roth's Zuckerman drama begins with Anne Frank and ends with Henry Roth. Not Joyce, Beckett, Mann, Proust, Ellison, Hawthorne, or any of the other great writers Zuckerman has invoked previously. Through Zuckerman, Roth yet again claims another literary ancestry for himself. Final gestures count. In the last Zuckerman novel, Philip Roth invites us to reread the Zuckerman saga through the example and career of Henry Roth.

When Zuckerman sees Amy Belette at the end of her life, is he seeing Anne Frank escaped from Auschwitz importuning him in the name of Henry Roth? In "The Art of Fiction" James argued that readers owe writers only the respect of their premise. That is, writers are free to invent whatever they may and a reader's judgment depends on whether the artist succeeds according to the logic the work creates. James, again, gives us the modernist aesthetic that Philip Roth tried to claim for his own. However, it turns out that Roth's work suggests that the Jewish writer cannot claim the freedom that James staked out. When he concludes the Zuckerman saga by linking his work to that of Henry Roth, Roth concedes that there are stories that Jews neither can nor wish to tell. Their destiny as Jews will not allow it. They do not possess the same freedom others writers claim. Although Henry Roth's story is embedded in what it has meant to be Jewish in the U.S., its meaning changed after the Holocaust. Of course there is the sense in which all Jewish stories changed in the wake of the Holocaust, but Roth's is a special case that bears rehearsing in part because he is possibly the only major Jewish American to have written significant works both well before and after the Holocaust. When Henry published *Call It Sleep*, few noticed its greatness. The book sold poorly and was out of print quickly. It made the biggest splash among Roth's fellow Marxists, who dismissed the book for its supposed glorification of the individual over society. Roth's great novel achieved fame when it was republished in 1964 as a paperback and became a bestseller. Irving Howe, who dismissed *Portnoy's Complaint* as silly, wrote a glowing front page book review for *The New York Times Book Review*. Why did something sink almost without a trace in 1934 to climb the national charts thirty years later?

One answer is Philip Roth. Two others are Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, the three principal figures in a post-World War II boom in Jewish American writing. By 1964, these three Jewish writers had each won the American National Book Award, perhaps the most prestigious prize for US-American novelists. Bellow won it for the second time with *Herzog* also in 1964. *Call It Sleep* was a belated arrival to this post-war boom in Jewish American writing. Fifty years earlier Anzia Yezierska and Abraham Cahan had attracted popular attention, but they were not celebrated as great US-American novelists so much as ethnic journalists. After World War II, being a good Jewish writer was no longer a sign of one's parochialism. Bellow, Roth, and Malamud seemed to write about Jews freed from the ghetto to pursue a complex subjectivity. Their alienation was charismatic, winning, and perceived to be modern to the extent that it was not a mere cultural inheritance. *Call It Sleep* appeared in this context as a voice from a forgotten grandfather, one who happened to be a genius. The world it portrayed was different from what was found in Roth or Bellow. *Call It Sleep* was rooted in the hardships of the crossing and the teeming poverty of immigrant slums. The novel's visionary ending in which the protagonist endures an ecstatic mystical experience could be read as a premonition of a promised land revealed, not a moment of transcendence within a life of hardship. By 1964 the Jewish descendants of Roth's fantastically complex cityscape were, like the Patimkins of *Goodbye, Columbus*, mainstream US-Americans. Stories from the ghettos of New York or Boston could not embarrass them or their goy readers.

By 1964 *Call It Sleep* was a ringer. It did not fit in with the works of later writers in its subject or style. None of these writers spoke of Henry Roth as a writer who had influenced them. Presumably, before Howe's review, their knowledge of Roth was equal to that of most readers of the *Times Book Review*. *Call It Sleep* was not simply modernist inflected, as Roth's and Bellow's works were, but itself a modernist masterpiece—although you are unlikely even now to find it on most modernist syllabi. When the novel is spoken of as modernist, it is generally, and grudgingly, put in a category called ethnic modernism. Nor has *Call it Sleep* usually been found among the short list of great US-American

novels, despite Roth's place in the recently published *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists* (see Wirth-Nesher). Why is it not modernist, but only ethnic modernist? Why is it not on the short list of great US-American novels everyone must read? Defensible responses are that it is long and regrettably not well known. And then there is the other, unprovable, answer, one not unrelated to the fact that it is not well known. It is a Jewish book.

*Call It Sleep* tells a story of US-Americanization, an immigrant story. But it is more than that, especially to the Roth who wrote it. As Zuckerman says, a novel is not evidence; a novel is a novel. In its immediate context, the one that the novel creates through its own wisdom, *Call It Sleep* is the story of a child within a particular milieu. The child is more important than the milieu, but the astonishing variety and particularity of the milieu is what compels the reader's admiration of Roth's artistry. It is hard not to notice that David is a Jewish kid trying to make his way among gentiles. However, when the reader leaves the world of the book and tries to talk about the experience the book creates, the easiest terms that come to mind are cultural. The book is obviously about creating and dwelling in the seam that binds a child's consciousness to the world around him (this is roughly how hostile Marxist readers characterized the book). A universal theme, in other words. Arguably, being set among Jewish characters is incidental. If you asked Roth in 1934 what the book was, he probably would have said something like the following: it is a novel I wrote about my life after reading James Joyce.

After *Call It Sleep*, Roth went into a long period of silence and published little. Kellman's biography suggests that he never surrendered a sense that he was, at heart, a writer. When he was rediscovered in 1964, he committed himself to writing again and the result eventually was *Mercy*. Above I suggest that what separated the first publication of *Call It Sleep* from its dramatic republication was the success story of Jews in the U.S. And so it did. There was also the Holocaust and eventually the creation of Israel. When US-Americans praised the work of post-war Jewish writers, they were not only also celebrating the fact that a new voice in US-American fiction seemed to have arrived. They were tacitly celebrating the fact that the Holocaust did not happen here. Roth tells us this explicitly in *The Ghost Writer*, and again in *The Plot Against America*. In those works, the U.S. is a safe haven. What can a US-American Jewish writer say in the face of that event, but it did not happen here. The American Jewish writer, anyway, should be free to follow his muse—a gift from history. Henry Roth could write *Call it Sleep* and Philip could write ... (choose your favorite). For the Jewish writer after Hitler even the US-American one, can there ever be a safe haven from the Holocaust? While originally writing from a Marxist perspective, Roth in the 1960s and 1970s had no loyalties. In the wake of Israel's birth as a nation, Roth came to feel that the preservation of a Jewish people mattered to him more than anything else. He started to speak of the rift within himself he felt when his family moved from the Jewish Lower East side to ethnically mixed Harlem. The opening pages of *Mercy* attribute these same feelings to Ira. In writing *Mercy* Roth's aesthetic regeneration was linked intrinsically to the rebirth that was Israel.

Roth's long second novel evokes the US-American Jewish world before Hitler and ends before World War II. It is not a Holocaust novel, although knowledge of the Holocaust shadows its pages. Interestingly, the book he referred to as "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Fiasco," rejects the aesthetics of Joyce which were so integral to the first novel (*Shifting Landscapes* 301). The novel is not trying to assert Ira's primacy as an artist (as Zuckerman did in *The Ghost Writer*), but to place Ira's desire to be an artist in the context of a Jewish family story. *Mercy* insists on the reality of history in the face of even the highest art. On the one hand, Ira must be led by a gentile (his muse, based on Roth's lover, Eda Lou Walton) to tell his tale of himself and his tribe. On the other, the tale of that tribe is the only one he knows. Rather than relate himself to the whole of Judaism, it is as if he is seeking the whole of Judaism's relation to him. Ira feels utterly alienated from it, but he cannot transcend it and therein lies his story. At the heart of the novel is Ira's sense of himself as a Jew in a Jewish family inflected through his fear of his father, love for his mother, and an incestuous relationship with his sister and cousin. The reader of *Mercy*, however, may not be struck by the luridness of the incest it depicts. What comes through is the deep love the brother and sister have for each other. Kellman suggests that the incest depicts how painful it was for Jews in that period to leave the family. You cling to what is near and comforting rather than what is strange and potentially threatening (311).

*Portnoy's Complaint*, set in a markedly different era, extends the cultural dynamic portrayed in *Mercy*. Part of Portnoy's hysteria derives from his recognition that he is caught in a family dynamic committed to replicating itself precisely to insure its continued insularity. His sister is supposed to become her mother and his role is to marry someone like their mother. There is no way to escape his family. His transgressive desire for the *shiksa* or his impotence when seducing Jewish women in Israel is arguably a manifestation of his recognition that within his group incest has become normalized. Because Jews risk being exterminated in one way or another by the outsiders they live among, incest

in these works portrays the survival instinct of the group. The will to incest, then, is less a perversion than a manifestation of group history that goes back to ancient prohibitions against intermarriage. Deeper than aesthetic innovation, then, is the story of what Jews have made of themselves across the centuries despite violent suppression of their group. In 1967 Henry Roth published an important although overlooked story, "The Surveyor," in *The New Yorker* that portrays this knowledge. He considered it an apprentice story for the great work he hoped he still had in him. It also predicts how his later work was a coming to terms with his place in a Jewish tradition that defines himself and his sense of the world. Teaching himself to write again, the story literally marks out the territory he would cover. For the purposes of the present study, we may think of it also as one of Zuckerman's lost stories.

"The Surveyor" relates David Stigman's quest to put a wreath on the site in Seville where Jews were killed during the Inquisition. This place lies unmarked. It sits near a giant statue of El Cid. Against the backdrop of this tribute to Spanish military might, Stigman, a US-American tourist, tries to claim a spot forgotten by nearly everyone. Using the tools of a surveyor, he works with his wife to mark as precisely as possible the exact place where practicing Jews and the Jews who had converted to Catholicism (*conversos*) were executed. The US-Americans create a small spectacle of themselves. Their work stops traffic and elicits attention. Eventually, the Spanish police confiscate their wreath and invite them to the police station. Stigman refuses to reveal the purpose of his trip. One of these modern "inquisitors," who happens to be part Jewish, figures out Stigman's plan. He arranges for them to be released and invites them to a bar where he reveals his own heritage. The three share a cup of exile. The wreath, however, is never returned to its place. For a few moments only, it had rested precariously on the spot Stigman had marked for it. For a Jew in a strange land, the very act of memorial is a risky and dangerous act. Nothing marks the spot where Jews were slain for being Jews. This knowledge the Jews bear, as Stigman bears the wreath away himself.

Monuments exist at Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen where Stigman might also have left a wreath. These sites can convey only partially the depth of the grief they mark, in part because the enormity of what they commemorate threatens to obliterate the history that preceded it. Hitler's Holocaust was not a new pattern in the history of the Jews. Its scope, abetted by technology and the twentieth-century population explosion, was. During the inquisition, Spinoza's family fled Portugal after the massacre of two thousand Jews in Lisbon in 1506. This is the point. Jews have been killed for being Jews virtually wherever they have gone. How does the Jewish writer mark such places, let alone such grief in his/her fiction? "The Surveyor" gives one example: *Mercy* gives another. Roth makes such a gesture when he evokes Henry Roth in *Exit Ghost* no less than he did when he evoked Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer*.

Often, we want to identify writers in terms of their nationality. In *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists*, Hana Wirth-Nesher raises the inevitable question concerning Henry Roth. Is he Jewish or US-American (130)? Such a question, even when it assumes the answer is both, asks which story or picture is superimposed upon the other. Which version do we prefer? Wirth-Nesher asks this question in the context of a book that celebrates specifically US-American writers. Inevitably, she tilts the answer to "American" by suggesting that "American" signifies the universal while Jewish denotes the particular. If we read Henry's work through "The Surveyor," however, these terms turn over. The particular topples the universal. US-American literature does not frame the Jewish story: it is merely the vehicle for its expression. Stigman's wreath commemorates a history that neither the Inquisition nor the Catholic Church can comprehend or, despite their efforts, eradicate. In the context "The Surveyor" provides, *Mercy*, or *Call it Sleep*, or the collected works of Roth, should be read as Jewish "memory" works which happen to be set in the U.S. It may seem strange to read Philip's novels this way. His commitment to subjectivity, in terms of experience and experimentation, coincides with the US-American imperative to invent yourself that runs through Emerson back to the Revolution. A work such as *The Plot Against America* may seem to privilege US-American exceptionalism over Jewish memory. Yet, it is Jews who figure in the story principally, a Jew who tells the story, and, most importantly, Jews who survive the threat of extermination so that their story can be told. The novel has a curious logic. It initiates a plot the novel's setting cannot believably sustain. Its lesson may seem to be the simple one that the U.S. is not Europe. Such a claim is true, even obvious, but ultimately misleading. The novel's deeper meaning is that the Holocaust did not cross the Atlantic, but its memory did. It was an event, like the Inquisition or the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. and that causes Jews to rebuild their connections to one another as Jews.

How writers continue to be read depends on future readers born after they die. One can argue that *The Plot Against America*, like Roth's work generally, celebrates the freedom allowed by US-American society. Yet, despite its US-American chauvinism, *The Plot Against America*, or any of Roth's



novels, does not obviously exemplify an ideal of US-American possibility in the way other US-American novels do. Nothing Roth wrote can replace *Moby-Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *My Antonia*, or *Invisible Man* as a living dream of US-American possibility left for future readers to re-imagine. Huck Finn lights out for the territory and Roth's characters carry their territory with them wherever they go. For this reason, Arendt, who was sometimes skeptical that the nation-state should exist as a permanent haven for Jews, could write, "even I know that any real catastrophe in Israel would affect me more deeply than anything else" (Arendt qtd. in Brightman 249). In *The Plot*, the nazis challenge the Roths as Jews, not as US-Americans. It is an assimilationist novel that is at its core anti-assimilationist. Arguably, so is the logic of Roth's oeuvre.

"The Surveyor" marks a territory broader than the U.S. and arguably deeper than the Holocaust. In a letter to Mary McCarthy, Arendt speaks of the old Jewish "survival passion" that dates to the reformer Nehema, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. and Ezra, who helped to enforce Nehema's prohibition of Jewish intermarriage with foreign women. Noting that the Jews "are as afraid of complete assimilation as they are of extermination," she says that what binds Jews is the "memory" of their survival despite history's continual threats to their continuing existence (Arendt qtd. in Brightman 249). "Jews think," she says, "empires, governments, nations come and go; the Jewish people remains" (Arendt qtd. in Brightman 249). This memory has outlasted history's massacres. No Jewish writer who writes about Jews as Jews can stand beyond its shadow. Shadows cannot exist absent light, which is the power of memory that Arendt names.

In *Exit Ghost*, Henry and Philip Roth stare at each other across the vast landscape of their many texts. Between them, joining them, is the doubled memory of Frank protecting each through their work. Here whatever was Frank's specific identity matters less than the pattern her story embodies. Out of the nightmare of history from which the Roths' hero, Joyce, wished to awaken, and that murdered Frank, Philip, like Henry, chooses to make another story. The history that lives through Roth makes possible the fiction he writes. That is the hard lesson the example of Henry Roth's life taught him. History for these writers cannot be transcended by art. Each in his way marked places which can be hidden, even lost, but not forgotten. The drama played out in their writing is different from one James's Vereker imagines. For James's character, the pattern in the carpet is the design of the author's brilliant, solitary mind. The pattern would not exist but for his genius. Each Roth left patterns of genius too. You can tell a Henry from a Philip. But the materials they used were never their own. They inherited them and were made by them because the stories they tell situate both Roths in a pattern more imposing than the ingenious designs they contrived.

*Exit Ghost* concludes Roth's long Zuckerman saga, which was, among other things, an exploration of the possibilities and responsibilities of the Jewish American writer. When the last Zuckerman novel lifts its protagonist's curtain for the last time and reveals Henry Roth, it does more than identify the literary precursor whom most have not associated with Philip. It acknowledges a cultural and historical predicament the two writers share. It asks us to wonder which story will last longer, have more adherents, be carried more places. The one concerning US-Americans or the one concerning Jews? This is an impossible question to answer. So I will ask it another way. Can the work of either these US-American writers, Henry Roth and Philip Roth, stand apart from the history they share with other Jews? Not as long as there are readers who self-identify as Jews to read it.

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