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16. *Ibid.*, see the essay "A Comparison" (pp. 61-63) and Ted Hughes' comment that a "lightning pass through all the walls of the maze was her real genius. Instant confrontation with the most central, unacceptable things . . ." p. 5.
17. Sylvia Plath, "America! America!" in *Johnny Panic*, pp. 54-55.
18. Kathleen Spivack, "Sharers of the Heart," *The Boston Globe Magazine* (August 9, 1981), pp. 10-13, 35-42.
19. *Johnny Panic*, "Ocean 1212-W," pp. 23-24.
20. *Letters Home*, p. 40, quoted by her mother from "Diary Supplement" dated November 13, 1949.
21. Sylvia Plath, "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices," *Winter Trees* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 50.

The Ethics of Narration in D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*

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Publication of *The White Hotel* by D.M. Thomas has been the cause of celebration and scandal, the book hailed as one of the great innovative fictions of the last few decades and condemned as a shoddy work, the product of a failed imagination resorting to plagiarism; praised for seriously dealing with the subject of the holocaust in fiction and castigated for fictionalizing real, that is historically documented, horrors.

The White Hotel is the story of Elizabeth Erdman, a Russian opera singer in Vienna who turns to psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud to relieve her of excruciating pain in her breast and groin. Her therapy completed, she progresses in her career, marries, and returns to Russia where she is eventually killed at Babi Yar. The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, actually entitled "The Prologue," is a series of letters by Freud and his followers, beginning with an account by Sandor Ferenczi of Freud and Jung's celebrated visit to America in 1909. The chapter introduces the heroine, as yet unnamed, as one of Freud's patients suffering from severe sexual hysteria and as the author of a document which Freud submits for publication in the interests of the medical community. Chapter I, entitled "Don Giovanni," is the patient's document, a first-person sexual fantasy—erotic, even pornographic at times, in which the patient imagines a sexual adventure with Freud's son. This long reverie, for which the setting is a white hotel, was originally published by Thomas as an individual poem in 1979.¹

"The Gasteln Journal," Chapter II, is a third-person narrative written by the patient at Freud's request and is an elaboration of the Don Giovanni fantasy. It is dreamlike, full of erotic and surrealistic images, indeed, at times an archetypal Freudian dream in that the images from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* seem to have infiltrated the patient's mind. In both the Don Giovanni poem and the Gasteln journal, the lovemaking of the young couple takes place simultaneously with catastrophe at the resort, a fire destroying one whole wing, causing many deaths. Other hotel guests, during the course of a few days, drown during a storm that floods the hotel or are buried under an avalanche

while burying their dead from the earlier disasters. Chapter III, entitled "Frau Anna G.," is the story of the patient as told by Freud in the form of a case history, similar to Freud's famous case histories of Dora or of the Wolf Man. It is an impeccable imitation of Freud's logic and style. In Chapter III, Freud concludes, primarily from analysing her dreams, that Anna's symptoms, severe pain in her left breast and groin, are the result of a repressed childhood memory of her mother and her uncle, naked, in the guest house. "The Health Resort," Chapter IV, is a third-person omniscient account in the tradition of the nineteenth-century novel, of Lisa Erdman's life beyond therapy, that is her gradual success as an opera singer and her marriage to the widower of her career idol and friend who died in childbirth. This chapter ends with her sense of fulfillment, personal and professional, evident in a letter which she sends to an aunt in America, dated 1936. "The Sleeping Carriage," Chapter V, is the account of Lisa's and her adopted son Kolya's last day of life, from their foreboding at dawn to their death among the thousands of bodies at Babi Yar. A large portion of this chapter, about one third in fact, is borrowed directly from the testimony of an eyewitness at Babi Yar, Dina Pronicheva, which appeared in Anatoli Kuznetsov's documentary novel, *Babi Yar*, published in 1970.² The author acknowledges his debt to Kuznetsov's book on the acknowledgement page and to draw further attention to the use of actual testimony for the brutality experienced by his heroine as one of the victims of Babi Yar, he introduces Dina Pronicheva as a character into Chapter II, scrambling up the ravine after dark. The final chapter, "The Camp," takes place presumably after death, where Lisa is reunited with her mother in an Eden that looks suspiciously like Palestine. Freud is there too.

Whatever one's judgement ultimately of the success of Thomas's work, one's first and lasting impression is that it is an ambitious book—ambitious in three respects:

1) Artistically as *innovative fiction*. Each of the six chapters is written in an entirely different narrative mode and each style, representing a different convention in the history of narration, is a comment on its own validity and appropriateness with regard to its subject. The fiction is sufficiently self-aware to call into question the realities created by particular literary styles, but so engaged in the subject as never to be fashionably self-reflexive or a mere display of the author's virtuosity.

2) Intellectually as *psychoanalytic fiction*. Freud is one of the major characters of the book and the Freudian account of human development, "That great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis" as Thomas calls it in the "Author's Note," is the informing principle of the work. In this respect, Thomas is examining the claims made for psychoanalysis as one of the reigning ideologies in this century.

3) *Morally as holocaust fiction*. Definitions of "holocaust fiction" range from extreme minimalism, eyewitness accounts written during the war only, to extreme maximalism, in which a "post-holocaust consciousness" seems to

pervade much of the literature of the West.³ My reason for including *The White Hotel* in this category of fictions is that the Babi Yar massacre is not historical backdrop here to provide a context for a private drama, but it is rather a central subject. Thomas, in a very deliberate and compelling manner, is asking what connection exists between collective tragedy and personal desire.

The book's ambition lies in the manner in which Thomas has braided together the three elements—the artistic, intellectual, and moral—so that no one element can be discussed independently of the other two. Human suffering, the book seems to argue, is communicated to others in narratives. While all narratives are imaginative reconstructions, when it comes to those of mass suffering, we should be particularly vigilant about honoring the line between fact and fiction. As the development of one individual psyche is also a narrative, is it parallel to or in contrast to the history of civilization? How can we narrate events of mass brutality meaningfully and how do we record, shape, and appropriate such accounts without violating truth, that is, the pain of the victim? Is there an aesthetics of atrocity?⁴ These are among the questions raised by Thomas in his disturbing *The White Hotel*.

In keeping within the tradition of the novel as the genre most concerned with the exploration of unique individual characters, D.M. Thomas creates a unique heroine in such a way that we, the readers, may come to some understanding of her life, may attribute to it some meaning and, having traced a pattern in it, wrest from it insight that transcends the life of the individual character and tells us something about ourselves; our experience with other novel heroines—our passionate acquaintance with Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Isabel Archer, Caddy Compson, Tess D'Urberville and others raises in us expectations about the accessibility of the lives of others and the authority of omniscient or quasi-omniscient authors to direct our perceptions. If every choice of a specific point of view is a stylistic expression of a concept of authority, what is the authority for arriving at a meaningful understanding of the life of Lisa Erdman? Thomas does not have one answer to this question. This we know because he does not narrate her life in only one style. Moreover, the different styles do not all narrate the same stage of her life, so that it is not a question of six different views of presumably the same slippery reality. In this case, multiple perspectives do not hold out any promise of reconstituting some kind of omniscience. In *The White Hotel*, each style is matched with different segments of the narrative; both story and mode of discourse change as we move from chapter to chapter, without any pretense of an overview.

What, then, are Thomas's models of authority? Let us examine each of the chapters, beginning with the prologue. By its position as the book's beginning, our tendency is to read this chapter as establishing a frame of reference for what is to come, as prefiguring perhaps, or, as is the case in any temporal ordering, we often assume the beginning to be the origin of what follows. The

prologue is in an epistolary mode, the exchange of fictional letters by historically "real" individuals. By calling this "The Prologue," Thomas removes it from the narrative itself, and by using historical characters, identifies inhabiting the real social world, he calls attention to it as a framing device that links the fictional novel to documented reality. In using a prologue to authenticate the historical or social reality of what follows, Thomas draws on a convention of the novel from Cervantes to Hawthorne, that is, the explanation of the origin of the story that denies its purely fictional nature. In this case, we have imaginary letters attributed to real cultural figures. Since the development and contributions of Freud's and Jung's careers are public knowledge, we can detect what some of Thomas's concerns are by what events he selects for his letter writers.

While establishing a clinical context for the journal which is to follow, the letters leave us with a character sketch of the originator of that clinical approach, Freud. A self-declared "profoundly irreligious man," Freud is seen as deeply sensitive, fainting when Jung nonchalantly tells a tale about exhuming bodies from a prehistoric mass grave, lamenting the ill treatment of war neurotics in German hospitals, and developing a theory of a death wish, claiming that we have "ignored the extreme of morbidity."⁵ The pre-historic mass grave, the result of a natural disaster according to Jung, prefigures the mass grave resulting from murder in the Babi Yar section. Thomas has also imitated Freud's characteristic affirmation of the nonjudgemental, objective nature of "the realm of science," as he does in the Dora case history whenever he anticipates criticism of offensive subjects or language. Yet, in an earlier lapse of clinical objectivity, Freud decorously assures a colleague to whom he sent the manuscript that his patient is "a young woman of most respectable character." In short, Freud the moralist is solidly present in the letters of the prologue.

Although we have been prepared to accept Chapter II as the notebook of a severely ill patient, we are not prepared for the power of the poem, its erotic and morbid images, and its self-conscious commentary—"for nothing in the white hotel but love is offered at a price we can afford." In psychoanalytic terms, the poem is an expression of "transference," the patient's transferring onto the physician feelings which did not originate in the analysis, but which, having surfaced as a result of analysis, are now directed to the analyst. In this case, the patient has further transferred her feelings onto the analyst's son, perhaps to avoid the expression of forbidden love and desire between patient and physician but also, as a form of resistance to therapy, redirecting her hostility and attraction to her doctor in the form of seducing his son. The as yet unnamed patient seems to comment on her own desires by recording her fantasy between the staves of a score of Don Giovanni, thereby identifying with a mythic rake and libertine, punished in hell for his sexual appetites. Anna, as Freud will call her in the case history, is a stern moralist. In Anna's fantasy, lovemaking is always connected with death and disaster, the imagining simultaneously of extreme libidinous desire and extreme morbidity. Thus,

Anna's fantasy is a vivid expression of Freud's theory of a death instinct.

When Anna expands and transforms her poem into a prose version, the conventions of prose fiction bring added dimensions to the account of her inner life. First, this third-person omniscient narrative begins with a more detailed account, as novels do, of how the heroine came to have her adventure, the experience leading to the affair with the young man. It opens with her nightmare position leading to the affair with the young man. It opens with her nightmare which she dreams while sharing a train compartment with Freud's son. The nightmare acts as uncanny foreshadowing, for her dream flight into a forest to escape pursuing soldiers and her stumbling over a boy, bleeding from cuts incurred in his flight, is exactly the account of Dina Pronicheva's escape from Babi Yar in the fifth chapter. Her dream is, then, a prefiguring of history. Second, the prose fiction account introduces minor characters who provide varied responses to the disasters that occur there, mainly through a series of postcards from the white hotel. As in a novel of manners, stock characters reveal their social class and aspirations in their messages. There are callous professionals, concerned only about interrupting their vacation, a narcissistic honeymoon couple, an altruistic nurse, a social climbing secretary, a botanist concerned only about his specimens, a priest casting all suffering in religious terms, a comic maid, and a reactionary army major measuring every event against life before the war (which is always incomparably better). The indifference to disaster displayed by the guests at the resort intent on preserving a genteel way of life calls to mind Mann's *Magic Mountain* or Appelfeld's *Badenheim 1939*—slow erosion of privileged isolation.

The matter-of-fact tone of the Gasteln journal is in contrast to the bizarre surrealist images. Here wombs and breasts fly through the air along with orange groves, one's hair can be on fire without being hurt, and it can rain on one side of a train only. It is a world where Freud's paradigm seems to have replaced the laws of physics, where all explanations of the supernatural are psychological or medical, flying wombs the projection of repressed anxiety about hysterectomies, a petrified foetus floating above the lake the guilt of a woman having undergone an abortion. Everyone's neuroses are objectified into the landscape; they constitute the social environment. Even conversations operate in Freudian code—"Shall I open a window?" says the young man in the stifling train compartment. "If you like," she murmured, "only I can't afford to become pregnant." No train is merely a means of transport, no tunnel merely a road through a mountain. Almost a textbook illustration of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, the Gasteln journal ends in a haunting near repetition of its beginning, not a dream about Babi Yar but an "unspeakably offensive remark," an anti-Semitic declaration by one of the guests. The lovers, ever more dedicated to their passion as the catastrophes intensify, include others in the white hotel, such as the priest, in their lovemaking until, Anna writes, "she could not tell which of them was making love to her... The spirit of the white hotel was against selfishness" (p. 86).

"Frau Anna G.," the title of the case history which constitutes chapter III of the book, is a masterful imitation of Freud's case histories in its organiza-

tion, rhetoric, and tone. Freud was an accomplished storyteller and his case histories read like novels. Thomas has given us the Freudian strategy—from the patient's story as he or she presented it to Freud through the process of guiding, manipulating, and teasing out of the patient the hidden, repressed aspects of that story that are, Freud would argue, responsible for the neuroses. Freud's case histories are detective stories, his method based on the belief of the power of the past, the tyranny of the repressed primal event that determines future behavior. Always aware, as Thomas's Freud points out, that "the unconscious is a precise and even pedantic symbolist" (p. 99), Freud relentlessly digs deeper, to use his own archaeological metaphor, for what the patient is intent on keeping from the analyst and from him or herself as well. Usually the climactic moment is the report of a dream that Freud can successfully decode so that the primal event can be reconstructed, or, as may often be the case, the *memory* of the event, itself a reconstruction, can be recalled. That is, the primal event is as likely to be a narrative construct which the patient creates, indeed, even a fiction which has been repressed.⁶ Thus, the patient constructs tales about his life that make him guilty enough to "forget" them. Freud attempts to reconstruct that narrative which may itself be a reconstruction. Taking notes after the patient's visit and writing his case histories after the completion of therapy, all of the narratives that are evidence for Freud's job of reconstruction are themselves constructs. In explaining his method of writing up case histories, Freud claims that "I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic facts end and my constructions begin,"⁷ yet he admits to having abridged, edited, and synthesized, despite his disavowal of any artistic inventiveness. "If I were a writer of novellas instead of a man of science," writes Thomas's Freud, just as Freud himself sets the record straight in the preface to *Dora* by denying that he wrote a roman à clef. While Freud repeatedly makes scientific claims for his method, he is a man so sensitive to artistic method that he criticizes other analysts for the poor way in which they write up "the stories" of their patients; he even goes so far as to criticize his *patients* for being poor storytellers. Freud implies that a coherent story, the definition of which is no doubt gleaned from the aesthetic of the late nineteenth-century novel, is in some manner connected with mental health. In discussing ailments, Freud characterizes them by the various types of narrative insufficiency that he commonly finds. The aim of treatment, he writes, is to repair damage to the patient's memory, so that he or she can come "into possession of one's own story."⁸

Thomas misses none of Freud's characteristics, such as his sense of all results being somewhat incomplete, most evident in *Dora's* case history. When Freud cannot explain why Anna's *left* breast and ovary are always the site of pain, he concludes "perhaps left-sidedness arose from a memory that was never brought to the surface. No analysis is ever complete; the hysterics have more roots than a tree."⁹ Thomas also gives us the Freud impatient of his subject's evasiveness, forcing what he believes to be the truth out of her by threats, as well as Freud the proud professional, offended by resistance to his

theories. In the case of *Dora*, Freud blames her for leaving analysis, not so much because she needed the therapy but because it prevented him from achieving a thorough investigation of hysteria. But most noticeable is Freud's ingenious singlemindedness, his unwillingness to consider evidence extraneous to the nuclear family drama. In the case of *Dora*, he blames a young woman for being inhibited sexually because she won't admit enjoying the advances of a man as old as her father and the husband of her father's lover. That the girl may just not have been attracted to a man Freud considered handsome and virile is out of the question as is the possibility that the girl may have considered such a liaison improper under the circumstances.¹⁰ Freud's case histories are fascinating for their dazzling singlemindedness; Thomas stresses this quality in his fictional analysis of Lisa's case in *The White Hotel*.

Thomas's Freud concludes that Lisa's symptoms, severe pain in the left breast and ovary, anorexia and asthma, are the result of a childhood trauma: repressing recognition of her mother when she came upon her uncle and a half naked woman in the guest house. That repressed knowledge, combined with the news that her mother died in a hotel fire shortly thereafter, Freud argues, were the cause of her asthma attacks and her hallucinations of fire and disaster during sexual relations with her husband.

During the course of her therapy she realizes that her aunt's habit of wearing a crucifix is clear evidence that the bare-necked woman in the guest house was really her mother. Her pain in the breast and ovary, then, are the expression of her unconscious hatred of her distorted femininity as a result of hating her mother and bearing her shame.

According to Freud, now that she knew for the first time that her mother and uncle had perished together in that hotel fire during one of their clandestine meetings, she should be freed of the tyranny of this repressed knowledge of her mother's sin. Except for not being able to explain why the pain occurs on the left side, it is a tidy explanation, particularly Freud's account of the white hotel in her fantasy as the body of the mother, the place without sin and remorse, and her desire for reconciliation with her mother, for the return to the "oceanic oneness of one's first years." *The White Hotel*, with its "wholehearted commitment to orality," is Lisa's longing for her mother's unconditional love. "Frau Anna's document expressed her yearning to return to the haven of security, the original white hotel—we have all stayed there—the mother's womb" (146). For Freud, Lisa becomes the symbol of the universal struggle between a life instinct and a death instinct.

But Freud's case history, with its clear delight in reconstructing Anna's narrative and its confident tone about her recovery, is seen to be severely flawed in light of the rest of the novel. In "The Health Resort," the next chapter narrated in a third-person omniscient manner and in the style of a realistic novel, we discover that Lisa Erdman, the "real" Anna G., withheld important information. "You saw what I allowed you to see. . . . It was not your fault that I seemed to be incapable of telling the truth," she writes to Freud (p. 182). She never told him about an earlier scene than that of the guest house—that at the

age of three she toddled on to her father's yacht to observe her mother, aunt, and uncle bare-necked. In her account of her first lover, the revolutionary student who left her because marriage, bourgeois domesticity, would have taken him away from his mission, she fabricated his brutality to her. But her grossest lie and violation of trust between patient and analyst was in her account of being harassed by sailors on a merchant ship who claimed to have read newspaper accounts of her mother's death by fire and to have known about her loose reputation. The knew *nothing* about her mother, she writes Freud. They abused her sexually because she was Jewish. "Eventually they let me go," she writes to Freud, "but from that time I haven't found it easy to admit to my Jewish blood." Because she knew that Freud was Jewish, "it seemed shameful to be ashammed" of her own Jewishness and she hid the true nature of the incident from him. Her hatred of her father, she believed, stemmed from his being her Jewish parent, the source of her hateful identity. In keeping with her reticence about her Jewishness, she failed to tell Freud that the reason she left her husband was her realization that he was a zealous anti-Semite and, having deceived him about her Jewishness, she felt his hatred and revulsion for her true identity.

In short, what she kept from Freud was the trauma of her Jewishness. Given Freud's method of excluding *any* life experience outside the family drama, such information would probably not have altered Freud's diagnosis based on his reconstruction of what he considered to be the crucial elements of every person's life history. Collective identity was negligible to Freud in his theories. Indeed, his very theories sometimes seem to be the intellectual response of a Jewish doctor in unstable, anti-Semitic fin-de-siècle Vienna, i.e., to his deliberate exclusion from the medical establishment.¹¹ Freud's paradigm of human history dissolves the distinctions between races that were causing him so much misery. His rationalism supports all the ideas of the Enlightenment that deny validity to myth or religion.¹² For Freud, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, the life of the individual, regardless of religion or race, recapitulates the history of the entire species. In his singleminded determination to keep social identity out of his paradigm, Freud was unable to fully explain Lisa's anxiety. More to the point, later chapters will show that two of her repeated hallucinations during sexual relations with her anti-Semitic husband, falling from a great height and mourners buried by a landslide, both inexplicable to Freud, are premonitions of her death at Babi Yar as a Jew. And her pain in her ovary and breast, far from being the result of nuclear family drama, are premonitions of her suffering as part of a collective identity, as a Jew, the victim of history, social hatred, and the brutality of fellowmen. That which Freud so systematically denied in his life and in his scientific methods is the very thing that is mysteriously associated with Lisa the Jewish victim, not Lisa the hysterical female. "What torments me," writes Lisa to Freud, the man of science who claims not to judge his patients morally, "is whether life is good or evil." Lisa's life, as we see it in the next section, the Babi Yar chapter, is part of a moral universe, not a psychological one.

The penultimate chapter, "The Sleeping Carriage," has been the source of most of the controversy about the book. Objections to this chapter are moral and generally focus on one of two related areas: plagiarism or the deliberate fictionalizing of factual accounts of atrocity which Thomas himself implies is innocent. For his liberal borrowing from Kuznetsov's documentary account of Babi Yar, Thomas is accused of plagiarism; indeed the *Times Literary Supplement* responded by conducting a symposium on that subject. Irrate readers accused him of failed imagination at the most critical moment of his novel. "Should the author of a fiction choose as his proper subject events which are not only outside his own experience, but also evidently beyond his own resources of imaginative recreation?" writes one such reader. "The words given to Thomas's fictional heroine are hers (Dina Pronicheva's)," writes another, "and no writer has the moral right to take the experience of a real human being and attach it, for his or her own ends, to a made-up character. . . . Fact and fiction, reality and unreality, do not blend this way."¹³ Thomas's reply to charges of artistic weakness and the use of actual testimony in fiction is sharp and to the point. "I could have changed the order of the words, but that would have been untruthful. The only person who could speak was the witness."¹⁴ But "Mr. Thomas's high-sounded defenses," another letter writer puts it, do not excuse what he calls "plagiarism admitted in advance, which insults literature and makes mugs of publishers and reviewers."¹⁵

Now plagiarism, as Harold Bloom rightly pointed out in the symposium, is a *legal* matter rather than a literary one. In this definition of the term, Thomas is innocent for he has violated no copyright laws. But in another sense, legal borrowing with appropriate acknowledgement can still be morally suspect for it makes use of someone else's efforts and exertions. When Thomas is accused of plagiarism this must be what the accusers have in mind, coming, as we all do, from a culture that stresses individual uniqueness and originality and that believes in compensation and recognition commensurate with expenditure of labor. But whose efforts has Thomas exploited? Since Kuznetsov claims that his book is not a fiction but rather a compilation and reconstruction of documentary material, Thomas cannot be said to have turned to another's fictional invention in place of creating his own. He can be accused of using a historical document in a fiction in place of a human suffering for which event, but the immorality of *creating* fiction about human suffering for which historical documents already exists is Thomas's *point*—artistically and morally. One could accuse Thomas of naivete in his definition of history, given Kuznetsov's method of recording and reconstructing narratives after conversations with eyewitnesses, but that would not affect Thomas's statement about the just artistic response to what he calls "unimaginable suffering."

Behind the charge of plagiarism lies the assumption that our efforts and inventiveness belong to us, just as behind the charge of fictionalizing the factual lies the assumption that our suffering and pain belong to us and should not be borrowed and used in another's imaginary invention. To put it another way, while pain can be imagined artistically, fictions about factual accounts of

human suffering betray those who suffer, either by creating an object of beauty and enjoyment out of another's pain or through fictionalizing, calling into question the "reality" of the pain having ever occurred. To act upon the former argument, the creation of beauty based upon the suffering of others, would mean to erase most of the great literature of Western civilization. But most critics who condemn fiction writers for using holocaust materials do not say that documented suffering cannot be the subject of art. They rather single out *this* horror, the holocaust, as being forbidden territory for art because of its unprecedented scale of atrocities. There is a danger here as well, for it means to privilege and even to sanctify the holocaust among human tragedies; it suggests a perverse sense of being chosen and an insensitive ranking of victimization. More to the point is the argument against fictionalizing holocaust accounts because the recording of facts in this generation is still in progress, and in light of charges that the holocaust itself is a fabrication, fictionalized accounts cast doubt on the existence of the actual events. In this argument, Thomas is guilty of calling into question the validity of Dina Pronicheva's account by giving her documented experiences to a fictional character, to Lisa Erdman. The irony of Thomas's achievement is that in his desire to preserve the record of what actually occurred, even a mediated and reconstructed version, he is accused of betraying that reality. Furthermore, it is his refusal to deny Dina her account of her own suffering by recreating her experience fictionally that caused him to borrow the textual passages leading to the charge of plagiarism. In this case, Thomas is more vigilant about the possible indecency of using someone else's pain for the sake of art than he is about using someone else's efforts, i.e. plagiarism. In his final reply to his critics in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Thomas writes,

[I]n Chapter V] my heroine, Lisa Erdman, changes from being Lisa an individual to Lisa in history—an anonymous victim. It is this transition, reflected in style as well as content, which has moved and disturbed many readers. From individual self-expression she moves to the common fate. From the infinitely varied world of narrative fiction we move to a world in which fiction is not only severely constrained but irrelevant.

At the outset of Part V, the narrative voice is still largely authorial (though affected by Pronicheva's tone) because there is still room for fiction: Lisa is still a person. But gradually her individuality is taken from her on that road to the ravine; and gradually the only appropriate voice becomes that voice which is like a recording camera; the voice of one who was there. It would have been perfectly easy for me to have avoided the possibility of such attacks as Kenrick's through some specious "imaginative recreation," but it would have been wrong. The witness's testimony was the true voice of the narrative at that point: "It started to get dark," etc. This is how it was—for all of the victims. It could not be altered. The time for imagination was before; and in my novel, after. Imagination, at the point quoted by Kenrick, is exhausted in the effort to take in the unimaginable which happened.¹⁶

It should be apparent that I acquit Thomas of the first charge—he did not plagiarize by any stretch, or should I say contraction, of the imagination. He borrowed from acknowledged sources because he wanted to be acquitted of the more serious charge—fictionalizing the factual. Here Thomas demonstrates his profound desire to preserve factual truth by withdrawing as storyteller and fiction writer. The impulse to do so is commendable in light of the present urgency of recording what actually occurred. By insisting that here the "recording camera" takes over, he expresses his desire to do away with constructs, while in practice he continues to depend on narrative constructs, because he has no choice other than silence. Dina Pronicheva's account, he implies, is as close as we can get to the truth, but it too falsifies in its narrative coherence, its sequence, and in its being shaped by Kuznetsov. What is worthy of respect in Thomas's approach to this problem is his *awareness* of it, visible in the deliberate rupture in the fictional text. He does not go so far as to declare a temporary moratorium on fictionalizing, as others have done, because he understands how difficult it would be to fix the border between fact and fiction. But he recognizes the moral imperative to seek such a boundary and then to use fiction to impress upon us the magnitude of the loss at Babi Yar by recreating imaginatively the *lives* of those who died, but not their deaths.

Thomas does fictionalize in "The Sleeping Carriage" for the purpose of his artistry. For example, because he wants to prepare the reader for the mystical, otherworldly final chapter, he gives his Babi Yar victims the false hope of a rumor that they are to be transported to Palestine. There is no evidence that such a rumor ever existed. Indeed, there is evidence to the contrary.¹⁷ Furthermore, the particular fictional circumstances of his character's death, the jackboot crashing into her left breast and left pelvis, becomes the final explanation of Lisa's mysterious symptoms—not neurotic manifestations of a traumatic event in her personal, familial past but mysterious prefigurings of her fate as part of the collective tragedy of the Jews. History supplants psychology.

As this depiction of the holocaust denies the privileged role of psychoanalysis as a way of knowing mankind, the narrative seems to move toward its end—Lisa at the bottom of a pile of corpses, "a quarter of a million white hotels in Babi Yar." "The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored. Most of the dead were poor and illiterate. But every single one of them had dreamed dreams, seen visions and had amazing experiences, even the babes in arms (perhaps especially the babes in arms) . . . If Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person." Psychoanalysis, that "great and beautiful modern myth," in its desire to transcend the boundaries dividing mankind, in its paradoxical romantic faith in self-discovery through reason, through sanctifying therapy, has no answer to organized evil. And the preoccupation with the self apart from collective identity finally appears, in this book, to be precious, both cherished but also overtly refined and delinquent in social responsibility.

Thomas did not end the book with Lisa's death at Babi Yar (although many readers have wished that he had). Perhaps because he felt that it would be too dark altogether to leave her at the bottom of the ravine, or perhaps because he wanted to demonstrate our drive to give meaning to events even so horrible as that, our propensity to place such horror into a coherent narrative. It is our irrepressible desire for endings beyond the finality of the death of individuals that Thomas demonstrates for us fictionally in that last troubling chapter, when he steps beyond the territory of most novel writers, taking the risk of depicting life after death. The corpses in the ravine, according to Thomas, buried under the concrete and steel designed to erase their slaughter, have "nothing" to do with what he calls "the guest, the soul, the lovesick bride, the daughter of Jerusalem."

In "The Camp," the final chapter, Lisa arrives in a cloud of dust at a settlement near a sparkling oasis in the desert where immigrants live in tents, learn Hebrew, and seek missing relatives. Lisa's death, then, has been a visa to a world beyond, to a heaven that not only is a messianic vision in the terms of Labor Zionism, but is a happy revision of history in that Richard Lyons (are we to read Lionhearted?), the English lieutenant, welcomes thousands of immigrants and directs the operation of erecting tents to house them. Reminiscing about the white hotel with Lyons, who remembers it as a beautiful place, Lisa glances at the dunes around her and sees it as equally beautiful. Palestine, then, is a return to the white hotel with scenes that echo the Gasterin journal, but it is, of course, a collective return to the mother, the homeland as an answer to the homeless persecution that precedes it.

Yet "The Camp" is not only a Labor Zionist dream of redemption, life after death as a people. Thomas presents us with three possible conclusions to three of the many possible narratives of Lisa Erdman's life. One I have already mentioned—a narrative of Jewish history that sees the rebirth of nationhood as collective redemption, the holocaust as a tragic lesson about the failure of Emancipation, Rationalism, the so-called Enlightenment to solve the "Jewish Problem." In this reading, the determining factor in Lisa Erdman's life is Jewish identity, the very experiences that she hid from Freud. But the camp is also a mystical return to the white hotel in psychoanalytical terms. Despite the horrors of history and mass suffering, the belief in the possibility of fulfillment of desire, of uninhibited love, of a place where Lisa can be both child at her mother's breast and can suckle her own mother—this belief redeems. In such a narrative of Lisa's life, as the psyche on a sacred voyage of self-discovery, psychoanalysis and its sanctification of the quest for self is the longed-for beyond. Lisa realizes in retrospect that Freud was the kindly priest, the spiritual guide, in her journal account of the white hotel. Freud's theory, itself a product of the Jew's belief in reason and enlightenment, coexists with the Zionist alternative that calls it into question. And coexisting along with these is a camp in which virgin birth takes place, fishermen congregate near a lake, her mother claims that she is not in the lowest circle, and the sun sets forming the likeness of a rose—in short, Dante's Christian soul redeemed

through faith and love. "Wherever there is love in the heart," declares Lisa, "there is hope of salvation."

So Thomas provides us with coexisting ideological, psychological, and theological endings to three ways of understanding the life and death of Lisa Erdman. Lisa's spirit has immigrated to the idyllic landscape of "The Song of Songs," a text that Thomas quotes liberally no doubt because its meaning is determined by frames of reference similar to those which he employs. It has been read as a personal quest, that is an erotic search for the loved one, as the love of God for the people of Israel, and as the love of God for the Church or for the Christian soul.

No one of Thomas's endings, however, is satisfactory. The camp has not healed Freud, who appears as an old man with a bandaged jaw, alone and silent—a fallen hero, like the silent Achilles, proud and incommunicative even in death. The miracle of virgin birth is reserved for a pet mascot, and Israel's tents, shining in the moonlight, are under the kindly eye of the British and untouched by any Arab opposition or wars of independence.

Each ending, each reminder of familiar narrative, is both seductive for its beauty and alienating for its parodying of that beauty. We give meaning to our lives, Thomas implies, through narratives, but the desire for coherent stories also keeps us from truth, as each of Thomas's narrative modes is subverted by the one that follows it. To see Lisa's death through the lenses of Zionism, psychoanalysis, or Christianity is to invest it with meaning that staves off the darkness of the Babi Yar ravine—and the inadequacy of these fictions to come to terms with mass suffering is conveyed in *The White Hotel*, a fiction that advertises its own inadequacy at each step and even questions its moral responsibility to the unsourced dead. In *The White Hotel*, aesthetic standards, the question of failed imagination and the use of another's efforts, plagiarism, are inextricably linked with moral codes, the question of the use of another's suffering. In its painful self-awareness, it disturbs, disorients, frustrates, moves and engages us—and in its tentativeness, it rings true.

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NOTES

1. It was published in the magazine *New Worlds*.
2. Anatoli Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel*, trans. David Floyd (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). Kuznetsov has asked that the English translation be considered the authoritative text because of the deletions and compromises that mar the Russian text published in the Soviet Union.

3. For a summary of recent books on Holocaust literature see David Roskies, "The Holocaust According to the Literary Critics," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1981.
4. For a discussion of this subject, see Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Alvin Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979); Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
5. All quotations are taken from D.M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (New York: Viking Press, 1981).
6. "... So far as my experience hitherto goes, these scenes from infancy are not reproduced during the treatment as recollections, they are the products of construction."
7. Sigmund Freud, "The Case of the Wolf-Man," trans. James Strachey, in *The Wolf-Man* ed. by Muriel Gardner (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 194.
In Freud's discussion of infantile neurosis in the case history of the Wolf-Man, he examines the entire question of primal scenes and their relation to fantasy.
8. Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 27.
9. For an analysis of Freud as a novelist see Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Random House, 1976).
10. Freud's tentativeness about his conclusions is examined by Marcus in his study of the Dora case history.
11. Phillip Rieff, Introduction to *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, p. 16.
12. For the effect of Austrian politics on Freud's professional life, see "Politics and Patriarchy in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*" in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* by Carl E. Schorske (New York: Random House, 1979).
"By reducing his own political past and present to an epiphenomenal status in relation to the primal conflict between father and son, Freud gave his fellow liberals an a-historical theory of man and society that could make bearable a political world spun out of orbit and beyond control." (p. 203)
13. Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Viking, 1950), p. 39.
14. First letter signed by D.A. Kenrick, *Times Literary Supplement*, March 26, 1982.
Second letter signed by Emma Tennant, *TLS*, April 9, 1982.
15. Thomas's first reply, *TLS*, March 30, 1982.
16. Letter signed by Geoffrey Giggson, *TLS*, April 16, 1982.
17. April 2, 1982.

The Paradox of the Narrative Styles in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*

Stephen Manning

Whatever their ultimate verdict on the artistic merits of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, critics have often pointed to problems in the style of the tale: they have spoken, e.g., of the differences between the literary sophistication of the fourteenth-century author and the style of the traditional folk materials which are the poem's ultimate sources (Uitley, 216-17); they have commented on the disparity between the style of the tale proper and that of the Envoy (Ruggiers, 225); and they have discussed whether the Envoy is the Clerk's or Chaucer's (Allen and Moritz, 193). What critics have recognized, then, is three overlapping but distinct styles in the tale: a traditional folk style, a more sophisticated literary style, and a third style markedly different in tone from the other two. Chaucer's mixture of these three styles has undoubtedly been responsible in part for the mixed critical reaction to the tale, for the distinctive characteristics of each style do not always blend well with those of the other styles. For example, the traditional folk style is discontinuous: events seem merely to happen as they will, and motivation seems gratuitous. Such juxtaposition of coordinate elements and the corresponding lack of subordination has led medievalists to give the style various names: paratactic (Auerbach, 101-18), additive (Robertson, 149, 179, 210), inorganic (Jordan, 6-9). The literary style, by contrast, tends to point up a causal connection between events, and to state or at least suggest proportionate motivation for the characters' behavior. In addition, it concerns itself with the emotional effect the situation has on the characters, while the folk style relies on brief, generalized statements ("he was angry," "she was terrified"). Northop Frye has tagged these two styles "and then" narration and "hence" narration, respectively (47). He also has noted a significant relationship between them: "In most traditional tales that are reworked by great writers, what is traditional is the 'and then' sequence of events, and the writer himself supplies his own 'hence' connective tissue" (51).¹ Here we can detect a possible tension between the two styles: the great writer may prove selective in his "hence" connective

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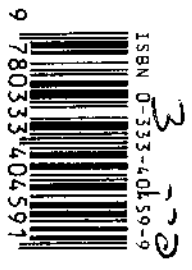
Michael Spindler
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

READING PHILIP ROTH

EDITED BY ASHER Z. MILLBAUER
AND DONALD C. WATSON



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was forgotten: Philip Roth the writer, who has been following the lives of the great and the small, the quiet and the violent, with much understanding. In their hearts, the prosecutors are aware that Roth knows his characters intimately, and his writing reflects not a rootless tale but rather a world well anchored in the contemporary Jewish existence. The prosecutors knew this, but in spite of their knowledge they rose against him with passionate anger that brings to mind the ancient excommunicators.

The fight forgot the writer. Today no one points an accusing finger at Roth as betrayer of Israel, but the sediments this controversy generated have not yet disappeared. There are few writers today considered to be Jewish writers; Philip Roth is one of them. To underscore this fact, I would like to say that Roth has a spiritual homeland whose roots are in the Jewish Newark. From there they spread. It is obvious that he did not remain bound by his locale; he distanced himself from it, as did Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. Yet Roth's devotion to roots made possible his flights of imagination and success as a novelist.

It is a pity that his works have had to stumble over so many misunderstandings, especially misunderstandings with his Jewish brethren. The one small consolation – and one which is not very convincing – is that most of the tribe's writers, and often the very best ones, have never harvested too much joy from their tribe.

Translated from the Hebrew by the editors.

A2

3

From Newark to Prague: Roth's Place in the American-Jewish Literary Tradition

HANA WIRTH-NESSHER

In *The Anatomy Lesson*, the central character of Philip Roth's trilogy *Zuckerman Bound* comes into his inheritance. Right after his mother's death of a brain tumour, her neurologist hands Nathan Zuckerman a white piece of paper on which one word appears in his mother's handwriting, her response to the doctor's request that she write her own name. The word is 'Holocaust', and Nathan notices that it is perfectly spelled.

This was in Miami Beach in 1970, inscribed by a woman whose writings otherwise consisted of recipes on index cards, several thousand thank-you notes, and a voluminous file of knitting instructions. Zuckerman was pretty sure that before that morning she'd never even spoken the word aloud. (p. 477)¹

As the neurologist is uneasy about throwing it away, he passes it on to Nathan who cannot discard it either. It is a legacy alien to his experience and incomprehensible; a scrap of paper both portentous and incidental. His compelling need to preserve it serves as an emblem both of Roth's relationship to his Jewish tradition and of a significant portion of what has come to be called Jewish-American literature.

Definitions of Jewish-American literature abound, beginning with Malin and Stark's landmark essay in 1964 in which the Jew is seen to be an existential hero and therefore a modern Everyman.² In a thesis that rapidly became a trend, the Jew is singled out, because of his victimisation, uprootedness, and history of suffering, as the

most apt symbol for humanity in the twentieth century.³ Jewish-American fiction, argued Malin and Stark, tends to be about seeking home (as a result of mass immigration), about the conflict between fathers and sons (cast in terms of generation conflict brought on by immigration), about coming to terms with history (caused by the awesome scope of the Jewish past), about dualities (chosen by God and rejected by the Gentiles), about the heart (suffering as initiation into humanity), and about transcendence (through humanity not God). Since all literature of the West tends to be about the longing for 'home', the conflict between parents and children, the individual in the face of history, duality, suffering, and transcendence, the only conclusion that one can draw about Malin and Stark's formula is that of Shylock, 'If you prick us, do we not bleed?' If Jews are men, and all men are Jews, there seems to be little point in discussing American-Jewish literature.

Several years later, Malin pursued the implications of his definition in a theological approach to the subject. Jewish-American writers, he argued, 'are made crusaders hoping for a transcendent ideal'. Malin continued to see Jewish literature in a religious perspective, 'Only when a Jewish writer, moved by religious tensions shows "ultimate concern" in creating a new structure of belief, can he be said to create "Jewish literature".'⁴ It would seem for Malin that a religious impulse linked with individualism and anti-traditionalism make for Jewishness. Continuity through discontinuity.

While not everyone agreed with Malin's stress on religion, other critics sought the Jewish elements in universal terms as well. Theodore Solotaroff, for example, defined Jewish-American writing in a thematic and moralistic framework. In Malamud, Roth, and Bellow, Solotaroff identified the theme of suffering leading to purification: 'There is the similar conversion into the essential Jew, achieved by acts of striving, sacrificing, and suffering for the sake of some fundamental goodness and truth in one's self that has been lost and buried.'⁵ As it would be problematic to argue that the ennobling of suffering is a Jewish concept, or that 'the moral role and power of the human heart' are attributes distinguishing Judaism from other moral systems, the moral approach is hardly more enlightening than the religious one.

As early as 1964, when the sanctity of the melting pot was being replaced by pluralistic and ethnic ideals of American culture, Donald Daiches doubted whether American-Jewish writing really

amounted to a movement. 'The American-Jewish writer has been liberated to use his Jewishness in a great variety of ways, to use it not aggressively or apologetically, but imaginatively as a writer probing the human condition', but he denied that extreme sensitivity was enough to qualify as a criterion for distinguishing Jewish-American literature from any other corpus.⁶ That same year Allen Guttman limited Jewish-American literature to a transient social and historical phenomenon, to documenting the immigrant Jews' conversion to other passions - Communism, capitalism, and secularisation. Assimilation, he argued, was inevitable and imminent.⁷

The most vociferous and sensible objection to existing definitions of Jewish-American literature has been that of Robert Alter: 'It is by no means clear what sense is to be made of the Jewishness of a writer who neither uses a uniquely Jewish language, nor describes a distinctively Jewish milieu, nor draws upon literary traditions that are recognizably Jewish.' For Alter, unless a writer's imagination is impelled by a consciousness of Jewish history, such as that of Kafka, there is no case for labelling him as Jewish. Admitting that there is 'something presumptuously proprietary about the whole idea of sorting out writers according to national, ethnic, or religious origins', Alter sees Jewish-American literature as one that informs the reader 'of the precarious, though stubborn, experiment in the possibilities of historical continuity, when most of the grounds for continuity have been cut away'.⁸

'Tradition as discontinuity', Irving Howe's summation of what constitutes the Jewish-American novel, turns Alter's observation into a dictum. Howe's corpus for this genre has been the literature of immigration, and as he has tended to see immigrant neighbourhoods as a kind of region, Jewish-American literature is for him a 'regional literature' focusing on one locale, displaying curious and exotic customs, and coming as a burst of literary consciousness resulting from the encounter between an alien group racing toward assimilation and half-persuaded that it is unassimilable. Drawing a parallel with American Southern writing, Howe has noted that a subculture finds its voice and its passion at exactly the moment that it faces disintegration'.⁹

By the time Jewish-American fiction was legitimised to the extent that a full chapter was reserved for it in *The Harvard Guide to Contemporary Writing* (in an ill-conceived project that distinguishes among Black Literature, Women's Literature, Experimental Fiction,

and Drama), Marc Shechner had abandoned any attempt at defining what he went on to describe under the title of 'Jewish Writers'. Cautiously and defensively, Shechner admits that 'neither "Jewish writer" nor "Jewish fiction" is an obvious or self-justifying subdivision of literature, any more than Jewishness itself is now a self-evident cultural identity'. Nevertheless, Shechner chronicles a 'historical fact' – that many American novelists happen to be Jews – and he invokes the Jewish writer as a 'convenient shorthand for a feature of the literary consensus that we want to examine but are not yet prepared to define'.¹⁰

Jewish-American literature, then, has emerged as a recognisable corpus of work in the American literary tradition, although criteria for admission into this canon remain problematic, as recalcitrant as criteria for determining definitions of Jewishness itself. Where is Philip Roth in a tradition as tenuous and difficult to pin down as this one? For a large number of his Jewish readers, Roth started out as an *enfant terrible* and matured into an informer. His writings have been called vulgar, vicious, and stereotypical of anti-Semitic lore. He has been accused of unfocused hostility and self-hatred. In his repeated self-defences, Roth has portrayed himself as a victim of incompetent readers, philistines, impervious to irony and artistry. In his zeal for self-justification, declaring that he never received a thank-you note from an anti-Semitic organisation or that his stories were not likely to start a pogrom, he occasionally became as single-minded about the processes of culture formation as his readers had been about the status of art. With implicit analogues to Joyce, Roth has depicted himself as an artist rebel, unfettered by social restraints and collective anxieties. The task for the Jewish novelist, he has argued, 'has not been to go forth to forge in the smithy of his soul the *uncreated* conscience of his race, but to find inspiration in a conscience that has been created and undone a hundred times over in this century alone'.¹¹ Despite his resistance to the label of Jewish-American writer, he has reviewed his own work in relation to other authors regularly included in that corpus. For example, he linked *Portnoy's Complaint* with Bellow's *The Victim* and Malamud's *The Assistant* as 'nightmares about bondage'. The novelistic enterprise in such books, he explained, 'might itself be described as imagining Jews being imagined, by themselves and by others'. In 'Writing about Jews', Roth recorded what was 'once a statement out of which a man might begin to construct an identity for himself: *Jews are people who are not what anti-Semites say they are*'.¹² From which one

can deduce that Roth would see Jewish writing as literature that is *not* what American Jews say it is, namely that renunciation, being Jewish, must be the inevitable subject of any Jewish literature.

Roth's early works, before he embarked on the long journey from Newark to Prague, are records of the last stages of the immigrant's assimilation into American life. From *Goodbye, Columbus* to *Portnoy's Complaint*, much of his writing documents the second and third generation of Jewish-Americans, well ensconced in the suburbs, the university, the army, and other American institutions, yet haunted by a tradition they do not understand and cannot abandon. 'Defender of the Faith', set in the American army, is exemplary for measuring the distance between Jewish literature of the immigrants and that of their sons and grandsons. Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe would have regarded the army as does one of Sholem Aleichem's characters, Shalom Shachnah, in the comic story 'On Account of a Hat'. Borrowing from the tall tales of the Cheim repertoire, Sholem Aleichem describes a rattlebrained Jew on his way home for Passover who takes a nap in a railway station and upon awakening accidentally grabs the hat of a high-ranking army official instead of his own. When the conductor escorts him to third class, he reads his obeisance as mockery, as no Jew could be expected to be treated so deferentially. Only when he catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror does he realise what happened – the peasant boy he paid to wake him, he reasons, must have wakened the army officer instead! The story is spun around the shtetl Jew's anxiety at being mistaken for a Gentile and the impossibility of reconciling the army attire with Jewish identity. It brilliantly embodies the total separation of Shachnah's life from that of the Russian culture around him, the very unimaginability of assimilation.

In marked contrast, 'Defender of the Faith', removed by several generations and set in America, records the anxiety of a Jewish army officer about being singled out as a Jew in the American army. One of Sergeant Nathan Marx's Jewish privates, Sheldon Grossbart, blatantly exploits his Jewishness to weasel out of his responsibilities in the army. As a result, Marx is caught between the expectations of Grossbart that he will abide by the collective loyalties of a minority and not betray him, and the expectations of his equally obnoxious superior Captain Barrett, who, in an anti-Semitic diatribe, praises Marx for his assimilation and loyalty to the army. When Grossbart invokes the persecution of the Jews and the invidious complicity of

self-hating brethren in order to plead for a weekend pass on religious grounds, Marx relents. But when Grossbart brings back a Chinese eggroll from what was to have been a Passover seder, Marx has Grossbart's sole exemption from the Pacific deployment revoked. Nathan Marx is 'Defender of the Faith', but which faith? Did he defend the faith from the abuse of religious charlatans like Grossbart? As Grossbart and Barrett are equally reprehensible, Marx finds himself in a position of dual loyalty, and although one can argue that he sought a just position regardless of American or Jewish allegiance, it would not be interpreted as such by either Barrett or Grossbart, and the vindictiveness of his action, the exaggeration of his response to Grossbart's misdemeanour, is indicative of how excruciating it is for him to be on the cutting edge of these conflicting loyalties.

In 'Eli the Fanatic', the smooth assimilation of second- and third-generation Jews into the upper-middle-class suburb of Woodenton is threatened by the infiltration of obtusive orthodox immigrants, including a yeshiva for orphaned refugees from the displaced persons camps after the Second World War. Eli Peck, appointed to represent the community in its campaign to keep this blight from their sanitised idyll, offers his tweed business suit to one of the black-garbed newcomers so offensive to Woodenton. Finding those black garments deposited at his doorstep, he cannot resist wearing them himself. Loping across the manicured lawns of his neighbours' on his way to the hospital to see his first born son, he vows that he will pass the same black garments on to the next generation. Treated like a madman by the hospital attendants, Eli screams 'I'm the father!', an affirmation of both his familial role to the newborn and his role as purveyor of the ancestral line. But the response of suburban America to so far reaching an outcry is to tear off the troublesome jacket and administer a sedative. 'The drug calmed his soul but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached.'¹³

These two early stories embody the Jewish elements in his fiction up to the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*: they are both chronicles of the drama of assimilation several generations removed from immigration, and also tales of near-pathological allegiance to a collective past that has no meaning for Roth's protagonists other than an emotional knee-jerk brought on by any reference to Jewish persecution, particularly the Holocaust. Both 'Defender of the Faith' and 'Eli the Fanatic' concern the Second World War, and each of these protagonists assumes extreme behaviour to protect his only

connection with the Jewish people, identification with their suffering. With the publication of *Portnoy* and Alexander Portnoy's endless and outrageously comic complaint about the crippling effects of Jewish psychic baggage on his sex life, Roth finally turned the 'nice Jewish boy' into a pathological joke. 'I am the son in the Jewish joke - only it ain't no joke! . . . who made us so morbid and hysterical and weak? . . . Is this the Jewish suffering I used to hear about?' By depicting narcissistic Portnoy, intent on blaming all of Jewish history, of which he is mostly ignorant, for his inability to lead a life of pure pleasure, Roth made himself vulnerable to moralistic attacks on his alleged self-hatred and vulgarity. The outburst of rage occasioned by the publication of *Portnoy* was a turning point in Roth's career. From then on, Roth's art began to turn inward so that the drama between the Jewish writer bent on freely expressing his desires in his art and his moralistic readers bent on denouncing him becomes the central subject of his fiction. And when his art begins to turn in upon itself, it also moves toward a more complex identification with Jewish life. Roth has himself admitted that this is the case: 'Part of me wishes the misreading had never happened, but I also know that it's been my good luck; that the opposition has allowed me to become the strongest writer I could possibly have been. In fact my Jewish detractors insisted on my being a Jewish writer by their opposition.'¹⁴

How is this translated into his work? Roth has always been a comic writer with a moralistic streak, preoccupied with the relation between the carnal and the spiritual. Nathan Zuckerman, the writer-protagonist of Roth's most recent works, the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy, is a comic author experiencing writer's block, exacerbated by his mother's legacy to him, the scrap of paper with the word 'Holocaust' on it. Symptomatic of the relation of the Jewish-American writer to recent Jewish history, it has a grip on the writer's consciousness disproportionate to its meagre presence in his own life. One word on a scrap of paper invokes guilt and anxiety powerful enough to further paralyse Zuckerman. The Jewishness in Roth's more recent writing goes beyond chronicling the last stages of assimilation (as in *Goodbye, Columbus*), by taking the form of a vaguely felt duty to identify with the most recent Jewish past, namely the Holocaust. Roth's work is marked by the discomfort of the American Jew who has never suffered as a result of his Jewishness, but is heir to a tradition that, from his point of view, is characterised by suffering. While he had already explored this theme in earlier works such as 'Defender of the Faith' and 'Eli the

Fanatic' his more recent fiction has an additional dimension, the discomfort of the Jewish-American author, particularly the comic writer, committed both to his art and to some identification with the suffering of his fellow Jews.

Roth's artistic strategy for dealing with his dilemma begins to become evident in 1973 with 'Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting: Or Looking at Kafka'. It is a daring essay in which he first documents Kafka's life, largely from the point of view of his 'habit of obedience and renunciation', and then writes an imaginative life of Kafka as the road not taken, of Franz Kafka not dead of tuberculosis and ensnared as a world-wide synonym for modernism, but surviving the war as an unknown Hebrew-school teacher in New Jersey, underpaid, and still practising renunciation. It is told as a reminiscence from the point of view of the child who remembers him as the Czech refugee with the formal bow who courts his spinster Aunt Rhoda, but never marries her. When the courtship comes to a tearful end after a weekend trip to Atlantic City, the narrator's brother explains that his aunt's tears have something to do with sex. The story closes with a stormy confrontation between the adolescent narrator and his father, paralleling the reverse of Kafka's relation with his father: 'Others are crushed by paternal criticism - I find myself oppressed by his high opinion of me!' Having left home, he receives a letter from his mother with Kafka's obituary thoughtfully enclosed that describes him as 'a refugee from the Nazis' with no survivors, who died at the age of 70 in the Deborah Heart and Lung Center in Browns Mills, New Jersey. 'No,' reflects the narrator, 'it is simply not in the cards for Kafka ever to become *the* Kafka - why, that would be stranger even than a man turning into an insect. No one would believe it, Kafka least of all.'

In this *tour de force*, Roth attempts to do what he strains for in all of his recent work, to strike a balance between the Jewish writer's moral impulse to draw on themes from his people's recent suffering, and the artist's insistence on creating in his own terms, in this case his comic mode; and furthermore, while he does draw on his own experience as an American Jew for his fiction, he also draws on the more compelling drama of his fellow Jews in Europe which naturally overshadows his miseries, always threatening to belittle his own life and to render it pitifully inauthentic. One of his strategies is to bring that history closer to home, to rescue Kafka and place him on his own turf in New Jersey, thereby domesticating and deflating what is awesome in its own context. In one respect, this denial of the Holocaust, which always acts as a standard by which to measure

American-Jewish history of the same period, restores to the protagonist the legitimacy of his own family dramas and sexual problems. But by beginning his text with the actual recounting of Kafka's life, he insists on the fictionality of his comic alternate history which is drawn from a background similar to his own and which pales beside the narrative of the 'real' Kafka. In the juxtaposition of the two texts, 'Looking at Kafka' elegantly sets forth the moral and artistic quandary of the comic Jewish writer in America.

Moreover, as the immigration experience ceased to be the Jewish element in his works, and his audiences began to blame him for betraying Jewish experience with his ribald comedy, Roth has continued to seek the artistic means to remain a Jewish writer without admitting to the charges levelled against him. To do so, he has had to see himself as part of a Jewish literary tradition. Without the benefit of writing in Hebrew or Yiddish, so that the language itself would be a purveyor of a literary tradition, he has identified in Kafka a literary father, his European *alter ego*, the writer who bridges both Jewishness and Western modernism and who is locked into a battle with his father that takes on mystical and mythic proportions in his art. But the real Kafka is an overwhelming father-figure both in terms of the drama of his own life and the place he now occupies in the post-Holocaust view of that life and art. So Roth can claim him as a literary father and then minimise that threat by making Kafka an unpublished author, a pathetic elderly man with comic elements, the subject of mockery by his Hebrew school pupils. This leaves room for Roth's life and art, while also diminishing it.

Roth repeats this strategy several years later in *The Ghost Writer*, when he brings Anne Frank to New England, the road not taken had she not walked down that road to Bergen-Belsen. In *The Ghost Writer*, the first book in the trilogy *Zuckerman Bound*, Nathan Zuckerman's fantasies about a young woman named Amy Bellette as the real Anne Frank made up a story within the story, and those fantasies contribute to the self-referential theme of the young artist who must vindicate his life and art before his family and community. Nathan's two fantasies are:

1. That Anne Frank, learning of her father's survival and the publication of her diary by a chance reading of *Time*, chooses not to be reunited with him because she is convinced that knowledge of her survival would diminish the power of her art and the message it brings to the world. She has drawn this

conclusion from sitting in the midst of a weeping matinee crowd at a Broadway performance of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

2. That Amy alias Anne falls in love with Nathan, making it possible for Nathan to be vindicated spectacularly by his family. 'I'd like you to meet my wife, the former Anne Frank.'

The Ghost Writer, then, is a sophisticated and richly structured response to Roth's critics who accuse him of betrayal in that he poses questions about the nature of American-Jewish identity through a tale about the nature of art and life. Just as Roth has deliberately projected his own problems onto Nathan, Nathan has projected his own wishes and identity onto Anne/Amy. Nathan imagines that Amy is Anne in order to be reconciled with his own father. But he also identifies with Anne for she is an artist who has willingly sacrificed her own bond with her father for the sake of her art. Thus, Amy is the paragon of both Jewish suffering and of renunciation at the holy altar of art. She is both artist and Jewish saint. If Nathan married her, he would become an accomplice in her secret scheme to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for readers like his own parents, while they, ironically, could still consider him a traitor to the Jewish community. Both Nathan and Anne, in his fantasy, are artists sacrificing personal happiness for their art, except that Anne's art is seen as holy in his community and his as profane.

As in 'Looking at Kafka', the implications of Anne Frank's life for the Jewish-American comic writer are neutralised by bringing her to the American scene and turning her into a college girl infatuated with her professor, and as in the Kafka story, it has the opposite effect of dramatically contrasting the world of Roth's fiction with recent Jewish history, turning the Jewish-American writer's problem into the central issue of the fiction. Roth raises the very complex issue of the morality of using the Holocaust, a symbol of collective trauma, as a social tool, to bludgeon the Jewish artist into restraining his imagination for the sake of 'the common good', or as an artistic tool to invoke sympathy from a critical audience by offering up one of its most sacred subjects.¹⁶

In *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Prague Orgy*, the third novel and epilogue of his latest work, *Zuckerman Bound*, the search for a literary father in the context of being a Jewish-American writer is developed even further as Nathan Zuckerman inherits that scrap of paper with the word 'Holocaust' on it. In *The Anatomy Lesson*, Nathan

Zuckerman is incapable of writing any more fiction, as he is suffering from severe pain of a mysterious origin. His sole quest in that work is relief from his paralysing and undiagnosed ailment. Life under the influence of this disease is a parody of wish-fulfilment: confined to a mat on the floor, Nathan is catered to and entertained by a variety of beautiful women. Nathan begins to believe that his agony is self-inflicted, the product of his guilt about his writings, 'penance for the popularity of *Carnovsky* . . . for the family portrait the whole country had assumed to be his, for the tastelessness that had affronted millions and the shamelessness that had enraged his tribe. . . . Who else could have written so blasphemously of Jewish moral suffocation, but a self-suffocating Jew like Nathan?' (p. 440).

Nathan Zuckerman comes to the conclusion that he can no longer write because he has lost his subject: 'A first-generation American father possessed by the Jewish demons, a second-generation American son possessed by their exorcism: that was his whole story' (p. 446). In this summation, Roth has located his own movement away from the subject of Jewish-American fiction that marked some of his own earlier work. Having left behind the fiction of immigration, he takes up the subject of the reception of that fiction, turning the drama between writer and audience into the moral dilemma of the Jewish writer in America, suspecting the legitimacy of his own private anguish when contrasted to that of his fellow Jews. Confronting the issue directly, Roth parodies Zuckerman's suffering while underscoring its debilitating effects. For a while Nathan considers basing his next fiction on the past suffering of his Slavic lover, Jaga (in a manner similar to *Sophie's Choice* in which American writer Styron invents a Slavic World War II victim in order to write about experiences alien to his own life).

But he couldn't get anywhere. Though people are weeping in every corner of the earth from torture and ruin and cruelty and loss, that didn't mean that he could make their stories his, no matter how passionate and powerful they seemed beside his trivialities. One can be overcome by a story the way a reader is, but a reader isn't a writer. . . . Besides, if Zuckerman wrote about what he didn't know, who then would write about what he did know? Only what did he know? The story he could dominate and to which his feelings had been enslaved had ended. Her stories weren't his stories and his stories were no longer his stories either. (p. 544)

To do penance and to bring about his own healing, he decides to abandon his writing career and become a healer himself. Viewed by the same audience that roundly condemned his writing, Nathan Zuckerman's desire to become a Jewish doctor would be supremely ironic and a posthumous victory for his parents, whose son's literary successes earned him what he believes to have been a deathbed curse from his father, and what surely would have been a blessing had he been a penitent medical student years before. But Roth does not give Zuckerman's community that satisfaction. On his way to medical school, Nathan launches what is first a practical joke and then an obsession – he presents himself to strangers as Milton Appel, pornographer. As Appel is the critic who has been most vociferous and persistent in his moral diatribes against the writer (Zuckerman's Irving Howe), Nathan can take revenge by the same tactic, public shaming. Nathan soon warns to the prank, however, and begins to identify with Milton Appel the pornographer, so that by the end of the book he is suspended between the two extreme identities that his community and family have forced upon him all along: the good doctor and the evil pornographer. Even a medical degree will not erase his having been the author of *Carnovsky*, nor is that necessarily what he wants.

The Anatomy Lesson ends with Nathan as a patient, not for the mysterious pain in his shoulder, but from the injuries incurred attacking a friend's father as the old man laments the end of his line because his adopted hippie grandson is 'everything we are not, everything we are against'. Zuckerman accosts Freytag with 'What do you see in your head? Genes with JEW sewed on them? Is that all you see in that lunatic mind, the unstained natural virtue of Jews' (p. 668). His own father dead, Nathan lunges at Freytag, 'the last of the fathers demanding to be pleased', intending to kill him. Freytag! Forbiddet! Now I murder you!' (p. 669). Suffering takes on a different dimension for Nathan when he is recuperating in the hospital, for among the other patients he comes face to face with genuine physical pain and the disfigurement of disease. Zuckerman's craving for a real enemy and for a therapeutic mission peaks in what he perceives to be the universality and very literalness of disease – and he'd given his fanatical devotion 'to sitting with a typewriter alone in a room' (p. 697). Yet the book ends without that resounding conviction, for Zuckerman roams the hospital corridors, 'as though he still believed that he could unchain himself from a future as a man apart and escape the corpus that was his' (p. 697).

Zuckerman can escape neither the corpus of his own ageing body, Years's spirit chained to a 'dying animal', nor the corpus of his fiction, the testimony of his having set himself apart and undoubtedly a cause of his pain.

In Roth's fiction, the Jewish-American writer cannot alleviate the anxiety provoked by his inheritance of that scrap of paper with the awesome word on it by relocating and neutralising the Jewish past on his own territory ('Looking at Kafka' or *The Ghost Writer*), or by avoiding art altogether and redirecting his passion into the art of medicine. He will have to relocate himself, and since he cannot return to the past, he can only travel to the scene of that past, which for Roth is embodied in the city of Prague. This he does in the Epilogue to the trilogy, *The Prague Orgy*, although he had already made this journey in search of Kafka earlier in *Professor of Desire*. In the Epilogue Nathan Zuckerman returns to a first person account of his experiences as was the case in *The Ghost Writer*, and he travels to Prague on a mission to retrieve the Yiddish stories of a Jewish author allegedly killed by the Nazis. The Epilogue is both a finale to the Zuckerman trilogy and a coming together of Roth's central motifs. The goal of retrieving the fiction of a Jewish writer from anonymity and seeing to their publication is a most appropriate action for a Jewish-American author anxious about his link to the Jewish history of loss and to Jewish literary fathers. It is also parallel to Roth's own goal of publishing the work of Eastern European writers in his 'Other Europe' series.

A major effect of his helping to reconstruct a lost literary tradition is that it may provide a literary father for Zuckerman/Roth. The Epilogue is haunted by three literary fathers – Kafka, Roth's literary *alter ego* whose uncertain identification with his own Jewishness and comic treatment of alienation is most compatible with Roth's sensibility; Henry James, Roth's American predecessor, whose self-consciousness about the place of the artist and preoccupation with the interpretation and misinterpretation of fictional texts influenced Roth's exploration of the same motif; Sisovsky, the lost Yiddish writer (in this case a fabrication of Roth's), whose absence haunts the post-Holocaust Jewish writer. The Jamesian influence in Roth's work is evident in his allusions to *The Middle Years* in *The Ghost Writer* and to the variation on the *The Aspern Papers* in *The Prague Orgy*. In neither James's nor Roth's tales about literary retrieval do the literary narrators actually get hold of the papers they are after, and in each case they court a woman in order to procure

the manuscripts. But Roth's version is a reversal of James's, for in *The Aspern Papers* the woman rebuffs the narrator and destroys the papers; in *The Prague Orgy*, the woman propositions the narrator who rebuffs her, while she hands over the papers only to have them confiscated by the Czech police. In Roth's version, then, political forces come into play. Moreover, in James's version, the papers are letters and the narrator is a literary critic prying into the life of a poet, while in Roth's version, the papers are works of fiction and the narrator is a writer himself, torn loose from the kind of clear literary tradition that James enjoyed.

The epilogue also draws on another of Roth's central motifs, that of trading places with another. In a new twist, Sisovsky remains in America and Zuckerman actually goes off to Prague to wrest the papers from the hands of the Czech author's wife, Olga. In an especially telling reversal of Roth's own fiction, Zuckerman contemplates making love to Olga as a means toward retrieving a bit of Jewish literary history, as opposed to Jewish history acting as a psychic obstruction when it comes to the goal of unrestrained sexuality. Sisovsky and Zuckerman both share the frustration of scandalous receptions of their books, and Sisovsky insists that the weight of stupidity, in the case of Zuckerman's readers, is heavier than the weight of banning. Zuckerman disagrees.

When the Jewish-American writer trades places with the Jewish-Czech writer in search of a literary father, he must finally skirt real danger. Apprehended by the Minister of Culture and deported as 'Zuckerman the Zionist agent', Zuckerman is forced to turn over the shoe box full of manuscripts — 'Another Jewish writer who might have been is not going to be; his imagination won't leave even the faintest imprint' (p. 782). Each of the several crimes which Zuckerman is accused of committing is punishable by sentences of up to twenty years. For a moment, Zuckerman can feel what it might mean to have historical and political forces shape his life, but he is no martyr, and he only meant to trade places temporarily. While Roth explores the road not taken in America for Jewish figures like Kafka and Anne Frank, Nathan Zuckerman walks the road not taken only up to a hint of real danger. Like Bellow, who made his journey to Israel to record the drama and the price of Jewish continuity in *To Jerusalem and Back* without ever sharing the vulnerability he describes, it was time to go back. But back to where? Back to what he calls the 'national industry of the Jewish homeland, if not the sole means of production (if not the sole source of satisfaction), the

construction of narrative out of the exertions of survival' (p. 761).

By the beginning of the twentieth century American literature was reflecting a change in national consciousness in its stories of returning East rather than heading westward. Philip Roth's long odyssey from Newark to Prague is also a turning point in the Jewish-American literary tradition, for it marks the passage from a literature of immigration and assimilation into a literature of retrieval, of the desire to be part of a Jewish literary legacy alongside the European and American literary traditions. Roth's strategy for locating his fiction in such a tradition is to turn the denial of his work by many Jewish readers into his theme, to trace his own moral dilemma as a Jewish-American writer compelled to treat recent Jewish history in his fiction (often by trading places), and to carve out a literary tradition by drawing on Eastern European predecessors. At the end of the *Zuckerman Bound* Epilogue, Nathan is left without a real or literary father, without a family, and without a home. Roth's intensifying preoccupation with the self-reflexive theme of his work's reception and with his own identity as a Jewish writer is narcissism turned moralism. These last works face the plight of the Jewish writer cut loose, as he is, from linguistic, religious, or cultural continuities, but seeking a literary tradition. They also signify, often elegantly, the impossibility of Philip Roth's not being a Jewish writer, given his need to document imaginatively every comic and tragic nuance of his own displacement.

NOTES

1. Philip Roth, *Zuckerman Bound* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985); subsequent references to this work will appear in the text.
2. Irving Malin and Irwin Stark, 'Introduction', *Breakthrough: A Treasury of Contemporary American Jewish Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); reprinted in *Jewish-American Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Poetry, Autobiography, and Criticism*, ed. Abraham Chapman (New York: New American Library, 1974) pp. 665-90.
3. See Jeremy Larnier, 'The Conversion of the Jews', *Partisan Review*, 27 (1960) pp. 760-8.
4. Irving Malin, 'Introduction to *Contemporary American-Jewish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) p. 7.
5. Theodore Solotaroff, 'Philip Roth and the Jewish Moralists', *Chicago Review*, 8 (1959); reprinted in Malin, 'Introduction', pp. 13-30 (the quote is from p. 20).

6. Donald Daches, 'Breakthrough', *Commentary* (August 1964), reprinted in Malin, 'Introduction', pp. 39-57 (the quote is from p. 37).
7. Allen Guttman, 'The Conversion of the Jews', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 6 (1965); reprinted in Malin, 'Introduction', pp. 39-57.
8. Robert Alter, 'Jewish Dreams and Nightmares', in his *After the Tradition* (New York: Dutton, 1961); reprinted in Malin, 'Introduction', pp. 58-77 (the quotations are from pp. 58-9).
9. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) p. 586.
10. Marc Shechner, in *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, ed. Daniel Hoffman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979) pp. 191-240 (the quotations are from p. 191).
11. Philip Roth, 'Imagining Jews', in *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Bantam, 1977) p. 221.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 150.
13. Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1959) p. 216.
14. Quoted in Clive Sinclair's 'Why Philip Roth Says Goodbye to Columbus', *The London Jewish Chronicle*.
15. Roth, *Reading Myself*, pp. 243-4.
16. See Hana Wirth-Nesher, 'The Artist Tales of Philip Roth', *Prolegomena: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, 3 (1983) pp. 263-72.

4

The Shape of Exile in Philip Roth, or the Part is Always Apart

MARTIN TUCKER

Recently I took my mother to one of several doctors she is now obliged to visit because of a serious illness. This physician, an eye doctor examining her for damage caused as a result of her diabetic condition, asked her to 'have a good look' at him. She said, 'Why are you good-looking?' Her wit broke him up (and surprised me who had always regarded everything about her as heavy-handed and fingering), and he smiled. She went on to ask him, 'Are you married, doctor?' When he said yes, the next question was inevitable, though she delayed it for several catches of breath. With as little trace of significance to innuendo as she could muster, she asked, 'Are you Jewish, doctor?'

'Why, don't I look Jewish? What do you think?', the doctor replied.

Now it was my mother's turn to smile.

This incident is characteristic of any number of Jewish-American writers, but the presence of a profoundly invidious mother (and father) in the story-telling is indissolubly (and indissolubly) Rothian. As Joycean and Freudian as he can be (without being either, ultimately, but only himself searching for the whole of himself), Roth includes a mother and father in practically every novel he writes, and the abiding love/hate, difficulties/sustenance the hero has in the course of his encounters with them. (I am excluding his two novels where the central character is a heroine and where the *modus vivendi* is essentially atypical of Roth. Significantly the heroines in both these cases are Gentiles, and the Jewish motifs of guilt and affection in their peculiar guises are absent from the two works. Again, significantly, these are the only two novels of Roth that are called 'serious' or at least not customarily