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THE NOVEL OF RETROSPECT IN AMERICAN FICTION OF THE 1990S: PYNCHON, MORRISON, ROTH

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

THE NOVEL OF RETROSPECT IN AMERICAN FICTION OF THE 1990S: PYNCHON, MORRISON, ROTH

By

SAMUEL COHEN

Adviser: Professor Louis Menand

In a nine-month period in the late nineties Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Philip Roth published historical novels that directly or indirectly confront the sixties, the era in which they became the writers they are known as today. Mason & Dixon, Paradise, and American Pastoral, written by three very different authors, address many of the same questions about America. The time at which these books appeared—the nineties, a decade which in light of recent events can be seen not simply as the post-Cold War era but as a period between wars—has much to do with their similarities.

The retrospective climate of the nineties can be ascribed to the anniversaries of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima, the end of the Cold War and the fiftieth anniversary of the last World War, and the end of the century and the millennium. This retrospective mood led Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth to reevaluate the original Edenic promise of America and the ways in which it has been lost. Pynchon revisits American history and asks whether the divisions and injustices of American life are as inevitable and insoluble as he has previously seen them to be. Morrison reconsiders her

ideas about race, wondering if sixties movements which sought to elevate race-consciousness simply repeated the mistakes of white racism. Roth reexamines the sixties' rejection of tradition and counts the losses incurred in the course of the attempts at liberation. Given the space to look back, these three novels reread American history and find evidence of the binary habits of thought and exclusionary patterns of action at the roots of the dream of an American paradise and of its loss.

The historical aspect of these novels is important not just for what it tells us about the nineties but also for what it corrects in academic literary criticism. While Fredric Jameson and others claim that contemporary novels are unable to represent our incomprehensible postmodern reality, these novels do tell us things about our world, and in doing so ask us to think again not just about contemporary life but also about the things that novels can do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Gulliver visits the Academy of Lagado, he meets a number of Projectors, learned men whose schemes never come to fruition. One Professor shows him his Literary Engine, a giant wooden frame covered with all of the words in the language pasted onto movable parts connected with wires. The projector explains:

> Every one knew how laborious the usual Method is of attaining to Arts and Sciences; whereas by his Contrivance, the most ignorant Person at a reasonable Charge, and with a little bodily Labour, may write Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law, Mathematicks and Theology, without the least Assistance from Genius or Study.

Of course, the Literary Engine, like everything at the Academy, does not work, producing nothing but broken sentences. As a result of these failures, Gulliver reports, "the whole Country lies miserably waste, the Houses in Ruins, and the People without Food or Cloaths."

In completing this, my own project, I have worked without the least assistance from genius, although I have done some studying. The assistance I have received from others, however, is what has made this dissertation possible, and for all of their help I would like to thank: Louis Menand, my director, who paid close attention to my ideas and my words, never failed to tell me when I was barking up the wrong tree, and in his own writing provided inspiration and instruction; Nancy K. Miller, who took

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I. The Nation, the Nineties, and the Novel

> I miss it, the cold war. It gave you a reason to get up in the morning.
> --Harry Angstrom, Rabbit at Rest

On or about September 11, 2001, human character did not change. American character probably did not fundamentally change either. However, the intentional crashing of four commercial airlines—two into the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon, and another, probably destined for the White House, in a field in western Pennsylvania—altered more than daily life. As reflected in the words of countless cultural commentators, there was a strong sense that these events constituted a significant historical moment, in particular the end of an era. As the end of the millennium occasioned retrospective evaluations of the century just ended, many of the responses to the events of September 11 took the form of post-mortems on the recent past, most often the nineties.

When seen as bracketed on one side by the end of the Cold War and on the other by the terrorist attack and subsequently declared "war on terrorism"—by the fall of the Wall and the fall of the Towers—the period begins to look like an interwar decade. While the Cold War went out with a kind of whimper, it did so after decades of violence around the world and the long-felt threat of attack on America itself, and a ratcheting back up of bipolar rhetoric under Reagan. The fall of the Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, then, signaled the

end to a time of great actual violence in the world and great potential violence to America. The Gulf War, again, while it caused great destruction in Iraq, was, in fact if not in perception, about oil, not the larger struggle between ideologies that the Cold War was said to have been about, and it took place half a world away. There was no felt threat of harm to American soil as during the Cold War. While fear of the bomb was not in the latter decades of the Cold War quite what it had been in the fifties and sixties, in the days of "duck and cover" and the Cuban missile crisis, there was still great anxiety in the eighties over the arms race and tensions between the superpowers, as events in Nicaragua showed, as well as over who else had the bomb or was trying to get it. The years after the Cold War did not provide sources for the same level of anxiety.

This difference between Cold War and post-Cold War America explains what was perhaps one of the greatest shocks of September 11—not its suddenness, or even its scale, but its location. As John Lewis Gaddis wrote,

> Except for Pearl Harbor and a few isolated pinpricks like Japanese attempts to start forest fires with incendiary bombs in the Pacific Northwest in 1944 and 1945, or the Mexican guerilla Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, N.M., in 1916, the United States has suffered no foreign attack on its soil since British troops captured Washington and burned the White House and the Capitol in 1814.

And the single-day death toll of the attacks was one of the three largest ever in America, with Antietam and Pearl Harbor, and the largest so overwhelmingly civilian. These were no isolated pinpricks. And they did not take place on a field of battle or a military installation, widening the anxiety; as Gaddis put it, "Everybody has airplanes, and everything that lies below them must now be considered a potential target."

One result of September 11, then, was the return of the kind of fear and resulting rhetoric that characterized the Cold War.[1] Much of the rhetoric produced in immediate response to the attacks and in the buildup to the war in Afghanistan echoed the language of the Cold War: facing an "evil enemy," it was said, America had to defend "its way of life" in a "war between civilizations" (or, in a telling variation, a war between civilization and the absence thereof). These attitudes, or at least their public expression, had not disappeared from American life since the end of the Cold War, but their expression intensified with the return of the kind of fear felt in America during the Cold War. This fear could be seen in the drop in air travel, in the stock market, in personal spending. It could be seen in the reluctance of private citizens to open their mail for fear of anthrax. Rather than fear of a nuclear holocaust, the American imagination was filled instead with the threat of jet-fuel-filled flying bombs, poisoned letters, and any number of as-

[1] See Boyer (By) for a discussion of the immediate reactions, as reflected in the widespread appearance of the language of awe, terror, and apocalypse; see also Lifton and Mitchell, and Nadel.

yet-unimagined acts of terrorism. The Arab and Muslim worlds were demonized, leading to acts of verbal and physical violence against Americans of Arab descent and those mistaken for them, widespread government investigation based on ethnicity, and generally a return to the fear-filled yet comfortingly familiar world of us-versus-them.

This return tells us as much about the post-Cold War years in America as it tells us about the American present. It allows us to see the period as a time between wars, between times characterized by the fear of threat to America and a concomitant binary orientation to race and nation. As a result, we can see the period as a time during which it became perhaps more possible for some to see that orientation at work throughout American history. Three who did are Philip Roth, in American Pastoral (1997), which tells the story of an all-American Jewish child of World War II and the collision between his successful assimilation into the American dream and the sixties' questioning of that dream; Toni Morrison, in Paradise (1998), which examines the impact of ideas of race on African-American social movements; and Thomas Pynchon, in Mason & Dixon (1997), which examines the effects of binary thinking in America from the seventeenth century to today. These writers were especially able to look back into history because of the correspondence between the place they were in their lives and careers and the national retrospective moment. This coincidence of generational and national history is important not just because these authors were at a point in their

lives and work that encouraged retrospection, but because they were born in the thirties, before World War II, lived through the Cold War, and were made, artistically and ideologically, by the sixties, the time at the center of the Cold War and so of the second half of the twentieth century. The nation's post-Cold War moment of retrospection coincided with their own, and the coincidence is significant beyond the fact that three important American writers, born in the thirties, reached their sixties in the nineties. As important was the fact that they reached their thirties in the sixties, the moment that the nation looked back on, argued about, and reevaluated in the nineties. It is this coincidence of generational and national history that made it possible for Mason & Dixon, Paradise, and American Pastoral to return to Cold War and sixties themes that run through all of American history—pastoral, paradise, and utopia, on one hand, and difference, division, and exclusion on the other.

* * *

A current trend in the academy is the reframing of the study of culture, politics, and history in global rather than national terms. Appearing under different rubrics, such as the postnational or the transnational, this global focus has taken many forms. Some working in this area identify nation with nationalism, and desire rejection of the nation as exclusionary. Others equate the current and past globalization of corporation and culture with the erasure of difference. In the current theoretical climate, then—one in which the very idea of the

nation is in question—a critical study framed in national terms may itself be questioned. Why restrict the study of literature, of culture, of history, postnational studies asks, to these arbitrary hegemonic boundaries?[2]

One answer, disciplinary conventions aside, is that, regardless of how we understand or value the idea and fact of nation, we cannot choose to ignore its significance either as an idea or as a legal entity. Nationhood is a meaningful historical category and citizenship is a significant component of daily existence and personal identity. While our lives may be shaped more than we realize by extranational forces and entities, our felt lives, our identifications and disidentifications, are significantly about country. Recognizing the cultural, political, demographic, and economic currents that cross borders can enrich our understanding of nation and national culture; it should not preclude attempts to reach that understanding.

The three novels that are my subject do not allow us to forget the nation. Each is explicitly national, and so forces us to remember the ongoing importance of the experience and idea of nation to contemporary life. If they are exceptionalist, it is because they focus on the particular, peculiar historical circumstances of America, and the peaks and pitfalls over which that history has passed. As I will argue, none of these novels

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[2] Two signs of this trend are the attention garnered by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Empire (2000) and the January 2001 special topic issue of PMLA entitled "Globalizing Literary Studies." See Baucom especially for discussion of these questions. See Bauman, Gray, Jameson and Miyoshi, and Stiglitz for criticisms of globalization.

ignores the darker aspects of American history (just as none claims there have been no bright moments). Each is also aware of the presence in American life of peoples and influences originating elsewhere; in fact, the way America reacts to these presences is central to these novels. The exceptionalism of these writers takes into account America's ideals and its failure to realize them, and it recognizes the strength and fragmentation of its identity.

All three of these novels are historical novels. The historical novel is, historically, national. The thinking of history in national terms is, for some, a trap from which we need to spring ourselves. Yet we continue to do it, just as our writers continue to think in terms of a national literature.[3] We imagine our history within borders. Central to each of these novels is the question of just how, within these borders, we do this imagining. This too is a global issue, as the models of history upon which we rely are tied to the global histories of the making and remaking of nations. The historical novel, with its roots in Enlightenment Scotland, thinks nationally because it was born out of the tension between different models of national

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[3] Roth and Morrison, whose reading habits and critical interests are more available to scrutiny than Pynchon's, write novels that entertain national themes; they also maintain interest in literature from other parts of the world. Roth has championed and popularized a number of Eastern European writers (see his 2002 Shop Talk, which collects interviews with Ivan Klima and Milan Kundera, among others); Morrison has written on literature from Africa (see her 2001 piece on the work of Camara Laye in the New York Review of Books, in which she writes, "[B]eing introduced in the early Sixties to the novels of Chinua Achebe, the work of Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Cyprian Ekwenski,

history. Asserting a national tradition against the imperial vision of progress, Katie Trumpener argues in Bardic Nationalism, nationalist models of history such as that found in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott are motivated by a desire to restore indigenous identification against its erasure by extranational forces. She writes:

> Nationalist accounts… place their emphasis very differently, insisting on a notion of cultural tradition left out of the natural and national histories of the mainstream Enlightenment. For the Enlightenment model is evolutionary, emphasizing the inevitability with which each developmental stage, each historical culture, is replaced with the next, the more advanced one. What shapes, destroys, and replaces cultural formations is an apparently impersonal, endlessly recurring social process. The nationalist reworking of this Enlightenment model involves a sustained attempt to challenge its assumptions about inevitability, agency, and progress. When cultures change, nationalists argue, it is often due to the violence of outside forces, rather than any inevitable internal dynamic. (28-29)

The violence of outside forces is, here, global. The history of the nation, told in the historical novel, reminds us of the

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to name a few, was more than a revelation—it was intellectually and aesthetically transforming" (18)).

global context without asking us to forget the nation—in fact, it begs us to remember it.

Mason & Dixon, Paradise, and American Pastoral do not follow Scott in reasserting traditional culture against imperial erasure. They do, however, examine their nation's past not just as it happened but as it survives, as it is retold and understood, and so as it shapes the way people live in the present. They ask how we remember, how we imagine the future unfolding from the past, and how we do these things not only as individuals but also as communities and as a nation made up of communities. An inextricable part of these questions, then, is the question of who "we" are, of who is American. Crucial to this last question, to these three novels, and to an understanding of American history is America's idea of itself as New Eden, as paradise on Earth, and the ways in which this idea has led and continues to lead to exclusion not just or even primarily of those outside its geographical borders but, most importantly, of some within. While it is crucial, especially today, to think about the ways in which the lines nations have drawn around themselves may be blurring, it remains important to think about the identities that still form within them. It is impossible, Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth demonstrate, to do this without looking at the past—from the first settlement of this already populated continent on—out of which our presently contested American identity has come.

* * *

From the beginning of the nineties, the importance of the past to the decade was clear. This could be seen during a ceremony held in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1991, the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese attack, when President George Bush put the end of the Cold War into what he saw as its proper context: "Now we stand triumphant," he said, "for a third time this century, this time in the wake of the cold war. As in 1919 and 1945, we face no enemy menacing our security" (Engelhardt, "Victors" 214). The dissolution of the Soviet Union, for Bush, became part of the ongoing story of America's success, notable not just for the resulting absence of threat to America but for the triumph of America. The triumphalist school of American history, emphasizing American victory from the Indian wars on (and eliding moments, such as Vietnam, that prove difficult to incorporate into the narrative), could without difficulty declare the fall of the Wall and the breakup of the USSR a victory for capitalism, democracy, and the American way of life. Two years earlier, as the beginning of the end of the Cold War was already under way, Francis Fukuyama had declared the end of history in a widely discussed article. Fukuyama's claim was not that all international conflict was forever in the past, but rather that, as the champion of a victorious ideology, America too had won: "the last systemic rival to Western liberalism, Marxism-Leninism, was dead as a mobilizing ideology. The 'triumph of the West' was complete" (Mills 27).

Contributing to this felt sense of triumph was the soothing of the nuclear anxiety that was so central to the Cold War experience. Nuclear anxiety was not only a phenomenon of the "hot" Cold War. Although it had cooled in the seventies, the years before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union saw its resurgence. There was, Cold War historian Paul Boyer writes,

> a wave of heightened nuclear fear that gripped the nation during President Ronald Reagan's first term. The nuclear-weapons freeze campaign... emerged as the political manifestation of this fear. At the same time, a tidal wave of movies, television programs, rock songs, and science-fiction stories bore witness to the public's renewed obsession with the specter of nuclear holocaust. (Fallout xv)

The resurrection of the Soviet threat enacted by Reagan's 1983 "evil empire" speech occasioned the return of nuclear fear. That anxiety did not magically disappear in 1991, as the continued appearance in the nineties of nuclear disaster scenarios in film, fiction, and video games attest (Boyer and Idsvoog). Nonetheless, it is inarguable that it significantly lessened as a result of the Cold War's end. The fact that so many began to reexamine the past after the end of the Cold War supports the notion that anxiety about the present had decreased. As Boyer wrote in 1998, "As the Cold War recedes further into the past, the moment is opportune for those who lived through all or part of that

stressful time to begin seriously the process of historical assessment—not just of the diplomacy of the Cold War, but of its social and cultural ramifications as well" (Fallout xi).

While the end of the Cold War meant for some an end to bipolar conflict (and with it the threat of nuclear annihilation) and perhaps the beginning of investigation into its meaning, for others it was a signal to step up the offensive on other fronts. In a 1993 interview, Irving Kristol said, "There is no 'after the Cold War' for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos... Now that the other 'Cold War' is over, the real cold war has begun" (qtd. in Sherry 107). Pat Buchanan described this conflict in his speech to the 1992 Republican convention: "It is about who we are. It is about what we believe. It is about what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself." For Kristol and Buchanan and many others on the right, the end of the Cold War proper was cause for greater vigilance in the war between those who saw themselves as defenders of America's traditional values and those they saw threatening them: As Todd Gitlin puts it:

> The collapse of Communism left America with an enemy crisis. The 1991 Gulf War did, it is true, produce a righteous mobilization, but the yellow-beribboned

> uproar in behalf of the Desert Storm troops, intense as it was, came and went within months... America the centrifugal was left to itself (or its selves). We fell, and what we fell into was the culture wars. (Twilight 80)

The end of the Cold War intensified the already-begun culture wars. Both had their roots deep in America's past, in narratives born long before either of them. As became clear by the mid-nineties, Kristol's cold war was very much about the American past: as in 1919 and 1945, it held, America was triumphant against an external enemy, but an internal enemy remained, and it threatened America's understanding of itself.

This importance of the past to the nineties was crystallized in the controversy that arose from another fiftieth anniversary, that of the bombing of Hiroshima. In honor of this anniversary, the Smithsonian Institution planned a 1995 exhibit of the Enola Gay. The original plans for the National Air and Space Museum's showing of the plane that dropped the bomb included material concerning the resulting devastation as well as the fear created by the use of the bomb. Veterans' groups were outraged, and began a campaign to pressure the Smithsonian to make its exhibit less critical of the bombing. Patrick Buchanan weighed in on the scholarship behind the exhibit, which he viewed as less than patriotic: "In all this, friends, there is something less benign than the timidity of academics desperate to be seen as politically correct. What is under way is a sleepless campaign

to inculcate in American youth a revulsion toward America's past" (qtd. in Boyer 248). This campaign, for Buchanan, was not first against the state, or a set of values, but rather against the past. The unquestioning pride Americans should take in all of America's history, Buchanan was saying, was absent from the hearts of these academics, and in its place was something sinister. Aggressive protection of the past was a way to protect America, for the present and in the future, from any doubts about America's rightness, its justification in using violence, and its continued triumph.

From the anniversaries of Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima, from the end of the Cold War and the fiftieth anniversary of the last World War, from the end of the century and the millennium, the nineties took on a markedly retrospective quality. Paul Boyer refers specifically to "the retrospective moment of 1995" (xviii), but culture throughout the nineties exhibited a fascination with history. This turn back to the past could be seen in the rise of the historical documentary, in particular those of Ken Burns, starting with Civil War in 1990 through Baseball in 1994 to Jazz in 2000, which collectively served to institutionalize not only the movement of camera over sepia-toned archival photograph but also the historical inclination of the age. This inclination also could be seen in the popularity of the History Channel, which was launched in 1995, and the A&E series Biography, which first aired as a weekly series in 1987 but expanded to five nights a week in 1994; in the number of

presidential histories in print and on television and in the corresponding ubiquity of historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Michael Beschloss. It could be seen in the attention to World War II in particular in these media, in the growth of historian Stephen Ambrose's work into a cottage industry, in war films such as Saving Private Ryan (1998), The Thin Red Line (1998), and Pearl Harbor (2001). It could be seen in CNN's twenty-four part history of the Cold War, which was proposed by Ted Turner in 1994 and aired in 1998 (CNN). It could be seen in the almost archivally faithful borrowings from past decades in popular music, such as those of Bob Dylan's son, Jakob, whose band, The Wallflowers, recreated the sound of his father's seventies work with The Band, in decade-specific situation comedies like That Seventies Show (1998), and in the miniseries dramatization of the sixties called, sensibly, The Sixties (1999).

While much of the historical attention in the nineties was paid to the forties, because of the various fiftieth anniversaries and the sense that the era that followed the original events was now over, a good deal of this attention was paid to the sixties in particular. A number of factors contributed to this focus, not least of which was the centrality of the sixties to the Cold War era, in terms not just of chronology but also of meaning. The protests against the war in Vietnam, the counterculture, the latter years of the civil rights movement and the rise of black nationalism, the women's movement, the violence of assassination and riot—the sixties challenged

what America thought about itself in the Cold War era. Since the end of the sixties, the meaning of the Cold War, of America, has had to be filtered through them. As I will discuss later in greater detail, the seventies witnessed the disillusionment of sixties hopes, the rollback of many of its political gains, and the beginning of the fall of its stock. Reagan conservatism drove it down further by demonizing the sixties, preaching a return to a mythical version of the values of the fifties, to the time before what was seen as the corruption of American social life. The nineties, then, coming at the end of the Cold War era, at the center of which was the sixties, was a time for interpreting not just the Cold War but also the sixties, the Cold War as seen through the sixties, and the sixties as seen in the decades following. As Stephen Paul Miller writes, Americans in the seventies dealt with the sixties by "ambivalently reconsidering older (ostensibly pre-sixties) organizing mechanisms... the sixties and a naïve sense of the fifties, or pre-sixties, [were] reimagined through one another" (30). In subsequent years, the sixties have continued to be reimagined against the times that preceded it and in light of the later times through which it is seen, in the larger context of the now-ended Cold War and the ongoing course of American history. Highlighted in the sixties are themes present in the Cold War—the exclusion of the Other, internal surveillance, the dream of a unified, homogeneous community safe from attack or infiltration—and present in American history from the start.

The importance of the sixties to the public life of the nineties could be seen in the major American events of the nineties. Beginning in 1991 with Rodney King's beating and the trial of the policemen who delivered it, the hearings on Clarence Thomas's nomination for the Supreme Court and Anita Hill's testimony against him, and the tumult of the Clinton campaign and the past dredged up to be used against him, American public life in the nineties was centered on events whose interpretation pivoted on issues and themes identified with the sixties. Race and gender equality, sexual permissiveness, and draft dodging were all raised by these very public spectacles, and the battles waged in each of these cases broke down along which side of various sixties divides the combatants found themselves. The battles of the sixties, in other words, were refought at the start of the nineties. The Clinton reforms of the early years of his first term and the Newt Gingrich-led "Republican Revolution" of 1994 followed this pattern, repeating the struggle between sixties and fifties views of society. What America was, what it was supposed to be, and who was and who was not an American were again questions of the day. These questions were asked throughout the decade, as could be seen in the trial of O. J. Simpson, the Oklahoma bombing, the Million Man March, the attempted impeachment of Clinton, and the protests over the World Trade Organization. One thread running through these disparate events, as was also true for the events of 1991, was the relevance of the sixties, the recourse made in interpreting contemporary events to

events and movements and debates thirty years old. The place of African-Americans in American society, the place of the government in the life of individuals, the place of sexuality in social life, the place of America in the world—issues with roots in the oldest American themes of paradise and exclusion—were still open. Those looking for answers or fighting for the answers in which they believed found support in the time when these questions were so openly contested, the sixties.

* * *

For Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth, the retrospective cast of the nineties meant looking back on their own lives. The closeness of their births—1937 for Pynchon, 1931 for Morrison, 1933 for Roth—is thus of some significance, as they shared the times in which they were raised, reached adulthood, and became the writers we know. As prewar babies, they predate the baby boom, and in doing so might be thought to be a less important generation in American life than the boomers, who, born in greater numbers in the flush of military triumph and economic growth, were the youth in the mass youth movements of the sixties and the graying majority in the economic boom time of the nineties, reaching their own fiftieth anniversaries. The cohort of Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth, on the other hand, was untrustworthily over thirty (at least for much of the decade), and in its sixties in the nineties.

While a debate about the relative importance of different generations to American life would be fruitless and irresolvable,

it is important to recognize the particular significance of this slightly older group. One perhaps unexpected aspect, given the dominance of the boomers in popular perceptions of American history, can be found in the role they played in the sixties. While the mass of the movements of the sixties was younger, most of the leaders of these movements were members of this older cohort. As Louis Menand writes,

> It is almost impossible to name a figure from the nineteen-sixties, apart from Janis Ian and a few college radicals late in the decade, who was born between 1946 and 1962, the years of the boom. This is even true of the leaders of the "youth culture," the people who went around saying "Don't trust anyone over thirty." Jerry Rubin was born in 1938, Abby Hoffman was born in 1936. Hoffman was thirty-one when he and Rubin founded the Youth International Party. ("Seventies" 131)

Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth were not leaders of anything in an organized, political sense. However, they were not just shaped by the politics of the sixties; as widely read commenters on American social life in the sixties and seventies, they helped shape them. Pynchon wrote about freedom, conformity, and authority, Morrison about civil and women's rights, Roth about the sexual revolution. They were in and of the period.

* * *

The novels in which Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth look back on this period are, of course, historical novels, and so have a national dimension. This dimension serves to foreground another important aspect of the historical novel, its not unrelated use and potential questioning of models of history. Mason & Dixon, Paradise, and American Pastoral explore not just national history but also the ways in which that history has been told. Continuing the historical novel's questioning of the ways in which we understand the past, these novels do not, however, replace one national story with another, "correct" one. Instead, they make use of the novel's ability to unsettle and overturn received understandings and of history's original, often forgotten ability not to tell the one story of the past but rather to ask questions of it.

Herodotus referred to his accounts of the past by the Greek word *historiai*. From the root verb *historein*, which means to ask questions, *historiai* carries the sense of inquiry, of asking questions of the past. Deep within our word "history," then, is the sense not of the documentation of the past but rather of inquiry into it. Christopher Hitchens has noted the etymology of the word in order to point out how far the contemporary American sense of history is from its root sense, how much history is taken as given fact rather than as field of inquiry.[4] While the

[4] In the essay in Harper's in which Hitchens notes this etymology, he argues for "the idea of trying to teach the whole story, not just 'warts and all' but as an *inquiry* or an argument" (46). He also argues against the model of historical discourse as dispassionate: "What needs to be combated is the idea, so often and so worthily expressed-and so

political ramifications of thinking of history as inquiry are what interest Hitchens—the challenge to received wisdom and authority posed by the questioning of official histories—there are also literary ramifications.

At times we oppose the historical and the literary, thinking of history as factual and the novel in particular as fictional, opposing science to imagination, investigation to creation. The historical novel can question this distinction: as it investigates the world through the use of imagination, it blurs these kinds of lines, and reveals not just that the novel cannot be assigned to the realm of pure fantasy but also that the historical cannot be relegated to the realm of fact. In blurring these distinctions, the historical novel remains true to the larger genre of the novel, whose origins can be traced to a time when these lines were not so clear. From its eighteenth century emergence out of forms as distinct as romance, history, and news, out of public forms such as the chronicle and personal forms such as the spiritual confession, the novel carries with it the blurring of this line. Because its roots run under both sides of the conventional property line between fact and fiction, the novel, rather than ignoring reality or documenting it, can ask questions of it.

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stultifying—that 'light' is to be preferred to 'heat.' Heat, as can be learned in other classrooms, is the only possible source of light" (47).

Milan Kundera argues not only that the novel can do this but that it should. In a 1980 interview with Phillip Roth, he explained:

> A novel does not assert anything; a novel searches and poses questions. I don't know whether my nation will perish and I don't know which of my characters is right. I invent stories, confront one with another, and by this means I ask questions. The stupidity of people comes from having an answer for anything. The wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything. When Don Quixote went out into the world, that world turned into a mystery before his eyes. That is the legacy of the first European novel to the entire subsequent history of the novel. The novelist teaches the reader to comprehend the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude. (Shop Talk 100)

Kundera explains his practice not to offer an explanation of one way novels can be written but rather to argue that his way is the right way, the way that is faithful to the mystery of the world itself. There are, he acknowledges elsewhere, novels that do not do this, but they are not real novels.[5] Real novels, while they

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[5] Of one example of novels that are not real novels, Kundera wrote in Art of the Novel (1986), "Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning: it can never accommodate what I would call the *spirit of the novel*. But aren't there hundreds and thousands of novels published in huge editions and widely read in Communist Russia? Certainly; but these novels add nothing to the conquest of being. They discover no new segment of existence; they only confirm what has

can take many different forms, do not give answers. They do not document what happened in the past, nor do they claim to faithfully represent present reality. What they do is ask questions.

Georg Lukacs, at least for the part of his career represented by The Theory of the Novel (1920), held a similar belief about the novel's true purpose. In that book he argued that the novel is shaped by a structural irony matching the structural irony of the modern human condition. What he means by this is that authorial subjectivity, rather than presiding over the world it creates (as in Wayne Booth's model of the implied author), instead is split between the narrating voice of the novel and the subjectivity of the main character. This condition is used to create an unstable irony, reflecting what Lukacs sees as the most basic truth of modern life: that the subjective, inner world is irreconcilable with the objective, outer world, that we cannot fully understand that world. Rather than presenting a stable irony in which the character misunderstands the world and the author shows us how it really is, Lukacs argues, the novel should instead present an unstable irony, in which we know the character has got it wrong but aren't told what right is. Lukacs sees the novel, then, as Kundera does, as properly asking questions about the world but refusing definitively to answer them. Even though the novel's rejection of

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already been said... By discovering nothing, they fail to participate in the *sequence of discoveries* that for me constitutes the history of the novel; they place themselves *outside* that history" (14).

its characters' worldviews does move in the direction of an answer, it never arrives there. This refusal to arrive reflects, for Lukacs, the fundamental condition of modern life: our inability to understand and represent the totality of a world without meaning, without God. It reflects a world that we must comprehend, in Kundera's words, as a question. By the time of The Historical Novel (1937), Lukacs had found Marx, and so believed that we can understand the world—and its history—by understanding capital. In the time of The Theory of the Novel, though, he still believed that this kind of total understanding was impossible.

If we believe in a world that can be fully, even scientifically understood, we can believe in a history that can be fully understood. We can believe in history as, in Lukacs' words, "the bearer and realizer of human progress" (History 25). The Hegelian idea that the meaning of individual events could be found in the process of history itself, that the meaning not just of history but of human existence lay in this process, was, to the later Lukacs, integral to the development of the novel. Coming out of the mass experience of history in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, Hegel's philosophy and the young novel both embodied the sense of the individual as enmeshed in a larger, determinative process. However, while the importance given to history by the historical novel might be the result of these developments, the claim that the job of the novel thenceforth (historical and otherwise) was to present scientifically the dialectic of history as instantiated in the

life of individuals does not follow. Given Lukacs' understanding that the historical novel after Balzac was not defined as such by its focus on the past but rather by its presentation of individual lives in the present as they are shaped by historical processes, and his rejection of the modernist novel as decadent for its failure to do the same, it might be said that for Lukacs, all novels ought to do this job.[6]

If, however, we see the world as a mystery, as do Kundera and the younger Lukacs, we cannot give the novel this job description, because it requires that the novel give answers. We can only require of fiction, as we ought also of the history to which it is mistakenly opposed, that it inquire. It is in this analogy that the relationship between the novel and history becomes clear. As Michael Wood puts it:

> I don't think resistance is quite the word for literature's relation to history. Literature is too close to (the writing of) history to resist it, and quite often it just *is* history, taking a figurative form... Literature, let's say, entertains history, the way we entertain an idea; it also entertains itself,

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[6] In The Historical Novel, Lukacs writes: "This continuation of the historical novel, in the sense of a consciously historical conception of the present, is the great achievement of... Balzac... Balzac passes from the portrayal of *past history* to the portrayal of the *present as history*" (81, 83). Of the literature that we might call modernist but which Lukacs does not even name, he writes, "[W]e shall not deal with representatives of extreme decadence. It will suffice to say that what for the important writers of the transitional period was the difficult 'problematic' of realistic, historical portrayal, now blossoms forth into a decadent play with forms—the conscious violation of history" (251).

> never at a loss for conversation or amusement; and in its more radical forms it invites history to think again. (Children 13)

In entertaining history, Wood writes, literature seizes on the idea of history as inquiry, and asks that it reopen its inquiry through imagination. This is what I see Pynchon, Morrison, and Roth doing in American Pastoral, Paradise, and Mason & Dixon.

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Just as there has been a tendency to emphasize the fictionality of the novel, especially when comparing it to genres thought of as factual, there has also been a tendency to emphasize its referentiality, to think about it and its history in terms of its representation of reality. There have been a number of voices in recent decades, speaking from this latter orientation, who have said that the novel cannot do what it used to do. Many of the variations on this claim about contemporary literary history base their arguments on contemporary social history, saying that changes in the world have made the novel unable properly to represent it. While this argument has not seemed to bother nonacademic novelists or readers too much, it has been influential in the academy.

Literary-historical arguments that the contemporary novel fails to engage reality range from the more literary, beginning from the evidence of contemporary novels, to the more historical, beginning from the evidence of the contemporary world. They end in roughly the same place, though, with the conclusion that while

novels used to be able to present the truth about the world, the world has changed so much that they can no longer do so. Among those who early in the postwar period saw the difficulty of representing American reality were Philip Roth, who commented on this difficulty in an often-quoted line delivered in 1960 at a Stanford symposium entitled "Writing in America Today":

> The American writer in the middle of the 20th Century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. (Reading 120)

Critics such as Ihab Hassan and Leslie Fiedler began to refer to the characteristic features of contemporary fiction, listing the ways in which it was different from the fiction of the first half of the century. Contemporary fiction, they argued, constituted a radical break, in its form and content, from the fiction that preceded it. They pointed to the fictions of John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Hawkes as examples of the turn away from this stupefying contemporary reality and toward textuality, self-reflexivity, and metafiction. While prewar fiction strove to dive deeply into human consciousness, their argument ran, postwar fiction instead played on the surface of existence, eschewing the depths to skate playfully, ironically, or resignedly above them. This fiction did so, it was argued, either because literary possibility was exhausted, to use Barth's

word, or because postwar life was exhausting, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima and as the world grew smaller, moved faster, and became more complicated and less comprehensible. There was too little left to do in fiction and too much to understand in the world.[7]

In an interview thirty years after Roth's statement, Don DeLillo said much the same thing: "What's been missing over these past twenty-five years is a sense of a manageable reality" (Lentricchia 48). American reality has changed so rapidly, DeLillo argues, that writers are unable to get any kind of a handle on it. After the assassinations of Kennedy and King, after Vietnam and Watergate, the novel would seem to have before it an impossible task. Writers and critics continue today to say what was being said decades earlier: the world is not just too much with us but just too much, and our literature reflects this experiential, epistemological surplus. For some of these observer-participants in literary culture, American reality serves as a welcome impetus for artistic inventiveness; Roth and DeLillo certainly see themselves as inspired to do new things to try to capture their changing world. For others, it serves only as a lamentable curb on realism. Both the metafictional funhouses of the sixties and the minimalist sketches of the eighties have been read by some as capitulations to the world's complexity, escapes into either amoral play or deadpan domestic drama, sans drama.[8] Still others lament the failure of contemporary fiction to display realist tendencies but don't buy the connection to

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[7] Barth, "Exhaustion."

changes in American social life. Tom Wolfe is one, and has made a small industry of his pronouncements against contemporary literary figures who, he feels, have dropped the realist baton. In a complaint he has made as recently as 2000, Wolfe argues that American writers have turned away from the tradition of painting on broad social canvases, as did Dickens and Twain and Dreiser; in this most recent complaint he oddly names John Updike, Norman Mailer, and John Irving as three primary offenders.[9] For him, their failure to be realist is a failure of nerve, or fashion, or politics; it is not the inevitable result of the way things are.

While Wolfe's assertion that contemporary American fiction is not driven by the realist impulse is mistaken, the implicit belief on which the assertion is made—the belief in the continuing availability of the American present as an object for the realist impulse—is not. Of course, it makes sense that he does not find the present so incomprehensible that it cannot be represented, as the New Journalism that he championed in the sixties grappled with the difficulty of representing new and strange phenomena in print and did not just overcome this difficulty but thrived on it. Using the techniques of fiction in nonfiction, and vice versa (witness the subtitle to Mailer's The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History [1968]), these writers covering the cultural dislocations and

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[8] See Gardner for an influential statement of this view of metafiction.
[9] In "My Three Stooges" (Hooking). Wolfe's criticisms of Updike, Mailer, and Irving is perhaps not so strange, given that each wrote a negative review of his 1998 novel A Man in Full (see Menand, "Strange", and Adair). See also Wolfe, "Stalking."

ruptures of the sixties enlivened journalistic and fictional prose and in the process implicitly questioned the theoretical validity of an absolute distinction between the two. In his 1973 collection called The New Journalism, Wolfe displayed the wares of a variety of writers producing similar work, and argued in his preface that the New Journalism was picking up the baton dropped by novelists. Nearly thirty years later, he is still arguing the point. What the actual work in the collection shows about its time, however, is not that novelists were no longer realist (which, outside of a few experimental writers, was not really the case). What the New Journalism shows is that the techniques of fiction were still useful at the time for writing about reality.

Literary theorists have made their own arguments against realism, some of which were formulated at the time of the New Journalism. As structuralism spread into the study of narrative itself, the work of narratologists such Gérard Genette (in Narrative Discourse (1972)) broke down the workings of reference in narrative, revealing it to be the work of a system of codes. While Genette saw his attempt to delineate the structure of narrative as scientific, Roland Barthes' S/Z (1970) more plainly debunked realism. He believed that literature's classically *lisible* pose was an attempt to hide its true *scriptible* nature. As literary meaning hides a multiplicity of meanings, and doxa hides nature's variety behind culture's givens, so literature hides its writerly plurality behind readerliness. After Derrida's critique of structuralism, poststructuralism's historically

particularized understanding of linguistic structures once thought universal encouraged critiques of realism along historical lines. Poststructuralist ideas led to critiques of representation attentive to the differences between distinct times. As the Frankfurt school and others had debated the merits of modernist literature, arguing over what if any representation (and so criticism) of the modern world it was able to achieve in comparison to that which the realist fiction that preceded it achieved, so a younger cohort of postwar theorists debated the ability of the literature of their own era to accomplish any kind of representation (and so, again, criticism) of their times, in comparison to that achieved by realist and modernist literature.

Chief among these theorists is Fredric Jameson, who has fashioned an understanding of art as shaped by ideological strategies of containment and so as bearing what he calls a political unconscious, and a theory of contemporary culture which he describes as postmodern. Postmodernism, which Jameson calls the cultural dominant of our age, is the product or expression of the latest stage of modern societal development, according to Ernst Mandel's three-stage theory of capitalism. Insisting on the existence of some kind of mediation between base and superstructure, against Althusser's rejection of such a relationship, Jameson sees a mediated (if not homologous, à la Lucien Goldmann) relation between early market capitalism, later monopoly capitalism, and present-day multinational capitalism, on one hand, and, respectively, realism, modernism, and

postmodernism, on the other.[10] Under the current cultural dominant, Jameson argues, the realism that was already compromised under monopoly capitalism has become unachievable. Following his understanding both of the present disintegration of the schizophrenic bourgeois subject under the cultural logic of late capitalism (as a result of the fragmentation of experience and resulting in the subject's inability to forge a unified understanding of that world) and also of the ways in which his method of dialectical interpretation can identify repressed content in a text's contradictions, Jameson concludes that the apprehension of contemporary reality is available only indirectly. Because global capitalism destroys the links between individual experience and reliable knowledge of the total shape and structure of society, he argues, writers cannot offer in their work any kind of realistic portrait of society, any understanding of the relations of production, of the present as historically shaped and situated, or of individuals' place in the world system. As a result of our lack of contact with historical reality we produce art that, try as it might with any variety of techniques (hence the experimental, metafictional work often identified as postmodern), can tell us nothing about the world except when read for social information produced as symptom of our divorce from reality.

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[10] For Althusser's rejection of mediation, see Reading (186-89). Jameson argues that what Althusser is really rejecting is not mediation but rather Goldmann's homology, a concept he introduced in his The Hidden God and applied to the novel in his later Sociology of the Novel (Jameson Political 43).

Jameson's theoretical understanding of postwar art has proven influential among critics. It has provided a touchstone, a name to invoke, and a framework to plug into when reading contemporary fiction. This framework, however, has ramifications beyond the contemporary period. Accepting the Jamesonian understanding of postmodernism when reading contemporary novels means accepting his model of the relationship of literature to reality.

In an early statement of his postmodernism, Jameson writes of the contemporary "disappearance of a sense of history" ("Postmodernism" 125).[11] Identifying the modern with newness, with change—with modernization and its uneven, heterogeneous development—and the postmodern with the completion of modernization and so with a loss of this sense of change because of a homogeneity of development, Jameson argues that the postmodern subject has lost any sense of history. The loss of this most basic of *grand récits*, in Lyotard's phrase, is the fundamental characteristic of the age and is the obstacle he and other postmodern thinkers must overcome; "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (Postmodernism ix).[12] Attempts by novelists to overcome it are not successful; they are not even encouraging evidence of a persistent impulse to understand the

[11] See especially "Nostalgia for the Present" in Postmodernism (279-96).
[12] See Lyotard for analysis of the loss of the grand narratives by which he believes we have understood the world.

world. Rather, they are proof of the height of this obstacle. Linda Hutcheon, among others, has disagreed, claiming that the "blunt, overt work of historical redescription performed by many postmodern texts ought to be viewed as a complicated narrative strategy and not, as Jameson would hold, a symptom of an enervated nostalgia" (Poetics 176). Calling this kind of work "historiographical metafiction," Hutcheon reads it as able to confront reality, after a fashion, though she is not a believer in reality as a single, graspable entity in the way Jameson (as a Marxist) must be. In contradistinction to Barbara Foley's claims for the aspirations of what she calls the "documentary novel," Hutcheon says that postmodern fiction "does not 'aspire to tell the truth'... as much as to question *whose* truth gets told" ("Pastime" 491). Continuing, she reveals her notion of reality: "Facts are not given but are constructed by the kinds of questions we ask of events." Jameson's opinion of this kind of thoroughgoing constructivism is surely as negative as his feeling about the reading of contemporary fiction it informs. He does not agree that what he calls "postmodern 'fantastic historiography'" puts us in any contact with historical reality, and argues instead that this kind of work is "no doubt the symptom of social and historical impotence, of the blocking of possibilities that leaves little option but the imaginary" (Postmodernism 368-69).

Approaches to contemporary fiction based on a theory that sees imagination as a poor last resort can produce poor readings. We have seen how an insistence on politics as the first basis of

judgment can misshape criticism, just as we have seen how an insistence that politics have no place (itself a political stance, of course) can have similar effects. The insistence on social realism in the thirties and the bias against it following the left's disenchantment with Stalin are illustrations. The exclusion of Dreiser and other turn-of-the-century American realists from the canon by Lionel Trilling and others in favor of what were seen as the more universal romances of Melville and Hawthorne betrayed a discomfort with politics that led critics to ignore a large segment of American writing.[13] As Marx's effect on Lukacs illustrates, reading only for the revolution can make critics ignore things, such as the importance of imagination to literature. Jameson's version of postmodernism, understanding contemporary culture as part of a dialectic leading teleologically to a resolution of the contradictions inherent under capitalism, leads him to ignore important things, including a crucial lesson literary history teaches us.

The aspect of literary history that Jameson does not sufficiently take into account is the fact that the novel, far from only recently having lost the ability to represent reality, has always questioned it. As Bakhtin argued, the novel, the only

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[13] See Schaub (American), especially his introduction, in which he presents Richard Chase's catalog of the "old mistakes" of liberalism, among which were "the facile ideas of progress and 'social realism,' the disinclination to examine human motives, the indulgence of wish-fulfilling rhetoric, the belief that historical reality is merely a question of economic or ethical values, the idea that literature should participate directly in the economic liberation of the masses, the equivocal relationship to communist totalitarian and power politics" (qtd. in Schaub, 7).

literary form born in the modern world, has been more of a force than a fixed genre, crossing generic boundaries, swallowing other forms of discourse in its hunger to grow and change as the world grows and changes. In part, this hunger, there from the start, was a hunger to incorporate other forms of discourse. The novel has been a mixture, in different instances and for different theorists, of many things: of account book and spiritual confession for Ian Watt, of history, romance, and news for Michael McKeon, of "biography" (narratives of life history such as the confession or the psychoanalytic case study) and "chronicle" (narratives of collective history such as the epic or genealogy) for Lucien Goldmann (Toward). At certain times this hunger, before John Barth and even before Laurence Sterne, has turned back on itself. The novel was born a cannibal. From the hints of self-consciousness in proto-novels such as the second century's The Golden Ass and the sixteenth century's Spanish picaresque to the overt self-exposure of Diderot's Jacques the Fatalist (1796), the novel has from its inception devoured itself, questioning its own motives and methods, at times doing so through the use of different genres and forms of discourses, through the use of its own hybridity. This playful exposure of the man behind the curtain first appeared in the same early stages as attempts to hide him through documentary gestures such as pretending to reprint found diaries or letters, as in the work of Richardson and Defoe.[14] All of this self-questioning ultimately

[14] Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor (1960) and Lost in the Fun-house (1968)

challenged the novel's claim to realism. From birth, the form that has been alleged to hold a mirror up to the world—"a mirror being carried along a highway," Stendhal called the form, while Auerbach called the modernist novel "a mirror for the decline of our world"—has turned that mirror back on itself.[15]

This aspect of the history of the novel does not only remind us that postwar writers did not invent metafiction and, therefore, that postwar fiction's peculiarities cannot be so easily explained as a result of the state of the postwar world. It also calls into question the idea that the contemporary novel represents a new stage of literary evolution, and highlights the shared linearity of literary histories based on formal evolution and those based on social history. Writers such as William Gass and Milan Kundera have questioned the postmodern explanation of metafiction by arguing against the literary-historical narrative of avant-gardeist radical breaks, saying that postwar novelists have not been inventing new forms but rather have returned,

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are examples of contemporary metafiction. Sterne's Tristram Shandy (1767) provides an example of the use of many of the same techniques hundreds of years earlier. Richardson uses letters in Pamela (1741); DeFoe uses the diary in Moll Flanders (1722) and the claim to present another's manuscript in Robinson Crusoe (1719).

[15] Stendhal uses this statement as an epigraph in Red and Black, and ascribes it to César de Saint-Réal, a seventeenth century French historian, who may not have ever said it (Stendhal 60, n. 3). Auerbach, in Mimesis, his study of the representation of reality from The Odyssey to To the Lighthouse, says this of Woolf's representation of multiple consciousnesses, but also argues that Woolf's attention to real things at a time of historical upheaval asserts a human commonality, an assertion that he too seems to have found valuable when he wrote his study in the early 1940s, in exile in Istanbul from Nazi Germany: "In this unprejudiced and exploratory type of representation we cannot but see to what extent—below the surface conflicts—the differences between men's ways of life and forms of thought have already lessened... it is

cyclically, to these old forms, in order to continue to say things about the world. Of the early masters of the form, Kundera has said:

> Sterne and Diderot understood the novel as a great game. They discovered the humor of the novelistic form. When I hear learned arguments that the novel has exhausted its possibilities, I have precisely the opposite feeling: in the course of its history the novel missed many of its possibilities. For example, impulses for the development of the novel hidden in Sterne and Diderot have not been picked up by any successors. (qtd. in Roth, Shop 93)

This is not because successors cannot do so; in fact, the statement assumes that they can, but for one reason or another have not. Impulses found in the work of other writers, even other impulses in Sterne and Diderot, have been picked up and incorporated into new works. This recognition of the novel's history of incorporating other forms, of changing in order to relate to an always changing reality, sometimes by returning to old forms, forces us to see that Jameson's view of the contemporary novel's decline—its sudden, alleged inability to represent reality—is not only mistaken but is based on a view of the novel that is itself mistaken.

In Don DeLillo's 1990 novel Mao II, Bill Gray, famous reclusive novelist, claims that terrorists have replaced

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still a long way to a common life of mankind on earth, but the goal

novelists. In a world that no longer reads, where people are more attuned to the image and more susceptible to the mass appeal, Gray says, novelists can no longer affect the way people see the world. The kidnapping, the bombing, the single violent act repeated over and over on the television news, is the novel's successor.

The morning of September 11, 2001 tested Gray's hypothesis. The images of the Towers being hit, burning, and collapsing in gray clouds have become inescapable. They have been burned into the American consciousness, beyond words. A few writers have since questioned the importance of literature, relative to the enormity of the events, and, it seems likely, in response to the power of these images. Gray's argument seems correct, in part. The impact of these attacks on American consciousness does attest to the power of the image and the terrorist. However, the past of the novel and the past of America, though riddled with examples of bad behavior, are testaments to the flexibility and resiliency that is born of hybridity and so are arguments against Gray. The terrorist and his mirror image, the unthinking patriot, trade in answers. To return to Kundera, novels teach readers to question the world, and there is wisdom and tolerance in that.

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begins to be visible" (551, 552).

II. Mason & Dixon & the Ampersand

> "It goes back," he might have begun, "to the second Day of Creation, when 'G-d made the Firmament, from the waters which were under the Firmament,'– thus the first Boundary Line. All else after that, in all History, is but Sub-Division."
>
> --Mr. Edgewise

> And wherever you may stand, given the Convexity, each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else… Here in the Earth Concave, everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,– ev'rybody's axes converge,– forc'd at least thus to acknowledge one another,– an entirely different set of rules for how to behave.
>
> --Resident of Terra Concava

> … for the Times are as impossible to calculate, this Advent, as the Distance to a Star.
>
> --Rev. Wicks Cherrycoke

The story goes that Thomas Pynchon was heavily involved in the design of his 1997 novel Mason & Dixon, inside and out. In particular, he is said to have been involved in the making of the novel's cover (Mxyzptlk). The dust jacket comes in two parts, a paper jacket and a transparent overlay. The paper jacket features the title, in an eighteenth-century-looking typeface, magnified and spread across the front and back. On the front of the transparent overlay are the more legibly sized author name and title running across the top and bottom. It is a distinctive design, but it may also serve a purpose other than marketing. Without making too much of something as (by definition) superficial as cover design, we are given space to think about

its significance by the fact of Pynchon's attention to its details. One particular detail that I believe is significant results from the way in which the title is expanded and placed--the ampersand that fills the space between author name and title. In effect, the centrally placed ampersand is magnified to the point that it moves from the background to become the central element, more illustration than typography.

The emphasis on the ampersand is likely no accident, because it points to what I will argue is a central idea in the book, one that is essential to its vision and so, also, to its difference from its author's earlier works. Mason & Dixon's ampersand is more than historically accurate; it expresses the shift in Pynchon's thinking that the novel represents. As he spins a picaresque historical tale in Mason & Dixon, Pynchon also tells a new, more hopeful story about America, emphasizing relation, connection, and possibility. At the center of this new story is the easily overlooked symbol of the ampersand.

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Mason & Dixon is in many ways a novel about lines. It is the story of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, astronomer and surveyor, who from 1763 to 1767 were in charge of drawing and blazing the 233-mile latitudinal line dividing the Penns' Pennsylvania and Lord Calvert's Maryland, the line which later came to divide North from South, free states from slave. The novel follows them, in Part One, "Latitudes and Departures," from their meeting in 1760, when they travel to Cape Town to observe

the Transit of Venus between the earth and the sun and help determine the Solar Parallax, to Mason's side trip to St. Helena for further measurement, to their return to London, and finally, in Part Two, "America," to their acceptance and execution of a commission to chart the disputed southern border of Pennsylvania. The novel ends, in Part Three, "Last Transit," with their return to England, Dixon's death, and Mason's eventual (and final) relocation to America. The tale is told by the Rev. Wicks Cherrycoke, who has come to stay (and stay and stay) with family on the occasion of Mason's demise in 1786. Mason, as astronomer, and Dixon, as surveyor, are professionally dedicated to the measuring, charting, and drawing of lines. The task that occupies the majority of their time in the novel is to plot and cut an eight-yard-wide line.

But this is only the first and most obvious way in which Mason & Dixon is about lines. Pynchon's telling of their story and the story of pre-Revolutionary America contains many kinds of lines, as do the larger contexts within which the story is set. To argue for the ampersand's place as an important figure in the novel, I will first sketch the ways in which the novel is so marked, the ways in which Pynchon understands these stories and their contexts in terms of the metaphor of the line. This latter metaphor has thus far understandably dominated the novel's reception by reviewers and critics. It is, after all, the word most closely associated with the names of the title characters, in the name given the swath they cut (a name only given,

interestingly, long after their drawing of it, and never in the novel itself). I will first read Mason & Dixon in this way because it is has been the dominant reading in the few years since its publication, with good reason, and because it is in relation to Pynchon's use of the line that his use of the ampersand makes sense, and, ultimately, vice versa. The ways in which the ampersand responds to the line, the ways in which connection and possibility answer division and difference, make Mason & Dixon something truly new for Pynchon.

* * *

Even before the two title characters receive their assignment in the colonies, Mason & Dixon is filled with geometry.[1] The first sentence of the novel begins: "Snow-Balls have flown their arcs" (5). The line seems a humorous allusion to the opening of Gravity's Rainbow (1973), "A screaming comes across the sky" (3). There is of course a bathetic drop from the latter to the former, or perhaps an ostensible lightening not just of mood but also of stakes. As becomes clear once the book gets rolling, though, Pynchon brings the reader past or more exactly through the playful and apparently (mostly) accurate eighteenth-century English of his narrator and other characters, and his almost compulsive punning, to arrive at the serious ideas

[1] Many who have written about Mason & Dixon have noted this characteristic of the novel. Responses to the novel include those by Boyle, Cowart ("Luddite"), Leonard ("Crazy"), Menand ("Entropology"), Moody, Ricciardi, Sante, Tanner (American), and Wood ("Pynchon's").

he explores in the novel.[2] While he is clearly being playful—a mood hardly new for his work—and may be beginning to establish a warmer tone than exists in his earlier work, Pynchon is certainly from the start creating a serious world. It is also, from the start, a geometrical world.

As has been noted by many readers, Pynchon's big novels have all had central geometric figures, which are even referred to in their titles: V. (1963) has the chevron, Gravity's Rainbow has the parabola, and, according to most critics, Mason & Dixon has the line.[3] From the opening arc of this novel's rather less threatening projectile, we are in a world just as geometric. From the arc of the snowball, to the Transit of Venus and the Solar Parallax, to the equator Mason and Dixon cross in their travels to chart these celestial phenomena, the world of the novel is from its beginning crossed by these straight lines, curved along hemispheres or orbits.

An important aspect of this crisscrossing in the novel is that the lines do not in one sense exist independently of the astronomers and surveyors who chart them and so, in effect, create them. Geometry exists in the abstract, as do laws of gravity and movement; all are assumed to be independent laws in their own right. However, in their embodiment in concrete, particular instances, they depend on people believing in them, understanding them, and applying them. From particular positions

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[2] For the accuracy of Pynchon's language, see Menand ("Entropology").

and with precision instruments, Mason and Dixon are able to chart the movement of heavenly bodies and divide the earth by degrees, to establish where every part of the earth is in relation to every other part, but their ability depends in the end on their belief. The ability, therefore, provides an apt metaphor for the times in which they exercise it. In a still-nascent America, a creation of the Enlightenment, their applications of science to government, of rationality to the wilderness, embody the claims of the Age of Reason. While the drawing of the line is on a (literally) mundane level mere surveying and cutting (as the unhappy, stargazing astronomer Mason at times sees it), it depends on a belief in the human ability to domesticate the natural, as did Revolution-bound America.

One important context for the story of this line, then, is the story of the Enlightenment. Pynchon's telling of it is less celebratory than the traditional version and more nuanced than the usual revision. One way to think about Pynchon's version is, conveniently, in terms of lines. The understanding of the Enlightenment that in the twentieth century came under attack saw the eighteenth century as the time, in Kant's words, of "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity," as a time when the light came to the West, when Reason reigned supreme, and when, as a result, civilization built up a great, improving head of steam called progress. Fundamental to this story are at least two kinds

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[3] For critical response to Pynchon's works, see Cowart (Pynchon), Hite, Levine and Leverenz, Schaub (Pynchon), Seed, Tanner (Thomas Pynchon).

of lines. First is the line of progress, the inexorably upward-moving line charting intellectual, social, and material improvement. The second kind consists of the lines drawn between concrete things and people. There are the lines of classification and division with which Western science understands the world and there are those with which it divides itself from the world. These are the lines drawn between concrete things, and people—between the enlightened and the unenlightened, the civilized and the uncivilized, the included and the excluded—and those drawn between abstract ideas—the proven and the unprovable, the rational and the mystical, fact and fiction. The Enlightenment, not just in its intellectual projects—Diderot's Encyclopédie, Johnson's dictionary, Linnaeus' taxonomy—but also in its revolutions, French and American, and its imperial and colonial manifestations, depended on and in fact championed the drawing and maintaining of lines. Progress, then, depended on it. As this kind of "progress" continues to be made, this story of the Enlightenment continues to be told.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer told a different story in the middle of the last century. In their Dialectic of Enlightenment, they argue that what has been called Enlightenment and hailed as progress in fact led to the gas chambers. With roots in Marx and Nietzsche, Adorno and Horkheimer and others in and outside of the Frankfurt School saw the belief in human mastery through reason and attempts to impose it on the universe, or "instrumental reason," as the root of the miseries of their

contemporary world, miseries that they could not cite as evidence of progress. As Walter Benjamin (also associated with the Frankfurt School) wrote in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). Earlier, Max Weber had told his own version of this story, noting that the classification of the natural and organization of the human, what he called the "rationalization" of the world, in effect "disenchanted" it. By drawing lines across experience, Weber argued, the Enlightenment project of understanding and domesticating the world had the unfortunate effect of robbing it of its magic.

Both versions of this story, the traditional and the revised, are recognizable in Mason & Dixon. The dependence of Mason and Dixon on the ideas of their time is apparent from the start of the novel, as Dixon makes clear: "Mason, I pray you,— 'tis the Age of Reason… we're Men of Science" (27). The question of what to think of these ideas follows closely behind, carried most prominently in the question of what to think of the line, or "visto," but present also in many of the novel's factual and fantastic, tangential and strangely germane subplots, incidents, and mysteries. However this question is raised, at stake ultimately is the value of the drawing of lines, and all that this action comes to symbolize in the novel, including not only division and classification of the natural and social worlds but also the rationalization of space and time. A focus on the line

as the dominant figure in the novel can lead to a reading of Pynchon as squarely on the side of Horkheimer, Adorno, et al. in condemning the Enlightenment as the cause of many modern ills. This condemnation would square with the readings many have made of V. and Gravity's Rainbow as depicting worlds disfigured by science and modernity. Reading Mason & Dixon only through the figure of the line yields this same reading, as I will show first. Reading it through both the line and the ampersand, however, complicates things. A thorough condemnation of the period in which he sets this novel is not, I will argue, what Pynchon is making.

As Mason and Dixon progress Westward in their cutting of the visto, into the unsettled yet not unpopulated frontier and away from the fast-dividing East, the significance of the visto as embodiment of the Enlightenment is raised in stark relief. The question of the significance of its provenance—of the judgment of the line as born of the Enlightenment—is then more easily asked, and is, repeatedly and in ways more and less direct. Among the more direct is the opposition of the Chinese *feng shui* expert Captain Zhang, who, upon learning of their project, asks Mason and Dixon, "you two crazy?" He continues:

> Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,—coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,—so honoring the Dragon or Shan within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-

> slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault. (542)

Zhang's objections might seem merely aesthetic, but his *feng shui* is more than a scheme for harmonious interior decoration. It recognizes the brutal, incongruous regularity of the line as an attack on the very nature of things. The Dragon within the earth is dishonored and wounded by the incising of a right line into its flesh, into the living flesh of nature. The Enlightenment roots of the line are here expressly criticized from a non-Western perspective, one that Pynchon recognizes may seem unserious to his modern readers, but then again may not.

Zhang's criticisms go beyond the nature of the line itself to a more pointed indictment of its effects. He asks, "Shall wise Doctors one day write History's assessment of the Good resulting from this Line, vis-à-vis the not-so-good? I wonder which list would be longer" (666). His later characterization of the line as a "conduit for Evil" makes clear that he does not really wonder (701). The list enumerating the not-so-good effects of the visto—and of the other lines it comes to represent—can be drawn from many parts of the novel. Lines to which our attention is drawn include that between black and white, which we encounter early in Cape Town, later in the colonies, and in the backs of our minds whenever we remember what the Mason-Dixon Line came to divide; the related line between native Americans and the settlers and colonists who pushed them Westward; that between Old World and

New, between hoary, tradition-bound Europe and the New Eden of America, which the founding-fathers-to-be and would-be Adams into whom Mason and Dixon run are intent on fixing; the line between those included in this new paradise and those excluded, the line between Elect and Preterite, Saved and Damned; that between the empirically known and the possible unknown, what the novel calls the indicative and the subjunctive, the former of which they set out from in the form of the governed, measured world of bureaucratic administration, and the latter of which they quickly emerge into in the form of talking dogs, amorous mechanical ducks, the eleven lost days created by the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendars, the race that lives on the inside of the earth, the ghost of Mason's wife, and many other fantastic yet plausibly presented phenomena; that between fact and fiction, history and romance, in eighteenth-century terms, a line highlighted by the form of the novel itself, which takes the strands of actual historical events and weaves fiction from them.

Each of these lines can be read as Zhang reads the visto, as conduits for evil. The line between black and white is first examined during Mason and Dixon's stay in the Cape Town home of the Vrooms, during which Mason is recruited to impregnate one of the family's slaves to help them produce light-skinned stock. It reappears most plainly for them in America, prompting Dixon at one point to say:

> —and now here we are again, in another Colony, this time having drawn them a line between their Slave-

> Keepers, and their Wage-Payers, as if doom'd to re-encounter thro' the World this public Secret, this shameful Core… Where does it end? No matter where in it we go, shall we find all the World Tyrants and Slaves? America was the one place we should not have found them. (692-93)

Finding all the world tyrants and slaves means uncovering a shameful secret, a concealed truth of the Enlightenment world, namely that freedom is reserved only for some. Even an incipient America, a land soon to proclaim all men equal, hides this truth, and not very well. Near the end of their time in America, Dixon tears the whip from the hand of a slave driver busy beating his property, whom Dixon frees. The act is heroic, and a judgment of the place in which it occurs. This line between black and white is most clearly represented by one significance of the visto that, because of chronology, can never be made quite explicit within the novel: as the divider of Union from Rebel states in the Civil War. The absence from the novel of the name by which the line came to be known underscores this implicit knowledge.

The ill effects of the line drawn between Native Americans and colonists become clear as Mason and Dixon and their party progress westward. But it is not just a phenomenon of the frontier. Long before they stop the line rather than cross the Great Warrior Path—the crossing of which, their new Mohawk companions inform them (through a translator), "would be like putting an earthen Dam across a River"—the presence of natives

and the effects of contact are clear (647). The division of Indian from White Man was enforced from the moment of settlement, a fact to which Mason and Dixon's visit to Lancaster alludes. They are there to inspect the site on which an Indian massacre occurred the year before; however, as Cherrycoke mentions when explaining why Mason did not go alone as originally intended, Lancaster, the location of more than one Indian fight, is "a Town notorious for Atrocity" (341). Among the more notorious is the 1676 Indian attack on Lancaster, which took place during Metacom or King Philip's War. While the hanging of three Indians for the murder of another, converted Indian, was the proximate cause of the war (still the most devastating, in terms of fatalities as percentage of population, in American history), the real cause was the encroachment of the settlers. The attack gained fame in America and especially in Britain as the occasion for a book published as The Sovereignty and Goodness of God (in England, A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson). The first-person narrative of Rowlandson's captivity, it provides a historical record of Puritan attitudes towards the Indians, which included both the missionaries' desire to better them through conversion and the belief of Rowlandson and others that the natives were a race of unredeemable savages. Rowlandson's book helped win the day, and many subsequent years of American history, for her racial attitudes.[4]

[4] For Rowlandson, see Salisbury.

Pynchon's allusion, then, is to a long history of American attitudes toward its original inhabitants, attitudes that led to results such as those of Metacom's War, which took forty percent of the local Indian population. This line is related, as all others in this book are, to one that is central: that which many Americans were intent on fixing between themselves and Europe, the Old World and the New. This line appears behind much of the intrigue and paranoia Mason and Dixon encounter upon their arrival on America's shores, in the street and in coffee houses, conspiracies and plots they first hear of from Benjamin Franklin, who they meet in a drugstore running a brisk trade in opium, and then from a Colonel George Washington, between puffs from his hemp pipe. Like the plotting they have encountered and imagined in their earlier travels, these plots depend on division, on nations and factions; this line in particular, though, is one many Americans are soon to draw in indelible ink. The line between America and not-America, that which it will leave behind and that which it will exclude, has, like the line drawn between slave states and free, old roots. Of these shared roots, Tony Tanner writes:

> 'North and South' is just one more example of the pernicious binary habit of thought, which Pynchon sees as having been so disastrous for America. He traces it back to the Puritan division—or line of demarcation—between the Elect and the Preterite, the Saved and the Damned, Us and Them. (Mystery 288-89)

The significance of the Revolutionary line, like that of the seemingly innocent line between Pennsylvania and Maryland, is one more example of what Tanner rightly identifies as binary thought, a phenomenon Pynchon has spent much time anatomizing elsewhere. Here it manifests itself in the delineation of a New Eden within its borders; everything else is without, unsaved. The line between the Elect and the Damned preoccupied the Calvinist-descended early settlers, whose anxiety led them in their lay-doctrine to work around predestination by sneaking the doctrines of work and faith back in under cover of signs of election. Their profound anxiety found some release, then, in works, faith, close attention to who would receive Grace, and attempts to define their earthly version of Paradise as open to those who could call themselves the English, as they referred to themselves, as us versus the various thems outside. The scrutiny on identity defined by group membership and the defensive stance against the external find not so much their analogue as their descendant, 100 years later, in attitudes about nation, religion, race, and countless other arenas in which lines of exclusion could be drawn.

The line Mason and Dixon draw, then, shares two things with the line America draws both around itself and against those within its borders it would rather were without: an inheritance and an essential structure. Also related to the line that defines America is a line that appears and reappears throughout Mason & Dixon, a line that also can claim a long descent: that between

what is here called the indicative and the subjunctive. This line is not grammatical so much as metaphysical, though the deep connection of the former to the latter is noted in the borrowing of terms: it distinguishes between that which we can say "is" and that which "might be." The connection of the American line to this line between what is and what might be, of America's self-definition and differentiation to the line between the known and the possible, is best seen in a passage set, fittingly, during the visit to Lancaster.

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?— in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of those Provinces, and on Westward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,—serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true*,— Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its way into the continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,—winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them

> unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair. (345)

Here the line as the embodiment not just of the Enlightenment but also of America is articulated. America as possibility—as the New World, as the place that allows what Europe cannot—is the dream of the Old World, and like a dream it is not true, but might be. But although it is Britain's dream, America keeps awakening itself, as it turns frontier into settlement into colony, curtailing its possibility, consigning hopes to its rubbish heap. The western frontier was only seemingly boundless. As long as it seemed so, America could be the place where the West in the larger sense could escape the Enlightenment reduction of possibility. When the western frontier's apparent boundlessness was revealed as only ostensible—when lines were measured and laid down across it, disproving its infiniteness—this escape route was cut off. Mason and Dixon run into a number of examples of the subjunctive, both before they begin their line and after, as they blaze the line across the frontier. The discovery of what would seem impossible and its near-simultaneous disappearance or destruction—its absorption into the bare, mortal world—dramatizes this metaphorical significance of the line. When anything seems possible, the old certainties, it seems, reassert themselves.

In their travels, Mason and Dixon come across, among many other unlikely phenomena, talking dogs, a flying mechanical duck with a crush on an unwilling French chef, a giant cheese, the ghost of Mason's late wife, and a race of people living inside

the earth. Each of these is seen as somehow outside of the Enlightenment, as Mason saw his experience of the eleven days "lost" when the calendar was switched from the Julian to the Gregorian in the "Schizochronick" year of 1752:

> 'Twas as if this Metropolis of British Reason had been abandon'd to the Occupancy of all that Reason would deny. Malevolent shapes flowing in the streets. Lanthorns spontaneously going out. Men roaring, as if chang'd to Beasts in the Dark. A Carnival of Fear. Shall I admit it? I thrill'd. I felt that if I ran fast enough, I could gain altitude and fly. (192; 559-60)

The occupancy of America by all that reason would deny dramatizes its status as the land of possibility. The loss of these phenomena, their eviction, dramatizes the loss of this possibility. Dixon's visit to Hollow Earth makes plain that it is eviction: "'Once the solar parallax is known,' they told me, 'once the necessary Degrees are measur'd, and the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish. We will have to seek another Space'" (741). Even though we know such a world could not exist, we still feel its impending loss; it as if the loss of possibility is doubled.

The line between subjunctive and indicative, then, is crucial both to the book's understanding of the Enlightenment, as the demarcation between what the Enlightenment "knows" and what it does not and so between "what is" and is not, and also to the

book's understanding of America, as the demarcation between what America might be and what it can no longer be. The visto Mason and Dixon draw, as it cuts through America, is the vehicle through which they and the novel encounter all of the ways in which America is built on lines, and, most importantly, through which they—and we—are able to think about how America turned out marked by these old lines when at first it seemed open and unlimited. It was one place we should not have found them. The disenchantment of America, the turning of the New World into just another part of the Old, is the turning of subjunctive into indicative.

The fate of the Indians illustrates this aspect of the line. In the end, the mysteries of their world, while given a reprieve by Mason and Dixon's party, seem surely doomed. Mason and Dixon turn back East, giving up the visto, when they reach the Great Warrior Path, an ancient North-South road reported to have a power that science does not recognize. They learn of the Path from Hugh Crawfford, the white man who accompanies the band of Indians that joins them towards the end of their journey. He tells them that it is sacred, and that they will not be allowed to pass. The remainder of the drawing of the line becomes fraught with tension, as they do not want to stumble upon the path and have only an inexact idea how far they are from it, because they do not know its precise location, and because, as Crawfford says, "Distance is not the same here, nor is Time" (647). Out in this still unmeasured wilderness, in the part of the continent that

may or may not be America but still belongs to the Indians and their unenlightened worldview, the impossible is still possible, and the laws of Western science may not apply:

> We all feel it Looming, even when we're awake, out there ahead someplace, the way you come to feel a River or Creek ahead, before anything else,– sound, sky, vegetation,– may have announced it. Perhaps 'tis the very deep sub-audible Hum of its Traffic that we feel with an equally undiscover'd part of the Sensorium,– does it lie but over the next Ridge? the one after that? We have Mileage Estimates from Rangers and Runners, yet for as long as its Distance from the Post Mark'd West remains unmeasur'd, nor is yet recorded as Fact, may it remain, a-shimmer, among the few final Pages of its Life as Fiction. (650)

As Cherrycoke notes when they reach the Path, the frontier is "the Membrane that divides their [Indians'] Subjunctive World from our number'd and dreamless Indicative" (677). As soon as they come to the Path, as soon as they are able to fix it in latitude and longitude, in numbers, the dream will be over, it will be Fact. Like the Hollow Earth, it will cease to exist. Again, when applied to the world, geometry, in Michael Wood's words, is an "imperialist gesture, an administrative onslaught by the numbered on the unimagined" ("Pynchon's" 128). The unimagined, when seen and counted, must by definition cease to exist as such.

As do the Indians, at least the way they were, untouched by the Old World. When the party finally reaches the line, Mason wants to continue, thinking the Indians who travel the path and live beyond it will not threaten them once they see that they are harmless. Dixon, on the other hand, does not:

> They don't want nay of thah'? They want to know how to stop this great invisible Thing that comes crawling straight over their Lands, devouring all in its Path… A tree-slaughtering Animal, with no purpose but to continue creating forever a perfect Corridor over the Land. Its teeth of steel,– its Jaws, Axmen,– its Life's Blood, Disbursement. And what of its intentions, beyond killing ev'rything due west of it? do you know? i don't either. (678)

After some disagreement, the line is ended, and the party turns back, but the Indians by whose war parties they are surrounded at the end will not be able to turn back those who sent Mason and Dixon. The Path, like the mysterious Indian Mounds they encounter, may survive physically, but its meaning and, so, its power will not.

The unlimited possibility of America, of the New Eden, the land not just of the free but the equal, will not survive either. As is seen in the novel's frame, Wicks Cherrycoke's 1786 telling of the story of Mason and Dixon, its great promise will not be met. He says, "This Christmastide of 1786, with the War settl'd and the Nation bickering itself into Fragments, wounds bodily and

ghostly, great and small, go aching on, not ev'ry one commemorated,—nor, too often, even recounted" (6). After the Revolution, what should have been the culmination of this promise, the nation is seen not to have met it, and this failure is seen specifically to take the shape of lines. The fragments into which the nation is dividing, the wounds that go aching on, existed long before the Revolution, as Cherrycoke's story illustrates. Though he is not recounting the story of the contemporary wounds, the story Cherrycoke does tell clearly applies. The American mania for drawing lines, and for thinking them progress, is not specific to the 1760s.

Nor is it specific to the eighteenth century. Pynchon is reading not just a historical moment but also all of American history. The drawing of lines that characterizes the birth of the nation is explicitly linked to a more recent time, 100 years after the time of Mason & Dixon. The Civil War, in this linkage, was another moment when the various lines dividing the country were contested. The racial lines drawn at America's birth remained, despite military, legal, and social efforts to erase them, and just as they persisted through Reconstruction and resurfaced in Jim Crow, Pynchon seems to believe, these lines are still evident today. His concern for racial prejudice and systemic discrimination can be seen in his novels, his early short fiction, such as "The Secret Integration" (1964), and even his nonfiction, such as his 1965 essay in the New York Times Magazine, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts." The late

nineteenth century, then, becomes another moment of potential emancipation from old, restrictive ways of thinking and acting, another time when all things seemed possible but much did not come to fruition. And we are led to ask how the century of Mason & Dixon's writing fits into this pattern of Pynchon's, what about the second half of the twentieth century fits this model of possibility raised and unrealized. The tendency to draw lines, the binary habit of thought seen as the dominant of American history, must exist in our time. What we make of Pynchon's take on the birth and subsequent life of America will lead to an understanding of what he is saying about his own times. Sticking to a reading of Mason & Dixon solely as a novel of lines, as a reckoning of the costs of America's addiction to binarism, will cost us a fuller understanding of Pynchon's reading of contemporary America and his ideas about its future. To get beyond a reading of Mason & Dixon as solely a condemnation of the destructive power of lines, to get at other ways of thinking and being it might entertain, we have to focus on the other figure that dominates the novel.

* * *

The ampersand is an ancient Roman symbol derived from the ligature or combination into one character of the "e" and "t" in the Latin "et," meaning "and." In modern English usage, it continues to serve as shorthand for "and." Its English name is a corruption of the words English schoolchildren used to recite the end of the alphabet: "X, Y, Zed, and per se and." The last phrase

refers to the ampersand character, which is per se (by itself) the word "and," and which came to be pronounced "ampersand." Modern typefaces have variations on the ampersand in which the original "e" and "t" have become lost. Eighteenth-century typefaces, such as William Caslon's, preserved the distinction between the two letters, linking them only at the end of the second, bottom stroke of the cursive capital "E" and the "t." The ampersand on the cover of Mason & Dixon is Caslon's.

Pynchon's choice of this variation of the character is worth noting because of its symbolic importance to the novel. A character whose meaning is equal to "and," it is not, however, "and" itself. It is a character which means "and," but which has a physical form and a name which can both be read to express certain ideas of andness. The ligature of the two letters expresses combination, connection, while the separate recognizability of the letters in the eighteenth-century version expresses the preservation of distinct identities, of difference. The name, which again literally means that the character itself means "and," conveys both by itselfness and its opposite—because the ampersand is not "and" itself but rather is joined to "and" as signifier to signified, so that when we see it we think "and." In other words, the name of the ampersand holds the same potentially paradoxical meaning as its form, namely the simultaneous coexistence of the ideas of distinctness and unity, of difference and individual identity. This meaning is

paradoxical, though, only if it is assumed that such a thing is impossible.

As I have tried to show, Mason & Dixon can be read as a book about the destructive prevalence of the habit of setting up and maintaining difference in American history. And it is such a book. From the choices made on its cover to the story told on its pages, it is also a book about the possibility of connection, relation, simultaneity, about possibility itself, about the ideas expressed in the character that dominates the very first opportunity for meaning a book has, its cover. A good place to start examining these ideas would be this first expression of them, paying attention not just to the particulars of the character itself but also to the immediate context in which it appears, the title, between the names of the novel's heroes.

The binary created in the title, the two constituent parts being the names of the two characters, could be said to capture the geometric form of the line, as it is the line between the two names, the distinction between the characters, which is emphasized. By using the ampersand rather than the word "and" (or, anachronistically, the hyphen which we are now used to seeing between these names), Pynchon expresses something else: the connection between these two distinct characters, just like that between the "e" and "t" from which it derives. The differences between the two men are clear from the start. Mason is a top-flight astronomer from the South of England, a Deistic Anglican. Dixon is a surveyor, a Geordie, a Quaker.

Temperamentally, they could not be more distinct: one attuned to mystical possibility, the other a good Enlightenment rationalist, one reserved, one loud and convivial, one a wine man, the other fonder of beer. However, as many reviewers noted, these differences do not drive them apart. Joined by circumstance, they become an instance of "the classic comedy team of straight man and flake," and the novel becomes "a buddy story," "like Huckleberry Finn, like Ulysses… one of the great novels about male friendship in anybody's literature" (Boyle, Menand "Entropology" 24, Leonard 68).

The relationship between these two is one element of Mason & Dixon that makes it new in Pynchon's corpus. It is generally accepted that V., The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), Gravity's Rainbow, and Vineland (1984) are not marked by the creation of and attention to fully rounded characters. As one review of Gravity's Rainbow put it, "Pynchon doesn't create characters so much as mechanical men to whom a manic comic impulse or vague free-floating anguish can attach itself, often in brilliant streams of consciousness" (Locke). This reviewer finds the absence of more typically novelistic characters appropriate to the worlds their author creates in his fiction, worlds in which only mechanical men have a place: "In Pynchon's world there is almost no trust, no human nurture, no mutual support, no family life." This characterization of Pynchon's fictional worlds is also generally accepted: though there is much humor in the novels, and much attention to the prevalence of human indecency and unkindness,

there is not much warmth. Though some demur, Pynchon's work up until Mason & Dixon has been largely seen as relatively cold; in its attention to large ideas, national and international histories of ideas and systems, and in its painting pictures of the world as a place riven by conspiracy or suspicions thereof, his work has had neither the time nor the inclination to present round, sympathetic, engaging characters.[5]

Mason & Dixon has been widely seen to have a warmth lacking in these earlier works, and this perception is due in large part to the way Pynchon draws these two men, separately and together. The stories of their lives before and after their partnership create sympathy for them as individuals, and their story together, stumbling across America, completing a task whose meaning dawns slowly upon them, and supporting each other as it does, creates sympathy for them as a pair. As Michael Wood writes, we see them

> arguing, Anglican against Quaker, mystic against rationalist, and finally discovering that their need and respect for each other, in spite of the frequent acidity of their exchanges and their constant mutual fending off of real intimacies, the drawing of a sort of line between Mason and Dixon, add up to a form of

[5] Some argue that Vineland, with its focus on family, is an exception; see Moody, and Berger, who notes, "The novel ends with a family reunion; its final word is 'home'" (par. 3), though he gives more weight to the relationship between two other (unrelated) characters, Prairie and Weed (par. 45).

> passion, indeed the central passion and care of their lives. ("Pynchon's" 124)

The line between them, the binary expectation set up by the juxtaposition of their names and the difference in their characters, becomes instead a connection, a relationship between two men who still remain distinct.

The possibility of connection coexisting with difference, illustrated in the relationship between these two men, is a hidden subject of Mason & Dixon. It is a possibility that applies not just to the main characters but to America, not just to the line drawn between these two people or any two people but also to the lines drawn between kinds of people, between aspects of experience, between times and places and ideas, between what is and what might be. What Pynchon sees in the relationship between Mason and Dixon, he sees in American history, and what he sees in American history, he sees in the American present: not just the age-old fact of division, but the simultaneous possibility of something else.

The relationship between Mason and Dixon is important because they connect across their division, relate across their difference. Just as their differences make for the texture of their bickering and, in the end, their friendship, so the division, rather than deserving only condemnation, is valued positively for making the connection possible. For the novel as a whole, then, lines are not simply to be condemned. They make

possible many things, including the existence of connections across them--without them, there would be no difference.

And yet in some ways we are moving closer to such a world all the time. Louis Menand sees Mason & Dixon as a novel about colonialism and an adaptation of Pynchon's favorite multidisciplinary metaphor, entropy. He calls the novel an American Tristes Tropiques because Pynchon seems to be practicing an anthropology like that of Lévi-Strauss which Menand says might as well be called "entropology" because it sees history as the process of increasing homogenization through contact ("Entropology" 24). The creation of homogenization—a world without lines—is not for Pynchon a victory over division but a defeat of energy, of motion, of change. It is also, in the process by which this creation occurs, a victory for cruelty.

Seeing the American frontier as Britannia's dream, as the place where it seemed that the impossible might be possible, Pynchon explores the simultaneous opening up and shutting down of possibility that America as frontier came to represent and the Mason-Dixon line symbolizes. As they travel westward, Mason and Dixon encounter the fantastic possibility of America beyond the New Eden of the New American Adam, the mysterious, mystical world both excluded and in a way created by the Enlightenment. As they encounter it, though, the line they blaze into the heart of this frightening and wonderful darkness brings a harmful light. Thus the moment of expansion is at the same time the moment of contraction, when that not normally seen is glimpsed and quickly

domesticated. When Pynchon entertains us with tales of the impossible, and in so doing laments its loss, he might seem to be resigned to this inevitable process, as we all must be resigned to the final loss of possibility that we all experience and that ends the book, with the deaths of its heroes. The reassertion of the old possibilities, what happens in the fantastic lives of Mason and Dixon and in the fantastic life of America might seem inevitable, as might the cruelty that sometimes results from America's old binary habit.

This sense of the inevitable—that people die, that cultural entropy occurs, that bad things happen to good people for no good reason—is undeniably part of Mason & Dixon. And the movement in Mason & Dixon beyond what readers of Pynchon over the years have called paranoia or conspiracy certainly contributes to this sense of the inevitable. Rather than a grand conspiracy, rather than a Trystero-like underground organization with tentacles everywhere, there is simply history. Mason and Dixon, while not entirely in charge of their fates, are not pawns in some great game. Dixon does ask, "Are we being us'd, by Forces invisible?" and "Whom are we working for, Mason?" (347). But this is not a paranoid book. The Jesuits, the trading companies, Captain Zhang, Royalists, many different forces and causes and organizations try to influence history, and while there may be trends, no mysterious master plan is in evidence. As Menand writes of this sentiment in the novel, "This is just the direction human history happens to run" (25).

But Pynchon's paranoia has not been replaced by an equally unknowable, unalterable historical inevitability. In Mason & Dixon, Pynchon presents a different sense of history. The old search for the conspirators in Pynchon's work is here, at bottom, explicitly what it was sometimes only implicitly in its earlier incarnations: a search for the answer to the question of the impossible. As is made clear in V., when Weissman deciphers an atmospheric message spelling out Wittgenstein's proposition, "the world is all that is the case," Pynchon is concerned with how we know, with the implications of accepting only what we see or being open to more. All the searches for transcendent patterns or forces or impossible things in Pynchon's work ask if this is true, if the world is all that is the case. This question is asked in Gravity's Rainbow, in which Roger Mexico sees no transcendent meaning while Slothrop is open to anything, becomes Rocketman, and eventually fragments into multiple possibilities, and earlier in The Crying of Lot 49, in which Oedipa Maas must decide whether or not, beneath the surface of everyday life, there lives a great underground conspiracy. In the end the questions go unanswered: The Crying of Lot 49 ends as the title event, which should reveal all to Oedipa, is about to happen. We cannot know if the world is all that is the case. The other side of this argument, though, which Pynchon seizes on in Mason & Dixon, is that we also cannot know if it is not—we cannot rule out other possibilities. And if we cannot rule out other possibilities, we cannot rule out different historical outcomes.

Pynchon insists in Mason & Dixon on the possibility that other worlds might exist in order to ask if things might have turned out differently, or might still. If this is the way history happens to run, it does not follow that it has to. The cruelty that fills history does not always, in every instance, have to happen. Those who try to stop it—as Dixon does when he challenges the slave driver—are not fools. They are simply open to the possibility of what might seem historically impossible.[6]

This openness is openness not just to difference, to recognizing both the existence of difference and also the possibility of connecting to that which is different, but also to a history that could have turned out differently and can still. Seeing this kind of history in Mason & Dixon requires seeing not just the line but what the line makes possible, seeing not just an anatomy of loss but also a celebration of continued possibility.

One way in which Pynchon uses form in Mason & Dixon to express this openness is generic—his use of the history of the forms the novel has taken. Responses to Mason & Dixon have noted that it feels like an eighteenth-century novel. It does, but

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[6] Ricciardi also sees a turn away from total resignation in Mason & Dixon. She cites Richard Rorty's argument in his recent essay "Achieving Our Country," in which he "argues that Pynchon's novels in general, and Vineland in particular, merely articulate a desperate pessimism unaccompanied by any impulse to outrage or protest and exemplify a 'rueful acquiescence in the end of American hopes'" and disagrees, arguing that "Mason & Dixon deviates from the sense of resignation that permeates Pynchon's earlier works insofar as the novel responds to an urgent consciousness of the need for historical witnessing" (1072). While failing to take issue with Rorty's

there is more to this resemblance than pastiche. One of the benefits or perhaps motivations of this reversion to an older form, aside from the appropriateness to the setting and the joy of the act itself, is the storehouse of older forms it opens up. The act itself is also a kind of intervention in constructions of contemporary literary history, in that it points out what others such as John Barth and Milan Kundera, in different ways, have noted—that the newness of works called postmodern depends in part on the recycling of old forms.[7] It also points out, as both of these critic-novelists also noted, that the richest time for the borrowing of these forms has been the eighteenth century. Opinions vary on which of the earlier proto-novels qualify as the earliest antecedent to the novel, from the second century's Golden Ass to the fourteenth century's Canterbury Tales to the seventeenth century's Don Quixote; it is with the eighteenth century's Richardson and Defoe, though, that the novel proper is agreed to have flowered. This flowering, however, depended on the critical mass of earlier forms of writing, and on their collision. Romance, history, yellow journalism, spiritual confession, even captivity narratives (and of course these protonovels) gave birth to the eighteenth-century novel, and the

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overstatement or specify the content of this need, Ricciardi does identify the turn taken by Pynchon in Mason & Dixon.

[7] Barth speaks specifically to the idea of contemporary fiction's use of past forms in his "The Literature of Replenishment" (a corrective to his earlier "The Literature of Exhaustion"); Kundera presents a more general view in Testaments Betrayed, in which he writes: "The meaning of the history of the novel is the very search for that meaning, its perpetual creation and recreation, which always retroactively encompasses the whole past of the novel" (17).

newness of the combinations that resulted left the contributing strands still visible. As M. M. Bakhtin, Michael McKeon, and many others have shown, the birth of the novel depended on these differences and on the social variety of the world out of which they came.[8] The variousness of modernity, the social and intellectual ferment of the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries—these elements gave birth to the form that Bakhtin identifies as the only one that really belongs to the modern world, to what he calls "the continuous present," the one that continues to grow and change as that world does. It is in the early novels, Moll Flanders and Pamela and others, that the possibility inherent in new forms and in new combinations of old forms is so apparent.[9]

Midway through Mason & Dixon, Uncle Ives voices an opinion about the young genre that was common in his time:

> I cannot, damme I cannot I say, energetically enough insist upon the danger of reading these storybooks,—in particular those known as 'Novel.' Let she who hears, heed. Britain's Bedlam even as the French Salpêtrière being populated by an alarming number of young persons, most of them female, seduced across the sill of madness by these irresponsible narratives, that will not distinguish between fact and fancy. How are those frail Minds to judge? (351)

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[8] See also Watt, Davis.

[9] The parodies of popular genres that Pynchon includes in Mason & Dixon—particularly "The Captive's Tale" and "The Ghastly Fop"—show his

At a time when certainty about the knowability of the world coexisted with belief in the unseen, when the former had not yet shouldered aside the latter so thoroughly, the line between the two was not to be trifled with. What allegedly drives these young novel-mad girls around the bend is not the blurring of this line in the abstract, though. The madness Ives imagines them to be suffering is not metaphysical so much as it is melodramatic: the stories they are seduced by are dramas of private life. The problem, then, is not so much the distinguishing of fantasy from fact but rather the crossing into private lives that the novel performs.

As Bakhtin has argued, the literary problem that drives technical innovation in the novel is what causes the problem Ives decries--the gaining of narrative access to private life. Early examples of the novel and proto-novels experimented with ways to tell stories previously outside of the purview of Western narrative, which, in Bakhtin's account, was devoted to telling public stories, with plots and characters already known, as in the great ancient epics. Telling stories about people who didn't found nations required attention to problems of narration, to who was telling the story and how they were supposed to know about the people and events of which they were telling. Early-novel innovations included the use of letters and diaries, two formal excuses for hearing about the everyday lives of private people.

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familiarity with and interest in the eighteenth century's variety of narrative forms.

Earlier innovations included a set of elements that has come to be known as the picaresque.

The picaresque, a form in protonovelistic narrative and early novels, is understood broadly as a story of the road, often the story of a single, not typically heroic character wandering in and out of settled situations, half in and half out of society. In its development of solutions to the early technical problems of the novel, the sixteenth century's Spanish picaresque came up with the picaro, often a servant or itinerant, perhaps mercenary soldier or even a criminal. The picaro serves as what Bakhtin calls a "third person" who provides narrative access to private life as a participant-observer (122-23). Living with a family but not part of it, for example, the servant picaro can be present for but detached from goings on, and therefore can himself report and comment or serve as a vehicle for observation. On the road, traveling from situation to situation, moving from participation to observation and from scene to scene, the picaro can provide a picture of a society even as it buffets him to and fro (or perhaps because it does).

Responses to Mason & Dixon have described it, like some of Pynchon's other works, as a road novel. The basing of the plot mainly on the journey of its heroes, and the assortment of characters they pick up or run into along the way, lead naturally to seeing it as a road novel, and so provide an easy way to categorize it. Thinking of it more formally as a latter-day picaresque, though, can make visible a number of formal moves and

meanings that may remain otherwise hidden. While Wellek and Warren's description of the picaresque—"chronological sequence is all there is" (qtd. in Wicks 29)—could also apply to the road novel, the picaresque is distinguished not by the setting of its stories so much as by the position of its hero, straddling the lines dividing center and margin, insider and outsider, society and individual. The formal and symbolic aspects of the crossing of lines particular to the picaresque are much used by Mason & Dixon.

Mason and Dixon are both insiders and outsiders at the scene of the creation of America. English born, bred, and identified at the start of the novel, they are essentially hired guns in America, mercenary surveyors. This position allows them to be participant-observers, Bakhtin's third persons at a nation's birth. This is one of many ways in which Mason & Dixon borrows and twists the picaresque: Pynchon creates characters who eavesdrop, for the purposes of narrative, on a private domestic scene that is also very public. While the epics of Homer and Virgil retold the already known, public stories of the founding of their respective nations, this novel retells the already known, public story of America's founding, but from a private perspective. As a paradoxical picaresque, Mason & Dixon confronts the epic of America, its myth, and eavesdrops on its private conversations.

This myth-revision, as expected, has an antiheroic element. In the original tellings, the hero of the epic founds

his nation, and the nation tells the story of its birth as made possible by his heroic actions. That the nation wasn't there when this happened doesn't matter; it has heard the story so many times from its aunts and uncles, it knows it by heart. It, as much as its founder, is the story's hero. The picaresque, on the other hand, is by nature antiheroic: its hero is not of high birth, his story not of brave action but of repeated defeat and survival. From the start the picaro was defined against the heroic courtier, in particular the courtier of the fledgling Hapsburg Empire (Sieber 6). The social satire provided by the marginal picaro, not quite parvenu but trying to get by and scheming to move in if not up, was thus directly tied to the building of Empire—but to its bottom rather than its top. Retelling this story from the inside, Pynchon borrows the picaresque, and with it gets this historic and formal antiheroic element, and uses it. The roots of the nation in old habits of thought and the cruelty that often results is not the stuff of epic. The attention to collateral damage attendant to conquest does not make for happy retelling at birthday parties. Tracking the impact of the success of the nation not just on outsiders but on the marginal, the half-insiders—Mason and Dixon—Pynchon uses the picaresque not just to novelize the myth of America but to show its darker sides.

The picaro has also been read as a version of the New Adam, his repeated ejections, kicked back out onto the road, as repetitions of the first ejection, and his wanderings and

attempts to fit himself into new situations as attempted returns to the Garden (Guillen qtd. in Wicks 66). The picaro is, essentially, solitary and homeless, a condition well expressed by the hero of the anonymous Spanish picaresque Lazarillo de Tormes (1554) when he says, "I must keep awake because I'm on my own and I've got to look after myself" (28). His attempts to find a new home after being kicked out of so many old ones make possible his status as Bakhtin's third person, but they also show his journeys to be, if not less aimless, less pointless than they might appear. His survival takes on a deeper significance. Seen as the story of attempts to reenter Eden, the picaresque makes an appropriate vehicle for Mason and Dixon's story, especially as it is adapted rather than just adopted. In the ostensible New Eden of America, they might be the New Adam; when they get into the heart of this Garden, though, they spend the time they're not turning it into a proper English garden of straight lines and square shrubbery looking around, and they are not sure they want to stay.

In the end, no longer feeling English yet never quite feeling American, Mason and Dixon remain twin picaros, homeless and looking out for themselves. Yet of course they are not alone: by the later stages of the novel, they are even looking out for each other. This is another way in which Mason & Dixon twists the picaresque. The fact that it changes the form by doubling its hero means that the symbolic import of the hero's situation is also changed. Claudio Guillen writes in The Anatomies of Roguery:

"the basic situation of the picaresque novel is the solitude of its principal character in the world" (383). This basic situation, then, is much altered. Not entirely, however; Mason and Dixon are very much alone in the world, isolated in their work (though accompanied by a crew and making friends along the way) and far from home, but they are isolated together. I have already emphasized the importance of their relationship to the novel's themes; what is important here is what that relationship means formally. Even in its earliest instances, as Richard Bjornson points out in The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction, the "essential picaresque situation involves the paradigmatic confrontation between an isolated individual and a hostile society" (qtd. in Wicks 31). If so, what does it mean that in Mason & Dixon there are two heroes, and that they have each other? Further, what does it mean for this adaptation of the picaresque that the paranoia inherent in the form's setup seems absent from this novel?

The line between the individual and society has been seen by many to be central to American culture and as a central theme in American literature. By adapting the picaresque for his own purposes, Pynchon addresses this line, and complicates our understanding of it. The separateness and isolation Mason and Dixon feel from their world and, for much of the novel, from each other, is challenged by the eventual closeness of their relationship. The permanence of the lines between individual people and other, larger aspects of experience is, as a result,

also challenged. And, most crucially, the importance of lines in maintaining difference, in resisting homogenization, is reinforced. Individual against society is, in the end, too easy and too simple. As the original picaresque emerged at a time of social upheaval, when the feudal order and aristocratic privilege were being challenged, so the time of Mason & Dixon is one of changes in the social order (Bjornson qtd. in Wicks 30). Pynchon's adaptation of the form highlights the contradictions inherent in America's particular changes, the persistence of cruelty and tyranny—of division—in the last place Mason and Dixon expect to find it. It also illuminates the possibility, still, simultaneously alive, of connection, of alternatives, of outcomes other than the ostensibly inevitable.

One last significant characteristic of the picaresque that Pynchon uses to shape his story of America is its unfinishedness. The road down which the isolated individual of the traditional picaresque travels, though aimed toward a New Eden, never reaches it. The lesson of this road aspect of the picaresque is, often, that it is the trip that matters more than the destination. Sal Paradise learns this in On the Road, as do Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil in V., Tyrone Slothrop in Gravity's Rainbow, and Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49. This formal unfinishedness takes on extra resonance in Mason & Dixon because this novel is the story of the beginning of a journey, that of America, and because the structure of the novel is implicitly retrospective, as any historical novel must be. The

difference between this novel, a crossing of the picaresque and the historical novel, and any historical novel is the nature of that retrospectivity. As the novel is not the epic, on Bakhtin's view, this historical novel is not Sir Walter Scott's historical novel, which is in many ways an epic in novel form, retelling an already known story of nation founding. Scott's story is a finished one, an exposition of etiology disguised as a dramatic restaging. Mason & Dixon, on the other hand, looks back not on a finished story but on an unfinished one, an open-ended one, through a form that is still in contact with the continuous present.

What this unfinishedness means for the novel is that the story it tells is not teleologically retrospective. It does not look back to tell the story of a past that leads naturally and rightly to the present as its end product and aim. Instead, it looks back on a past that is unfinished, from a present that is, as a direct result of the past's unfinishedness, itself unfinished. The present, in other words, is not the finished product of historical development, of progress, but part of a continuing chronology, one chartable only with twists and turns, not a straight, upward-tending line but a road crossing back over itself, ampersand-like, winding nowhere in particular, and ending up, for now, in the present.

That present, in Mason & Dixon, is multiple. There is the present of the novel's frame, that is, the 1786 from which Cherrycoke looks back and thinks about the lost promise of pre-

Revolution America. There is also Pynchon's present, 200-odd years later, the implicit frame around Cherrycoke's frame, the result of which is that all that has happened since is also implicitly present in readers' minds. Thus the retrospective takes on a wider focus, inclusive of the Civil War, 100 years after Mason and Dixon, and the postbellum years, as well as the turmoil of the 1960s, some 100 years after that War, and the years between that turmoil and the time of the novel's publication. All of America's past between then and now, from Lancaster to Gettysburg to Kent State to Oliver North, is part of the story.

The structure of the novel, then, makes possible a way of thinking about America that crosses the lines between eras, making American history a single connected story. It also makes possible a way of thinking about history itself, about its connections and cycles. The picture of history we see in Mason & Dixon, like the relation of all the pasts and presents in the line of the novel, is not linear, nor is it progressive. The literary-historical argument implicit in Pynchon's use of forms from different eras of the novel—not just the picaresque but the language and forms of the eighteenth-century novel, the oral first-person narrative—is that the road the novel form takes through literary history is not one of progressive innovation but recyclings, repetitions, adaptations. It is itself ampersandic. The larger historical argument implicit in Pynchon's use of forms is the same. While it seems not to accept the traditional,

Enlightenment, progessivist model of history, Mason & Dixon does not draw a downward line either. It does not tell a story of descent or degradation. The story this novel tells is one of repetition, of repeated moments of potential change, of utopian promise, followed by failures to fully realize that promise. Each of these moments is at bottom about changing the ways in which America wants to deal with the lines it has drawn down the middle of itself and around itself, about the promise of doing so less divisively and more inclusively. And each of these subsequent failures of possibility—of these moments when the subjunctive is reduced to the indicative—is about the failure to remain open to alternatives, particularly to the alternative of connection.

As Tony Tanner notes, Mason and Dixon's 1760s, the important moments in the Trystero's history in The Crying of Lot 49, and the moment in the German Zone in Gravity's Rainbow can all be seen as "explosions of change" (Mystery 235).[10] All are times when much seemed possible, when barriers were down, boundaries fluid. The explosions of change that were the American 1860s and 1960s were also about barriers. Mason & Dixon's interest in slavery and the Civil War is clear. Pynchon's concern with the issues debated in and now identified with the 1960s may

[10] For a description of a similar meaning in the representation of a single historical moment, the sixties, in Vineland, see Berger, who likens Pynchon's understanding of later interpretations of the sixties to Walter Benjamin's *jeztzeit*, "the critical moment of historical, redemptive possibility which continues to erupt into the present even after many previous failures" (par 5).

not be as evident in Mason & Dixon as it is in his earlier works, but it is at the center of this novel.[11]

Mason & Dixon is the product of Pynchon's continued exploration of the drawing of lines, an exploration apparently motivated in large part by the hopes raised and disappointed by the sixties. It asks us to see the persistence of this American way of thinking by linking the 1760s, 1860s, and 1960s. What Mason & Dixon does not ask us to see, I am arguing, is inevitability. Unlike Pynchon's earlier works, it accepts neither paranoia nor hopelessness. It does not accept the failure of the sixties to fully realize its utopian visions. Lines will always be erased and drawn again, but the way America deals with them has changed many times, and can continue to do so. It changes when America remembers that history, its history in particular, is not finished. Mason & Dixon is the first novel in which Pynchon can look back historically on the decade that raised so many of the issues at the center of his work: the Cold War has ended, the century's end approaches, and the sixties appears as the decade at the chronological and ideological center of that era. In retrospect, the sixties have stood as a kind of running historical Rorschach test, with successive decades and different political orientations rereading the sixties according to their

[11] As Cowart has pointed out, the connections between the sixties and Pynchon's work have not been much explored by critics, a failure only slightly redressed by reactions to Vineland ("Pynchon" 12).

needs.[12] The retrospective stance on the sixties and on American history as a whole in Mason & Dixon is not nostalgic, as in Vineland, nor merely allusive. This novel is a reminder, in a post-Cold War America grown complacent in its ostensible victory, that history is not over. In the face of the triumphalist nineties, characterized by announcements of Cold War victory and the end of ideological contest, nostalgic World War II anniversary celebrations, and the end not just of a century but also of a millennium, Mason & Dixon insists that history continues, that no telos has been reached, no real war won. As America in the nineties experienced a boom market in historical products, reflecting a national retrospective mood, Pynchon's novel insisted that the past is still tied to the future, and in that connection, another symbolic resonance of the ampersand, utopias imagined and grasped for in the past are still imaginable and graspable.

Michael Wood interprets the tension in the novel between indicative and subjunctive in this way: Pynchon is telling us that what we "miss is not a mystical revelation or an ancient wisdom, and not the grand conspiracy underlying all things, but a sense of 'Human Incompletion'" ("Pynchon's" 129). This incompletion, he argues, is at root what we need to remember if we wish to avoid the errors and cruelties of American history, the ways of dealing with division that have led to so much that

[12] See Miller for the ways in which the sixties have been reimagined against the fifties and in light of subsequent decades.

is regrettable in our past. Like remembering that there are things we don't know, that what lies on the other side of the line is not inherently worse than what is on our side, we ought to see America always as frontier, in its most hopeful sense. America as frontier does not have to be the America that acts as if everything is new, and that what is previously established—ideas, communities—does not matter. America as frontier can simply be America as possibility. What America remembers, when it remembers that it is unfinished, is possibility; what it forgets, when it forgets to see its past and present as continuous and ongoing, is that, to intentionally misquote and contradict Mason and Dixon's contemporary, Alexander Pope, Whatever Is, Is Not Inevitable, that the world may not be all that is the case.

This sense of incompletion, of unfinishedness, can keep us open to possibility, and to a particular aspect of possibility, a way of thinking symbolized in Mason & Dixon by the imagined world inside the earth and its difference from that outside it. As one resident says:

> And wherever you may stand, given the Convexity, each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else… Here in the Earth Concave, everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,— ev'rybody's axes converge,— forc'd at least thus to acknowledge one another,— an entirely different set of rules for how to behave. (741)

This is not a set of rules for how to behave: it is a set of rules for how to think, a way of seeing the world not just in

terms of possibility but also in terms of relatedness. If each of us on the Earth Convex, in this Terra Concavan's terms, stand on the outside of an outwardly curving Earth and so point slightly away from each other, then we can ignore each other and act accordingly; those on the inside of the inwardly curving Earth Concave do not have this luxury, and so are forced to act with others in mind. The former way of thinking and acting is presented in the novel as Mason & Dixon's: the line they draw ignores its effects on the lives they draw it through. By extension, it is an American way of being, an Enlightenment way of being, a Western way of being. The Earth Concave's alternative is thus presented as an alternative not only to American exceptionalism but also to a global divergence of axes. Acknowledgment of the crossing of lines that is the world's reality, of the world's ampersandic actuality, is wanting everywhere. This acknowledgement is not an unfinished task only for America.

As the unending road of the picaresque that provides the shape of this novel lends a sense of unfinishedness, so too do its other borrowings from the past. The novel's intentionally anachronistic references and language are crucial to its sense of history not as simply unfinished but as recrossing itself, as cycling back and crossing over its own past as the line of our contemporary ampersand loops back across itself. This sense of history can be seen in three of Pynchon's anachronistic uses of caffeinated beverages and other addictive luxuries: the last name

of the narrating Rev. Cherrycoke, the Starbucks-like All Nations coffeehouse with its half-caf ordering, and a tableful of coffee and sweets that a Quaker gentleman reminds them is "bought… with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbadoes" (329). The first anachronism alludes to Coca-Cola, of course, the coffee of the twentieth century, the caffeinated stuff that empire now spreads around the globe. The second anachronism likewise refers not just to our time but to also to the global reach of the American corporate empire and its homogenizing potential. The third reference might not seem anachronistic, but it in fact helps connect the other references across time and space to a present concern. The Quaker's line echoes the moment in Candide when Candide comes across a maimed slave lying at a crossroads, who says of the hand and leg he lost in the cane fields of Surinam, "this is the price of the sugar you eat in Europe" (40). When Candide breaks into tears and wonders for a moment if maybe this is not, as Pangloss has taught him, the best of all possible worlds, he cries not just for the slave (or for himself, finding another instance of Pangloss' error) but also for the uncovering of further evidence of empire's effects. The eighteenth-century concern over the deleterious effects of globalism raised by Pynchon's allusion echoes our own contemporary concern over globalization, and connects the substances that fueled the revolutionary thinkers of the eighteenth century like those in Pynchon's inn—the coffee, sugar, and tobacco firing their dreams of freedom, democracy, and

untaxed profits–to those that fuel today's workers in the new economy and, of course, to the empire that they also fueled, as the trading companies were in the New World to trade them.

Pynchon's ampersandic history, connecting these different moments, enables further thought about how America has ended up where it has, and why, and whether it can go somewhere else. It asks whether the line of American history will endlessly recross itself as does the line that symbolizes the infinite, or whether the opening in one loop of our contemporary ampersand can be taken to signify the possibility of things taking off in another direction. The line of empire America has blazed across the North American continent and the world stage, according to Mason & Dixon, has not ended so much as paused, ready perhaps to loop back on itself once again and then continue on as before or, perhaps, head off on another path. Perhaps, this novel asks, the recognition in our post-Vietnam, post-Reagan, post-Cold War time that we have in many senses been here before will force the realization that we are more concave than convex, more pointed toward each other than away. Once that realization sets in, perhaps we will be forced not just to acknowledge each other, as the resident of Hollow Earth puts it, but to see that in our still divided yet ever more connected world, our axes converge, and so our interests must as well.

Ultimately, if attention is paid only to the meanings of the line in Mason & Dixon, what is missed is the historical sense symbolized by the ampersand--awareness of the connections between

disparate moments from across American history, the feeling that these explosions of change are repeated resurfacings of possibility, of alternative outcomes for an only seemingly inevitable future. These moments resurface in the midst of forgetting, a historical amnesia that results not only when America ignores its past entirely, or when it sees in that past only the glorious story of its founding followed by the upward path leading to its triumphant present, but also when it sees in its past only the inevitable cruelty attendant to its unkickable binary habit. Rather than seeing our past as the story of failure to get this binary monkey off its back, Mason & Dixon wonders, perhaps we can learn to think in terms of possibility. Certainly, as Bernard Duyfhuizen writes, the book aims "to unravel the historical roots of the racial and social dislocations" of contemporary America (G4). But its exploration of the past is more than a disinterment, an autopsy explaining the death of American promise. If a medical analogy is wanted, the psychotherapeutic might be more apt: Pynchon's talking cure aims to get America to realize the patterns of thought it learned in its youth, in order to get it to think differently in the future. Cherrycoke ends the paragraph in which he describes the America of 1786 as bickering itself into fragments: "for the Times are as impossible to calculate, this Advent, as the Distance to a Star" (6). The contemporary America Pynchon is trying to calculate might also seem to be following an old pattern by bickering itself into fragments, and might seem as difficult to calculate

as Cherrycoke found his times. This line comes from the very beginning of the book; by the end, through telling his story, Cherrycoke may have figured a few things out. And they may be things Pynchon thinks applicable to our own era.

Mason & Dixon ends sadly, with Mason descending not just into the dreams of senescence but also into paranoia. He has, from his relationship with Dixon and his relation to the land through which they drew their line, learned some of the lessons I argue Pynchon is trying to teach. At the end of the American section of the book, they are both in flux, and have learned to like it: "Betwixt themselves, neither feels British enough anymore, nor quite American, for either Side of the Ocean. They are content to reside like Ferrymen or Bridge-Keepers, ever in a Ubiquity of Flow, before a ceaseless spectacle of Transition" (713). While Mason has learned a new way to think about division, to reside in transition, he cannot hold on to it forever, as he eventually must give up one side of the ultimate line for the other. Death is, here, "That failure of perfect Return, that haunts all for whom Time elapses. In the runs of Lives, in Company as alone, what fails to return, is ever a source of Sorrow" (630). The moment of Mason's paranoia, when he regresses to an older way of seeing things, is, in the end, the last moment of the subjunctive: "the Event not yet 'reduc'd to Certainty'… [a] last moment of Immortality" (177). The inevitability of death, though, is accompanied by a reminder of the magical possibility inherent in and symbolized by America. In the words

of Mason's once estranged children, words which close the novel and read as if they were poetry:

> "The Stars are so close you won't need a Telescope."
>
> "The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick."
>
> (773)

Any times, especially those times of retrenchment following explosions of change, can be as difficult to calculate (as Cherrycoke says) as the distance to a star. Mason & Dixon reminds us that there have been times when we were closer to the stars, that they may come again, that in some ways we are always in flux between distance from and proximity to them. Impossibly far or unimaginably close, the stars will always be separate from us, but, like the residents of the Earth Concave, we can lean toward them, and each other.

III. Deafened by the Roar of History: Toni Morrison's Paradise

> Bluid is thicker than water.
> --Sir Walter Scott
>
> The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.
> --W. E. B. DuBois
>
> The time for undiscriminating racial unity has passed.
> --Toni Morrison

In the 1993 afterword to her reissued first novel of 1970, The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison describes the goals she had in mind for the novel. She says that she wanted to produce what she calls "Black writing," writing that attempts "to transfigure the complexity and wealth of Black-American culture into a language worthy of that culture" (216). She grounds the discussion of her efforts in the opening phrase of the novel proper, "Quiet as it's kept":

> First, it was a familiar phrase, familiar to me as a child listening to adults; to Black women conversing with one another, telling a story, an anecdote, gossip about someone or event within the circle, the family, the neighborhood. The words are conspiratorial, "Shh, don't tell anyone else," and "No one is allowed to know this." It is a secret between us and a secret that is being kept from us. The conspiracy is both held and withheld, exposed and sustained. In some sense it was precisely what the act of writing the book was: the public exposure of a private confidence.

> In order to comprehend fully the duality of that position, one needs to be reminded of the political climate in which the writing took place, 1965-69, a time of great social upheaval in the lives of black people. The publication (as opposed to the writing itself) involved the exposure; the writing was the disclosure of secrets, secrets "we" shared and those withheld from us by ourselves and by the world outside the community. (211-12)

Morrison characterizes the writing of her first novel as the public exposure of a private confidence. She says that it was an act undertaken at a time of great social upheaval, a time when the unspoken assumptions of the public world were themselves being exposed. The civil rights movement was fighting to expose the open secret of racism in America, to bring out into the light the workings of discrimination. Morrison saw her fiction as part of that movement, as a social act. Looking to the recent history of America, in particular to the past of the part of America from which she came, she created a fictional world in which to expose the effects of racism on its victims.

In turning to the past rather than the present as the setting of her novel—to the forties and not the sixties—and in looking back even farther into the past from that past, Morrison initiated a pattern she was to follow in many of her novels. From Song of Solomon (1977) to Jazz (1992), Morrison's novels have been set in the past. This past has included Reconstruction, the

twenties, the early sixties, and has been set against an even older past, from slave times to the more recent past, a past she revisits with her characters as they (and she) try to make sense of themselves and their world. In setting her books in these double pasts, Morrison has enabled herself to dig down into the rich, tragic soil of American history to find the roots of the American present. She has done this in order to find the personal and public antecedents of that present and at the same time to cast an eye on the process of historical interpretation itself by watching from a distance the ways in which people in the past have read the past.

For her digging she availed herself of the subgenre of the historical novel, a tool that is especially fit for the task of exposing the private confidences of her public to a larger public because it is the form that takes the greatest advantage of the novel's inherent ability to bridge public and private. When in Song of Solomon Milkman Dead traces his family history back through slavery to its roots in Africa, searching at first for gold but in the end finding his name and his ancestral past, he is both vehicle for and part of the historical novel's genealogy, of the project of searching for understanding through excavation of family history. In each of Morrison's novels, the historical background allows us to understand that the conditions, the consciousness, and the fates of individual characters goes back, through genealogy, to the originary events of the middle passage and slavery. This background is carried generationally, through

the great migration that brings her characters up from the slavery- or post-slavery-era South, north to New York or Ohio, away from but not escaping these defining moments in their family histories. Memories of this genealogical background may be forgotten or dimmed, but the background is not lost, and the task of many of Morrison's main characters becomes not just the delving back into their own, individual, often rejected pasts but the recovering of this familial, collective past, the "rememory" of the painful, perhaps long-suppressed events that eventually shape these individual lives.

Paradise (1998), Morrison's latest novel, is a watershed in her career. It is because it is the novel in which Morrison rejects genealogy. That she does this is significant, given its importance in her previous work. It is also meaningful that she does it in a historical novel, given the importance of genealogy to the form. She rejects genealogy in a novel about a town that has relied on genealogy to understand its past and present, and future, and she does so by constructing a novel that rejects genealogy as it appears both in the form of the historical novel and in the historical thinking of her characters. Doing this while continuing, as in earlier novels, to create characters who are both the vehicles by which she examines the past and also examiners themselves serves to emphasize the connection between historical thinking in novels and in life. Morrison shows how this way of understanding the world—by reference only to a rigid understanding of the past—cripples the characters in Paradise.

She also shows how it cripples the understanding of the world usually achieved by historical novels.

What Morrison does in Paradise amounts to a deconstruction of a way of understanding fundamental to America, African-Americans, and the novel: a way of seeing the world split into false and destructive binaries. In particular, Paradise addresses the power and problems of essentialist constructions of race, of the fiction of racial purity and essence that Ralph Ellison called "blood-magic and blood-thinking" (qtd. in Posnock Color 17). It takes on America's private confidence, and exposes it publicly as not only white America's but also Black America's. That it does, when it does, tells us something about its moment in social and literary history. It tells us that in the nineties in America, some people were rethinking not just the history of race in America but the idea of race itself.

* * *

In thinking about why Paradise appeared when it did, we should consider the unprovable but important idea that it was not likely to have come at another time—that the revision of career, community, and literary form that Morrison makes in this novel would not have been made earlier. As Morrison says of The Bluest Eye, one needs to be reminded of the political climate in which the writing took place.

Paradise was written in the immediate post-Reagan/Bush, post-Cold War years, which was for many a time of looking back and summing up, of apparent closure and ostensible victory.

Morrison joined in the end-of-an-era history-making engaging the national imagination. As the title indicates, Paradise responds to the triumphalist, paradise-found histories being told in the late eighties and early nineties. Likewise, and equally important, Paradise's take on race responds to the stories being told at the time about race.

The eighties saw Reagan's offensive against the civil rights legislation that had cemented the social gains of the civil rights movement. This effort was described by one legal scholar:

> It took all of Ronald Reagan's eight years. But it now appears that he achieved one of his major goals: hastening an end to the Second Reconstruction in America. Reagan not only succeeded in reducing the protection of specific laws; he transformed the federal judiciary, once the foremost champion of individual rights, into a threat to those laws. (Schwartz 130)

Affirmative action was under attack in the eighties, as were a number of social programs and legal remedies lumped together by opponents as overly race-conscious. The effort to consolidate civil rights gains became an effort to defend them against reaction. The culture wars of the eighties, many battles of which were fought over the concept of multiculturalism, were stirred up by calls for legal and social recognition of and respect for racially and ethnically identified groups, calls which came as a

response to efforts to negate racial considerations in public policy. These calls (and these efforts) led to debates over whether multiculturalism recognized and celebrated the value of individual cultures or balkanized American culture.

It was in this climate in the early nineties that a number of events that brought race to the fore in public discussion and contributed to a reconsideration not simply of racial and ethnic identification but also of the categories themselves. They included the 1991 hearings for Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court, and in particular Anita Hill's testimony against him, and the 1992 riots in Los Angeles over the acquittal of the officers who beat Rodney King. These events made Americans think about identity, history, and racial solidarity and so added to a growing discussion of the identity politics of multiculturalism that had become accepted among many Americans, particularly among African-American intellectuals.

In 1995, Atlantic Monthly ran an essay about how African-American intellectuals were the new public intellectuals, in part, it argued, because a number of them had stopped thinking and writing only about African-Americans as African-Americans:

> Recently, several black intellectuals have been redirecting their attention from race-based politics to the importance of American citizenship for race relations . That is, they have thought less exclusively about the meaning of "blackness" and more inclusively about what it means to be an African-

> American... Most important, by pointing out the pitfalls of rigid identity politics, they have sought to distance themselves from the notion of victimization that has so dominated race-and ethnicity-specific rhetoric, whether formulated by blacks or whites. (Boynton 56)

The author's claim that these intellectuals were motivated to change their thinking by a desire to move away from the politics of victimization would be disputed by many of them; that the change had occurred would not. In 1992, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. edited a special issue of Critical Inquiry entitled "Identities." In their introduction they questioned the academy's overly narrow focus on race, class, and gender. Calling these terms the "holy trinity of literary criticism," they argued that they would soon "become the regnant clichés of our critical discourse" (8). While they called for a more complicated understanding of identity—one that recognizes the ways individuals are multiply identified—their criticism indicated a problem they had with the way identity was being thought of at the time that went beyond their sense that it was simplistic. With the 1992 publication of his In My Father's House, Appiah made explicit his argument that the concept of race is false. Based on bad nineteenth-century science, he argued, there is no biological truth to the classification of humans by race, even in terms of genetic variation, which does not correlate to racial classification. In both African-American identity politics and

the Pan-Africanist movement, a reliance on race-based identity, while serving certain political purposes, is as essentialist as white racism and as inaccurate. Gates, informed by postmodernism and earlier thinkers whose ideas have been adopted by postmodernism (such as Bakhtin), was also talking at the time about racial identity as social construct rather than intrinsic essence. In "Blackness without Blood," published in 1990 in a collection of essays about the eighties in America, Gates explains what he believes African-Americans had done in their thinking about race: "Recognizing that what had passed for 'the human' or the 'the universal' was in fact white essentialism, we substituted one sort of essentialism (that of 'blackness') for another" (115). As did many others, Gates still insisted on race's social reality: "To declare that race is a trope, however, is not to deny its palpable force in the life of every African American who tries to function every day in a still very racist America" (125).

These are two of the time's many rejections of what Ross Posnock, in a study of African-American intellectuals, calls the "romance of identity" (3), moves away from what Alain Locke called the "fetish of biological purity" (qtd. in Posnock Color 17) and toward the cosmopolitanism similar to that which he believes was overlooked in the thought of W. E. B. DuBois, Locke, and others earlier in the century. These later rejections of essentialism were part of a larger questioning of identity politics among intellectuals fueled in part by the poor fit

between certain strands of postmodern thought and multicultural or identity politics (as reflected in Gates' work). The antiessentialist stance of much postmodern thought, together with a sense of the subject that does not allow for the notion of the coherent self, was like oil to the water of the belief in authentic racial selfhood. Just as postcolonial returns to ethnic identity clashed with postmodernism's constructed, interpellated, overdetermined subject, so too did cultural pluralism. Attacked from one side for its reassertion of a coherent self and from another for its balkanization of universal humanity, multiculturalism had a hard time of it in the late eighties and nineties. The impact of these challenges was still felt at the end of the nineties, as witnessed by the June 2000 special issue of American Literature edited by Houston Baker entitled "Unsettling Blackness."

These two trends in American culture of the late eighties and early nineties—retrospection and reconsideration of race—meet in Paradise. Morrison, in the time of the writing of Paradise, found herself at a time in her life, in her career, and in the life of her nation that was ripe for revision, not just of the present state of things and not just of timeless concepts but also of the relation between the two. Morrison wrote Paradise at a time when she could look again at race through the prism of the last years of the civil rights movement.

By choosing to ask again about race in a novel set in the late sixties and early seventies, the time that produced The

Bluest Eye and so in a sense produced her as a novelist, Morrison not only challenges her own reading of that time, but also rereads herself. By extending her latest novel's setting to the mid-1970s, she reexamines the time that made The Bluest Eye and the years immediately following its conception and birth. She connects the American present to a time she believes is central to its past, a time that challenged some exclusionary, utopian narratives and gave birth to others, equally flawed. Central to the importance of that time—the late sixties and early seventies—is the loss of the momentum of the civil rights movement and other movements of the sixties, seen in the loss of hope in the wake of the assassinations of the Kennedys, King, Malcolm X and the fall from integrationist civil rights and antiwar activism to separatism and Watergate disillusionment. By 1970, Nixon was reversing desegregation and housing laws and militants were taking over leadership roles at SNCC and CORE: "When Toni Morrison published her first novel... the civil rights movement was already history" (Walker 5). The raising and dashing of the dreams of the civil rights movement is both background to Paradise and its implicit subject; what happened to dash these hopes is the question the novel asks. In the late eighties' and early nineties' rejection of essentialist conceptions of race, Morrison finds the answer.

Morrison was in many ways the creator of a new literary category early in her career, elevating black women's writing in importance and recognition and thus exposing worlds of experience

both to those who hadn't lived them and also those who had.[1] Her work through 1992's Playing in the Dark had been concerned with asking questions about subjects that she believed official narratives ignored. As the history books ignored the lives documented in the material collected in The Black Book (1974)—a groundbreaking project Morrison edited which collected primary texts about the African-American people and events left out of American textbooks and, so, American history—so literary history and social history had ignored the presence of African-Americans in American literature and culture. The Black Book was important to Morrison and completed very much under her guidance. It was also intended in part for a very specific audience:

> Although there is no evidence in the text to indicate it, in 1974 Morrison took on one of the most important projects of her career... The Black Book, as Morrison perceived it, was a corrective to much of the rhetoric of the radical wing of the Civil Rights Movement, which she feared was disrespectful of the lived experiences of many who survived slavery and/or the oppressions that came in its aftermath. (McKay 6)

The job Morrison had set for herself had been to correct this ignorance not just for Whites who ignored history, or Blacks who simply didn't know it, but for Black activists who neglected it.

Morrison's work has long been read as a kind of corrective to historical and racial ignorance. Her novels have been read

[1] For discussions of Morrison and black women's writing, see Peterson;

largely as the work of an African-American woman writer, a race woman. So it would have been natural if, when writing Paradise, she had thought twice about questioning herself. Doing so immediately after being awarded the Nobel Prize, a prize awarded for a writer's entire body of work, might have added to the difficulty. But just as Morrison shows that being too closely wedded to a story or a history is dangerous to the characters in Paradise, so she seems to have recognized that it could be a danger to her own work. Playing in the Dark was Morrison's critical attempt to throw light on the presence of Blackness in American literature. It is possible that following its publication, Morrison's insistence on this African-American presence had led her to an unexpected realization. In Playing in the Dark, Morrison asserted that African-American culture was not an isolated entity, that it had great influence on mainstream American culture, that the two were in fact not separable. The making of this argument might have contributed to Morrison's coming to believe that the biological boundary thrown up between these two peoples which are not two is fundamentally a false one, to see the hyphen between African and American as indicating not demarcation but linking, even unity. While holding on to the notion of blackness as a social reality, Morrison seems to have come to believe (again in Gates' phrase) in "blackness without blood" ("Blackness" 129). Whatever led to this realization and so to the decision to reconsider her past work and the ideas that

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Grewal, 2-3; Christian.

informed it—maybe the Nobel served as impetus rather than obstacle, maybe the fire that burned her house and manuscripts in 1993 freed her in some way, maybe it was simply the times—the result is a novel in which Morrison tells an old story in a new way.

* * *

In the afterword to The Bluest Eye with which I began, Morrison discusses what she was trying to do in the novel and the difficulties she ran into in the attempt. In doing so, she reveals what she sees as its flaws. Dated November 1993, one month after she received the Nobel Prize, the afterword reveals a writer determined to talk about problems in her work of more than two decades earlier. It also reveals Morrison's take on her thinking, two decades earlier, about the issues confronting America, especially Black America. The afterword's new take on old views can be seen as the product of the same forces to which we want to connect Paradise. It can even be seen as itself having helped to motivate Morrison to write Paradise.

In the afterword, Morrison wrote, "One problem was centering: the weight of the novel's inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing" (211). The character about whom Morrison speaks is Pecola Breedlove, daughter of Pauline and Cholly, southerners who'd joined the great northward migration and ended up in Ohio, where their lives came apart. Pecola's

story is told mostly from the childhood perspective of the adult Claudia MacTeer, a neighborhood girl of similar circumstances whose family manages to keep things together in the face of the institutionalized, internalized racism of America in the early 1940s. Pecola's story ends with her rape by her father, her resulting pregnancy, and her ultimate mental disintegration, culminating in her belief that she has gotten for herself the blue eyes she'd always envied in Shirley Temple and all of the other pretty white girls staring up at her from candy wrappers and down at her from billboards. Claudia's telling makes this as much the story of her own awakening to the realities of racism, and especially of internalized racism, as it is the story of Pecola falling into the sleep of madness. In her telling, the story shows us the beginning of the enlightenment of an angry black girl experiencing what W.E.B. Du Bois, in The Souls of Black Folk, famously called "double consciousness," "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45). The novel is an exploration of this condition, exemplified in the struggle against (or the giving in to) its most visual aspect, a beauty standard in which white, not black, is beautiful; the condition is also seen in many other of that society's standards of valuation in which black is found wanting. And it is these conditions, in the end, that provide a kind of answer to the question with which the

novel begins, a variation on the question to which she finds a new answer in Paradise.

That question appears in The Bluest Eye's frame, the first appearance of a device that Morrison uses repeatedly in later work. In it, Morrison begins the novel by giving away the store. In the first six pages, she reveals the novel's ending, a move perhaps inspired by a tendency in the modernist fiction which was the subject of Morrison's thesis to value other elements over traditionally structured plot (as expressed by Nabokov's reported rhetorical question in response to student complaints when, teaching a literature class at Cornell, he revealed the ending of the novel under discussion: "You don't read for the plot, do you?")(Romm). Morrison, however, gives away the ending of her novel not primarily to make a literary point about novels in general but rather to lead us to focus not on what happens in life but on what's behind what happens. To borrow Morrison's own words, from her introduction to a collection of essays on the nomination hearing of Anita Hill, "In addition to what was taking place, something was happening" (Race-ing x). By analogy, the initial telling of the plot is "what took place," while the unfolding of that plot in the novel proper is "what happened"; the difference is that between the bare outline of events, on the one hand, and, on the other, attempts to begin to understand how and why they occurred (x). Beginning the second introductory section with "Quiet as it's kept," she ends, having told us what happened in the past and will happen again in the course of the

telling, with a somewhat disingenuous claim: "*There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since* why *is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in* how" (6). Of course, there is much more to say, and it will include much more than how. But the point she seems to wish to make is clear: that the ultimate causes for Pecola's tragedy are to be found not primarily on the surface of things, in events, but deeper, in the ways people think. These are the answers to the question of why that Claudia ostensibly dodges but really drives the novel.

Morrison makes this point in the first introductory section, which consists of a Dick-and-Jane primer that paints a picture of a perfect house and family, a paragraph that is repeated twice more, in each instance removing more typographical cues and thus more sense. The point, reinforced by repetition (and further distortion) of passages from this primer as chapter headings, is that the heart of the story lies in the minds of its characters, in particular in the way in which they see themselves in the world, against the models supplied to them in their earliest exposures to the white American culture outside their homes. Morrison uses the second introductory section to the same end by having Claudia, her narrator, present the story as it first appeared to her and her sister: not as the pregnancy of a friend by her father, but as the failure of the marigolds to bloom. The full first line: "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (5). In the minds of these children, what happens can be handled only indirectly. The

disruption of nature that is incest is represented in their minds by the failure of the marigolds to bloom, by the failure of the seasons to bring what the seasons are supposed to bring. And the taking refuge in "how" to which the adult, narrating Claudia resorts is a similarly distancing method for handling something difficult, something which is difficult in part because it is internal—the debilitating effects of double consciousness. The unnatural result of internalized racism—the viewing of oneself negatively, as other—also falls under the symbolic aegis of the absent marigolds. This unnatural self-hatred taught by the historical experience of African-Americans is the ultimate answer to the novel's question, asked not only about Pecola but also, of course, about Black America.

Richard Wright, in "How Bigger Was Born," his essay on the making of Native Son, discusses his earlier story collection, Uncle Tom's Children. "I found," he laments, "that I had written a book which even banker's daughters could read and weep over and feel good about" (531). He resolves, with Native Son, not to make the same mistake again. Like Wright, Morrison wanted to write a book too tough to inspire mere pity. The interrogation she hoped to inspire was readers', of themselves, for contributing to internalized self-hatred like Pecola's. As Morrison writes in her afterword, one problem in the construction of the novel is that Pecola is overburdened, that her fate is overdetermined, and that as a result readers may pity her rather than look at their own

complicity in her fate. Later in the afterword she returns to this issue:

> A problem lies in the central chamber of the novel. The shattered world I built (to complement what is happening to Pecola), its pieces held together by seasons in childtime and commenting at every turn on the incompatible and barren white-family primer, does not in its present form handle effectively the silence at its center: the void that is Pecola's "unbeing." It should have had a shape—like the emptiness left by a boom or a cry. (214-15)

The flip side of Pecola's overburdening in the construction of the novel is this, the silence of Pecola herself at the center of this shattered world. The two worlds Morrison creates—the reality she constructs in the novel and the world in which a reader lives as she reads—are not constructed effectively enough to "handle" Pecola. The result is Morrison's complaint: that with Pecola, there is no there there.

Of course, the absence of an authentic self is the point of Pecola; any possibility of it existing, Morrison seems to argue, was lost when her parents' selfhood was crushed by the weight of racism. The boom or cry she wishes she had incorporated would have mitigated the smashing of Pecola as a presence in the novel if not as a person, would have given her a voice, however muted, and so would have more effectively represented the silence where she should have been. Instead, because of the silence, readers

may not be led to the self-interrogation Morrison desires. Instead, again quoting Du Bois, we may "look on in amused contempt and pity"—a pairing which nearly equates the latter with the former. Feeling sorry for Pecola isn't enough; it's almost as bad as laughing at her. And as James Baldwin wrote of Richard Wright and Bigger Thomas, it is dangerous to write characters who fall so short of the mark the author herself sets; as Wright could imagine Bigger but Bigger couldn't imagine Wright, so could the same be said for Morrison and Pecola.

Morrison, in her afterword, sees her failure to give a satisfactory shape or sound to Pecola as one of technique; she writes, "It required a sophistication unavailable to me" (215). As a first novel, she seems to be saying, it should not surprise that the technique is found to be lacking here and there. Looking back from five novels later, Morrison sees The Bluest Eye as marred by this and other flaws that are the fault of her rawness as a writer; she seems to think that Morrison the editor (she was working at Random House when she wrote the novel) should have caught the errors of execution made by Morrison the writer. She seems to be testing her skills, and the seams of the novel sometimes stretch with the effort, as, for example, in the powerful but awkward section after Pecola "receives" her blue eyes, in which she talks to her new imaginary friend.[2]

I would argue that in Paradise, we have evidence that

[2] Morrison discusses other parts of the novel in this way also, as when she describes the section devoted to Pauline, in which she tried to

Morrison came to recognize that the flaws in The Bluest Eye were the result not of artistic inexperience but rather of the ideas that drive the novel. In Paradise, Morrison reconsiders these ideas and the times that were formative to them. In the afterword to The Bluest Eye, she discusses them:

> The reclamation of racial beauty in the sixties stirred these thoughts, made me think about the necessity for the claim. Why, although reviled by others, could this beauty not be taken for granted within the community? Why did it need wide public articulation to exist? These are not clever questions. But in 1962 when I began this story, and in 1965 when it began to be a book, the answers were not as obvious to me as they quickly became and are now. (210).

The answers were not as obvious to her because they were not as obvious to America in the early 1960s. The rise of the Black Power movement as an outgrowth from and response to the earlier civil rights movement, the growing out of Afros as a response to the straightening or keeping neat of kinky black hair, the celebration of African roots—these were powerful things, powerful because they had the force of the idea already known but never articulated. Statements for the call to see that "black is beautiful" meant more than a call for the broadening or rejection of the American beauty ideal: they stood for all the broadenings, or rejections, that needed to be made of white American

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shift back and forth between the novel's usual narrative voice and

attitudes, and for all the defiance toward the negativity enshrined in these attitudes.

Morrison was involved in and inspired by these developments early in her professional career. As an editor, she promoted black women's fiction, such as novels by Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones, and The Black Book. The texts collected in The Black Book would go on to influence Morrison's own recovery of that history in her fiction. An 1856 article about a mother who killed her children rather than allow them to be returned to slavery provided inspiration for Beloved (1987)(McKay 6). Playing in the Dark also reveals the impact of her reading of American history, literary and otherwise, as having left out the story of African-Americans; even the language of American literature, she writes, has worked to reinforce what she calls "the dismissive 'othering' of people" (x)

Morrison's ideas, then, were the ideas of the times. One could argue that Morrison's primary reason for setting the book in the early 1940s, a time when the issue of racial beauty seemed to her and many others not to have come to the fore yet, was to express the power of the articulation of these ideas. By portraying a young girl who experiences something about which she is not fully able to think until she reaches adulthood, Morrison shows the existence of the illness at a time when the diagnosis (and so the cure—at least for the patient) was not yet widely available. By making clear that the organizing consciousness of

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Pauline's own voice, as "extremely unsatisfactory" (215).

the book is that of the adult Claudia, the narrative frame allows the novel to be not just Pecola's story but the story of Claudia's enlightenment, as it makes clear that she is looking back at her childhood from the time in which the discussion that allows her to interpret that childhood takes place. The urgency to understand the black experience in the 1960s was both a movement to be thought of in terms of social groups and also, like all movements, something that took place in the minds of individuals. It took place when individuals looked back at their own experiences in the light of newly articulated ideas, and came to a new understanding of them.

The ideas of the sixties, then, realize themselves in Morrison's reexamination of the past. Her focus on the racialized American beauty standard came out of these ideas, and led to her exploration of its roots in the past. These reexaminations serve, as revisionist stories do, to illuminate the present and future, but only for the survivors; for others, such as Pecola, it is, as Morrison writes in the last sentence of the novel, "much, much, much too late" (206). The problem of Pecola that Morrison identifies in her afterword is not ultimately the technical problem Morrison makes it out to be. It is the result of ideas about African-American history, about race, which, in retrospect—in Paradise—she comes to believe are themselves flawed. As The Bluest Eye is the story of Claudia's awakening, so Paradise can be read as the story of Morrison's.

One thing that Morrison can be seen to reconsider in Paradise is her belief in the inevitable force of double consciousness, as expressed in the "the incompatible and barren white-family primer" that begins the novel, in the primal humiliation of Cholly at the hands of the white hunters, in the destruction of Pauline's self-image by the movies, in Pecola's Mary Jane Wrappers and Shirley Temple cups. The ostensible main plot of The Bluest Eye—Pecola's decline—is constructed as inescapably predetermined. There seems to be no moment when things could have gone better for her, no turning point missed or opportunity squandered, no alterable circumstance that might have saved her. The world she lives in is not made that way. She can see herself only negatively, only with others' eyes, because she has no other view with which to replace the view from outside. Pecola cannot speak up for herself because she cannot see another picture of herself. The novel constructs things this way. There are characters, such as Claudia and Frieda and their mother and even the whores who live above Pecola's house, who seem in some measure to escape the fates of the Breedloves by holding tight to their own views of themselves. In spite of these characters, the novel expresses Morrison's picture of double consciousness in the world: that it shatters the world into pieces too small and sharp to allow people to put themselves back together in it, in fact to allow them to do anything but cut themselves trying.

We feel this sense of inescapability even in these characters who seem better equipped than Pecola to deal with this

world. Claudia does not suffer the fate of Pecola, but she is consumed with hatred, of white dolls and girls in 1941, of herself later, after the yearlong scope of the book, when, she reports, she learns to love Shirley Temple and so hate herself. She is a victim of the Thing, as she calls it, a quite significant victim—if not one bearing consequences as severe as those Pecola suffers—and we never see her beat the Thing. We only get the sense that her identification of it, the anatomy she offers in her narration of the novel, may be some kind of step forward. Her mother does have the saving grace of the circle of women, talking in kitchens, constructing their own world inside the world of white kitchens and dismissive storeowners that surrounds them. Outside of this small world, though, she manages only to construct a family life, warm in its own way (as seen in Claudia's adult memory of a childhood cold: "when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die" (12)), but hard and unprotected from the larger, hostile world. The laughter of women seems a defense from, more than a victory over, a world whose hardness lies not just in the material but the social. The prostitutes, of course, have their humor and their subversiveness, but even their memories of happy times, of fish fries and lovemaking, carry a sense of escape, not victory.

In all three cases, these women are not seen within the bounds of the novel to have rid themselves of double consciousness, of the curse of seeing themselves as other, as not

meeting the standard. This fact—that there is no example of a black woman who successfully frees herself from the white gaze within her, from the hidden sense that the blue eyes she will never possess are the only thing that would make her feel good enough for the world—makes Pecola's fate more than an extremity, a worst case illustration. It makes it more than emblematic, but rather, in fact, pretty much the fate of all of the women in this novel's world, because none of them is shown to be able to escape double consciousness. This sense of inescapability carries an air of historical inevitability, almost of predestination. When we read Pecola's brief genealogy, we are not being given, as an explanation for her horrible fate, the peculiar set of circumstances that created her family. Instead, we are given the genealogy not just of the Breedloves but also of the MacTeers, of the prostitutes, of everyone like them in Lorain. They came Up North from Down South, as part of the Great Migration of blacks from the post-Reconstruction former slaveholding states, and found a coldness that was a function of something more than climate. In leaving the South, they were trying to escape the white gaze, found not just inside themselves but outside in the fields and in the courthouses and the single trees out front of them, the white gaze first encountered, historically, on the western shores of Africa. However, it was up North too, and not just in the people they met there but also, still, inside themselves.

This history is embodied in the brief story of the Breedloves and informs the entire novel. It makes Pecola's story more than emblematic: in its inevitability, it is a historical pattern. The genealogy traceable for all of these characters, her story seems to say, will provide the model for each of the characters, for any black American whose roots lay in Southern soil—which is to say for most, biographically, and for all, as members of a social group with a history.[3] The Bluest Eye is set in the early 1940s, again, to provide a historical grounding for a discussion of double consciousness inspired by what Morrison calls "the reclamation of racial beauty." This time represents, for Morrison, a time before the ideas which inspire the novel were widely articulated, a time with which to illustrate life before enlightenment, before the widespread discussion of the insidiousness of seemingly innocent scenes such as Shirley Temple dancing with Mr. Bojangles. Because of what Morrison was using this setting for, then, the idea that Pecola's fate was historically inevitable followed naturally. The fact that the explanation for the immediate causes of Pecola's tragedy are found in genealogy, in the black experience, was also fitting.

In her subsequent novels, Morrison travels farther back into this past, using genealogy as a kind of roadmap. Traveling back through the time after slavery to the slavery years themselves, and back farther into the murky memories and myths of the time before slavery, traveling routes marked by names encoded

[3] As in many of her other novels, e.g., Song of Solomon (Brenkman 66)

in rhymes and songs, Morrison details the ways in which history shapes the present. Morrison's novels are steeped in genealogy, in history as lived by forebears, from Sula's historical perspective on the neighborhood known as the Bottom, following three generations; to Song of Solomon's convergence with crucial moments not just in civil rights history but African-American history back to the middle passage, following four generations; to the colonial history that haunts the islands in Tar Baby (1981); to the novel of Morrison's set farthest in the past, Beloved; to Jazz's look back from the Harlem of the Renaissance to the beginnings of African-American life under slavery.[4] Song of Solomon appeared at a time when the recollection of slavery and the return to African roots had a strong hold on the African-American imagination, as shown by the phenomenon of Alex Haley's Roots. Through Milkman's genealogical quest, it links the distant slavery and pre-slavery past to the civil rights movement's late struggles, which are, by the fact of the temporal gap between the novel's mid-sixties ending and mid-seventies appearance, elided (and so, as John Brenkman has argued, emphasized). Like Haley, in Song of Solomon Morrison looked to the past for roots, for a sense of group identity in group history. The work that Sethe finds herself consumed by in Beloved is the work of "beating back the past" (73); she finds some measure of peace when she deals with it, understands what led her to murder her child. It is only

[4] For historical dates in Song of Solomon, see Walker.

when she understands her past that she can stop fighting it, can "lay it all down, sword and shield" (173).

The Bluest Eye shows how both the ideas and the essential techniques of Morrison's novels were present in her work from the start; Paradise examines the connection between these ideas and the time that gave birth to them. It is set in the years formative to Morrison's writing and the years following her beginnings as a writer, years contemporary to the full flowering of the civil rights movement and to its decline, and reconsiders not so much what took place but what happened. In doing so, Paradise reconsiders the genealogical inevitability expressed in her earlier works. What it finds is that the Black Power movement, which challenged the integrationist philosophy of the civil rights movement with separatism, was not a solution to this inevitability but rather a reinforcement. Pride in Blackness as essence, as inborn and pure, as in-the-blood, Paradise suggests, lays the same trap that White supremacy laid. As Morrison and many other were coming to believe toward the end of the twentieth century, racial identification, blood-thinking, only made it seem "much, much, much too late." At our late date, Paradise asks, maybe it really isn't.

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Morrison does not make a connection between what she laments as Pecola's absence in The Bluest Eye and her portrayal of double consciousness as historically inevitable, at least not in her afterword. However, I believe Paradise shows that the

Morrison recognized in some way that that there is no Pecola in The Bluest Eye because Morrison's ideas—the ideas of the time of the novel's writing—left no room for her. The ideas of the times and of Morrison's own experience led her to construct a novel in which genealogy, history, must win.

In Paradise, Morrison makes room for Pecola by returning to the time of The Bluest Eye and reconsidering the ideas that led to her absence. She tells a story that revisits not just the history of black America but also the way history itself has been used, the way the tracing of roots and the retelling of the past have affected the tracers and the tellers. She uncovers the roots of these ideas about history, digging down through the American soil to the deepest ideas and beliefs of the West, of Christianity, where she finds a source of errors that informed her times and informed her own thinking and work. It is these ideas about self and other, about teleology and paradise, about the relation of the individual to history, that ultimately make for Pecola's absence and similar absences haunting Morrison's novels. But it was in The Bluest Eye that she first assayed the history that she has told and retold in her work, and so it is that novel, and the formative time out of which it came, to which Morrison returns, in effect, to start over again.

Paradise begins, as does The Bluest Eye, with a kind of secret: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time." We are not told who the white girl is. This secret is not the same kind of secret as that which opens The

Bluest Eye. It is not an invitation to share. Reading this first sentence, we may see it at first simply as unclear, and thus of a piece with Morrison's often elliptical style. Familiar with Morrison's many skeleton-plot openings and, more generally, her stated desire to make her readers work with her to complete her novels, we may assume the blanks will be filled in as the plot is fleshed out, or that we must work to fill them in ourselves. We may expect the following paragraphs to tell us more about this white girl. We would be wrong.

The rest of the first chapter tells the story of this murderous 1976 attack. The attack is made on the Convent, a former Catholic school for Indian girls in Oklahoma, home since the late '60s to a group of mostly black, unattached, sexually liberated women. It is made by a group of men from the nearby all-black town of Ruby who for some reason feel threatened by the Convent women. The rest of the novel is organized into chapters that tell the stories of these women and of the usually separate but at times intersecting story of prosperous, exclusive Ruby. A large part of this latter story, in addition to the stories of the lives of Ruby's present-day inhabitants, is the town's long history. It comes in three parts. The first is the pre- and post-slavery story of their ancestors in the deep South, a story marked by liberation, a rise to prominence, and then a fall in which they are purged from positions of local and statewide power. The second is the story of the long journey away from the deep South, a journey which is marked by their rejection not just

by whites and Indians and all-Black towns generally but by a lighter-skinned black town (an event they call "the Disallowing"); the journey ends in the founding of their own exclusionary town, Haven. The third part of this history is the voluntary exodus of the young from Haven after their bittersweet return from World War II to still-racist America, and the subsequent establishment of the new town of Ruby based firmly on the same unspoken exclusionary principles, later unearthed by one of the town's women, principles based on maintaining the town's pure black blood. The violent attack that begins and ends the novel is carried out in the name of this town's moral health, but the real motivation is this unspoken principle.

What the rest of the novel does not tell us is who the white girl is. While some reviewers argued that we are given enough information to suss out the identity of the white girl, the mystery is at least very carefully maintained and at most unsolvable.[5] The secret with which Paradise begins is not a "quiet as it's kept" secret, then, neither a secret exclusive to members of a community nor a between you, me and a lamppost secret about information not to be made public. It is not a secret Morrison lets us in on. Instead, it is a secret she keeps from us. While we may never learn the secret, it leads us to a further and more fruitful question, namely, why do such a thing?

[5] Brooke Allen thought that Pallas was the white girl in her review in the New York Times Book Review; Louis Menand claimed in The New Yorker that the white girl is Seneca ("War").

Why begin a novel with a private confidence not intended for public exposure?

The answer to this question, the motivation for Morrison's secret-keeping, is to be found in her motivation for the entire project. If we approach Paradise as a kind of afterword to Morrison's career thus far, to a way of understanding the world inscribed in the books she's written, we can understand why we aren't given to know who this white girl is. We will learn why it might not be so important. And we will see how this last point is at the heart of Paradise, how Paradise is not just Morrison looking back but Morrison starting over.

Ironically, a book that begins with a secret that is not told is filled with secrets that are. As in many of Morrison's novels, the unfolding of the already-told plot of Paradise is itself a kind of revealing, an uncovering of the ways things happened, and why. As the explanation for Pecola's fate in The Bluest Eye is found in the hidden past of its characters, so in Paradise the explanation for the central event, the attack on the convent, is found in hidden, unknown pasts, in secrets told in the retelling of these pasts. And the secrets of the town of Ruby are not the only secrets told in the explaining. The secrets of the Convent, of the women at whom they shoot, are part of this story. The hidden life of the Convent, so different from that of Ruby, is part of the cause, in the eyes of the townsmen. But the four women who come to live at the Convent and the one who was already there also have their own pasts, pasts they are not

reliving so much as still living. A large part of the story of the Convent is what the past does to the women who live there, and what they do with and to their pasts.

The first of these retold pasts belongs to Mavis, who arrives at the Convent not long after the accidental death of her two youngest children and subsequent escape from the house where her husband and remaining children were, she felt, plotting to kill her. The chapter opens, "The neighbors seemed pleased when the babies smothered" (19). The scene is the visit of a local reporter and photographer, who shoots Mavis and the children as well as the scene of the crime, the mint green Cadillac they couldn't afford, in the back seat of which the babies stopped being able to breathe. The reporter tries to get Mavis to say something for other mothers: "You know. Something to warn them, caution them, about negligence" (22), but she is unable to come up with anything. She is so convinced of her inadequacy, her stupidity, that she is unable to say anything about the accidental horror they are there to document. And in her trip away from a loveless marriage become what feels to be a murderous home and toward California, she confirms her inadequacy to herself, running out of gas, trusting hitchhikers who rip her off, until she arrives at the Convent. There she meets the mirrored sunglass-wearing Connie and the pale, frail woman upstairs surrounded by a ring of light in a house without electricity, a woman Connie calls Mother and of whom she says, in response to Mavis' confusion upon meeting the white mother of

this brown Connie: "She is my mother. Your mother too. Whose mother you?" (48). In this moment, Morrison tells us much about Mavis and about the Convent. There is something mystical in this place, from Connie's mysterious eyes to the unexplainable light around the old woman, yet there is something very basic that connects to Mavis too—the maternal. The lack of confidence Mavis suffers is addressed by Connie when she makes her shell pecans for her, dismissing her protests that she would fail at it and telling her that she has the perfect hands for the task. The mother she has failed to be is inside her, and Connie tries to bring her out with a little of her own mothering. The old woman upstairs, while appearing to have something of the supernatural about her, also has something of the earthly mother about her as well. The place that seems somehow to be hers, then, will be a mothering place, a place where she will be your mother, and where you will mother too. And what color you are will not matter.

Mavis is the first of the women to arrive, years before the attack. She stays, off and on, until it happens, drawn by Mother and Connie and the chance to remake herself. The other three come one by one, running from their own pasts, landing at the Convent in various states of disrepair and disrepute or shame. The first of these is Gigi, or Grace, a sexual free spirit who is haunted by the images of body bags and boys spitting blood into their hands so as not to ruin their shoes, by the violence of the times, foreign and domestic. Like Mavis, she finds on arriving at the Convent that she is surprisingly ravenous for its simple

food. She arrives at the unexpected end of her search for a rock formation in the desert alleged to be in the shape of a man and a woman "fucking forever" (63), which had become a search for a pair of fig trees near Ruby entwined like lovers, finding instead that Mary Magna, the old woman who'd so attracted Mavis, had died, and stays to eat and, as her ride leaves without her, to watch the bereaved Connie sleep. As one search ends, another, it seems, begins, this one a search to find out what food will fill the space left behind when Vietnam and the struggle for civil rights took her innocence.

Seneca, the third, was abandoned at five by a girl she thinks is her sister but is actually her mother, and went through the projects floor by floor for four days and five nights. She arrives at the Convent after years as a foster child and a recent stint as a paid sexual companion for a rich woman. She is afraid of abandonment, still the young girl who thinks that cleaning her teeth and washing her ears will bring everyone who's abandoned her back, who thinks that it's something in her that leads to the rapes by her foster brother and the approach, money in hand, by the chauffeur. And she has picked up the habit of self-mutilation, cutting lines in her skin to steady herself, to kill the pain inside her. The fourth, Pallas, is, as the three women who preceded her, a sexual victim. She arrives at the Convent, mute, having run away from the sight of her mother and the man who'd eloped with her, taking her from her father's house, rolling around and moaning together in the grass. In her escape,

her truck is forced off the road and she is raped, escaping again by hiding underwater. As do Mavis, Gigi, and Seneca, Pallas comes to the convent still covered in the past, her hair full of algae from the lake in which she'd hidden herself.

Consolata, or Connie, is there to meet these women in one way or another when they arrive. By the time the last of them arrive, she is no longer the strong, kind woman who met Mavis, but instead, after Mary Magna's death, a increasingly angry and sad drunk who lives in the basement, hating the women who'd come to live in her house. Rescued from the streets of Rio de Janeiro as a girl by the Mother Superior and raised at the Convent, Consolata becomes unable to console herself over her losses, of her virginity at nine by rape, of love thirty years later, and of the nun who raised her and who she was unable ultimately to keep alive with her newly discovered supernatural power (hence the glow Mavis noted), succumbing to the self-loathing that afflicts all of these women, outcasts of one kind or another. Her rebirth, as literal as it is figurative (as the women note, "She has the features of Dear Connie, but they are sculpted somehow"(262), as if she'd come through some kind of purifying fire), comes with a new kind of religion, the Afro-Brazilian syncretic Catholic Candomblé, which is of course old for her (Bouson 209, Leonard 25). Armed with this new/old belief, she takes control of her Convent, and to her new initiates announces, "If you want to be here you do what I say... And I will teach you what you are hungry

for" (262). As each arrived and was surprised to find themselves hungry, each, Consolata says, will find that they truly need.

The results of this new program at the Convent appear not long before the attack on the Convent, which comes (or is completed, as we saw its start at the novel's start) at the end of Paradise. At this point in our reading of the novel, we have learned the secrets of the Convent women's pasts, and it is time for them to learn how to free themselves from these pasts, how to retell the stories in ways that allow them to free themselves from the repeating loops in which they are stuck and so to continue the stories of their lives. And we have learned much more than just the secret pasts of these women by this time in our reading. We have learned the secret pasts of the town of Ruby—their official past, the difference between this story and the true story, and the difference between their official present and what is really happening in their town. We have learned about the times when the Convent's short history has intersected with the recent history of Ruby, two different sets of stories set against and occasionally across each other. And we are prepared for the final, violent intersection with which the novel begins and ends, an intersection that is more a blindsiding than a crossroads.

As the secret pasts of Ruby are separate from yet intertwined with the story of the nearby yet so different Convent, dividing the novel in two, so Ruby's stories are themselves filled with doubling and divisions, with distinctions

drawn between things and people close but distinct. Ruby's public and private histories as well as its present secrets are filled with twins and doubles, with sides taken and lines drawn, with parallels noticed and unnoticed. The ending of the part of Ruby's continuing history that includes the Convent, which provides a coda and a culmination to all that we have learned about it, comes out of this doubleness and division, this sameness and difference. This ending—the attack—is prepared for and shown by the novel in a way that reveals all of the manifestations of this structural tendency and points out its roots in a history that goes back much farther than the history Ruby tells itself about itself.

The histories of Ruby, official and otherwise, can be pieced together by readers only as they make their way through Paradise. What can be pieced together of the official story, as retold by Deacon and Steward Morgan, the twin brothers who effectively run the town, begins in 1890, with the Old Fathers. This group of ancestors had been in Louisiana since the 1750s, as slaves, and after Emancipation had helped govern the state for a short time, until Reconstruction ended. Unhappy in a South in which they were again field labor, they began a long trek to the Oklahoma territory, where they hoped to settle and work their own land. What they find instead is rejection, not just from poor whites and Indians but also from the all-Black towns that had begun to pop up, on the grounds that they didn't have enough money. One man's response: "They don't know we or about we. Us

free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference?" (14). This difference—money—was not as baffling as the difference that caused rejection that hurt the most and most shaped the future, the rejection that came to be called "the Disallowing." This difference, the heart of the story of the Disallowing, is the part of the story of Ruby's history that takes the longest to come out. It was the color of their skin—not that they were black and not white, but black and not light. Described as "8-rock" after the darkest coal found deep in mines, these ancestors were turned away from the town of Fairly, Oklahoma, because they were too dark.

> For ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves. Serious enough that their daughters would be shunned as brides; their sons chosen last; that colored men would be embarrassed to be seen socially with their sisters. The sign of racial purity they had taken for granted had become a stain. (194)

They were "blue-black people, tall and graceful" (193), and they were turned away by "blue-eyed, gray-eyed yellowmen in good suits" (195). And they never forgot it.

This part of the story takes so long to be revealed in the novel because it is secret. The distinction drawn between them and those they wanted to join was so fine and yet so final, and the shame attendant to it so great, that they not only never forgot it, they based their future on it. The great unspoken secret of their story, which becomes the great unspoken secret of Ruby and its own Fathers, is the exact nature of the Disallowing—this difference in color—and what the memory of the Disallowing does to shape the subsequent history and the present of their group. When Deacon and Steward's grandfather Zechariah and the other patriarchs found Ruby' predecessor town, Haven, they build a communal oven bearing a large iron plate reading "Beware the Furrow of His Brow." Ostensibly religious in meaning—befitting the religiosity of the founding families, who saw their wanderings and establishment of Haven very much as an exodus in the Old Testament sense—the plaque was taken to urge obedience to a strict and demanding God. A second sense of the words on the Oven, though, betrays the inscription of their rejection on the hearts of Haven, a sense "in which the 'You' (understood), vocative case, was not a command to the believers but a threat to those who had disallowed them" (195). On their most central symbol of their trials they commemorate the one that hurt the most. And Haven becomes at its establishment not just a place in

which the founding families can be safe from all that is "out there" or a community in which tradition and duty are paramount but a warning to those who had made that initial, lasting wound.

The story behind Haven's founding, then, illustrates "the importance of shame and pride in the formation of racial and cultural identity" (Bouson 193). Haven outlasts the all-black towns that had rejected it, through hard work and solidarity and, according to some, divine protection; that this survival is in large part due to wounds inflicted upon its people is not part of the common understanding. In the thirties the chosen people of Haven see their town begin to fail as the others had done; in the forties, the young of Haven return from war to find that white America is not impressed with their contributions, and expresses itself with violence and humiliation. They pick up and remove themselves farther from "out there," "where your children were sport, your women quarry... where congregations carried arms to church and ropes coiled in every saddle" (16). They travel farther into Oklahoma and found Ruby, named after the sister of Deacon and Steward who dies during the journey, in a hospital where she goes untreated by white doctors and is told that a veterinarian would be found to help her. Strengthening their determination to keep out there out, and to keep in here safe, the New Fathers of Ruby withdraw further from the world, turning Ruby into a self-sufficient place with no hotel, no bus stop, and no desire to traffic with those who'd wronged them along the way. Material possessions pile up, houses are beautified, appliances

hum, gardens become ornamental, no one dies. The supernatural protection of Ruby seems a miracle.

In the other understood "You" in the Oven's message, the flip side of the miracle of Ruby is evident. This you, it turns out, is the resident who chooses not to follow the unspoken rule of the community, the blood rule. What the Old Fathers took from the Disallowing, and passed on to the New Fathers, was a determination not just to withdraw and protect but also to keep pure. The 8-rock blood, the sign of purity that had become a stain, is recaptured as not just a source of pride but a covenant, a promise to keep Ruby 8-rock by allowing marriage only between the families or to outsiders also blue-black dark. Patricia Best, who has been compiling folders and notebooks documenting family trees as well as her own increasing discomfort with what her research uncovers, discovers this covenant, and much more. Pat uncovers the truth of the blood rule through investigation of, among other cases, her own: the daughter of Roger Best and his light skinned wartime sweetheart, Delia, she connects the death of her mother in childbirth and the refusal of the men of ruby to help to the blood rule, and the hatred directed at her and her father to the same source. And it was the men who enforced this rule, the New Fathers who repeated past hurts in new ones: "He's bringing along the dung we leaving behind," Steward said of Roger Best when he sees Delia. He was scolded by the women but, Pat writes in her notebook, "they were

just women, and what they said was easily ignored by good brave men going to Paradise" (201-02).

Pat discovers that the reason for gaps and crossings-out in her trees is the blood rule and retaliation against those who break it. In anger, she burns her files and notebooks:

> She felt clean. Perhaps that was why she began to laugh. Lightly at first and then heavily, her head thrown back as she sat at the table. Did they really think they could keep this up? The numbers, the bloodlines, the who fucks who? All those generations of 8-rocks kept going, just to end up narrow as bale wire? Well, to stay alive maybe they could, maybe they should, since nobody dies in Ruby. (217)

She realizes, watching the school Christmas pageant's Ruby-customized reenaction of the Nativity, that there are only seven families in the current version, not the original nine for the nine founding families, and knows that two families had been cut out because of violations, one her own. She realizes that the Morgans, Deacon and Steward, are taking care of Ruby's 8-rock blood by keeping only the pure in Ruby, and driving the rest out. She asks herself:

> What new bargain had the twins struck? Did they really believe that no one died in Ruby? Suddenly Pat thought she knew all of it. Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. That was their deal. For

> immortality… In that case, she thought, everything that worries them must come from women. (217)

These good brave men really believed they were going to Paradise, Pat realizes, on the strength of their stewardship of blood. Who fucks whom becomes not merely a moral question but a survival question, and what threatens that survival, in the minds of these good brave men, is woman, only one of two whos, but apparently the one that can go wrong.

There is a long recent history of the Convent helping the women of Ruby—helping them to go wrong, in the eyes of the New Fathers. This secret succor, to Arnette, who has been trying to abort her baby by K. D., nephew and lone male descendant of the twins, to Sweetie, who has been trying not to walk out on her sickly children, is given freely but is turned by Ruby's men into reason to be rid of the Convent. Even Deacon's long-ago affair with Consolata becomes occasion for blaming the Convent women. Their behavior, so unlike the proper and protected behavior of the Ruby women, is sign of their evil, of the threat they pose:

> They don't need men and they don't need God. Can't say they haven't been warned. Asked first and then warned. If they stayed to themselves, that's something. But they don't. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into *our* homes, *our* families. (276)

Out there is seeping into what's theirs, and what's out there, Godless and unnatural, is contaminating pure Ruby. This contamination is blamed for the thing that most needs to be blamed on something, somewhere, the turning of Ruby's young people against the old ways.

Reverend Richard Misner, an outsider who comes to minister to Ruby, observes this turn, as seen in the disintegration or exit of some and the rebellion of others. He also takes part in it, bringing the ideas of the civil rights struggle to a town that has somehow remained oblivious to it, or more exactly has chosen to ignore it as one more thing from which to separate itself. Misner's ideas crystallize around the words on the Oven. The official story's "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" is in dispute, as the first word was lost when the Oven was dismantled and moved from Haven, and the young people argue that the "Beware" was in fact "Be," that the Old Fathers did not mean that their people should fear God's hand but that they should act as God's hands, bringing change to the world. This is taken as blasphemy by the New Fathers and by their minister, Reverend Pulliam, with whom Misner struggles for the future of Ruby. The black power fist that gets painted on the Oven illustrates the clash between generations and ideals that comes even, eventually, to Ruby; their desire to change the world is at odds with the separatist ethos of Ruby tradition, of avoiding trouble by keeping away from whites. And their social behavior, reflecting the trend of out there, is becoming more liberal, a change of

which the Ruby men, who like their women under control, cannot be in favor.

So armed with the rightness of protection by God and of womanhood, family, and the future of their town, the men of Ruby prepare to rid themselves of their problem. As Morrison shows us their preparations, leading us slowly to the final intersection between these two stories, she also shows us the turnaround at the Convent. Consolata's rebirth is followed by the establishment of a ceremony that forever changes the Convent women, allowing them to come to an understanding with their pasts that in one way or another continues to mutilate them. The "loud dreaming" is a ceremony in which each tells her story in a way that allows the others to live it, all lying naked on the floor of the basement across floor paintings of themselves and their secrets. This loud dreaming, performed across months, allows them to expose their secrets and even have them read, interpreted, by others, and in doing so to free themselves from endlessly repeating them. And this freeing allows them to mature, to stop acting out a false freedom of dress and behavior that left them as unhappy as before their arrival, and left Consolata hating them. They are kinder to each other and themselves. "Unlike some people in Ruby," it might occur to a visiting friend, "the Convent women were no longer haunted" (266). They begin to establish a real Paradise. The formative hurts of their histories no longer continue to deform them. The contrast is made clear: in this they are unlike Ruby.

Because Ruby is still haunted, because they are imploding under the weight of their exclusionary, other world Paradise-directed covenant, the men grab their "clean, handsome guns" (3) and head for the Convent. The novel's first chapter begins with the shooting of the white girl, leads us through the Convent with the searching men to their discovery of the other women out back, running, and ends, "God at their side, the men take aim. For Ruby"(18). The penultimate chapter shows the women fighting back before they run, and shows the shooting of Consolata by Steward, which Deacon tries to stop and both of their wives witness. The others go down in the backyard. People from Ruby race to the Convent, and the fitting of this latest episode into the official story of Ruby begins, but not without trouble. K.D. claims self-defense, and Steward points to the perverseness he thinks he has discovered in the house. But Deacon goes off the reservation:

> "The evil is in this house," said Steward. "Go down in that cellar and see for yourself."
>
> "My brother is lying. This is out doing. Ours alone. And we bear the responsibility."
>
> For the first time in twenty-one years the twins looked each other dead in the eyes. (291)

And Deacon is not alone. Driving away, the doubts about Ruby's wholeness and health continue in the wake of this latest shock: "How hard they had worked for this place; how far away they once were from the terribleness they have just witnessed. How could so

clean and blessed a mission devour itself and become the world they had escaped?" (292).

The answer, as Pat Best has discovered, lies not in change or in circumstance but in the very roots of Ruby's founding, in reacting to exclusion by further excluding, in the telling of their story as the tale of the exodus and nation-founding of a chosen people who must keep themselves pure and separate if they want to endure and make it to Paradise. The rigidifying of this story against all other versions, against all others, makes for a narrow path, divergence from which becomes impossible, in spite of the pressures of the fast-changing outside world. The official version of the attack is contested, but things in Ruby seem to return almost to normal. The convenient disappearance of all of the bodies helps this process along. What keeps things only almost normal is the change in Deacon, who cannot go along: "It was Deacon Morgan who had changed the most. It was as though he had looked in his brother's face and did not like himself anymore" (300). What he doesn't like comes out in a conversation he has with an unlikely new friend, the new minister. He realizes, he tells him, that his remorse for his affair (with, we know, Consolata) was not so much the adultery, though he felt awful about that, but the way in which he ended it: he remorse was for "having become what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different" (302). He had judged and rejected the light-skinned, green-eyed, unconventional Consolata in a way that

echoed for him the way the needy, defenseless, different people of Haven had originally been rejected and, now, the way Ruby had rejected the Convent. In his brother's face he sees the judge in himself.

Ignoring Misner's request for him to identify the woman, Deacon, without transition, tells another story. He returns to one of Ruby's originary moments of doubleness and difference, telling Misner the truth about Zechariah, their grandfather, the Old Father who was patriarch of the clan and about whose lost twin brother Pat Best had wondered. Coffee, his name before he rechristened himself, took a bullet in the foot rather than dance before a group of taunting whites, while his twin, Tea, danced. Of the rightness of the silence with which Coffee shut out Tea and which he imposed on others who might speak about him, "not because he was ashamed of his twin, but because the shame was in himself," Deacon is unsure. Misner responds: "Lack of words. Lack of forgiveness. Lack of love. To lose a brother is a hard thing. To choose to lose one, well, that's worse than the original shame, wouldn't you say?" (303).

The brothers they have rejected as a response to the original shame of their own rejection are a loss to them. These brothers, on this reading, are the lighter-skinned blacks who turned them away. But they are also, I would argue, whites as well. And they are also sisters. The worlds the men of Ruby shut themselves away from are not just different in shade and color but gender, too. The exclusion of the difference they so fear,

the shame and resulting anger they feel about themselves and toward everything that is not them, does not turn a blessed mission into something bad and wrong: it makes that mission wrong from the start. The lesson they learn from the Disallowing is the exact wrong one, Morrison seems to be saying. It is not their exclusion that is wrong: it is exclusion itself. As Misner thinks but does not say:

> They think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them. And when the maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause. Born out of an old hatred, one that began when one kind of black man scorned another kind and that kind took the hatred to another level, their selfishness had trashed two hundred years of suffering and triumph in a moment of such pomposity and error and callousness that it froze the mind. Unbridled by scripture, deafened by the roar of its own history, Ruby, it seemed to him, was an unnecessary failure… How can they hold it together, he wondered, this hard-won heaven defined only by the absence of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange? Who will protect them from their leaders? (306)

They think they are keeping themselves alive in a hostile world, and are preparing for a better world after. They believe they must beware the furrow of God's brow in order to make it to

Paradise. In doing so, however, they make a hell of their time on earth. In deciding to stay after asking himself these questions, Misner points to hope for Ruby. This hope lies in the inevitable opening up of Ruby, to roads and diners and gas stations, to television, to forced encounters with saving difference.

The ending of Paradise emphasizes Ruby's original error by pointing to the alternative possibility of inclusion. In mystical reappearances by the Convent women, perhaps resurrected by Consolata (she "steps into" the white girl, keeping her alive), perhaps never dead, and in the final, mysterious scene, the novel presents moments in which we see these women, alive or dead or somewhere between, coming to terms. All is not peace and forgiveness—Gigi seems to her father to be carrying a gun, and Pallas to her mother looks to be holding a sword—but those who had been apart come together, briefly, and words are spoken, words of the kind that Coffee never spoke to Tea, that Deacon as of yet seems not to have spoken to Steward. The short final scene is the Pietà, a woman "black as firewood" who could be Mary Magna cradling in her lap the head of a woman with tea-colored hair and emerald eyes who must be Consolata, a gender- and color-crossing refiguring of the Virgin holding the dead Christ in her lap that alludes also to the Black Madonna (Bouson 214-15, Menand "War" 82). In the image, Consolata is described: "All the colors of seashells—wheat, rose, pearl—fuse in the younger woman's face" (318). All the colors people come in are together in the faces of these women, as are love, in the company they share, and hope, in

the boat that approaches the shore on which they sit, filled with the lost and the saved, coming to rest (as does the novel, with these words) "before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise" (318). Wherever this scene takes place, whatever the state of these figures, this happens down here, and there is work to be done. And it is Paradise. But not Ruby's Paradise. Morrison's insistence that the last word of the novel should not have been capitalized (Bouson 216) points to this last in a long line of differences. This paradise is not up there and after, and it is not to be established by keeping others out there and admitting only those saved, only those similar. It is down here and now, and it does not exclude.

In a paradise like this, we don't need to think about race. In J.M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K (1983), a story that takes place under Apartheid is devoid of racial identifiers. The story is told through the eyes of a main character who must be black, but he is either too slow or simply unconcerned with such things to notice them, and so we are never given to know who is black and who is white. This absence of seemingly pertinent information is maddening at first. As the novel progresses, it gradually goes unnoted, and attention can wander from the enormous, ostensibly inescapable fact of race in a society based on it and focus on other things: the way power is wielded, human potential for kindness and unkindness, the beauty of the earth. While the setting for Coetzee's novel is hellish, the view of it that Michael K possesses gives readers a glimpse of a kind of

potential color-free paradise. Morrison is up to something similar in Paradise. The paradise we glimpse at the end can also be seen in the opening authorial act of refusing to make race the most important thing we can know about a character. Identifying the first victim of the attack as "the white girl" calls attention to race right off the bat, of course; refusing to tell us which of the Convent women she is calls attention to our own desire to know. And criticizes it.

This criticism is the secret of Paradise. In refusing to name the white girl, Morrison does what she has Pat Best do: she burns the notebooks and files of genealogy, as the fire that took Morrison's house burned her own genealogy-filled manuscripts. These endless records have informed American thinking since the time they were first kept, even before the slave ships crossed the Atlantic, perhaps when the first settlers saw the natives, observed their difference, and saw inferiority. As Mary Rowlandson chronicled in the narrative of her captivity, this perception of others can have a religious source. The Sovereignty and Goodness of God relates her trials in the wilderness to the Old Testament, seeing the Puritans (or "the English") as the chosen people and the natives as pagan, heathens sent by God to test their faith. Godless and unnatural, they must be fought and kept away. From these early moments, race was of primary importance in America. Setting the murderous attack that begins and ends the novel in July 1976, the time of the bicentennial, reminds us of this as well (Dalsgard 241). This need to divide,

to see others as different and therefore to be excluded, has throughout American history been combined with and spurred on by Christianity and by an even broader Western tendency to see things in terms of twos, reductively—black and white, male and female, heaven and hell, innocence and experience, mind and body. This tendency is the most basic private confidence publicly exposed by Paradise. Morrison's inclusion of Native Americans in the history of Ruby, from the Creek whose land Haven was founded on to the dispossessed Cherokee they encountered on their journey, echoes the treatment experienced by Native Americans at the time of European settlement, and so reminds us of how central exclusion and Othering have been to the American story. The secret of Ruby—the blood rule—is one expression of a secret part of the Western tradition not worth passing on.

It is Morrison's secret too. This is what writing the afterword to The Bluest Eye may have shown her. The rigidity of the history Ruby tells itself about itself is Ruby's downfall, or nearly. It is a history in which blood is all. Morrison's first novel was written during the time when she was making herself as a novelist and some were trying to remake America as a fairer, more just society. Yet it is marked by a rigidity similar to that which she sees in Ruby's self-told history. It is this rigidity, this insistence on racial essentialism and on the determinative power of race in America, that leads to Pecola's absence. Morrison's subsequent novels follow this pattern, tracing genealogies back through history, tracing hidden roots in order

to explain visible foliage. Her latest novel was written during a much different time in her life and in the life of America. She is looking back, after her Nobel, during a later stage of her career and during a time not of uncertain, turbulent remaking but rather of endings and reconsiderations. Morrison's acknowledgement of the horrible wrongs of white America to black survives, as does her attention to double consciousness, to the image created in the mind's eye of the victim of racism. It survives in every doubling in Paradise, in every moment when someone faces another and sees either identity or difference, asserting the former or the latter when neither is exactly the case. What changes is what she does with this acknowledgement. What Ruby should have done and may still be able to do, Morrison herself tries to do in this novel. She responds to a past marked by hatred and exclusion not by returning that hatred and repeating that exclusion but by refusing them. By refusing to agree with their assumptions—by refusing to attend to difference, by showing its falseness and the harm it has caused—Morrison refuses to be ruled by it. In doing so, she refuses to accept the words she had put, decades earlier, in Claudia's mouth. For Morrison, in Paradise, it's not too late.

IV. Novelist of this Disorder: Philip Roth and American Pastoral

> Doubtless, we are as slow to conceive of Paradise as of Heaven, of a perfect natural as of a perfect spiritual world. We see how past ages have loitered and erred. "Is perhaps our generation free from irrationality and error? Have we perhaps reached now the summit of human wisdom, and need no more to look out for mental or physical improvement?" Undoubtedly, we are never so visionary as to be prepared for what the next hour may bring forth.
>
> --Henry David Thoreau

> The point, as Marx saw it, is that dreams never come true.
>
> --Hannah Arendt

> *We have no idea how it's going to turn out.*
>
> --Mickey Sabbath

In an October, 2002 interview, Philip Roth was asked about the events of September of the previous year. The interviewer offered, "It has been said many times that with September 11, the United States lost its innocence." Roth responded, "What innocence? That's so naïve. From 1668 to 1865, we had slavery in this country, Then, from 1865 to 1955, a society marked by brutal segregation. What innocence? I don't really know what people are talking about" (Turlin).

Five years earlier, Roth had published American Pastoral (1997), the first of a trilogy of novels about postwar American history.[1] Roth, very much a novelist of his moment throughout his career, a contemporary novelist in the truest sense, turned in

the nineties to the historical novel. American Pastoral tells a history of the Vietnam era, another time when America is said to have lost its innocence. In telling this story, Roth confronts America's belief in its innocence and also the reality of its experience. Long thought to be a novelist of experience, Roth shows in American Pastoral that he does know what people are talking about when they talk about innocence. What happened to the nation in the late sixties and early seventies took place in the context of a history of people dreaming of a new Eden while the world around them caught fire, in part because some of them thought they had to burn it down to build a new world. The sureness with which many in the sixties rejected the old Eden and tried to set up a new one was a manifestation of an old American trait, one responsible for much of the progress the country has made. It is also what gets people killed in the name of ideas. This innocence of conviction and purity of purpose contributes to the particular tragedy around which American Pastoral revolves and to the larger tragedies of Vietnam-era America. Writing from the nineties, when the end of the Cold War engaged much of America in a triumphalist reaffirmation of the nation's innocence and purity, Roth looks back on the years at the center of that era with an eye toward its animating dreams, its tragedies, and the connections between the two.

* * *

[1] I Married a Communist (1998) and The Human Stain (2000) complete the trilogy.

Philip Roth's 1969 novel Portnoy's Complaint famously ends with Dr. Spielvogel's response to his analysand, Alexander Portnoy: "Now vee may perhaps to begin." Dr. Spielvogel's response brings to an end Alex's relentless, book-long confession of sexual misadventure and family conflict. What he intends to begin, perhaps, is the process of Alex truly dealing with his complaint; while the doctor's response is humorous (it is introduced with the subtitle "PUNCH LINE"), it points to the continuing seriousness of Alex's problems. The end of the novel also begins the history of response to it. At the time of its publication, Portnoy was read as an act of rebellion.[2] It tells the story of Alex's struggle to be free from the constraints of his family, his Newark Jewish community, his larger Jewish-American tradition, and from the sensibility and morality for which they stand, a struggle that takes the form of frenzied attempts at sexual liberation. In letting us hear Alex's angst-ridden cry from the couch, Roth let us hear Alex's criticism of the world of his upbringing for ourselves; in doing so, Roth rebelled, in the eyes of many American Jews, against his own community.

With Portnoy's Complaint Roth also jettisoned the solemn weight of his immediate literary tradition and his more distant literary models. The lampooning of Alex's family, sitting around the dinner table screaming about their son's bowel movements, can of course be seen as the novel's way of exposing a community and

[2] For contemporary responses to Portnoy's Complaint that read it as an

a way of life to criticism. What is less apparent but no less important to Portnoy is the literary revolt, one goal of which Roth himself described as "liberating me from an apprentice's literary models," namely Henry James and Gustave Flaubert (Facts 157).[3] Another aspect is that of the more local revolt against the constraints of writing as a member of the Jewish-American "school" of Bernard Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer, a revolt assisted by Saul Bellow, whose The Adventures of Augie March has been cited by Roth as the book that made his writing possible: "Bellow was indeed Columbus for people like me, the grandchildren of immigrants, who set out as American writers after him" (Shop 143). Portnoy is at least as much about defying the influence of James and Flaubert, and Roth's more immediate predecessors and contemporaries, as it is about defying the authority of the world of his upbringing. The angry cry of Portnoy, then, could be said to come not just from the couch but also from the writing desk.

The end of Portnoy thus began Roth's career in earnest. It was not his first success, though. Goodbye, Columbus (1959), his novella and collection of stories, was well-received, as was his first novel, Letting Go (1962). While When She Was Good (1967) met with criticism, it was the criticism of readers disappointed when faced with work not up to the mark already made by a writer of recognized quality. And Roth had been criticized before for his representation of American Jews: the early "Defender of the

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act of rebellion, see Howe, Kazin, Trilling.

[3] For influence, see O'Donnell, who notes, "The specter of James appears repeatedly in Roth's work" (n. 367).

Faith" (1959) provoked accusations of providing fuel for anti-Semitic fires when it first appeared in the New Yorker. Portnoy's Complaint was also not the first time Roth had ventured into relatively more explicit territory, in his coverage of sexuality among Jews, than was common. But the Roth known to most readers, the one who entered the broader public consciousness, is the one who wrote Portnoy's Complaint.[4] And the prolific Roth of the seventies and eighties wrote novels possible only after Portnoy's Complaint—novels that focus unromantically on the customs and mores of the community of his youth and its offspring and do so in language his earlier, "apprentice" books would not have dared, some dealing explicitly with the personal and professional impact of having written a novel such as Portnoy's Complaint.[5]

American Pastoral ends, in 1997, what Portnoy's Complaint began in 1969. If Portnoy's Complaint began Roth's revolt against everything that worked to define his protagonists—the middle class morality, ethnic superiority, and narrow and stifling worldview of American Jewry at mid-century—American Pastoral represents a reevaluation of these things at century's end. If Portnoy also began Roth's literary revolt against the constraining influence of his literary antecedents, American Pastoral represents a reconsideration of the value of those influences and the costs of rejecting them. In the nineties,

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[4] Just how broadly Roth entered the public consciousness with Portnoy's Complaint can be measured by sales—the initial print run of 150,000 hardcover copies ballooned to 420,000 within a year of publication (Cooper 107).

America's retrospective turn, made possible by the relative peace and prosperity following the end of the Cold War, provided the opportunity for Roth to look back at the history his career had thus far spanned. At the center of this history was the sixties, the decade chronologically and ideologically central to the half-century just passed. In the later years of his career and in the twilight glow of the end of the American Century, Roth looks back at all that he and America chose to leave behind and wonders about the cost.

* * *

American Pastoral ends with a question. The narrative voice—which in the last moments has been offering us the main character's thoughts through free indirect discourse, allowing us almost direct access to his reactions to the events of what has surely been the worst day of his life—now seems to leave him behind. This voice asks: "And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" The narrator is Nathan Zuckerman, longtime Roth protagonist. Zuckerman is telling the story, as he imagines it, of Swede Levov, hero of his youth. The Swede, who earned his nickname for his all-American, not-particularly-Jewish good looks, is a former star athlete and successful businessman who has achieved one version of the Jewish-American dream by marrying a Gentile beauty queen, Miss New Jersey no less, and moving away from the ethnic enclave of Newark and out to the country. Zuckerman tells this

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[5] For the fullest consideration of the relationship between Roth's work

story in the wake of his forty-fifth high school reunion in 1995, where he learns of the Swede's death only days before. Zuckerman is thrown into a nostalgic reverie by the reunion, a reverie which is darkened not just by the news of the Swede's death but also by his learning of the 1968 war-protest bombing of the local general store by the Swede's daughter. For Zuckerman and his entire boyhood community, the Swede had embodied the possibility of oneness with America outside the parochial prison of ethnic Jewishness. Learning how the Swede's exemplary life strayed off course, Zuckerman devotes the rest of the novel to asking what went wrong. The novel-within-the-novel that he proceeds to write is his attempt to answer this question. The fact that American Pastoral ends with a question complicates our reading of it. Does Roth really have Zuckerman answer his question with a question, or is the final question rhetorical? This ambiguity shows that "what went wrong" is a hard question to ask, especially when the object of inquiry represents the possibility of things going perfectly right. It also reminds us that the novelist's job may not be to answer questions and resolve ambiguities but rather to lay them before his readers in all of their paradox and irony.

The story of postwar America, for many, is the story of the repeated emergence of the possibility of things going right followed by their eventual failure to do so. The Edenic promise of the American century seemed realized after World War II in the boom that followed the hardships of the Great Depression and

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and his Jewishness, see Cooper.

wartime. As historian James T. Patterson has argued, postwar prosperity affected American attitudes:

> The majority of the American people during the twenty-five or so years following the end of World War II developed ever-greater expectations about the capacity of the United States to create a better world abroad and a happier society at home. This optimism was not altogether new: most Americans, living in a land of opportunity, have always had great hopes for the future. But high expectations, rooted in vibrant economic growth, ascended as never before in the 1950s and peaked in the 1960s, an extraordinarily turbulent decade during which faith in the wealth of the United States—and in the capacity of the federal government to promote progress—aroused unprecedented rights-consciousness on the home front. (vii)

This optimism paradoxically led many to recognize the struggle of those excluded from enjoying that bounty and the internal and external costs of keeping the century American. Utopian hopes themselves inspired by the postwar boom animated the sixties—hopes that the bounty of this Great Society would be shared by all, that the domestic and international power exercised by America's leaders might be used for good. These dreams of the sixties—embodied in movements for civil and women's rights, in protests against the war in Vietnam, and in the "counterculture"—led to much change, but never approached fulfillment. By the mid-

seventies, it was clear to those who believed in these dreams that things were not going to go perfectly right.

For one group of postwar dreamers, the children and grandchildren of immigrants who believed that hard work would enable them to provide a better life for their families, the dream seemed to have come true. A decade or two later and a generation further along—by 1964, or 1968, or 1973—the dream seemed over. The assassination of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, the war, Watergate, and the social influence of countercultural movements led many of these men and women to ask what had gone wrong. For them, it was not necessarily failure to arrive that led to doubts about their dreams of American success; rather, it was the landscape of the place at which they arrived, which they could barely recognize from the pictures in the brochure.

For Zuckerman, the Swede represents this particular second-generation Jewish-American dream of an American paradise, in both its success and its failure. What went wrong for the Swede is what went wrong for this dream. "What is wrong with their life," then, is a significant question. It asks not just where responsibility lies for the personal tragedy that happened to this family, and not even just where their dreams went wrong, but ultimately where America went wrong. How the landscape changed, then, how the American paradise was lost, is the ultimate question asked by American Pastoral. The answer is to be found by

looking back to the historical moment when things went wrong, to the moment that, not coincidentally, made Portnoy's Complaint.

* * *

American Pastoral begins with a two-word sentence: "The Swede." In this beginning we feel the size of the figure to whom we are being introduced; just a mention of the "magical name," bearing the definite article, is enough for one sentence (3). The size of this man was apparent not just in life but especially, it becomes clear when the next sentence begins, "During the war years," in memory. The opening passages recount the fame of the Swede from some unspecified vantage point long after the war (no need to specify: we know which war, as we apparently know the Swede, or ought to), long after the wartime and postwar years of the Swede's youthful heroism and the narrator's youthful hero-worship. Quickly, after this initial singing of our hero's exploits, we learn who our narrator is and from where he is looking back. This unnamed boyhood friend of the Swede's younger brother is "Skip" Zuckerman. The friends sitting with Zuckerman at the baseball game hear the Swede refer to him by his boyhood nickname when they run into each other. They also see that the worship Zuckerman recalls from his days as Skip, when a quick aside from the Swede during football practice was a major event, is still there.

We learn more about the connection between the Swede and Zuckerman when Zuckerman tells of a dinner with him ten years later, to which he was ostensibly invited in order to help the

Swede write a book about his father Lou's life. Zuckerman is maddened by the Swede's failure at the dinner to discuss the mysterious "shocks that befell [his father's] loved ones" to which he alluded in the letter containing his invitation (18). Zuckerman thinks that maybe he had been right after all about the Swede, that, while he was indeed a magnificent athlete, a symbol for the Jews of Weequahic of the possibility of succeeding as Americans, a man who had not just been a Marine drill-sergeant but had married Miss New Jersey, he was not a man with much self-awareness or depth, not a man with subjectivity. The letter inviting Zuckerman to dinner had raised hopes that the Swede had, in suffering, been brought to the awareness that suffering can bring; at the restaurant, he realizes he had not, with the resignation of a writer losing interest.

But it is an angry resignation, as Zuckerman realizes that he wants the Swede to hold up his end of the hero-worship deal, to be more than an all-American surface, more than "the embodiment of nothing" (39). When he asks himself, "Why clutch at him? What's the matter with you" (39), he does so because he realizes that his curiosity about the Swede is motivated by more than writerly desire to dig deeper and is about more than just the Swede: it is about Zuckerman's own fascination with him. And it is a fascination not just with the Swede as he was but with what he has become. That the "Jewishness that he wore so lightly" was responsible for Weequahic's past elevation of the Swede is obvious; his heroism lay less in his on-the-field exploits than

in his "unconsciousness oneness with America" (20). The mystery of the Swede, for Zuckerman, lies in what happens to this assimilated hero, in what kind of person he becomes, in whether he really "succeeds." What Zuckerman wants to know is whether the Swede slides into complacent, superficial blandness, becoming "a human platitude" (23), or achieves an awareness of the harsher realities of life as it is for most humans. Zuckerman wants to know whether the Swede's life "had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore just great, right in the American grain" (31), or, as for Ivan Ilych, the uneventfulness of his life is its own terror. The frustrated sense of anticlimax with which the dinner leaves him is a sign of the mystery's importance. For a moment, when he learns of the Swede's recent prostate surgery, he thinks perhaps the Swede will have been brought to "subjectivity" (20), to a deeper understanding, even a skepticism, by a new sense of mortality, but this hope too is quickly dashed when he sees that he is a "big jeroboam of self-contentment" (29). Unlike Zuckerman, of course, the Swede is asked by life only "To respect everything one is supposed to respect; to protest nothing; never to be inconvenienced by self-distrust; never to be enmeshed in obsession, tortured by incapacity, poisoned by resentment, driven by anger" (29). He is the opposite of the Zuckerman we have come to know.

The chapter ends our introduction to the Swede and to Zuckerman's obsession with him by letting us know, again, what Zuckerman has told us before: "I was wrong" (39). In fact, he was

and he wasn't. The twists in the Swede's story are not what he imagines them to be, but he was right that there was something more there. We learn over the rest of the novel what that something was, and we learn why it is important for Zuckerman from the particular way in which he imagines the rest of the story. But the groundwork for understanding both is laid in this opening chapter, especially in what lies just in the background, in elements seemingly brought up only to be quietly dropped:

There is The Kid from Tomkinsville, the 1940 book Zuckerman calls "the boys' Book of Job" (9) and says could have been titled The Lamb from Tomkinsville (8), which Zuckerman first saw on the Swede's shelf and which tells the story of a good-hearted, innocent baseball hero struck down tragically. Zuckerman describes the drawings of ballplayers as "lean and hungry workingmen" (7) as emerging straight out of the Depression.

There is the prostate surgery, which leads Zuckerman to reflect on his own experience with prostate cancer. He tells the Swede of friends who had come out of surgery somewhat unhappily, either impotent or incontinent or both, doesn't reveal that the diapers were worn by him, and the subject is dropped.

There is the wealth of detail about the manufacture of gloves, from the history of the founding of the family business to the details of making an actual glove down to the fourchette, the piece of leather between the fingers. Intertwined with this history there is the history of Newark, a collection of immigrant neighborhoods such as their own idyllic Weequahic, the recreated

Polish shtetl that grew more like America in the first post-immigrant generation (their fathers') and had become, by the time of the dinner and as a result of the '67 riots, what the Swede calls "the worst city in the world... the car-theft capital of the world" (24).

The importance for Zuckerman of the Swede's fate can be seen early on in the novel in the way the story is framed and in these more-than-atmospheric details that surround it. It is seen as the tragedy of an innocent undeservedly struck down, as the story of the Lamb from Weequahic, which he will tell in this novel and which will be more than "simply a book." It will be more than a kid's story, recollections of a childhood hero, because it is a story told by a writer becoming increasingly, immediately aware of his own mortality. Zuckerman is from the start of the novel overcome by memory, wistfully, elegiacally, but also angrily. Zuckerman's unvoiced rage against how things have turned out for him, emasculated, infantilized, and alone in his house in the Berkshires, frames his investigation into the fate of a man who has been for him a symbol of happy endings.

Beyond Zuckerman's own life, there is a larger cultural frame for his telling of this story. From the beginning of our introduction to the Swede we have been led to see him as a hero of a particular sort, blessed with a "Jewishness that he wore so lightly" and none of the conflict of the hyphenated American, possessing "no striving, no ambivalence, no doubleness" (20). The fate of such a symbol, "the household Apollo of the Weequahic

Jews" (4), born out of wartime Jewish America, is from the novel's start clearly important to the question of assimilation. What makes this story even more important to Zuckerman is what makes it larger, and this is hinted at in the intertwined stories of Newark Maid gloves and Newark itself. The idyllic world of Newark in the forties and fifties, where hard work and attention to detail are rewarded, is important to Zuckerman as the world that spawned the Swede. The loss of that kind of world, however, the burning, the loss of the factories to the third world and of the original families to the suburbs, is a loss not specific to Weequahic. It is, for Zuckerman, the loss in the late sixties of an America that he and his parents' generation strove to join and that the Swede had apparently conquered. If that world is gone, if the world is now a world without values, a world in which children feel that killing pedestrians or themselves in stolen cars means nothing, Zuckerman asks, what then? The story of the Swede, from the very start of American Pastoral, is for Zuckerman and so for Roth about more than the dreams of one man, one town, or one ethnic community: it is about postwar American dreams, and why America came up short fulfilling them.

* * *

Where did these dreams come from? They were born earlier for the first immigrants to Weequahic, fresh off transatlantic ships carrying them to the land of opportunity, and even earlier for the nation, facing West towards an endless frontier. They were re-energized in the boom years following the Second World

War. Zuckerman begins the second chapter's undelivered reunion speech, written afterward, which he describes as "a speech to myself masked as a speech to them" (44):

> Let's remember the energy. Americans were governing not only themselves but some two hundred million people in Italy, Austria, Germany, and Japan. The war-crimes trials were cleansing the earth of its devils once and for all. Atomic power was ours alone. Rationing was ending, price controls were being lifted; in an explosion of self-assertion, auto workers, coal workers, transit workers, maritime workers, steel workers—laborers by the million demanded more and went on strike for it. And playing Sunday morning softball on the Chancellor Avenue field and pickup basketball on the asphalt courts behind the school were all the boys who had come back alive, neighbors, cousins, older brothers, their pockets full of separation pay, the GI Bill inviting them to break out in ways they could not have imagined possible before the war. Our class started high school six months after the unconditional surrender of the Japanese, during the greatest moment of collective inebriation in American history. And the upsurge of energy was contagious. Around us nothing was lifeless. Sacrifice and constraint were over. The Depression had disappeared. Everything was in motion. The lid was

> off. Americans were to start over again, en masse, everyone in it together. (40)

After the defeat of the Axis powers, and especially of Hitler, this was a powerful set of notions for American Jews. Zuckerman goes on to describe the end of the war as "the clock of history reset... a whole people's aims limited no longer by the past" (41). "People" here indicates the American people. No distinction is made for the Jewish people. This resetting of the clock is felt to occasion the erasure of old boundaries, the freeing of a people—a whole people—to pursue American dreams. These ideas of wholeness, of freedom, of time beginning again, are Edenic ideas. To start over again, everyone together, is to return to the Garden.

This beginning is recreated by Zuckerman, in all its rich detail, as a response to his reunion and the speech he makes to himself. With a nod to Proust's madeleine-inspired reverie, Zuckerman's remembering, which does not pull him out of time but sends him "rocketing to its secret core" (45), is helped along by the rugelach handed out at the end of the evening. Wolfing them down, Zuckerman recalls the "apprehensiveness of death" (47) vanishing from Proust in his own search for lost time, and laments the same not happening for him. In the imagined narrative of the Swede's life Zuckerman soon undertakes, the goal is at least partly the same, to overcome death through memory. His method is similar, to supply a rich, almost overwhelming wealth of detail. The result, however, apparently will not be the same.

Zuckerman does supply the detail, though, and in so doing recreates the new postwar Garden in his narrative. The descriptions of the neighborhood, of the glove-making business, from tanning to stretching to cutting to forming to shipping to selling, are presented not just with the glow of nostalgia but with the realist's obsessive drive to depict reality through the weight and thickness of detail. Like William Dean Howells on Silas Lapham's Boston paint factory or Frank Norris on McTeague's San Francisco office, Zuckerman's description of the Levovs' Newark glove-making concern works to convey the truth to be found in the material of life. However, as with the genteel realism of Howells and the determinist naturalism of Norris, Zuckerman's use of detail to present reality "as it is" is shaped by a particular project. If Howells' realism was driven by a democratic impulse, and if Norris's naturalism revealed what he saw as the animal just beneath the thin veneer of civilization, Zuckerman is driven by his own project to shape the "objective" facts of the life of his subjects in particular ways.

That project is to recover a lost, idyllic past and at the same time to ask how it was lost—and at what cost. The thing that complicates a reading of American Pastoral as a straightforward realist novel is the obvious but easily forgotten fact that Zuckerman is not its author. It is so easy to think of him as an authorial stand-in (at the risk of missing Roth's sometimes complicatedly ironic stance toward him) that we might mistake his words for Roth's. Doing so in this case would mean missing the

ways in which Zuckerman's project shapes his representation of reality. Roth does not simply use Zuckerman's reunion experience as an excuse with which to frame a novel about the past. Rather, in his use of this frame he makes clear to us that Zuckerman recreates his own past and the past of the Swede through an act of imagination. He is inspired in the first instance not by the documentary urge but by a reunion and some buttery baked goods, by the death of a childhood idol, and by his own prostate cancer, and, as a result of all of these, by a need both to recapture the past and consider its loss.

These needs are described in the two major encounters Zuckerman has at the reunion, with Jerry Levov and Joy Helpern, conversations that push him to write his novel-within-a-novel. It is the juxtaposition of the warm nostalgia of the latter and the cold shock of the former that pushes Zuckerman away from himself and toward the Swede.

The appearance of Jerry, the Swede's brother and Zuckerman's classmate, explodes the quiet nostalgia of the reunion. The past returns as itself, not as nostalgia or what Jerry calls "the past undetonated" (61). Jerry's news of the Swede's death at first only adds to the litany of losses recited at the reunion. It is only when he tells Zuckerman about "little Merry's darling bomb" (68) that the past opens up. All of Zuckerman's questions about the Swede's apparently absent subjectivity, about what could happen to a man who so perfectly and so literally embodied the dreams of assimilation and success,

are raised again and reframed by what he learns from Jerry: that the Swede's daughter was, in Jerry's words, a "kid who stopped the war in Vietnam by blowing up somebody out mailing a letter at five a.m." (68). He learns that the Swede had in fact acquired subjectivity, in the hardest way, as Jerry tells him:

> The incessant questioning of a conscious adulthood was never something that obstructed my brother... the self-questioning did take some time to reach him. And if there's anything worse than self-questioning coming too early in life, it's self-questioning coming too late. His life was blown up by that bomb. The real victim of that bombing was him. (68)

Jerry goes on to explain how this kind of violence could erupt out in pastoral America, in the perfect life of the Swede, in three words: "That was '68." He continues:

> That was '68, back when the wild behavior was still new. People suddenly forced to make sense of madness. All that public display. The dropping of inhibitions. Authority powerless. The kids going crazy. Intimidating everybody. The adults don't know what to make of it, they don't know what to do. Is this an act? Is the 'revolution' real?... He knew something was going wrong. (69)

But the Swede was, in Jerry's words, "just a liberal sweetheart of a father" who raised his daughter "with all the modern ideas" and who "took it and took it" (69, 70). In this world the "duty"

(72) that was the Swede's central belief could not stand him in good stead, because the things to which he felt responsible were crumbling all around him. For Jerry, this sense of duty to family and to the American dream brought the Swede back from Double A ball to his father's factory, and led him to marry Miss New Jersey and move out to the country, and so in the end it was this sense of duty that led to Merry, to Merry's act, and eventually, we learn almost as an aside, to her death.

For Jerry, the shock of the bomb is due both to the Swede's misplaced sense of duty and also to the ways the world changed. For Zuckerman, it is not so easy. Jerry seems too hard, still too much the resentful little brother to trust as an interpreter of his older brother's life. While as a writer Zuckerman is continuously aware of the ways in which people get other people wrong (talking to Jerry, he calls these layers of misunderstanding caused by the inaccurate pictures people have of each other "the shit" (64)), he still feels it will take a novelist's imagination to get closer to the truth.

Jerry's summary statement—"One day life just started laughing at him and it never let up" (74)—are his last words to Zuckerman, because they are interrupted by the arrival of the woman who "used to be Joy Helpern," an old boyhood crush (77). Their shared remembrance of a class hayride distracts him only for a moment from what he's learned, and in fact throws him back into thoughts of the Swede. Talking about Joy's then-untouched breasts leads Zuckerman to think again about the tyranny of the

body, as the litany of class deaths had led him to, and these thoughts lead him to the tyranny of the Swede's own body over him, the tyranny of the duty of the high school star athlete, of the duty that comes from heroism long after heroism stops being as easily defined as scoring a basket or a touchdown. Zuckerman realizes that the "human confusion" (68) out of which Jerry said the Swede had heroically tried to remove his family had still gotten him, in the end: "A sliver off the comet of the American chaos had come loose and spun all the way out to Old Rimrock and him" (83). This tragedy, the senseless destruction of a man who embodied the American dream for an entire community, is suddenly imbued with extra significance by Zuckerman: "I thought, But of course. He is our Kennedy" (83).

Dancing with the paradoxically crying Joy, Zuckerman reflects on the introduction of this chaos into Swede's life and so into America's, on "the disruption of the anticipated American future that was simply to have unrolled out of the solid American past" (85):

> ...the daughter and the decade blasting to smithereens his particular form of utopian thinking, the plague America infiltrating the Swede's castle and there infecting everyone. The daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the

> counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk. (86)

The Swede's attempt to preserve the American dream he'd been forced to embody was utopian, an attempt to live outside of history. Formed by history, however, by American success in World War II and Jewish success in America, he couldn't run from it, and in the end it ran him over. Zuckerman asks himself, "How," living the ideal life out in an Old Rimrock that saw itself as unchanged since the Revolutionary War, "had he become history's plaything?" (87). Zuckerman notes, "People think of history in the long term, but history, in fact, is a very sudden thing" (87). Whatever happened to America and to the Swede happened suddenly, but not, Zuckerman hopes, without reason.

It is with his guess at this reason that Zuckerman begins his imagined story of the Swede. He begins there because it is where he imagines the Swede must have begun. A man bearing such a sense of duty must have, accurately or not, imagined that the responsibility for his daughter's murderousness lay with him, with some failure of responsibility. Realizing this, Zuckerman then imagines what that perceived failure could have been, as he imagines the Swede must have done, searching his memory and his conscience. Zuckerman's sense seems to be that "the mysterious, troubling, extraordinary historical transition" (88) that was the late sixties exploded the lives of families like the Levovs, "families full of tolerance and kindly, well-intentioned liberal goodwill" (88), regardless of whether the latter disposition

invited or caused the former event. The immediate cause for Merry's violence is Zuckerman's creation and what he chooses to begin his narrative with, seeming to slide into it effortlessly and almost by surprise:

> To the honeysweet strains of "Dream," I pulled away from myself, pulled away from the reunion, and I dreamed... I dreamed a realistic chronicle. I began gazing into his life—not his life as a god or demigod in whose triumphs one could exult as a boy but his life as another assailable man—and inexplicably, which is to say lo and behold, I found him in Deal, New Jersey, at the seaside cottage, the summer his daughter was eleven, back when she couldn't stay out of his lap or stop calling him by cute pet names, couldn't "resist," as she put it, examining with the tip of her finger the close way his ears were fitted to his skull. (89)

So begins the story of the day in which the Swede kisses his daughter the way he kisses, in her stuttering word, "umumumother" (89). He does it because he has unintentionally mocked her stuttering request, and out of his guilt, Zuckerman imagines, he turns what had been an innocent summer-long intimacy into a moment of passion and, ultimately, a paradise into an inferno.

The sentence with which this narrative begins is the last in the novel in which Zuckerman's "I" appears. After, as at the end of the sentence, the rest of the novel is narrated, but by a

narrator who has chosen to fade into the background, taking the first person singular pronoun with him. He absents himself at the start of his narrative, which begins not at the beginning but *in medias res*, with a shocking moment for which we are totally unprepared. It is a moment apparently meant to stand for the liberal permissiveness of his family and of so many families of the time whose children seemed to turn upon them and their nation. But it is a moment that calls for skepticism, as we know that its creator, Zuckerman, did in fact create it, and not from the research he says provided material for other parts of his narrative but out of whole cloth. So our suddenly absent narrator reminds us of his presence by his flagrant imagination of events not evidenced in the record, and as a result of this reminder we remember also that this narrative is motivated by a project. We remember this because of everything we have read so far, preparing us for the ways in which Zuckerman's own concerns will shape his recreation of the Swede's life.

The musical accompaniment that the one-man reunion band provides to the beginning of Zuckerman's narrative also reminds us of this project, of the fact that there is more motivating this narrative than nostalgia. He is compelled to pull away from himself by much more than selfless, novelistic curiosity, as the novel's first epigraph makes plain in its quotation of the same Johnny Mercer song:

> Dream when the day is thru,
> Dream and they might come true,

Things are never as bad as they seem,

So dream, dream, dream.

Zuckerman is driven by his recently sharpened sense of his mortality, his sense that his day will soon be through, and by his sudden discovery. At the root of the Swede's story, re-created through a dream, and of his own story, are two larger stories. One is the one about the "dreams" that might come true, the dreams that made the Swede so important to Weequahic and that make him so important to the adult Zuckerman: American dreams. The other is about "things," the raw lumber of history whose hard, rough surface these dreams seek to plane smooth. The effortless path of the Swede's razor-sharp American dream, Zuckerman discovers, is interrupted, caught on the knot of the sixties. How things got to be "as bad as they seem" for such a good, ostensibly invulnerable man who lived by dreams so apparently right is the question Zuckerman sets out to answer. In short, he dreams his "realistic chronicle" in order to ask whether what happened to the Swede was the fault of the material or the tool.

* * *

> In Portnoy the Jewish son had his revenge... A whole middle class of sons and daughters, turning and turning within the widening gyre of the nuclear Jewish family—nucleus indeed of the Jewish experience and the first scenario of the psychoanalytic drama—found in Portnoy its own fascination with the details of

> childhood. It was this emphasis on the unmentionable, Roth's gift for zanily working out inaccessible details to the most improbable climax, like Portnoy masturbating into a piece of liver, that was the farce element so necessary to Roth's anger. There was the calculated profanation of mother, father, the most intimate offices of the body—a profanation by now altogether healthy to those therapeutized members of the professional middle class to whom everything about the body had become, like the possibility of universal destruction through the Bomb, small talk at the dinner table. (Kazin 148)

Like most readings of Portnoy's Complaint, the account Alfred Kazin offers here interprets Roth's public unveiling of the heretofore private workings of bodies and of families as a calculated act of revenge on his own family and on the claustrophobia-inducing Jewish family in general. In 1969, Kazin writes, the shock was palpable, carrying the weight of Roth's anger, but it was not unprepared for; the novel "captured perfectly a generation psyche which was more anchored on family, and more resentful of it, than any other" (147). This generation recognized the anger and was not uncomfortable with its vehicle of expression. The preceding generation, as reactions indicated, was not so comfortable.

To ascribe the difference between these two reactions to intergenerational conflict is sensible; Roth clearly seems in

Portnoy's Complaint to be striking out against perceived inherited constraints.[6] Kazin, following Roth's lead in the figure of Spielvogel, sees this conflict played out on a field chalked with the new lines of psychoanalyzed culture's game, in which an outpouring of the darkest secrets and desires is only the beginning of a journey towards self-understanding. Kazin does not see Roth as a social commentator in a broader sense, however. Citing Roth's comments in his 1961 lecture (reprinted as "Writing American Fiction" in Reading Myself and Others (1975)) on contemporary reality outdoing the imagination of the American writer, Kazin acknowledges that Roth is aware of the great historical changes of his day. However, he denies that they are Roth's subject: "Though the 1960s closed on more public disorder than Roth could have dreamed of, he did not become the novelist of this disorder, or even the journalist of it" (147).

Roth would not have disagreed at the time with this characterization then for many years after. To quote from his later discussion of the novel in The Facts at greater length:

> [Portnoy's Complaint] was a book that had rather less to do with "freeing" me from my Jewishness or my family (the purpose divined by many, who were convinced by the evidence of Portnoy's Complaint that the author had to be on bad terms with both) than with liberating me from an apprentice's literary models,

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[6] Greenberg, among many others, argues for the importance of intergenerational struggle to Roth's work, connecting it to a larger

> particularly from the awesome graduate school authority of Henry James, whose Portrait of a Lady had been a virtual handbook during the early drafts of Letting Go, and from the example of Flaubert, whose detached irony in the face of a small town woman's disastrous delusions had me obsessively thumbing through Madame Bovary during the years I was searching for the perch from which to observe the people in When She Was Good. (157)

In 1988 as in 1969, Roth does not disagree with Kazin: he describes his novel as less a comment on a cultural moment than an attempt to break old literary constraints. Roth's objection to what he sees as a misreading of Portnoy's Complaint is on one level an objection to the biographical assumption—that Alexander Portnoy's feelings and struggles are in some way his own. As strangers on the street call out "Carnovsky!" to Zuckerman in Zuckerman Unbound (1981), confusing him with his Portnoyesque character, so Roth feels critics misidentify him with his character. He also objects to the critics' characterization of his book as an unreflective call for liberation, a characterization they make because of their failure to note the author's ambivalence toward the freedom for which Alex fights.

The freedom Alexander Portnoy wants is freedom from his family, embodied especially in his mother (whose authority and presence were so overwhelming that a young Alex would rush home

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"cultural origin of transgression" (487). On the father-son conflict in

from school to try to catch his mother transforming from his teacher back to herself) and freedom from himself. It is a self he is still not free of at the end of the novel, when he cries, "Nothing but self! Locked up in me!" (280). He is not free of family or of the traditional sexual mores they represent for him, standing outside the locked bathroom door of his psyche, asking what he's doing in there. His affairs do not lead to a freer, guiltless existence.

Portnoy's Complaint was mistaken as a simple manifesto of the sexual revolution by critics such as Diana Trilling and Irving Howe because they failed to recognize the note of ambiguity in Roth's presentation of Alex's attempts to free himself. But the book, while not a wholehearted manifesto for liberation, is not a condemnation either. The difficulty Alex encounters in trying to liberate himself is more a comment on how hard it is to do than an argument that it is not the right thing to.

The liberation Roth wants to focus on in later comments about the novel is that from literary convention. Part of that liberation was about content, about the freedom to mention the unmentionable, and part was stylistic. Discussing in The Facts the "ingredients" that made up Portnoy's Complaint, Roth cites the "reckless narrative disclosure" he learned from his own psychoanalysis, and especially notes a new kind of language, inspired by

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Roth's work, see Rubin-Dorsky.

> the ferocity of the rebellious rhetoric unleashed against the president and his war, the assault that Johnson's own seething cornball bravado inspired and from which even he, with his rich and randy vein of linguistic contempt, had eventually to flee in defeat, as though before a deluge of verbal napalm. It bedazzled me, this enraged invective so potent as to wound to the quick a colossus like Lyndon Johnson, especially after my long, unnatural interlude of personal and literary self-subjugation. (137-38)

The rebellion seems here to take on a social cast, in spite of Roth's efforts to insist otherwise. In both asserting the right of full disclosure of private life (his characters', if not his own) and also claiming a style as incendiary as napalm, Roth recognizes that in writing, he is performing a social act. Whether or not Portnoy's Complaint was intended as social commentary at the time, whether or not Roth meant to be, in Kazin's words, "the novelist of this disorder," of the social changes sweeping away old rules and old conventions, whether or not Portnoy was a part of those changes or a comment upon them—whatever the case, it seems that in 1969 (and 1988) Roth preferred not to think about his novel in those terms.

He prefers not to, but does have his characters think of Zuckerman's work in these terms. In The Ghost Writer, Zuckerman receives a letter from a family friend (a judge, fittingly) asking, "Can you honestly say that there is anything in your

short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels?" (103-4). While the question is hyperbolic, the recognition of the work as grounded in and acting within a social context is not entirely undercut. In Zuckerman Unbound, Zuckerman recognizes that he is not writing in a vacuum, that his work, misread or not, is taken by those around him as a rejection. This recognition culminates in the (possibly misheard) last word of his father, "Bastard." He takes it as a condemnation of his work. Any doubt he may have about what he heard is erased by his brother:

> You are a bastard. A heartless conscienceless bastard. What does loyalty mean to you? What does self-denial, restraint—anything at all? To you everything is disposable! Everything is exposable!... Love, marriage, family, children, what the hell do you care? To you it's all fun and games. But that isn't the way it is for the rest of us. And the worst is how we protect you from knowing what you really are! And what you've done! You killed him, Nathan... With that book. Of course he said "Bastard." He'd seen it! He'd seen what you'd done to mother and him in that book! (397)

Carnovsky, though intended by Zuckerman not as personal confession but rather as satirical comedy, is taken as an attack on his own family, on Jewish tradition, on family and tradition. It is this reading, as much as the world of his birth, from which Zuckerman attempts to unbind himself in the three novels and

novella of Zuckerman Bound (1985). He does so by protesting both the employment of critical fallacies which allow readers to mistake his narrators for himself and his novels for his life and also the refusal to recognize his work as satire. It is the guilt over this perceived rejection and the reaction to it with which Zuckerman binds himself in The Anatomy Lesson (1983). The chronic, inexplicable pain tortures Zuckerman throughout the novel, so much so that he tries to escape it by ending his career as a writer and going to medical school. Try as he might to deny the social aspect of his work, Zuckerman is bound by it. Fiction, Roth clearly shows in his own fiction, is never only a matter of style and subject. It is always about the world.

It takes a long time for Roth to recognize the ambiguity of his personal literary liberation, to see that it was more than personal and more than literary. Nearly three decades pass before he acknowledges, in his fiction, that his liberation in fiction in fact was a rejection not just because his family and larger community said it was, but because its results were as mixed as the results of Alex Portnoy's. As Alex struggles fitfully to liberate himself from the physical and psychic home of his mother and father, and as Zuckerman liberates himself as a writer only to be accused of literally killing his father, so Roth sees that his own liberation as a writer and a man was not just achieved at great personal cost but was part of a larger cultural liberation that came at its own cost. When Roth finally fully considers his career in the context of the times in which it was born, he

recognizes that rejection and loss are inherent in liberation because the liberator can see only his own innocence and purity. In the old American pattern, the dream must be realized in toto, the old people and ideas gotten out of the way. Only when he considers this does Roth stop protesting against misreading and parochial ignorance, and consider for himself what he lost in 1969. He is able to consider these losses, paradoxically, because he turns his attention away from the tangle of biography and career and toward the times themselves.

He is able to make this turn in large part because of the ways in which the world has changed by the mid-nineties. Roth's recognition of the losses inherent in the liberations begun in the sixties, losses that were embodied by and expressed in Portnoy's Complaint, provides him with the answer to the question the story of American Pastoral leads him to ask, that is, whether what happened to the Swede is the fault of the dreamer or of the world in which he dreams. If an answer is to be found, it will be in the last two sections of the book, "The Fall" and "Paradise Lost," in which Merry reappears and the Swede's world finally falls apart.

* * *

"The Fall" begins with our introduction to Rita Cohen, a tiny, childlike figure who bears the heavy weight in this novel of all that has gone wrong with the world. She comes to the Swede four months after Merry's disappearance, pretending to be writing a thesis at Wharton on the leather industry in Newark. The Swede,

raw from the recent events of the bombing and his daughter's disappearance, welcomes the chance to give Rita a tour of the factory and lose himself in "all the history and all the lore" (121) of the glove-making business. He feels himself swept up by his words, by "his father's words" (121), and for a moment escapes the recent rupture of his world by wrapping himself in the ideal, Edenic world of his father. Roth produces mountains of realistic detail as the Swede takes Rita through the history of tanning ("Six-thousand-year-old relics of tanning found somewhere—Turkey, I believe" (123)), stories of the old European craftsmen who first manned his father's cutting room in suits and ties never removed, descriptions of the way the practiced hands and the spit of the men working the leather produces the perfect glove. The precise images make us feel the concreteness, the solid rightness of form of the place and of the past which made it. And we connect that rightness, as the Swede does, to his past, to his memories of taking the now-lost Merry around his factory, showing her how things are done right. Because he does this through the figure of Rita (whom he has begun to call Honey as he acts more and more fatherly towards her), because he finds himself thrown back into paradise, Rita's revelation that she is really there to deliver a message from Merry, still alive and somewhere near, is even more jarring.

Meeting in secret the first few times with Rita, the Swede is exposed to the kind of rant with which readers of Roth are familiar, but Rita's thoughts are not typical of Roth characters.

Explaining why Merry hates him, Rita says that Merry's anger is righteous, and flows from her upbringing by "Mr. Law-abiding New Jersey Fucking Citizen" (137), and his lovely wife, "Lady Dawn of the Manor" (135), "kindly rich liberals who own the world" (139) and who, respectively, ignored and hated their daughter. Of the murder, she says, "You're really stuck on that, aren't you? Do you know how many Vietnamese have been killed in the few minutes we've had the luxury to talk about whether or not Dawnie loves her daughter? It's all relative, Swede. Death is all relative" (139). Rita's venom bowls over the Swede, who imagines crushing her skull until her ideas pour out of her nose. Rita's rants strike him as thoughtless, violent, dismissive rhetoric, as a nonsensical rejection of everything that made her generation possible. He wonders where a girl like her could come from, "this child who did not know anything and would say anything and more than likely do anything—resort to anything to excite herself" (139).

Hoping that he will be able to see his daughter, the Swede meets Rita in a hotel room with a briefcase full of cash. Ignoring his repeated announcement that he had brought the money, Rita lies down on the bed, sings a childhood song he and Dawn had taught Merry to help her overcome her stuttering, and says, "Let's f-f-f-fuck, D-d-d-dad" (143). She then mockingly attempts either to seduce or disgust him, or both. As the moment of their meeting moves from the innocent paradise of glove-making and memories of the Swede's young family to the Swede's rude

expulsion from that remembered world by Rita's announcement, and as in this later meeting Rita is the depraved figure of sexual knowledge, her desire or depravity an attempt to introduce the Swede to the reality of the world outside his garden, so the historical moment that Rita and Merry embody is figured as a time of the movement from paradise to fallen world. The precocious, unwanted knowledge Rita forces on the Swede is a figure for the knowledge the liberations of the sixties bring to American culture.

In finding out just what Rita could do, just what she knows, he also hears her answer to the real question—not where a girl like her could come from, but where the girl his daughter became came from. The "something he could not name" (147) in that hotel room, the thing from which he runs, is not just the self-described "depraved" (146) Rita but the summertime childhood kiss he gave to Merry, the moment with which Zuckerman begins his story. Merry can say and do anything because of the unspeakable act the Swede will not name. The momentary lapse committed by a man who embodies responsibility is brought to his attention by this nightmare creation of families like his, Rita Cohen, and is thus tied to her in his mind and in ours. The moment of permissiveness, the moment when the thing that must not be done is done, is connected to the child-women who do all the things that must not be done, who know what they should not know, and to the general permissiveness of the well-intentioned liberal parents who allow this fruit to be eaten.

It is five years before the Swede sees his daughter and begins to make these connections. During this period, from 1968 to 1973, he watches the newspapers, hoping Rita will turn up in connection to one of the bombings sweeping across the country. "Bombs are going off everywhere" (147): variations of the word "bomb" appear thirteen times on one page, hammering home the violence until the word itself becomes merely a sound, a meaningless signifier, the very real, exploding referent of which is lost in repetition as it must have been lost to the readers of the papers and the watchers of the news like the Swede. That it is never a completely empty signifier for the Swede becomes clear when he fears that the body found at one bombing is his daughter's. Ironically, the one thing to allay that fear is news of further bombings: "The torso's not hers! Merry is alive!" (150).

Aside from raising and dashing the Swede's hopes, the bombings remind him of the violence Merry witnessed as a girl:

> It was back in '62 or '63, around the time of Kennedy's assassination, before the war in Vietnam had begun in earnest, when, as far as everybody knew, America was merely at the periphery of what was going haywire over there. The monk who did it was in his seventies, thin, with a shaved head and wearing a saffron robe. Cross-legged and straight-backed on an empty city street somewhere in South Vietnam, gracefully seated like that in front of a crowd of

> monks who had gathered to witness the event as though to observe a religious ritual, the monk had upended a large plastic canister, poured the gasoline or kerosene, whatever it was, out of the canister and over himself and drenched the asphalt around him. Then he struck the match, and a nimbus of ragged flames came roiling out of him... No screaming, no writhing, just his calmness at the heart of the flames—no pain registering on anyone on camera, only on Merry and the Swede and Dawn, horrified together in their living room. Out of nowhere and into their home... the monk came to stay. (153)

Searching for an explanation for what Merry had become, an alternative to that hinted at by Rita and by Zuckerman at the start of his story, the Swede seizes on this moment. Merry was haunted by this image for weeks, crying through nightmares about it, trying to understand it. The Swede read to her from the papers, explaining the situation in South Vietnam, unwittingly feeding her conviction that the "gentle p-p-people" (154) of the earth are at the mercy of the great conscienceless mass, but calming her, until another self-immolation made the evening news, and then another, beginning a series of repeated images that did not allow her to forget her new knowledge of the world.

For Merry these images embodied the injustice of the world and the violence necessary to awaken people to it. For the Swede it was an image of the senseless violence visited on the

blameless American family, perverting its values, producing young people who thoughtlessly reproduced the violence. And he asserts and reasserts the blamelessness of the family, forcing into the background another explanation, the "something" he cannot face, "trying to convince himself that no other explanation existed, that nothing else sufficiently awful had ever happened to her, nothing causal even remotely large enough or shocking enough to explain how his daughter could be the bomber" (157).

The times explode before the Swede's eyes, in the news, in his business, and finally in his own home life, in the village of Old Rimrock. He notes the stories from the local papers tacked to the Community Club bulletin board. Even his personal tragedy is filtered through the news, made public, his presence as a Jew in this town as old as the American Revolution suddenly more obvious, his daughter's desecration of small town, old American values made plain for all to see. The outer-directed Swede suddenly acquires the inner life Zuckerman had wondered about. At the heart of this inner life, filled with "tyrannical obsessions, stifled inclinations, superstitious expectations, horrible imaginings, fantasy conversations, unanswerable questions," is remorse, "even," he thinks, "for that kiss when she was eleven and he was thirty-six" (173). He asks himself, finally allowing this memory into his consciousness, "Could that have done it? Could anything have done it? Could nothing have done it?" (174). He could answer that it was the violence of the times, embodied in the figure of the burning monk, that produced the monster

Merry became, or maybe the permissiveness of the successful liberal Americans. Or Merry simply might be unexplainable, the product of chaos.

By the time the Swede receives a letter from Rita in 1973 telling him that Merry is living in the Ironbound section of Newark, he has remade his life and brought Dawn back from the edge of suicidal depression. Dawn blames him for her breakdown, for turning her in real life into the Miss America her becoming Miss New Jersey had promised but not delivered. She had begun her road back with a face-lift and continued it with the sale of their revolutionary era stone house, the house of the Swede's childhood dreams, and the building of a new, contemporary one. Her rejection of the old house, telling the architect she'd hated it ever since they'd moved in, wounds the Swede, but Dawn's reawakening is enough for him. Relating the Swede's reflections on all this, Zuckerman recreates their pasts, their youth together and separately, he a young marine discovering America in the other, varied Americans he encounters in the service, she a beauty queen, they together the perfect American couple, living the pastoral life with their cows and their happy daughter. The Swede cannot reject this recreated past and the dreams that shaped it for him, as Dawn seems to be doing and as Merry did. The hatred for America that consumed Merry is unimaginable to him: "He loved America. Loved being an American" (206). He had lived his life under an American nickname he loved as he loved the way his father would use these names, saying, "Fill 'er up,

Mac. Check the front end, will 'ya, Chief?" (208). The Swede feels as if "Life was laughing at him" (216). The dream in which he believed is rejected with such thoughtlessness and fought against with such absurd pointlessness that the Swede, still-living embodiment of that dream, becomes absurd even to himself.

The middle section of the novel, "The Fall," ends with the Swede's finding Merry in Newark, and with the conversation he has soon afterward with his brother. Both conversations are shocking, the second a scalding rebuke of the Swede by a more cynical Jerry, the former a sense-assaulting encounter with the mentally and physically deteriorating Merry, made more shocking by the memories surrounding it in the retelling. In these two moments, any innocence left clinging to the Swede is lost as he falls finally from the America he believed in into what America has become.

Driving to find Merry, the Swede remembers Saturday morning trips with his father to pick up piecework done in the homes of immigrant Italian families, before the factory existed. These memories, of families working hard together, becoming Americans, are juxtaposed to the sight of his daughter. Newark. Merry, who has become a Jain, wears the foot of an old stocking across her mouth to avoid breathing in and so killing helpless microorganisms. She is filthy and smelly, and lives in a dirty room in the worst part of town furnished only with a mattress on the floor. Hearing Merry's story, he thinks that all his efforts to maintain order as a man and as a father had been futile, that

he'd lived under an illusion: "She is not in my power and she never was. She is in the power of something that does not give a shit. Something demented. We all are. Their elders are not responsible for this. They are themselves not responsible for this. Something else is" (256).

He thinks this as he listens to Merry's account of her five years underground, a killer and a victim herself, and after he leaves her. Sitting at his desk in the empty factory, the Swede is filled with images of his daughter being raped, images linked in his mind to the riots, the "women pushing baby carriages heavily loaded with cartons of liquor and cases of beer" (268) linked to the rapist shitting on his daughter's prone, violated body. These images of the perversion of the most basic things, of motherhood, of sex, of excretion, paint a picture for the Swede of a world upside down, a world so chaotic that the responsible man has no way to influence anything, no way to keep order. In this state of helplessness, he calls Jerry, who offers little in the way of comfort. Expressing his shock at what he has learned about his daughter, the Swede is met by criticism, first of his not dragging his daughter out of her hovel, then of the compulsion to always do the right thing that drove his daughter to this life, of his being "still in your old man's dreamworld," with which the real world has nothing to do:

> You wanted Miss America? Well, you've got her, with a vengeance she's your daughter! You wanted to be a real American jock, a real American marine, a real American

> hotshot with a beautiful Gentile babe on your arm? You longed to belong like everybody else to the United States of America? Well, you do now, big boy, thanks to your daughter. The reality of this place is right up in your kisser now. With the help of your daughter you're as deep in the shit as a man can get, the real crazy American shit. America amok! America amuck! (277)

The causal connection Jerry makes between the Swede's belief in the world's orderliness and the chaos in which his daughter is now drowning does not convince him. But he no longer believes in order, no longer believes in the chalk lines on the field. He doesn't believe in Jerry's explanation, no longer believes in explanation at all: "Reasons are in books" (281).

The Swede perceives the fall as the knowledge of the impossibility of knowing, of the chaos in which cause and effect seem to have broken down. This understanding of the fall, however, is not enough for Zuckerman or for Roth. Jerry's notion that the Swede's American dream is to blame does not seem enough either, and the fall of the Swede's world is not for them attributable entirely to the acquisition of a different kind of knowledge, the knowledge of abandon and carnality, of rejection of restraint and respect, though that is part of it. Living the pastoral life in his stone colonial-era house on Arcady Road, Swede's fate has more to do with the meaning of pastoral, not the original ancient Greek and Roman meaning but rather its

revisions. The idealized rural life championed by Virgil in his eclogues may be what the Swede envisions moving out from Newark, but it is not all that Roth is invoking. Since ancient contrarians pointed out the real Arcadia of the pastoral was a backward, savage place, people have been exposing as myth the invidious comparison of city to country, embodied in rustic images of bounding livestock and simple shepherds. In the seventeenth century, Guercino and Poussin contributed to this exposure in successive paintings of shepherd's tombstones inscribed with the motto "Et in Arcadia ego." Even in ideal rural life I exist, says Death; even the perfect life is only life and therefore imperfect. While the fall of the Swede's ostensibly perfect world is not due merely to its falling prey to a violent outside world, it does not seem true to the novel either to say that the fall of this world is due to its hidden imperfections suddenly manifesting themselves. One thing Roth's allusion to the pastoral tells us is that there are no perfect, pure, innocent places, populated by postwar landed gentry or countercultural rebels or ideological revolutionaries. Each may think that his or her way is the only way and that the old ways must be rejected in toto, but there is death in that rejection.

* * *

Looking back on the late sixties and early seventies as the time when the forbidden fruit of liberation was eaten, "Paradise Lost," the last section of American Pastoral, is an examination of what was lost as a result of liberation. It is set during a

dinner party the Levovs throw for a few friends and the Swede's parents the evening after the Swede finds Merry. It opens, "It was the summer of the Watergate hearings": the explosion Merry's bomb was meant to affect, an explosion of American ways and beliefs, has already occurred, and the blast is beginning to be felt, the ripples spreading outward like those in films of atomic bomb tests (285). It is after the war in Vietnam finally began to fall apart, after the Kennedys and King and Malcolm X were assassinated, after the summer of love and Altamont and the Manson family. As the blasts spread outward from New York, San Francisco, Washington, Alabama, and Vietnam, they reach as far out as bucolic Old Rimrock and as deep as the close-guarded heart of the Swede.

Outwardly, though, the America of Old Rimrock, like the American in the Swede, is unruffled. The back porch of the Swede's house, same as it ever was, is close enough to the field where they grazed their cows that if Dawn wanted to, she could call to them and they would come. But Merry is gone, so there is no little girl to see the cattle before she goes to sleep, and they have been sold, along with all the equipment. Instead of sitting on the porch watching their herd on the hill, the Swede and Dawn are watching the replay of the Watergate hearings on television with his parents. Even this is haunted by memories of Merry. As Lou sits and yells about Nixon and Erlichman and the others to whom he writes letter after letter of condemnation, the Swede remembers the letters he used to write to Johnson about

Vietnam, letters he would show Merry in an attempt to get her to channel her hatred, to express it in a less frightening way. He tried to get her to be less vocal at school, "to nip this in the bud" (288), to show her how people can be reasonable and still be angry at their government and how he was one of them: "This family is one hundred percent against this goddamn Vietnam thing. You don't have to rebel against your family *because your family is not in disagreement with you*" (290).

They are haunted by the Swede's failure to nip this in the bud, and the subject comes up, in spite of the Swede's keeping secret his finding Merry, when he misspeaks and says "Merry's big beefsteak tomatoes" instead of "Dawn's" (292). They briefly discuss their hopes that she might resurface somewhere, but return quickly to the television and release their frustration and rage on Nixon. The moment ends with the four of them on the porch, "in tears, holding one another, huddled together and weeping on that big old back porch as though the bomb had been planted under the house and the porch was all that was left of the place. And there was nothing the Swede could do to stop them or to stop himself" (300). It seems to the Swede that all they have left is each other, that everything else has been reduced to rubble, but as it turns out, the shock waves have reached farther than he thought.

Bill and Jessie Orcutt, a couple invited for dinner, are old stock, his antecedents "the prominent legal family of Morris County" (300). On the Levovs' first moving in, Bill took the

Swede on a historical tour of the area, to Washington's headquarters and to a cemetery as old as the Revolution, where he shows him the grave of "the first Morris County Orcutt" (305), who'd fought in the Revolution. The hoary grandeur of Morris County and the Orcutt clan is juxtaposed with the prosaic fact that whenever the Swede heard "Morris" from Orcutt, he had the same reaction he'd had when his father had first told him about the old Morris Canal that used to end in Newark: he'd think of his late uncle Morris, for whom he had first thought the Canal was named. The contrast of the blue blood and the new blood, heard in the difference in sound between Morris as the name of a WASP county and Morris as the name of a Jewish uncle, did not escape the Swede when he first moved out to Old Rimrock, against his father's protestations that it hadn't been so long since the Klan had been in the neighborhood and that he would be surrounded by Roosevelt-hating Republicans. To the Swede, though, Old Rimrock was America, in all of its Revolutionary inheritance and its postwar promise, a promise Lou couldn't understand, as the Swede explained to Dawn: "Nobody dominates anybody anymore. That's what the war was about. Our parents are not attuned to the possibilities, to the realities of the postwar world, where people can live in harmony, all sorts of people, no matter their origins" (311). For the Swede, this sense of America's promise was rooted in a pastoral sense of America, a deracinated, nondenominational Americanness embodied for the Swede in the figure of Johnny Appleseed. He even imagined he was Johnny

Appleseed on long weekend morning walks to the village, tossing imaginary seeds as he went.

The Levovs no longer even have each other anymore, it turns out, because of Orcutt, who has ended up working for them as the architect of the new house and, in his spare time, becoming Dawn's lover. The Swede discovers that Dawn wasn't just tired of the old stone house, that the "unfaithfulness to the house was never unfaithfulness to the house—it was unfaithfulness" (335). As he glimpses the possibility of Merry returning to the family, he discovers the family itself is in jeopardy.

Zuckerman connects the disintegration of the Swede's marriage to the disintegration of American culture. The conversation at dinner alternates between Watergate and Deep Throat, which is being shown not just in adult theaters but in regular movie theaters, to the disdain of Lou. As Bill Orcutt sympathetically (and ironically) responds to Lou's expressions of dismay, "It's not the same out there anymore, in case you haven't heard" (345). Lou responds by talking about the world of glove-making and all the values embodied in it, which he believes are no longer respected in this historical moment in America (even invoking Scott, historical novelist and son of a glover, and Shakespeare, sometimes-historical playwright and also son of a glover, to make his point). That social conditions have changed is no surprise to Lou, but that no one seems to care shocks him. Especially shocking is the fact that no one seems inclined to protect children from the "degrading things" afloat in the

culture, things that are "an affront to decency and to decent people" (358).

Hearing this conversation, during which another guest, Marcia Umanoff, a cynical academic, says, "And what is so inexhaustibly interesting about decency?... Not the richest response to life I can think of" (359, 60), the Swede is unable to keep things pushed down in his mind. The inner life Zuckerman had wanted to see in him, born with the bombing, is no longer under control, and he imagines the details of Orcutt and his wife together as he earlier had imagined Merry's rape. Confronting these latest personal affronts to his sense of decency, filled with an uncontrollable and sudden "frenzied distrust of everyone" (357), the Swede listens to his guests debate the larger loss of decency in America. Challenged (again by Orcutt) to say what response she would recommend, perhaps "the high road of transgression," Marcia defends herself against Lou's incredulity by referring to Genesis:

> "Isn't that what the Garden of Eden story is telling us?"
>
> "What? Telling us *what*?"
>
> "Without transgression there is no knowledge."
>
> "Well, that ain't what they taught me," he replied, "about the Garden of Eden. But then I never got past the eighth grade."
>
> "What *did* they teach you, Lou?"

> "That when God above tells you not to do something, you damn well don't do it—that's what. Do it and you pay the piper. Do it and you will suffer from it for the rest of your days."
>
> "Obey the good Lord above," said Marcia, "and all the terrible things will vanish." (360)

The paradise that is lost for the Swede, that is finally crumbling before his eyes as he is teased with the impossible possibility of its restoration, is here debated by the champion of liberation and the champion of restraint, and it as if all the terrible things the Swede has tried to keep out of his life all his life have flooded into his dining room. He is driven to consider this when Marcia turns the discussion of Linda Lovelace's career choice into a comparison of prostitution and beauty contests. Looking at the abundance on his table, the beefsteak tomatoes and red onions and corn in bandanna-lined wooden buckets, he sees it representing "the sad inventory of his domestic bounty" (364), what is left of his unfulfilled hopes. Amid the talk of limits and transgression and convention, the Swede sees the irony of his faith in the future. Even Dawn's recuperation from her breakdown, her coming back to life, was not what it appeared; she had not had her face redone and a new house built for herself, for them, but for her and Orcutt. The fall is complete, his own wife a transgressor. "The outlaws are everywhere," he thinks, "They're inside the gates" (366).

Zuckerman has the Swede question his faith in the American order he has believed in all of his life just as Jessie, Orcutt's drunken wife, responding to Lou's attempting to get her to try pie and milk instead of scotch, stabs him in the temple with a fork. Unable even to recognize what she has done, Jessie is tragic, a casualty, and the act an example of the disorder the Swede is confronting. But Marcia, who revels in this disorder, is not tragic. Rather, Zuckerman presents her as guilty of not trying to stem the tide of the disintegration she only too clearly recognizes. She fills the chair Jessie has just been lifted out of, the demonic replacing the merely pathetic, and laughs. She is one of those who choose to laugh

> at their obtuseness to the flimsiness of the whole contraption, to laugh and laugh and laugh at them all, pillars of a society that, much to her delight, was going under—to laugh and to relish, as some people, historically, always seem to do, how far the rampant disorder had spread, enjoying enormously the assailability, the frailty, the enfeeblement of supposedly robust things. (423)

The enormous enjoyment Marcia feels at the sight of a man nearly losing an eye stands for the detachment of her attitude, for the lack of humanity in her insistence on the value of liberation and of nothing else. That she should laugh at the sight of a sad, drunken woman absentmindedly holding a blood-tipped fork, for the

Swede, is a sign that the last ripple has finally spread out to Old Rimrock and into his kitchen.

This sight is the image with which American Pastoral ends and against which is set its final question of what is less worth scorn, what less deserving of laughter than the life of the Levovs. The supposedly robust things for which they are meant to stand have been exposed in all of their frailty. Zuckerman returns in the last moments of the novel, reminding us that all we have read since he slipped away was his reverie and asking this question[7]. He does not answer.

That he does not answer is not because the question is rhetorical. The whole novel has led up to it, has been thinking about it before it has been asked. Roth, through Zuckerman, is asking something larger than Zuckerman could answer. Roth is asking himself whether he was wrong to have set off his own bomb, in his work and in his life. He is asking whether Portnoy's Complaint and his own rejection of much of what he was brought up with was necessary, whether it was necessary to have taken things to such a degree. In asking this, he is asking whether the extremism of the times of which his personal attempts at liberation were part was necessary.

The Zuckerman frame of American Pastoral exists in part to point to Roth's larger questions. Roth seems to direct our attention to the frame in order to let us see what motivates his

[7] An earlier reminder that what we are reading is Zuckerman's invention comes when Merry reappears. As Elizabeth Hardwick noted in her review,

own writing of the novel, specifically, to let us see the importance of history to this work. He wants us to see, as he has, that his work has always been more historical, more a part of its times as history, than his claim to have made only literary rebellions admits. It is in this way that American Pastoral is a reconsideration not just of late sixties and early seventies America, in the context of the Cold War and the whole sweep of American history, but also of Roth's part in those times, including Portnoy's Complaint.

Does he think he was wrong to have set off his own bomb? After the metafictional experiments of so many of his novels, after the incendiary language of his works from Portnoy's Complaint to Sabbath's Theater (1995), in American Pastoral Roth writes in an earlier style, influenced by Flaubert and James, that he was once proud to have left behind. The wealth of detail provided in finely crafted, infinitely subordinated sentences and the calmer, relatively rant-free prose of this novel represent a return to literary roots for Roth. No pages-long footnotes containing phone-sex conversations here, as in Sabbath's Theater; rather, we have pages-long catalogues, in exquisite detail, of the process of manufacturing gloves. If not a retrenchment, the way in which he writes this novel represents at least a renewed appreciation of the value of his earlier influences. In terms of the literary liberation Roth attempted in the late sixties, then,

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Merry's claim not to have known Rita Cohen brings into question what Rita represents as "part of Zuckerman's dream" (14).

American Pastoral can be seen as a reconsideration of what was lost in that act of rejection.

While he always recognized the literary rebellion, in American Pastoral, Roth also seem to admit, looking back, that Portnoy's Complaint was also a social rebellion, even if it was ambivalent about the difficulty of such an act. The bomb that Roth tossed into the library, exploding the old forms and subjects, was also a bomb thrown into the kitchen, exploding the old ways and beliefs. He also seems to be admitting that, however valuable the act of freeing himself from tradition both literary and social, there were losses, losses due to the extremism licensed by the innocence of the young looking to establish paradise. While acknowledging these losses in earlier works, from the ambivalence of Portnoy's Complaint to the sadness of still-raging Mickey Sabbath's continued defiance of convention in a novel Morris Dickstein calls "the last novel of the 1960s" (228), in American Pastoral Roth fully recognizes the extent of the loss and the value of traditional dreams. Through the story of the fall of an American hero during a time of historical rupture, and through the laughter of figures like Marcia Umanoff accompanying that fall, Roth reconsiders the unfortunate rejections inherent in the also valuable liberatory impulse of the sixties, and reconsiders his role in that rejection.

In Reading Myself and Others Roth called the sixties "the demythologizing decade," and demythologizing is the job of the kind of novelist Roth sees himself to be (86). Twenty years

later, Roth seems to see that demythologizing, novelistic or otherwise, is not a value-free activity; that is, it works from its own ideals, its own vision of perfection, and it can tear down more than it intends. This aspect of the demythologizing project is embodied in the cynically laughing figure of Marcia Umanoff. Roth's novel in the end is a kind of confession. He admits the parallels between himself and the laughing professor as well as those between himself and the younger radicals, sees how the latter were often driven by good impulses but could have been more thoughtful, and recognizes himself. Further, he emphasizes the connection between intergenerational struggle and rebellion, a relationship he has noted in all of the father-son pairs in his fiction (and, here, perhaps significantly, father-daughter). The young fight for change and against the ideas of the generation previous. Sometimes what they fight against deserves their scorn; sometimes it does not. And sometimes there is no disagreement, but the fight must go on regardless, a phenomenon Roth notes when the Swede ineffectively protests to Merry that she doesn't have to rebel against her family because they too are against the war.

Roth's reconsideration of the past in this novel is possible because of the time at which it he undertakes it. In the light of the reinvigorated triumphalism following the end of the Cold War and the culture wars born out of its ashes, Roth looks back on his own rebellions and those of the sixties and considers the ways in which they come out of the same vision. The echo of

1945 in 1995 is plainly heard in American Pastoral. The idea that the clock of history was being reset again, that a unified nation was making a fresh start after a victory, must have made 1995 seem a pale imitation of the original to Roth. Looking back to the sixties, Roth is able to see that he joined in the laughter at the enfeeblement of the supposedly robust things of postwar America. Driven by the urge to start fresh, to throw out the old and build anew, he missed the value of what was already there.

In The Counterlife, Zuckerman watches a film on human reproduction. He comments on the point of view from which it is shot, inside the woman's reproductive organs:

> According to one school, it's where the pastoral genre that you speak of begins, those irrepressible yearnings by people beyond simplicity to be taken off to the perfectly safe, charmingly simple and satisfying environment that is desire's homeland. How moving and pathetic these pastorals are that cannot admit contradiction or conflict! (368)

This refusal to admit contradiction, to move beyond the simplicity of one's own belief and the surety with which others are rejected, is the death that lurks in the heart of the liberations of the sixties. Roth's work has contained the idea of the deep source of the attraction to the pastoral from the birth of his bad-boy characters, Portnoy and Zuckerman, as Ross Posnock has noted: "In their near hysterical devotion to being bad, [they] paradoxically retain a boyish commitment to purity, to the

myth of pastoral and its nostalgia for the 'womb dream of life,' 'before the split began'" ("Purity" 91). This devotion to purity, to innocence, to being right against those who are wrong, is something of which Roth the novelist, devoted to irony, must surely be wary. Writing about The Professor of Desire (1977), Milan Kundera describes the objects of Roth's devotion: "Irony does not simply contradict one certainty on behalf of another. Guided by its 'marvelous predilection for the complexity of things,' irony calls into question *all* certainties, and certainly itself" (167). The line Kundera quotes is spoken by Baumgarten the seducer, who is teaching David Kepesh the tricks of seduction; he is warning Kepesh to beware his inclination towards complexity, urging him to say simple things to women he's trying to seduce. In life as in art, Roth values irony. In art, irony allows us to avoid the seduction of simplicity and therefore create more nuanced, sophisticated works. In life, irony helps us to see the complexity of human experience, allowing us to avoid the seduction of simple ideas.

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