

**THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the  
Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of  
Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.**

**Part Two: "Mon Semblable,—Mon Frère": Ken Kesey's *Sometimes  
a Great Notion*.**

**Chapter Six: "Impression is the ticket": Secondary  
Accommodations in *Sometimes a Great Notion*.**

*"Impression is the ticket. Teach 'em respect; impress 'em; show 'em you're just as good, just  
as big as they are. Bigger!"*  
Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

In *Sometimes a Great Notion* the hierarchical accommodations between Lee and Hank Stamper serve a representative and illustrative function. An examination of the other accommodations in the novel shows that all relationships between men are informed by similar tensions and processes and are similarly hierarchical; if a mixture of jealousy, aggression, misunderstanding, mutual mis-comprehension and hierarchical jousting characterises the relationship between the half-brothers, it is also a model of Hank's relationships with other men, and of their relationships with one another.

Outside the Stamper system the main "players" in the "games" of accommodation which take place on the stage of *Sometimes a Great Notion* are: the Union, embodied in J. B. Draeger and Floyd Evenwrite; the pugnacious youth "Big" Newton, whose physical conflict with Hank, purely a matter of a challenge to an "alpha" male, provides a simple and easily examined example of accommodation between men; the elderly, influential local business-man Bobby Stokes, an old antagonist of the family and the "anti-social" values for which it stands; and Teddy the Bartender, whose insights into other characters, the mood of the town, and musings on the nature of men and fear occupy large portions of the latter half of the novel. Teddy's cynical editorialising on life in Wakonda is important; it makes clear the extent to which fear serves as the force which binds the hierarchical structures in the society together, keeping men in their place and maintaining their allegiance to the imperatives of their systems. Teddy considers the cynical, selfish attitudes of men like the "Real Estate Hotwire" of Wakonda ("known as a shrewd cooky with a mortgage and a hotwire

speaker at the Tuesday Jaycee luncheons<sup>1</sup>) and the pathetic, suicidal Willard Eggleston. An examination of the activities of the characters mentioned above forms a representative record of the secondary hierarchical accommodations in *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

In an order which is a mirror image of that of the Stamper system, the levels of hierarchy among the non-Stampers have their counterparts within the ranks of their enemies, characterised by much the same sort of hierarchical accommodations, and comprising men adhering to a comparable but inverted code.<sup>2</sup> The principal difference between the two orders is that "Stamper" men face their fear, and are held by bonds of love, mutual allegiance and mutual dependence, while men in the non-Stamper system are kept in place in their order by their inability to rise above their terror and self-doubt. Men like the Stampers and even the leader of the non-Stamper faction, Jonathan Draeger, remind men in Wakonda of their own fearfulness, and their inability to overcome the inertia of terror and engage "life" (that is, engage the individuals and the hierarchical structures with which they must accommodate) in the contests which will reveal their "real" place in the order of things. Men are afraid not only of pain, and loneliness, but of low and hopeless position, a fact Jonathan Draeger understands well, as much as they are afraid of discovering that their illusions about their own strength, power, and place in the scheme of things are ill-founded.

Draeger is at the apex of the system of "non-Stamper" values and individuals. He is a California-based union "trouble-shooter" who descends on Wakonda to sort out the union's dispute with the family. Needing to forge a close accommodation with the "Town" hierarchy as the most efficient way of furthering his organisation's battle with the Stampers, Draeger's facility for hierarchical accommodation forces acknowledgment of his superiority from almost all those with whom he deals. The details of the workings of the non-Stamper system are shown in the manner in which Draeger alternately intimidates and cajoles his "lieutenants," Floyd and Teddy. Draeger's manner of hierarchicising is to maintain control over those who might serve his ends through a combination of "the carrot and the stick." For example, he overawes and out-thinks Evenwrite, the District Co-ordinator of the union in Wakonda, playing on the latter's fear, insecurity and habit of obedience to authority, while he uses an entirely different strategy in making an "alliance" with Teddy, the owner-proprietor of the Snag. After their first meeting a few words implying intimacy and partnership from Draeger cause Teddy's "plump little body [to] stretch nearly

to bursting as his initial admiration and awe swells to love and beyond—to adulation, to worship.”<sup>3</sup> Draeger manipulates both Evenwrite and Teddy to suit his desires, effectively employing his theories about men and their motivation to work toward the destruction of the Stampers.

Draeger's forceful persona magnetically focuses those others who wish to challenge the Stampers' non-union practices. Draeger is a master at maintaining a calm, reserved, authoritative presence, which he couples with the unshakeable assurance of an obvious leader. His, however, is but a manufactured version of the natural, un-selfconscious Stamper arrogance; where Hank works intuitively, Draeger employs a notebook as a kind of Bible, in which he keeps his observations about men and what motivates them, and to which he makes regular reference. Draeger's book shows that he shares with his Stamper adversaries a fondness for aphorisms. His are by and large pretentious, essentialising observations about men and their ways, truisms bolstered by a smattering of Skinnerian psychology and Nietzschean preconceptions about human nature. Draeger's notes on Hank also constitute a short-hand reinforcement of the central, cynical ideas about man Kesey presents in *Sometimes a Great Notion*: The plan of the *eminence grise* behind the opposition to the Stampers is to play on whatever elements of jealousy and resentment he can uncover and employ against the family. As Draeger comes to realise that behind local respect for Hank Stamper is a fund of fear and envy, he finds a tailor-made opportunity to practice his belief that:

*“Man is certain of nothing but his ability to fail. It is the deepest faith we have, and the unbeliever—the blasphemer, the dissenter—will stimulate in us the most righteous of furies. A schoolboy hates the cocky-acting kid who says he can walk the fence and never fall. A woman despises the girl who is confident that her beauty will get her man. A worker is never so angered as by an owner who believes in the predominance of management. And this anger can be tapped and used.”<sup>4</sup>*

Draeger employs a philosophy of negatives; if the Stamper system is about courage, challenge, confrontation and self-improvement, Draeger's non-Stamper system is its opposite. Fear is the heart of Draeger's system, and this fear is the parent of the envy and resentment and anger a man or woman directs at those who are more competent, comfortable and capable. Draeger relies on the fear which he assumes exists in all his fellow human beings, and in his ability to arouse and amplify that fear for the strategy he

employs in Wakonda to recruit the locals into his campaign against the Stampers.

In an attempt to identify the source of Draeger's authority, Teddy asks himself: "*This Mr. Draeger...he's up in a position of some height...So why doesn't he act afraid of falling?*"<sup>5</sup> He concludes, egocentrically and inaccurately comparing himself with Draeger: "*There is one thing, Mr. Draeger, that sets you apart from me and the muscleheads both...I can just escape fear; you can create it.*"<sup>6</sup> Teddy identifies Draeger's power as being centred on an understanding and manipulation of fear.

"*You know how to wait,*" he comments,

*...Because you are one of the forces yourself...You know what it is—the cold force in the dark—that makes people move...You know that Brother Walker's God is just a straw God, a make-do doll to wave in the face of the true All-Powerful...A make-do deity doll, not even as powerful as the other make-do gods like What the Fool Next Door Thinks, and The Great Things to Be Done . . . none of them a fraction as powerful or terrible as the Force that created them, the Fear that created them.*<sup>7</sup>

Draeger has made a career of dealing with "obstacles" to the successful completion of Union business, but in Hank Stamper he finds the first individual he has encountered over the course of the thirty years of his working life to confound him. Hank cannot be flattered, bribed, threatened, or intimidated. Draeger's failure to dominate and defeat Hank is galling; it is, to Draeger "a deliberate refutation of all he believed to be true, *knew* to be true about Man...a blasphemous affront to a faith forged over an anvil of thirty years, a precise and predictable faith hammered out of a quarter-century of experience dealing with labor and management...a religion almost."<sup>8</sup>

Once it is clear to the union man, however, that the head of the Stampers is as immune to psychological pressure as he is to physical threat, at Draeger's behest the Stokes' store ceases deliveries up-river and closes the family's lines of credit. The union organizer next concentrates on those around the immediate family, the relatives who constitute the lower orders of the Stamper hierarchy. Draeger's plan is socially to isolate the family, and bring pressure to bear on those who may not be as oblivious to coercion as the head of the clan. On Draeger's instigation Stamper children at school in Wakonda are shunned by their playmates, and Stamper women treated coolly by their friends; to end this state of affairs those without the inner

resources of the "true" "Stampers" in turn pressure their partners to stop supporting Hank. Draeger here is putting into effect another of his theories, for he believes

that the fool Man will oppose everything except a Hand Extended; that he will stand up in the face of every hazard except Lonely Time; that for the sake of his poorest and shakiest and screwiest principles he will lay down his life, endure pain, ridicule, and even, sometimes, that most demeaning of American hardships, discomfort, but will relinquish his *firmest stand* for Love.<sup>9</sup>

Draeger is certain that "Love, or the Fear of Not Having It, or the Worry about Not Having Enough of It, or the Terror of Losing It—certainly does conquer all."<sup>10</sup> Kesey notes that:

To Draeger this knowledge was a weapon; he had learned it young and for a quarter-century of mild-mannered wheeling and easy-going dealing he had used that weapon with enormous success, conquering a world rendered simple, precise and predictable by his iron-hammered faith in that weapon's power.<sup>11</sup>

Draeger reasons that Hank must realise that the longer he maintains his strike-breaking work schedule the more likely will be his permanent ostracism from the town and its life. Draeger asks Viv: "...doesn't Hank realize what the town will *think* of him if he goes through with it?...Isn't he aware that he is risking complete--*total*—alienation?"<sup>12</sup> Draeger, however, has not reckoned on Hank's self-containment and resolve. Hank misses, but does not actually need, the support of others; he can survive without any kind of social intercourse, a point which is made most strongly when he renews his battle with the union on the very day on which his wife deserts him. When his enemy's most carefully plotted strategy fails, however, that enemy resorts to outright deception, and Draeger originates and spreads a rumour to the effect that Hank has surrendered to the Union for a large financial settlement. He does this not in the belief that he can get away with such a lie, but in the hope that the acclaim and gratitude—and greed—of Hank's family, and the affection they will shower on the "alpha" Stamper in expectation of their share of the "bribe," will convince him to submit gracefully, and accept that acquiescence is more profitable than continued conflict.

Draeger's faith in the power of his lies and in his manipulation of fear in the end proves to be ill-founded. Although puzzled as to the reason for

Hank's eventual decision not to deliver the logs, Draeger assumes that the accumulation of his stratagems has finally assured victory. He is on the verge of departure from Wakonda when Lee's own plan to fell Hank from the head of the Stamper hierarchy turns on itself, and results in the brothers' foolhardy decision to run the logs down the river on their own to enable the family firm to fulfil the contract with Wakonda Pacific. Draeger, the epitome of the intelligent, scheming, modern "Corporate Man," is defeated by the old-fashioned loyalty to self and to family, to values of self-respect and being "true" to oneself and one's obligations, which is at the heart of "Stamper." Draeger retreats in disarray, and when he encounters a decamping Viv Stamper, her statement that: " 'You must go through a winter to get some notion' "<sup>13</sup> is the best he receives as an explanation of the conundrum of Hank Stamper. Teddy, who has long noted that his sale of alcohol is an accurate barometer of the fear level of the males of Wakonda, sums up the situation best when he mutters to himself, watching his erstwhile hero's ignominious departure: " '*There are bigger forces, Mr. Draeger. I don't know what they are but they got ours whipped sometimes. I don't know what they are but I know they aren't making me a dime.*' "<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, although they do not work on Hank Stamper, the result of the reader's exposure to Draeger's theories is that he or she must be plunged into thought by such a bald exposition of how organisations manipulate individuals through what can only be agreed is an accurate, if depressing, analysis of the male psyche. It can be seen that, until they founder on the rock of Hank Stamper, Draeger's theories are remarkably effective. Except when dealing with a man resolutely prepared to face his own inner terrors, Draeger is proven right time and time again in operating on the principle that fear is the greatest motivator of men's actions.

A perfect example of the validity of the theories behind Draeger's success can be seen in his interactions with the character of Floyd Evenwrite. Evenwrite is a large-framed, muscular timber-man, easily capable of defeating Draeger in a physical confrontation; nonetheless the former is readily subordinated by the latter's tactics of coercion. The blustering, often unthinking Evenwrite is coolly dealt with by Draeger, who patronises him and crushes him in conversation and "one-on-one" accommodations. One might say Floyd is constantly "put in his place," and the phrase would be revealing of the results of the jostling for the relative hierarchical place and the power differential which is indicative of the relationship between the two men. Evenwrite's place in the union hierarchy is lower than Draeger's, and the Californian is definitively Floyd's superior in all matters of union

organisation and the psychology needed to move and motivate other men. It is Floyd who undertakes the “dirty work” of sabotaging the Stamper mill, which Draeger may decry for its lack of subtlety and its illegality, but which he eagerly authorises and helps plan when he realises such acts can be performed by “proxy.” Floyd is one of Hank Stamper's age-peers; they began as *isotimoi*. Like most males in the Wakonda area contemporary with him, Floyd has lived most of his life in the shadow of Henry's eldest son, and he becomes one of the most violent and deceitful of the Stampers' opponents in the matter of the strike. Floyd's particular grievance originates when, as a teenager, he loses a place to Hank in a representative high-school American Football side. More than once in the novel Floyd will pretend that this honour went to him and not to his rival; in frustration at his lie being discovered on one occasion he blunders into a fight in a bar with a real football fan who, as luck would have it, remembers “the name of the All-State high-school fullback from twenty years back.”<sup>15</sup> Floyd is badly beaten and, cleaning himself up in a service station rest-room, he “vows to his red-nosed and red-eyed image in the mirror that he'll make Hank Stamper rue the day he used his family influence to get picked on that All-State team over him, by jumping Jesus!”<sup>16</sup> Unable to face the real nature of the situation or his consequent emotional reaction—he cannot seem to accept that Hank might have been the better player—Floyd displaces his anger. Floyd lacks the “Stamper” nature which would allow him to accept his relative place, and ability, and concentrate on growing past his disappointment and preparing to face other challenges in life. Instead, one defeat sets Floyd up for many, as one, like, for example, Lee, continues to live in a past whose failures he can lay at Hank's door rather than with which he can attempt to cope, and employ to steel himself in future battles.

For all that he hates the other's “easy” superiority, in many ways Floyd is like Hank, and in his own way he is as obedient to, and self-confined by, his father's code as Hank is by his father's. Floyd, too, has an adult character formed by the desire to imitate the “legends” and models bequeathed to him by his immediate male antecedents. In the case of Evenwrite it is the ambitiousness and sense of justice associated with “knowing that both logging and labor were in his blood, though the price of this pride came high. His granddad had been a big man in the very start of the movement, in the IWW, the Wobblies.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of “Never Give an Inch,” Floyd Evenwrite inherits a different attitude from his activist forefathers. Both his male parent and his grandfather are eventually destroyed by the monolithic hierarchies of capitalist industry they assault. His father, “Knob” Evenwrite,

described as “one of the fence-nail-chew-ingest, carpet-tack-spittingest men in the woods...an all-around dawn-til-dark diehard logger and...labor visionary...[of whom] his old man...would have been proud,”<sup>18</sup> will summarise the “Evenwrite way” as a Marxian imperative to see life as a war between “the Big-Asses...an’ the Little-Asses.”<sup>19</sup> “ ‘The Big-Asses,’ ” Floyd’s father has told him, “ ‘they think ..they’re *better* than the Little-Asses...We got to haul ‘em *down* from that, do you see? We got to *show* them we’re just as important as they are! *Everybody* is as important as they are!’ ”<sup>20</sup> This theoretical levelling may be a characteristic of the socialist utopian dream, but, ignoring as it does the hierarchical nature of the results of male accommodations, it leads to a naive world-view which ends in Floyd becoming severely disillusioned as he grows. Nonetheless, later in adult life, in order to preserve his heritage and the tradition established by his father and grandfather, Floyd Evenwrite takes a drop in pay to become a union worker. As he deals with union business dressed “like a rubber toy in a forty dollar suit, stiff and inscrutable and gas-filled,”<sup>21</sup> he strives “to...*prove* to any one...who might doubt t, that Floyd Evenwrite, ex-bushler and chokersetter from the little pissant town of Florence, was just as goddam good as anybody else *whatevertl efuck* size of the city they come from!”<sup>22</sup> This hopeless struggle grinds Floyd down, for the fact remains that he is not as good as anybody else, and in reaction to his refusal to acknowledge this he betrays the union ideals for which he supposedly stands in his high-handed relations with the workers he purportedly serves. Just as Draeger casually squashes him, so in turn Evenwrite bullies those even lower than he is in the union hierarchy.

Floyd’s blundering, strategically ill-advised games with those he considers his economic and social inferiors are a pathetic stripping away of the fragile pride and insecure ego of the low-level hierarchicist. Working on the principle that “if you aim to impress the ones on top, you damn sure have to impress the ones on the bottom,”<sup>23</sup> Floyd leaves a meeting ignoring the outstretched hand of a man he calls by terms Draeger might well apply to him: a “flunky”<sup>24</sup> a “sniveling little snake”<sup>25</sup> and a “union fink.”<sup>26</sup> In Floyd’s eyes this is “pretty slick...pretty bygod smooth—leaving the little runt standing there with his paw stuck out and his eyes batting.”<sup>27</sup> His rudeness, he feels, is justified, even admirable: “Impression is the ticket. Teach ‘em respect; impress ‘em; show ‘em you’re just as good, just as big as they are. Bigger!”<sup>28</sup> Floyd’s masculine games with the union flunky in Florence, however, may not be of the same magnitude as, for example, Barney Kelly’s games in *An American Dream*, but they are nonetheless of



exactly the same kind. They are designed to show a man's status, and to reinforce on another his inferior place in regard to that man.

Floyd is finally reduced to a life of pointless fist-fights and ineffective political demagoguery directed at his fellow-Wakondans in the Snag. His fate indicates his relative impotence within the hierarchical systems with which he is involved, and the failure of the theories for which he stands, and for which his father and his grandfather stood. In *Sometimes a Great Notion* the reader is privy to Hank's harsh, repressed and repressing pragmatism and Draeger's patterned cynicism. One can only note the different world-view inherent in the metaphors through which Floyd Evenwrite expresses to himself the workings of power. Evenwrite at one stage likens accommodation and hierarchicisation to a poker-like game of bluff and cunning, similarly governed by luck: "And that's about it, too, you come down to it, playing the crummy cards you was dealt and betting on better cards to come. Bluffing and bullying when you're short, laying back when you're long."<sup>29</sup> Luck and chance, one notes, are seldom counted upon by either the Stampers or the Draegers of the world, in comparison to whom Evenwrite is plainly of the second rank. Part of "the price" Floyd pays as he attempts to accrue enough power and prestige to assuage, perhaps even avenge, his wounded pride, and to satisfy his sense of obligation to his heritage, is encapsulated by Teddy, whose judgment of Draeger by a similar yardstick is recalled when noting of Evenwrite: "*Floyd has added to the normal fear of the dark a worse fear: the fear of falling...and worst of all, he is too stupid to know he isn't high enough to fall very far.*"<sup>30</sup>

The hierarchical interpersonal behaviours of two other individuals, Bobby Stokes and "Big" Newton in *Sometimes a Great Notion* are relevant in providing additional illustrations of the secondary masculine hierarchical accommodations in the novel.

If the reader learns from Lee's and Hank's stories that hierarchicising between *isotimoi* begins early, the relationship between Henry Stamper and Bobby "Boney" Stokes is evidence that it continues until death finally renders inconsequential the ascension and maintenance of place in a hierarchical structure. A vast gulf exists between conceptions of self and the world, between Stamper and non-Stamper, in this, the oldest relationship, the oldest example of hierarchical jousting, and the oldest emblematic accommodation (between "Stamper" and "non-Stamper" economic systems) in the novel. The economic hierarchy headed by Bobby Stokes has been in conflict with Henry Stamper and Stamper economics since the foundation of the town. Henry Sr.'s sniping, fencing, lifelong "friendship"

with the local store-keeper is a living history of the region; it also shows the typical accommodations of —and limitations inherent in— the self-sufficient Stampers' arrangements with their local community. Like Draeger, Stokes is symbolically at the apex point of a hierarchy threatened by Stamper independence. Under the cover of the strike, which provides both impetus and excuse, Stokes becomes less tolerant of the Stampers' refusal to be beholden to anyone in social or economic terms, and allows himself and his business enterprise to participate in the destruction of the "House of Stamper," despite Stokes' ready profession of friendship for Henry Snr., a male he has known since both were boys together more than half a century previously. During the strike the Stokes' store "happens" to find it inconvenient to continue the supply run which takes in the Stampers' river home. Pretending comradeship, as if in confraternity, Bobby Stokes loses no opportunity to "help" the family; like his father before him he does what he can to manoeuvre the Stampers, through obligation, into accommodation with the economic and social hierarchies of the town, and thus force them to acknowledge a dependence on the Stokes.

"Boney" Stokes' cautious, bloodless personality makes him the antithesis of the hard-drinking, hard-working, aggressively independent Henry Stamper Snr. Stokes' father had remained when Jonas Stamper had left Wakonda, eventually deriving great profit from a monopoly he had arranged with distant supply companies. Offering credit to locals, and forming a local "voluntary collective" to ensure access to production as well as consumption, the Stokes, as classic "middle men," justify their avarice as pioneering entrepreneurial activity, which they further valorise with ideology as a necessity they rhetorically describe as "mortal man's *only hope* against the untamed elements...that we strive together to survive together."<sup>31</sup> In an argument which occurs while he is visiting his old "friend" in hospital while Henry is recuperating after the near-fatal accident—the aging patriarch's second calamity in the novel— Henry Snr. snaps in response to his visitor, Stokes, when the latter presents the above idea in what one takes for often-rehearsed and repeated remarks: "I heard that pioneer-community-against-the-wilds shit so much the first years my belly was run over with it...I don't recollect as how I did much *strivin'* together, but I believe I did survive. Even gained a little bit on the side."<sup>32</sup> Even after so many years, and despite his superior wealth, "Boney" cannot dominate Henry; even when the older Stamper is bedridden, alive more through tenacity than for any other reason, after the loss of an arm and an ordeal which would have killed many, Stokes cannot make an unchallenged point,

or free himself from the taunting which began in boyhood with Henry giving him his too-descriptive nickname. Just as Hank's physical presence alone seems to constitute a challenge to other men, so Stokes, rich and influential in every other way, cannot free himself from fear and hatred while Henry lives. Boney lingers near the doorway to the hospital room, finding that

he couldn't walk out the door. Not while out of the corner of his eye he could see that cursed imbecile grin, shellacked with tobacco, that face like the face of a heathen idol shining out against everything he knew to be holy and right, those eyes that had so long needled and irritated and made uncomfortable an existence that would have otherwise been a peaceful stretch of peasant pessimism.<sup>33</sup>

Stokes' inclination to hierarchicisation does not allow him to rest while there is one man who does not acknowledge his primacy of place, one system which is not subordinated to his, or one figure which he cannot comfortably assign to an inferior place. His frustration is compounded because Old Henry remains unconquered, and because the survival of the "Stamper" system is a reminder to Stokes that all supremacy is relative, and all victories conditional.

A final example of secondary accommodations in *Sometimes a Great Notion* might be found in the activities of Benjamin "Big" Newton. Although not a member of the Stamper family, and identified, in fact, with the non-Stamper system, Newton actually embodies "Stamper" values. "Big" is a male who faces his fears, and who prefers to identify and confront his rivals in the world rather than retreating from them, displacing them, or otherwise trying to explain them away; "Big" seems to cherish the security of hierarchical placement. In his open competition with Hank, Newton is more honest than any one else on the "Town" side, and in defeat he retains an integrity not even the deceitful Draeger can share.

"Big" Newton is a youthful local timber-worker who has fought Hank before and will doubtless fight him again, if Hank survives the trip downriver which is about to take place at the end of the novel. Newton, "the bully of the woods, the thick-headed heavy who'd bust up any block who got in his road,"<sup>34</sup> like any young buck with his eye on the position of the "alpha" male, knows that time is on his side. The young lumberjack is a man possessed of a different temperament from the others in the "Town" structure. Physically of a size sufficient to enable him to contemplate physical confrontation with Hank, even the series of pugilistic defeats he

suffers at Hank's hands grants him a cachet unknown to the other Wakondans, who can merely cheer Newton on and hope to vicariously share in what must eventually, one day, be his triumph. "Big," like Hank, is a symbol of an independence and forthrightness of which they can only dream, and a reminder of their frustrated, surrendered ambitions. Support for Newton serves the same function as partiality directed toward a sporting team; he is each Wakondan's symbolic champion in a struggle in which the Wakondan cannot, and dare not, engage personally: the effort to pull down "The Enemy," in this case Hank Stamper.

When news of the campaign being mounted against the Stampers spreads, almost inevitably this foe sees the opportunity to return to the town and test Hank's position in a Wakondan hierarchy based on physical strength and fighting ability. Newton has an unofficial manager, Les Gibbons, a near-neighbour of the Stampers, who relies on them for river transport, and who is cordial to the point of obsequiousness to Hank's face, but who is also one of the first to join the conspiracy against him. Les makes sure Hank knows the evening on which Newton "might" visit Wakonda's Snag. The night of the "event" a large crowd gathers alive with vociferous expressions of good fellowship which are almost more than Hank can bear. Newton, at least, has the grace to pass speedily through the social rituals which demand a pretence of conviviality and a "legitimate" excuse for the inevitable fight.

When the combat between Hank and Newton begins, Hank employs a characteristic strategy. He remains calm, almost passive, apparently secure in the belief that, unlike the pretenders, gamblers, dissemblers and hypocrites who assail him, he is dealing from a position of strength. Lee describes watching "as Hank stood, strangely peaceful, and let the challenger deliver the first blow."<sup>35</sup> Lee comments: "It was almost his undoing."<sup>36</sup> Hank will elsewhere allow Lee the "first blow" of adultery with Viv in the combat between them; he allows Evenwrite the "first blow" against his business enterprises in the attempted, and bungled, sabotage of the Stamper mill; he allows Draeger the room to plot, and to undermine his position in the town. The point is thus reinforced that in reference to a secure "alpha," the "challenger" must always make the first move. In relation to Hank it is the town which has to force its accommodations on him. Hank must be removed from his position; those who would attack him must take the initiative, and try and force their close accommodation on him.

Newton's first blow knocks Hank from his feet. Yet, after being floored by the younger man, Hank rises to the occasion, and, after a long and bloody fight, he triumphs. "Big" (like the "Big" Union) is defeated by the

"ordinary" hero, and retreats once again, with the two men sharing the mutual respect of professional combatants who understand that the struggle for place and prestige between them is not so much personal as compulsory for those who would aspire to the advantages of a "reputation." Hank, with recourse to the frontier mythos of which he is so fond, tells Lee by way of explanation of the trouble between himself and Newton: " 'You might say...that our relationship is one of these things where this here town ain't big enough for the both of us.' "<sup>37</sup> Hank resumes his other trials with his legend enhanced, his reputation secure, and with many in the town even more firmly convinced that, despite the ferocity of the union's opposition to the strike, nothing will defeat the clearly, and with justification, arrogant, apparently invincible, and seemingly near-invulnerable Hank Stamper. When this eventually proves to be untrue, however, the effect on Newton is dramatic. The loss of his principal, if not his only, rival, leaves "Big" feeling adrift and purposeless. "Now," Kesey tells the reader, intruding on the youth's thoughts, "barely voting age, he faced the bleakish future of the bully with no blocks left who'd get in his road and nothing to bust up."<sup>38</sup> spends "this inevitable blockless day"<sup>39</sup> in the Snag, wondering: "What does a guy *do* . . . when his purpose in life peters out? when he ain't fit for marryin' or bein' friends or for nothin' but bustin' up one certain somebody? And that certain somebody's just finked out?"<sup>40</sup> Without Hank to focus on in hatred Newton's life has lost a great deal of its zest; succeeding to Hank's position was the only goal he had, and it lay tantalisingly close. As Hank steps down, however, Newton can only contemplate the much diminished joy of inheriting a vacant title, and having to endure the boasting of his former manager and booster Les Gibbons, and entertaining nothing more challenging than "doubts that the big liver-lipped monkey will ever get drunk or fierce enough"<sup>41</sup> to provide in turn a worthwhile opponent for him.

"Big" Newton is not alone in experiencing a sense of dislocation and unexpected resentment after the "abdication" of Hank Stamper. Kesey's focus in the latter part of the book is directed toward reinforcing the idea that Hank has a function, a role, in Wakonda which is essential to the psychic or spiritual order of the community. The ramifications of his sudden "fall" point to Kesey's opinion about the essence of masculine hierarchicisation. The strange reaction of the males of Wakonda to the removal of the "threat" of Hank Stamper reinforces the central place the emotion of fear has in the life of the town, and, in a wider sense, reminds

the reader of Kesey's theories about that emotion and its place in the cognitive structures of human beings, particularly males.

In *Sometimes a Great Notion* the accommodations between Lee and Hank are linked by metaphor to all the other accommodations in the novel, and can be employed to illustrate the idea that fear is the "binding force" which keeps masculine hierarchical structures of prestige and power together. Lee's return to Wakonda and his battle with his inner demons is an example of male accommodation on the real and the mythic levels; at the end of the novel he has come to understand that if ever he is to be free of the past which so plagues him, he must learn to face his fears and his disappointments openly, and take steps to deal with them and carve himself a future not crippled by resentments linked to the past. Recalling various boyhood terrors, Lee realises that the spectre of Hank has lain behind them all, and yet he comes to believe that: "*I ain't scared of Hank neither. The only thing I was really scared about was that he might be watching when I jumped or yelled or something.*"<sup>42</sup> In other words, Lee is afraid of the opinions of others, primarily of the god-man Hank Stamper. Lee's principal fear is that if he cannot "live up" to Hank's standards he will be a lesser man in Hank's, his own, and others' eyes as a result. When Hank and Lee fight Hank eventually demands that Lee admit that he has "had enough"; Lee does so at the time, but, as the novel finally moves back to its "present," in one of his last conversations Lee has with his sister-in-law before she departs and he returns to take his place alongside Hank in the perilous attempt to run the logs downriver; Lee comes to the realisation that:

*"I didn't have enough. I can never have had enough as long as he makes me say that! I can never have you as long as I let him make the heroic runs down the river...But listen...do you see? out on the bank? I was fighting for my life. I know it. Not running for my life as I've always done before. But fighting for it. Not merely to keep it, or to have it, but for it . . . fighting to get it, to win it...No! by god I don't care what he thinks I haven't had enough."*<sup>43</sup>

Lee cannot best Hank, but he must give his best to Hank, and to the values of Stamper which they both share, and which have shaped them both. This is what "Stamper-ness" demands of them, and perhaps this is all it demands of them. The trouble between Lee and Hank is never, and has never been, a question of who is the better man. Hank is plainly "superior," and Lee does not dispute this. What he comes to learn is that he is not expected to "defeat" Hank, but his possession of a "Stamper" nature demands

something he has been afraid to give: one hundred percent effort and vigilance and commitment to his own accommodations. Lee's acceptance of the values of Stamper shows him how to participate in an ongoing process of living in the moment, and of facing each trial, each moment of life, with complete awareness and as much courage and dedication as he can muster. Once a commitment to that effort is given and maintained, any man, Lee discovers, can hold his head high within the realm of "Stamper," regardless of how great or small his ultimate contribution, his greatest effort, might be. At the end of the novel the reader realises that just as Lee needs Hank to goad him, and Hank needs the challenge of Lee's desire to displace him in the family hierarchy, so all men in the "Stamper" system need, in Lee's words, entities to act as "demons" and "teammates," and one might indeed "think they were one and the same."<sup>44</sup> Hank ultimately survives all challenges because as a Stamper he has been bred to a philosophy of personal conquest, and domination of self as well as others, and the environment. Hank possesses the family traits in greatest measure, and is the "weakest," that is, the most susceptible to them. Hank turns his demons into his teammates, while his teammates turn into his demons; he is driven by and challenged both by that and those which would help him as much as by that and those which would hinder him. Character and the land become intertwined: the Stampers have altered the land and it has affected them in turn. The American experience is conditioned by the land, and by history also, and American cultural and social products infused with a predicate of a future in which there need always to be new fields to conquer and fresh hierarchical challenges which will, through an "evolutionary succession," always raise the "fittest" to the "top of the pile."

Men in the position of head of a "family" power structure—whether Old Henry, Hank, or Draeger—become in the novel the summary of all the things of which lesser men are afraid, a "father-guardian figure" and symbol of the "power" which keeps men in their place in hierarchical structures. The father and the family are employed in the novel as symbols of the demons-teammates who are at once a potential source of strength and a potential liability or emotional weight. To conquer fear an individual must, it seems, displace the figure at the peak of the hierarchy, and become himself "father" of a new life, just as Old Henry does when deserted by Jonas, just as Hank does in fighting for some self-definition when succeeding Old Henry, as Lee does when becoming free of Hank's shadow, but as the men of Wakonda most pointedly cannot do. The relationship of a man with the "alpha males" in the structures he inhabits, and with the central symbolic

“alpha” of phallogentric masculine culture, the Father imago, then, is formative in the masculine psyche. The interpersonal relations humans form in later life are often modelled on the first structures which they observe as children—thus patriarchal, hierarchical systems proliferate as older men bequeath to and teach younger men—in the fashion explored in *Sometimes a Great Notion*—the complex and usually non-articulated “rules” which govern homosocial interaction.

Notes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (New York: Viking, 1964) 45.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, Fig. 1. and Table 3.

<sup>3</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 395.

<sup>4</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 86.

<sup>5</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 366.

<sup>6</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 389.

<sup>7</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 393.

<sup>8</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 9.

<sup>9</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 10.

<sup>11</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 10.

<sup>12</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 12.

<sup>13</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 627.

<sup>14</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 627.

<sup>15</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 81.

<sup>16</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 83.

<sup>17</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 372-3.

<sup>18</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 373.

<sup>19</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 374.

<sup>20</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 374.

<sup>21</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 51.

<sup>22</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 59.

<sup>23</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 52.

<sup>24</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 52.

<sup>25</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 52.

<sup>26</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 53.

<sup>27</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 54.

<sup>28</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 54.

<sup>29</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 380.

<sup>30</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 365-6.

<sup>31</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 559.

<sup>32</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 559.

<sup>33</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 559-60.

<sup>34</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 538.

<sup>35</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 341.

<sup>36</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 341.

<sup>37</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 338.

<sup>38</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 538.

<sup>39</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 539.

<sup>40</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 539.

<sup>41</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 546.

<sup>42</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 306.

<sup>43</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 621-2.



---

<sup>44</sup> Kesey, *Notion* 489.

# THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.

## Part Three: "My Father's Face": Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Zuckerman Bound*.

"Yet in My Lineaments they trace some features of my father's face." Lord Byron, "On This  
Day I Complete my Thirty-Sixth Year."

### Chapter Seven: *Portnoy's Complaint*: "The Whole, Slimy, Suicidal, Dionysian Side of My Nature."

"Bless me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me *whole!*"  
Philip Roth *Portnoy's Complaint*.

Philip Roth was born on March 19, 1933 in Newark, New Jersey. His family were part of a community in which, as Roth would comment fifty-five years later, "the Jewish family was an inviolate haven against every form of menace, from personal isolation to gentile hostility. Regardless of internal friction and strife, it was assumed to be an indissoluble consolidation."<sup>1</sup> Roth's writing continues to demonstrate a sense of the power of the family unit, the energy of its internal relationships, and a sensibility inherited from a father of whom the son would later write: "Narrative is the form that his knowledge takes, and his repertoire has never been large: family, family, family, Newark, Newark, Newark, Jew, Jew, Jew. Somewhat like mine."<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the 1950s Philip Roth had completed the "journey from Weequahaic Jewishness into the bigger American society,"<sup>3</sup> although he would, ironically, spend the next decades frequently re-enacting this journey in fiction, and translating the experience of Newark and the growth of his consciousness as an American male of ethnic heritage into commercially and critically successful prose.

In *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) Roth achieves what remains his most exorbitant, and certainly best known, focus on the issues of what it is to be a man, what it is to be an American, what it is to be a Jew, and how these identities shape, conflict, and complicate one another. While those who approved would praise the author's endeavours as honest and incisive, and hail him as the "Bolivar of the Jewish libido,"<sup>4</sup> the commercial success of *Portnoy's Complaint* earned Roth a degree of notoriety he had not

previously experienced outside the American Jewish community, within which he had been a controversial figure since the start of his career. Roth recalls dismay at the "alleged anti-Semitism"<sup>5</sup> which over time came to "pervade the discussion of [his] work,"<sup>6</sup> prompting him, as he later recalled, to defend myself in essays and public addresses and, when I decided to take things more aggressively in hand, to strike back at accusations that I had divulged Jewish secrets and vulgarly falsified Jewish lives by upping the ante in *Portnoy's Complaint*. That was not mistaken for a conciliatory act, and the ramifications of the uproar it fomented eventually inspired me to crystallize the public feud into the drama of internal family dissension that's the backbone of the Zuckerman series, which began to take shape some eight years later.<sup>7</sup>

Roth's final, sadder-but-wiser comment on these affairs is that he eventually "understood self-hatred to mean an internalized, though not necessarily conscious, loathing of one's recognizable group markings that culminates either in quasi-pathological efforts to expunge them or in the vicious disparagement of those who don't even know enough to try."<sup>8</sup>

Mailer's *An American Dream* and *Why Are We In Vietnam?* and Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* have provided a portrait of the American male in the 1960s primarily in regard to two of the "realms" in which I am interested: the political and the economic. Kesey's depiction of family relations and Mailer's of father-son and marital relationships and these novels' shared focus on the competitive inter-masculine dynamic in America have facilitated the presentation of complementary perspectives on the hierarchical "shapes" which dominate thematic and textual elements of the works by these two novelists. Initially I had chosen next to focus on the family life and the sexual and emotional development of American man in the 1960s as presented in Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint*. Eventually, however, I felt it more interesting to comment with relative brevity on this work: the family hierarchicisations it portrays are similar, but less thoroughly delineated, than those later depicted by Roth in his Zuckerman novels. Additionally although the novels concerning him were not written in the 1960s, the character Nathan Zuckerman is, like his nation, on the threshold of manifold changes at the start of the 1960s (in *The Ghost Writer*), challenged and bemused by the speed of both personal and social liberation in the 1960s (in *Zuckerman Unbound*), and able to provide a

postscript to the 1960s as he suffers in its aftermath in *The Anatomy Lesson* (set in 1973). Thus I felt that Roth, through his depiction of one man's life experience, delivered both a coherent view of man in, and a contextualisation of, the 1960s.

If similarities can be pointed out between all Roth's male protagonists, the psychologies and the fictional voices Roth has created for Portnoy and Zuckerman show them to be intimately related as fictional creations: the retarded adolescence of Alexander Portnoy is mirrored in the inconclusive adulthood of Nathan Zuckerman; both are obsessed with childhood recollections; and in both works the same dry narrative tone pervades the foregrounding—often at once—of elements both banal and fantastic in conversation. However, Zuckerman is both a more mature man, and a more mature creation. His inner life is of greater complexity than Alex Portnoy's, and his masculine voice has greater authenticity. Portnoy's sexual life interferes with his career; his mistress, "The Monkey," is a social liability,<sup>9</sup> and threatens to discredit him by giving publicity to his sexual peccadilloes. The results of Zuckerman's neuroses, on the other hand, are his subject matter, and the income and reputation they bring affirm a self-perpetuating cycle of self-obsession which allows him to circumvent the normal male's need to accommodate with a business hierarchy for employment purposes and with an affinity group for purposes of affirmation and social contextualisation. Zuckerman is economically secure, and alone in his field; finally, however, his solitary and obsessive habits make all close relationships problematic, and like his first literary mentor, E. I. Lonoff, Zuckerman employs his writer's vocation to ignore at will other human beings, including those who might have legitimate call on his selfishly husbanded time and emotional energy. The relentlessly sexual focus of *Portnoy's Complaint* ignores many aspects of a (normal?) male's life; the Zuckerman novels provide a great deal more information about the nature of American man, his familial, economic and social accommodations and the shapes of the hierarchies by which he is encinctured. Roth's "fictionalised recall" adds intensity to his depiction of the convulsions of emotions, encounters with strange characters, and spiritual velleity which characterise Zuckerman's inner life as the 1960s come to a close. Public attention, the blurring of the line between fact and fiction, the intrusiveness of people who feel the purchase of a book entitles them to intimacy with the author: Zuckerman might be able to opt out of the majority of hierarchical accommodations, but he can't avoid accommodation with his fellow-citizens, and with the social life of his

nation. Zuckerman is required to act the part of celebrity as the price of celebrity; his life is assumed to be the subject of his fiction, and everything he says on the subject is disbelieved, or used to justify conclusions at which his interlocutors have already arrived.

In *Portnoy's Complaint* a more intimate approach is assayed through the most "unmanly" modality of frank disclosure: Portnoy's strategy is to refuse to play the American "male game," the imperative that American men attempt to meet the heroic paracim. Portnoy not only refuses to be a "good boy", but he intends to raise to the surface male attitudes to sexuality; disclose events and attitudes about which men speak only among themselves, if at all; and to invert hierarchical modalities of mutual competitiveness, in which boasting and exaggeration characterises discussion of sexual experience. This subversive project Portnoy carries off with self-revealing candour. Just as Roth is fond of smudging the borders between fact and fiction, so *Portnoy's Complaint* blurs the division between the realms of the private and the public. For example, western men are taught that the practice of ideal masculinity is at least in part a matter of taciturnity and aloofness. A man is socialised to keep the facts of his body and his body's operations to himself. For a male to explore his own body, or even to take pleasure in it, to celebrate it and proclaim it, is narcissism, suspiciously feminine and implicitly homosexual. In contrast, however, for a male to inflict his body on another, sexually or physically, is more or less acceptable. The desire to dominate is an approved male modality; the patriarchal, male conquest modality of the traditional "hero" is seen to be active still in constraining and constructing male sexuality through its phallogocentric focus on conquest, victory, taming, altering, erection, penetration and climax. *Portnoy's Complaint* reveals and expands the phallogocentric, climax-centred sexual orientation of the American male. Woman is sex object, repository, status symbol, counter in marital exchange, a weapon to be employed against parents—anything but a person, a partner, a companion. However, the misogynistic sexuality of the male in American society<sup>10</sup> is even more chilling when demonstrated by reasonable, urbane Nathan Zuckerman, whose habitually effusive commentary halts when the subject of the failure of his heterosexual relationships draws near. Even in the "progressive" fiction of the 'liberated 1960s' women are not treated as complete characters, but instead their symbolic function is dominant, revealing thereby the continuing operation and self-perpetuation of the ideology of patriarchal masculinist culture in twentieth century America, in literature as much as in the wider society.

*Portnoy's Complaint* is the story of one young man and his struggle to balance the desire to indulge his obsessive sexual appetites with the anxiety his indulgence causes him. On the first page of the novel Roth presents a definition, as if from a medical dictionary, of "Portnoy's Complaint": "[a] disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature."<sup>11</sup> A comment Alex Portnoy makes toward the end of the novel's fourth division ("The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation In Erotic Life") indicates that his first holiday away from his parents was "[s]ixteen years ago...November 1950."<sup>12</sup> The year, then, is 1966, and the reader gradually realises the narrative purports to be that of Portnoy talking to his therapist, one Dr Spielvogel.<sup>13</sup> American patronage of practitioners of psychiatric therapy in the 1950s and 1960s and the translation of elements of Freudian theory into reductive and misunderstood explanations for unhappiness and misadjustment of all kinds is parodied by Roth as he invites the reader to construct Portnoy's "complaints" in purely psychological terms.

Alex Portnoy is priapic—he is penis- and climax-obsessed. As a teenager at the start of the 1960s he begins his own personal sexual liberation as powerful hormonal drives result in a secretive, self-censorious obsession with masturbation—he describes himself as "[t]he Raskolnikov of jerking off"<sup>14</sup>—and, later, with other forms of sexual expression. In the first part of his "confession" Portnoy catalogues his excesses with grotesque comic imagery. He spends "half [his] waking life locked behind the bathroom door"<sup>15</sup>; he also masturbates in bed and at school<sup>16</sup> and on family outings. Portnoy describes ejaculating frequently into the toilet bowl,<sup>17</sup> and using as receptacles socks, his sister's underwear,<sup>18</sup> a cored apple, a milk bottle, and pieces of liver<sup>19</sup>; he describes surreptitiously masturbating at the theatre,<sup>20</sup> and on a bus after a day at the baseball and after eating lobster—shellfish are proscribed for Jews—concluding: "that taboo so easily and simply broken, confidence may have been given to the whole, slimy, suicidal Dionysian side of my nature."<sup>21</sup> He describes getting semen in his hair ("like a blast of Wildroot Cream Oil"),<sup>22</sup> and the taste of some he accidentally swallows (a "sauce of buttermilk and Clorox"<sup>23</sup>). The spoof of satyriasis is furthered by chapter headings like "Whacking Off"<sup>24</sup> and "Cunt Crazy."<sup>25</sup>

As well as his unresolved Oedipal fixation, Portnoy also (or causally) labours with a tremendous amount of parent-induced guilt about his sexual impulses and about his failure to meet the paradigm of a "good son" (i.e. an ideal young man), and about his ambivalent relationships with his parents.

Much about Alex's attachment to his mother, for example, is explicable in terms of the functions of mother as archetype. Alex's "all-mother" and her imagined puissancy is reinforced by his belief in what he calls "her powers"<sup>26</sup>; from earliest childhood Portnoy harbours the suspicion that his mother is *all* women, and/or that all women are his mother.<sup>27</sup> Portnoy never truly abandons his female parent as the object of his desire and source of total verification and strength. Alex's "imago" mother can "accomplish anything"<sup>28</sup>; her symbolic/spiritual status and Madonna-nature is indicated by Mrs Portnoy's reluctant confession "that it might even be that she was actually too good."<sup>29</sup> Alex continues his Oedipal attempts to appropriate his mother's body throughout his life; he lovingly, almost erotically rehearses his precious, exclusive childhood memories of watching her move around the house, and at least once of seeing her menstrual blood.<sup>30</sup> In the Freudian equation the father is the rival, and although Alex Portnoy loves his male parent, in his imaginative life and in his narrative recreation of his father's character he attempts to overthrow him; he is tormented by powerful impulses both "infantile" and "archaic" as he finds expression for his unacknowledged parricidal tendencies and the forces of his equally unacknowledged incestuous attraction to his mother. Portnoy junior celebrates his father's symbolic "impotence," as illustrated by the older man's inability to achieve promotion in his profession despite his heroic industry, due to the mind-set of anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic prejudice in corporate America. In an additional symbol of his weakness, Alex's father cannot rid himself of his constipation, and it is this "failure" which Alex recounts in gleeful detail. "Oh, this father!" he will cry, "this kindly, anxious, uncomprehending, constipated father!"<sup>31</sup>

Alex Portnoy is at war with his desires, with his parents, and with the "forces" of his conscience and of parental disapproval. However, just as he insists that "there's more here than just adolescent resentment and Oedipal rage,"<sup>32</sup> Alex Portnoy's rebellion indeed needs to be seen as representative of the development of most (all?) males rather than as the product of specific conditions: Alex Portnoy's rebellion is every man's rebellion. The struggle in Roth's novel becomes symbolic of generational conflict, of cultural conservatism versus progressiveness, of the historical memory versus the desire to begin again, and above all, of the struggle for the right to self-definition and self-determination which has characterised all stages of the European American experience. Alex Portnoy rails against the "law" his parents represent and all the rules they enforce or with which they comply, asking: "What law? Whose law?"<sup>33</sup>—but his fate only reinforces the notion

that it is within the family that he seeks accommodation, rather than outside it. It is the Law of the Father—his biological father as well as the Father God—young Portnoy seeks to challenge, if not the very laws of nature which dictate that: "...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."<sup>34</sup> Alex Portnoy challenges the temporal facts of existence. He is not finished with childhood even when it is finished with him. Adulthood, he is disappointed to find, is not a matter of arrival, but of the accumulation of experience and the movement to commitment, and it is precisely this latter quality, so evident in his father, which Alex Portnoy lacks. Indeed, the novel charts the essentials of Alex Portnoy's hesitant coming to terms with sexual and social development, and the repression, and/or displacement, and/or abandonment of his "primal" desires as part of that process. Alex Portnoy, well into adulthood, fails to understand his place in the family hierarchy as well as in the hierarchies of the wider society. He finds exasperating what might be an experience which is almost certainly not limited to children of a particular nation, culture or faith, when bemoaning that "a Jewish man with parents alive is a fifteen-year-old boy, and will remain a fifteen-year-old boy till *they die!*"<sup>35</sup>

Portnoy is also at war with the imposition of definition by patriarchal American society and with an equally constricting and patriarchal ethnic culture. Portnoy is constantly bound by, reacting against, and in other ways showing the reader, by what he is opposed to, the outlines of the paradigm of ideal masculinity. Portnoy's specific articulation of masculine character is heavily conditioned by American-Jewish masculine normatives, which are not always consonant with the more general paradigm of ideal masculinity. Where Mailer's Rojack and D.J. never question the allure of "the heights" of fame, wealth and power, Portnoy deprecates his achievements by rarely mentioning them. Indeed, he goes further and indicates his disdain for wealth and material attainment.<sup>36</sup> As an adult Portnoy instead devotes his life to public service. He has a wide reputation for probity, and at the time of the novel he has been appointed by the historical figure of Mayor Lindsay of New York to be Assistant Commissioner for the City of New York Commission on Human Opportunity. As a fierce champion of civil rights causes, particularly in the 1960s, Portnoy would have been seen as an heroic figure, successful by almost any definition. Instead, however, the ethnic definition of success which colours Alex Portnoy's self-conception focuses on his "refusal" to meet its requirements, on his inability or unwillingness to become a husband and father, and to provide his parents with



grandchildren,<sup>37</sup> the marker of continuity and success in terms of “family”. It is by the standards of the ethnic family ethos that Portnoy is not successful, and this failure prevents him from taking pride in his other achievements, and fuels his continuing resentment against his parents. In rationalising what he describes as “the face of my defiance”<sup>38</sup> he asks in agonised rhetoric: “if my father had only been my mother! and my mother my father! but what a mix up of sexes in our house!”<sup>39</sup> The confusion engendered in a household built on traditional sex-trait stereotypes in which sex-role stereotypes are inverted—Portnoy's mother is the source of strength, the reserved, powerful figure—might explain why Alex has difficulty changing the focus of his “desires,” expanding his understanding of the family dynamic, and engaging with the processes of maturation. The novel charts and reiterates young Alex's suppressed, infantile rage as he fails to grow past his earliest fixations, but remains enduringly guilty about his refusal to comply with the model of ideal young Jewish-American manhood which his parents and ethnic milieu present to him. (“Do [you] want people to look down on a skinny little boy...or to look up to a man?”<sup>40</sup> his mother chides him when he refuses to eat his dinner.) Alex Portnoy, like Nathan Zuckerman, cannot accept that his place is that of a *child* in the family hierarchy. He remains “stopped” in his childhood relationships by his own ego and by what to him are his parents' inconsistent responses to him. Portnoy's parents remain “present” in both his conscious life and in his unconscious life, at once authors and audience for his litany of rebellion, shame, and guilt, and his expressions of a love tempered by senses of obligation and debt.

Later, as the “adult” Alex Portnoy translates his masturbatory adolescent fantasies into the pursuit of real women, he remains obsessed with females and with thinking about their genitalia.<sup>41</sup> It is power, and intercourse for its own sake, not as part of the process of reproduction, that captivates Portnoy. He lambasts himself with the knowledge that “while all the other sons have been carrying forward the family name, what he has been doing is—chasing cunt.”<sup>42</sup> Even so, his frenzied coupling with non-Jewish females is less to do with sexual release than with an attempt to “[c]onquer America”<sup>43</sup>; as the character admits: “I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds—as though through fucking I will discover America.”<sup>44</sup> Thus a traditional American search for “new territory” (new women and a new definition for Jewish-American men) is at the heart of “Portnoy's complaint.” In one sense, at least, the different forms of the search for “freedom” embedded in the American historical and cultural

tradition and in the youth project of the 1960s, with its liberal rhetoric, are united in the character of Alex Portnoy. He borrows from his Jewish heritage and the drama of the Exodus, which has also been appropriated by American myth-makers, when he finally ruminates of his search for liberation: "It surely never crossed my mind that I would wind up trying to free from bondage nothing more than my own prick. LET MY PETER GO....that's the story of my life, all summed up in four heroic dirty words."<sup>45</sup>

Roth broadens his attack to lampoon "mainstream" American beliefs about Jewish-American life: an overtly hierarchical and oppressive family structure is dominated by a smothering, overwhelming mother who strives to plant emotions of guilt in her offspring at every turn, and a tone evocative of a repressed but volcanic sexuality is employed in the presentation of an affectionate, and at times hilarious, melange of memoirs and confessions. Underlining Portnoy's frantic sexuality by narrating the novel in a tone of understatement, Roth depicts an arrested, immature culture which valorises assertive masculinity while remaining obsessed with puerile demonstrations of power and an unappealing, thoroughly naturalised, phallogentrism of which Alex Portnoy is merely an extreme, literal-minded example.

The novel ends with the title character, on a visit to Israel, experiencing impotence after a clumsy rape-seduction goes awry, and eliciting from Dr. Spielvogel the response which indicates that a cathartic confession of the experience of the past and the past's sins and mistakes has been accomplished, and a future conditionally free from their interference can at last be countenanced: " 'Now vee may perhaps to begin.' "<sup>46</sup>

The 1960s is often remembered as a period of sexual liberation which followed a long period of sexual conservatism. If Alex Portnoy's misadventures show the perils of a male sexuality in which sexual expression assumes too much focus, the novel ends at the point at which Portnoy, with his "incomplete" sexuality, will have to face the other incomplete processes of his passage to adulthood. Portnoy's career of social benevolence has consumed the time, attention and one presumes craving to give and receive love, that a family should have taken. Portnoy's ambivalent relationships with a series of paramours, climaxing with his love-hate relationship with a woman on whom he bestows the charming epithet "The Monkey," all end inconclusively. Commitment remains as elusive for Alex Portnoy as his search for sex without guilt. He fails to accommodate with his parents' vision of success (the attainment of wife and

family) and he fails to live up to the model presented to him as a Jewish male. His clumsy, quasi-romantic attempts in Israel to find a suitable mate—which consists of propositioning the first two Israeli women with whom he is alone—clearly indicate that Portnoy, whatever his attainment in American terms, is a failure when measured against the Jewish mores and the constructions of masculine identity appropriate to Middle Eastern cultures which are most central (whether he likes it or not) to his sense of self.

Nathan Zuckerman is, as I have suggested, akin to Alex Portnoy in many ways, both in terms of their existences as fictional creations of Philip Roth, and in terms of the psyches with which Roth provides them. These two Jewish-American males share exaggerated—wounded—attitudes to emotional and sexual development; each is plagued by an arrested Oedipal development in no way assisted by Portnoy's sharply manipulative female parent and Zuckerman's constant imaginative recreations of his mother's presence; and neither ever allows another woman to take his mother's place. Ejaculation, conquest and mastery seem Portnoy's replacement focii, while Zuckerman weaves his memories and unresolved tensions and fears into his stories, and makes profitable fictions of his fixations.

Roth's Jewish-American men are forced to be, to use such a phrase, "in touch" with their feelings to an extent which is denied "Anglo" (or Anglicised) males like Rojack and D. J. Jethroe. Alex Portnoy and Nathan Zuckerman must try and make something coherent of conflicting messages; to do this they question the American definition of masculinity as much as the rather contradictory qualifications to it provided by ethnic discriminations. Mailer's characters (like their creator) are thoroughly Americanised, and have adopted American ways of looking at the world, including at the creation of character according to gender. Roth's men, on the other hand, have a perspective of "otherness" and on American-ness which is provided by the immigrant experience of their parents and/or grandparents. Roth's men explore the different, often conflicting, expectations they have of themselves and which others have of them. The choices they make, and the choices that are available to them, indicate a great deal about the restricted range of behaviours and expressions of self open to American men.

*Portnoy's Complaint* might be seen as a wry celebration of male sexuality, but its presentation of Alex Portnoy's sexuality also provides a subtle, serious critique of the modalities of sexual expression of American men in the 1960s, and the conflict which can arise in a society which wants its men

to be strong, brave and independent in addition to meeting the conformist, morally-constrained infantile model of a "good boy." That these two models are mutually incompatible does not seem to have been widely noted—Americans seek a vital, rugged expression of masculinity at the same time as they attempt to "geld" men with the encouragement of a crippling super-ego for whom the punishing hand of the parent is never, even long after the physical death of the progenitor, absent.

To follow the longer-term results of this conflict in one male's life—which Roth does not do with Portnoy, but does with Zuckerman—and to aid in a more complete description of the characteristics of the American male, it might be instructive to examine one man's experiences in the period immediately following the 1960s. My examination of Roth's Nathan Zuckerman is, of course, chiefly interested in his experiences during the 1960s, but I think it legitimate to follow him into the 1970s. Roth does not pursue Portnoy's story, but if my suppositions about the connections between the two characters are valid, by following Nathan Zuckerman's destiny we might understand the possibility for success or otherwise of Portnoy's life after his therapy with Dr. Spielvogel.

Following the deaths of Nathan's parents the sense of relief the son feels offers only temporary respite from the psycho-drama of his memory recreations of his parents. If his parents' immediate influence on his inner life is lessened, he senses the finality in the unresolved dramas of his life—his sexual attraction to his mother, and his continuing ambivalence about his father—which indicates that whether they are alive or dead he must still wrestle his way through the stages of his Oedipal drama into a world of independent adult relationships with himself in the "father" position.

The urge to this kind of action, which is implicit in the events of *The Anatomy Lesson* will not be heeded by Nathan Zuckerman until the events chronicled in *The Counterlife* (1986) and *Deception*, (1990).<sup>47</sup> Zuckerman finally jettisons his fantasy of finding a perfect Jewish woman, a fellow martyr, and a fellow artist—an Anne Frank—and settles for a realistic marital partnership of equity and mutual commitment. Nathan has previously, as he admits in *The Anatomy Lesson*, wed only for "the order, the intimacy, the dependable comradeship, for the routine and regularity of monogamous living"<sup>48</sup>; in other words, found temporary allies for domestic and sexual reasons. Mary Schevitz's dismissals of his previous brides as "the fey elfin dancer,"<sup>49</sup> (Betsy); "the neurotic society girl"<sup>50</sup> (Virginia); and the "certified public saint,"<sup>51</sup> (Laura) only reinforce the impression that Zuckerman has been involved with unions which have served a purpose

other than to cement a physical, romantic, and economic relationship of mutuality and equality. When Nathan's fifth marriage, to a woman named Maria, and eventually fatherhood, seem imminent, one at last feels that Nathan's passage from childhood to adulthood, long delayed, and itself only the first stage in a journey, has been completed.

Between *The Anatomy Lesson* and *The Counterlife* Nathan Zuckerman also appears in "The Prague Orgy" which was first published in 1985, and which was added as an "Epilogue" to the original trilogy of Zuckerman novels when they were collected as *Zuckerman Bound* in 1989. This work is less concerned with the issues of family relations and hierarchical accommodations which drive its companion novels, is altogether darker in mood, and features a humour entirely more grim. In this novella the recurrent motif of Anne Frank, and metaphors for sexuality, language and identity are once more manipulated as Zuckerman undertakes a journey to the capital of the Republic of Czechoslovakia to assuage his long-suffering sense of debt to his Jewish heritage through his attempts to rescue the manuscripts of a short story writer killed during the Second World War. The title of a study of the novels of Zuckerman a Czech student wishes to discuss with their author is entitled " 'The Luxury of Self-Analysis As It Relates to American Economic Conditions,' " and this sarcastic aside makes a fitting summary of this novella's focus on the obsession with self of its protagonist as much as such a statement might even serve as a subtitle for this present work if one were allowed to broaden the definition of power to include all manner of "economic" interactions and accommodations.

In *The Counterlife* brothers Nathan and Henry continue to squabble over the bones of family authority and the deaths of their parents. The telling of the tale follows the same pattern as the earlier novels in the series, raking over the coals of past events, renewing old accusations and completing Roth's study of the accommodations within the Zuckerman family. With considerable verve *The Counterlife* employs experimental techniques in the form of contrasting, overlapping, and sometimes mutually incompatible narratives which further the novel's exploration of the relationship between art, narrative, identity, and truth. This time the claims of the wider "family" of Jews replaces the claims of the family of Zuckerman, and "Israel" as geographical locus and politico-philosophical construct becomes theme, symbol, and hero/villain at once, as it extends a potent call to Nathan and Henry Zuckerman, and male hierarchical structures show their never-flagging influence on the life of the American male. In the novel the ultra-Zionist "alpha," Mordecai Lippman, becomes the personification of

both Israel and Father, replete with overtones of a vengeful Judaic deity. As Nathan says of Henry's infatuation with the gun-wielding extremist, clearly indicating the polarities of behaviour between which he and his brother have been torn all their lives:

"It is Dad—though this time round without the doubts, without the hidden deference to the goy and the fear of goyish mockery. It's Dad, but the dream-Dad, supersized, raised to the hundredth power. Best of all is the permission Lippman gives not to be so nice. That must have come as a relief after all those years—to be a good Jewish son and *not* nice, to be a roughneck *and* a Jew. Now that's having everything."<sup>52</sup>

Roth plots a series of "counterlives" for the brothers, as Nathan and Henry Zuckerman face the approach of middle age and physical decay with conjoined meditations and plans and theories of action designed to bring direction and meaning back into lives in which the passage of time and habituation to patterns of bourgeois life have stripped content from context. In *The Counterlife* Henry Zuckerman also makes an accusation which he intends to apply to his brother, but which Roth, with evident self-mockery, proves he is aware might be applied to him also. Henry attacks Nathan's obsession with the psychological interpretation of events, and for insisting that one can indulge in a psychological reduction of a man's motivations to: "Henry is doing *this* because he wants to please Momma and Poppa, Henry is doing *this* because he wants to ..displease Momma, or displease Poppa."<sup>53</sup> Insists the younger of the Zuckerman brothers:

"Beyond all your profundities, beyond the Freudian lock you put on every single person's life, there is another world, a larger world, a world of ideology, of politics, of history—a world of things larger than the kitchen table...a world defined by *action*, by *power*, where how you wanted to please Momma and Poppa *simply doesn't matter!*"<sup>54</sup>

This interpretation is consonant with the view proposed by this study, and while not, by any means, the only possible light in which to see the novels which concern Nathan Zuckerman, it is a central interpretation: the hierarchical organisation of power-accommodations forces itself on those novels as their main structuring principle. A world defined by action and power *is* the world in which Nathan Zuckerman, and Alex Portnoy, live, and all the relationships in which they are involved—all the accommodations which as American men they are forced to make—are

hierarchical in their nature, and concern themselves with the structuring, formalising, granting and recognition of power and prestige, whether they care to see it that way or not, or whether it seems to be the focus of the narratives in which they are involved.

#### Notes:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (New York: Penguin, 1988) 14.
  - <sup>2</sup> Roth, *Facts* 16.
  - <sup>3</sup> Roth, *Facts* 164.
  - <sup>4</sup> Pearl K. Bell, "Philip Roth: Sonny Boy or Lenny Bruce?" *Commentary* 64.5 (1977): 60-1.
  - <sup>5</sup> Roth, *Facts* 116.
  - <sup>6</sup> Roth, *Facts* 116.
  - <sup>7</sup> Roth, *Facts* 116.
  - <sup>8</sup> Roth, *Facts* 117.
  - <sup>9</sup> Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (London: Guild, 1982) 201.
  - <sup>10</sup> See Heather Formaini, *Men: The Darker Continent* (London: Heinemann, 1990); Shere Hite, *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* (Dee Why: Paul Hamlyn, 1977) and Shere Hite, *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality* (London: McDonald-Optima, 1981).
  - <sup>11</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 1.
  - <sup>12</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 228.
  - <sup>13</sup> Spielvogel=Playing with, talking about, selling, the penis? "Bird" (vogel) is a slang term for penis in a number of languages. *Spiel* can be Yiddish or German for talk/sales-pitch.
  - <sup>14</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 20.
  - <sup>15</sup> Roth *Portnoy's* 17.
  - <sup>16</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 18.
  - <sup>17</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 18.
  - <sup>18</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 21.
  - <sup>19</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 19.
  - <sup>20</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 131.
  - <sup>21</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 79.
  - <sup>22</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 18.
  - <sup>23</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 18.
  - <sup>24</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 17.
  - <sup>25</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 78.
  - <sup>26</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 3.
  - <sup>27</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 3.
  - <sup>28</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 3.
  - <sup>29</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 11.
  - <sup>30</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 11.
  - <sup>31</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 39.
  - <sup>32</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 64.
  - <sup>33</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 34.
  - <sup>34</sup> *Genesis* 2:24.
  - <sup>35</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 111.
  - <sup>36</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 204.
  - <sup>37</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 108.
  - <sup>38</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 41.
  - <sup>39</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 41.
  - <sup>40</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 16.
  - <sup>41</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 102.
  - <sup>42</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 100.
  - <sup>43</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 235.

---

<sup>44</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 235.

<sup>45</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 251.

<sup>46</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's* 274.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Farrar, 1986); Philip Roth, *Deception* (New York: Simon, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Philip Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson, Zucker nan Bound* (London: Penguin, 1989) 303.

<sup>49</sup> Philip Roth, *Zuckerman Unbound, Zucker nan Bound* (London: Penguin, 1989) 187.

<sup>50</sup> Roth, *ZU* 187.

<sup>51</sup> Roth, *ZU* 187.

<sup>52</sup> Roth, *Counterlife* 138.

<sup>53</sup> Roth, *Counterlife* 139-40.

<sup>54</sup> Roth, *Counterlife* 140.



## THE '60s, MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.

### Part Three: "My Father's Face": Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Bound*.

#### Chapter Eight: "Seeking Patriarchal Validation": *The Ghost Writer*.

*"I had made this journey to plead a matter of utmost personal urgency...to submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son."* Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*.

The 1960s was a decade in which the socialisation of men was being disturbed on all levels by a restructuring of concepts of social and family organisation and of masculinity, all accelerated by the climate of change occurring in the United States, and in other countries as well. Roth's "biography" of Nathan Zuckerman traces the continuing struggle of American males to find a definition of masculinity to replace that bequeathed to them by their familial and cultural systems; discovering only destabilised, or equally limiting definitions in operation in the wider society, they return to their "roots" to begin afresh the business of philosophical and cultural synthesis and accommodation with the hierarchical structures of power to which they are linked. Often rejecting a distant accommodation with the family from which they spring, and with a society from which they feel excluded, Roth's American-Jewish males must somehow find an identity which neither rejects nor accepts unquestioningly the definitions of self and ethnic identity, and which can embrace the "mainstream" American experience with a cultural/sub-cultural integrity intact. This, as might be expected, is not a process which is either easy or peaceful. Caught between the unacceptably extreme claims of "mainstream" America and "ethnic" America, the principal difficulty Roth's men experience is in striving for self-definition—even basic self-confidence—in a social order made up of people and systems vigorously attempting to force close accommodation on an already unsteady individual.

Nathan Zuckerman is distantly accommodated to the hierarchy headed by Victor and Selma Zuckerman. He has been thoroughly inculcated with the idea that the worst crime he can commit is to refuse to play the role of the dutiful son required by that hierarchy, as defined by the "traditions" of his culture. He is the victim of a tremendous anxiety whenever he fails to be, in his words, "a model boy,"<sup>1</sup> like his brother Henry. As Nathan learns, and

will demonstrate to the reader, he can never escape the gravity which draws him back to his first home and the influence of his first authority figures. Throughout his life Nathan's father's proscriptive hand hovers nearby whenever Nathan contemplates action, particularly sexual or creative, and his mother's symbolic presence colours all his relations with women: " 'Jewish mothers know how to own their suffering boys' "2 is a message he will be forced to acknowledge ruefully on more than one occasion. Although to the world he presents the mask of a roguish, but dedicated and professional, novelist, in his inner life, like Alex Portnoy, Nathan Zuckerman is able neither to escape nor to ignore his place on the lowest level of the Zuckerman family hierarchy, his distant accommodation with the family hierarchy or the tenacious grip of a parentally and culturally inspired ideal of son-hood and masculinity. As Nathan passes from childhood into adolescence he is exposed to many ideas at variance with the mores of Jewish-American society: he finds an oppositional set of values to those he absorbs with devotional fervour from American literature; he learns different ideas about individuality and family in the secular society of the non-Jewish Americans, in which he, to a much greater extent than his parents, participates; and he learns, while in the care of the teachers at his university, to valorise publicly and privately the call of Self, Art and the imperatives of Self-as-Artist. The sum of these influences is a definition at odds with the "good boy" his parents have created, and which at length gives birth to a "headstrong, unconventional son,"3 addicted to an incompatible mixture of prestige- and approval- seeking, and which manifests in the figure of Nathan Zuckerman.

Both definitions of self, the "good" "Jewish" Nathan, and the "bad" "American" Nathan somehow survive, albeit uneasily, in Zuckerman's personality, causing tension both in his inner life and in his accommodations with others, as he strives to obey their often conflicting calls. Nathan's unresolved Oedipal dramas, and his variant ideas of how to behave, and how to be a man, inform much which occurs in the books which chronicle his life. In each of the novels under discussion the shadow of his parents looms large in the action and across Nathan's consciousness, while it is no accident that each of the books is set during a significant moment in the lives of those parents, as much as during a significant moment in Nathan's life. *The Ghost Writer* covers the Zuckermans' anxieties during the period in which their eldest son leaves home, while the second and third books in the series centre on the deaths of Victor Zuckerman and Selma Zuckerman respectively; if these works also deal

with Nathan's experience of these traumatic events, it is how they serve as "rites of passage" in his growth toward a delayed maturity on which Roth focuses, and which provides the real emotional heart of the developments of plot and theme within them.

Roth's focus on maleness and masculinity, and how it is constructed through the experience of the family and the wider society, facilitates his investigation of a number of themes which continue to fascinate him: the relationship between fathers and sons; the connection between fact and fiction; the connection between an author and his or her autobiographical details as they concern the fiction he or she might create; and the "fictions" of identity and memory and their relationship to the construction of personality. Nathan Zuckerman is a figure through whom Roth has explored a number of issues which relate to his own experience, and the experience of Americans like him. Like Roth, Zuckerman is a native of crowded, ethnic suburbs, in both cases New Jersey's Newark; like Roth, Zuckerman is the author of a controversial novel of the 1960s, and like Roth, Zuckerman has been concerned with the problematic relationship between life and art, a difficulty made more vexing when others refuse to follow Henry James' exhortation to grant the writer his subject, and display their own incapacity on that account when refusing to believe that a writer can successfully separate one from the other; finally, both Zuckerman and Roth have been beleaguered by those who do not like their work or who dispute their choice of subject, or who find in either one who is, as Stanley Cooperman has commented regarding Roth, "[n]either Jew nor 'American' "4 and who "wanders through a metaphysical comic nightmare in which moral value is reduced to mannerism and formal tradition to eccentricity — an eccentricity at best picturesque or exotic."<sup>5</sup> The same critic has, in more informative mood, identified Paul Herz's Uncle Asher, a character in *Letting Go* (1962) as "the pagan (or 'Epicoros' — a name which Jews, at the time of the Greek conquest, gave to their fellows who chose as their own exile the way of the flesh and imitative secular art)."<sup>6</sup> The designation, describing a relationship to culture, to society and to art, seems peculiarly appropriate to Roth and perhaps even more so to Nathan Zuckerman.

In Roth's *The Ghost Writer* male hierarchical accommodations are brought to the fore by an examination of the stresses in a male's first and most influential accommodation with another male: the relationship with the first "alpha" he encounters, the father, or father-figure. Roth teases out the nuances in the relationship between a father and a son by focusing on the specific example of Nathan Zuckerman and his father Victor during a

period of tension for both parties, as the son becomes disengaged from the original family hierarchy. Contemplating the creation of his own hierarchy, the young man moves into a position of conditional, partial, autonomy, and both father and son contemplate the consequences of the younger man's entering into adult accommodations of his own: for example, taking full control of his social interactions; commencing independent economic activities and becoming responsible for his own affairs in that regard; and considering partnering and beginning the task of producing and raising children.

Expectation fostered by stereotypes would tend to attribute more anxiety to a mother over the "loss" of children when the time comes for them to leave the parental home than to a father. However, whatever emotions are involved, as well as being emotionally wrenching for the father as well as the mother, the defection of a member of a hierarchy of such small size as a family has serious consequences for the "head of the house," and for his sense of prestige. This will particularly be so if the individual departing from the family hierarchy exits under circumstances which see him exercising his own hesitant authority, and undermining the authority of the "alpha" male of the original family structure. This is precisely the situation which occurs as, amidst dissension and mutual recriminations, Nathan Zuckerman breaks from his family, begins life as an adult, and commences his career as a writer.

It would be a rare youngster who has not engaged in the fantasy of wondering what life would be like if he or she had different parents and different domestic circumstances. In *The Ghost Writer*, with family unpleasantness fresh in his mind and bonds of love and tradition temporarily obscured by emotion Roth allows his talented fictionaliser and aspiring novelist, Nathan Zuckerman at twenty-three, the opportunity to give these impulses full play. Nathan has written to a famous short story writer, E. I. Lonoff, and arrives at the latter's house at the start of the novel in response to an invitation to dinner. After this, for a variety of reasons, Nathan plays at replacing the people with whom he is accommodated in reality, most centrally the members of his biological family, with a family structure more in accordance with the personal, creative and symbolic mythos he hopes as an artist to construct, and which he feels is more suitable to the person he wishes to be. The transformation of an imperfect, mundane reality into an exotically agreeable fantasy Nathan hopes to accomplish through winning for himself the "moral sponsorship and...the magical protection"<sup>7</sup> of one who is already a "Great Artist," whose talent

Nathan hopes will spill over and affect the art in which he intends to chronicle and reflect this metamorphosis. The novel charts the course of Nathan's attempt to bring about this extraordinary piece of autobiographical alchemy as he strives to find alternatives for relationships in which he feels he is not understood, and his "gift" and his "art" not appreciated, and as he attempts to hide from the realities and difficulties of accommodating with a world which stubbornly refuses to conform to his dreams.

In the correspondences which make up Nathan's intended substitute family, each of the characters who feature most prominently in *The Ghost Writer*, and is part of the imaginary hierarchy of family Nathan is in the business of creating, has a counterpart in Nathan's real family, the members of which feature only in the guilty memories which occupy his mind at various times during the book.<sup>8</sup> Nathan's father, a chiropodist bemused by his son's artistic pretensions, has his counterpart in "the great man,"<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Isidore Lonoff, a Jewish, Russian-born master of the short-story, in whom Nathan sees a potential mentor as well as a substitute parent; his mother's "alter-ego" is Lonoff's wife Hope, an elegant, monied, long-suffering-but-acquiescent New England blue-blood; and his girlfriend Betsy, an attractive ballet dancer who has shared Nathan's bed and his life, but whose charms have palled somewhat due to her devotion to her own art-form, has a "double" in "the enchanting and mysterious houseguest"<sup>10</sup> of the Lonoffs, Amy Bellette, whose intended adjunctive function in the young writer's life becomes even more apparent as one realises her name evokes the *belle lettres* to which he aspires creatively. Bellette, as befits a muse, is as beautiful as the "Velázquez princess"<sup>11</sup> of whom she reminds Nathan. She becomes even more desirable and acceptable in his eyes when he turns Lonoff's former student, by a further process of fictionalising, which John Leonard refers to as Nathan's "appropriating the Ophelia of the death camps for his dark, libidinal purposes,"<sup>12</sup> into an Anne Frank who has mysteriously survived the Holocaust, and who emerges in the Berkshires just in time to reveal her "secret identity," wed Nathan, and return with him to an approving Zuckerman family. Nathan sees in Amy a way of reuniting the sundered elements of fantasy and actual selves and existences—son and artist and writer and Jew—to at last wed him permanently and painlessly to his Jewishness, effect his reconciliation with Zuckerman *pere* and all the members of Nathan's families, factual and fictional, and return him to a secure place in the hierarchical structure of the Zuckerman family.

While the emotional details which underpin the novel are complex, the story of *The Ghost Writer* is itself quite simple. The novel begins with

Nathan about to describe his pilgrimage to the Berkshire home of the celebrated emigré Lonoff and his wife Hope, “as the amused literati had it, [his] ‘high-born Yankee heiress.’”<sup>13</sup> Nathan informs the reader insouciantly he is, “like many a *Bildungsroman* hero before me, already contemplating my own massive *Bildungsroman*.”<sup>14</sup> The would-be master of the word is, however, “nonplussed,”<sup>15</sup> “bashful”<sup>16</sup> and “breathless”<sup>17</sup> in the older man's presence; he confides to the reader that the reason for this is that he has found his way to Lonoff's home “to plead a matter of utmost personal urgency...to submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son.”<sup>18</sup> *The Ghost Writer* describes Nathan's overnight stay with the Lonoffs, and the events the hours he spends in the Berkshire farmhouse hold for the literary neophyte. Having confessed his desire to be “adopted” by Lonoff, Nathan admits:

Of course, I had a loving father of my own...but my father was a foot doctor and not an artist, and lately we had been having serious trouble in the family because of a new story of mine...As a result, after two decades of more or less unbroken amiable conversation, we had not been speaking for nearly five weeks now, and I was off and away seeking patriarchal validation elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Both the text and sub-text of the novel reveal that the Zuckerman saga, for all that it masquerades as a *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, is also attuned to the realities of the dynamics of power relationships within the family unit, and power and accommodation between sons and fathers and father-figures within different expressions of patriarchal hierarchy. In *The Ghost Writer* Nathan returns obsessively to the subject of his feud with his father, and the reasons for his attempts to coerce affirmative and supportive behaviour from a succession of male figures are revealed. Nathan substitutes devotion to art, and obedience to its subjective imperatives, for devotion to the family and obedience to the father, at the same time as he seeks a figure who can symbolically replace the male parent who will not acknowledge the superior claim of the new structure over the old.<sup>20</sup>

*The Ghost Writer* explores the relationship of Nathan to his writing, and explains much about the hesitancy of his hierarchical adjustments and the tentative accommodations which characterise his later career. It tells the story of how that career came to begin, following an argument which is, the “fifty textbook scenes of domestic schism”<sup>21</sup> from his childhood and teenage years aside, the first real quarrel between the man coolly characterised by Nathan as “the first of my fathers”<sup>22</sup> and the boy on whom “Doc”

Zuckerman clearly notes. In *The Ghost Writer*, interspersed between his account of the sequence of events which comprises his stay with the Lonoffs, Nathan gives the history of his search for a patriarchal figurehead who will grant him the affirmation his real father can not or will not give him concerning the subject matter and style of the work he has begun producing.

Nathan's accounts in *The Ghost Writer* encompass the fact that he has already experienced disappointment and rebuff (a failed accommodation) in a relationship with an established literary figure. After initial encouragement, an offer of aid does not materialise from the Byronic personage of a novelist named Felix Abravanel. Nathan reluctantly concludes when he relates the tale of their encounter that "Abravanel was clearly not in the market for a twenty-three-year-old son."<sup>23</sup> However, searching for a second father who will provide the masculine validation and creative acknowledgment which his nascent literary career has failed to elicit from Dr. Zuckerman, in the urbane Lonoff, a fellow Jew, and a successful and influential writer with the suitably romantic lineage of having been long ignored by the American public before being discovered and lionised, Nathan feels he has at last found an appropriate candidate for substitutive paternity.

Yet, while Nathan searches for the perfect father, he remains obsessed with the reasons behind his failure to relate to his real father, and that father to him. Although he tries to see his father's criticism of his story as something which any writer can expect—"Hadn't Joyce, hadn't Flaubert, hadn't Thomas Wolfe, the romantic genius of my high-school reading list, all been condemned for disloyalty or treachery or immorality by those who saw themselves as slandered in their works?"<sup>24</sup>—the eldest son, thoroughly distantly accommodated to the family hierarchy, cannot but help worry about his position in relation to his *anisotimoi* in the hierarchy of the Newark Zuckermans: "But what about sons? It wasn't Flaubert's father or Joyce's father who had impugned me for my recklessness — it was my own."<sup>25</sup> Nathan's account of his contretemps with his father is constantly interrupted by the litany of the minutiae of the elder Zuckerman's devotion to what Nathan eulogises as a "close family bound by the same strong feelings,"<sup>26</sup> watched over by a caring, competent *paterfamilias*, and his tender feelings for his father struggle with his anger and his sense of being misunderstood through the calls of his gift being misrepresented.

If Nathan, however, expects his real father not only to be a perfect father but a perfect man, he expects to find in Lonoff a perfect man he can make into his perfect father. Nathan is, however, disappointed with the reality of

the individual in whom he has invested so much psychic energy. The Lonoff "who emerged from the study to bestow a ceremonious greeting...made me think of him stepping down from a shoeshine stand rather than from the high altar of art,"<sup>27</sup> he reports, while next admitting registering the "impression...that E. I. Lonoff looked more like the local superintendent of schools than the region's most original storyteller since Melville and Hawthorne."<sup>28</sup> As their meeting proceeds, the qualities Nathan most admires in the writing he finds amusing in the man, as "a blunt, colloquial, pointedly ungrandiloquent Lonoff seemed to take turns with a finicky floorwalker Lonoff as official representative to the unwritten world."<sup>29</sup> He mentally bemoans to the famed author that "the excruciating scrupulosity, the same maddening, meticulous attention to every last detail that makes you great, that keeps you going and got you through...now is dragging you down."<sup>30</sup>

However, the desire of the acolyte at the "high altar of art" to praise wins out over the bitter vexatiousness of the querulous son, prepared over again for disappointment. Once inside the Lonoffs' home Nathan reacts as if in a temple, the atmosphere he obviously wishes to feel imbuing the scene before him with symbolic intensity. "Purity. Serenity. Simplicity. Seclusion. This is how I will live,"<sup>31</sup> he enthuses. The American boy is entranced by his reception at the hands of the cultured, cosmopolitan Lonoff, and, after the older man tells him that "I told Hope this morning: Zuckerman has the most compelling voice I've encountered in years, certainly for somebody starting out,"<sup>32</sup> and toasts him at dinner with words Nathan finds more intoxicating than the Chianti which accompanies and the brandy which follows the meal: "'To a wonderful new writer.'" <sup>33</sup> Nathan is gripped by "the strength of a feeling that I had rarely had toward my own father,"<sup>34</sup> and a small joke shared with the writer shortly after causes Nathan to find "released in me a son's girlish love for the man of splendid virtue and high achievement who understands life, and who understands the son, and who approves."<sup>35</sup> Nathan feels he has won acceptance, and with the detachment permitted by his ability to be "professionally innocent despite myself,"<sup>36</sup> to which flaw he confesses in another context, and with the zeal, if not excess, which will characterise all the endeavours of his later life, the fellow who can now admit to being "new to manhood (about five minutes into it, actually)"<sup>37</sup> spends the remainder of this most successful evening plotting the replacement of the other unsuitable player in the drama of his real life, his *de facto* spouse.



Nathan is estranged from Betsy at the time of *The Ghost Writer*. The "artistic and amatory alliance"<sup>38</sup> of the pair has ended after he has confessed to numerous sexual liaisons with her friends. This state of affairs, as it transpires, is only temporary, for the persistent reader of Roth discovers during the course of the next Zuckerman novel, *Zuckerman Unbound*, that Betsy later becomes Nathan's first wife. Nathan has been, in revealing the sordid details of his infidelities, "crueler than was either necessary or intended,"<sup>39</sup> and, with brio, prophetic in terms of later installments in the Zuckerman saga, he is "carried away by the idea that if I were a perfidious brute, I at least would be a truthful perfidious brute."<sup>40</sup> In this instance, as with his desire to substitute Lonoff for his own father, Nathan prefers to construct for himself an ideal, and idealised, version of life in which his own and others' behaviour can be artistically rearranged; while Alex Portnoy avoids the routines of marriage and children by "refusing" to find and marry a "nice Jewish girl," Nathan Zuckerman rationalises his philandering at the same time as he goes about rejecting his lover and replacing her with Amy Bellette.

While enjoying the hospitality of the Lonoffs, Zuckerman is entranced by Bellette, a graduate student working on compiling Lonoff's working notes and drafts. His busy fantasies about her are perceptively and economically juxtaposed with the fracture lines which appear in the Lonoffs' marriage. As Nathan will find later in life, the demands of vocation can cause the failure of even the most intense romantic vision and, despite seeming so perfectly balanced, the marriage between Emmanuel Isidore and Hope Lonoff is shown to be little more than a strained, if highly polished, facade. Hope has seen her own "hopes" for domestic harmony disintegrate; competent and cultured, she can "in her own unostentatious way...do anything, except figure out how to make her husband happy."<sup>41</sup> Exasperated by years of emotionally unrewarding life with Art as a mistress-competitor, Hope tries to surrender her place to Amy, and *The Ghost Writer* ends with a humorous mock-anabasis over snow and ice as Amy Bellette decamps by car, to be followed first by Hope, with a suitcase, but on foot, and finally by E. I. Lonoff himself, in pursuit of his wife, leaving the young visitor temporary master of the literary mansion, symbolically but unpreparedly wearing the mantle for which he has yearned, but which he had clearly not thought to possess so swiftly, and in such comic circumstances.

The story-line of *The Ghost Writer* is complicated by the trio of asides, diversions, or subplots with which Nathan conjures, and which he fills with voices and ideas which act in similar fashion to a Greek chorus in

providing a commentary on the novel's other events. These subplots are: the history of the controversy caused in the Zuckerman family as a result of Nathan's use of family history in his short story, "Higher Education"; Nathan's account of his encounter with Felix Abravanel; and Nathan's fictional biography of Amy Bellette, "Femme Fatale," in the penultimate chapter of *The Ghost Writer*.

The highly charged hierarchical jousting which takes place between Nathan and his father, the head of the Zuckerman family and the arbiter of its opinion, as a result of the appearance of Nathan's semi-biographical story in a national magazine, causes trouble between Nathan and all the members of his immediate family, and irritates profound rifts in the previously harmonious family lute. This trouble is not only central to this, the first novel in the Zuckerman series but also of significance for succeeding installments of the saga, over which the spectre of his father's and his family's disapproval also hangs. "Higher Education" is the first, but by no means the last, time Nathan will find himself facing, as Roth describes them when discussing similar charges laid at his door in the 1960s, "accusations that [he] had divulged Jewish secrets and vulgarly falsified Jewish lives."<sup>42</sup> Nathan's father is indignant at the treatment Nathan has handed out not only to the Zuckerman clan, but, by extension, to all Jewish-Americans; indeed, all Jewry might well feel "gratuitously disgraced and jeopardised by my inexplicable betrayal,"<sup>43</sup> as Nathan, with his habitual adoption of the self-flagellating intensity of a *pen tente*, terms it. These accusations of filial ingratitude and anti-Semitism, acting synergistically, in his father's eyes, produce a crime even worse than either would be alone. They will, in different forms and from a variety of sources, pursue Zuckerman throughout his life. Instead of being proud of the recognition afforded his offspring the elder Zuckerman expresses a sense of injury at his son's fictionalising of private lives and family secrets. Hurt by rebuff when he has been "naïve enough to expect nothing more than the usual encouragement,"<sup>44</sup> the young writer goes looking to others for the praise which he fails to elicit from his closest kin.

The event marks a critical moment of transition in the family life, sparking the first "adult" quarrel between Dr. and Mrs. Zuckerman and their eldest son. It also precipitates the other events in the novel, for the emotions engendered by Nathan's fictional re-working of family legend not only initiate his desire and search for a substitute father-figure, but also eventually provoke his desire to "atone" for his crime against the family by returning to its bosom with his credentials as a son of Abraham reaffirmed

by his capture of the mate no Jewish family could fail to adore, the Holocaust victim Anne Frank, brought back to life and brought home as wife to a devoted and dutiful son. This impulse is in evidence throughout *The Ghost Writer*, as Nathan remains conscious that his story and his rebellious defence of it has subverted the authority of the family's hierarchical structure. Despite his stubbornness and his refusal to compromise his art, Nathan admits that he has long suffered from "the oldest and most ingrained of habits,"<sup>45</sup> and he desires still to "please [his parents] and make them proud."<sup>46</sup> At Lonoff's, left alone with his thoughts after dinner, Nathan attempts a letter to his father which he fervently hopes will give evidence of "some enlightened sign of contrition for the offences I had begun to commit against my greatest supporters."<sup>47</sup>

"Higher Education" is a fictionalised version of a dispute over an inheritance between members of a family, relatives of the Zuckermans. The details Nathan has employed to fuel his tale, he admits, have been "borrowed from family history instances of what my exemplary father took to be the most shameful and disreputable transgressions of family decency and trust."<sup>48</sup> Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last time, Nathan's fault seems not to be that he has lied, but that in telling the truth he has told too much of it. " 'Wel...you certainly didn't leave anything out, did you?' "<sup>49</sup> Nathan's father repeats accusingly, as he walks Nathan to his bus the day before the latter's departure for Quahsay. Favouring his offspring with some observations about the nature of art and truth, and the conflicting claims of loyalty to self, and to family, religious and cultural values, Nathan's father concedes: " 'Maybe I don't know about art myself. Maybe none of our family does, not the way that you do. But that's my point. People don't read art — they read about *people*.' "<sup>50</sup> The elder Zuckerman's opinion is that " 'your story, as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing and one thing only...It is about kikes. Kikes and their love of money.' "<sup>51</sup> His concern is that " '[t]his story isn't us, and what is worse it isn't even *you*....You are not somebody who writes this kind of story and then pretends it's the truth.' "<sup>52</sup> Nathan realizes that a crucial moment between parent and child has arrived. He recognizes the potency of the appeal to the "model boy" in him, the son whose behaviour must be perfect, and who will be content to remain in subordinate place in the family hierarchy. This call conflicts with the fledgling claims of the writer, in the son who wishes to pass to adulthood. For what may be the first time in Nathan's life he asserts the claims of the self he wishes to become, the adult Nathan, with the right to opinions of his own, and to autonomy of action in

a structure in which he is his own master: " 'But I *did* write it.' "<sup>53</sup> he protests.

Nathan's father's reply works toward an emotive crescendo, culminating, with most damning and constraining parental effect: " 'You are a loving boy...You are a good and kind and considerate young man...you are not somebody who writes this kind of story.' "<sup>54</sup> Nathan records how his father next

threw his arms onto my shoulders. Making me all the more belligerent...'You're not,' he pleaded, shaking me just a little.

But I hopped onto the bus, and then behind me the pneumatic door, with its hard rubber edge, swung shut with what I took to be an overly appropriate thump, a symbol of the kind you leave out in fiction.<sup>55</sup>

Nathan indicates an awareness that the details of the exchange are themselves symbolic of the struggle in which the men are engaged, the eternal conflict between father-son, tradition and change, and man and man about possession of authority, interpretation, and validation. The love of Victor Zuckerman for his son is beyond doubt, as is its reciprocation; nonetheless their struggle is inevitable, and its outcome certain to be painful for both of them, with no victory to be won without endings, and a parting of ways. Nathan boards his bus, and the longest silence between his father and him since his birth is the result.

Both men are shaken by the dispute; Victor perhaps even more than his son. As Nathan comments of his father's final response to "Higher Education": "He was so bewildered by what I had written that he had gone running to *his* moral mentor, a certain Judge Leopold Wapter, to get the judge to get his son to see the light."<sup>56</sup> Unable to convince Nathan through logic or force of will, and unable to command obedience by fiat, Victor Zuckerman, finding his own authority waning, appeals in desperation to a figure of patriarchal validation of his own.

Judge Wapter is a symbol of great potency as far as Nathan's father is concerned. Wapter not only represents success in America, but a success in American terms which has been gained without the loss of adherence to traditional Jewish values. Wapter is a Jew integrated into mainstream society, a man who straddles the gulf between immigrant and American. The judge belongs to a transitional group; he began, as he will remind Nathan later, standing alongside the Zuckermans and other Jewish families, " 'poor people in a new land, struggling for our basic needs, our social and

civil rights, and our spiritual dignity.' "<sup>57</sup> He is now, Nathan's mother comments, " 'admired and loved, and by gentiles, too.' "<sup>58</sup> Wapter has attained, in the local Jewish-American community, the status of a culture hero.

The reader is informed that it was Wapter who was originally responsible for recommending Nathan for a university place, thus "rescuing" him from Newark's wasteland; this reinforces the judge's prestigious place in family lore, for Nathan recounts how Victor Zuckerman "still remembered having been rescued by one of the Wapter brothers—it could have been the future jurist himself— when a gang of Irish hooligans were having some fun throwing the seven-year-old mocky up into the air in a game of catch."<sup>59</sup> Wapter's function in *The Ghost Writer* demonstrates that the Jewish conception of ideal masculinity is not at all incompatible with the Anglo-American structure of ideal masculinity. In many senses, in fact, they are consonant. The *s*-structure forms of expression of the *p*-structure may be different, but the object of the archetype as it operates in society is the same: the ideal male is the phallic focus, the hero and policeman and god; he stands for the preservation and reinforcement of patriarchal structures, and validation of the strategies of individual males for attaining power over people and places and things. Nathan notes that "the Wapters occupied a position of prestige and authority rather like that accorded in our household to President and Mrs. Roosevelt,"<sup>60</sup> and this coupling of "parent" figures is telling, for in Hebrew "Judge" is a synonym for "leader," and Judge Wapter's judicial role is complemented by his prestigious place in the Jewish community, and the implication of his wife's moral and role-model stature. The upbringing which has inculcated in Nathan the virtue, the necessity, of being both a good Jew and a law-abiding American citizen, obedient to the constraints of religious and secular, and cultural and legal, sanctions, are evoked in the person of Wapter, further complicating the potency of the call to order to which Nathan is subjected by his father and the family.

Ironically, Roth focuses on the extent to which Judge Wapter, truly a Jew of the Diaspora, and in some ways closer to WASP than Wapter, is one of a group who has enacted precisely the same journey which Nathan wishes to make, away from the restricted world of ethnic identity and, via the "melting pot," into a wider, increasingly polyvalent, America. Just as Roth's early Jewish critics attempted to define for him how he could proceed with his art, and how and under what circumstances he could depict Jewish life, so the Judge with Nathan. Thus there is an odd, "dog-in-the-manger" attitude about Wapter's criticism of the story Nathan has written; having

redefined the American Jewish experience for himself, and having partaken of what seems to have been a jovially goyish accommodation with his culture, Wapter (and the Zuckermans) resent Nathan's refusal to administer a literary praline coating to the image of Newark and the immigrants by whom it has been inhabited. " 'I will not,' " Nathan tells his mother at one point, " 'prate in platitudes to please the adults.' " <sup>61</sup>

Nathan's ambivalence towards the judge can be compared with the feelings which intrude into the text when he first meets Lonoff. Wanting, even needing, the male before him to be a figure of authority and potency, Nathan nevertheless in both instances asserts the claims of his own ego and ambition in noting the physical inadequacy of the actual man when compared with the aura of the ideal, the image, which he has constructed, and which has been constructed for him, prior to the encounter. His attitude during his one meeting with Wapter shows a precocious boy prefiguring himself as the objective, observant, stubbornly opinionated novelist fiercely dedicated to his art, and without fear or favour translating into fiction his razor-sharp perceptions and rapid-fire judgments. Although at first overawed, Zuckerman describes the "tanned, plumpish, cheery" <sup>62</sup> judge with a keen eye. Comparing him with his own models, Nathan notes the judge is "years younger than my own anxious father, and not half as serious" <sup>63</sup>; "not as small as my father" <sup>64</sup>; but "still...easily a foot shorter than Abraham Lincoln." <sup>65</sup> The most serious disappointment Wapter delivers on the occasion is by way of a sartorial lapse, for Nathan notes that:

Reputedly an excellent golfer, he was probably either on his way to or from a game; that's how I later came to terms with his argyle socks. But when I first noticed them...I was shocked. It was as though he were the callow, unworldly applicant, and I, with my father's garters pulled tight as a tourniquet, were the judge. <sup>66</sup>

In both instances, in his accommodations with Wapter and Lonoff, we realize that if Nathan's criticism is the result of his own ambition, his expectations are coloured by the "modes of specification" of ideal masculinity; that is, there is a picture embedded in Nathan's sub-conscious mind, against which figures of authority in his life are automatically measured. In the accommodations between a male and those more highly placed in hierarchical structures, there is an expectation that a certain physical type will accompany a "man of power." In the words of Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette: "And though those in the outer world may not live up to the archetypal expectation, the archetype is nonetheless present." <sup>67</sup>

This archetype Nathan brings into play to measure his father, Wapter, Abravanel and lastly, and, final y, the "commanding, autocratic...regal, meticulous"<sup>68</sup> E. I. Lonoff, whose first name is Emmanuel, "God with us", and whose initials may also be rearranged to approximate the Hebrew for "god," (I/El) which together indicate the ultra-paternal status which attaches to his magisterial frame. Nathan's creative work acknowledges the extent to which each of these men has shaped him and/or guided him; yet Nathan's choice of subjects for his fiction, and his treatment of them, whether his real father, Lonoff, Wapter or Abravanel, serves as rituals of exorcism through which he engages in the Oedipal revenge-taking against the same sex parent which is the other side of the love and respect of a son for his father. Each of Nathan's "fathers" frightens him, intimidates him, and at the same time goads him to compete, to criticize and to otherwise test his strength against theirs in the classic modes of hierarchicisation, and struggle between older male and younger male.

In *The Ghost Writer* the reader learns that Victor Zuckerman has sent "Higher Education" to Judge Wapter for comment. Wapter, a cagey advocate, responds with a letter to Nathan which he is sensitive enough to couch in terms which are meant to act as a sop to the pride of the misunderstood artist, invoking the archetype of a bardic or Orphic figure, to which Nathan had at first himself appealed in justifying his work. Implying that his sympathies are more with the artist than the critic, Wapter's concessions form the preamble to his most telling blows. He relates that he has informed Nathan's father that

down through the ages and in all countries, the artist has always considered himself beyond the mores of the community in which he lived. Great artists...have been harshly persecuted...by the frightened and ill-educated, who do not understand that the artist is a special individual with a unique contribution to make to mankind...I for one would never want to be allied with the intolerance shown by the Greeks towards Socrates, or by the Norwegians towards Ibsen.<sup>69</sup>

Wapter does not omit to "remind" Nathan of the previous relationship between them, and the debt which might be construed as having been incurred by Wapter's championing of Nathan's application for a university place. The judge's chatty, man-to-man discourse implies that he and Nathan have a great deal in common, as if Nathan is on the way to being "admitted" to the same "order" to which the judge belongs. A timeless

hierarchical pattern is seen as being in operation, whereby the base of the hierarchical pyramid is filled by the promise of steady ascension to the apex.

With little subtlety, the judge prods Nathan towards the sort of Zionist mythologising that he feels should be coming from such a promising pen as that which belongs to the young Zuckerman. He adds an incongruous postscriptum to his letter: "If you have not yet seen the Broadway production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, I strongly advise that you do so. Mrs Wapter and I were in the audience on opening night; we wish that Nathan Zuckerman could have been with us to benefit from that unforgettable experience."<sup>70</sup> With ironic significance in terms of the "Anne Frank" who appears in *The Ghost Writer* (whose existence might be construed as having the same relation to fact as the girl portrayed on the stage, or even in the book *Het Achterhuis*, to the "original" Anne) the unforgettable experience the judge implies would undoubtedly have been that Nathan would have seen how a "real" Jewish writer should operate.

Wapter's missive is a classic of the mannered, rhetorical strategies of the fraternity to which he belongs. "On the other hand," it continues,

I do believe that, like all men, the artist has a responsibility to his fellow man, to the society in which he lives, and to the cause of truth and justice. With that responsibility and that alone as my criterion, I would attempt to give...an opinion on the suitability for publication in a national magazine of your latest fictional effort.<sup>71</sup>

In a questionnaire which he appends to his letter Wapter's fatherly tone gives way to a more sophisticated, more literary reiteration of Victor Zuckerman's conversation with his son at the bus-stop: there appears the same evocation of the spectre of racism and genocide; the same emotional appeal to an abstract of society, culture and race; and the same suggestion that it is a betrayal of all that is hallowed for a Jew to resist the call to show a concerted, careful public face to the gentiles. Three samples of this document should suffice to demonstrate its tone and to make clear its agenda:

1. If you had been living in Nazi Germany in the thirties, would you have written such a story?
2. Do you believe Shakespeare's Shylock and Dickens's Fagin have been of no use to anti-Semites?...9. Aside from the financial gain to yourself, what benefit do you think publishing this story in a national magazine will have for (a) your family; (b) your



community; (c) the Jewish religion; (d) the well-being of the Jewish people?<sup>72</sup>

Instead of a meditation on ingratitude and an admission of wrongdoing, confession and repentance, however, Nathan declines to answer the judge's letter, setting off a *tsunami* of indignation from family members: " 'Oh, Nathan, where's your humility where's your modesty—where's the courtesy you have always had?... You could tell him you went to see *The Diary of Anne Frank*. You could at least do that,' "<sup>73</sup> his mother cries, but if Nathan will regret his recalcitrance before the end of *The Ghost Writer*, and even for years to come as his life and his career progress, for the present he remains intransigent. Nathan's career may be said, in fact, to be one long attempt to atone to his disappointed mother and to win back the love of father and the patriarchal validation he feels he loses in this first novel. Through that process he seeks to attain again the self-respect of the Jewish son who believes he abandons father, family, religion and original identity to search for art, self, and America, through the cathartic, and profitable, practice of a particularly convincing kind of "fictionalised recall." The message Nathan might have learned even at this early stage is that father and culture have not abandoned him, nor he them; such a separation, indeed, can not be so easily achieved. Nathan betrays the influence of father and culture, and they live in him, constantly reminding him of their loving, supporting, shaping presence. He is his father's son, and a Jew, and an American, and a writer, all at once, despite the difficulty in juggling and harmonising the calls of these varied identities. In stretching the wings of his independence "Nathan Dedalus" —the title of the second chapter of *The Ghost Writer*— spends much of the novel justifying to himself, to Lonoff and to the reader his rejection of the laws of the father as embodied in the Judge and Victor Zuckerman. Zuckerman is preoccupied with enacting his own version of the myth of the struggle of the youthful creative artist to break free from home and history, personal and general. Having grown up with the incompatible attractions of post-war American materialism and the stresses of still-fresh memories of the Holocaust, with their diametrically opposed claims on his creative soul, Nathan Zuckerman make his decision as he reacts against the figures that represent the patriarchal, historical tradition. His final reply to emotional manipulation is to reject those making the call, and the values for which they stand. Nathan refuses to compromise, will not accept his father's criticism of his story, will not be swayed by his mother's anguished, guilt-inducing appeals to him to preserve family *status quo*, and he will not reply to Wapter's letter and its

call to the super-ego of a social, cultural and ethnic conscience. In a replay of the final moments of his bus-stop dispute with his father, on behalf of all the authority figures in his life, in a fraught dialogue Nathan's mother attempts to hold on to her "good Jewish boy":

'Oh, I can't believe this is you.'

'It is me.'

'But — what about your father's love?'

'I am on my own!'<sup>74</sup>

The call of Art wins out over obligation to family, and Zuckerman imagines that he steps over the threshold from boy to man at the close of *The Ghost Writer* as decisively as he steps over the threshold of the Lonoff house in the novel's opening scene. This former moment marks the end of his childhood, and, as he walks into the consciousness of his readers in the latter, the birth of the fictional creation and creator of fictions named Nathan Zuckerman.

#### Notes:

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (New York: Farrar, 1986) 132.
  - <sup>2</sup> Philip Roth, *The Anatomy Lesson, Zuckerman Bound* (London: Penguin, 1989) 384.
  - <sup>3</sup> Roth, *Counterlife*, 150.
  - <sup>4</sup> Cooperman 203.
  - <sup>5</sup> Cooperman 203.
  - <sup>6</sup> Cooperman 214.
  - <sup>7</sup> Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer, Zuckerman Bound* (London: Penguin, 1989) 7.
  - <sup>8</sup> See Appendix, Fig 1.
  - <sup>9</sup> Roth, GW 3.
  - <sup>10</sup> Roth, GW 80.
  - <sup>11</sup> Roth, GW 15.
  - <sup>12</sup> John Leonard, "Fathers and Ghosts," *Critical Essays on Philip Roth*, ed. Sanford Pinsker (Boston: Hall, 1982) 86.
  - <sup>13</sup> Roth, GW 22.
  - <sup>14</sup> Roth, GW 3.
  - <sup>15</sup> Roth, GW 7.
  - <sup>16</sup> Roth, GW 7.
  - <sup>17</sup> Roth, GW 7.
  - <sup>18</sup> Roth, GW 7.
  - <sup>19</sup> Roth, GW 7.
  - <sup>20</sup> See Appendix, Fig 1.
  - <sup>21</sup> Roth, GW 59.
  - <sup>22</sup> Roth, GW 57.
  - <sup>23</sup> Roth, GW 48.
  - <sup>24</sup> Roth, GW 79.
  - <sup>25</sup> Roth, GW 80.
  - <sup>26</sup> Roth, GW 59.
  - <sup>27</sup> Roth, GW 3.
  - <sup>28</sup> Roth, GW 3.
  - <sup>29</sup> Roth, GW 49.
  - <sup>30</sup> Roth, GW 53.

- 
- <sup>31</sup> Roth, GW 4.  
<sup>32</sup> Roth, GW 52.  
<sup>33</sup> Roth, GW 21.  
<sup>34</sup> Roth, GW 54.  
<sup>35</sup> Roth, GW 41.  
<sup>36</sup> Roth, GW 22.  
<sup>37</sup> Roth, GW 54.  
<sup>38</sup> Roth, GW 26.  
<sup>39</sup> Roth, GW 27.  
<sup>40</sup> Roth, GW 27.  
<sup>41</sup> Roth, GW 33.  
<sup>42</sup> Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (New York: Penguin, 1988) 116.  
<sup>43</sup> Roth, GW 69.  
<sup>44</sup> Roth, GW 59.  
<sup>45</sup> Roth, GW 58.  
<sup>46</sup> Roth, GW 58.  
<sup>47</sup> Roth, GW 57-8.  
<sup>48</sup> Roth, GW 59.  
<sup>49</sup> Roth, GW 62.  
<sup>50</sup> Roth, GW 67.  
<sup>51</sup> Roth, GW 68.  
<sup>52</sup> Roth, GW 69.  
<sup>53</sup> Roth, GW 69.  
<sup>54</sup> Roth, GW 69.  
<sup>55</sup> Roth, GW 69.  
<sup>56</sup> Roth, GW 7.  
<sup>57</sup> Roth, GW 72.  
<sup>58</sup> Roth, GW 76.  
<sup>59</sup> Roth, GW 70.  
<sup>60</sup> Roth, GW 70.  
<sup>61</sup> Roth, GW 78.  
<sup>62</sup> Roth, GW 71.  
<sup>63</sup> Roth, GW 71.  
<sup>64</sup> Roth, GW 71.  
<sup>65</sup> Roth, GW 71.  
<sup>66</sup> Roth, GW 71-2.  
<sup>67</sup> Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King Warrior Magician Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) 10.  
<sup>68</sup> Roth, GW 3.  
<sup>69</sup> Roth, GW 73.  
<sup>70</sup> Roth, GW 74.  
<sup>71</sup> Roth, GW 73.  
<sup>72</sup> Roth, GW 74-5.  
<sup>73</sup> Roth, GW 76-7.  
<sup>74</sup> Roth, GW 78.