Philip Roth – The Continuing Presence
New Essays on Psychological Themes
This book is dedicated with love to my husband,
Michael Slote.
Philip Roth – The Continuing Presence

*New Essays on Psychological Themes*

Jane Statlander-Slote

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Nathan Marx, the deeply conflicted narrator in Philip Roth's short story "Defender of the "Faith," admits, in an epiphany of a man who has discovered something alluringly distasteful about himself, "there are strategies of aggression, but there are strategies of retreat as well" (194). In doing so, Marx sets the stage for the push and pull of competing desires and warring impulses that motivate Philip Roth's characters throughout the long trajectory of his fiction. For Roth, character is all about motive, those oppositional and ambivalent impulses that drive people to perform ingeniously choreographed acts of inspired and often desperate self-assertion. These "strategies of aggression" and "strategies of retreat" are the shape-shifting contortions designed to play-out fantasized versions of self. And for Roth, these brilliantly executed contortions revolve around the changing shape of what it means to be a Jew in the midst of the unrestrained mess of the twentieth-century and into the early decades of the twenty-first, an era struggling to emerge from under the anguished weight of its modernist predecessor. And Roth's characters will invent and re-invent the most implausibly seductive stories to confirm their fabricated lives. As the ever-persistent Nathan Zuckerman puts it, self-fabrications are "the kind of stories that people turn life into, the kind of lives that people turn stories into" (The Counterlife 124). These are stories with which Roth's characters must live; they live lives that are subject to constant revision, imagined outcomes, re-imagined selves. As the narrator of Roth's Nemesis reminds us, "the tyranny of contingency – is everything" (242).

The conflicted Nathan Marx, having by necessity cultivated an "infantryman's heart, which, like his feet, at first aches and swells but finally grows horny enough for him to travel the weirdest paths without feeling a thing," will, in that fraught spring of 1945, be reminded of the person he might have become had the war not intervened ("Defender of the Faith" 162). His impartial and dispassionate military posture will show itself to be a convenient masquerade, taking himself out of himself in a temporary hiatus, since, in the darkening light of one wistful spring evening among the young men under his charge, he will return to being the Jew goaded by the crafty, self-serving Sheldon Grossbart, whom we
both applaud for his chutzpah and disparage for his manipulative, opportunistic ploys. All it takes for the wavering Marx to capitulate to his former "self" is Grossbart's evocative call of "Good shabbus, sir!" in the dimming light of evening's summons to the Sabbath. Grossbart's seductive call conjures the past for Marx:

Suddenly touched a deep memory...the shrill sounds of a Bronx playground where, years ago...I had played on long spring evenings...I indulged myself in a reverie so strong that I felt as though a hand were reaching down inside me. It had to reach so very far to touch me! But now one night noise, one rumor of home and time past, and memory plunged down through all I had anesthetized, and came to what I suddenly remembered was myself ("Defender of the Faith" 170).

The nascent Nathan Marx reveals the kind of split self that governs the actions of the characters in Roth's fiction of the next five prolific decades. Roth's characters, driven by an array of motives enigmatic to themselves, will, like Nathan Marx, go "in search of more of me" ("Defender of the Faith" 170). Yet for Roth, the "self" is a slippery prospect, both concealed and ironically buttressed by anxious yearnings to rewrite reality, to rewrite the Jew in history.

At the close of the short story "Eli, the Fanatic" a "flailing," frenzied Eli, who dons the garb of the black-clothed Jewish refugee from Europe's wreckage, will be provisionally subdued, tranquilized by a drug that "calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached" (298). The "blackness" here would seem to be suggestive of the "Jew" in Eli as in Nathan Marx as well, who, "like Karl and Harpo," ambivalently finds himself to be "one of them" ("Defender of the Faith" 165). Here Roth aligns the Jew with emotion, with unrestrained emotive, infantilized, and reactive posturing in defiance of a detached, controlled, and not un-comically goyish reserve. It's the adult male, the admonishing, punitive father in the uncompromising Nathan Marx, who will discipline Grossbart at the story's close, sending him, like the other enlisted men, off to his fate in the Pacific.

Roth's characters, since the very beginning, are torn, torn between the person they fear themselves to be - the "history" bequeathed to them - and the person and the life willed into being by impetuous desire. Roth, speaking of himself in the third person, as if his own favorite character, in the preface to the thirtieth anniversary edition to Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories, identifies the ambivalence of the young writer as performed by his characters:
He proceeded to make identical the acts of departure and return and to perpetuate those contradictory yearnings that can perplex the emotions of an ambitious embryo – the desire to repudiate and the desire to cling, a sense of allegiance and the need to rebel, the alluring dream of escaping into the challenging unknown and the counterdream of holding fast to the familiar (xiv).

This is exactly what Roth has always done – "repudiate" and "cling," the unconscious pull of the id battling the moderating, restraining superego. As psychoanalyst Adam Phillips has suggested of Roth's wily characters, "there's no good performance - no performance, indeed - without indiscretion, or its possibility" ("Philip Roth's Patrimony" 168). And, to be sure, all of Roth's protagonists are involved in the ongoing, parodically executed performance of the self. As the resilient Nathan Zuckerman puts it, "one is acutely a performer"; the trick is to recognize it (The Counterlife 366). The performance of the self – or, more precisely, the performance of many selves – is Roth's characters' obsession. Roth, as Phillips argues, "has always had a strong and exhilarating sense that character...is not so much the acquisition of virtue as its defiance....Defiance of virtue requires impersonation; the excessive desire to be not too good is suited to the ventriloquence of fiction" ("Philip Roth's Patrimony" 172). The need for Roth's characters to impersonate selves reveals a deep-seated anxiety about identity and place; it is symptomatic of the conflicted psyche that defines Roth's neurotically displaced and misplaced protagonists. The art of impersonation that we find ironically displayed in Roth's fiction can be exhausting, not in the least, because it requires a counter-existence, a parallel and niggling sense of the self as other, watched over by the nagging, disapproving super-ego, for whom Roth's characters can never get it quite right. The impersonation of the self suggests, as Zuckerman knows all too well, the lack of a defended, secure sense of identity and, in short, a "character" with whom one can live comfortably.

As Zuckerman, with considerable, if unnerving, assurance tells us: "It's all impersonation – in the absence of a self, one impersonates selves" (The Counterlife 366). Inventing and reinventing lives, is hard work, harder still to maintain the liquid guise, which is why Nathan Marx's military maneuver against Grossbart, for example, pales in comparison to the subterfuges of self-reinvention. Such machinations thus result in the kind of exhibitionism with which Roth's characters perform their impersonations, from Sheldon Grossbart to Eli, the fanatic, to Henry Zuckerman remade as Hanoch in The Counterlife, to the exorbitantly performative Mickey Sabbath in Sabbath's Theatre, to Bucky Cantor, warrior of the Weequahic playground, in Nemesis. For, after all, as Adam
Phillips quips, "one lets people down – or 'deceives' them – when one refuses to be only one version of oneself" (168-9).

All Roth's fiction – from the early stories in Goodbye, Columbus to the later novels in the Nemesis tetralogy – reveal the kaleidoscopic outcome of the comically contorted attempts to live counterlives, attempts, as Zuckerman acknowledges, of "turning what-was into what-wasn't or what-might-be into what-was" (The Counterlife 38). Despite such machinations, however, Roth's characters meet up with the uncomfortable inevitability that "there was only the deadly earnest this-is-it of what-is, a theme at the center of The Human Stain (38). The essays in this collection on Roth and psychoanalysis demonstrate the ways in which Roth's anxiously-driven characters are motivated to construct counterlives and counterselves, all the while dodging the kind of self-betrayal that lies at the heart of every story.
Foreword - Works Cited


Introduction
Introduction

By Jane Statlander-Slote

In 1969, Philip Roth threw down the gauntlet of psychoanalytical readings with *Portnoy's Complaint*, a book that was, perhaps, both an unconscious challenge to readers to discover his true intentions, and a psychoanalytical exercise for himself and his then psychoanalyst, Dr. Hans Kleinschmidt (i.e. Dr. Spielvogel and the psychoanalytical process in general). Roth incorporated in his book narratives in the same continuously running "psychoanalytical" monologue-like style that he no doubt used in his sessions with his psychoanalyst.

The author explained in an interview that his choice to frame his narratives as psychoanalytic sessions was directly influenced by "the permissive conventions of the patient-analyst situation," which permitted the fictional inclusion that kind "of intimate, shameful detail, and coarse, abusive language that...in another fictional environment would have struck me as pornographic, exhibitionistic, and nothing but obscene" (Saxton, Searles 78).

*Portnoy's Complaint* contains a psychiatric textbook definition, including pronunciation key and editorial bracketing, of the psychological disorder Alexander Portnoy suffers from, as well as listing himself, Alexander Portnoy, as a mental illness. There is also Dr. Spielvogel's analysis of the patient; Alexander Portnoy is designated as both the sufferer of the disease and the disease itself: *Portnoy's Complaint*: n. [after Alexander Portnoy (1933-)]. A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses...war...with extreme sexual longings...of a perverse nature. Spielvogel says: 'Acts of exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, auto-eroticism and oral coitus are plentiful....feelings of shame....dread of retribution in the form of castration.' (Spielvogel, O. 'The Puzzled Penis,' Internationale Zeitschrift fur Psychoanalyse, vol. xxiv, p. 909)....believed by Spielvogel that...the symptoms can be traced to the bonds...in the mother-child relationship (*Portnoy's Complaint* 21). Portnoy's stream-of-conscious, couch confessional is one long—sometimes slightly diverging—three hundred page brilliant and imaginative monologic rant generally about his mother with only occasional questions directed at Dr. Spielvogel, who Roth never gives voice to answer (Appignanesi 5).

For that nearly half century from the sixties to the nineties, Dr. Kleinschmidt, art collector and specialist in abstract expressionism, treated
many famous artists and talented thinkers—Philip Roth, Robert Motherwell, the abstract expressionist painter, and my husband, Michael Slote, the philosophical ethicist—to name just a few. Although, as Slote asserts, Kleinschmidt didn't encourage his patients to explore their neuroses through their art or intellectual pursuits (Slote), it's obvious that the psychoanalytical process would become ingrained in these patients' thinking processes and perceptions.

Thus Portnoy's Complaint becomes a non-spoken talking cure for psychological conflicts. The language and conceptual structure of the psychoanalytical process profoundly informed, shaped and influenced these narratives so deeply steeped—albeit at times veiled and buried—in psychoanalytical themes, undertones and resonances. As Jeffrey Berman states: "When a Philip Roth character finds himself lying on a couch, more than likely he is engaged not in sex but in psychoanalysis. Therapy becomes the most intimate and imaginative event in life for the beleaguered hero, the one love affair he cannot live without" (239).

Of all fictional writers, Roth is the most informed and articulate about psychoanalytical theory, its methodology and practice. No other writer's protagonists are more psychoanalyzed than Roth's. It is difficult to bring to mind a work by him that does not contain a psychoanalytic frame, setting, or undertone.

Portnoy's Complaint is, after all, a "psychoanalytical monologue" (Berman 243) with the stylistic manner of writing that "captures perfectly the nuances of psychoanalysis. His language is analytic, restlessly interrogative, self-mocking" (Berman). His language and style are framed: the psychoanalyst listens to the patient's self-confessional, dazzling, exhibitionistic (and narcissistic) monologues. The Rothian narrator uses the psychoanalytic frame for his own purposes without necessarily bestowing honor on either the therapist or the psychoanalytic couch environment. Nevertheless, as much as Portnoy monologizes, Roth gives Dr. Spielvogel the last word: "So...Now ve may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (Berman 250).

Thus Portnoy's Complaint begins and ends on the couch. Bruno Bettelheim underscored the inherently psychoanalytical nature of Roth's Portnoy's Complaint in his essay, "Portnoy Psychoanalyzed," subtitled, "Therapy notes found in the files of Dr. O. Spielvogel, a New York psychoanalyst." Published in 1969, the same year that Roth published Portnoy's Complaint, Bettelheim's essay also comes on the heels of an essay published in American Imago, "The Angry Act: The Role of Aggression in Creativity" (Imago 98-128). Kleinschmidt's piece, most of which discussed the case histories of the artists, Kandinsky and Mann, inserts, almost parenthetically (from pages 123-127 in an essay that begins on page 98), apparently fictitious patient case information on two of Kleinschmidt's
analyzes: an unnamed painter and a Southern playwright. It is the "Southern playwright" figure that Philip Roth quickly understood was, in fact, himself and about whom Kleinschmidt's essay revealed confidential private information gleaned from Roth's psychoanalytical sessions with Kleinschmidt.

Roth's answer to Kleinschmidt's betrayal was to publish *My Life as a Man*, which, as Berman so ingeniously points out, mirrors Kleinschmidt's point by point analysis of Roth in the former's *Imago* essay, i.e., the "Southern playwright" in the Tarnopol-Spielvogel war of words (Berman 263-8); the fray Bettelheim jumped into in his '69 piece, "Portnoy Psychoanalyzed." As Berman asserts in a startling discussion of Kleinschmidt's essay: "The ironies are astonishing and extend everywhere. Roth, and no doubt Kleinschmidt never expected anyone to make the connection between 'The Angry Act' and *My Life as a Man* (Berman 265). To complicate this Roth-Kleinschmidt comedy of competitive brilliance, Bettelheim's piece, wittily purporting to be the notes made by New York psychoanalyst, Dr. O. Spielvogel, opens up a receding perspective of mirrors within mirrors within mirrors: Bettelheim "mirrors" Roth mirroring Roth in Tarnopol and Kleinschmidt in Spielvogel; and the interreflecting texts of both Roth and Kleinschmidt, ultimately underscore the profoundly psychoanalytical nature of Roth's narratives. Bettelheim paints a picture of the Tarnopol/Roth figure as a "petty bourgeois...highly intelligent...compulsive talker, extremely narcissistic and exhibitionistic," who masks himself "behind ironic self-deprecation" (13). Again, psychoanalysis, its formulations and concepts, is, in Bettelheim's analysis, the foundational underpinning of Roth's narratives.

These narratives are replete with great psychoanalytical nuggets: Roth's protagonists' incestuous desire for mother or females in general; the oedipal competition of siblings or fathers and sons; phallic power or the mourned loss of it; the pen as penis; impotency of the organ, as is, for example, so evident in *Exit Ghost*; the psycho-linguistic assertion of writing and the word as penis-power, or its lack and loss.

In fact, we can trace this process through all of Roth's books: from the potent, youthful boisterous phallic-driven narratives of his early and middle-period writing to the mournful, depressive, angry, impotent narratives of the later stages of his work. After reading *Exit Ghost* any informed reader could have predicted that the author's career would soon be coming to an end: his central male protagonist writer figure was becoming more and more physically unhealthy and aged in equal measure to the penis and power that his once-virile penis-pen was running low on.

Bettelheim's caustic, Freudianly-satiric response to *Portnoy's Complaint* in "Portnoy Psychoanalyzed," inadvertently helped feed the anti-Freudianism of the seventies and eighties. Frederick Crews, an early
advocate of psychoanalytic literary criticism in the '80s, ultimately rejected psychoanalysis, criticizing Freud's thinking on scientific and ethical grounds. Crews became a prominent critical source for the virulent anti-Freudianism of the 1980s and 90s, and the "Freud Wars" that raged on about the merits and demerits of Freud's reputation and true impact on the twentieth century. However, the ferocity of this raging battle only served to underscore and highlight the profound influence of Freud's thought: Freud was important enough to battle about. This was starkly contrasted with the sixties, which was informed by a deep sympathetic admiration for Freudian thought.

In 1909 Sigmund Freud arrived in New York Harbor with Carl Jung and Sandor Ferenczi. They were on a one week visit to deliver lectures on his "talking cure" at Massachusetts' Clark University. Before heading north, Freud spent time walking around Central Park, the Lower East Side, Coney Island and enjoying the Metropolitan Museum art collection. He barely spent a week in New York City but it became his cultural home. A century later, Manhattan, the native ground of the often Jewish and male classic middle or upper middle class neurotic, i.e. Philip Roth, Woody Allen and others we've grown to love and hate, remains the primary perception for how America views psychoanalysis.

In a special way, Sigmund Freud, the Jew with what has been designated a Jewish philosophy of motives involving mothers', fathers', sons' and daughters' endless discussions of histories and psychodramas that can all be summed up by the Herr Doctor's command: "Tell me about your relationship with your mother...." At least three generations were raised with this ingrained in their consciousnesses (Miller I).

Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis, and psychoanalytical literary readings have come full circle. From hostility to the near total eclipse of Freudian thought and, indeed, legitimacy and value of the psychoanalytical model, psychologically-informed inquiry is reversing its patricidal path and returning to its place of origin, legitimacy and status. That Freud's thought was colored and influenced by nineteenth century Germanic thought and patriarchal prejudices is not the issue here; neither are the negative male stereotypes of the female that Feminist thought rightfully pointed its finger at; but the baby was thrown out with the bath water and psychology and psychologically informed discourse have ultimately been unable to cut their ties to the language, form and content that inform their very methodologies and colloquy. In truth, literature and literary discourse have much in common with the language of psychological and psychoanalytical discourse: they are equally submerged in motives, characters, narrations, behaviors, actions, scenes, time frames, reasons and stories. Thus as far as literature and literary analysis is concerned, Freud could never be completely eradicated from literary
discourse, academic inquiry, its discussion, rhetoric or style of examination.

There are three stages in Rothian criticism. The earliest readers of Roth's work, 1959-1975, were generally shocked by the scatology, pornography, narcissism, anti-Semitism, misogyny and neuroses Roth spewed out. Another Newarker, Leslie Fiedler, in a 1959 essay stated: "For Newark...to exist for the imagination of strangers...[it] would have to produce a writer as vulgar, comical, subtle, pathetic and dirty as itself" (Fielder 24). Mitchell Morse complained that Portnoy is "the Neurotic Jewish Liberal Intellectual who is nothing but The Neurotic Jewish LiberalIntellectual" (Morse 51). The Breast, Frederick Crews asserts, is "the oedipal film...run backwards until we find ourselves polymorphous guilt-free infants once again" (Crews 67).

Mark Shechner called Portnoy's Complaint "Freudian fiction" (Shechner 122). Alex Portnoy, he maintained, although rebelliously transgressing the taboos of eating pudding and (shiksah) pussy, fights for his manhood at the kitchen table battle site and ultimately loses (123). Theodore Solotaroff relates a conversation with Roth. Solotaroff asked Roth: "Why all the schmutz?" Roth's reply was: "The story is the schmutz" (137).

The second stage is from 1976-2004. In this second wave, reader reaction focused on Roth as a legitimate representative of American Jewish literature: ultimately a kind of good Jewish boy worthy of inclusion in that canon. Nevertheless, Roth was considered a Jewish writer. The critical analyses of Asher Z. Milbauer and Donald G. Watson, Hana Wirth Nesher, Martin Tucker, Estelle Gershgoren Novak, Donald Kartganner, Milan Kindera, Jonathan Brent, Daniel Walden, Debra Shostak, Ben Siegel, S. Lilian Kremer and others of that period, focused generally on issues of identity, anxiety, emotional displacement due to the Holocaust and Jewish history; homelessness; estrangement, transformation; metatextuality; fictionality and factuality.

The one lone voice of Jeffrey Berman, who in a rather brave 1985 volume, The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis, precociously began or anticipated this new wave of a psychoanalytical reading of Roth's work. Peter L. Rudnytsky followed with his literary-psychoanalytical studies of Roth and others. Rudnytsky and Berman both stress the kinship and affinity of psychoanalytical and literary narratives. It must also be mentioned that Andrew Gordon's annually convened international psychology and the Arts Conference has given impetus to such investigations of the corresponding relationship of psychology and the arts.

The third stage is from 2004 to the present. It is here that Rudnytsky, Berman and Gordon's work have started to attract others to the connection and examination of psychoanalysis and literature such as the writer who is
the focus of this study. It's nevertheless a stage not only of fresh new investigations but also of ones such as Elaine Safer's polite and rather insipid 2006 study of Roth that takes the author largely at face value (Safer 101); as well as Siegel and Halio's rather anemic volume that appears on the verge of a more dimensional psychologically informed discussion of Roth and his work, but finally falls short. Karen Grumberg's insightful analysis of the connection between location and authenticity, explores the concept of the fakeness of the Galut place and identity versus the realness of self and place in Israel (Grumberg 35).

My own Philip Roth's Postmodern American Romance, de-hyphenates Roth as a Jewish-American writer, locating him squarely in the canon of American literature, specifically postmodern American Historical Romance. There is, of course, this present volume which expands the studies of Berman and Rudnytsky, but focuses solely on Roth. This is the first volume about Roth's work to study the psychoanalytical dynamics in this author's work.

Rudnytsky's Reading Psychoanalysis is an examination of the interface of literature and psychoanalysis through the investigation of the primary psychoanalytic thinkers, Freud, Rank, Ferenczi and Groddeck and literary theory. Rudnytsky views psychoanalysis as a conduit and vehicle for understanding literature and the creative enterprise. It should be made clear that this is not to say that it becomes a means for psychoanalyzing writers, like Roth and others; but is a constructive way of revealing meanings and the symbolic layering that texts like Roth's consist of. As Rudnytsky states, it is his desire to articulate a "vision of psychoanalysis as a discipline with the unique potential to conjoin science and hermeneutics" despite the "widespread reports of the demise of psychoanalysis". This endeavor, he adds is "poised for an exciting period of growth and renewal in the twenty-first century" (Rudnytsky Reading xi). Rudnytsky and Rita Charon's edited work, Psychoanalysis and Narrative Medicine, is a product of a February, 2004 conference of the same name that Rudnytsky organized at the University of Florida. The importance of this Gainsville, Florida conference cannot be overestimated: it was the first time that scholars in both narrative medicine and psychoanalysis united to create "a new interdisciplinary dialogue...bringing together individuals with backgrounds in psychoanalysis, the humanities and the health care professions" (Psychoanalysis 1).

This volume has a distinguished cast of stellar academics in the fields of psychoanalytical/psychological and literary analysis. There are two interviews and one transcribed lecture included with psychologically-based essays on various aspects of Roth's work.

Andrew Gordon's essay views My Life as a Man as the turning point from Roth's positive to negative attitude towards psychoanalysis. We now
know from Berman's research that Roth's psychoanalyst, Dr. Hans Kleinschmidt, wrote a thinly disguised essay for American Imago, purportedly about a "Southern playwright" but actually detailing intimate information that Roth disclosed during their psychoanalytic sessions. There is much psychoanalytical meat to feast on in the idea that Roth felt betrayed yet another time – first by his mother and then by Dr. Kleinschmidt. In My Life as a Man, Roth/Tarnopol returns to the primal scene of first his mother's then Spielvogel/Kleinschmidt's betrayal of him. The Novak essay explores the areas of identity and performance in Roth's The Counterlives.

Daniel Walden's piece, transcribed from a lecture, analyzes the oedipally competitive relationship of Philip Roth and Saul Bellow.

The historical, psychological and literary implications of Claire Bloom's Leaving a Doll's House and Philip Roth's I Married a Communist are compared in the Jeffrey Berman essay.

Lewis Fried in "All Happy Families Are Alike: The American Trilogy and its Discontents" explores the world-weariness of Nathan Zuckerman's meditations on the psychology and behavior of human beings.

Miriam Jaffe-Foger's essay focuses on Philip Roth's psychological control games and manipulation of his interviewer, Livia Manera in her film on him, Philip Roth: Sans Complexe. My interviews with Peter Rudnytsky and Derek Parker Royal explore a number of psychoanalytical topics in Roth's work and life.
Introduction

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The Resistant Patient in My Life as a Man
1

The Resistant Patient in Philip Roth's Novel
My Life as a Man

By Andrew Gordon

"Oh, Doctor, don't start practicing psychoanalysis." Peter Tarnopol to his psychiatrist Dr. Spielvogel, My Life as a Man (263)

Philip Roth's novel My Life as a Man dramatizes a turn in Roth's career as he became increasingly skeptical of psychoanalysis. After the dissolution of a disastrous marriage leads to a nervous breakdown, Roth's protagonist Peter Tarnopol undergoes an analysis of several years, mirroring the real-life first marriage and subsequent seven-year psychoanalysis of Roth himself. As the analysis continues, however, Tarnopol starts to lose faith in his analyst, whom he feels has betrayed him. The novel ends up offering many possible reasons for Tarnopol's terrible marriage, none of them conclusive. At this stage in his career, Roth began to favor uncertainty over definitive answers. Thus psychoanalysis would no longer serve his fiction the way it had before.

My Life as a Man was one of the most difficult books Roth ever wrote; he struggled for years to transform into fiction material that was so personal, raw, and humiliating for him. In The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography, Roth writes that after the death of his estranged first wife in a car accident,

It would take years of hapless experimentation before I could decontaminate myself of my rage and discover how to expropriate the hatred of her as an objective subject rather than be driven by it...My Life as a Man would turn out to be far less my revenge on her than, given the unyielding problems it presented, hers on me. Writing it consisted of making one false start after another and, over the years it took me to finish it, very nearly broke my will (Facts 152).

Roth's solution to dealing with the pain, shame, and rage associated with his first marriage is to blend the directness and intensity of a roman-à-clef
with the indirection and buffering of metafiction. Part One, "Useful Fictions," consists of two stories, "Salad Days" and "Courting Disaster," about the adolescence and young manhood of Nathan Zuckerman, an aspiring Jewish novelist from New Jersey who suffers through a horrible marriage to an older, unbalanced gentile woman. "Salad Days," about Zuckerman's early years, uses third-person narration that is comic in style and subject matter, whereas "Courting Disaster" is situated in the first person and is about the somber and melodramatic nature of the marriage. Moreover, some details about Zuckerman's family and life change from the first story to the second.

Part Two, "My True Story," is a memoir by the fictional novelist Peter Tarnopol. The reader now understands these stories in a new light as "useful fictions" for Tarnopol to begin the process of working through his own painful marriage. The shifting, provisional nature of the fictions shows that Tarnopol is unsure how to read his life; so he views it first as comedy and then as tragedy. "My True Story," then, combines the farce and the melodrama. As Margaret Smith writes, My Life as a Man is "the beginning of Roth's postmodern experiment with style and point of view" (86).

The effect of these stories within stories acts as a hall of mirrors or mise en abîme: Roth creates Tarnopol, who in turn creates Zuckerman: all Jewish novelists from New Jersey, all victims of traumatic first marriages, seeking to extract some meaning from the chaos of their lives and to make their misery yield fictional dividends. Therefore, it is not only a novel about a rotten marriage but also one about the relation between fiction and life and vice versa. For Roth, we are all fiction-makers who understand the world through "useful fictions": we borrow or invent fictions about ourselves and others to construct the way the world works, then we use these stories to make up our lives, and then, retrospectively, we transform our lives into stories.

In the context of constructing realities, psychoanalysis becomes one of many competing fictions within My Life as a Man and is also a dominant theme in Portnoy's Complaint, which is one long psychoanalytic session, with Portnoy ranting for 200 pages until his final primal scream. At that point, his analyst Dr. Spielvogel speaks for the first and last time in the novel's last line or "punchline": "So, now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (274). Roth writes:

I gave the babbling book's last word to the desperately clowning analysand's silent psychoanalyst. The single line was intended not only to place a dubious seal of authority on the undecorous, un-Jamesian narrative liberties but to have a secondary, more personal irony for me as both hopeful instruction and congratulatory message (Facts 157).
In *Portnoy's Complaint*, Dr. Spielvogel functions as a listening ear, an audience for Portnoy's "desperate clowning"; his silence gives the patient permission to babble. Until the last line, we readers are in the same place as Spielvogel, silent listeners to Portnoy's lie-down monologue. The closing line, however, turns the doctor into a character; it suggests that both we the readers and Portnoy the patient are mistaken: what we took to be his analysis has not yet begun, and all that preceded was not the talking cure but just Portnoy's venting. Now the wise, restrained Doctor intervenes, telling him that, with Portnoy's permission, they are ready to begin together the hard work of analysis. The end is also a beginning, so there may be a slim hope for Portnoy someday to be cured of his complaint. At the same time, Spielvogel is a comic stereotype, the Jewish analyst speaking broken English with a heavy German accent: "A dubious seal of authority," as Roth says. Fitting the mix of the painful and the farcical throughout the novel, the ending is both serious and the punchline to a joke: the sober clown Spielvogel finally speaks to the desperate clown Portnoy.

Although Dr. Spielvogel (in *My Life*) has the same name and is also an analyst, he is otherwise a very different character than in *Portnoy's Complaint*. This Spielvogel speaks with a slight German accent and grammatical English, not the thick accent and broken English of his counterpart in *Portnoy*. Primarily, he is not a comic caricature but a fully rounded character.

Tarnopol first meets Spielvogel at a social occasion, a summer party in Connecticut: "He wore a yachting cap...but otherwise he seemed at once dignified and without airs—a tall, quiet decorous man, growing stout in his middle forties, with a mild German accent and that anomalous yachting cap" (*My Life* 203). Three years later, after suffering a nervous breakdown when he tries to leave his marriage, Tarnopol chooses Spielvogel as his analyst because "friends in Connecticut that summer had spoken well of him, and...treating 'creative' people was supposed to be his specialty" (204). He finds the doctor physically changed for the worse, looking pasty and shrunken and walking with a limp after surviving cancer, which establishes some sympathy for Spielvogel's suffering. Jeffrey Berman sees many parallels between Spielvogel and Freud, who are both German-Jewish analysts, cancer sufferers who continue to practice; they both have pictures of the Acropolis in their offices and are fascinated by artistic creativity (*Talking Cure* 255).

Yet Tarnopol says that "the doctor he reminded me of most was Dr. Roger Chillingworth in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter. Appropriate enough, because I sat facing him as full of shameful secrets as the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale" (*My Life* 204). Coming immediately after establishing some sympathy for Spielvogel, the analogy is troubling because Chillingworth
Dimmesdale's cucking of him. Dimmesdale wants to torment Chillingworth into confessing his adultery. The unspoken implication is that Spielvogel may be jealous of "creative" people and thus secretly wants to cut them down, not cure them.

In fact, Dr. Spielvogel, who supposedly specializes in treating creative people, has a very narrow view of artistic creativity, diagnosing it as an aspect of artists' narcissism. The first time he mentions Spielvogel, speaking of himself ironically in the distanced third-person, Tarnopol says, "Mr. Tarnopol is considered by Dr. Spielvogel to be among the nation's top young narcissists in the arts" (100)—hardly a complimentary description. At times, Tarnopol wonders if Spielvogel's diagnosis is correct: "Oh, Spielvogel, maybe you are right...maybe this Maureen of mine is just the Miss America of a narcissist's dreams" (296). But at other times, he fights back against the doctor's label. When Spielvogel says, "what a narcissistic melodrama you are writing here, Mr. Tarnopol. If I may offer a literary opinion," Tarnopol replies, "I don't always know, Doctor, exactly what you mean by 'narcissism.' What I think I am talking about is responsibility.... It would seem to me that it's you who are inviting me to take the narcissistic line" (168). In other words, it may be Spielvogel and not Tarnopol who is the grand narcissist, simply projecting onto his patient. Late in the novel, Tarnopol tells Spielvogel, "and that is your reductivism again, if I may say so, and your obfuscation. Spare me that word 'narcissism,' will you? You use it on me like a club" (255).

And Tarnopol then turns the club against the analyst, "I just realized that you are never going to admit to me that you could be mistaken in any single particular....Talk about narcissism as a defense!" (259).

Ultimately, Tarnopol rejects Spielvogel's reductivist notion of the artist as narcissist:

He is not simply looking into the mirror because he is transfixed by what he sees. Rather, the artist's success depends as much as anything on his powers of detachment, on de-narcissizing himself. That hard conscious work that makes it art! Freud, Dr. Spielvogel, studied his own dreams not because he was a 'narcissist,' but because he was a student of dreams. And whose were at once the least and most accessible of dreams, if not his own? (242-43).

In terms of the art of this novel, the events of Tarnopol's courtship, marriage, breakdown, separation from Maureen, psychoanalysis and recovery, are not told chronologically. This means that the first analytic session between Tarnopol and Spielvogel takes place in the middle of the book, when we already have knowledge of future events, which...
negatively influences our view of the doctor even as we are introduced to him. In that session, Tarnopol expresses to the doctor his doubts about his new lover, Susan McCall, a beautiful, rich, passive young widow who has become part of his convalescence from the battles of his marriage. "In fact, it required my doctor to get me to continue taking my medicine called Susan, when, along the way, I repeatedly complained that I'd had enough, that the medicine was exacerbating the ailment more than it might be curing it" (166).

During the session, Tarnopol mentions his fears that Susan, like Maureen, is too fragile, helpless, and hopeless. "Look, what if after the affair is no more, she cannot accept the fact and commits suicide? Answer that, will you?" (167). Spielvogel belittles this notion, seeing it as a "narcissistic melodrama" Tarnopol is writing. Yet in this instance, we know that Tarnopol is right and Spielvogel wrong, for we have already seen Susan attempt suicide in 1966 after Tarnopol leaves her. Thus the placement of the first analytic session described in the novel undercuts the doctor as diagnostician.

Yet other scenes show Spielvogel as calm and kind, a potentially good therapist. Almost forty pages after their argument about Susan, which occurred midway through the analysis, Tarnopol describes his first session with Spielvogel when he is suffering a nervous breakdown from his marriage:

For fully five minutes I sobbed into my hands—until Spielvogel asked, 'Are you finished?' There are lines from my five years of psychoanalysis as memorable to me as the opening sentence of Anna Karenina. 'Are you finished ' is one of them. The perfect tone, the perfect tactic. I turned myself over to him, then and there, for good and bad (205).

This scene helps explain why Tarnopol turned to Spielvogel: after his marriage to Maureen, he was completely unmanned, shattered and weeping like a baby, and he needed a strong, patriarchal figure to help restore his manhood.

Tarnopol admires Spielvogel's strength and certainty and comes to depend upon him. He often wonders what Spielvogel would think, he asks his advice, and when he has trouble with Maureen, the first one he phones is Spielvogel. For example, after Maureen comes to his apartment and he beats her, he phones the doctor, who is calm and non-judgmental, and advises Tarnopol to call his lawyer: "'If you want, call me back and tell me what he said. I'll be up"' (290). After that incident, Tarnopol flees with Susan to Atlantic City, where he buys Spielvogel a present of salt-water taffy.

Tarnopol is so in awe of Spielvogel that he is astonished when by
chance he glimpses him riding a bus: "My attitude toward the doctor was very much like that of the first-grader who accepts on faith the wisdom, authority, and probity of his teacher" (221). For a moment, he loses faith when he sees that Spielvogel is just a man like other men: "How could I have been so stupid as to confide my darkest secrets to a person who went out in public and took a bus?" (222). But he soon recovers his admiration for the doctor.

Tarnopol needs Spielvogel as a father figure to instruct him how to live as a man and to lay down the law like Moses:

Why did I stay with Spielvogel? Let us not forget his Mosaic prohibitions...Thou shalt not covet thy wife's underwear. Thou shalt not drop thy seed upon thy neighbor's bathroom floor....Thou shalt not be so stupid as to buy a Hofritz hunting knife to slay your wife and her matrimonial lawyer (264).

Tarnopol relies so much on Spielvogel's help that he is willing to buy into the doctor's misdiagnosis, despite his misgivings. Almost immediately, rather than listen to his patient, Spielvogel starts pushing on Tarnopol his simple-minded diagnosis and browbeats his patient into going along with it: "The question with which he began our second session was, 'Does your wife remind you of your mother?' My heart sank. Psychoanalytic reductivism was not going to save me...I said no, she did not. My wife reminded me of no one I had ever known before, anywhere" (215). Nevertheless, the doctor proceeds, "writing his own Tarnopol family history," trying to persuade his patient that he had a "'phallic threatening mother figure "' and explaining that it accounted for "'the dominance of narcissism' as my 'primary defense'" (218). As Spielvogel hammers home his misdiagnosis, Tarnopol resists, but through the power of suggestion he begins to dislike his mother:

Thus did I try to rationalize the severity with which I was coming to judge my mother, and to justify and understand the rather patriarchal German-Jewish doctor, whose insistence on 'the phallic threatening mother' I sometimes thought revealed more about some bête noire of his than of my own. But...I was far too much the needy patient to presume to be my doctor's doctor. I had to trust someone if I hoped ever to recover from my defeat, and I chose him (221).

As Mark Shechner notes, My Life as a Man "cast[s] a critical light on psychoanalysis: on the reductiveness of its diagnostic terminology and its power to browbeat the skeptical patient simply by charging him with
resistance" (56).

The crisis which almost ends the analysis occurs when Tarnopol reads an article by Spielvogel in a psychoanalytic journal, a case study of a narcissistic poet. Jeffrey Berman has written at length about the article by Roth's own psychoanalyst, Dr. Hans J. Kleinschmidt, "The Angry Act," which appeared in the 1967 spring-summer issue of American Imago, from which Roth quotes in both Portnoy's Complaint and My Life (Talking Cure 263-69). It is now generally accepted that Roth's analysis with Kleinschmidt provided him material for both novels. The article Tarnopol reads gives a thinly disguised version of him, so he feels exposed and betrayed by his analyst. Even worse, Tarnopol the novelist thinks Spielvogel is a bad writer composing "his banal fucking fiction" (My Life 248). He wonders, "how can you, who have done me so much good, have it all so wrong?" (245). Enraged, Tarnopol confronts Spielvogel, who is unapologetic and suggests he quit the analysis, but Tarnopol is not yet strong enough to do that: "I must say, his immunity to criticism was sort of dazzling...And maybe that's why I stayed with him—out of admiration for his armor, in the hope that some of his impregnability would rub off on me" (262).

The novel suggests a number of parallels between Spielvogel and Maureen. Tarnopol is in thrall to both: he turns to Spielvogel to help him separate from Maureen, and he ends the therapy when Maureen dies. He fights both Spielvogel and Maureen, two bad authors who try to impose their mistaken notions about him, to reshape his life to fit their "banal fucking fictions." Both expose and betray him. Maureen drags him into the divorce court and exposes him to bad publicity and ridicule as a "well known seducer of college girls." Spielvogel's article also reveals his secrets and publicly humiliates him. Susan says that Tarnopol lets both Maureen and Spielvogel "walk all over" (261) him. Spielvogel denies to Tarnopol that he is "another Maureen, out to betray and deceive" him, but Tarnopol says that, nevertheless, he feels "misused" by Spielvogel (259). Tarnopol worries, "if it turned out that I had been as deluded about Spielvogel as about Maureen, it was going to be awfully hard ever to believe in my judgment again" (262).

Ultimately, however, Dr. Spielvogel is neither a cartoon shrink nor a villain. He is portrayed as intrinsically human, a contradictory character, a cancer survivor who walks with a limp, a man who can be maddeningly obstinate, who will never admit a mistake, yet who can be calm and kind, and is there for his patients, even after working hours. Spielvogel also sometimes shows a glimmer of humor, and he seems to genuinely admire Tarnopol's talent. He completely misdiagnoses Tarnopol, yet nevertheless, paradoxically, he helps him. Tarnopol tells him: "Because staying with you, I was finally able to leave Maureen.... If I hadn't left her, I'd be
dead—dead or in jail...on the practical side, on the subject of my everyday life, you have been a considerable help to me. You've been with me through some bad times" (250-51). And Tarnopol tells Susan, "maybe he's a lousy analyst and a good therapist" (260). As Jeffrey Berman explains, Roth's "psychoanalysts seem frozen in time, imprisoned by a rigid Freudian ideology that most analysts have long ago abandoned or sharply revised" ("Revisiting Roth's Psychoanalysts" 106).

According to Mark Shechner, *My Life* was Roth's way of "having art take up where therapy had left off, and to do what therapy had failed to do: produce usable fictions" (58). Tarnopol in "My True Story" proposes various explanations for his catastrophic marriage. First, he had been misled by reading great literature to think that life was as meaningful as art: "My model of reality, deduced from reading the masters, had at its heart intractability ...instead of the intractability of serious fiction I got the intractability of soap opera" (*My Life* 195-96). Second, he entered into a difficult marriage because that was what the gender politics of the 1950s encouraged: you became a man in the 1950s by taking on responsibility, such as early marriage. Third, he is simply neurotic: narcissistic, or a woman-hater, or self-punishing for unconscious reasons. The conclusion of the novel offers yet a fourth possible explanation for the disastrous marriage: Tarnopol's parents say that even in kindergarten he was stubbornly independent, determined to do everything by himself, even if it was self-destructive. In the end, Tarnopol is not satisfied with any explanations, still baffled about himself and his motives. Shechner calls *My Life" a book of uncertainties" (55) and Jeffrey Berman says Tarnopol is "a man of many obsessions and few certainties" ("Revisiting Roth's Psychoanalysts" 259).

The problem with psychoanalysis, at least with the rigid way that Dr. Spielvogel applies it, is that it offers easy explanations. Spielvogel's most serious flaw is that his simplistic notion of psychoanalysis is not a "useful fiction" but a "banal fucking fiction," as banal and wrong as those of Maureen. So Tarnopol the writer rejects both, just as Roth the writer is always seeking those fictions that are truest to life. In his fictions beginning with *My Life as a Man*, Roth begins to move away from psychoanalysis because he prefers multiple explanations over absolute understanding, mystery over certainty.
Works Cited


