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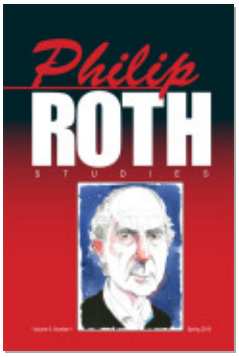

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Mistaking Merry: Tearing off the Veil in *American Pastoral*

Clare Sigrist-Sutton

ABSTRACT. This article offers a reading of *American Pastoral* (1997) as a portrait in mythic history, or creative misremembering, and as an example of the considerable transformative power such an enterprise exercises over the social imaginary of modernity. If the serious activists of the sixties and their nonviolent protests are misremembered as the act of a deranged adolescent bomber, as in the case of the novel, the threat such protesters pose to the established order is neutralized. Such a mythic re-storying must be read in political terms, for the historical analogues it calls to mind and for the imperial perspective from which it descends. The result of this discursive maneuvering is that mythic history persists at the end of Roth's novel despite the wish of its narrator, Zuckerman, to critique that structure. As Roth's novel makes clear when read through the lens of contemporary theory, the resilience of post-sixties mythic history has much to do with precisely this form of familial psycho-drama that personalizes rather than politicizes systemic social issues.

At the close of *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, Todd Gitlin writes, "Any finality I can imagine for this book seems false, for I write not just about history but imprisoned within it, enclosed within the aftermaths of the Sixties, trying to peer over the walls" (433). In narrating the same decade through the eyes of Seymour "the Swede" Levov, Nathan Zuckerman enacts this reality in his own storytelling. Zuckerman, too, is therefore limited by what he is able to see and say and even uncertain about the assertions he can make within those limitations. Writing in the mid-nineties, he cannot simply set the story aright but must first begin with how it has been "created and revised in historical time" (Gitlin, *Sixties* 433). Zuckerman's own voice and opinion open the novel but are later swallowed up by Seymour's narrative. Some have interpreted this disappearance as merely an affirmation of the Swede's vision.

Closer attention to Zuckerman's variance with that vision, however, may imply otherwise. Within *American Pastoral* (1997), Zuckerman imparts a certain sensibility for the historical framing of Seymour's story, and though the bulk of the narrative submits to a history as told through the Swede's eyes, the ending of the novel returns to Zuckerman's voice and his dominant inquiry—the historical. Within the logic of a historical novel, Zuckerman must submit to being silenced by a larger-than-life narrative in order to underscore that his reading of the period is not the one that will dominate historical memory. While this silencing gives rise to a rather conventional portrait of the Sixties, Zuckerman's voice does succeed in reminding us that this portrait is only partial. That partial narrative, so easily mistaken for the whole, is the Swede's, one of mythic proportions, worldly success, and terrible tragedy—a story that, Zuckerman seems to imply, would imprison one like him.

The novel opens at Zuckerman's forty-fifth high school reunion where he first learns of Seymour's death. The Swede's story emerges out of this nostalgic haze, a mood to which Zuckerman himself does not surrender. Resolute and clear-sighted in 1995, Zuckerman asks, "out of what context did these transformations arise—out of what historical drama, acted unsuspectingly by its little protagonists, played out in classrooms and kitchens looking nothing at all like the great theater of life?" (*Pastoral* 44). Philip Roth's subject, the effect of the Sixties radical students on the present, finds its expression in a subject incapable of evoking the general historic predicament of the times; as Zuckerman says, this historical drama "look[s] nothing at all like the great theater of life." Consequently, the Jewish American family moving toward all-American assimilation, however intimate and harrowing as a portrait, cannot be read as historically representative. The reader looking for a more representative swath of the time period, then, has to look elsewhere or, at the very least, to the imaginative margins of the text. Roth's awareness of both the strengths and limitation of his narrative craft imparts to the reader a commensurate sense of the difficulty of reading *American Pastoral* as a historical novel, set as it is within Roth's larger historical project of the American Trilogy.

The difficult task of interpreting the novel's historical project, then, requires an approach that would look beyond the portrait of the middle-class American family that it presents—beyond the purported majority status of such a group to what it obscures: both the oppressed racial classes within the nation-state and those struggling for national liberation outside of it. Zuckerman alludes to the politics behind this negated form of representation through the story of the Levov family glove factory, Newark Maid, placing the relatively puny enterprise beside the likes of Chase Manhattan, General Motors, and other corporations that outsourced production in the post-civil rights era. Through the factory's story, Zuckerman alludes to the era's shift from a production to a consumption-based economy and the resultant transformation it wrought within the international division of labor. Zuckerman summarizes Seymour's

short-lived business with a Czech glove factory in the following disapproving tone: "when a plant that suited him went up for sale in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, over near Mayagüez, he'd *bailed out* on the Czechs" (26, emphasis mine). Zuckerman's condemnation, if faint, is nonetheless present.

Such a sense of the period, however, remains peculiarly encrypted within the pages of *American Pastoral*, muted and consequently overlooked. If many finish the novel sympathizing with the Swede and valuing the same worldly comforts that he continued to value, Zuckerman's fragile voice becomes what he claims it to be at the outset: "a speech to myself masked as a speech to them" (44). Paralleling the speech's fate in the novel, in which Zuckerman delivers his lines to an empty hotel room, his insights are never directly shared. As Laura Tanenbaum has argued, *American Pastoral* becomes a novel that "undermines its own most vivid historical insight: the denial that lies at the heart of the Swede's own vision of an American pastoral without history, violence, or complicity" (52).[1] Through the protagonist's eyes, and even more so through his father's, the American Dream becomes one in which, if you work hard, if you assimilate as best you can, you can gain an honest measure of comfort and respectability in this world. Indeed, their visions belie, to some extent, the undercurrent of voices, black, colonized, and feminist, that would call such a dream a lie. These voices, however, do exist within the text as reverberations, sounding through the counter-voice of Merry and even the cross-voices her father gleans from the media coverage of Sixties protestors. The historical insight, then, that Tanenbaum identifies, may not be entirely lost but only muted in the Swede's story. The novel indicates this absence of voices speaking to the denied history, violence, and complicity of the American Dream, if only through the tensions that enter the protagonist's world. These tensions cause him to search, and, ultimately, leave him frustrated in his attempt to pinpoint a cause. In drawing Seymour as a character who does not find himself complicit, Roth delivers a much stronger message about the status of dissident voices within the culture of the American Dream. Zuckerman's almost silent, subtle voice aligns him with those dissidents. Still, the question then arises, how does one approach a novel that, in encoding itself so, risks misunderstanding in order to reach its message?

The sense that Zuckerman is simply staging an old drama that persists in our media today is further underscored in the reunion setting, where it feels "as though it were still 1950, as though '1995' were merely the futuristic theme of a senior prom" (46). This characterization of the moment also imparts a sense that not much has changed in terms of the forum dissident voices are able to attain. As Glenn Greenwald has noted in reflecting on our more recent past,

> the idea of street demonstrations is probably the most stigmatized idea in our political process. There were huge marches, for instance, prior to the Iraq war, against the war. There were hundreds of thousands of people, millions of people

> throughout Europe marching in the streets against the war. And yet, the media virtually excluded those demonstrations from the narrative, because they're threatening, and because they're considered to be the act of unserious radicals and people who are on the fringe, and I think that in some sense, that's reflective of the fact that that level of agitation is probably the most threatening to the people who have a vested interest in having the system continue unchanged.

The unrepresented voices of these street demonstrators illustrate in contemporary terms a phenomenon that also shaped and continues to shape our vision of the Sixties, a vision that Seymour's story begins to illustrate and that Zuckerman's framing calls into question.

American Pastoral explores its own unserious radical in the figure of Merry Levov, the Swede's daughter, who throws a bomb in their quiet, suburban neighborhood to protest the Vietnam War. Fittingly, Merry is a stutterer, a disability that evokes Zuckerman's own assessment of a decade as one "strewn with the bodies of the misunderstood" and marks a site on which the inaudibility of unrepresented voices may be recorded (42). Merry, however, cannot fully stand in as a precursor to the type of protestor Greenwald identifies within and outside the American political system in the twentieth century. In her privileged upper-middle-class background, Merry becomes not a silenced voice, but an overstated voice. Just as Seymour's story stands in as the story of the Sixties, so too does Merry's bomb. Quite curiously, the bomb alone becomes the representative symbol of Sixties radicalism in the novel. Roth even seems to coax the reader into realizing this representation as a narrative distortion. At one point, near the novel's end, the Swede exasperatingly muses, "If only Merry had fought a war of words, fought the world with words alone […]. Then Merry's would be not a story that begins and ends with a bomb but another story entirely. But a bomb. A bomb. A bomb tells the whole fucking story" (Roth 340-41). Even as he knows no way out of it, Seymour feels this story in all its oppressive might. And through his pain, we feel what seems to be the tyranny of public narratives on violence. Undoing the dominance of such narratives, particularly those concerning terrorism, dissent, and issues of representation within the nation-state, seems to be one of largest interpretive tasks facing scholars of postcolonial studies today, and Zuckerman's self-consciously imprisoned position within the Swede's story may offer one such interesting opening into that work.

The dominance of such narratives—narratives that "never fail to get [people] wrong," as Zuckerman says in a tone-setting moment of his narration—is the underlying theme of *American Pastoral*. For a moment, the action of the plot halts as the prose turns poetic:

> You fight your superficiality, your shallowness, so as to try to come at people without unreal expectations, without an overload of bias or hope or arrogance, […] and yet you never fail to get them wrong. […] You get them wrong before you meet them, while you're anticipating meeting them; you get them wrong while you're with them; and then you go home to tell somebody else about the

> meeting and you get them all wrong again. [… T]he whole thing is really a dazzling illusion empty of perception, an astonishing farce of misperception. And yet what are we to do about this terribly significant business of *other people*, which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous, so ill-equipped are we all to envision one another's interior workings and invisible aims? Is everyone to go off and lock the door and sit secluded like the lonely writers do, in a soundproof cell, summoning people out of words and then proposing that these word people are closer to the real thing than the real people that we mangle with our ignorance every day? (35)

What Roth delivers in this stunning passage is a palpable sense of, even a reverence for, the human attempt to understand—an attempt riddled with tragedy. In this passage, Roth, through Zuckerman, invites us to read the structure of the unfolding tale as one that "gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous." The narrative to come will be farce; and, therefore, Zuckerman's rendition of the activism of the Sixties—it seems to be hinted—might also suffer the same fate. This farce, however, as the above passage suggests, will assume a significance all its own.

Roth's own comments on *The Great American Novel* help to illustrate *American Pastoral* along these very terms. Roth explains the novel's perspective as the sole domain of its main character, as "what America is really like to one like *him*":

> By attributing the book to Smitty, I intended, among other things, to call into question the novel's "truthfulness"—to mock any claim the book might appear to make to be delivering up *the* answer—though in no way is this meant to discredit the book itself. The idea is simply to move off the question "What is America really like?" and on to the kind of fantasy (or rewriting of history) that a question so troublesome and difficult has tended of late to inspire. ("Reading Myself" 75)

Roth's reflections on Smitty might illuminate the role Seymour plays for Zuckerman in *American Pastoral*. With his chosen subject, Zuckerman once again puts Roth's subject matter squarely in pursuit of the counter-realities that sublimate the actual realities within historic memory. In choosing the Swede, Roth once again explores the politics of the American myth and with it, the tendency to rewrite historical events to continue that myth. By focusing the mutations in our historical memory of the Sixties radical student protest against American empire, Roth ultimately depicts one way in which we collectively misremember in order to secure our hold on the American myth. Yet, there is a catch: in witnessing the mutations the period undergoes in the collective American consciousness, with the Swede serving as one conventional record of it, Zuckerman risks perpetuating the very mythic history that he is, at the same time, attempting to unveil.

In the first part of the novel, Zuckerman feels no such impulse. As readers, we enter into "the mystique of the Swede" with him and then are just as quick to dismiss the protagonist as a shallow jock who grew up to lead a rather banal life (*Pastoral* 15). In the second part of the novel, Zuckerman explores

the tragedy that entered Seymour's life. In allowing that his character had suffered, Zuckerman begins to deepen his story. Pain prompts this father to search for meaning in his daughter's violence. Seymour thinks of the illicit kiss he and his daughter shared at the beach when she was just eleven. He thinks of the traumatic images Merry witnessed that same year on the nightly news: the Buddhist monks in Vietnam lighting fire to their bodies as political protest. Most of all, he thinks of the horrible stutter that sent him and Dawn to a string of psychologists and speech therapists, of the stutter that besieged their home long before the bomb ever did. Finally, we find that the Swede cannot put his faith in any of these explanations. In the concluding section of the novel, Seymour and Merry meet and talk. Paralyzed by Merry's transformation, her emaciated, filthy body and her foreign, book-learned Jain faith, he cannot take her from her squat in the Newark slum and bring her home. Daughterless, the Swede heads home to his dinner party and Dawn.

In this, the novel's culminating scene, Zuckerman delivers a raucous and dramatic charade. In the final three paragraphs of the novel, we hear his authorial voice return:

> Marcia sank into Jessie's empty chair, in front of the brimming glass of milk, and with her face in her hands, she began to laugh at their obtuseness to the flimsiness of the whole contraption, to laugh and laugh and laugh at them all, pillars of a society that, much to her delight, was going rapidly under—to laugh and to relish, as some people, *historically*, always seem to do, how far the rampant disorder had spread, enjoying enormously the assailability, the frailty, the enfeeblement of supposedly robust things.
>
> Yes, the breach had been pounded in their fortification, even out here in secure Old Rimrock, and now that it was opened it would not be closed again. They'll never recover. Everything is against them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!
>
> And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs? (423, emphasis mine)

In characterizing the literature professor, Marcia Umanoff, Zuckerman's historical sensibility reemerges. Still, he withholds judgment on the Levovs and their lives and instead empties his censor on Marcia. After pages and pages of windup, the last paragraphs seem to deliver up a misdirection. This misdirection, however, adds a final layer of complexity to the portrait of Seymour Levov's life, as one that finally inspires doubt where our initial impulse was to blame.

On the level of human drama, on the level of personal heartbreak, Roth describes the Swede's story with such vividness as to account for the book's sensational success; yet, the possibility exists that the majority of his readership put the novel down with the sense that Zuckerman understood the Swede, that we, in seeing him through Zuckerman's eyes, understood him, too. Is this sense illusory? In the case of Merry, it most certainly is. We leave

the novel with the impression that we do not understand—indeed, that no one understands—Merry. The novel, nonetheless, encourages us to try to pretend that we do. The play between knowing and not knowing is one indicator among many of the larger tensions present in the novel. Indeed, such background forces impel the drama along. In the interplay between Merry's critiques and her father's actions, the novel pushes back at the ideological message it purportedly puts in place—that is, of the ultimate good of the American Dream, that if one just works hard, the reward of domestic comfort can be achieved. However, the novel resists confirming such a dream. Plot tensions, instead, signify the largely incoherent reverberations of the Sixties' voices of grievance. Merry skews them but nevertheless is able to mark them. Her inaudibility becomes the sign of the voices that the novel will not let in. As Greenwald notes, there are certain voices that do not find a forum in the media. The ethical undercurrent Roth brings into play in *American Pastoral* arises from the tensions caused by the counter-voices, signified by Merry and others. They invite the reader to think beyond what the novel offers. In catalyzing this search, Roth makes *American Pastoral* a formidably serious novel.

As a way of sharpening this undercurrent, the novel develops a preoccupation with acts of unveiling, acts that open the novel to themes of investigation that continue and deepen its resonance for postcolonial theory. The first page of *American Pastoral* cues the reader to the novel's fascination with the act of unveiling were Zuckerman describes Seymour as masked: "Of the few fair-complexioned Jewish students in our preponderantly Jewish public high school, none possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking *mask* of this blue-eyed blond born into our tribe as Seymour Irving Levov" (3, emphasis mine). The story, then, first begins with the significance of the mask in helping to facilitate the American myth as it is lived out in an everyday neighborhood: "The elevation of the Swede Levov into the household Apollo of the Weequahic Jews can best be explained, I think, by the war against the Germans and the Japanese and the fears it fostered." Seymour's athletic prowess "on the playing field […] provided a bizarre, delusionary kind of sustenance, the happy release into a Swedian innocence, for those who lived in dread of never seeing their sons or their brothers or their husbands again" (4). In accounting for the complexity of wartime psychology and allowing for a sympathetic portrayal of Seymour as one prop within it, Zuckerman achieves an effective level of nuanced portraiture mixed with critique. In athletics, the Swede represents the larger arena of an American underdog triumphing in world affairs, surely a reflection of the positive self-image that many Americans felt at that time; yet, in unveiling the mystique of Seymour Levov, Zuckerman also finds a story of a boy forced to wear a mask before he could choose to do so of his own free will. As Zuckerman follows the Swede into his adult years he imagines his adaptation to such as mask, as it grows to represent a sort of veiled existence behind middle class normality and

decorum—an existence, we find, to which Seymour's less assimilated father and brother are not so beholden.

In part, then, the perspective of the novel reflects the degree to which its characters are assimilated into the American myth. After watching a TV special on the Weather Underground, Lou Levov exasperatingly asks, "What the hell happened to our smart Jewish kids? If, God forbid, their parents are no longer oppressed for a while, they run where they think they can find oppression. Can't live without it. Once Jews ran away from oppression; now they run away from no-oppression" (255). Everything her father is living—"the good life" in Old Rimrock—Merry cannot comprehend. For a very different reason, Lou cannot either. For Lou, his son's chosen home is "a narrow, bigoted area," formerly dominated by the Ku Klux Klan (309). For Merry, her father's life remains incomprehensible because she has not known the struggle toward "the good life," as Lou rightly perceives.

By including points of view that span the continuum from complete assimilation to utter rejection of the American myth, Roth complicates the mirroring pattern of the novel. In *American Pastoral* we find a text of dissembling viewpoints, the narrative version of a matryoshka doll, where Roth speaks through his perennial narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, who speaks for his high school hero, "the Swede," who speaks for his daughter Merry, the detonator of the bomb. Each narrating viewpoint refracts and augments the characters it contemplates until the storyline, inventive and complex as it is, nevertheless, becomes a study in reduction. That the fundamental structure of the novel is a mirror further emphasizes the narrative logic that would make Merry the symbol of Sixties radicalism. A good critical reading of the novel needs to decode this house of mirrors as a symbol of inquiry. Roth stages such refractions in order to interrogate the image of the self and other in the world they impart. To my mind, Merry as mirror marks the novel's political problem. Positioned as she is, as a reflection of her father's search, Merry becomes a reduction of Sixties radicalism; as Zuckerman is well aware, this is an ideologically questionable narrative choice. The tendency of the novel to turn Merry into a figure of the Sixties radicalism in general, and thus to represent that radicalism as a solely violent rebellion, is a profoundly erroneous picture, obscuring, as it does, the decade's many triumphs in civil rights and women's rights.[2] Through Merry, the political is truly elided. Occluded by this reduction, the Sixties become transformed from a mass student movement to Merry's individualized acts of violence. Merry's story narrows a widespread phenomenon of nonviolent protest to a wholly enclosed exploration of familial and psychological drama. The parameters of the novel's question—"How had [the Swede] become history's plaything?"—suggest the need for a much larger explanatory model (87). Here again, the novel pushes back on the reading it offers.

Faced with Zuckerman's challenging question, Seymour falls disappoint-

ingly short in his search for an answer. In many ways the novel continually turns around this question without ever approaching it directly. Locked within the mirror structure of the novel's inquiry, where Zuckerman looks to the Swede, and the Swede to his daughter, the Swede does not really seem to have the capacity to look to the larger political and historical structures at work in the world. On his own, Seymour can cobble together a vision of Merry that remains faint as best. Desperate for a more defined sense of her, he turns to the media:

> Now he watches the news to see Angela Davis. He reads everything he can about her. He knows that Angela Davis can get him to his daughter. He remembers how, when Merry was still at home, he went into her room one Saturday when she was off in New York, opened the bottom drawer of the dresser and, seated at her desk, read through everything in there, all that political stuff, the pamphlets, the paperbacks, the mimeographed booklets with the satiric cartoons. There was a copy of *The Communist Manifesto*. Where did she get that? Not in Old Rimrock. Who was supplying her with all this literature? [… A]nd now he believes he can remember something in that drawer written by Angela Davis. […] Yes, now he remembers clearly sitting at Merry's desk trying to read Angela Davis himself, working at it, wondering how his child did it, thinking, Reading this stuff is like deep-sea diving. It's like being in an Aqua-Lung with the window right up against your face and the air in your mouth and no place to go, no place to move, no place to put a crowbar and escape. (158-59)

To one like the Swede, these revolutionary thinkers are utterly alien and claustrophobically shortsighted. Almost a century ago, Joseph Conrad described revolutionaries of similar ilk as "apes of a sinister jungle" (282). In this image, Conrad conveyed the idea that impressionable young men and women could become lost *to* such "jungle" voices (282). Seymour perceives his daughter in much the same way. Merry, he reasons, "would have outgrown the Communism," but due to the tragic turn of this adolescent phase, is taken in by charismatic idealists like Angela Davis (*Pastoral* 159).

Later in the novel, Seymour finds that Merry has moved beyond the ideas he found in her dresser drawer to other thinkers, even more alien to him. While living underground in fear of the FBI, Merry tells him, she encountered the work of Frantz Fanon, "whose sentences, litanized at bedtime like a supplication, had sustained her" (261). For Merry's litany, Roth reproduces one particularly evocative passage from Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled":

> *It must be constantly borne in mind that the committed Algerian woman learns both her role as "a woman alone in the street" and her revolutionary mission instinctively. The Algerian woman is not a secret agent. It is without apprenticeship, without briefing, without fuss, that she goes out into the street with three grenades in her handbag. She does not have the sensation of playing a role. There is no character to imitate. On the contrary, there is an intense dramatization, a continuity between the woman and the revolutionary. The Algerian woman rises directly to the level of tragedy.* (261)

In the textual allusion to the Algerian struggle to overthrow their French

occupiers, Zuckerman can continue his own project of unveiling with the additional hint at imperial overthrow that Merry's litany suggests. The allusion also deepens the theme of voice and audibility in the novel by reproducing another image of constraint placed on dissent. Like the revolutionaries who discard their veils, then resume wearing them in order to more fully realize their voices of protest, Zuckerman, too, must identify his "papier-mâché mask" only to resume wearing it again in order to voice his dissent (46).

Portrayed as choosing to wear a veil herself, Merry adopts a role that furthers her identification with voices of dissent. Theorized into agency by one more privileged than themselves, Algerian revolutionaries, such as these women, are notoriously misunderstood. As Diana Fuss and others have noted, Fanon's writing essentializes their femininity and naturalizes their duplicity (Fuss 28-29). Even more egregiously misreading the revolutionary women, the colonizers would take their Westernized appearance not only as proof of their support for the Western occupiers, but also as proof of their feminist liberation. Indeed, their acts of colonial defiance are predicated on such misunderstanding. The re-donning of the veil after the planting of bombs creates a double-rebuttal of both their Westernization and feminization. Quite powerfully, the reinstitution of the *haik* delivers the verdict that the colonizers had "g[o]t them all wrong again" (*Pastoral* 35). The victory of Algerian independence, only alluded to in the novel, is nonetheless significant as an example of a struggle mounted without the voice of the agent whose actions bring the victory to fruition. To his theme of getting people wrong, Zuckerman offers silenced voices like these as one possible cause.

Defined within the terms of the novel, American empire, even in its domestic realm, operates under the power wielded by representation, the power to reimagine the world and live as if one actually inhabited such an idyll. As Derek Parker Royal has remarked, "A closer look at the presentation of the Swede's life […] helps us to understand the various ways in which we construct, order, and understand the world" (14). In characterizing one phenomenon that attempts to disrupt and thereby alter such an order, Homi Bhabha uses the term *mimicry* which he explains as "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" ("Of Mimicry" 126). Rather dangerously, Merry herself appropriates the identity effects of political others as she endeavors to protest on their behalf. If the American empire in Roth's novel exposes the power mechanisms of memory, it does so under the anxiety of mimicked identity in which Zuckerman, the Swede, and Merry all mimic subject positions: Zuckerman mimics the Swede, while Seymour, according to Jerry and his father, mimics middle-class Anglo-America. And, Merry, in a rather bewildering way, mimics the third world Other.[3]

Bhabha identifies instability as the source of the threat that mimicry poses to the established order. No reference corresponds to any essence or authentic

self but rather "comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects' in the play of a power" ("Of Mimicry" 131). Merry harnesses the performative threat of mimicry as a Jain in her quite literal adoption of "the veil." The instability Bhabha attributes to mimicry may be observed in the final scene in which the Swede considers Merry a threat. At the dinner party, Seymour imagines the nightmare of his daughter's return:

> At an hour, in a season, through a landscape that for so long now has been bound up with the idea of solace, of beauty and sweetness and pleasure and peace, the ex-terrorist had come, quite on her own, back from Newark […]
>
> "No!" exclaimed Grandpa to this veiled intruder reeking of feces who claimed to be their beloved Merry, "*No!*" and his heart gave up, gave out, and he died. (*Pastoral* 420-21)

As Tanenbaum remarks, "the authority of the father figures […] is certainly elegized along with Newark" (50). Roth forwards the truth of the Sixties' challenge to authority by writing a novel in which the dominant perspective loses its place of prominence. In the closing scene of the dinner party, the Swede's father becomes an insignificant relic, a rambling, ignored voice that the other guests simply tolerate. Yet, Lou Levov's vision of the world does retain some dignity. As the Swede's nightmare shows, he desperately wishes to protect his father, but from what? Is this nightmare a proper image of the Sixties social movements putting to death the old order?

On the surface of the Swede's plot, Merry exists as a cherished daughter inexplicably transformed into a vile murderer. In the Swede's account, nestled as it is within Zuckerman's historical framing, Merry becomes a symbol for the whole of the Sixties movements, and the nightmare is a commanding one, as riveting as it is politically perilous. It is easy to forget that Zuckerman claims at the outset that this picture cannot assume the onus of representation for the "great theater of life." It is also easy to be seduced into the Swede's yearning after the nostalgic but failed re-inscription of the post-World War II idyll, while forgetting that Zuckerman calls this time "the greatest moment of collective inebriation in American history" (40).[4] Yet the critical discussion of *American Pastoral* includes commentary from the relatively objective to the forthrightly ideological, and that, too, spanning the range of the political spectrum.[5] In weighing such mixed readings, one must consider the countermessage that Zuckerman sets forth in initiating the storyline.

Once Zuckerman transports his authorial imagination into that of the Swede's, his original, nuanced inquiry flattens to a question that Seymour might ask: Why "the indigenous American berserk"? (86) At this point in the storyline, the representation of Merry the novel gives up is contingent on her father's perception of her. Out of this limited perception, she is described as "the fury, the violence, and the desperation" brought down on the Swede and his vision of America (86). As Zuckerman's view recedes, Merry's place

in the narrative grows in a novel that becomes increasingly consumed by the Swede's vision. Within the prevailing narrative, reflected by the monologues of the Seymour's inner thoughts, Merry is not a protester of American empire but an assailant for its respectable, law-abiding citizenry and "to a coherent, harmonious world that she despised and that she, with her embattled youthful mischief […] had turned upside down" (421).[6] Surely, Seymour is misreading Merry's motives even as he rightly perceives that she is a profoundly lost child, but who is in a position to understand Merry?

For several reasons, Merry seems to be an oddity within this historical novel. Gitlin illuminates these historical irregularities in his review of the novel:

> Given all [Roth's] effort to get social details right, from family histories to Watergate hearings, Roth's sixties are chronologically odd. Merry bombs the story on February 3, 1968 […] when the antiwar movement was only just turning (in a phrase of that time) "from protest to resistance." The militant vanguard wasn't anywhere near bombing. Two years would pass before the Weather Underground's 11th Street townhouse in New York City blew up, killing three of their own. […] Merry explodes prematurely. ("Weather Girl" 64)

Why would Roth decide to cast a sixteen-year-old high school student as the leading vanguard in militant antiwar dissent? Given these facts, it becomes difficult to accept the story's psychological model for explaining Merry's indoctrination into revolutionary thought, yet Roth seems to have decided to make her teenage disposition toward violence *feel* realistic. If this dubious realism is not commentary enough on our own willingness to be indoctrinated by the wrong history, the chronological incongruity also calls into question another factual gaffe: Seymour's belief that Merry was brainwashed by the Weather Underground. As Weather Underground militancy warms up, Merry's militancy goes cold. Adopting Jainism, she becomes a pacifist.

Her father, however, quite understandably cannot admit that she could have acted on her own. In one of his paranoiac musings we read:

> He heard them laughing, the Weathermen, the Panthers, the angry ragtag army of the violent Uncorrupted who called him a criminal and hated his guts because he was one of those who own and have. *The Swede finally found out!* They were delirious with joy, delighted having destroyed his once-pampered daughter and ruined his privileged life, shepherding him at long last to their truth, to the truth as they knew it to be for every Vietnamese man, woman, child, and tot, for every colonized black in America, for everyone everywhere who had been fucked over by capitalists and their insatiable greed. The something that's demented, honky, is American history! It's the American empire! It's Chase Manhattan and General Motors and Standard Oil and Newark Maid Leatherware! Welcome aboard, capitalist dog! Welcome to the fucked-over-by-America human race! (*Pastoral* 256-57)

In describing Merry as "destroyed" by this group, the Swede rescues her from blame as much as he guards himself from the pain of applying it. With the help of the media, Seymour turns his daughter into a victim lost *to* the voices

of dissent. The reader, however, seeing this as a coping mechanism of a parent in utter agony, can understand that Merry is not lost *to* but lost *in* these voices. While Merry is woefully inadequate in bringing the seriousness of such grievances to light, she does, nonetheless, spur her father to listen to the angry voices of critique. A bit of the sloganeering begins to allude to the actual grievances that threaten to disrupt the Swede's world. As Seymour had earlier declaimed to St. Angela Davis, "yes, the United States *is* concerned solely with making the world safe for business and keeping the have-nots from encroaching on the haves" (166). Through his paranoia, a partial picture of the period's grievances begins to materialize.

By focusing on Seymour's perception of Angela Davis, the Weathermen, and the Black Panthers, Zuckerman is able to explore the narrating power of the imperial subject and thereby reveal a mindset that aspires to say of its subject, as Fanon put it, "'I know them', 'that's the way they are'" (qtd. in Bhabha, *Location* 83). Fanon's description could just as easily apply to Richard Nixon, when, in referring to the anti-war demonstrators, he proclaimed, "Let's recognize these people for what they are. They're not romantic revolutionaries. They're the same thugs and hoodlums that have always plagued the good people" (qtd. in Reeves 271). Under this discursive frame, the youth movement is redefined from the voice of grievance to the menace that would assail America's respectable, law-abiding citizenry. As one citizen among many, the Swede becomes Zuckerman's means through which to document the soaring success of the Republican Party's rhetoric on the whole of America. As Seymour's brother Jerry tells Zuckerman, his brother was "[j]ust a liberal sweetheart of a father" (*Pastoral* 69). Liberal or not, Zuckerman records the bipartisan appeal that won Nixon his "silent majority."

This controlling mechanism continues the perpetual turn inward on the imperial self so that the American berserk is no longer an exploration of the world that would provoke such a reprehensible act, but an exploration of the reprehensibility of a few ostracized members within the nation-state. This turning away from the world, Zuckerman argues, marks a turning away from history: "[The Swede] had learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense. And when that happens the happiness is never spontaneous again. It is artificial and, even then, bought at the price of an obstinate estrangement from oneself and one's history" (81). As Bhabha has observed, "what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history" ("Of Mimicry" 128). Many have remarked on history's marginal place in *American Pastoral*. Morris Dickstein sees this absence as a fault, claiming that "Roth would portray the young radicals of the sixties as simply ranting, obnoxious, and demented in their hatred of grown-ups, indifferent to human life, and quite damaged by their permissive liberal upbringing" (259-60). While it seems absolutely right to distrust the reductive current of a novel that would turn Merry into a figure of the Sixties radicalism in general, Roth incorporates enough ambiguity as

to make a strictly reductive reading impracticable. First, Seymour is himself aware of the explosive entry of history into his family and life.[7] In depicting the Swede in this light, Roth, through him, grants a seriousness to Sixties radicalism that would go beyond characterizing it as a mere tantrum. Secondly, Zuckerman in his historical framing of the Swede's story calls into question the very idea that Merry could pretend to represent a decade. This portrayal raises a political problem in the novel that reflects a real problem in the world. Merry represents a more general problem in terms of the representations and voices that are allowed entry into the public sphere. Finally the cross-voices and counter-voices that edge into Seymour's psyche bring to the main narrative enough tension to subvert, to some extent, its supremacy. For, however spotty its portrayal of the Sixties might be, *American Pastoral* rather modestly professes to depict the worldview of the Swede and, perhaps, by implication, others like him who maintain an uncritical fidelity to the American Dream.

The Swedian pastoral persists in its domestic zone of familiar knowledge, in the memory of "the union of beautiful mother and strong father and bright, bubbly child" (*Pastoral* 413). Merry's outrage, the bomb that would implicate a system and its worldview, collapses under the framework of the family. Part of the power of *American Pastoral*, then, exists in Roth's ability to depict the Swede's pastoral idyll as an appealing version of the American myth while interweaving Zuckerman's dissonant voice into its portrayal. Through Zuckerman, Roth skews this oneiric language to display a distinctly American, neo-imperialist exercise in reimagining reality—an exercise in which Seymour is shown to be largely a hapless, though culpable, pawn. The subtlety in this intertextual weaving at once captures the cultural record of a triumphant, albeit weakened, American myth, as it allows for readings that continue to take such a myth at face value. That such contradictory readings exist within the critical conversation surrounding the novel is testament both to the vividness with which Roth represents the myth and to the appeal the myth still holds for many. Despite contradictions, the American myth persists, and that is part of the profound historical insight *American Pastoral* offers. It traces a moment where the myth is shaken and exposes its re-entrenchment. If Zuckerman's counter-voice is noticed and the Swede's vision checked, the novel can be read as a meditation on not only the way representations of the political Other are manipulated in order to validate established powers, but also for the practice that fine-tunes this process: that is, the discursive models that explain violent political acts in purely psychoanalytic terms, thereby deflating their threat to the established order. In speaking to the legitimacy of the psychological model for understanding terrorism in the post-9/11 world, Judith Butler warns that "to take the self-generated acts of the individual as our point of departure in moral reasoning is precisely to foreclose the possibility of questioning what kind of world gives rise to such individuals" (15-16). In

illustrating the kind of foreclosure Butler identifies, *American Pastoral* forcefully speaks to a post-9/11 world.

Like the Algerian woman who is believed to be indoctrinated into Muslim orthodoxy, Merry is believed to be indoctrinated into Weatherman orthodoxy. Only under this guise can she emerge as "the counterpastoral" (*Pastoral* 86). Sandra Kumamoto Stanley notes that what Roth "[u]ltimately […] suggests [is] that the very counterpastoral critique that would destroy the Swede's pastoral mythology is actually a legacy of the myth itself" (5). This division between pastoral and counterpastoral becomes a self-division, turned inward, recasting the other, containing her, in images made by those wielding power; in short, it is a manufactured conflict.

Reflecting his society, Seymour adopts a mode of narration whose speakers Gayatri Spivak describes as "transparent in the relay race, for they merely report on the non-represented subject and analyze (without analyzing) the workings of (the unnamed Subject irreducibly presupposed by) power and desire. The produced 'transparency' marks the place of 'interest'" (279). Merry is not approached openly as a person to be known; rather, she is approached as a threat to be understood. This inquiry whose real object is to protect the pastoral dream, as opposed to understand another as she exists in the larger world, collapses many avenues for knowing. A true description of the conflict would look beyond the particular tragedy of Merry to the world out of which Merry emerges. Merry is lost in the revolutionary voices of her time, but what has prompted this confusion in so young a girl at the outset?

Allowing that the Swede thinks in these terms theoretically may be one thing, but what his brother does in his weakest moment is to challenge him with this false consciousness on the most personal of levels. Jerry puts the pastoral/counterpastoral split in human terms. Unable to take his daughter home, away from her filthy dwelling in the Newark slum, Seymour calls Jerry for support. After advising his older brother to take Merry home by force, Jerry delivers this scalding judgment on the Swede's life:

> I'm not the one who thinks holding his family together is the most important thing in existence—you are. [… Y]ou loved her as a fucking thing. The way you love your wife. [… T]hat's what your daughter has been blasting away at all her life. You don't reveal yourself to people, Seymour. You keep yourself a secret. Nobody knows what you are. You certainly never let *her* know who you are. That's what she's been blasting away at—that façade. All your fucking *norms*. Take a good look at what she did to your *norms*. (*Pastoral* 273, 274, 275)

In his wish to bring Merry back into the household, Seymour fails to recognize her criticism of that household as bourgeois and therefore complicit in forwarding the aims of the dirty war. He analyzes (without analyzing) his daughter by imagining her as lost *to* the powerfully indoctrinating voices of the Weather Underground.

Lost in the demands of middle-class decorum, the Swede has himself

become indoctrinated in his push toward assimilation. What Jerry does, when he takes aim at his brother, is expose his complicity within the larger system of middle-class decorum. Jerry accusingly states, "Whatever society dictates, you do" (274). Royal's observation that "[i]t is as if this tirade of Jerry's […] is Zuckerman's" makes Jerry's accusations all the more consequential (13). As Jerry says in one of the most cutting lines of the novel, "You are unrevealed—that is the story, Seymour, *unrevealed*. That is why your own daughter decided to blow you away. You are never straight about anything and she hated you for it. You keep yourself a secret. You don't choose *ever*" (*Pastoral* 276). Zuckerman does indeed think of his high school hero in these terms, but to this perspective, he adds a saving compassion. Through Zuckerman's eyes we see the Swede: "A performance over a ruin" (81). Ruined, all Seymour can do is mimic normalcy.

As a performance of a similar kind, the dinner party also becomes an exercise in "suppress[ing] horror" (81). At this point in the novel it is not only Zuckerman's self-enforced absence but also Merry's that attests to the dominance of the narrative, one that, as Tanenbaum observes, whitewashes "the denial at the heart" of how Americans remember their history (52). The final scene of the dinner party delivers its verdict in the image of "Jessie Orcutt, seated before a half-empty dessert plate and an untouched glass of milk and holding in her hand a fork whose tines were tipped red with blood." To complete his indictment of the Levov household, Zuckerman arranges it so that the hired servant girl is left "to recount the story" of Jessie thrusting her fork into Lou Levov's eye (*Pastoral* 422). It is as if the final scene is shaped to affirm the Swede's worst imagining when he hears the Weathermen saying, "The something that's demented, honky, is American history! It's the American empire!" (257). The implications of Zuckerman's dinner party scene strangely align with the New Left rhetoric, and with this turn, the voice of protest seems to raise above a whisper, as the reverberations of dissident voices gain a foothold in the signifying work of the final scene.

Timothy L. Parrish notes that Merry "is given no acceptable form through which to create herself. Where Zuckerman writes stories, Merry throws bombs" (92). Indeed, loosely aligned thus, the two characters do share a creative energy in the way in which they dissent. The comparison also brings to the novel the theoretical framing of terrorism as violent communication. Elaine B. Safer observes the startling clarity Merry achieves in her turn to violence: "What did correct her articulation was her violence" (87). And indeed, Zuckerman writes, "Assembling bombs had become her specialty after she'd successfully planted her second and third. […] That's when the stuttering first began to disappear. She never stuttered when she was with the dynamite" (259). Through a quite literal use of voice, *American Pastoral* illustrates the idea that terrorism imparts a form of representation to those without a political voice.

In her writing about women political terrorists in literature, Josephine Hendin observes a shift:

> Conventional wisdom holds that political violence and terrorism are inspired and shaped by structural inequities, those broad social forces, such as poverty, that operate independently of individual situations or predilections. One widely recognized formulation holds that violence arises primarily when no legitimate means of protest is available. But portrayals of the political violence of women in the contemporary United States indicate otherwise. A personalization of all social issues lends political terrorism a unique meaning and configuration of motives. (151-52)

In characterizing Merry as it does, *American Pastoral* conforms to such a trend while, at the same time, allowing counter-voices within the dominant narrative to subtly hint that this characterization is an ideologically driven false step. Hendin's observation of such a trend within fiction might begin a project that analyzes the way journalistic and popular culture caricatures of the Sixties radical form a large feedback loop within the politics of representation.[8] Misrepresented as the "counterpastoral" and thereby incorporated into the symbolic order of her father's world, Merry turns into a contained, essentially neutralized threat.

In the neat compartment of a father-daughter relationship, the Swede and the controlled menace of Merry reenact the ambivalence of imperial authority on the imperial power's home turf. While Bhabha's concept of mimicry does not quite account for such a convoluted fictional example of mimicry as Roth presents in *American Pastoral*, the Other as embodied in a white woman dramatically illustrates the mechanism of imperial discourse as a system that reproduces itself without any presence of the colonized other. In Seymour's mind, his daughter stands in for the disenfranchised. And in a strange way, Merry does theatrically perform the subject position of the oppressed. By mimicking this subject position, she becomes a symbol of the colonial subject's absence from the dominant discursive of power. In displaying this asymmetrical construction, *American Pastoral* confirms Bhabha's fear that "the language [of] a new Anglo-American nationalism […] express[es] a neo-imperialist disregard for the interdependence and autonomy of peoples and places in the Third World" (*Location* 20).

Zuckerman does not wish us to rescue Seymour's image of Merry, nor does he wish for us to read in it some noble cause or salvageable end. Within the terms of Swede's narrative Merry is simply the victim of villains who would destroy his pastoral dream. She does not self-narrate nor does she have a voice at all. Merry stutters, and, according to Rita Cohen, she even becomes the "colonized" subject (*Pastoral* 136). Of course, Rita is wrong. Merry, as a child of privilege, cannot be a representative of the colonized; rather, she stands for an inaudibility, a sign of the voices that would protest a system, a system that does not bid them enter. Merry then, represents something quite different from what Rita Cohen implies. Merry, whose proximity to the American

myth would seem to grant her a loud voice in challenging it, instead confirms its strength. By inventing and reinventing herself, she becomes a girl who never finds herself.[9]

The violent decolonization movements of the Sixties, pushed as they are to the outside edge of the novel, still add an interesting echo to the dominant plot of *American Pastoral*. Merry's litany from Frantz Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled" as an allusion to the National Liberation Front of Algeria, if only faintly, evokes the figure of the female bomber. Claudia Brunner's review of the literature of female suicide bombers describes how profiling of such subjects perpetuates stereotypes, which lead to "the discursive production of female suicide bombers as the irrational other of the rational, enlightened Western self" (958). Brunner also notes how researchers with an agenda of counterterrorism prevention necessarily have conclusions that reflect such agendas. "By structuring an opposition between the threatening female other and the United States," Brunner explains, "the American foreign policy agenda is covertly placed at the center of analysis," thus changing the questions a researcher might ask (962). Correspondingly, in *American Pastoral* the security of Seymour's pastoral vision structures the line of analysis, effectively obscuring other questions that might be asked. The novel collapses under the self-protective pose in which the terrorist threat turns into a question solely about the Swede: "How had he become history's plaything?" (*Pastoral* 87). The framing of the question is partly to blame for the outcome of the search. With such a perspective, Seymour effectively excludes an inquiry into the kind of world that would give rise to such violence. As in the novel, when our inquiry only seeks answers that protect ourselves, we enact "the epistemic violence" within the "allegedly neutral and objective academic analysis of terrorism" (Brunner 966). Roth's representation of the Sixties delivers a broader message about the importance of narrative and, more broadly, discursive framing.

As Brunner observes regarding the literature on female suicide bombers, when the Self and Other are knowingly refused differentiation, "specific conflicts rooted in complex sociopolitical, ethnic, and nationalist histories are reduced to questions of a presumed religious and cultural nature" (969). This reduction further masks the reality it purports to explain. She explains, "Rather than enhancing understanding of these specific histories and power dynamics, occidentalist representations mask colonial and postcolonial power relations and structural violence in its multiple dimensions. Thus, occidentalist approaches reproduce and contribute to the perpetuation of asymmetric power relations" (969). The Swede's rationalization of his daughter's violence is an example of this reduction: masking her lunatic stab at agency as helpless victimization. After learning of his daughter's rape, Seymour can think of little else. Like one disturbed, he begins to fixate on the fact: "The most perfect girl of all […] had been raped" (*Pastoral* 266). Desperately needing to think of Merry as victim rather than agent of violence, the Swede thinks,

"Only the rape was imaginable. Imagine the rape and the rest is blocked out" (267). And the Swede does. He thinks about his daughter's rape while "sitting alone in the last factory left in the worst city in the world. And it was worse even than sitting there during the riots" (268). He thinks about "a woman killed in front of his eyes … and not even that was not as bad as this." He recalls "a volley of pistol shots blowing out every one of the street-level windows displaying [his factory's] signs…and [the rape] is worse by far" (269). Like the Biblical cock crowing three times, the Swede three times denies the tremendous violence of the 1967 Newark riots beside the one act of violence inflicted on his daughter. By fixating on the image of his daughter as victim, he is able to continue his life while asymmetric power relations persist. In the drama of one victim's story, the whole stage is filled.

Indeed, the drama of Merry's bomb that "turn[ed] their living room into a battlefield" remains stubbornly individualistic and domestic in scope (113). Her refusal to speak at the most confrontational moment in the novel's plot is suggestive of the subaltern's inability to speak in the forum of Western discourse (Spivak 308). Desperately trying to connect to his daughter, Seymour, screams, "*Now* speak!" And then again, "Speak!" (*Pastoral* 264, 265). She refuses. In Merry's case, it is not that she cannot speak; it is that she will not speak. She has chosen, and her choice mimics the reality Spivak pronounces: "The subaltern cannot speak" (308); yet, Merry is no subaltern. She is not even Other. As Stanley argues, she "[e]mbod[ies] a number of national anxieties from communism to the Bomb to domestic chaos. […] Merry represents alterities that the system finds difficult to contain" (16). I would add that the system does not even struggle to contain them but, actually, enforces their silence, and it is this silencing that Merry indirectly represents.

The transformation the Sixties have worked upon the present partially stems from this inaudibility. In his effort to record this omission, Zuckerman reveals little by way of legitimizing the larger picture of the Sixties through depictions of the civil right movement, the student movement, the women's movement, and the national liberation movements around the globe. Instead a middle-class white girl, disoriented and lost in the voices of protest of her day, profoundly disconnected from social or cultural ties of any sort, stands for the inaudibility of voices of protests within the Swede's world. In as much as it is the truth of Roth's novel, Seymour's world is deaf to the voices that would seriously challenge it, hence the imploring questions that end the text: "And what is wrong with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" (*Pastoral* 423) The novel, of course, given its scope, cannot pretend to answer such a complicated question on its own. Whether they are the black, Puerto Rican, or Czechoslovakian employees of the Newark Maid glove factory, or the Vietnamese monks on the nightly news, or the Algerian women of Fanon's essay, the colonized subject enters *American Pastoral* only as a reverberation.

What makes *American Pastoral* so complex and important a novel is the sympathy Roth, through Zuckerman, is able to call forth when contemplating the Swede. Seymour's confusion feels real even as the reader understands that his narrow vision makes him complicit. The counter-voices Roth allows into the Swede's world may be inaudible, but the tensions they create propel the plot forward. The seriousness of the novel exists in these countercurrents. Zuckerman works this ethical dimension into the novel by calling on history; in structuring the narrative as if it were a series of mirrors, Roth points to the way recorded history reflects our world back to us, at times, wrongly, but always at least partially, truly. Through Zuckerman, Roth points towards a different, more dynamic interpretive model. As an exercise in re-imagining, Roth's novel models in narrative what Brunner argues must be applied even more expansively to policy:

> [O]ther questions must be asked: questions that open up space for controversy where common sense has already defined the limits of thinking about, discussing, and knowing political violence; questions that avoid narrow definitions of what is considered the problem (suicide bombing) and instead dare to put it into a larger geopolitical context (of asymmetric international power relations); and questions that focus neither exclusively on a presumed Western self nor on a supposed Oriental other but rather try to reflect on the relations between the two, politically and epistemologically. (970)

The power of *American Pastoral* may be found not merely in Roth's ability to inspire us to ask such questions, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in his manner of disclosing, ever so tenderly, our staggering attempts to enter into this "terribly significant business of *other people*" (*Pastoral* 35).

NOTES

1. The careful reader can draw her own conclusions from the contradictions that emerge in a man who "contracted with the Communist government in Czechoslovakia" though he had previously worried about a daughter who brought home Communist pamphlets from New York City (*Pastoral* 26).
2. Robert Boyers lucidly analyzes this fact, when he writes, "The conditions that aroused so many mature adults to participate in the antiwar and civil rights movements are barely mentioned in a book committed to examining the period. For *American Pastoral*, recent American radicalism is to be associated with irrationality and the unconscious" (16).
3. Jeremy Varon's notes the former SDS president, Greg Calvert, accused the Weathermen of embodying "the politics of proving," that even though the militant group used violence, that alone did not generate enough solidarity to appease their feeling of "white guilt" (90). Merry, of course, reflects little of this anxiety. As for any serious deliberation of the possibility of unification for a larger left movement, these issues are important to consider.
4. Historian Charles Maier's characterization of the shift that occurred in post-World Waar II American from "Empire of Production" to "Empire of Consumption" parallels the development in *American Pastoral*.
5. Laura Tanenbaum specifically discusses two reviews in these terms, Carol Iannone's

"An American Tragedy" and Norman Podhoretz's "The Adventures of Philip Roth," both of which appeared in *Commentary*.

6. Described in this way, Merry represents a very valid critique of Weather Underground member Bernardine Dohrn who was criticized by fellow members for invoking Charles Manson as a way of "scaring the shit out of Honky America," as Dohrn put it (qtd. in Varon 160). Her grisly rally went, "Dig it; first they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the room with them, then they even shoved a fork into pig Tate's stomach. Wild!" (qtd. in Varon 160)

7. In *The Plot Against America*, the father asks, "What's history? History is everything that happens everywhere, even here in Newark, even here on Summit Avenue, even what happens in this house to an ordinary man" (180). In an interview, Roth said of the line, "That's a moment where I push things a bit. Yeah. History comes into the living room. The large forces that make the world go, they come into our living room, and I like that, I like depicting that" (Brown). *American Pastoral*, then, represents an earlier confirmation of this.

8. Of course, this trend may also reflect an anger from more centrist leftists, like Todd Gitlin, who feel that the militant radicals of the New Left destroyed the party platform.

9. In this respect, Merry echoes her radical predecessor, Ira of *I Married a Communist*, especially as Murray describes him, as a man "hungering after his life," as a man who "could never construct one that fit" (*Communist* 319).

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