From Heideggerian Dasein to Melvillean Masquerade: Historiology and Imaginative Excursion in Philip Roth's *The Facts*

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FROM HEIDEGGERIAN DASEIN TO MELVILLEAN MASQUERADE: HISTORIOLOGY AND IMAGINATIVE EXCURSION IN PHILIP ROTH’S THE FACTS

Abstract. Is there a convergence of Philip Roth’s The Facts and “the facts,” as contextualized historically, in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time? And to the extent The Facts may reconfigure Sartrean flight and Heideggerian regard for resolute consciousness and historicity, how does such transformation relate to Roth’s implied musings in The Facts on Herman Melville’s The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade? Roth channels irresolute facts not toward the somber absence of consciousness implied by Heideggerian resoluteness and “historicality” but toward the supremacy of Dasein inherent in enduring literary excursion charted by the Sartrean-inspired masquerade of Dasein’s being what one is and is not.

While recent scholarship establishes the relevance of Sartrean philosophy for the fiction of Philip Roth, attention to the importance for Roth of related Heideggerian concern remains scant.1 My attention to Roth’s The Facts, with regard to these varied existential outlooks, hinges on divergent explanations of consciousness—that is, Dasein (sein “being”; da “there”). Whereas in Being and Nothingness (L’être et le néant) Jean-Paul Sartre defines consciousness as the upsurge of negation that distinguishes Dasein from that which it is not, Heidegger, in Being and Time (Sein und Zeit), posits being there as a temporal situation in which consciousness, a “state-of-mind,” finds itself “Being-thrown” into a world of distraction.2 Ideally perceiving the unification of past, present, and future (BT, pp. 374, 401), Dasein becomes
aware, via “anticipatory resoluteness” (p. 477), of the inevitable demise or cessation of consciousness. Such is the “Being towards death” (p. 277) of Heideggerian Dasein, or of one’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (p. 183)—that is, an “authentic” (p. 277) cognizance of, rather than a “fleeing” from, “the face of death” (p. 477).³ Such, I suggest, is matter inherent in Roth’s ostensible autobiography, though by way of transformation. The Facts, while evoking Heideggerian concern with historicity, instead champions the supremacy of imagination inherent in Sartrean flight, and as foreshadowed in Roth’s veiled allusions to Herman Melville’s The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade.

Significant for such metamorphoses is how Heidegger regards resolute Dasein as “free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen” (BT, p. 435)—all such awareness occurring within historical categorization that either reflects or deflects awareness of trifold time in its most unified and therefore resolute form. Heidegger thus refers to history, in its irresolute status, as “historiology”; in its resolute phase, as “historicality,” here acknowledging deliberative predecessors, including Friedrich Nietzsche (BT, p. 448), Wilhelm Dilthey, and Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg (pp. 449–55).⁴ As concerns the resonance of such matter in the artistry of Roth, I argue that the celebration of the imaginative faculty in The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography dramatically transforms assumptions about resolute history and its supportive “facts” into appreciation for the irresolute cognition of imagination, which, in the Dasein of Roth, is at one with Sartrean- and Melvillean-inspired masquerade.⁵

This play of ideas—in which Roth posits imaginative excursion rather than finitude as the authentic “end” of Dasein—has much to do with how the putative “Roth” of The Facts frames his manuscript of personal recall within an epistolary exchange between him and Nathan Zuckerman, the now-sidelined narrator of the autobiography.⁶ Zuckerman, skeptical about the self-serving recollection of the so-called “facts,” rebukes the nouveau autobiographer for having surrendered, in the evasive quest for factuality, the genuine insights of literary enterprise—that is, the imaginative rendering of facts, when conveyed by narrators such as he, Zuckerman, had been.⁷ Scarcely new, though, is Zuckerman’s charge that the quest for objective facts and history can yield to subjective fabrication. Indeed, precedent for such critique exists, among other works, in the unreliable narration and historicity of Melville’s Billy Budd, of Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time, and of Washington Irving’s A History of New York—the last of those narratives evoking Henry St. John,
First Viscount Bolingbroke’s eighteenth-century inquiry into the plausibility of writing or retrieving entirely factual history. Descriptive, as well, of the errancy of factual recall in historical writing are contemporary discussions of so-called “metahistory” and the self-enhancing impetus of what, with regard to autobiographical recall, Zuckerman characterizes as “fiction-making tricks.” Such are the conventional categories in part explaining Zuckerman’s challenge to the putative record of the facts put forth by “Roth.”

Still, as concerns Roth’s valuation of literary aesthetics, significant divergence exists between Being and Time and The Facts vis-à-vis historical “facts” that fall short of resolute awareness. Heidegger regards “the facts,” or “how something has factually been,” as inauthentic precursors of an ultimately valid historical viewpoint that takes account of “factuality” —that is, of a “resolute projection of itself upon a chosen potentiality-for-Being” (BT, p. 446). By this Heidegger means recognition, through the unification of time, of cognitive demise or death. In The Facts, however, Roth morphs resolute historicality into a Sartrean-like determination to promote, as the consummate end of Dasein, not the absence of self-reflection but, rather, an imaginative journey toward that which simultaneously is and is not. And here, as suggested above, Melville’s The Confidence-Man—which Roth elsewhere references in Sartrean context—figures in a unified vision of Dasein, masquerade, and imaginative foray.

Melville’s novel, which illustrates that all people “perform acts”—that “To do, is to act,” and that “Life is a picnic en costume”—dramatizes the gullibility of those who adhere to optimistic views of human nature. The narrative therefore depicts what is likely a single confidence man who, disguised in ever-shifting identities—the man in gray, a flaxen-haired mute, a crippled African American, an herb doctor, a cosmopolitan, the Intelligence-office man, a man with a long weed on his hat, and the president and transfer agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company—defrauds sanguine travelers aboard a Mississippi steamer. He does so in large measure by exploiting their disinclination to credit Calvinistic tenets pertaining to human turpitude. Still, with regard to the creative impulse, Roth appears less concerned with nefarious deception and its capacity to exploit liberal-Christian sentiment than with Melville’s dramatization of mercurial identity, the latter illustrative of the novel’s artistry, which dramatizes the shifting, never-restful state of consciousness requisite for the creation of fiction. In The Facts, imagination of that
order, as celebrated by Zuckerman with added Sartrean flare, displaces Heideggerian resoluteness as the most exalted manifestation of Dasein.

What this study therefore proposes, via the existentialism of Sartre, is Roth’s transformation of Heideggerian resoluteness into artistic masquerade in *The Facts*. This transfiguration commences with the effort of “Roth,” in his prefatory letter to Zuckerman, to preempt a challenge to the accuracy of an autobiographical manuscript. Familiar with at least part of *Swann’s Way* (*F*, p. 92), “Roth” concedes that memory bends the facts, so that there “is something naïve about a novelist like myself talking about presenting himself ‘undisguised’ and depicting ‘a life without fiction’” (p. 8). But despite that concession to the haziness of recall, “Roth” otherwise claims that his manuscript renders “the facts as lived” to be in consonance “with the facts as presented,” so that his narrative “faithfully conforms to the facts” and is fundamentally a “distillation of the facts” (p. 7). Thus vaunting “prefictionalized factuality” (p. 3), he informs his now-de trop narrator that the autobiography contains “experience untransformed” (p. 5). Zuckerman, after reading the manuscript, nonetheless denies its verity, including its accounts of the boyhood of “Roth” in New Jersey; of memories surrounding stateside life during World War II; of love interests and a chaotic marriage; and of the efforts of “Roth” to come across, after so many years of antinomian resentment, as a defender of the Jewish faith (pp. 165–66). Such criticism of autobiography is certainly subject to an eighteenth- through twentieth-century critique of historical writing. At the same time, though, Heideggerian disenchantment with nonresolute historicity is apparent in the way *The Facts* displaces the resolute cognizance and historical concern of *Being and Time* with the triumph of imaginative excursion and deception inherent in Sartrean “flight” and narrative aesthetics.

This bending of Heidegger’s view of historical concern relates to the manner in which “Roth” sees the “facts” as supporting his “history’s meaning” (*F*, p. 8), though Zuckerman claims that “Roth” as autobiographer—that is, as “personal historian”—is destined “to falsify, distort, and deny” (p. 164). Yet insofar as prevarication is the essence of creative writing, Zuckerman’s defense of imagination becomes a novel refraction of Heidegger’s resolute thought about the destiny of consciousness. And important for Roth’s conversion of somber existential reflection into compelling artistry is Heidegger’s contention that, in routine context and historicity, Dasein exists in an irresolute state of “throwness”—that is, a state of being “lost in its ‘world’”—where Dasein continues “falling” into the “untruth” (*BT*, p. 264); that is, into diversionary concerns that inhibit
Dasein from appreciating the absence of consciousness in death. For Heidegger, then, conventional accounts of history are mired in a slough of sublunary facts consistent with nonresolute cognitive susceptibility to everyday concern with the “ready-to-hand” or “presence-at-hand.”

Heidegger here references equipment, customary work, cultural protocol, and likewise ephemeral, mind-consuming matters (BT, pp. 117, 227–28). Such distracted consciousness, and the historicity that frames it, is allied with “Being lost in the publicness of the ‘they’” (p. 220)—for Heidegger a form of majoritarian shortsightedness that, “dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted” (p. 264), impedes resolute awareness. In The Facts, that susceptibility to the “they”—with regard to the surrender of aesthetic prowess rather than to the vanishing of consciousness in death—emerges via autographical writing in what Zuckerman posits as “Roth’s” pandering to “a deep sense of belonging” (F, p. 170) to his Jewish community and its crippling “norms,” Zuckerman here referencing “the overwhelming majority” and the “stereotypical voice of the tribe” (p. 172). All such distraction, according to Zuckerman, provokes “Roth” into surrendering the “less sociable impulses” that are of a kind with the “demands of fictional invention” (p. 170). Such inventiveness is the highest faculty of Dasein, now perceived as creative narrative. Thus, insofar as Heideggerian lament against “the facts” figures in The Facts, the point, as morphed by Roth, is that one must remain resolute, albeit with regard not to epistemological endgames but to aesthetic pursuit.

Heidegger himself engages in conversational thinking vis-à-vis authentic Dasein and historicity, for he little dismisses the value of irresolute cognitive apprehension. Rather, he practices what we might call philosophical typology in crediting the way irresolute “historiology,” via the unity of time, foreshadows resolute historicality—the latter accounting for expressions of Dasein in which awareness of death emerges from the “futural character” of preresolute, thrown being. Stated otherwise, thrown consciousness evolves, via the unity of trifold time, toward authentic cognizance amid the “historicality of unhistoriological Dasein” (BT, p. 447). While thus utilizing the irresolute consciousness of the past—and its inability to grasp the true “meaning” of “the facts,” or “how something has factually been”—genuine “‘factuality’ is constituted by its resolute projection of itself upon a chosen potentiality-for-Being” (p. 446). This is to say that irresolute consciousness and history ultimately merge with resolute consciousness within the temporal unity characterizing authentic historical contextualization. As summed up by one of Heidegger’s commentators, and with relevance for the creative
transformation of this concept into Roth’s aesthetic disposition, “It is due to my falleness and my inauthenticity that I look upon history as made up of facts,” since “Heidegger’s answer is that history is not about facts, no matter how they are bound together in any kind of sequence, but rather it is about ‘worlds’ in which resolute Daseins are.”

Preoccupation with nonresolute “facts” aligns with Zuckerman’s skeptical regard for Roth’s so-called historical “facts,” and in such manner as to call for the transformation of those into imaginative utterance, or what one commentator calls “the truth of lived experience, the truth of emotional and psychological effect, rather than a cool appraisal of past events.” As further concerns Roth, the question becomes how the mortuary and arguably deterministic emphases of Being and Time become a vivacious, imaginative foray in a literary narrative about the fabricated history of autobiography. That evolution has everything to do with the creation of a narrator like Zuckerman, whose absence results, according to Zuckerman, in the failed enterprise of “practically any artist without his imagination” (F, pp. 184–85). Imagination here trumps mundane facts that should better serve as points of departure for higher cognitive foray and insight.

This approach to Roth’s literary alchemy builds upon recent scholarship disclosing his playful recourse—in The Anatomy Lesson, The Counterlife, and Exit Ghost—to Sartrean “flight”; that is, to the suggestion that consciousness, or Being for-itself (l'être pour soi), arising amid that which it is not, must simultaneously be what it is and what it is not in the act of perpetual and frequently playful becoming in the realm of possibility. As articulated in Being and Nothingness, the ekstasis (“standing outside”) of consciousness must fulfill three requirements: “(1) to not-be what it is, (2) to be what it is not, (3) to be what it is not and to not-be what it is—within the unity of a perpetual referring” (BN, p. 137). Such reasoning accounts for the difference in titles and core emphases in the treatises of Sartre and Heidegger, with Sartre identifying Dasein as imaginative flight predicated on negation, and Heidegger stressing an ecstatic, temporal vision that aligns Dasein with the unity of past, present, and future. Thus, for Heidegger the “ecstatic unity of temporality,” or resolute “Being-there,” consists in a “state-of-mind” that “temporalizes itself as a future which is ‘making present,’” while “the Present ‘leaps away’ from a future that is in the process of having been, or else it is held on to by such a future” (BT, p. 401).

Roth, less resolute, appears inclined toward the Sartrean formula for Dasein when, in an interview, he describes his “hero,” Nathan Zuckerman
(of The Anatomy Lesson), as having “to be in a state of vivid transformation or radical displacement. ‘I am not what I am—I am, if anything, what I am not!’” That revelation of Roth’s artistic debt to Sartre has led to the suggestion that the inherent freedom of Sartrean Dasein, as implied by the ever-kinetic evolution of Being for-itself, figures in a rebuke of historical determinism in Roth’s short narrative “Juice or Gravy?” Those readings, in turn, find support in the supremacy of “irresolute” values in The Dying Animal, Everyman, and in Roth’s short story “Novotny’s Pain” (“HS,” pp. 447, 450–53, 458–61). Narratives such as these exalt irresolute Dasein such as to cast light on Roth’s transferendum (that is, his need or imperative for crossover) from Heideggerian resoluteness into the something more—not in time but in epistemological significance. Stated otherwise, as concerns The Facts, the imagination that inspires literary expression—itself a form of masquerade—is the consummate upsurge of Dasein.

Consistent with how The Facts transitions Heideggerian resoluteness into Sartrean flight is the suggestion in Roth’s narrative that duplicity and masquerade are the mainstay of creative writing, with fictive excursion bypassing Heideggerian resoluteness as deftly as the a priori categories of Immanuel Kant evaded the sensoriality of John Locke and the skepticism of David Hume. Similarly, for Roth, aesthetic departure from facts outstrips Heideggerian philosophy, since the novelist deems imagination the consummate expression of Dasein. Indeed, Roth has Zuckerman distance himself from the banality of factuality not by celebrating the immanence of death or the absence of consciousness but by exalting the always-unfulfilled and ever-evolving state of creative apprehension that inheres in the for-itself of literary creation: “There is mystery upon mystery to be uncovered once you abandon the disguises of autobiography and hand the facts over for imagination to work on” (F, p. 184). Imagination here becomes a means of cognitive grace, transforming Heideggerian resoluteness into the literarily transcendent, never-dormant flight of Sartrean-inspired Dasein.

For Zuckerman, then, celebration of aesthetics redirects the resolute outcomes of Heidegger toward the “dramatic energy” of “imagination” (F, p. 166)—indeed, toward cognition at its “most interesting” (p. 162), thus achieving “the one percent that’s saved for . . . imagination and that changes everything” (p. 172). That fraction is the upsurge of ideas tantamount to the freedom implied by Sartrean flight: “you . . . owe me nothing less than the freedom to write freely,” and that freedom is what induces artistic expression by simultaneously being, in the creation
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of either narrators or literary personae, what one is and is not. Says Zuckerman to Roth, “Your gift is not to personalize your experience but to personify it, to embody it in the representation of a person who is not yourself” (p. 162).

Such manner of shifting identity invites examination of how Sartre and Melville merge, in Roth’s imagination, into a philosophy of aesthetics. In his later years, Roth scathingly referenced The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade to criticize President Donald Trump.21 Much earlier, though, and far more positively, Roth appears to have evoked the novel to explain his creative impulse, including his ability to write “fake biography” and “false history.” Rather than fault such errant representation, he credits its “half-imaginary existence,” made from “the actual drama of my life”; he also celebrates the capacity of the creative writer, via imagination and quasi-Sartrean rhetoric, to “pass oneself off as what one is not.” He does so—with Melvillean resonance—because the literary inclination to “pretend” is of a piece with “sly and cunning masquerade.”22 As for the relation of that dissimulation to Existentialism, such pronouncement occurs in the same interview (discussed above) in which Roth echoes Sartrean regard for being, at once, what one is and is not—further inspiration for the creative experience. In The Facts, by extension, the faux “Roth” naively believes that autobiography allows him to present himself “undisguised” (F, p. 4), since he claims the manuscript expresses his “exhaustion with masks, disguises, distortions, and lies” (p. 6). Still, as Zuckerman implies, only confidence games—that is, “disimulation”—liberate the literary artist to find his “freedom from the falsifying requisites of ‘candor’” (p. 184). Thus, after designating the errant historicity of autobiography as “artistically fatal,” Zuckerman waxes Melvillean in praising “the cunning playfulness of fictional masquerade” (p. 175). Here as elsewhere, Roth hardly faults himself for nonresolute cognizance, or for not moving beyond irresolute history. At stake, rather, in verbal masquerade, is the union of personal experience and artistic invention toward never settled, necessarily dissimulative creative flight, conceived as masquerade: “You don’t necessarily, as a writer, have to abandon your biography completely to engage in an act of impersonation. It may be more intriguing when you don’t. You distort it, caricature it, parody it, you torture and subvert it, you exploit it—all to give the biography that dimension that will excite your verbal life” (CR, p. 167; emphasis added).

The point, as Roth elsewhere makes clear, is that “the writer has something beyond self, which is imagination,” allowing him to “make
things up.”23 For readers attentive to the resonance of Being and Time in The Facts, such creativity is a consummate gift rather than an existential liability. This is the more Sartrean asset, relative to the creative impulse, of simultaneously being what one is and is not—in artistic masquerade.

In The Facts, then, imagination becomes the living end, as it were, of irresolute Dasein, constantly in flight and coequal with Roth’s highest conception of creative writing and thinking. To that artistic end, Roth has the fictive Zuckerman finally share with “Roth” the fictive musings of Zuckerman’s young wife, Maria Freshfield Zuckerman, who is said to be twice married, with a child from a previous marriage, and now pregnant with Zuckerman’s child. A twice-removed product of Roth’s imagination—indeed, a “fresh field” of creativity—she celebrates the virtues of irresolute consciousness: “I want to be left alone with the things that are of no great interest at all. Bringing up a child. Not neglecting an aging parent. Staying sane. Uninteresting, unimportant, but that’s what it’s all about” (F, p. 192).24 Here, too, irresolute Dasein trumps Heideggerian resoluteness, such sentiment existing in an imaginary universe where an imagined narrator quotes his imaginary wife, suggesting that, for the literary artist, imagination—always in Sartrian flight—is indeed what it’s all about. Such is the transformative view in The Facts of one’s “uttermost potentiality-for-Being” (BT, p. 307).

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3. Gradations exist in Heidegger’s speculations about resolute consciousness. For example, he defines *perishing* as “the ending of that which lives”; *dying* as “that way of *Being* in which Dasein is *towards* its Death”; *demise* as an “intermediate phenomenon” in which “Dasein . . . can end without authentically dying” (*BT*, p. 291; also see p. 295).


5. This study stands to place in broader philosophical and literary context the conclusions of existing accounts of Roth’s blending of facts, fiction, ethics, and history in *The Facts*, and in other ostensibly autobiographical narratives (*Deception*, *Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock*) that Roth at one point considered collecting in one volume with the title “Two-Faced.” See David Gooblar’s manuscript-based study, “The Truth Hurts: The Ethics of Philip Roth’s ‘Autobiographical’ Books,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 32, no. 1 (2008): 33–53 (35). For an insightful study of Roth’s blending of personal and imaginative writing, benefiting from reference to Milan Kundera, see Velichka Ivanova, “Pursuing the Ghost of Personal History,” *Philip Roth Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 205–18.


6. Here and below, I follow existing scholarship in placing quotation marks around the name “Roth” to reference his narrative personae who purport to be writing autobiographically. See “PRF”, p. 20. With the claim that *Sabbath’s Theater* demonstrates that “self-projection is a desperate gesture against the annihilation of self” and that “the
urge toward autobiography” is “an act of self-preservation” in the face of “the vanishing self” (p. 35), Shostak’s analysis is compatible with my recourse to Sartrean categories to describe Roth’s exaltation of the imaginative faculty over Heideggerian dirigé.


10. Though without reference to Melville’s novel, one commentator notes the importance for The Facts of “narrative disguises” that grow out of shifting identities in The Counterlife. See David Brauner, Philip Roth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 82, also p. 89. Another critic points to the rhetoric of one of Roth’s 1984 interviews to suggest that Roth’s fictive references to ostensible autobiography hinge on “impersonation” and “ventriloquism”—“both of which appear centrally in Roth’s later work and which bespeak the provocations to the imagination inherent in inventing and projecting a self” (“PRF,” p. 25). Without reference to Dasein or Heidegger, Shostak elsewhere notes the concern in The Facts with mortality and extinction. See Debra Shostak, Philip Roth: Countertexts, Counterlives (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 226–27.


13. Such is the use of the term “fall” that Roth evokes when, in an essay about Saul Bellow, he quotes a humorous passage from Herzog in which Moses Herzog imagines
himself writing to Heidegger: “Dear Doktor Professor . . . I should like to know what you mean by the expression ‘the fall into the quotidian.’ When did this fall occur? Where were we standing when it happened?” Philip Roth, “Re-reading Saul Bellow” (The New Yorker, October 9, 2000), in Philip Roth, Shop Talk: A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 49.


16. On “flight,” see Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), pp. 40, 123, 125, 164, 362; hereafter abbreviated BN. On “possibility,” see BN, pp. 128–29. Sartrean flight thus differs from the deterministic emphasis of Heidegger on “fleeing in the face of authentic existence which has been characterized as ‘anticipatory resoluteness’” (BT, p. 477) and provides philosophical context for what one commentator defines as the “anarchic and un-socialized” message of Zuckerman to Roth in The Facts. See, for the latter, Ross Posnock, Philip Roth’s Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 37. Approaching but not becoming an explicitly Sartrean reading, Shostak’s discussion of My Life as a Man mentions Peter Tarnopol’s staving off the “existential vertigo implied by the recognition that neither the proper name nor its pronoun has a locatable referent. In the assertion of the ‘me’ in the text, Roth offers his consummate irony about the nonexistence of the ‘me.’” The current study, on the other hand, perceives that nothingness as the very ground of artistic imagination—a Sartrean view that corresponds to Shostak’s further observation, relative to Derrida, that the “freedom to invent selves is a writer’s special privilege” (“PRF,” p. 26). See, as well, with reference to Kierkegaard, how Roth “materializes an affirmation of the imagination’s power and a refutation of facticity,” in Elaine M. Kauvar, “The Doubly Reflected Communication: Philip Roth’s ‘Autobiographies,’” Contemporary Literature 36, no. 3 (1995): 421.


20. My phrasing, as pertains to imagination’s graciously morphing the resolute Dasein of Heidegger, is indebted to Ernest Lee Tuveson’s characterization of imagination as a “means of grace” in post-eighteenth-century literature. See Tuveson’s The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960). Roth’s friend Benjamin Taylor, in conversation with Roth, raised a related suggestion as pertains to Romantic notions of imagination and redemption. See Benjamin Taylor, Here We Are: My Friendship with Philip Roth (New York: Penguin Books, 2020), p. 140. As for Sartre and imagination, I reference existential flight in Being and Nothingness rather than Sartre’s earlier works on “imagination” since those expositions pertain, in the main, to the speculative history of ideas surrounding the relation of images to consciousness and imagination, and only occasionally foreshadow Being and Nothingness with regard to the vacuity of consciousness and imaginative flight. See, for example, Sartre’s 1936 monograph, Imagination: A Psychological Critique, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962) and Sartre’s 1940 exposition on the psychology of imagination, The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination, trans. Jonathan Webber (New York: Routledge, 2004). While Sartre does raise the issue of nothingness in these works, he attributes it to images that, on the basis of desire, are the objects or functions of consciousness rather than, as will become the case in Being and Nothingness, to the nihilation and ensuing freedom entailed in a first-instance upsurge of consciousness itself. Both of the earlier works associate reality with consciousness, as evidenced by reference to “the layer of real existences” in “the imaging consciousness”—that is, the solidity of the “I,” or a “real me,” coequal with “the existence of a thematic consciousness with a personal unity” (Sartre, The Imaginary: pp. 136, 146, 158 [quoted]). Such utterance veers wide of the key insight of the nothingness of Dasein as later formulated consistently in Being and Nothingness. Granted, Sartre takes a phenomenological approach when considering “the relation between form and matter in aesthetic experiences” (Webber, “Philosophical Introduction,” The Imaginary, p. xxii). Still, since Sartre did not read Being and Time until April 1939 (see Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, “Historical Introduction,” The Imaginary, p. xii), and since Being and Nothingness transforms Heidegger’s temporal vision of Dasein into the trifold requirements (see above) of simultaneously being what one is and is not, we should not be surprised by different, but related, emphases in Sartre’s earlier works on imagination.

21. For Roth’s jarring comparison of Donald Trump to Melville’s confidence man, see Judith Thurman, “Philip Roth Emails on Trump,” The New Yorker (January 30, 2017). In this exchange, reverberation of Heidegger’s belief that resolute Dasein is “non-relational, and not to be outstripped” (BT, p. 295) may exist in Roth’s claim, “It isn’t Trump as a character, a human type—the real-estate type, the callow and callous killer capitalist—that outstrips the imagination. It is Trump as President of the United States.” If resonance to
Heidegger indeed exists in such utterance, then the pronouncement may feature Roth’s offhand blending of concerns that span Heidegger, Sartre (via transcendent Dasein in flight), and imagination—but all served up, in this case, tendentiously.


24. My philosophical reading of Maria, relative to irresolute Dasein, is compatible with the proliferation of perspective that Finney (“RC,” p. 385) attributes to her creation.