Zuckerman/Roth: Literary Celebrity between Two Deaths

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FOLLOWING IN THE WAKE OF THE 2007 PUBLICATION OF *EXIT GHOST*, the journal *Philip Roth Studies* devoted its entire fall 2009 issue to "mourning Zuckerman." In the issue's introduction, Aimee Pozorski attributes her interest in the project to the "Janus-faced temporality associated with mourning" as Freud conceptualizes it in "Mourning and Melancholia." According to Pozorski, mourning "is always looking back—back to that which is lost in the past—but also it looks forward to anticipate . . . a loss that is yet to come" ("Mourning" 155). While Pozorski does not specify the loss anticipated by the mourning enacted in the issue, it is not a stretch to infer that Nathan Zuckerman's valedictory disappearance presages Philip Roth's own death, that the sustained association between author and avatar in this case is such that *Exit Ghost* functions as a kind of surrogate suicide, after which Roth, the biographical author, becomes a specter suspended between two deaths.

Of course, as all Rothians know, Nathan Zuckerman is himself suspended between two deaths, having died already in *The Counterlife* (1986), a book that critics agree marks a turning point in Roth's prolific career. By having Zuckerman die on the operating table in the fourth chapter of that book, Roth is able to dwell directly on the transformation death can effect in the perception and reception of an author's work. As Miriam Jaffe-Foger notes in the eulogy that concludes the special issue, the "problem of posthumous representation haunted Zuckerman" (282), but I would modify this statement slightly and say that the problem of posthumous *reputation* haunted Zuckerman and his creator or, rather, generated the need for such an avatar in the first place. None of the essays in this special issue, and no book on Philip Roth, fully accounts for the necessity of Nathan Zuckerman in Roth's career. Either Zuckerman is assimilated into the cast of authorial

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doubles—from Neil Klugman to David Kepesh to Philip Roth himself—who populate Roth's fiction and provide him with a platform to explore the problem of the self, or he is subordinated to any number of thematic preoccupations—from the fall of Newark to the legacy of the Holocaust—that recur in Roth's oeuvre.[1]

This is surprising, since Nathan Zuckerman is surely Philip Roth's most significant creation. He is a creation without precedent; though many writers, from George Eliot to Mark Twain to Stephen King, have adopted pseudonyms or invented avatars, no one has sustained what is, in effect, a parallel persona whose life and work reflect and refract the entire literary career of the persona's creator. And yet, while Nathan Zuckerman is exceptional, he is also representative, insofar as his creation is a response to a contradiction that confronts any author who aspires for lasting literary consecration in a culture industry focused on contemporaneous acclaim.

Such consecration has always been Philip Roth's ambition, and Nathan Zuckerman, I will argue, was conceived as a way of managing the conflict between the gradual and ultimately posthumous fame associated with his modernist forebears and the instantaneous, contemporaneous celebrity that characterized his own postmodern career. These two temporalities of recognition correspond to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "sub-field of restricted production" and the "sub-field of general production," the former constituted by the slow accretion of a reputation among a discrete audience of the avant-garde and the latter constituted by the rapid achievement of popularity with a mass audience (*Field* 53). During the modern era, these fields and the temporalities and economies that constituted them remained largely distinct, and most modernist authors achieved recognition in the restricted subfield before becoming known in the general subfield. By the postwar era, in which Roth began his career, the two fields increasingly overlapped and interpenetrated, such that critical canonization and mass popularity could coincide. Nathan Zuckerman enabled Philip Roth to negotiate this coincidence and manage its attendant contradictions.

As Pozorski affirms in her introduction to the recent collection *Roth and Celebrity*, "scholars of Roth and of celebrity have explored Roth's privileged position and insight into the condition of celebrity far less than seems warranted" (4). Building on Joe Moran's insights in *Star Authors* (2000), which posits all Roth's authorial alter egos as "hypothetical selves" designed to deal with the consequences of his post-*Portnoy* celebrity (103), *Roth and Celebrity* works to remedy this neglect, and a number of essays in that volume, especially Jaffe-Foger's "Philip Roth: Death and Celebrity," have contributed to my thinking on this topic. However, no essay in the volume is devoted exclusively to Zuckerman, though the series *Zuckerman Bound* is acknowledged throughout as central to any consideration of the topic.[2]

If *Roth and Celebrity* fails to fully account for Nathan Zuckerman, it is also true that, with the exception of Moran, scholars of literary celebrity have neglected Roth. Since the publication of John Cawelti's foundational (if frequently overlooked) essay "The Writer as Celebrity," authorial celebrity in literary history has undergone considerable scholarly scrutiny, involving individual writers ranging from Byron to Twain to Stein to Mailer and historical eras ranging from the Romantic to the postmodern, but Roth has played a minor role in this scholarship. Indeed, in my contribution to this growing subfield of literary studies, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880–1980* (2004), I conclude with the premature prophecy that "literary celebrity . . . persists only as a residual model of authorship. It no longer commands the cultural authority it did in the modern era; and it never will again" (200), effectively placing Roth outside the historical coordinates of my argument. My conclud-

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ing claim resonates with the introduction to the recent *PMLA* issue devoted to "celebrity, fame, notoriety," whose authors argue that "[i]n the twenty-first century, the immortality of traditional fame has taken a back seat to the incandescence of celebrity" (Boone and Vickers 904), thereby affirming that the kinds of acclaim conventionally associated with literary achievement are, indeed, residual. And yet Leo Braudy's contribution to that issue notes that "it's worth trying to keep fame and celebrity distinguished if not separated, for it could be argued that it is exactly the rise of celebrity that helps engender some of the more interesting efforts at fame" ("Knowing" 1072). Nathan Zuckerman, as both an exceptional and a representative figure of postmodern authorship, is surely one of those efforts.

To clarify how Zuckerman can be both exceptional and representative, I will recapitulate the history of the contradictions his creation is intended to resolve. As the coordinators of the *PMLA* special issue emphasize at the outset, "Celebrity has a history" (Boone and Vickers 906), and the most comprehensive and compelling history of it remains Braudy's *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*, which usefully places literary and artistic fame in a broader historical context. Braudy details how the idea of the artist as an exceptional individual was conceived in the early modern era in deliberate contrast to the more worldly models of renown based on political and military achievement. Thus, he claims that "the effort to reserve 'art' and especially 'artist' for a more rarified sense of making is comparable to our current urge to distinguish fame from celebrity" (281). The "timelessness" of literary creation, then, is a historical response to competing models of recognition based on more worldly achievements.

The more direct antecedents of the reputational dynamics determining Roth's career emerge in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the genesis of an autonomous literary field meticulously documented by Bourdieu in *The Rules of Art* (1992). As Braudy affirms, it is in this bohemian milieu that we see "the first large-scale effort to supplement or even replace the traditionally tangible sources of fame with a fame of the human spirit struggling against a hostile or indifferent society." This effort generated what Braudy describes as a "cult of failure in the present to ensure celebration in the future" (*Frenzy* 485, 488) and what Bourdieu theorizes as the "economic world reversed" that has defined art since the nineteenth century (*Field* 29). Subsequently, economic value and cultural value have tended to be conceptually opposed, and failure to earn the former, even under a postmodern dispensation, continues to signify success in earning the latter for those aspiring to traditional models of literary and aesthetic consecration.

These rules of art have posed acute challenges for American authors and artists. As I have argued elsewhere, in the modern United States "many authors whose self-understanding was based in European models of restricted production found themselves having to adapt to the marketing strategies and audience sensibilities of large-scale production" (6). And, as Braudy confirms, a representative figure in this regard is Ernest Hemingway, who "remains the prime case of someone fatally caught between his genius and its publicity" (*Frenzy* 547). And Hemingway provides an important precedent for Roth, by exemplifying what Cawelti deems "the most interesting twentieth-century development in the relationship between celebrity and literature," which is "the use by a number of major writers of their celebrity personas as an integral part of their art" (171). This development, insofar as it forces the writer to engage the problem of posthumous reputation, tends to provoke a preoccupation with death. Braudy writes, "[W]henever a writer creates a hero whose nature is like his own . . . the themes of fame and death are closely related" (*Frenzy* 28).[3]

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Citing Braudy's history, as well as Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, Moran's *Star Authors*, and my *Authors Inc.*, Faye Hammill notes that the "history of literary celebrity has been rendered in strikingly male terms" (13). Hammill establishes that recent attention to famous women writers has mandated a complication of Bourdieu's categories, specifically a "recuperation" of the middlebrow as a key location in which literary celebrity has been negotiated, frequently in ways that have resulted in the neglect of women writers who were celebrated during their lifetimes. And as Brenda Weber confirms in *Women and Literary Celebrity in the Nineteenth Century* (2012), attention to these women writers necessitates scrutinizing the terminology of renown. Thus, she points out that in Braudy's nomenclature

> [f]ame stands for the high, celebrity for the low. Fame marks aspiration; celebrity brands ambition. Fame indicates valor; celebrity stains scandal. And, since the machinery of fame is often the elite masculinist theater of politics, war, and heroism, whereas the workings of celebrity often engage the feminized domains of rumor and innuendo, the divide between fame and celebrity clearly conveys both class and gendered distinctions.

Weber's response to this terminological tradition is to "deliberately move back and forth between the terms fame and celebrity so as to problematize the gender bias that stands at the heart of the fame/celebrity distinction" (18).

Since Roth was himself invested in this distinction, I have found it useful to maintain it, but in a schematically specific way that illuminates his career, including its gender dynamics, and accounts for some of the more interesting consequences of the increasingly complex interpenetration of the fields from which the distinction initially emerged. In the discussion that follows, I define fame as posthumous and celebrity as contemporaneous; when they are formulated in this way, their cultural interpenetration can be understood in terms of Slavoj Žižek's concept of being "between two deaths." According to Žižek, the difference between two deaths is "the difference between real (biological) death and its symbolization, the 'settling of accounts,' the accomplishment of symbolic destiny." He elaborates that "this gap can be filled in various ways; it can contain either sublime beauty or fearsome monsters" (*Sublime Object* 135). His two illustrations (derived from Jacques Lacan's *Seminar VII*, on "the ethics of psychoanalysis") are Antigone, whose symbolic death precedes her biological death, and the ghost of Hamlet's father, whose biological death precedes his symbolic death.[4]

Ghosts make up something of a leitmotif in the Zuckerman cycle, which is bookended by titles that use the word *ghost*. In *The Ghost Writer* (1979), Zuckerman is haunted by the specter of Anne Frank, whom Roth places in an Antigone-like position by imagining that she did not really die. In *Exit Ghost*, Zuckerman gets to play the ghost of Hamlet's father, reminding us of the sins we seem unable to expiate. The first ghost is an object of desire; Zuckerman desires Amy Bellette, and, as we shall see, this desire motivates him to envision her as Anne Frank. The second ghost is the subject of a drive; Zuckerman, now impotent and incontinent, has become a bodiless teller of tales that illustrate what is rotten in our lives.[5]

In *Looking Awry*, Žižek explains how the space between two deaths divides desire from drive, specifying that "apparitions that emerge in the domain 'between two deaths' address to us some unconditional demand, and it is for this reason that they incarnate pure drive without desire" (21). This decoupling of drive from desire clarifies why Roth felt it necessary to kill Zuckerman after the conclusion of the first trilogy, which is dominated by desire, allowing him to live on as a sort of pure narrative drive. The split also illuminates the contrast in ethical orientation

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between the two trilogies, the first of which focuses on the resolutely masculine amorality of the narcissistic author figure and the second of which calls out the entire culture for its moral hypocrisy.[6]

In brief, the mass cultural celebrity precipitated by *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), followed by the devastating attack on that text and its author by Irving Howe in *Commentary*, provoked Roth to reconsider and re-create his career on the model of his literary forebears—James, Flaubert, Proust, Malamud, Mann, and especially Kafka, who died young after having published little. *Zuckerman Bound*, the three novels and epilogue that constitute the first Zuckerman cycle, effectively absorbs the charismatic powers of these ancestors. Then Roth kills and resurrects his avatar, enabling himself to write his American trilogy (*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*) from a posthumous perspective, between two deaths. Roth solved the problem of the contradiction between contemporaneous celebrity and posthumous fame by, in effect, trumping time, first rehearsing a career in the former mode, in which celebrity ultimately leads to failure and death, and then living on, between two deaths, in the latter mode, a legend before his time, still writing.

The Problem with Portnoy

Unlike his modernist forebears, most of whom spent long apprenticeships laboring in obscurity before garnering recognition, Roth gained renown and notoriety early. Celebrity, in other words, was not only the consequence of *Portnoy's Complaint* but also one of the underappreciated contexts for its conception. As Roth confirms in the author's note to *Reading Myself and Others* (1975), "Because recognition—and with it, opposition—came to me almost immediately, I seem (from the evidence here) to have felt called upon to assert a literary position and to defend my moral flank" (viii). Many of the pieces in that volume reflect not only on the causes and consequences of Roth's own celebrity but also on the moral stakes of the larger celebrity culture to which he was forced to accommodate himself.

Portnoy's Complaint was partly a response to the former, insofar as Roth decided to create the character that he imagined his Jewish audience imagined him to be. But it was also a way to process the latter; as Roth recounts in "How Did You Come to Write That Book, Anyway?" a source of inspiration for the novel was a "longish monologue" he began writing in the late sixties, to be accompanied by a slide show consisting in "full-color enlargements of the private parts, fore and aft, of the famous." While working on this "unfinished," indeed "unpublishable," piece, he found himself able to "go on at some length about the solitary activity that is so difficult to talk about and yet so near at hand" (*Reading* 31–32). Roth found a way to write about male masturbation, the act for which Portnoy and Roth himself would become celebrities, through writing about the "private parts" of public people. Portnoy's persona, which would become the basis of Roth's celebrity in the seventies, emerges from these masturbatory fantasies about celebrities, fantasies that anticipate the increasingly explicit attention to the intimate sex lives of famous people in the decades after the sexual revolution. And it is a persona dominated by a psychoanalytically determined conception of desire, by Roth's classical, indeed clichéd, understanding, partly informed by his psychoanalysis in the sixties, of the struggle between the id and the superego.

It is over and against these fantasies, fantasies "which purported to enlarge and examine upon an illuminated screen the sexual parts of *others*," that Roth began to write "a strongly autobiographical piece" based on his Jewish upbringing in postwar Newark, a piece for which his working title was "Portrait of the Artist." Roth frames the juxtaposition between these exercises in terms of literary

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genre ("the extremes of unmanageable fable or fantasy and familiar surface realism or documentation") and character type ("the Jewboy and the nice Jewish boy" [33]). But the two pieces also model different modes of recognition and reputation, one based on contemporaneous visual exposure by others and one based on retrospective verbal narration by the self. It is the cultural and temporal clash between these modes that generated the need for a figure like Nathan Zuckerman.

The Death of Desire and the Desire for Death

Portnoy's Complaint was no *Portrait of the Artist*, though many confused author with protagonist, and indeed *Portnoy*'s purported lack of artistry would be the basis of Howe's accusation that Roth's work suffers from "a thin personal culture" (73). In his contribution to the special issue of *Philip Roth Studies*, R. Clifton Spargo argues that we should see "the invention of the alter ego Nathan Zuckerman at least in part as a response to the criticisms of Irving Howe" (253), and David Gooblar has affirmed, more specifically, that we can understand Roth's engagement with Franz Kafka and Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer* as "part of the 'personal culture' that Irving Howe claimed Roth was lacking" (87). *The Ghost Writer* has been widely, and legitimately, understood as marking Roth's serious engagement with his modernist forebears, including not only Kafka but also Joyce, James, Mann, and the fictional E. I. Lonoff, whose ascetic refusal of all public attention comes to symbolize the modernist dismissal of celebrity.[7]

Kafka makes perfect sense in this respect. As someone who died before any of his major work was published, he presents the ideal model of an ascetic life followed by posthumous fame, which is impossible for Zuckerman (already an "unchaste monk") to emulate (Roth, *Ghost Writer* 7). Desire is immediately posed as a reputational issue in *The Ghost Writer*, as Zuckerman guiltily remembers looking at his picture in the *Saturday Review* and "thinking that this photograph of an intense and serious young writer . . . said to be living in a five-flight Village walk-up with a young ballerina, might inspire any number of thrilling women to want to try to take her place" (38). Though he idealizes Lonoff and will eventually become like him in the later trilogy, the young Zuckerman is loath to live the ascetic life of the modernist artist; instead, he relishes the degree to which his reputation might enhance his sex life.

His immediate love interest in *The Ghost Writer* is Lonoff's mysterious assistant Amy Bellette, whom Zuckerman imagines to be Anne Frank and whose role in this text, and *Zuckerman Bound* as a whole, has been the subject of considerable critical attention, most of it understandably focusing on how she allows Roth to engage the issue of the Holocaust and its (mis)representation in postwar American popular culture (e.g., Pinsker; Van Oostrum; Spargo). However, critics have also noted the degree to which she functions as an authorial double for Zuckerman, a female complement to Kafka. As Gooblar sums up, "Zuckerman has imagined Anne Frank to be his double, a Jewish writer much like himself" (80).

What Franz Kafka and Anne Frank reveal to Zuckerman is the crucial role that death can play in the negotiation of literary reputations. Roth had already illustrated this importance for Kafka in his brief jeu d'esprit "I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting," in which he imagines the author living on in obscurity as a Hebrew teacher in Newark, indirectly establishing the degree to which Kafka's death precipitated his canonization (*Reading* 223–44). But the relationship is scrutinized in more detail and complexity in the "Femme Fatale" chapter of *The Ghost Writer*, when Zuckerman imagines Bellette as Anne Frank coming to the conclusion that her literary reputation depends on her death. After going to see the "dramatiza-

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tion of Anne Frank's Diary" in New York, she realizes that she has "to be dead to everyone" (124). In deciding to stay Amy Bellette, she illustrates how important authorial death can be to the establishment of literary reputation. As Roth explains:

> Were *Het Achterhuis* known to be the work of a living writer, it would never be more than it was: a young teenager's diary of her trying years in hiding during the German occupation of Holland, something boys and girls could read in bed at night along with the adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson. But dead she had something more to offer than amusement for ages 10–15; dead she had written, without meaning to or trying to, a book with the force of a masterpiece. (145–46)

Dead, she is able to claim that "of all the Jewish writers, from Franz Kafka to E. I. Lonoff, she was the most famous" (152). Anne Frank, then, is not only a model of the Jewish writer for Zuckerman, she is also an example of posthumous canonization, an author to whom fame came after (and because of) death.

Franz Kafka and Anne Frank, then, model a version of posthumous reputation that is unavailable to Nathan Zuckerman, or to Philip Roth, and the comic complexity of becoming famous while still alive would be the thematic focus of *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), the Zuckerman text that focuses most explicitly on the consequences of *Portnoy's Complaint* (renamed *Carnofsky* in the Zuckerman books). The figure that embodies these consequences is the manic fan Alvin Pepler, who, like many readers of *Portnoy's Complaint*, confuses author with protagonist. Pepler functions in this text as a readerly double, providing a mechanism whereby Roth can incorporate and respond to his audience's (mis)readings of his work, creating a dialectical feedback loop that, as Mark McGurl affirms, has contributed to Roth's productivity (51–56).

Pepler is, or rather was, also a celebrity, and his renown as a game-show prodigy (based on that of Herbert Stempel, a figure in the quiz-show scandals) further illuminates the contrast between posthumous and contemporaneous renown. Pepler's celebrity, significantly based on his "photographic memory," is evanescent and televisual, in contrast with the established literary reputations of the great modernist authors—from Flaubert to Proust—who are repeatedly cited in the narrative (19). Thus, when Pepler claims, "You're our Marcel Proust, Mr. Zuckerman" (13), the irony is generated not so much by the inaptness of the comparison as by the fact that it is made by a self-proclaimed "man of the people" while Zuckerman is still alive. As Zuckerman anxiously notes, "When the lion comes up to Hemingway with his review of 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,' time to leave the jungle for home" (148). Pepler's proximity to Zuckerman violates the temporal and spatial distance presumed to exist between modernist authors and contemporary readers, particularly in the postwar era when the authors were dead and the readers were American college students; the extended conversations and contretemps between Zuckerman and Pepler, then, allow Roth to probe the incommensurability between the reputational temporalities that bring them together.

This temporal incommensurability leads Zuckerman to fantasize that Pepler is going to kill him, an act that would resolve the contradiction through rendering Zuckerman's fame posthumous. And it is additionally significant that this fantasy is routed back through the original onanistic reveries that spawned *Portnoy's Complaint*. Thus, Zuckerman imagines the headlines that will appear the day after his assassination: "JERK-OFF ARTIST KILLS BARD OF JERKING-OFF; ZUCKERMAN DEAD BY ONANIST'S HAND" (215). As the circularity of this headline indicates, contemporaneous celebrity collapses author into audience, thereby making it impossible, in the end, to differentiate assassination from suicide. Indeed, Zuckerman's fear of the former in this

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text hardly masks a persistent desire for the latter; both of them would comfortably place him in a posthumous position more appropriate to his literary aspirations.

Zuckerman Unbound also provides a platform for Roth to consider the contrast between masculine and feminine experiences of renown, a contrast that, as we have seen, maps onto the distinction between fame and celebrity and that is again leveraged by way of the figure of Anne Frank. However, in this text Frank figures not as an author but as a role, the theatrical debut of Caesara O'Shea, the "sex symbol" with whom Zuckerman has become associated in the gossip columns and whom he dates, and beds, in the middle of the narrative. In O'Shea's drawing room Zuckerman finds a copy of Søren Kierkegaard's *The Crisis in the Life of the Actress.* With O'Shea in the backseat of her limo, he reads that a famous actress "knows that her name is on everyone's lips, even when they wipe their mouths with their handkerchiefs!" Imagining that the lines are about O'Shea and luxuriating in his luck in having had sex with her, Zuckerman wipes his own mouth in giddy self-congratulation. O'Shea's fame is based on her desirability, on her embodiment, as Kierkegaard specifies, of "feminine youthfulness" (97, 96).[8] This physical desirability, which inevitably fades with age, contrasts with the temporality of literary reputations, which are supposed to increase with age, only reaching full maturity after the death of the author. The perversity of collapsing these types of celebrity into each other is symptomatized by the "damp matted handkerchief," steeped in the "stale acrid odor" of semen, that Zuckerman receives, purportedly from Pepler, in the mail (176).

If *Zuckerman Unbound* engages the problem of Roth's populist apotheosis, of his realization that "all one's readers, it turned out, weren't New Critics sitting on their cans at Kenyon," *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983) engages, and effectively dispenses with, the New York intellectual tastemakers whose approval he had initially sought and received (*Reading* 78). As Spargo affirms, in this text "Zuckerman is a stand-in for a quarrel with Howe that might have unfolded, had Roth not refused to take it up in a non-fictional context" (269). Thus, in the fictional context of *The Anatomy Lesson* we are informed that "Milton Appel had unleashed an attack upon Zuckerman's career that made Macduff's assault upon Macbeth look almost lackadaisical" (68).

Roth then has Zuckerman refashion Milton Appel the critic as Milton Appel the publisher of the magazine *Lickety Split*, which "is not a mass-distribution publication because it's too dirty" (173). Zuckerman's hilarious and increasingly addled impersonation of Appel over the course of the second half of the novel, based partly on Roth's impressions of Al Goldstein, the editor of *Screw* magazine, serves not only to denigrate Howe, and therefore to dismiss his residual authority as an arbiter of reputations, but also to illustrate how Zuckerman's post-*Carnofksy* renown "wasn't literary fame, it was sexual fame, and sexual fame stinks" (207). *The Anatomy Lesson* illustrates how the stink of sexual fame depends on the living, suffering, desiring body of the author, which has now, inevitably, exhausted itself as a source of literary productivity. Roth laments, "Zuckerman had lost his subject. His health, his hair, and his subject" (39).

Zuckerman's sexual fame correlates to the feminized experience of celebrity as it is anatomized in *Zuckerman Unbound*, confirming that, under a postmodern dispensation, male public figures, including writers, are increasingly subjected to the types of spectacular display conventionally associated with feminine desirability, while female public figures are increasingly granted the kinds of artistic canonization previously reserved principally for men. The *Zuckerman Bound* series as a whole is more concerned with the consequences of the former than the latter, however, and most centrally represents Roth's

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determination not to be trapped by the limitations that constrain his alter ego.

In *The Prague Orgy* (1985), the brief epilogue to the first Zuckerman trilogy, Roth returns to his original models of literary fame, Anne Frank and Franz Kafka, and demonstrates not only that they cannot work for him but also that they are no longer operative at all in an era divided between a place where "everything goes and nothing matters" and a place where "nothing goes and everything matters" ("Philip Roth"). The West corrupts its authors with instantaneous celebrity while the East destroys its authors by condemning them to permanent obscurity. Anne Frank again figures not as an author but as a role, yet this time, instead of enabling the career of the actress who played her, the role has destroyed it. Eva Kalinova, the middle-aged refugee whom Zuckerman meets in the opening pages, was fired from the Prague National Theater for playing the role, and later in the novel Zuckerman laments "how they have used Anne Frank as a whip to drive her from the stage, how the ghost of the Jewish saint has returned to haunt her as a demon" (*Prague Orgy* 61).

As for Franz Kafka, he has been replaced by Olga Sisovksy, who, Zuckerman is told, "was the most famous woman in the country" (28). Olga herself then tells him, "Are you looking for Franz Kafka? The intellectuals all come here looking for Kafka. Kafka is dead. They should be looking for Olga" (29). Zuckerman attempts to retrieve from Olga the short story manuscripts by an obscure Czech Jew who was killed in the Holocaust and whose talents are repeatedly compared with Kafka's. Zuckerman tells Olga that he will try to publish an article about the stories in the *New York Times*, but Olga, who wants him to marry her and take her to America, replies in outrage, "You will be hero to the Jews and to literature and to all of the Free World. On top of your millions of dollars and millions of girls you will win the American Prize for Idealism about Literature. And what will happen to me? I will go to prison for smuggling a manuscript to the West" (72). The logic of the posthumous "discovery" of literary genius is no longer operative in a world where literature garnishes "millions of dollars and millions of girls" in America while in Eastern Europe it condemns one to prison. Roth must work out some other temporal logic whereby the honor of posthumous fame is achievable in a cultural environment saturated with contemporaneous celebrity.

The Counterlife (*The Facts*) and Death

Roth discovers this logic in *The Counterlife*. Like *The Anatomy Lesson*, this text features a Zuckerman who has exhausted his literary resources, who claims that "as a writer I'd mined my past to its limits, exhausted my private culture and personal memories, and could no longer even warm to squabbling over my work" (283). The reference to Howe's article here is pointed and deliberate, signaling that the preceding trilogy and epilogue had proved sufficiently that Roth possesses the cultural credentials to be a respected Jewish American author. But *The Counterlife* also signals that Roth's aspirations are higher than that, and the text lays the groundwork for the Jamesian major phase to come, which will allow him to go above and beyond anything the New York intellectuals may have expected. For this shift, it is necessary that Zuckerman move beyond his personal life, and the best way for him to do that is to die.

The Counterlife aligns death with impotence, the cardiac medication's "single terrible side effect," which drives Henry and Nathan Zuckerman in separate chapters to undertake the operation that will lead to their demise (3).[9] In establishing this alignment as, in essence, the premise that links the text's embedded and entangled narratives, Roth signals that Zuckerman's death will serve the function of dividing carnal desire from narrative

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drive, situating his avatar as a ghost between two deaths who can serve as the pseudo-posthumous author of the masterpieces still to come. Or, more aptly, Zuckerman will become the conduit for stories purportedly told by others. His English paramour Maria tells him in her crucial revelation at the end of chapter 4, "I know now what a ghost is. It is the person you talk to. That's a ghost. Someone who's still so alive that you talk to them and talk to them and never stop" (254). This function of ghostly auditor will become Zuckerman's role in the American trilogy: he is the one who listens to the compulsive stories of others, others who need their stories to be told.

For the living author, these compulsions translate into the kinds of homicidal overidentification associated with Alvin Pepler, who reappears in *The Counterlife* as Jimmy Ben-Joseph, the obsessed fan Zuckerman meets at the Wailing Wall, who proclaims, "I've read all your books! You wrote about my family!" and then returns as the maniacal hijacker on Zuckerman's plane back to England from Israel. Like Pepler, Jimmy is a figure for readers who not only confuse author with protagonist but also usurp the rights of authorship for themselves. He is attempting to hijack not just the plane but the very story Zuckerman is writing. Thus, Zuckerman realizes with horror that Jimmy's statement for the press, "Forget Remembering," is "the title of the play and the assassin is the self-appointed son who learned all he knows at my feet. Farce is the genre, climaxing in blood" (171). The oblique reference to Marx's dictum on how history repeats itself restages yet again the contrast between the honor of posthumous fame and the shame of contemporaneous celebrity, as Zuckerman is repeatedly subjected to the murderous misreadings of his fans.

Roth rewrites Zuckerman's life as tragic by killing him off, an act that retroactively turns his breakout bestseller, *Carnovsky*, into a masterpiece by way of his editor's eulogy. As his brother, Henry, fumes, the eulogy—which, it turns out, Zuckerman himself wrote in anticipation of his death—has the effect of elevating "*Carnovsky* to the level of a *classic*" (213). Roth has learned the lesson of his modernist forebears, that true literary fame and recognition can only be posthumous, but he gives it a postmodern twist by achieving it vicariously, by killing off his avatar and then resurrecting him to write the novels that will cement his reputation.

Before Zuckerman reemerges as the author of the magisterial American trilogy, he figures as an interlocutor in Roth's attempt to come clean about his actual past, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988). Roth's reminiscences are preceded by a letter to Zuckerman, purportedly requesting his advice, and followed by a letter from Zuckerman, advising against publication. The autobiography itself ends with the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*, thus leading up to, but not actually narrating, the creation of Nathan Zuckerman as an authorial alter ego. The chronology of *The Facts*, then, further confirms the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* as a dividing line in Roth's life and in a sense cedes the second half of that life to the Zuckerman cycle that follows.

The Facts establishes some significant differences between Roth's biography and Zuckerman's, particularly in the familial dynamics. We learn that, unlike Zuckerman's, Roth's family supported his work throughout his career. We also learn that Roth is the younger, not the older, brother (Roth's older brother, Sandy, was a commercial artist, not a dentist). In his letter, Zuckerman takes exception to Roth's sentimentalizing of his family, but Zuckerman's most insistent critique involves the treatment of Roth's disastrous marriage to Margaret Martinson Williams, named Josie in the text, who died in a car accident just before *Portnoy* went to press. Zuckerman insists that Roth give Josie her "real name," explaining that "Josie is the real antagonist, the true counterself, and

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shouldn't be relegated like the other women to a kind of allegorical role" (179). Zuckerman's unheeded advice not only affirms the crucial importance of this relationship for Roth, it also establishes that the absence of this relationship constitutes the most significant difference between the facts of Philip Roth's biography and the fiction of Nathan Zuckerman's. Though Zuckerman was initially conceived, in the torturous crucible of *My Life as a Man* (1974), as a way of dealing with Williams, once he appears full-blown in *The Ghost Writer* his life unfolds without the domestic derailment that dominated Roth's life in the sixties. Zuckerman enabled Roth to rewrite his life without her in it.

The Facts, then, provides a chronological and biographical dividing line between Philip Roth and Nathan Zuckerman. Chronologically speaking, *Portnoy's Complaint* is confirmed as the watershed moment, the publication of which, as we have already seen, precipitated the need for an avatar to manage the consequences of celebrity. Biographically speaking, Margaret Martinson Williams makes the difference; if she threw Roth's career off course, Zuckerman gets him back on it. Thus, when Roth concludes the autobiographical section of the text with the affirmation that he "was determined to be an absolutely independent, self-sufficient man—to recapture, in other words, twelve years on, at age thirty-five, that exhilarating, adventurous sense of personal freedom" (160) that he had had before he met her, he is speaking as much of Zuckerman as he is of himself.

Codamerica

The Nathan Zuckerman of the American trilogy is as good as dead. Impotent and incontinent, living in Lonoffish isolation in the New England countryside, Zuckerman is no longer the subject of his stories but has become a conduit through which stories flow. The fact that these stories focus on the lives of others means that Zuckerman literally becomes a ghostly presence, hovering around the edges of his characters' lives, listening without being seen, vanishing entirely for long stretches of narrative. And, now that he is no longer the subject of his stories, they no longer engage his personal desires. Zuckerman has become an oracular site of pure narrative drive; like Hamlet's ghost, he embodies a compulsion to tell. And the inertial power of this drive is illustrated by the scale and scope of its products; *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*, each longer than any previous Zuckerman title, came out in rapid succession between 1997 and 2000, astonishing everyone with the speed of their production and the scope of their ambition. Roth had achieved, while still alive, what his modernist forebears had only fully achieved after death: classic status. It is appropriate, then, that he is only the third living writer to have his works published by the Library of America.

Ross Posnock has recently affirmed that "Roth is actively defying the trajectory of most major twentieth-century American novelists," whose early work is unanimously seen as their best, the prelude to a falling off in quantity and quality in their later careers, usually attributed to the burdens and distractions of economic success and critical consecration. The "falling off from their prime" that characterizes the careers of such modernist masters as Faulkner and Hemingway confirms that the tension between contemporaneous recognition and posthumous acclaim predated Roth's career and can be understood as constitutive of modernist success as such (4). However, during the modern era the two temporalities were still distinct, both conceptually and practically, and the standard career arc was to begin in obscurity and achieve coterie recognition before catapulting to mass cultural renown later in life. By the time of Roth's later career, the two temporalities have effectively collapsed into each other,

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generating the instant classics characteristic of the postmodern moment.

It is interesting and informative, then, that the analogue of Roth's late-career productivity predates the modern era; as Posnock notes, "late Roth is now beginning to deserve comparison with what is usually regarded as the summit of late turns of novelistic genius—Henry James' major phase at the start of the century" (4–5). Such invocations of a Jamesian "major phase" became almost unavoidable after the publication of *The Human Stain*, but I would argue that this designation cuts two ways. The novels invoke the late James in their ambition but also in their form, which makes them, in the end, more derivative than the exceptional cycle that precedes them. As a uniquely symptomatic response to the new temporalities of reception that constitute the shift to postmodernism, the first trilogy is a truly remarkable achievement, while the second one is something of a coda, ironically confirming the solitary despair with which both trilogies conclude. The American trilogy is a notable achievement, but it is also infused with an awareness of the loss of the conditions that would make it more culturally significant.

Enjoy Your Afterlife

Exit Ghost opens with the claim "I had ceased to inhabit not just the great world but the present moment" (1). As Jaffe-Foger affirms, borrowing her terminology from Thomas H. Kane, it is an "automortographical" text, one in which the author prefigures his or her own death ("Philip Roth" 67). And *Exit Ghost* also brings the entire Zuckerman cycle full circle, returning to E. I. Lonoff, now long dead, and Amy Bellette, now dying of cancer, still stubbornly devoted to her ex-lover's legacy. The thematic focus of *Exit Ghost* is, not surprisingly, biography, the genre that haunts any claimant to literary celebrity, at least on the modernist model. In this elegiac text, Zuckerman finds himself doing verbal battle with Richard Kliman, a young and eagerly ambitious aspiring biographer of Lonoff, who claims he has a sensational secret that will resuscitate interest in the forgotten author. At first Zuckerman, outraged by the invasion of privacy, vows to fight, telling him "the last thing Lonoff wanted was a biographer" (45). But eventually Zuckerman realizes that he cannot stop Kliman from pursuing Lonoff's biography and that when it is finished there will be no way to prevent him "from turning his blazing attention on me. Once I was dead, who could protect the story of my life from Richard Kliman?" (275).

Jaffe-Foger claims that Roth kills Zuckerman in order "to explore the possibilities of what *might* happen if he were forced to relinquish all control" ("Philip Roth" 69), but I would argue that Zuckerman is in fact part of a larger strategy of Roth's to extend his control beyond his death, to protect his story from the Richard Klimans of the literary world. Indeed, in the recent *Paris Review* interview in which he confirmed the rumors that he was retiring from writing fiction, Roth claims that he has been keeping busy stage-managing his biography: "I've been working instead on my archives so I can turn them over to my biographer. I've turned over thousands of pages which are like memoirs but not literary, not publishable as such. I don't want to write my memoirs, but I wanted my biographer to have the material for his book before I die" ("In"). And he further claims that he has instructed his executors to destroy his archives once his biographer, Blake Bailey, is through with them. Roth, in other words, wants to use this last gap between two deaths, between his retirement as a novelist and his physical death, to "authorize" the biographical account of his life. The fact that he is on his second "official" biographer confirms the degree to which he is determined to control his posthumous representation and reputation.

On 18 March 2013 I delivered an early version of this paper at Roth@80, a two-day event in Newark consisting of a conference

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and a celebration of Philip Roth's eightieth birthday. The birthday began at the Newark Public Library, with a remarkable exhibit of photos from Roth's private collection, ranging from infancy to old age. Significantly, there were no photos with Margaret Martinson Williams or her children (nor any photos with Claire Bloom). This was followed by a bus tour of Newark, though little remains of the city Roth grew up in. The evening's events were held at the Newark Museum and included opening remarks by Jonathan Lethem, Hermione Lee, Claudia Roth Pierpont, and Alain Finkielkraut. Lee and Pierpont vigorously defended Roth's gender politics and his representation of female characters. That this defense was part of the overall agenda of the evening seemed confirmed when Roth was introduced by his old friend Edna O'Brien, who dismissed rumors that they had been lovers.

Roth then gave a reading from *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) that the *New Yorker* editor, David Remnick, called "the most astonishing literary performance I've ever witnessed." Roth read from a late scene in which the protagonist, Mickey Sabbath, visits the Jewish cemetery where his family is buried. The scene is an extended meditation on death, and of the seven pages Roth read, a full page was given over to the inscriptions on the gravestones. What gave this monotony of "beloveds" such astonishing tonal power was the obvious joy with which Roth voiced this litany of loss. It was as if the author, suspended between two deaths, had already written and was now reading his own epitaph, and enjoying it. We may be mourning Zuckerman, but Philip Roth is clearly enjoying his afterlife.

Notes

1. There is only one book-length study dedicated entirely to Nathan Zuckerman, Pia Masiero's *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Story World*. Deploying a combination of narrative and reader-response theory, Masiero meticulously details how Roth establishes Zuckerman as a coherent and continuous character across the various texts that feature him. While Masiero is also invested in analyzing the parallels between Roth's autobiography and Zuckerman's fictional life, she is unconcerned with the features of the literary and cultural field that would make such an avatar necessary in the first place and that help to explain the discontinuities and incoherencies that she works to downplay and discount.

2. While Moran's chapter on Roth is indispensable for any discussion of Zuckerman and celebrity, it was written before the publication of the American trilogy and *Exit Ghost*, which prevents Moran from fully appreciating the degree to which Zuckerman differs from Roth's other authorial avatars.

3. For useful discussions of Hemingway and celebrity, see Raeburn; Leff; Glass 139–74.

4. Lacan's seminar generated a lengthy debate on feminism, psychoanalysis, and ethics. In addition to Žižek, the key texts in the debate are Butler and Copjec.

5. In an essay written before the publication of *Exit Ghost*, Alexis Kate Wilson affirms that ghosts constitute "a grander theme" uniting the novels in *Zuckerman Bound* (105). The publication of this last title reveals the degree to which the theme stretches across the entire Zuckerman cycle.

6. As Masiero confirms, "[T]he thematic trajectory of the first trilogy might be considered to span from unmitigated sexual urge and imaginative total indulgence to physical incapacity and the loss of one's subject matter, and the second shows Roth (via Zuckerman) as a social novelist caring about history's cultural minutiae" (14).

7. According to Donald Kartiganer, *The Ghost Writer* characterizes "Lonoff as the selfless saint of high modernism and Zuckerman as the self-indulgent, irreverent postmodernist" (36).

8. The most direct antecedent of O'Shea is Barbra Streisand, whom Roth was rumored to be dating in the late sixties, but O'Shea is also based on Roth's second wife, Claire Bloom, who had brought the Kierkegaard text to his notice and who, according to Roth, resembled Anne Frank (Roth, *Reading* 193–96; Bloom 168–69; Pierpont 124–26).

9. Roth himself had been diagnosed with coronary artery disease some years before and had, unsurprisingly, decided against taking the medication mentioned here.

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