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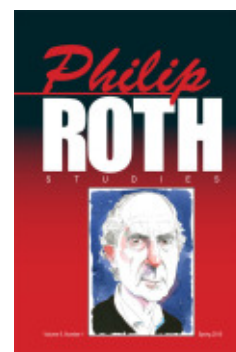
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Philip Roth Studies, Volume 5, Number 2, Fall 2009, pp. 227-239 (Article)

Published by Purdue University Press



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Chiastic Reflections: Rash Moments in the Life of Zuckerman

Claudia Franziska Brühwiler

ABSTRACT. Nathan Zuckerman's farewell with *Exit Ghost* is interwoven with Joseph Conrad's initiation story *The Shadow-Line* (1917), which traces the moral maturation of a young captain. While one could see Conrad's unnamed protagonist mirrored in Richard Kliman, this article rather suggests to read *The Shadow-Line* as the motivic fundament of Zuckerman's life: during his whole literary existence, Zuckerman has been meandering along the shadow-line, the emblem of this developmental twilight state the initiand is held in. In contrast to the typical initiand who will, eventually, be able to claim a new position, Zuckerman remains a perpetual initiand.

In 1917, Joseph Conrad lent his voice to a nameless young sailor who leaves his ship in a South Asian port, without any reason or further plans: "My action, rash as it was, had more the character of divorce—almost of desertion" (4). A rash action in a rash moment. This mere adjective haunts Nathan Zuckerman's last appearance as Philip Roth's writer-protagonist in *Exit Ghost* (2007). In fact, it becomes the formula by which he transcends his past experiences and it inspires him to write an erotic, maybe even rash, playlet:

HE

Did you ever read a short novel called *The Shadow-Line*?[...] The opening line goes, "Only the young have such moments." These are moments Conrad describes as "rash." In the first few pages he lays everything out. "Rash moments"—the two words make up the entire sentence. He goes on, "I mean moments when the still young are inclined to commit rash actions, such as getting married suddenly or else throwing up a job for no reason." It goes like that. But these rash moments don't just happen in youth. Coming here last night was a rash moment. Daring to return is another. With age there are rash moments too. My first was leaving, my second is returning. (*Exit Ghost* 137-38)

“Rash moments” involve thoughtlessness and reflect a tendency to act upon whims; in short, they are signs of immaturity. As indicated by the subtitle of his monograph *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* (2006), Ross Posnock perceives “immaturity” as a central characteristic of Roth’s writing, albeit in a creative sense: Posnock locates Roth alongside writers who have shared his sense for provocation and obscenity, refining their immature surface, so to speak. Posnock argues that after serious beginnings, particularly with *Letting Go* (1962) and *When She Was Good* (1966), Roth started working on his frivolous art, trying to capture the anarchic spirit of immaturity, and celebrating the “rash moments” of his protagonists (12, 87).

Yet beyond immaturity’s aesthetic appeal, the more profane aspects of the characteristic that are signaled by Zuckerman’s reference to Conrad also concern Roth. In fact, the reference reveals one of the themes dominating the Zuckerman series, as Conrad’s protagonist is the prototype of a very specific *immaturus*, his immaturity being that of an initiand. *The Shadow-Line* is an initiation story in that it shows its nameless protagonist experiencing “a significant change of knowledge about the world [and] himself” which leads him permanently “towards an adult world” (Marcus 222). This is a path that Nathan Zuckerman never walks to its end, and thus, as I will try to show, remains a perpetual initiand.

In my article, I hope to give Posnock’s original thesis a new twist by suggesting that Conrad’s imagery in *The Shadow-Line* is the underlying theme, the *motivic fundament* so to speak, of Zuckerman’s very existence. I propose that Zuckerman’s immaturity specifically reflects a trait of the initiand, shifting the focus to the attempts to overcome immaturity rather than focusing on immaturity itself. Beginning with the self-declared *bildungsroman*, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), convincingly unveiled by Elaine B. Safer as a converse interpretation of the genre (21), Zuckerman’s story is a series of rash moments and arrested initiations, which constantly induce him to flee the responsibilities of maturity and leave him stuck in a perpetual cycle of initiation. Conrad’s tale is thus dominantly mirrored in the previous appearances of Zuckerman, yet a chiasmic reflection will become visible to tighten further the intricate relation between Zuckerman’s début and his exit. In *The Ghost Writer*, Zuckerman, the artist in the making, is ironically preoccupied with Henry James’s story “The Middle Years” (1893), which delineates the last moments of a literary life. The writer Dencombe realizes how little he seized life in light of a younger man’s admiration, which leaves him dying with regret and self-reproach. The gloomy, though ironic, tale defines the undertone of *Exit Ghost*: yet another encounter between old and young.

In order to elaborate my rereading of Zuckerman’s story, I will first take a step back and focus on the central intertext, *The Shadow-Line*. This will serve not only to recall the novel’s synopsis, but also to explain how initiation constitutes a liminal experience. In the same vein, “The Middle Years” will be discussed, though only very briefly, for the relations between James’ and

Roth's works have already been explored extensively (O'Donnell 365-78; Safer 22-23). Having covered these theoretical grounds, I will then focus on Zuckerman's constant attempts to become an initiate. This will finally lead to his proclamation as a perpetual initiate, lost to—again in reference to Posnock's study—*The Art of Immaturity*.

AWAKENING BEYOND THE SHADOW-LINE

"I ... felt myself a mere bird of passage in that port. In fact, it might have been said that I had already broken off my connection." This key line from *The Shadow-Line* describes the condition of Conrad's protagonist after he quits his employer's ship (23). His first instinct, albeit not his firm plan, is simply to wait for the first passage back to his home country. Yet the experienced Captain Giles, whom he encounters in this unnamed transit harbor, gingerly persuades him to assume the post of successor to a recently deceased captain. In hindsight, Conrad's novice-captain sees himself claiming the command of his ship with a relative naïveté, unaware of the challenges lying ahead: "My education was far from being finished, though I didn't know it. No! I didn't know it" (39). When he first sets foot on the deck of his purported dominion, he encounters a crew wrecked by illness and a first mate still haunted by the image of the captain's predecessor. The journey to the safety of Singapore's harbor will thus challenge the nameless youth on several levels, demanding that he not only learn to lead his crew and fight superstitious premonitions, but also live with his weaknesses and surmount them in times of crisis, such as a storm:

And what appalls me most of all is that I shrink from going on deck to face it. It's due to the ship, it's due to the men who are there on deck—some of them, ready to put out the last remnant of their strength at a word from me. And I am shrinking from it. From the mere vision. My first command. Now I understand that strange sense of insecurity in my past. I always suspected that I might be no good. And here is proof of the positive. I am shirking it. I am no good. (88)

The recognition of his own shortcomings finally prepares him to overcome the feeling of being "no good." He becomes aware of his dependence on the community—the intricate links between his own destiny and those of other people. This enables him to accept individual weakness and teaches him compassion. Therefore, he does not scorn being left by his reliable, but, in the end, worn-out cook when they reach their destination: definitive proof of—as Benson put it poignantly—his "passage from egocentric youth to human solidarity" (50). When at last he reencounters his furtive mentor Captain Giles, the latter acknowledges the erstwhile novice among the ranks of experienced men (cf. Bluefarb 504).

In light of Conrad's tale, the word "passage" assumes several meanings: on the one hand, it is simply a passage to Singapore, a voyage on the sea with a point of departure, time on the open sea, and eventual arrival at the destined

port. More importantly, though, the story traces a passage in the sense coined by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, as a metaphorical passage from one social position to the next. Such a passage is often marked by certain rites, namely by *rites de passage* (21). In the specific case of the transition from youth to adulthood, as witnessed here, we speak of initiation rites, which entail an “existential ordeal, crisis, or encounter with experience in the life of a youth. Its ideal aim is knowledge, recognition, and confirmation in the world, to which the actions of the initiate, however painful, must tend. It is, quite simply, the viable mode of confronting adult realities” (Hassan 41). Ideally, these rites follow three phases: the separation of the novice from his known environment, a transition phase which is often monitored by mentors or elders, and the subsequent incorporation of the initiate either into a new community or his known society, albeit assuming a new position therein (Grimes 104; van Gennep 21).

This classical tripartite scheme, however, has been identified against the backdrop of pre-modern, small-scale communities and their distinct rituals, and could therefore easily be dismissed as futile with regard to non-ritualistic passages as illustrated by Conrad. This objection can be refuted by referring to the novel, which follows this threefold pattern in that it is split into the triad “point of origin—open sea—destination.” Moreover, each of these three geographic locations indeed mirrors one of the phases observed by van Gennep: at the unnamed point of origin, the still ingenuous youth breaks with his routine and is virtually ushered by a third person into forsaking the known destination of home for the insecurity of being a captain, i.e., for a *separation*. The mind behind it, Captain Giles, intended thereby to let the young man undergo a first true test, a phase of *transition* which forces the young man to wake up to the realities of adult life. On the sea, during his mental transition, we can grasp this dramatic awakening by the entries in the captain’s diary, where he records his reaction to every test the journey presents. Finally, with his feet on the ground of Singapore, he is welcomed—*incorporated*—by Captain Giles among his equals.

Although the pattern is less clear, we can identify similarities in the case of a very late initiate, namely Henry James’ Dencombe in “The Middle Years.” An illness forces Dencombe, an author of repute, to *separate* from his usual environment and seek recovery at the English seaside. Unexpectedly, a relapse will turn out to be his *transitory phase*, as it brings an ardent admirer, young Dr. Hugh, to his bedside. Thanks to the youth’s devotion, the writer recognizes that he himself had sacrificed his life for art, that “[h]e had done all that he should ever do, and yet he had not done what he wanted” (James 213). One could therein see his *incorporation* among the wise, although it is immediately followed by his death: a neophyte until the last moment possible.

Both the initiation at the verge of death and the Conradian initiation journey bring van Gennep’s metaphorical description of the essence of initiation to life (Freese 184): van Gennep compares initiation to the crossing of

thresholds, of geographic boundaries or to stepping through a doorway, and thus highlights what Turner would later describe as initiation's liminal character (Grimes 103; Turner 25). The concept of liminality, however, is important not only in its rather literal terms, but also in its implication of uncertainty and ambiguity, defining marks of any period of transition and thus of initiation. According to Turner, "liminality" is that condition in which those held in it: "elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). Interestingly, the term itself has roots not only in the Latin word for "threshold" or "border," but also in the Greek word λιμήν (limén, harbor), hence alluding simultaneously to the in-between and safety (Roughley 109). This duality is reflected in the potential that lies in liminal states: as the initiation is a necessary—but with regard to the outcome, uncertain—process for the development of a person's character. Thus, it is vital to any passage to progress in the very literal sense of crossing territorial boundaries (Smith 49; Nel 226-27).

Conrad captures the liminality of the young captain's initiation journey, on the one hand, by setting the story on the ship that has, as Casarino (201) pointed out in reference to Conrad's preceding work, *The Secret Sharer* (1910), a distinct meaning in terms of Foucault's concept of heterotopia:

[I]f we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat [. . .] has been [. . .] the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. (27)

The liminal space occupied by Conrad's initiation story is further accentuated by what Benson calls a "dream-like unreality" conveyed by the mode in which the young captain tells his story (50). There are instances when he feels inclined to yield to the superstitious warnings of his first mate and he seems to surrender his rationality to haunting fears. His language often slides, as Kotzin observes (15-16), into the voice of fairy tales: "I was very much like people in fairy tales. Nothing ever astonishes them" (*The Shadow-Line* 33). In contrast, fairy tales astonish their audience, which generally consists of children, who should be not only entertained by them, but also instructed by them as well. Fittingly, Conrad's narrator is the one gaining most in knowledge from the tale, and is transformed by the "strong magic" of command (24).

Although the tune of fairy tales and the wonders of magical beliefs are alien to Nathan Zuckerman, he likewise uses narrative devices to highlight the liminality of his experiences—and his constant challenges as an initiand.

ZUCKERMAN ALONG THE SHADOW-LINE

Zuckerman might regard himself as part of a conspiracy, burlesque or tragedy, rather than as the hero of a fairy tale; his tales, however, are likewise haunted (Wilson 105). While the ghost of his predecessor troubles Conrad's captain on board, Zuckerman feels doomed by his Jewish roots and the collective memory linked to them. This leads to his being persecuted by the effects his writing has on both those who are close to him and his readers. Yet different from the Conradian protagonist, Zuckerman will not even in the exorcism of *Exit Ghost* be able to banish these specters from his life, just as the quest for his self never reaches an end. This is somewhat ironic, given the fact that the Zuckerman series starts with what Zuckerman presents as an example of the genre, which usually requires stories to culminate in self-recognition, or at least a leap towards this goal: the *bildungsroman*.

Alas, neither the desired maturation nor the sought mentor truly materialize in *The Ghost Writer*, although Zuckerman optimistically begins his odyssey as an artist and man with a visit to the home of the writer E.I. Lonoff in whom he hopes to find, according to Brauner, "a father/confessor, a benign judge who will acquit him of all charges of betraying his real father and exploiting his family history for the purposes of furthering his career" (29). Although the detached and solitary lifestyle, dedicated solely to "turning sentences around," appeals to Zuckerman, Lonoff points out that life in the midst of society actually nourished the young writer's prose and living as a recluse would only have deprived him of this fountain (cf. Milowitz 28). (Little could Lonoff know at that time that Zuckerman would be equally productive in the solitude of the Berkshires, even though his creative powers would still depend upon external stimuli.)

Thus the chosen mentor refuses to assume his assigned role, and, for his part, cannot draw anything from the admiration and energy brought to him. Instead of following the example of the often-cited Dencombe, who finally realizes what limits he had imposed on himself, Lonoff remains within his confinement (Milowitz 37). Unwittingly, Lonoff thus becomes not Dencombe, but a clueless Captain Giles in Zuckerman's life, as after his visit, the youth will further pursue his initiatory quest. Zuckerman will actually explore a first path towards maturation during the night spent at the master's house, although only towards an imagined process: eavesdropping on Lonoff and Amy Bellette, student and temptress, Zuckerman mentally writes the story of the young woman reconceived as Anne Frank, the clandestine survivor, perfectly suited to become his future wife. For how else could he redeem himself, he who had been accused of Jewish self-hatred and of stimulating fascist fancies, than by marrying the one Jewish icon of victimization and courage?

Hence, Zuckerman embarks upon his artistic initiation journey, separating himself from his family and seeking to undergo his transition under the wings of a mentor, but, to no avail, at least if we take the initial motives as

the benchmark. As an artist, he will succeed beyond his hope, as we witness in *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), in which he tries to restrain the ghosts of his success: "The only book that seemed to exist was his own. And whenever he tried to forget it, someone reminded him" (50). Worse, his scandalously carnal novel in the fashion of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), *Carnovsky*, puts him in the similarly strained situation within his family that he confronts at the outset of *The Ghost Writer*. Thus, he is exposed to the same trial; the story, though, will not repeat itself, but instead presents us a dim variation of the primary odyssey, a headless one with a sole objective, to escape. Instead he encounters yet another would-be resurrection of Anne Frank, for the first time embodied by an actress whose most important role was this icon of Jewishness. Again, Zuckerman's trials do not culminate in his acquittal by recovering his self, and in lieu of this acquittal, he becomes separated once more from his known spheres: "'No one,' replied Zuckerman, and that was the end of that. You are no longer any man's son, you are no longer some good woman's husband, you are no longer your brother's brother, and you don't come from anywhere anymore, either" (224-25).

"Bastard," was the last word Nathan heard his father utter. "Bastard," is what his brother Henry calls him for having ridiculed the family in his best-seller. Thus freed from and unbound by his family ties, Zuckerman still does not feel liberated. Rather, with the last abuse still haunting him, Roth not only ends *Zuckerman Unbound* on a note of defeat and forsakenness, but also keeps this tune in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983).

The Anatomy Lesson shows Zuckerman tormented by physical pain, which he interprets as his penalty, a penalty only aggravated by his brother's clear wish to keep him out of all the planning of the last rites accompanying the recent death of their mother. Nathan may attend the funeral, but being deprived of any role during this time of mourning, he cannot even go through this particular rite of passage, or, more precisely, this rite of separation (van Gennep 143). His exclusion and his sudden mentioning of past marriages and subsequent divorces heighten the reader's awareness that Nathan Zuckerman has never consciously undergone a rite of passage. No such rite which could induce further description has left a definite mark in his memory, a short moment of re-celebration. His marriages happened; his bar mitzvah happened; his first sex happened; but none of it has led him truly through a phase of transition. None of it has led to his incorporation as a neophyte.

Again Zuckerman seeks redemption, this time by cherishing the idea of going to medical school and becoming a worthy man, and again this attempt comes to naught. The paralysis of his writing is only paralleled by the paralysis of his speaking ability. Like the observers grouped around Rembrandt's image of Dr. Tulp, the original *Anatomy Lesson*, we stare at Zuckerman's viscera, yet we do not find the remedy to his suffering. Neither does he. Instead, he will embark in his following appearances on journeys that, at the outset, might be perceived as political initiation journeys in conflict zones: in *The Prague Orgy*

(1985) he follows the footsteps of David Kepesh by traveling to Prague, albeit on the lookout for a lost manuscript, stirring reminiscences of Bruno Schulz and Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987). In *The Counterlife* (1986) Zuckerman's several invented selves find their ways to Israel and England. Although these journeys broaden his perspective of potential selves and responsibilities, none of them will truly alter him—although one will make it undesirably clear what part of his identity cannot be redefined.

The journeys both to Prague and to Israel entail a political education, for they introduce Zuckerman to regimes obeying codes other than those known to him. In this vein, from his Czech guide and fellow-writer Bolotka he learns the rules of artistic survival in a totalitarian regime, while the fanatic and fundamentalist Lippman colors Israel in Hobbesian and Machiavellian shades. They present him with a distorting mirror, letting him get a glimpse of what he believes he is not as an artist and as an American Jew. As an artist, he does not see himself politically compelled to write, to write as a form of resistance; as an American and a Jew, he does not feel tied to Israel, even though his brother would want him to feel that way. Yet his Jewishness becomes an inescapable reality on the uncontested grounds of England: "England made a Jew of me in only eight weeks, which, on reflection, might be the least painful method" (*Counterlife* 273).

In Israel, Zuckerman feels that he cannot escape his roots. But while he could distance himself from Lippman's frantic soliloquy, his friend Shuki's question whether his English partner would agree to have a son circumcised cannot be refuted as easily: "Why do you pretend to be so detached from your Jewish feelings? In the books all you seem to be worrying about is what on earth a Jew is, while in life you pretend that you're content to be the last link in the Jewish chain of being" (77).

Shuki's reminder of the covenant between God and Israel induces Zuckerman to ponder, for the first and last time, an actual initiation ritual, which he interprets not as an incorporation into the group and thus a gain, but rather as a story of loss:

Circumcision is everything that the pastoral is not and, to my mind, reinforces what the world is about, which isn't strifeless unity. Quite convincingly, circumcision gives the lie to the womb-dream of life in the beautiful state of innocent prehistory, the appealing idyll of living "naturally," unencumbered by man-made ritual. To be born is to lose all that. ... Circumcision confirms that there is an us, and an us that isn't solely him and me. ... A Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, without Jewishness, without a temple or an army or even a pistol, a Jew clearly without a home, just the object itself, like a glass or an apple. (273)

Like any integration rite by mutilation, circumcision is an irreversible mark that is, as Zuckerman explains, inescapable in that it leaves no possibility to define oneself without reference to the mark, to Judaism (van Gennep 76). Whether the mark carries any meaning for oneself, whether one would have

chosen freely to be singled out in this manner, is irrelevant: circumcision turns into a predicament, the one mark locking the individual into Judaism. Maybe this perceived entrapment explains why Zuckerman later will fail to take on any other role, and why he even rewrites his possible initiation journeys. For in Zuckerman's hands, both Israel and Prague turn into utopias, unreal zones mocking any differentiated viewpoint. Be it the burlesque personnel populating the Czech nightlife or the ideal-typical extremists jeopardizing Israel, be it the suffocating imprisonment under socialism or the frantic fundamentalism instilled at the Wailing Wall, the absurdity of both contexts can hardly serve Zuckerman as a place of rebirth. Rather, we see him wandering through liminal zones that oscillate between fiction and madness.

The aimlessness of his wanderings only becomes understandable when we read in *I Married A Communist* (1998) memories of his adolescence, which are primarily memories of the Ringold brothers Ira and Murray. Even a story which contains classic ingredients, images and plotlines of a (political) initiation, is in the end only a herald of later odysseys and the subsequent de-initiation from all societal responsibilities. Zuckerman remembers his friendship with the Ringold brothers as a mentorship, casting himself in the role of the disciple introduced, predominantly by Ira, to socialist ideology and the political instrumentalization of art. The brothers, archetypically for the genre of the initiation story, gain the position his father once held, though with the implicit promise of a new role for young Nathan:

The Ringolds were the one-two punch promising to initiate me into the big show, into my beginning to understand what it takes to be a man on the larger scale. The Ringolds compelled me to respond at a level of rigor that felt appropriate to who I now was. Be a good boy wasn't the issue with them. The sole issue was my convictions. ... But once little Tom Paine has been let into the company of men and the father is still educating him as a boy, the father is finished. (32)

The rupture of filial ties, a transitional vacation in Ira's shack, and the political indoctrination by means of literature are elements that hint at a classical initiation story, and induce us to expect an ideologically invigorated grown-up Nathan Zuckerman, who feels to have likewise gained in physical strength as his boxing language suggests. Yet, as we already know from earlier novels, he will assume quite a different path: art recaptures him, the show to join will be the literary circus, which induces him to leave ideological battles behind and instead indulge in the pleasures of immaturity.

This retreat will be finalized after his odysseys through the liminal zones of world politics during which Zuckerman chooses, like Rousseau, Thoreau and Ira Ringold before him, to seek solitude in a small house in the Berkshires. Such a place of refuge not only evokes the image of independence and freedom (Kinzel 60), but also is the classic symbolically laden location chosen for initiation rites. The initiands are brought to such solitary shacks to separate them from their known environment and to acquire the knowledge required for their new role; they reach a place of ritual death and subsequent rebirth

(Bergmann 37). Zuckerman, however, seems to see his retreat first and foremost as what its name promises, a place permitting him to evade life, as well as the pleasures and responsibilities tied to it. But, on the occasion of Murray Ringold's visit to the Berkshires, Zuckerman realizes that his withdrawal also provides him with "a 'moral pass.' If politics requires a morality premised on 'worldly' consciousness, that is, in the first instance, a moral commitment to engagement with the world beyond one's own doorstep, then Zuckerman too seems aware that he may have acquired his own form of 'moral pass'" (Hutchinson 325).

Not for the potential injustices around him, nor for any person's doings, would he assume responsibility. Neither Alvin Pepler, nor anyone else seeking his support, will find it. As someone who never reached the fruition of an initiation process, he will not become a mentor himself, and even allows the last chance to pass to make this transition: *Exit Ghost*, our final literary encounter with Zuckerman, offers him the opportunity not only to revisit his beginnings and finally close that chapter of his life, but also to become a mentor. Instead, he aims for a position midway between Lonoff's stance and the stance taken by Dencombe in Henry James' "The Middle Years."

ZUCKERMAN, A PERPETUAL INITIAND

After years of rarely interrupted seclusion, Zuckerman returns in *Exit Ghost* for a longer stay in New York. Here he submits himself to the hands of a physician who cannot promise him a bath in the fountain of youth, but at least a chance for more dignity, specifically relief from incontinence. While trying to get back at least a bit of his former physical assuredness, Zuckerman will see his erstwhile self, as depicted in *The Ghost Writer* through a distorting mirror, and he will be reminded of his former self in two ways: on the one hand by encountering Amy Bellette, the former seducer and now widow of E.I. Lonoff, and on the other hand, by recognizing himself in an aspiring young writer.

And again, Zuckerman encounters a young woman who will stir his desires and his imaginative powers so that he creates a plot involving him and her, "He and She," as a couple. But other than his erstwhile fictional marriage to Amy Bellette/Anne Frank, the affair outlined in the short play shall not redeem him. Rather, he dreams of once more indulging in a moment of sexual rashness and thus reclaiming his former self. While the earlier marriage fantasy should have led to his maturation, he now embraces immaturity; furthermore, he now mourns the loss of the vigor needed to savor the pleasures to which his immaturity might eventually lead. At times, the reader can imagine him repeating the sigh of Henry James' dying novelist Dencombe in "The Middle Years": "Ah for another go!—ah for a better chance!" (James 214).

In Richard Kliman, Lonoff's ambitious would-be biographer, Zuckerman

sees the one who will indeed have more than just another go at life, who does not yet feel alienated from, and betrayed by, his body:

All of us are now “no-longers” while the excited mind of Richard Kliman believes that his heart, his knees, his cerebrum, his prostate, his bladder sphincter, his everything is indestructible and that he, and he alone, is not in the hands of his cells. Believing this is no soaring achievement for those who are twenty-eight, certainly not if they know themselves to be beckoned by greatness. They are not “no-longers,” losing faculties, losing control, shamefully dispossessed from themselves, marked by deprivation and experiencing the organic rebellion staged by the body against the elderly; they are “not-yets,” with no idea how quickly things turn out another way. (256)

Although Kliman offers Zuckerman a last chance to influence another’s path as a mentor, the elder novelist refuses this task. Amy had pleaded with him to dissuade Kliman from uncovering her late husband’s alleged incestuous relationship, hoping that Zuckerman would be more successful than her. To the reader’s surprise, the latter seems willing to act as Amy’s messenger, even though in *Deception* (1990) Roth once let a writer envision the plight of a Lonoff biographer. While then it seemed ridiculous that a literary hermit like Lonoff might “in secret [have] the remissive history of Jean Genet” (*Deception* 98), which let the biographer scorn the Lonoff family and its desire for a “pious monument” (98) to the deceased, Zuckerman now shows sympathy for similar wishes. Yet he stumbles over his former self, as Kliman constantly reminds him that he, Zuckerman, had once also been brash and rash in his writing. Kliman becomes a projection surface for Zuckerman’s old self, and can indeed instill in him the desire once felt by Dencombe.

When Lonoff was confronted with Zuckerman’s ardency, he refers to the protagonist in James’ tale, yet failed to take him as an example. Zuckerman, however, would become a better disciple of Dencombe, a disciple who prefers to reread a tale of awakening rather than a tale of death when confronted with his physical decline. The chiasmic relationship between these two central intertexts, “The Middle Years” and *The Shadow-Line*, and the two Zuckerman novels featuring them, *The Ghost Writer* and *Exit Ghost*, becomes thereby palpable: while, in the novels explicitly referring to them, these texts grasp the situation of one of the minor characters, Lonoff and Kliman respectively, they only unfold their significance with regard to Zuckerman in the opposite novel: whereas James defines the tune of *Exit Ghost*, Conrad defines the motif of Zuckerman’s existence. By turning to Conrad rather than to James during his final appearance, Zuckerman even seems to acknowledge his fate as the perpetual initiand, who cannot become anyone’s mentor, for his own art is nourished by the constant rashness of his existence, an art, in the words of Posnock once more, celebrating “the art of immaturity.” Zuckerman’s *vita* seems to suggest that a writer can only “reach” immaturity in his art, can only liberate himself from bourgeois constraints, if he remains captured in the ambiguous status of the initiand: only when he is enjoying the liberty of the

initiant, who may break society's rules and put his own abilities constantly to the test, can the artist exemplify the art of immaturity.

In contrast to Dencombe, Zuckerman is denied the final passage; Roth has refused Zuckerman the completion of any rite of passage, and, consequently, also refuses to bury him. Nathan Zuckerman will remain the perpetual initiate, tried and tired, never whole, but always creating new ways to fill the voids.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Prof. Dr. phil. Yvette Sánchez, Ass. Prof. Aimee L. Pozorski, and Dr. iur. Daniel Häusermann for their valuable comments and suggestions. This article was written during my research stay at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, where I received fantastic support from Prof. Catherine H. Zuckert.

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