

# The Stubborn Underdog Anti-Hero and His Distorted Democratic Utopia in *I Married a Communist*

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This study highlights the least acclaimed novel from the American Trilogy by Philip Roth, *I Married a Communist* (1998). It outruns the staging of the 1950s historical McCarthyism as the source of failure of the American utopia of democracy and parallels it with the personal failure of the American character as an anti-hero. It argues that Roth's achievement lies not only in subverting the democratic myth but especially in coupling it with a doomed anti-heroic quest. Protagonist Ira Ringold is a stubborn underdog anti-hero whose quest towards purification of the self and history makes him an ironic Christ and changes his stand from a rebel into a victim. Thereby, the seeds of national and personal failure couldn't be inherent in history's omnipotence merely, but most drastically in an anti-heroic, self-seeking, purifying myth

**Keywords:** Philip Roth; *I Married a Communist*; ironic Christ; rebel-victim; American utopia of democracy; American postwar novel; anti-heroic radical innocence.

*I Married a Communist*, published 1998, is the second part of Philip Roth's the American Trilogy. Being the direct succeeding novel of the one-shot *American Pastoral*, this novel could not probably climb to the fame and huge admirableness its predecessor gathered. Nevertheless, the perspective from which the ensuing argumentation is taking the novel, hopes to put it at equal footing with the other two novels.

*Communist* won Roth the Ambassador Book Award of the English-Speaking Union. It is structured as an eight-chapter narrative with this explicit, satiric slant that characterizes the whole trilogy. This novel, furthermore, voices the political – just as *American Pastoral* tends to the historical description – and tells of the rise and fall of mannish, gigantic Ira Ringold. Comparing it to *American Pastoral*, Derek Royal asserts: “Whereas the Swede's pastoral strife had been for a-historical Edenic genteel America, Ira's becomes a socially-just and politically progressive America”. In Royal's understanding, the substitution of the proletariat for rustic shepherds will get us the ‘Democratic America’ as another version of the impossible pastoral which is, as well, free of daily constraints and conventional righteousness (2011: 191). This article tries to turn up the story in a search for illuminations to this man's pitiful doom and its incentives in parallel with the failure of the democratic utopia in America of the 1950s.

This novel presents explicitly the dynamic overlap of the two life facets, public and private, picturing them focally in interaction. This representation is of America in its 1950s as dominated by the McCarthy red-hunts and blacklists. Such a mad time was the diseased soil generating betrayal, accusation, and revenge to generously define the whole decade. Mostly, these are the prominent themes *I Married a Communist*, as a Cold War narrative, uncovers. Most of this analysis is focally presented through the miniature of Ira Ringold's cruel life incidents and their swell to the

public sphere. From Ira's personal ideological frenzy, both the intimate and the national meet on the infecting plateau of traumatization and disequilibrium which affected all America.

Ira Ringold is created as the innocent emotionalist and a rather representative of the 1950s American postwar agitation. He is depicted as an adolescent deprived of parental care. He spends the rest of his life seeking to recompense this through running to the protecting womb of two dreams. Put differently, he is seeking safety and love by running from his angry childhood, first by letting himself be guided by fanatic Communist Johnny O'Day, his father figure. Also, Ira resorts to the mask of acting President Lincoln to separate himself from both his true self and his unfair environment. The second of Ira's obsessions is home, and in the text this implies his quest for having a family. The study shows that Ira's farfetched dreams and his twisted ways for attaining them end in neither finding his vision for America nor for his own life. Ira's failure of big aspirations expels him politically and socially from the order he tried to achieve, with the voice of death calling him.

Many incidents jointly seem to draw Ira Ringold to his miserable end. They range from the type of his innate temperament, mentioned above, to America's agitated status quo. Properly, McCarthyism, as a political condition, exposes the darker face of America's patriotism. It is interestingly one of the craziest times in the American experience, when the American character was immensely influenced by the era's politics. Murray, Ira's brother and the aged literature professor of Nathan Zuckerman, his ex-student and co-narrator, recalls, "[...] as I now understand it, the revolution fought and won by America's working class, in fact, World War II, the something large that we were all, however small, a part of, the revolution that confirmed the reality of the myth of a national character to be partaken by all" (Roth, 1998: 38).

These tense politics, by turn, are the live influence of America by the wider worldly instabilities (Korean War, Vietnam War etc.). Definitely, the 1950 postwar years mark "the gradual shift from a consensus to a dissensus model in society and in American families". Hence, the sixties' slogan of "the personal is the political" was instigated from such a tense climate of the 50s, only to blow up later in the form of the Vietnam storming depicted by the former novel, *American Pastoral* (Hornung, 2007: 78).

What is certain is the critics' observation of the tightened relationship of the contemporary protagonist-man to his culture and times that are usually times of crisis, of which McCarthyist witch-hunt here is a fine illustration. In convenience with contemporary critic Ihab Hassan's view, "[t]he image of the self in its standing, and embittered quarrel with culture comes into focus in the picture of the anti-hero" (*apud* Gurung, 2010: 5). Ira – just as the Swede or Coleman in their time – in his standing fittingly as a mirror to the 'anomalous' spirit of 50s America is correspondingly an ironic antihero. Rita Gurung explicates the new hero's changed relationship to the self and society: "Unlike his classic predecessors, the ironic anti-hero is not created in the social image. It is now the altered apprehension of the self, the changed position of the society that defines the character of the new hero. This generic hero [...] between the contradictions to which we are heir, [...] mediates between them in the process of initiation, his discovery which often leads him to the brink of defeat" (2010: 19).

The freedom Ira searches all his life is sought and expressed in his revolt against the existent social order. This revolt exactly, as will be explained, associates Ira with Rita Gurung's archetype of Jesus Christ, who is the antitype of tragic scapegoats – like tortured Hamlet – and usefully "the archetype of the incongruously ironic" (2010: 24). I perceive Ira under the latter type because of his unhesitant anger and unthoughtful revolt. Explicably also, the decades Ira Ringold lived in were times when "everything [was] permeated with stupid politics" (181). Below, the quote tells about the 1950s unjustifiable actions like the prevailing of the random accusing lists which reflect the flavor of the time: "Lists, busily being compiled in every office and agency in Washington. All of the forces of reaction swapping names and mistaking names and linking names together to prove the existence of a mammoth conspiracy *that does not exist*" (214-215).

This was the 1950s atmosphere, colored by "[t]he fear. The acute fear there was in those days,

the disbelief [...] one's life and one's livelihood under threat" (248) as Zuckerman describes it. This postwar era was also swept with a "gigantic naïve faith" (127) of young guys newly back from the war in Europe, in re-discovering America as a new paradise, and freshly brushing with literature and politics. Not different, Ira is one of these freshmen whose fights were chosen for them, and mechanically one for whom postwar America offered "anger" (163). The novel depicts postwar instabilities as spreading inflammable anger everywhere.

People in 'democratic' America, the Fathers' paradise, were denied their basic rights to freedom of speech and belief. Heightened emotions were battling in everyone's self. But most seriously, though among many other spread ideologies the people run towards, to American policy "Communism was *the* international peril" (247), as the above quote emphasizes. Yet, at such a time when people's beliefs started to become the government's prior business, the idea of America as a free new paradise emerging out of war was being blurred and the myth behind it simultaneously started to dissipate.

Like Swede's 'angry Merry', Newark Jew boy Ira Ringold is the angriest. Noticeably, Ira's anger does not result from such times only, but also from his early life. Poverty, illiteracy, and lack of familial absorption intensified by early orphanage constituted Ira's early childhood. When a child, Ira left home and spent his life working and living as a ditch digger in Italian neighborhoods. To my view, the engagement with these neighborhoods, in addition to his series of suffering bends Ira more to the figure of Christ, as well. But this tough part of his youth life closed up callously by his killing of an Italian boy for an anti-Semitic slur. This weirdly traumatized moment clings to his life till its end.

This incident is of a reckonable importance, as I tend to view it, simply as it illustrates Ira's culmination of violent anger, the uncontrollable drive to avenge his disgust with life, and the misery of his upbringing. Furthermore, it is a tough moment of initiation into his more cruel adulthood. His astute brother Murray who first renamed him Gil Stephens, as a result of this incident, comments sensibly: "His whole life had been looking for a way *not* to kill somebody. [...] an attempt to defuse the violent impulse" (292). More than his whole generational anger when back from W.W. II, Ira had his distressing infancy and his upsetting visit to Iran as reasons to add to the general postwar grief. It perhaps gets further significance if we think of it in the vein of the disturbed Vietnam vet, Les Farley in *The Human Stain*.

Understandably, this droughty past is what justifies Murray's understanding of Ira on basis of his lack or need through the narrative. This gives reason mostly for how he clings unquestionably to his father figure, Johnny O'Day, and his Communist credo. From the harsh realities of the 50s, Ira thrusts himself into the dream of Communism for salvation. He perceives it as a residue of his dreams of individual total freedom, and also the embodiment of the myth of a national American democracy as disclosed in the narrative. Yet markedly, Ira continued to have a constant divided need; a pleading for salvation, and a blazing for a fight, that explicably converge, to my view, in his 'un-American' practice of Communism. In comparison with the Swede, who claimed his pastoral ideal of peace calmly, Ira seems to fight even with himself because of his boiling temper. He proceeds all along his life angrily.

However, Ira's insistent commitment to the Communist ideology has never been through understanding or conviction. For Roth, the ideology itself, without considering America's tension with it, is by itself questionable. Those Communist teachings, for him, are mere "claims to purity of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union" and sacred purity of the group about which Ira "was causing problems for himself by wanting to know more" (176-177). Roth through his different characters appears to attack any possible fancies or adventurous visions preferring rather to adhere to reality in spite of its bitterness.

Still, Zuckerman's voice illuminates us while his ear weighed critically the sad "Dubinushka", a Soviet folksong of remote times: "Heave-ho! Heave-ho! As though human wiliness, weakness, stupidity, and corruption didn't stand a chance against the collective, against the might of the people pulling together to renew their lives and abolish injustice. Heave-ho!" (74-75).

Blind to this realistic Rothian outlook, unrealistic “driven man” Ira, as Roth depicts him, falls for “the lure of the underdog. The struggle of the disinherited up from the bottom was an *irresistible* lure. You drink deep, you drink dregs: humanity to Ira was synonymous with hardship and calamity” (69). Seen as such, we become aware that he is superior neither to his environment nor to other men, which makes him, as critic Northrop Frye explicates, the hero of the low mimetic famous in comedies and realistic fiction (34). But Roth’s purpose in his trilogy is ironic and his creation of Ira as uneducated and emotion-driven man is firm. His point, in line with Frye’s perspective in his *Anatomy of Criticism* and as simplified by Rita Gurung, suggests that Ira is rather “inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration and absurdity, the hero belongs to the ironic mode” (7). Therefore, I treat Ira according to Gurung’s view.

With this ‘lure of the underdog’ capturing Ira’s view, he determinedly adopts Communism, as it is the sweeping ideology back then, and for he considers certainly nothing else but falls readily to what he encounters (O’Day). This, and also because Communism shields all the under-considered minorities, like the neighborhood blacks whom Ira befriends sympathetically. I assume that this immense sympathy resembles him to Christ’s humanist mission. Though not well weighed a vision, Ira’s view surpasses his focus on the self to his interest in the American national ideals and the whole world’s humanity.

Later on, Ira’s star shines as Iron Rinn in the radio business of *The Free and the Brave*, but also secretly as a member of the Communist Union. In staging historical drama, Ira cooperatively inserts the Communist ideology within his parables. This fact will be identified after as the reason leading to his doom. Differently, though held by his brother Murray as no actor, Iron Rinn is a man of overwhelming passion, and openness. He sincerely embraces the roles he acts, yet this fact did him no good. Like Christ, he believed in his humanist message despite opposition. Murray reasons “Ira took on those heroes that he played. I never bought it, but the average listener believed in him as their embodiment. He had an aura of heroic purity” (54). In my perspective, this is equivalent in Ihab Hassan’s terms, to ‘radical innocence’ which is the sincerity and the uncontrolled drive towards the mythic dream. An innocent natural ‘aura’, Ira would pay for as did the Swede. Audiences’ naivety and emotionalism by its way, is thought also to hasten his fall into the grip of the ill-skeptic eye of American patriotism.

Most interestingly, Ira’s patterns of thought and character are abruptly very direct, open and most dangerously audacious. Nevertheless, it is this bewitching emotional power together with his abnormal physical power and huge size (Ira used for his ever risky fights) that his fame has been fully polished. It all privileged him to impersonate a plenty of working-class personalities from history. Yet specifically, Ira stars in the radio business with *The Free and the Brave*, pouring out his aura of purity specifically by posing as Abe Lincoln. Impersonating this great historical legendary man, Ira inadvertently is embodying America the ideal, the paradise, or precisely democratic America.

Moreover, on a personal level, Roth creates these two men’s lives drama on the same tracks to render the symbolization more effective. This is expressed through the stage director, Arthur Sokolow: “I want Ira up there telling the *story*. Telling how goddamn difficult it was: no schooling, the stupid father, the terrific step-mother, [...] that hysterical shopper his wife, the brutal loss of the son [...] the condemnation from every side. [...] the savagery of the war, [...] *then* the assassination [...]. Wonderful stuff there for an actor” (142).

The similarity augments when Sokolow reflexively thinks of Lincoln as identical to Ira: “I’ve thought a lot about that man killed by an actor. Who else?” and this would be Ira who is “not yet apprised of the fact that he is ‘Lincoln’ of the memorial” (142). In fact, acting Lincoln is like a release to Ira of his beliefs that sorrowfully do not match reality of a stable America, let alone that of the 50s. Hence, Lincoln is Ira’s mask; his way to react to democratically ‘unjust’ America but further importantly to escape himself. That is to evade his original self which endured childhood deprivation, then committed murder and eventually immersed in the artifice of transfor-

mation and self-creation. Hence, Roth's skillful simulation of Ira to President Lincoln achieves the merge of the private and public aspects which is meant to end negatively.

His other mask is his secret commitment to the Communist party. His life's impulse has been heroically sustained by the Emersonian faith that: "there is no limit to man's power to improve himself, there is likewise no limit to his power to improve the world in which he lives" (Stovall, 1943: 54). In other terms, this is his American dream of being reborn. A dream suggested by the new era of postwar and followed by the new Adamic hero. This dream justifiably is what returns him to the simplicity of a lost childhood he will not attain, and to an equitable, democratic America that no future can guarantee. These idealistic visions are then what connects him, like the Swede and Coleman, with the myths of a pure past, and thus make them feel reborn.

The personal dream of rebirth makes Ira an Adam initially, but his vision for America and view for the humanity makes him a Jesus Christ. Iron Rinn has to be understood as a person with more than flings of over-passion to his character. A guy like himself, uneducated and incredibly emotional, obediently "from the party he got the idea that he was an instrument of history, that history had called him to the capital of the world to set society's wrongs right" (180). But, in truth, Ira's predicament is not primarily his entanglement with the Communist ideal. Rather it emanates from his determined belief in the American utopia of Democracy and freedom of speech and thought. Ira in a heated discussion with Nathan argues "[b]esides, you can fight them, you know. You can fight the bastards. Last I heard there was a Constitution in this country, a Bill of Rights *somewhere*" (215).

In a time of cheap propagandists and profit-politicians (like Grant), Ira voices his challenge: "I can work in the mills. If I have to, I will. But not without standing on my rights as an American!" (215). As such, Ira keeps insisting on a fight amidst an ideology larger than himself, and beyond his hubristic powers. Moreover, his commitment to it is not true since he is not a reasonable man of thought. Above all, this happened in a time when the word right seems to hold no intrinsic value because of undemocratic McCarthyism. Believably then, this is what renders him 'a rebel without a cause'. It is as suggested in the end of the novel, these ideologies surpass individuals, especially unthoughtful ones like Ira, and they can succeed by themselves.

In this way, considering this decade's context, Ira's position is that of a rebel. Yet, speaking up on behalf of complex ideologies, Ira renders himself a victim. Anthony Hutchinson supports conveniently with what comments on Ira's intricate ways, "public personae adopted for political agendas or staged performances belie the true nature of human beings" (88). Actually, utopian "ideologies which promise perfection on the far left or the far right are equally destructive to human lives" (89). Besides, Ann Fallon and Gerd Hurm argue that these promising ideologies cannot account for the dynamism of the human self. Ira, thus, is a rebel-victim as Zuckerman, in this textual instance, attests that he "had never before known anyone whose life was so intimately circumscribed by so much American history, who was personally familiar with so much American geography, who had confronted, face to face, so much American low life. I'd never met anyone so immersed in his moment or so defined by it. Or tyrannized by it, so much its avenger and its victim and its tool" (189).

To any extent the rebellion is justified, "a rebel is a man who says 'no'", continues Gurung, "one who resists or resents authority, one who refuses to conform to the accepted modes of behavior, and rejection of accepted conventions" (2010: 42). Rightly, Murray defines Ira along these lines, "[h]ere was somebody whose greatest strength was his power to say no. Unafraid to say no and to say it into your face. Yet all he could ever say to the party was yes" (182). And this is exactly what victimized him. It is what made of him, the no-yes Ira, the rebel-victim.

The ruminations of Murray and Zuckerman make out a reasoning effort by which they can understand history's irrational abruptness in Ira's life. In a distinct representation of a few carefully American mature people who think this way is Nathan's father to his son: "I'm not going to make you a martyr to the First Amendment. I only hope that when you've read it and studied and thought about it, you have the good sense to know that it's a sheet of lies and to confiscate it

yourself” (100). If only Ira were able to *think* as such, probably none would have occurred to him. Alternately, all of Ira’s quest including him impersonating Lincoln would not but only strengthen his tie to this democratic utopia.

Between the anger and hopeful naivety of the postwar generation, compliant Ira’s “self-conception was of being virtuous. By and large”, Murray meditates “I believe he was another innocent guy co-opted into a system he didn’t understand” (181-182). Murray finds it hard to believe that one who emphasizes freedom as Ira does, could let any ideological mold constrict his thinking and make him, like their entire generation so gullible. Yet, because of uncontrollable anger, Ira could only dedicate his life in defense of a lost cause such as the American freedom.

The interlacement of the public and private state of affairs in the characters’ lives, as stated, is a central issue in the novel. Chiefly, this is epitomized by the life of Ira Ringold, who tried to introduce to his private life the same ideology he conveys to the larger world. His life pattern demonstrates, in Murray’s view, that when any individual tries to contribute his individual problem to an ideological agenda, the ideology squeezes everything out and keeps only what is useful to it. Murray on another occasion wished to say to him: “You’ve got your eye on the wrong menace. The menace to you is not your imperialist capitalism. [...] not your public actions, the menace to you is your private life. It always was and it always will be” (87). But despite Murray’s realism, stubborn Ira would never allow his own private life discussed.

Besides a large ideology to *invest* his boiling temper, as explained, miserable Ira’s determined mind drew a second aim of a good life reduced to a happy caring familial house to which he could retreat. He sought the latter aim by marrying the very famous Eve Frame, a one-time silent-movie star. With this, Ira has been himself the hero at the peak of his craving. In fact, “[h]e hangs out in cheap places and eats in cheap restaurants and suddenly these two are isolated together on West Eleventh Street, and its summer in Manhattan and its great, its life as paradise” (55). Marital romance and his starring in the radio tempt him of a gained paradise where he is: “No longer the excluded giant consigned to be the strange one forever. Barges in with that brash courage – and there he is. Out of the grips of obscurity. And proud of his transformation. The exhilaration of it. The naïve dream –he’s in it! The new Ira, the worldly Ira. A big guy with a big life. Watch out” (60).

But Ira’s aim behind his marriage to the star Eve is disclosed only with its end which is more than superficial romance. Ira, as one can assume from the narrative development, meant Eve to be his means to carry on his ideological frenzy of Communism. Here then, the two realms of Ira’s private life and the public political commitment clearly merge together. But also he meant her to be the other womb which can shelter him with its power of bourgeoisie and fame. This concept of the return to the womb is defined as a “claustral fantasy”, that is this secure and isolated space to which one could recoil from the dangerous chaos of the outside world (Morgan *apud* Douglas 1933: 205).

Unluckily, Ira’s choice is not well weighed or thought out. This marriage is incongruously contradictory to the ideology he calls for. In outline, R. W. B. Lewis considers genuine fiction as naturally ironic, and whether comic or tragic, dramatizes the interplay of opposites (91). Ira then, a Newark Communist middle class Jew, after all ended with a nationally renowned and trendy star actress whose riches and looks can wrap the whole of his world’s simplicity. Above all, she was grimly a self-hating Jew, and the mother of the most hating saddest girl, Sylphid. Sadly for him, the marriage has been a mismatch before it began. It has uncovered, furthermore, many disparities in himself.

Indeed, Roth shows the complexity of Ira by means of wrapping his being in a many-sided self, giving out mystic confusion which is, in a sense, every human being’s complexity. Ira is an agent and a victim; his life is notably an unceasing sway between private and public. His life is between a palace and a shack. He is strong to avenge and kill; weak in dealing with striving workers and lesser classes. He is the tender who lonely cries at a bird’s funeral, and also the brute who, at the crest of his rage, kills a man needlessly. Furthermore, Ira is a rudely direct and clear man (in

speaking his thoughts out), but also one with dangerous secrets (murder, Communism etc.). Maybe his life's most explicit inconsistency is being a simple Communist sensing and striving for the working class rights, and yet living in a mansion "with Eve Frame and Sylphid, its beauty, its [...] luxurious intimacy, the quiet aesthetic harmony of its thousand details" (119).

At a deeper ideological level, Ira, as Doris genuinely conceives, is a Communist and not, at the same time as he "lived everything personally including his contradictions" (83). He has been running from 'the personal', i.e. his earlier self, and not joining in the closed enclave of the party either, but stuck in between. As Lewis's in *The Hero in Space* explains, Ira's state might have been generated from his being "a solitary, who had sprung from nowhere" (92). The anti-heroic being is characteristically ambivalent (Gieri, 1995: 150).

Instead of marrying a supporting comrade, as his brother suggests for instance, Ira is not sorrowful or irritated by Eve's pretense. Mysteriously, he is busily "determined to assert unflinchingly one being in secret and another in public and a third in the interstices between the two, to be Abraham Lincoln and Iron Rinn and Ira Ringold all rolled up into a frenzied, over-excitable group self" (235).

This marriage meant a lot to Ira, however. As Murray usually justifies wisely to Nathan: "Forget that he was now somebody himself. The guy had a *home*. He never had that before" (68). More problematic is Ira's idealistic worldview that creeps into his family life, an idea Murray has relentlessly wanted to transmit through his storytelling. Eve's irresolvable tension with abnormal Sylphid was adopted by Ira as his-to-be-solved strain. Affordably trying, he has never understood or thought that this girl was "inconsolable" (170). Enforcing her mother to abort, Sylphid called off, and for good, every hope Ira had for their house.

In essence, Ira didn't succeed in finding his self and his life, and by extension would never succeed with Eve or any other. As I project in this account, the source of failure is seen as Ira's utopian vision of reality. Murray's perceptive commentary is indispensable to illustrate Ira's final situation: "Ira and the shovel. All that he imposed on himself", Murray said, He never discovered his life, Nathan. He looked for it everywhere [...] That's what enraged him and confused him and that's what ruined him: he could never construct one that fit. The enormous wrongness of this guy's effort. But one's errors always rise to the surface, don't they?" (319).

Alfred Hornung agrees with Roth's emphasis on the reality of "the foibles and fallibility of human beings", besides politics and social conditions of the 1950s, as the central topic of trilogy (2007: 318). Setting away meticulous interpretations of the McCarthyist era, Murray Ringold justifiably reduces the political drama of the time to the area of gossip. In this sense, as this latter attests, the personal and the political are interlocked in unprecedented ways in America during this period reflecting, at any rate, "the condition of totalitarian societies where the distinction between the two is erased" (Hornung, 2007: 318).

Like the act of Swede's Merry, Ira's Eve publication, at last, raised her darling's scandal above the family level to a gossip-hungering merciless public. Similar to Merry's bomb, Eve's tell-all book *I Married a Communist* reverses Ira's being, de-mythologizes his heroic ideological strife, and resets his self-created life to its miserable beginnings. Besides the deprivation his nature has caused him, this propaganda book "stripped him of his job, his domestic life, his name, his reputation". Thus, he shed all his self-forged life and "set out to become his own uncorrected first self" again (122-123). One side to the gossip coin is the public fun at the 'personal failure'. Consequently, as Hornung argues, "the characters of the novel are not so much victims of a political witch hunt, but are caught in a multifold pattern of the public performance of betrayal and revenge" (2007: 284).

Other than the public ideological betrayal of the democratic American utopia and the humanist Communism, besides the disgraceful published book, Ira was betrayed by his own body. Iron Rinn whose mere name denotes stupendous might, falls ill, (similarly with the Swede and Coleman) to an unrecoverable condition. Here again, he is a 'Lincoln', not as a hero, but as a fallen anti-hero stricken by his very illness. Worthy to mark in the whole trilogy is that when the

protagonist falls from his heroic stature, his unique body also decays mutually. Nearing his end, Ira's uncommon disease has been just like his moods, "hyperinflammatory" (178). Most distinctly and symbolically, he had Lincoln's Marfan. If this signifies anything, it is the suggestion of America's disease in this decade. Like the subsequent 60s, this is an age of desperation and overall impotency. Ira's self-education "was all political stuff. And that was not ideological thinking either. It wasn't 'thinking' at all" (60). The Marxist philosophy and the utopian intricacy that went with it, never matched Ira's simple innocence neither did America's entire "McCarthyism as the first postwar flowering of the American unthinking" (284). It seems all about the relationship between unthinking and embitterment.

But Ira's other betrayal on the private level is letting down his old true self, entailing on himself the high cost of rebirth dream. Back thereby to old Ira, he eternally returns to his deserted proletarian shack in the woods. Ira's life then symbolizes the journey back to the true pre-civilized self and its full harmony with its first image, the end of Adamic rebirth possibly. Because, as Murray's insight supports, "Ira wasn't a superior artist brought down. Ira was just brought back to where he began" (292). His pastoral recoil-place significantly is "a shack with a taste of rural America, a primitive solitary hut as the nearest to human nature for it is 'the place where you are stripped back to essentials'". It is an evocation of old mythic America, and its "earliest images — of independence and freedom particularly — that do live obstinately on, despite the blessing and the bludgeoning of life's fullness" (72).

But the Romantics shack, which I name the 'ideological space', insinuates a dark end as well (Lewis, 1955: 114)<sup>1</sup>. It is strikingly the way all three protagonists of the trilogy are bewitched by its magnetism. In fact, I tend to see it as the call of death that is a strong desire to return to the womb represented in this case by the dark shack in wild nature. The return to the womb, interpreted in line with the narrative, seems to be the initial or symbolic death. Unlike the original romance and its pattern of quest, the quest in Roth does not entail any rebirth. Instead, there is an impossibility of life again, unlike in Hawthorne, for instance, where we feel a hope emanating from his religious metaphors. Maybe because the heroes in Roth are not meant to learn something themselves, but to make their American surrounding — the world to and in which they advance their frenzy of thoughts — change. In this way, Roth's track is satirizing heroic and romantic ways that tell of a sustainable virtuousness and a possible eternity.

The utopian mythic ideal, as I see it, seems to relate to the idyllic or the pastoral which provides it with purity that, by turn, allures the virtuous human subject and eventually floats his/her human destructibility. This way Ira has turned utterly into an antihero, ironically because of his trials to isolate his fallible human nature and mask it by his quest for purity. Murray expertly warns his ex-student Zuckerman about the utopia of isolation: "Beware of the utopia of isolation. Beware of the utopia of the shack in the woods, the oasis defense against rage and grief. An impregnable solitude. That's how life ended for Ira, and long before the day he dropped dead" (315).

As Joseph Campbell, in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, says "[t]he essence of oneself and the essence of the world, these two are one. Hence separateness, withdrawal, is no longer necessary" (357). So fitted to Ira, he begins from nowhere and ends as expelled in a nowhere, as well. Ira's end actually can be compared to Christ's crucifixion, maybe, as it bungs his humanist mission unfairly. Campbell then continues: "Wherever the hero may wander, whatever he may do, he is ever in the presence of his own essence... Thus, just the way of participation may lead in the end to the realization of the All in the individual, so that of exile brings the hero to the Self in all" (357).

Yet, Roth cuts short this simile of Ira as Christ, living heroism neither in his life, nor at his death. Ira, when sensing his death and reverts to his place in the shack, thinks of a way to revenge Eve, and satisfy his anger of her betrayal. Murray expresses this as Ira taking off the mask of

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<sup>1</sup> A pastoral isolated place used by O'Day then Era to think out their 'mythic' dreams or live out their 'un-social' ideology with followers.



Lincoln, and becoming his true self (301). This way, he is depicted as frightening with a hysterical laugh like the one he laughed when he committed his first murder, and ‘defended his right’ as he perceive it. This revenge is what actually can make of Ira an anti-Christ instead of a Christ as well.

Back to the above quote then, the dream of a sustainable peaceful life, the dream of an all-encompassing national democracy remains an illusion, especially in the stiff American years of the 1950s. Such unexpected times uncover suddenly the unreality of the myths and the humans’ actual vulnerability. This may be a plausible answer to “why it was impossible for *him*” (72).

The 50s righteousness is typified by the Grants as a pro-humane cover to their mean ends. Iron Rinn, the worldly Christ, in seeking and fighting for the ‘right’ by his turn, has been denied by the plot development, consisting of memories and ending with expulsion on a desolate wilderness. Because Iron Rinn lacks self-knowledge and wise awareness, his end is not inevitably tragic like that of Adam, but incongruously ironic as Christ’s, the archetype of the “perfectly innocent victim excluded from human society” (121). It should be assumed as a close then that none could ever be a measure for the widely congruous human depths. “There is only error. *There’s* the heart of the world. Nobody finds his life. That *is* life” (319). That’s why the stars remain indispensable for us; for we are here to dream and try, however, on a basis of a realistic conciliatory vision towards our nature with its indivisible stains.

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