The Written and the Unwritten World of Philip Roth
For Sheila
The Written and the Unwritten World of Philip Roth
Fiction, Nonfiction, and Borderline Aesthetics in the Roth Books
Abstract


This thesis examines five books by the American author Philip Roth commonly referred to as the “Roth Books,” which are The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography (1988), Deception (1990), Patrimony: A True Story (1991), Operation Shylock: A Confession (1993), and The Plot Against America (2004). These books, held together by the author’s proper name, are often viewed as texts that conflate fiction and nonfiction or demonstrate the “fictionality” of all factual narrative accounts in compliance with well-known postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. Contrary to this view, I argue that a valid understanding of the Roth Books demands that we acknowledge that these works represent a series of quite different ways for the author to transform his own life into written form, a creative act which is manifested in both fictional and nonfictional writing.

In the attempt to argue this view, I turn to a field of study where the question about criteria for distinguishing fictional from nonfictional narrative literature has occupied a prominent place: narrative theory. However, my theoretical and methodological point of departure does not align itself with the “standard” paradigm in narrative theory with its origin in classical, structuralist narratology. Rather, the thesis promotes a pragmatic and rhetorical perspective which is argued to better account for how we read and make sense of different narrative texts. In opposition to standard narrative theory, where all narratives are considered to adhere to the same model of communication, I argue in favour of a view where narrative fiction and narrative nonfiction are conceived as distinct communicative practices.

I open the thesis by showing that Roth’s books contribute to the discussion on how to distinguish fictional from nonfictional narrative texts (Chapter 1). I then continue by approaching the distinction between fiction and nonfiction in general theoretical terms (Chapter 2). And in what follows (Chapters 3-5), I present a reading where the Roth Books are juxtaposed against each other. This reading demonstrates how these texts, although in some sense related, because of their divergent qualities and differing intentions still communicate differently with their readers, inviting a readerly attention that is dissimilar from one work to the other.

Keywords: Philip Roth, Fiction, Nonfiction, Borderline Aesthetics, Narrative Theory, Autobiography, Authorship, Referentiality, Literature, Identity, Counterfacts, Ethics.

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Acknowledgements

Although an academic work requires an independent mind, a thesis such as this one is also a collaborative and collective effort. During the process of writing this monograph I have had the privilege to receive comments, criticism, and advice from competent readers to whom I feel greatly indebted.

First of all, this study would not have been possible without my supervisor, Professor Lars-Åke Skalin. He is the reason that I ended up at Örebro University in the first place. And throughout my years as a PhD student he has shared with me his time and his knowledge about literature, storytelling, and the scholarly practice. Professor Greger Anderson, my assistant supervisor, has been indispensible to this thesis. His ability to understand ideas that are poorly expressed and his concrete advice has helped me time and time again to understand my own work better and move on. Erik van Ooijen provided a thorough and necessary critique of my first final draft and his comments have been very helpful during the final stages of writing. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge my gratefulness to the members of the higher seminar in comparative literature at Örebro University – Pär-Yngve Andersson, Gunnel Erkman, Ulrika Göransson, Carina Lidström, and Sten Wistrand. I am also thankful to Gray Gatehouse for going over my English, locating errors and suggesting improvements.

While working on this thesis I have had the opportunity to present my ideas in various workshops and at different conferences. I would like to direct a special thanks to the members of the interdisciplinary project Narration, Life, Meaning at Örebro University and to the members of The Nordic Network of Narrative Studies and to all the participants in the events arranged by the network. I would also like to express my gratitude to The International Society for the Study of Narrative.

Besides the help and the advice I have received from colleagues, friends, and well-meaning strangers, I have gotten much support from my family. Their encouragement has been invaluable to me during these years. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to Sheila. Volim te, ljubavi moja.
1. The Written and the Unwritten World of Philip Roth

Introduction

It is a fairly uncontroversial claim to state that novelists and other writers use their own lives, generally speaking, as inspiration for their work. Certain authors, of course, go to great lengths in order to separate themselves from the contents of their writing while others are known to more or less explicitly make use of autobiographical material in their works. Some authors even go as far as making the line between their lives and their books a central theme in their writing. The American author Philip Roth, for instance, can be considered to belong to this latter category. Roth is known for his preoccupation with the relationship between “the written and the unwritten world” (RMO xiii).¹ For any of his devoted readers, the connection between literature and life is surely recognizable as a central theme in his entire body of work, yet probably most apparent in the novels where his alter ego Nathan Zuckerman appears and in the so-called “Roth Books,” consisting of The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography (1988), Deception (1990), Patrimony: A True Story (1991), Operation Shylock: A Confession (1993), and The Plot Against America (2004).²

These five books are the focus of my thesis. The Roth Books are often considered to be a mixture of fact and fiction, and they are viewed as texts that erase the distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional. From a well-known postmodernist and/or poststructuralist view, some critics, to be discussed here, have argued that these works, individually or together, conflate fiction and nonfiction. This argument I reject. Instead I attempt to demonstrate that a valid understanding of the Roth Books makes it necessary to maintain the distinction between these two categories. In the attempt to argue this view, I turn to a field of study where the question about criteria for distinguishing fictional from nonfictional narrative literature has occupied a prominent place, namely narrative theory.

¹ In an Author’s note to the book Reading Myself and Others (1974), a collection of essays, interviews, and articles, Roth writes: “Together these pieces reveal to me a continuing preoccupation with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world” (RMO xiii). Roth explains that this distinction is borrowed from Paul Goodman and that he finds it more useful than the one between “imagination and reality,” or the one between “art and life,” because, as the author notes, “everyone can think through readily enough the clear-cut differences between the two […],” that is, the difference between the written and the unwritten world (xiii).

² In the following, the Roth Books will be referred to without their subtitles if these are not in some way relevant in the context of discussion.
This does not mean that I have found narrative theory in its “standard” form as immediately useful. Rather, my approach has come to be formulated to a certain extent against “standard” narrative theory for the following reasons. The ambition of narrative theory to comprehend all narratives, fictional and nonfictional alike, under the same model of communication or the same definition will counteract any attempt to distinguish between fictional and nonfictional communication in a general way.

While the Roth critics of the postmodernist school I discuss have been known to express a view that narratives are “fictions” qua narratives, standard narrative theory has established a communicational model that assumes nonfictional or “natural” narratives as its paradigm. But such attempts at unification of fiction and nonfiction texts are misdirected. They ignore fundamental differences in how we read and make sense of these two categories. Such differences, however, are the centre of my attention in this study. My argued readings of the Roth Books, which to a great extent will be done in terms of pragmatics, can therefore be seen as a conversation with earlier Roth criticism on the one hand and narrative theory on the other. Both parties in this conversation will play important roles in my demonstration of why a distinction between fiction and nonfiction is vital to any proper interpretation of these works.

The Roth Books: Fiction, Nonfiction, and Literary Hybrids

The common denominator in the Roth Books is the name “Philip Roth” which places the author himself at the centre of these works. Debra Shostak explains that “between the release of I Married a Communist in 1998 and The Human Stain in 2000, [Roth] altered the list of ‘Books by Philip Roth’ in the front matter of the latter book from simple chronology to groupings organized around the central voices to which he has returned. The list now reads ‘Zuckerman Books,’ ‘Roth Books,’ ‘Kepesh Books,’ and ‘Other Books’” (Shostak 2004: 10). According to this explanation, then, the Roth Books are held together as a group of texts by the “voice” of “Philip Roth,” in the same manner as the Zuckerman Books and the Kepesh Books are supposedly held together by the voices of “Nathan Zuckerman” and “David Kepesh.” Yet, if this is the case, what does it mean for a reader that the Roth Books supposedly constitute a grouping within Roth’s body of work unified by this “voice” or by the author’s proper name? Does it mean that we read them as the same kinds of texts? In order to begin discussing these questions, I will turn to the works in question and briefly summarize each of them individually.
When Roth published *The Facts* in 1988, his “novelist’s autobiography,” it was the first time he explicitly included himself and his own name in one of his books that was not a collection of essays, stories, or some type of non-narrative nonfiction. Yet since the start of his writing-career, as David Brauner notes, Roth has “been labelled an autobiographical novelist” (Brauner 2007: 9). Because his protagonists often share the author’s occupation, age, background, and ethnicity, Roth’s books have been viewed by some readers and referred to in the popular press as “autobiographical” in the sense of being “based on the author’s life.” Shostak notes that “early readers accused him of mining untransformed material from his life, of writing autobiography every time he wrote a novel [...]” (Shostak 2004: 159). *The Facts*, however, as I aim to demonstrate, is not a novel with a content inspired by the author’s life, but an autobiography proper, presenting the history of how Roth became a novelist.

Aside from a “letter-correspondence” between the author and his fictional creation Nathan Zuckerman included in the book, *The Facts* is a fairly conventional autobiography. The book begins with a letter from Roth to his literary alter ego, in which he explains his motivation for writing autobiographically. The book ends with “Zuckerman’s” reply, in which Zuckerman criticizes the autobiographical narrative and makes a defence-speech for the potentiality of fiction-writing. The autobiographical narrative contained between these letters consists of a prologue and five chapters chronicling Roth’s life from his childhood through his college years, his first disastrous marriage, his beginning as a writer, up until his critical and public breakthrough as the author of *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969). In other words, Roth’s autobiography follows the conventional and chronological pattern found in autobiographies answering the question “who am I?” with a narrative that tells “how I became who I am,” as Philippe Lejeune defines autobiographical narrations (Lejeune 1989b: 124).

The second Roth Book to be published was *Deception*. It was subtitled “a novel” but formally it is one of Roth’s most experimental books, consisting almost completely of dialogues. Only very rarely does the reader encounter any commentary to these dialogues, and when commentary occurs it most often consists of just a single word, for example “laughing.” The cast is limited. There are the protagonist, identified as an American-Jewish author named Philip, his English mistress, his wife, two women and a man from Czechoslovakia, and a Polish woman. In the penultimate chapter, it is “revealed” (in more dialogues) that the dialogues we have been reading are the author’s notebook transcripts of actual and imaginary conversations. This “revelation” is occasioned by the situation which arises after Philip’s wife has happened to see these dialogues in her husband’s
notebook and accuses him of having an affair. Philip answers that he is having an affair, yet an imagined one, with a character from a novel he is working on. Neither the wife in the book nor the actual readers of the book are sure what to believe. The word which is the title of Roth’s novel – *deception* – applies equally to how the author in the book, Philip, is possibly deceiving his wife with another woman and to how the author of the novel, Roth, is possibly deceiving his readers.

After *Deception* Roth published *Patrimony*, “a true story” about his father Herman Roth and their relationship during the last years of the father’s life, before he passed away of a brain tumour. As the title suggest, the book is as much about the son as it is about the father. It presents the elderly Herman through the perspective and emotions of the son. In six chapters the author reminisces about his father and reconstructs certain events in their life together, especially events during the time they shared just before Herman’s demise. These episodes are often reconstructed as scenes complete with dialogues, descriptions, and vivid detail.

The fourth Roth Book is *Operation Shylock*, subtitled “a confession.” In it Philip Roth meets an imposter pretending to be Philip Roth. The first chapter begins with the words “I learned about the other Philip Roth in January 1988 [...]” (OS 17). Then follows a plot about how the author Philip Roth, after recovering from a drug-induced depression, encounters a man who may or may not be his double. Using Roth’s well-known name, this man is a spokesman for an idea called “Diasporism” in the Middle East, its object being to convince the Jews of Israel to return “home” to Europe. The book could be described as a mixture of autobiographical references, historical facts, surrealism, spy-thriller, farce, and parody.

After having published the first four Roth Books consecutively, between the years 1988 and 1993, it took the author over a decade before he added another book to this “category” linked together by the author’s name. In 2004, *The Plot Against America* was published and gained much recognition. This time the author revisits the childhood remembered in the first chapter of *The Facts* and places the past in a counterfactual historical context. While to some extent remaining true to the facts of his upbringing, the author imagines an alternative history during the first years of World War II, from 1940 to 1942, which “impacts directly on his personal family autobiography,” as Hana Wirth-Nesher notes (Wirth-Nesher 2007: 168). In Roth’s counterfactual account of America during this period in modern history, Charles Lindbergh becomes elected president of the United States of America and strives to keep the country out of the world war by compromising with Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. This, of course, has grave
consequences, especially for the Jewish population in America, which in
the book is represented by the Roth household.

As should be clear from my summaries, the Roth Books, in one way or
another, represent the author’s preoccupation with the borders between life
and literature, either by making the relation between a life lived and a life
written a theme in the text, or by transforming life into literature in differ-
ent ways, or both. In the five Roth Books the author has directed the inter-
est toward himself as the creator of these texts, yet, as should also be clear
from my descriptions, the books display very notable differences from each
other. After juxtaposing them one might feel compelled to ask if the name
or the voice of “Philip Roth” even could be considered, as I tentatively
described it, a common denominator in these texts.

Some literary critics hold the view that Philip Roth is always writing
about Philip Roth. For these critics the Roth Books are just more explicit
than the author’s other novels about what the subject of the texts is,
namely Roth himself. In most Roth criticism, however, the Roth Books are
not described as a prolonged autobiographical project but rather as an
extended deconstruction of the genre of autobiography, a project blurring
the distinction between fact and fiction. Brauner writes: “Although three
of these books – Deception, Operation Shylock and The Plot Against
America – are generally regarded as fiction and two – The Facts and Par-
ummony – as non-fiction, taken together they constitute a sustained interro-
gation of the relationship between these two labels” (Brauner 2007: 80).
Discussing The Facts, Brauner states that the book, by including Zucker-
man, “dissolves the distinction between the ‘written’ and ‘unwritten’
worlds” (84), and with reference to Deception he claims that “Roth is not
insisting that there is clear water between the worlds of fiction and non-
fiction, but deliberately muddying it” (85-86). Brauner, as I will argue in
the following, is quite representative in his approach to the Roth Books.
These books are for the most part approached as literary hybrids of sorts,

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3 Robert Alter is often quoted in Roth criticism for saying that “Philip Roth is al-
ways writing about Philip Roth” (Alter 1993: 34). This phrase is used by some
critics to illustrate a view of Roth’s authorship ascribed to certain readers. The
phrase is discussed by, for example, Ross Posnock who declares that it “would be
hard to find a more typical response […]” than the one presented by Alter in regard
to Roth’s writing (Posnock 2008 [2006]: 272n). See also (Shostak 2004: 8).

4 In a discussion on Roth’s “autobiographical” books, which include the first four
of the Roth Books, David Gooblar makes a distinction between how these books
have been described by the popular press as “merely solipsistic exercises” and how
the books are seen by academic critics as expressing “a postmodernist concern with
the permeable borders between fact and fiction […]” (Gooblar 2008: 33).
mixing fact and fiction, and consequently erasing the border between the fictional and the factual, between the written and the unwritten, and so on.

In opposition to a view of the Roth Books as connected either by an exclusively autobiographical motivation or by the rather theoretical view in which they are said to challenge the distinctions we make between fictional and nonfictional texts, I argue throughout this study that the Roth Books might more accurately be said to represent quite different ways for the author to transform his life into written form, which is manifested in both fictional and nonfictional writing. Besides being connected in a general way by Roth’s preoccupation with the relationship between life and literature, more specifically his own life and writing, the Roth Books cannot be seen as a “category” of books held together by the proper name used as the sign of a unifying voice. Rather, the name – “Philip Roth” – is given substance and meaning in different ways and with different effects (see Chapter 3).

Critical Reception

Philip Roth Criticism and the Roth Books

The obvious trend in contemporary narrative literature towards the creation of “literary hybrids” and “borderline cases” has indeed brought to the fore the theoretical issue of how to make distinctions between fictional and nonfictional texts. In discussing this theoretical problem many have considered literary hybrids as the result of attempts to create new genres, neither fiction nor nonfiction, or both fiction and nonfiction. These assumed new genres have received rather paradoxical and oxymoronic labels, for example “nonfiction novel,” “true life novel,” ”novel biography,” “auto-fiction,” “documentary fiction,” “factfiction,” and so on. As these labels suggest, hybrids are viewed as a mixture of genres or narrative “forms,” for instance novel and biography, fiction and memoir, etc.

Literary criticism on the Roth Books has to some extent aligned itself with this strategy of finding new concepts to describe these texts and what might be called their borderline aesthetics. For the most part, however, these books are regarded as deconstructing or challenging existing generic

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concepts such as “autobiography,” “novel,” “fiction,” etc. *The Facts*, for example, has been labelled a “meta-memoir” (Wirth-Nesher 1998), and a “quasiautobiography” (Safer 2006: 15), and it has been used as an example of how Roth supposedly transforms autobiography into fiction. Richard Tuerk writes that the book “could be easily classified as postmodernist fiction or metafiction” (Tuerk 2005: 138).

The Roth Books are often interpreted as typical of the author’s interest in “characteristics conventionally associated with postmodernist writing [...]” (Brauner 2007: 51). It has been argued that Roth is “aided by poststructuralist epistemologies” (Shostak 2004: 172) and that he at times has expressed a “poststructuralist position” (Finney 1993: 377). Even though the books have been characterized somewhat differently one can discern a dominant critical view which can be described as follows: in the Roth Books the distinction between nonfiction and fiction and the line between the real Philip Roth and a fictionalized version of him are intentionally blurred by the author. Whatever the concepts of fiction and nonfiction have come to mean in different contexts, a tenet in poststructuralist theory has been that meaning in general is instable, and that the deconstruction of the dichotomy between fictional and nonfictional texts is a consequence of this understanding. There seems to be agreement among most critics concerned with the Roth Book that the author shares this view and that these works come to express it.

Many critics have chosen to classify the Roth Books as “autobiographies” and “autobiographical,” or “nonfiction” and “nonfictional,” with the use of quotation marks to signal that there is something problematic about the terms themselves, a suspicion which is strengthened when confronted with Roth’s writing. Discussing *The Facts*, Mark Shechner writes: “[...] I highlight the word autobiography with quotation marks [...] because Roth himself, by the time the books was finished, called the entire story into question and begged us not to mistake *The Facts* for the facts” (Shechner 2003: 19). Similarly, Elaine M. Kauvar refers to *The Facts, Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock* as Roth’s “‘nonfiction’ trilogy” (Kauvar 1995: 413) while David Gooblar discusses the first four Roth Books under the heading of Roth’s “autobiographical” books (Gooblar 2008: 34). Shostak claims that Roth is not “strictly speaking, writing autobiographically, but rather [...] makes capital out of his readers’ inclinations toward biographical interpretations of his work” (Shostak 2004: 158).

In her treatment of the author’s “autobiographical” works, among them some of the Roth Books, Shostak finds that Roth makes the point that self-exposure through autobiography is “always a work of fiction” (176). The author is in other words said to demonstrate that writing about oneself is
always a process of fictionalizing. The intention of Roth’s “autobiographical” writing thus reveals something fundamental about the nature of autobiographical writing, namely that facts become “facts” or even plain fictions when textualized or narrativized. The distinction between fiction and nonfiction is not just a problem in the Roth Books, according to the critics I discuss, but presented as a distinction that might be questioned to some extent in general, in regard to all autobiographical writing.

With reference to The Facts, Roth’s novelist’s autobiography, Finney writes that the point of the book is to show that “ultimately you cannot separate the facts from the imaginative transformation they undergo as soon as they become part of a textual web, whether that web passes as fiction or autobiography” (374). According to him, the author “has traced his growing recognition of the indeterminacy of all forms of textuality” (372). Finney also claims that it “is not simply impossible to disentangle fact from imaginative invention; it is impoverishing” (378). In his article on The Facts and Deception, Tuerk argues that the books in question “blur the distinction between fact and fiction, [and] explicitly remind their readers of the blurring, and [...] point out to the readers the impossibility of arriving at complete certainty” (Tuerk 2005: 136-137). Further, Tuerk states that these two books “tantalize the reader into trying to separate fact from fiction, an effort that is probably doomed to failure from the start,” and he claims that they are “factual in that they reflect the real fictitiousness of postmodern (and for many postmodernists, all) human life” (137). A similar conclusion is made by Derek Parker Royal when he warns us that if “we engage in the game of ferreting out ‘the real’ from the imagined, we could wind up running in circles” (Royal 2005: 88). He argues that “[i]n light of the nature of autobiography, it doesn’t matter” (88).

Consequently, the name Philip Roth is also put within quotation marks by many Roth critics to indicate that it designates a (fictional) version of the author. Shostak argues that the Philip Roth we read about “must always be read in quotation marks, even when seemingly most unmediated, in order to underscore the indeterminacy of the ‘Roth’ who appears in each narrative and to distinguish this narrativized ‘Roth’ from the man who writes the books and lives in Connecticut – a distinction the texts labor to obscure” (159). Royal writes, echoing Shostak’s arguments, that in The Facts, Deception, Patrimony, and Operation Shylock, “the subject under consideration is no longer Zuckerman or Tarnopol, but ‘Philip Roth’” (Royal 2005: 75). Regarding Deception, Tuerk states that “it seems impossible to know where the character Philip ends and the real Roth begins” (Tuerk 2005: 131), and regarding The Facts Finney claims that Philip Roth
is as much a fictional creation as Nathan Zuckerman, that they are both “textual artefacts” (Finney 1993: 385).

Postmodernism, Panfictionality, and Embodied Theory

In this study I will pursue the argument that a majority of previous Roth studies and discussions on the Roth Books has interpreted these works as a kind of embodiment of the postmodernist, poststructuralist critique of the fiction-nonfiction distinction. What I am critical of is the tendency to treat literary texts, fictional or nonfictional, “as if they were a kind of embodied theory,” as Richard Walsh has noted regarding Linda Hutcheon’s discussions on postmodernist novels characterized by her as “historiographic metafiction” (Walsh 2007: 40).6 The Roth Books are often mistakenly viewed as primarily contributions to theoretical arguments (i.e. postmodern theory) rather than as a series of individual works which present to their readers different kinds of content demanding different kinds of communicative means and interpretative responses.

In postmodernist criticism, guided by the theories of poststructuralist philosophers bent on deconstructing “the most entrenched cultural categories,” the dichotomy between fiction and nonfiction has become “a favourite target,” as Marie-Laure Ryan notes (Ryan 1997: 165).7 The conflation of fiction and nonfiction, or the expansion of the concept of “fiction” at the expense of the concept of “nonfiction,” has resulted in what Ryan re-

6 Walsh writes: “Historiographic metafiction has a special relevance to the issue of narrativity which is, of course, thematic. The self-consciousness of such texts about the artifice inherent in all narrative invites a general, symptomatic reading in which historical scepticism, relativism, or revisionism is advanced via the exploration of historiography’s narrativity. But readings that thematicize metafictional self-reference in order to understand these works generically, as subversive of the distinction between history and fiction, do so at the expense of the specific effects of a given text, beyond any such generic theme. The focus of attention moves prematurely to a level of thematic abstraction at which a novel like Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, for example, is read as itself a contribution to theoretical arguments about historiography, precisely inasmuch as it can be classified as a historiographic metafiction” (Walsh 2007: 41). See also Linda Hutcheon’s A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (Hutcheon 1988).

7 The view I present of poststructuralism in this study is intentionally simplified. The reason is because “poststructuralism” as presented in Roth criticism and by those arguing for panfictionality is in itself a simplified version of complex philosophical poststructuralism. This simplified version corresponds to what Markku Lehtimäki has described as “naïve poststructuralism” (Lehtimäki 2005: 30) in a context where he discusses the same theoretical issues as I do here.
fers to as “the doctrine of panfictionality” (165). She explains that one of the typical arguments for panfictionality is a linguistic argument tracing back to Saussurian linguistics: “If reality is produced by language, fiction is the model of all discourse, since it openly exercises the creative power of its medium” (174-175). Critical of this claim, Ryan notes that “the metaphysical thesis that there is no reality outside of its representations does not derive from the Saussurian doctrine of the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs” (175). The argument rather rests on a faulty syllogism: “All fictions are artifices. All representations are artifices. Hence, all representations are fictions” (180). The concept of “fiction” is in other words seen as coextensive with the artificiality of all texts and imaginary elaboration of language as such, according this (naive) poststructuralist view.

Ryan’s description of the linguistic argument for panfictionality has obvious similarities to the arguments presented by some of the Roth critics cited above. These critics argue that the distinction between fictional and nonfictional texts is deconstructed in certain works by Roth, yet it seems that Roth’s writing also questions this distinction in general, according to pre-established theoretical assumptions. As such, these critics tend to oscillate between describing particular works, for instance The Facts or Deception, and making generalizing claims about the nature of facts, fiction, and autobiographical writing. The author of the Roth Books is said to demonstrate that facts cannot be presented in writing without serious consequences: what may be intended to be facts are transformed into “facts,” or “fiction.” This makes any project of writing a truthful autobiographical account illusionary – the result will necessarily be “fictional.” Yet as I intend to demonstrate, the general theoretical claims these critics present are often in conflict with how they actually interpret the works in question.

Instead of relating the fiction-nonfiction distinction to the pragmatic level of literary communication, most Roth critics seem to conceptualize this distinction as a question of “real” versus “made-up” contents. Fiction becomes synonymous with what is invented or imagined. The “facts” of nonfiction on the other hand are viewed as corresponding to such notions as “what really happened” or “truth” in some metaphysical sense. Making

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8 Ryan identifies two theoretical arguments for panfictionality: the linguistic argument and the historical argument (Ryan 1997: 173-177, 177-179).

9 In The Distinction of Fiction, Dorrit Cohn notes that “the homonymic plurality of the word fiction has notably eased the erasure of boundaries between different types of discourse” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 2). This leads Cohn to place her own generic definition of fiction – “a literary nonreferential narrative text” – against four other meanings: “fiction as untruth, fiction as conceptual abstraction, fiction as (all) literature, fiction as (all) narrative” (1-2).
a distinction between fiction and nonfiction is therefore turned into, as Royal puts it, a game of ferreting out the “real” from the “imagined.” And since this game is doomed to failure from the start, because of the indeterminacy of all forms of textuality, we should not even try, as both Finney and Tuerk suggest. It does not seem to matter, according to these critics, whether a text is presented as fiction or as nonfiction since we cannot connect an assumed nonfictional text with the “facts” of any historical reality.

With this view, however, follows the problem of how to distinguish one text from another. Since the line between fiction and nonfiction is blurred, there will be no use in trying to find a line that differentiates one individual Roth Book from the other. In this study, on the other hand, I attempt to demonstrate, by an analysis which pays regard to the pragmatics of fictional and nonfictional communication, that a “novelist’s autobiography” such as The Facts and a “true story” such as Patrimony cannot be read in compliance with the kind of communicative rules by which we interpret the remaining three Roth Books. In doing this I will rely on a theoretical framework which differs in considerable respects from the postmodernist, poststructuralist tenet of the Roth critics referred to.

Theory, Method, and the Field of Study

Against Postmodernism: Fictional versus Factual Narratives

Within narrative theory it has been important to meet “the poststructuralist, postmodernist challenge,” as Lubomír Doležel labels the issue discussed above (Doležel 1999: 247). Ryan and Doležel among many other narrative theorists have argued for the necessity of differentiating between fictional and nonfictional narratives of different kinds, thus countering arguments placing an equal sign between fictionality and narrativity.10 In the follow-

10 In the essay The Discourse of History, Roland Barthes equates historical discourse with fictional discourse (“imaginary narration as we find it in the epic, the novel, the drama”) based on a view of language as incapable of referring outside itself (Barthes 1986: 127). For Doležel this essay is “a turning point between structuralism and poststructuralism” (Doležel 1999: 247). Hayden White is also often associated with merging the concept of fictionality with that of narrativity. As a reaction against a positivistic or an “objective” view of historical writing, White claims that narrative history shapes past reality by using literary or fictional plot structures which make historical events coherent and meaningful. Because of this “emplotment” in historical discourse, works of narrative history might, in White’s opinion, be viewed as “translations of fact into fictions” (White 1978: 92).
ing I will discuss how fictional and factual narratives have been separated on the basis of different criteria.

What is today regarded as the wide and varied field of narrative theory has grown out of structuralist “classical” narratology and its ambition to be a science of narrative. In Gerald Prince’s often cited definition, narratology is said examine “what all and only narratives have in common [...] as well as what enables them to be different from one another [...]” (Prince 2003 [1987]: 66). The most important aspect of this definition for my concerns is of course the phrase what enables them to be different from one another. However, in attempting to examine and determine what all and only narratives have in common, narratology and its claim to generality has tended to create a conflict between the ambitions presented in Prince’s definition. The claim to encompass all narratives has led to a narratological “imperialism” which has “rolled over long-established boundaries between text types and genres,” as Doležel acknowledges. He argues that this is “narratology’s contribution to the self-destruction of French structuralism; this is the ammunition needed for launching the poststructuralist, postmodernist challenge [...]]” (Doležel 1999: 248).

It is then both with regard to theories associated with postmodernism or poststructuralism, and with regard to a theory of narrative treating the category of “narrative” itself as above and beyond fictionality and factuality, that the fiction-nonfiction distinction has been put forth by narrative theorists engaged in this particular issue. The guiding question has often been wherein this distinction may be identified, that is, what makes a narrative fictional respectively nonfictional. To simplify the discussion one might argue that the answer to this question either has emphasized the textual or the contextual aspects of narratives, i.e. what can be found within a narrative or a text and what lies outside the narrative or the text.

This distinction between text and context is not, of course, unproblematic and clear-cut. Yet it can serve here to acknowledge how theorists have reasoned regarding where the fictionality respectively factuality of a narrative text can be located. Dorrit Cohn, for instance, has argued that there exist fiction-specific signals, “signposts” of fictionality, which may be found within texts and thus revealing the fictional nature of the text in question (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 109-131). Gérard Genette, on the other hand, argues that the “indexes” of fiction (corresponding to Cohn’s signposts) are not all narratological in nature, because they are not all textual in nature. For him a narrative declares its fictional or factual status mainly based on what he calls “paratextual marks” such as the generic label on the title-page, prefaces, and, primarily, the onomastic identity between the author and the narrator (Genette 1993: 79).
In “How to Distinguish between Fictional and Factual Narratives: Narratological and Systemtheoretical Suggestions,” Ansgar Nünning argues that we should distinguish between indicators of fictionality which are textual, contextual, and paratextual (Nünning 2005: 36). Nünning writes that contextual indicators might be what he refers to as the communicative situation, by which he means for instance a theatre performance, poetry reading or even the appearance of a book. “Common textual indicators of fictionality,” he claims, “are the title and subtitle, forms of subdividing a text, particular introductory and concluding formulae as well as generic designations and other paratextual elements which explicitly indicate the fictionality of the characters and events presented in the work” (36). As Nünning argues, what distinguishes fictional and factual narratives is determined by factors found within as well as outside narratives, yet as we can see the line between what is perceived as “textual” and what is perceived as “paratextual” tends to merge in his description.

Another way to describe the different approaches within narrative theory to the fiction-nonfiction distinction is to distinguish between a focus on narrative objects and a focus on narrative acts. Martin Kreiswirth explains:

As narrative theory’s journeys back and forth within the humanities and between them and other disciplines have begun to teach us, the fictive/nonfictive distinction may be more of a problem of method and perspective than of substance or definition. Rather than see narrative as some kind of subspecies of fiction, or fiction as some kind of subspecies of narrative, or hopelessly to conflate the two, as has been too often accepted in the humanities tradition, narrative thinkers interested in speech acts, pragmatics, rhetoric, discourse analysis, and cognitive science have argued that these terms might better be seen as describing acts rather than objects, discursive processes whose determinations are constituted by a community’s ways of using them, not by a text’s intrinsic formal features. (Kreiswirth 2005: 381)

Approached in this way, narratives are not inherently fictional or nonfictional. Rather, the focus is redirected toward the communicative act behind a narrative, i.e. toward how it is intended to function, in what context and to what purpose(s), etc. Yet, as Kreiswirth acknowledges, narrative thinkers with a focus on the act-aspect of narrative do not constitute a homogeneous group. In its concentration on acts rather than on objects with inherent properties, and in describing different narrative practices corresponding to certain concepts rather than defining these concepts apart from communicative practice, my own study is in harmony with this approach. Yet, this focus of attention is just a starting-point, a formulation of the question, not
Instead of asking for fixed definitions of fiction and nonfiction, to emphasize the act-aspect means to ask what kinds of rules and conventions are operating in our making sense of a text as either fictional or nonfictional. To frame the question of how we are to theorize the distinction between fictional and nonfictional narrative texts in this way is to move away from a view that fictionality or factuality, the fictive or the non-fictive, can be located solely within texts, either on account of the ontological status of the semantic content or on account of the existence of certain formal features. This does not mean, however, that an author’s use of specific narrative forms or narrative techniques cannot be an indication of how we are to read a text. These forms or techniques may not be fictional or factual in themselves, but they can still be regarded as congenial to a particular narrative practice (see Chapter 2).

In the following, I describe my position in relation to narrative theorists sharing my focus on communicative acts and practices, especially in regard to the fiction-nonfiction distinction. My theoretical and methodological approach to this issue can be understood as pragmatic or grounded in pragmatism, but in order to specify my intention when using these terms it is necessary to sketch out a fuller theoretical context.

Reading in Practice: Pragmatics, Rhetoric, and Narrative Theory

In this section I discuss pragmatic and rhetorical approaches to narrative and narrative interpretation. I argue against a view of classical structuralist narratology and pragmatics as complementary approaches. I also discuss the notion of narrative (as) rhetoric in order to arrive at my own implementation of the term “rhetoric” in this thesis. The aim is to present a view of pragmatics and rhetoric which falls outside the domain of standard narrative theory. More specifically the aim is to describe how my approach towards the guiding theoretical issue in this study – fiction versus nonfiction – can be regarded as pragmatic and rhetorical in a specified sense.

With a very broad definition, pragmatics might be defined as the study of “the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (Mey 2001 [1993]: 6). Consequently, narrative pragmatics is “concerned with the user’s role in the societal production and consumption of narrative” (Mey 2005: 463) and literary pragmatics might be said to study the “effects that authors, as text producers, set out to obtain, using the resources of language in their efforts to establish a ‘working cooperation’ with their audiences, the consumers of the texts” (Mey 2000: 12). From these definitions presented by Jacob L. Mey it is hard to see
what falls outside the purview of pragmatics. We can conclude that a pragmatic approach should entail a focus on the communication between author and reader, and the rules governing such communication, yet this focus, as Mey demonstrates, is in no way exclusive to one field of study.

In narrative theory, a pragmatic perspective can be viewed as integrated with a structuralist view of narrative. As noted in the previous section, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, for example, is viewed by some structuralist narratologists as relating to the pragmatic level of narrative. Genette, for example, conceives the distinction between fictional and factual narratives as mainly in terms of the “pragmatic” relation between the author of a text and the narrator in a text, i.e. as a question whether the author is equated to or separated from the narrator (Genette 1993: 78).

Within narrative theory, the terms pragmatics and rhetoric often overlap with one another. This is not surprising when one considers that both terms aim to put a spotlight on the communication between authors and readers through a focus on the rules and effects of such communication. What might be said to distinguish rhetorical approaches to narrative is that they “conceive of narrative as an art of communication [...]” as James Phelan notes (Phelan 2005a: 500) or that a “rhetorical perspective implies a concern with communicative acts [...]” as Richard Walsh puts it (Walsh 2007: 5). A starting-point in discussions on the “rhetoric” of narrative and fiction is most commonly Wayne Booth’s study *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961, 1983). The core idea that informs Booth’s book is that literary fiction is motivated by how it affects the reader, that is, by its rhetorical faculty. This means that fiction can be seen as a play of contesting moral values where the means of meaning-producing dynamics lies in the communication between (implied) authors and their audiences.

In the same way as pragmatics has been viewed as complementary to structuralist approaches to narrative, some narrative theorists view a rhetorical approach as complementary to the textual-formalistic procedure of structuralism. Michael Kearns, for instance, presents his project of creating a “rhetorical narratology” as a fusion of structuralist Genettean narratology and Boothian rhetoric. Kearns writes:

To my knowledge there is no theory that combines these two fields – that draws on narratology’s tools for analyzing texts and rhetoric’s tools for analyzing the interplay between texts and context in order to better understand

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11 “*Narrative Discourse* in fact remains the single best book on narratology, a book that, when combined with Wayne Booth’s famous *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, anchors the whole field” (Kearns 1999: 7).
how audiences experience narratives. To fill this gap I’m proposing a rhetorical narratology that is grounded in speech-act theory and thus considers narrative from the perspective of the socially constituted actions it performs: narrative as “doing” as well as “saying.” (Kearns 1999: 2)

Even though Kearns might be the first to propose a rhetorical narratology, his ideas are not that distant from those of James Phelan and his view of narrative as rhetoric.¹²

According to Phelan, “narrative itself can be fruitfully understood as a rhetorical act: somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (Phelan 2005b: 18). In fictional narrative, he argues, “the rhetorical situation is doubled: the narrator tells her story to her narratee for her purposes, while the author communicates to her audience for her own purposes both that story and the narrator’s telling of it” (18). In nonfictional narrative, Phelan claims, “the extent to which the narrative act is doubled in this way will depend on the extent to which the author signals her difference from or similarity to the ‘I’ who tells the story” (18).¹³ What he refers to as “the multileveled nature of narrative communication” (19) can also be explained hierarchically in the following way: “When the source of the utterance is the narrator, the addressee is the narratee; when the source is the implied author, the address is the implied reader or authorial audience; when the source is the flesh-and-blood author, the addressee is the flesh-and-blood audience” (213).¹⁴

¹² Kearns does not fail to connect his work with Phelan’s book Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology (Phelan 1996), which was published three years prior to Rhetorical Narratology. See (Kearns 1999: 30-31).

¹³ Phelan is here discussing the connection between what he refers to as character narration and his own conception of narrative as rhetoric. We can note that even though Phelan’s model coheres with what I in the following section will discuss as the standard communicational model in narrative theory, he does not make a claim that fictional and nonfictional narratives can be separated firmly from each other on account of the separation or equation between author and narrator, as argued by for instance (Genette 1993) or (Cohn 2000 [1999]). By stating that the extent to which the narrative act is doubled in nonfiction depends on the extent to which the author is one and the same as the narrator, he indicates that the author’s separation from or equation with the narrator is not either/or, but a matter of degree. See my discussions in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

¹⁴ See Seymour Chatman’s influential model of narrative communication which traces the transmission of a narrative text from real author, implied author, and narrator as senders to narratee, implied reader, and real reader as recipients (Chatman 1978: 151).
Kearns proposed, as I have noted, a combination of structuralism and rhetoric, and it is possible to regard Phelan’s rhetorical approach to narrative as a “modification” of classical narratology, something I will discuss in more detail in the next section. For Richard Walsh, however, both pragmatics and rhetoric stand in opposition to structuralist narratology and the standard model of narrative communication. The main difference between Phelan and Walsh, as I conceive it, is that the latter’s rhetorical approach always emphasizes the real-world communicative gesture, or what he calls “the authorial communicative act” (Walsh 2007: 5). Walsh does not view fictional narrative as the communication between a narrator and a narratee; instead he discards the concept of the narrator because it functions to establish a representational frame within which the narrative discourse must be read as something reported as fact rather than something invented or told as fiction.15 Walsh explains that his “allegiance to rhetoric” begins with his focus on “the author (not merely the implied author) and the authorial communicative act […]” (5).

The model of narrative communication presented by Phelan (and cited by me above), can be seen as adhering to what Walsh critically refers to as “a typology of narrating instances which is conventionally understood within a communicative model of narration – a model in which the narrating instance is situated within the structure of narrative representation, as a literal communicative act (that is, as a discursive event that forms part of a chain of narrative transmission)” (Walsh 2010: 35). Walsh states that from a rhetorical stand-point (or rather his rhetorical stand-point), “narrative representation is not conceived as a structure within which a communicative model of narrative acts is implied, but as an act itself, the performance of a real-world communicative gesture – which, in the case of fictional narrative, is offered as fictive rather than informative, and creates, rather than transmits, all subordinate levels of narration” (35).

Walsh states that his perspective on the issue of fictionality “is both grounded in the pragmatics of discursive process and pragmatist in its theoretical orientation” (Walsh 2007: 3). For him this perspective is in opposition to structuralist narratology. Walsh writes: “Structuralism was about nothing if not the hegemony of systems as the precondition for any meaning, or meaningful action, whatsoever; the scientific mind-set of struc-

15 “[T]he narrator, as an inherent structural principle, functions primarily to establish a representational frame within which the narrative discourse may be read as report rather than invention” (Walsh 2007: 69). “The function of the narrator is to allow the narrative to be read as something known rather than something imagined, something reported as fact rather than something told as fiction” (73).
turalist theory is very much about the project of exhaustive description and refinement such a view of a system invites, along with the demonstration of its explanatory power across the range of instances within the system’s compass; that is to say, the project of filling out the paradigm” (3). Walsh then adds: “There is much in a pragmatist view that sits uncomfortably with such a model of the field of inquiry: it tends to introduce elements of irreducible contingency, an awareness of analytical horizons, and scepticism towards the possibility (or utility) of exactly the kind of synoptic, systematic mastery that is the prime directive of structuralist-inspired narratology” (3). For the narrative pragmatist which Walsh identifies himself as, the “ultimate objective is not, of course – cannot be – to instate a superior model of an object of study (narrative), but to characterize the parameters of the communicative process of narrative creation and reception [...]” (4). For Walsh, this characterization of the parameters of the communicative process of narrative creation and reception, as he puts it, is the aim of his rhetorical and pragmatic approach, and this aim is contrary to the aim of structuralist-inspired narratology.

For my purposes here, Walsh’s use of the terms pragmatics and rhetoric provides a frame of reference in which I am able to specify how these terms can be applied to my own theoretical and methodological point of departure. With Walsh I share a view of narrative and literary communication, especially fictional communication, which is at odds with the standard model of narrative communication within narrative theory. His pragmatic perspective on the issue of fiction and fictionality emphasizes the communicative nature of narrative interpretation by focusing on use and interpretative responses, acts and authorial intentions, etc. This applies as well to my own pragmatic perspective where the communication between authors and readers is understood in a normative sense, not as the communication between individual authors and individual readers (or narrators and narratees). And if this study were to be described as rhetorical it would be on the basis of my focus on not just communicative acts in general but specifically the authorial communicative act and how it corresponds to readers’ interpretative responses. Rhetoric for me, as for Walsh, functions as a term which directs the focus of interpretation toward the author and the authorial communicative act behind a narrative text.

My theoretical point of departure is pragmatic and rhetorical since I approach the main theoretical issue of this study – the distinction between fiction and nonfiction – as a distinction between different communicative practices. The differences between fictional and nonfictional narrative texts are to be described in terms of communicative acts and with focus on the interpretative responses narrative texts invite in being “presented” in one
The question of why we read a text as fiction or as nonfiction and the question of what the “consequences” of such readings are constitutes the core of my pragmatic and rhetorical approach. With this approach I attempt to describe how different narrative texts relate to what I broadly consider to be different practices with distinct rules, norms, conventions, expectations, and sense-making operations.

If we perceive a narrative text as communication or as communicated in a general way, we need to differentiate between different kinds of communications. In the following I will therefore continue my discussion on a subject which I have briefly touched upon already, namely how narrative theory has established a standard model of narrative communication which is assumed to encompass both fictional and nonfictional communication. By presenting a critical view of this model I aim to introduce a different perspective on how fictional and nonfictional communication can be separated in pragmatic and rhetorical terms, as described here.

Fiction and the Standard Model of Narrative Communication

With the so-called “narrative turn,” the study of narrative was extended to several fields and disciplines other than those studying narrative literature. Furthermore, since the classical phase of narratology, different post-classical approaches to narrative have devolved. Instead of talking about narratology in the singular, today many speak of narratologies. However, it has been argued by some theorists that there is a “standard” narrative theory and a standard model of narrative communication recurring in the supposedly different narratological approaches, from the classical structuralist narratology to its post-classical incarnations, such as “natural” narratology, cognitive narratology, or the rhetorical narratology proposed

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16 The term “presented” does not simply intend the presentation of a book through what is generally considered paratexts (titles, subtitles, prefaces, or a book’s placing in a book store or a library, etc). These paratextual markers are a part of what I intend by the verb “presented,” yet my use of the term is wider and include the many different means which authors use in order to communicate with readers in particular ways; for instance formal features, narrative techniques, allusions, intertexts, and different generic markers, and so on.

17 For a brief overview, see Martin Kreiswirth’s “Narrative Turn in the Humanities” in Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (Kreiswirth 2005: 377-382).

18 For a comprehensive overview, see Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses (Alber & Fludernik 2011).

19 See Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis (Herman 1999).
by Kearns or Phelan. Walsh, for instance, acknowledges that “a great deal of the most important work on narrative over the last twenty years has sought to qualify, reconfigure, hybridize, or otherwise move beyond classical structuralist narratology, but in some fundamental respects this effort can be understood, in the main, as convergent with the paradigm established in that classical phase” (Walsh 2007: 3). Lars-Åke Skalin has since 1991 in different books and articles questioned “the standard narrative paradigm,” which he has characterized as a paradigm built on so-called “natural” narratives (Skalin 2011: 104-105).

In this section I present two related arguments against the standard communication model in narrative theory which will recur throughout my following discussions. First, the ambition in standard narrative theory to encompass all narratives within the same model of narrative transmission, or the same definition of narrative, ultimately leads to a conceptualization of fiction and nonfiction which fails to treat them as distinct communicative practices. Secondly, and this relates to the first argument, the standard theory assumes nonfictional or “natural” narrative as the paradigm when theorizing narrative fiction.

If we return to Phelan’s definition of narrative, cited in the previous section, we can note that it can be translated, in the case of fiction, into “a report from narrator to narratee,” as Henrik Skov Nielsen notes (Nielsen 2010: 278). In fiction, the communicative act behind the phrase someone telling someone else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened is situated within the fictional world or diegesis. Someone – i.e. the narrator – is telling – i.e. reporting, informing – someone else – i.e. the narratee – on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened. In Phelan’s definition, as Skalin explains, “the act of ‘telling’ is supposed to have the same meaning irrespective of the status of the content: it being fiction or non-fiction” (Skalin 2008: 210). The standard theory assumes that narrative is the communication from a sender to a receiver, in which the former is telling the latter about something, informing, i.e. performing a referential act.

The standard communicational model of narrative theory is described in detail by Marie-Laure Ryan in this summary:

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In a narrative text, the narrator is the speaking ‘voice’ which takes responsibility for the act of narration, telling the story as ‘true fact.’ In non-fictional narration, this is the actual speaker who physically produces the narrative discourse. In fiction these two elements of the communication situation are logically distinct. The actual sender – or author – is located in the actual world and transmits a fiction to another member of the actual world, the reader. The narrator is part of the textual world and communicates a narrative to another member of the textual world, the so-called narratee. The communicative pairs formed by the author/reader and narrator/narratee are located in separate systems of reality but the systems are bridged through an accepted convention: the author speaks as if he were the narrator, the reader receives the message as if he were the narratee. (Ryan 1995 [1993]: 600)

This model is then built on the assumption that “all narrative readings could be regarded as observing the same basic communicational schema,” as Skalin notes (Skalin 2011: 102). Readers of nonfictional narrative texts are supposed to regard themselves as informed about true facts and circumstances. And in fiction, readers are supposed to regard themselves as if informed about “true facts” and circumstances. From the standpoint of standard theory, all narratives are equated with reports of fact or informational storytelling, i.e. someone communicating to someone else by telling about something that has happened. This someone is either the author in nonfiction or the narrator in fiction. However, as Nielsen concludes, rather mildly, if “we analyse all narratives according to the same model, we oversimplify matters” (Nielsen 2010: 299).

With the help of the already mentioned theorists, I will argue that to treat narrative fiction and nonfictional narratives as adhering to the same communicational model, we do not just oversimplify matters; we run the risk of conflating these distinct communicative practices by conceptualizing fiction as “imitation” of nonfictional narrative. Since the standard model of narrative communication assumes “ordinary informative telling” (Skalin 2011: 104) as its paradigm, narrative fiction is often considered by extension to imitate nonfictional, referential discourses such as autobiography (first-person fiction) or biography (third-person fiction), (see Chapter 2).

Approaching Fictional and Nonfictional Communication

What has been discussed above as the standard paradigm in narrative theory, Sylvie Patron among others has referred to simply as communicational theories of narrative. These communicational theories – “where communication between narrator and narratee, be they real or fictive, is constitutive
of the definition of narrative [...]” (Patron 2011: 14) – are contrasted with non-communicational theories, or “poetic” theories, “where fictional narrative, or a certain type of fictional narrative, and communication are two mutually exclusive categories” (15). Even though I am critical of so-called communicational theories of narrative, I will, as I have noted, make use of the term “communication” with a general applicability, yet with a different meaning of course than that defining those communicational theories criticized by Patron and myself.

From my advocated pragmatic point of view, fiction and nonfiction are viewed as different communicative practices governed by distinct norms, rules, and sense-making operations, etc., not as communication between an individual sender and an individual receiver. By “practice” I intend here the normative, rule-following activity which is the interpretation of narrative texts of different kinds. And by “interpretation” I intend how we as readers of narrative texts identify and comply with certain rules and sense-making operations.

In this chapter I have discussed how narratology and narrative theory have strived for a universal systematization of narrative, trying to create a model or a definition that captures what all and only narratives have in common, as well as what enables them to be different from each other. In this study, the term “narrative” has of course a central bearing on the topic of discussion. However, I approach the term not as predefined or even as possible to capture with a single definition but as “a term we rather uns-

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21 Patron is following Ann Banfield and S.Y. Kuroda. See (Banfield 1982: 183-223) and (Kuroda 1979: 205-216).

22 Skalin equates the term communicative practices “with the Wittgensteinian term, ‘language-games’, corresponding to certain ‘forms of life’” (Skalin 2011: 104). Though I concur with Skalin’s usage of the term communicative practice and its connection with the Wittgensteinian notion of language-games, I will largely refrain from using the latter term since it might force me into a philosophical dialogue with Wittgenstein scholars and their interpretations of this controversial concept. See also Peter Lamarque’s article entitled “Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of Practice,” in which the author seeks to trace Wittgenstein’s influence on “the idea of a rule-governed practice within literary aesthetics” (Lamarque 2010: 376). Lamarque explains that “the analytical concept of a practice [...] takes the analogy of a game – notably Wittgenstein’s own favourite example, that of chess – as paradigmatic and seeks to uncover the deeper constitutive rules in the practice that make possible certain basic activities such as the creation, appreciation, evaluation, and interpretation of literary works and conventional relations between authors, works, and readers” (376). He adds that “this idea of a practice provides an activity-based rather than object-based analysis of literature” (376).
The concept ‘narrative’ should not be analysed by a model in any way similar to the model we use in analysing natural kinds, because narrative as the content of an expression “narrative” is not an object with an identity independent of how we use this term. We use the term to describe what issues from various acts in various communicative situations ruled by various intentions. What has made us name various communicative phenomena “narrative” does not have to do with a shared feature in all of those phenomena, but something else; the naming may sometimes be due to family resemblance; sometimes it may probably be quite arbitrary. (34)

The term “narrative,” then, displays a polysemy. It will denote different things, or rather different acts, in connection to narrative fiction on the one hand and narrative nonfiction on the other. In opposition to standard narrative theory’s claims to generality, this view does not assume that what we broadly consider a narrative text or text dominated by narrative features, for instance “a novel,” is “a narrative” according to a definition of narrative or a shared model of narrative communication.

In narrative texts, both fictional and nonfictional communication is the communication between author and reader. However, if the terms fiction and nonfiction are understood as distinct communicative practices, the authorial communicative act will in each case be different. In the nonfictional case, the author assumes the role of a speaker who takes responsibility for the act of narration. In nonfiction, the author is narrating to an audience and asserting something as fact. However, nonfiction should not be equated simply with informative storytelling or reports of fact since a nonfictional narrative, as I will discuss further on, can also be told as, for instance, entertainment or as literature. What distinguishes nonfictional communication from fictional communication is the referential act of asserting something as fact, rather than communicating a work of narrative fiction to an audience.

In the fictional case, the reader recognizes in some way or another that the author is offering or communicating a piece of narrative fiction. In other words, fiction-reading is based on recognition of the authorial intention that a narrative text is to be read and interpreted as fiction. The key phrase here is as fiction, yet to answer the question of what it entails to read a text as fictional can only be answered through a larger characterization of the practice of narrative fiction; a description of fiction’s “otherness” in relation to nonfictional communication.
This larger characterization of the nature of fiction is very much a part of this project and a necessary aspect of approaching the fiction-nonfiction distinction. Following Skalin, among others, I approach narrative fiction and its *differentia specifica* through a specific interpretation of the concept of *mimesis*. Skalin argues that “the purpose of narrative fiction is to present *a mimesis praxeos kai bion*, the imitation of action and life [...]” (Skalin 2011: 105) in the Aristotelian sense presented before him by Käte Hamburger in *The Logic of Literature* (1973). To acknowledge also the aesthetic aspect of fiction, and to some degree nonfiction, I (re)turn to the Russian Formalists. As is well known, the formalists approached literature as art (however this may broadly be conceived). In much narrative theory the issue of how narrative literature *functions* as art is seldom discussed. As such, my theoretical point of departure combines the pragmatic and rhetorical approach with a formalistic interest with aesthetics and narrative literature as art.

The intention behind my proposed theoretical and methodological orientation is to argue for a distinction between fiction and nonfiction which answers to our experience of and intuitions about these – as I have labelled them – communicative practices. The argumentation is to some extent circular in that I propose a way to conceptualize this distinction and then aim to discuss and demonstrate why it makes sense to retain this distinction, even in regard to texts which might be assumed to challenge or erase the fundamental difference between these practices.

Motivating his approach to the subject of fictionality, Walsh notes that it “does not, and should not, conflict with what we currently do as readers and critics [...]” (Walsh 2007: 37). A rhetorical perspective, he argues, has the capacity “to account for the effects of representation which dominate the experience of reading fiction,” and he adds that his “premise is that a properly rhetorical account of fiction ought to be answerable to the nature of such reading experiences [...]” (6). In concluding his book, Walsh states: “I have been at pains throughout this book to show that my theoretical perspective does not fly in the face of critics’ and readers’ intuitions about fiction [...]” He claims that his pragmatic and rhetorical approach instead provides “a better foundation for those intuitions [...]” (170). Similarly, my perspective on the relationship between fiction and nonfiction aims to answer to, as I have phrased the matter, our different experiences of and intuitions about how these communicative practices intend to engage us and what interpretative responses they invite from us readers.

Of course, both the notion of “experience” and the notion of “intuition” are quite problematic, to say the least. For me, these interrelated terms are just meant to function as a way of talking about practice and the
idea that what we do as readers of different narrative texts is not arbitrary but a matter of communicative acts and interpretative responses governed by norms, rules, and sense-making operations. In presenting an alternative to standard theory and its aim to provide general or “fixed” definitions of certain terms, such as the term “narrative,” Skalin turns to Ludwig Wittgenstein and states: “[I]t seems to me that the most fruitful way for a narratologist to deal with the subject will be to ‘look and see’ and to ‘describe’ as Wittgenstein says in Philosophical Investigations), to characterise observed salient properties and analyse relations to other phenomena without feeling tied to a particular term” (Skalin 2009: 70). Since I emphasize the importance of approaching concepts in context, through my different examples and various ostensive definitions, it can be said that I aim to “look and see” and to “describe” by attending to terms in relation to practice and practice in relation to terms.

Concepts, Contexts, and the Content of the Form

To sum up: even though my discussion on the fiction-nonfiction distinction is situated within the field of narrative studies, my study does not, as I have explained, apply narrative theory as a methodological framework in my readings of the Roth Books. Rather, my method can to some extent be seen as a continuous negotiation between narrative texts and theoretical (mainly narratological) concepts. By approaching fiction and nonfiction in pragmatic terms, my analyses of the Roth Books will move between the wider characterizations of different communicative practices (Chapter 2) and the texts in question (Chapters 3-5). As a consequence, I discuss certain core concepts in narrative studies which are more or less taken for granted as interpretative tools within (and to some extent outside) this field of study, for example the concept of the narrator and its relation to the author or the idea that narratives in general consist of a story and a discourse.

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23 Skalin explains his use of the term “intuitions” in the following way: “When I say ‘intuitions’, I mean quite simply the web of concepts and rules for their interaction [...] that are working within us (or, perhaps even more so, can be ascribed to us), when we think we can handle a term in different contexts” (Skalin 2009: 36).

24 In this respect I take after Walsh’s approach in The Rhetoric of Fictionality (Walsh 2007) and discuss the value and the function of certain core concepts in narrative theory. Similar to Walsh, I do not intend to present any “new” concepts but rather to discuss how already existing terms are “theory-laden,” that is, how in practical use they tend to carry with them certain basic assumptions about, in this case, what narrative communication is in fictional and nonfictional practices.
My aim is to establish a reciprocal relationship between my theoretical discussions on concepts and my particular readings of the texts. Therefore, in my analyses of the Roth Books I adopt a method of comparative reading grounded in my proposed pragmatic and rhetorical point of departure. In these analyses I discuss and demonstrate how my general theoretical claims concerning fiction and nonfiction as different communicative practices can be translated into readings of particular texts. And by reading the Roth Books juxtaposed against each other I am able to examine differences between these works but also relate these differences to norms, rules, expectations, sense-making operations, etc. which I take to distinguish communicative practices from each other. To illustrate my overall method of discussion more clearly I will briefly comment on the structure of the study.

In Chapter 2 I deal with the questions presented here as the core of my pragmatic and rhetorical approach: what makes us choose to read a text as either fiction or nonfiction and how might the phrases “as fiction” and “as nonfiction” be understood? In these discussions I will present differing viewpoints in order to arrive at what I take to be a valid, pragmatic understanding of what distinguishes fiction from nonfiction. Furthermore, I will argue for a way to comprehend borderline aesthetics in narrative literature that does not conflate fiction and nonfiction.

In the chapter following my theoretical orientation, entitled “The ‘I’ and the Other Philip Roth,” I discuss what is in the name “Philip Roth” which links the Roth Books together. In order to demonstrate that the name cannot be assumed to automatically provide an autobiographical reference or lack reference to the actual author altogether, I focus on individual works, mainly *Deception*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*. I also connect the question of the identity of “Philip Roth” with discussions on onomastic identification as a criterion used to distinguish fiction from nonfiction. More specifically, I criticize the assumption underlying narrative theory’s thesis of a necessary separation between author and narrator; a thesis arguing that the primary thing dividing a fictional autobiography and an actual autobiography is the name on the title page.

Chapter 4, entitled “Countertexts, Counterfacts, and Competing Versions,” takes its point of departure in Roth’s method for creating competing or alternative accounts of the same event, his own presented story, or of history at large in *The Facts*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*. Here I aim to demonstrate that the idea of “rewritings” comes to mean different things depending on how we determine the interpretative context; if we interpret a narrative text as a “version” or a “variant.” This leads me to discuss how referentiality divides fictional and nonfictional
texts and also to reconsider certain concepts fundamental to narrative theory’s model of narrative transmission (“story,” “discourse,” and “event”).

In Chapter 5, I approach borderline aesthetics through the concept of “literary nonfiction,” illustrated by Roth’s true account of his father in *Patrimony*. I analyse how certain nonfictional texts foreground literary functions we conventionally associate with fictional literature, urging to be read as *literary* works with certain qualities. The chapter takes as its point of departure a pair of terms presented by Roth at the end of *The Facts* – ethics and aesthetics – and it approaches the relation between these terms through their “meeting” within literary nonfiction. Furthermore, I discuss the notion of ethics as it is made relevant through an author’s depiction of other people, in nonfiction as well as in some fiction.

Regarding the structure of Chapters 3-5, each individual chapter follows the same disposition. These chapters all begin with an introduction presenting the main questions and the focus of attention. They also include one or two sections entitled “Context and Concepts” and “Analysis and Argumentation.” In the former section I present the central concepts pertaining to the discussions at hand and the theoretical context in which these concepts belong. Most of Chapters 3-5, however, consist of what I call analysis and argumentation, that is, sections in which I discuss one or several of the Roth Books, individually or together.

**Concluding Remarks**

In certain ways each book collectively referred to as the Roth Books might be seen as a continuation rather than a deviation from the rest of Philip Roth’s body of work. Thematically they are all preoccupied with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world, between life and writing. Yet they are also very much concerned with another central theme in Roth’s oeuvre, namely the implications of being a Jewish man living in America. In *The Facts*, Roth traces the origins of his authorship, more specifically how he became the Jewish-American author Philip Roth. In *Deception*, Roth touches upon a familiar subject in his writing, that of being an American and a Jew living abroad. In *Patrimony*, Roth examines his Jewish heritage through his relationship to his father. In *Operation Shylock*, the matter of Jewish identity, personal as well as collective, is a constantly present concern for the author as well as the protagonist. Finally, in *The Plot Against America*, Roth rewrites history during the first years of World War II in order to examine latent anti-Semitism in America.
Even though I obviously acknowledge the presence and importance of many different thematic connections between each of the Roth Books and the whole of Roth’s body of work, I will not focus heavily on these matters in this study. The theme of Jewishness and Jewish-American identity in Roth’s writing, for example, has already been discussed at length by other critics.\textsuperscript{25} Certainly my focus of attention will exclude interesting aspects of these works, yet as I will demonstrate, most discussions on the Roth Books—whether they deal with the ontological status of “Philip Roth,” the author’s method for rewriting, or the relation between borderline aesthetics and ethics—are forced to deal with the question of fiction versus nonfiction because the books themselves so clearly foreground this matter.

The Roth Books might also be considered to be thematically connected by themes related to characteristics of “postmodernism.” This applies to a certain extent to the rest of his body of work as well. Roth is often viewed, as I have noted, as a postmodernist writer, yet he has also been characterized as a realist author. Brauner, for instance, explains that Roth is a “contemporary American writer who manages to combine characteristics conventionally associated with postmodernist writing (metafictionality, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, plurality, the indeterminacy and instability of both text and self) with many of the attributes identified with realist fiction (an investment in the psychology of character, a commitment to the ideals of liberal humanism, an assertion of the existence of a socio-historically reality external to, and independent of, the text)” (Brauner 2007: 51).

My intention here is not to argue that Roth is a postmodernist or a realist author, or both. However, I do find it necessary to note that there is no contradiction between my rejection of what I have labelled the postmodernist paradigm in Roth criticism and the possibility of viewing Roth broadly as a postmodernist writer. To state that Roth is engaged with themes associated with postmodernism or that he uses techniques associated with postmodernist literature in general is not the same as saying that Roth’s books express a postmodernist or poststructuralist position, thereby reading them as what I have referred to as embodied theory. To state that Roth makes the reciprocal relation between life and writing a central theme in different ways and through different (metafictional, intertextual) means is not the same as saying that the author erases the boundaries between the written and the unwritten world, or between fiction and nonfiction, in accord with postmodernist, poststructuralist attempts to deconstruct classi-

\textsuperscript{25} See for example Alan Cooper’s \textit{Philip Roth and the Jews} (Cooper 1996) or Debra Shostak’s \textit{Countertexts, Counterfacts}, Chapter 2-3, “The Member of the Tribe” and “Impersonation and the Diaspora Jew” (Shostak 2004: 66-106, 107-157).
cal binaries and dichotomies. What I am acknowledging is simply a distinction between what might be considered postmodernist “theories” and what might be labelled postmodernist themes or postmodernist techniques. Roth’s books should not be read as expressing or embodying postmodernist theories, yet they do often comply with themes and techniques associated with postmodernism or postmodernist literature.26

By now, hopefully the aims and limitations of this study are clear. In this introductory chapter I have presented the focus of interest, i.e. the Roth Books, and the theoretical question guiding my discussions and analyses, i.e. how we are to conceptualize a distinction between fiction and nonfiction in regard to narrative texts which are assumed to challenge or erase this distinction. In the following chapter I will, as I have noted, approach the issue of fiction versus nonfiction within a wider theoretical context. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss what determines why we read a text as fiction or nonfiction and what it might entail to interpret a narrative text either as being fictional or nonfictional.

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26 For more on postmodernist literature (themes, techniques, theory, etc.), see Brian McHale’s Postmodernist Fiction (McHale 1987).
2. Fiction, Nonfiction, and Borderline Aesthetics

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I argued that what separates fiction from nonfiction are the interpretative responses narrative texts invite by being presented as one or the other. In this chapter I will discuss how we come to decide whether a text should be read in compliance with the kinds of communicative rules, conventions, norms, and sense-making operations governing a certain practice. By discussing a variety of theoretical arguments and presenting some as more preferable than others, I intend to arrive at a description of the qualitative, pragmatic differences between reading a text as fiction and reading a text as nonfiction. Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate that a narrative text can be read as both fiction and nonfiction. A pragmatic distinction should not be strictly binary, I argue, but allow for the protean nature of literary and narrative communication. This leads me to argue for a view of borderline aesthetics which is dependent upon us separating fiction and nonfiction rather than merging the two concepts.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I discuss how an author’s commitment to truthfulness might provide a dividing line between nonfictional and fictional texts. The question dominating the discussion is how a reader comes to indentify the authorial communicative act behind a narrative text and determine its frame of interpretation. The second part aims to demonstrate how the practice of narrative fiction is governed by a representational logic distinct from “natural” and nonfictional narratives. Here I also discuss how interpretative responses conventionally associated with either fiction or nonfiction might co-exist in a single work.

I. Beyond the Text: Referentiality and Truth-Claiming

Telling the Truth, or How to Determine the Authorial Intention

Since nonfictional statements are often equated with telling the truth, the presence of factual inaccuracies or plain lies in nonfictional texts are by some viewed as signs of fictionality. The discovery of fabricated facts is therefore argued to transform a nonfictional text into a work of fiction. By others, however, the difference between autobiography, history, etc. and narrative fiction lies not in “the presence or absence of truth value but of the commitment to truth value,” as Meir Sternberg notes (Sternberg 1985: 25). In the 16th century Sir Philip Sidney acknowledged this when he stated
that “the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth” (Sidney 2001: 348). Following in this tradition, Marie-Laure Ryan has stated that the dichotomy between fiction and nonfiction should avoid “the association of nonfiction with truth and fiction with non-truth” (Ryan 1997: 166). Ryan argues that “the purely extensional concept of truth as correspondence can be replaced with the intensional concept of claiming truth” (166).

If we accept this view, the difference between fiction and nonfiction is not that the latter presents the “truth” while the former presents “non-truth.” Instead what distinguishes nonfiction from fiction is that nonfictional texts are recognized to be claiming to tell the truth. Ryan explains:

In the domain of nonfiction, textual competition is the name of the game. This competition is made possible by the sharing of the reference world. Whether accurate or inaccurate, texts of nonfiction stand in a competitive relation with other texts and other representations because to the reader they offer versions of the same reality. (166)

As opposed to fiction, then, nonfiction claims to present a truth (subjective, historically situated, etc.) about a particular referent. Two biographies of the same person or two narratives presenting the history of the same historical period share a reference world and therefore stand in a competing relation to each other. However, even should we decide in favour of referentiality or its absence as a criterion by which to separate fiction from non-fiction, the question that arises is: How do we decide whether a text is referential or not? What makes us read a text as claiming to tell the truth and why are other texts absolved from commitment to truthfulness?

In speech-act theory, an author’s commitment to truthfulness is fundamental to the distinction between fictional and nonfictional statements. This is consistently argued by John Searle in “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse” in which he formulates a theory of fictional discourse based on the question what is done by the sentences of literary fiction; what about the expected illocutionary acts (i.e. making statements, asking questions, giving orders, etc) of such texts? Searle argues that “[t]here is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will indentify a text as a work of fiction” (Searle 1979: 65). He claims that what makes a text work as fiction or nonfiction is “the illocutionary stance that the author takes toward it [...]” and he explains that this stance “is a matter of the complex illocutionary intentions that the author has when he writes or otherwise composes it” (65-66). For Searle, then, the distinction between fictional and factual texts is not determined by elements in the texts, but in how we
perceive a certain text-element to be intended by its author. If a statement is fictional or factual depends on the illocutionary stance of the author, his or her commitment to the truth of the statement.  

A fictional statement lacks commitment to the truth and the speech acts in fictional discourse are therefore “pretended.” The author merely pretends to perform a series of illocutionary acts. Thus, according to Searle, fiction is “nonserious” (60). If an author of a novel tells us that it is raining outside he or she is not actually claiming that it is raining outside at the time of writing (Searle’s example). Yet, the question then becomes how it is possible for an author of a work of fiction to perform pretended illocutionary acts and why we as readers recognize them as such?

Searle’s answer is that fiction is “made possible by the existence of a set of conventions which suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts and the world” (67). The rules a statement have to comply with in order to be “serious,” in Searle’s vocabulary, are described as vertical rules establishing a connection between words or sentences and the world. Nonserious statements, however, which constitute a work of fiction, should be thought of as horizontal conventions which sever this connection between word and world. The following question for Searle then becomes: “what are the mechanisms by which the author invokes the horizontal conventions – what procedure does he follow?” (67) In other words, “how is the pretense performed?” (67). The answer he provides is that the utterance act – the act of writing or uttering words and sentences – is real, but the illocutionary act is pretended. Searle concludes: “[T]he pretended performances of illocutionary acts which constitute the writing of a work of fiction consist in actually performing utterance acts with the intention of invoking the horizontal conventions that suspend the normal illocutionary commitments of the utterances” (my emphasis) (68).

Here we reach the problematic conclusion of Searle’s view of fictional discourse. I agree with him that reading fiction entails a separate set of conventions; that we engage in a practice different from that of nonfiction reading. The problem, however, is that his theory does not describe the positive properties of this assumed set of “horizontal” conventions. A fictional discourse consisting of nonserious statements is, in Searle’s account,

27 Searle presents four rules pertaining to his claims about the author’s commitment to truthfulness: “1. The essential rule: the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition. 2. The preparatory rules: the speaker must be in a position to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition. 3. The expressed proposition must not be obviously true to both the speaker and the hearer in the context of utterance. 4. The sincerity rule: the speaker commits himself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition.” (62)
merely the negative of the serious statements of nonfictional discourse and therefore “parasitic” of the latter. Furthermore, even though the basis for his separation between fictional and nonfictional discourse lies in the author’s commitment to the truth, the difference between real and pretended reference seems to be more a matter of what exists in the world and what does not exist in the world rather than the author’s intention. In Searle’s account, the intentional act of referring to real people and places seems to become undermined by his allegiance to a semantic philosophy of language where a referent’s existence in the real world presupposes real reference regardless of illocutionary intention.

In discussions on how an author’s commitment to truthfulness can separate nonfictional from fictional texts or statements, Searle’s essay has been highly influential. In “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative,” Gérard Genette elaborates on Searle’s view and aims to provide a more systematic answer to the question of how an author assumes responsibility for his narrative and its truthfulness. To this aim the narratological category of voice is taken to be a workable instrument. A definite sign of a narrative’s commitment to truth, Genette argues, should be when both author and narrator are designated by the same proper name. However, the criterion of onomastic identity does not, as I will discuss more thoroughly in the following chapter, provide any definite means by which to separate fiction from nonfiction, as Genette also acknowledges (see Chapter 3, p. 74-78). An author can very well name the protagonist or the narrating character

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28 This becomes apparent at the end of Searle’s essay when he feels compelled to pose the question: Why bother? To his mind, following classical semantic philosophy, there is only meaning in propositional speech, in saying something about the world. So why bother with pretended speech acts which become “meaningless” with this logic? His answer alludes to the crucial role imagination and shared products of imagination play in social life in general. Also, the idea that serious speech acts can be expressed through fictional texts, that a “message” can be conveyed by a work of fiction although it is not in the text, seems to save fictional discourse from “meaninglessness,” according to Searle (74-75).

29 In discussing nonfictional elements in fictional stories, Searle uses Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes novels as examples and claims that “along with the pretended references to Sherlock Holmes and Watson, there are in Sherlock Holmes real references to London and Baker Street and Paddington Station […]” (72). Searle writes: “The test for what the author is committed to is what counts as a mistake” (my emphasis) (72). One of his examples reads: “[I]f Sherlock Holmes and Watson go from Baker Street to Paddington Station by a route which is geographically impossible, we will know that Conan Doyle blundered even though he has not blundered if there never was a veteran of the Afghan campaign answering to the description of John Watson, MD” (72).
after himself without seriously assuming responsibility for the narrative and its truthfulness.

Searle’s discussion on the logical status of fictional discourse has also influenced Eric Heyne in “Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction.” In the essay, Heyne strives to separate literary fiction from literary nonfiction by following Searle’s speech-act theory and by using his notion of the author’s illocutionary intention. Heyne writes: “If Searle’s distinction makes sense, it follows that the author is the sole determinant of whether a text is fact or fiction, whereas the reader must decide for herself whether a work is good or bad fact” (Heyne 1987: 480). For this reason Heyne makes a distinction between “factual status” and “factual adequacy” (480). The question of a text’s “status” is a matter of the author’s intention and the answer is either/or, according to Heyne. Either a text has factual status or it does not have factual status. The question of factual adequacy is, on the other hand, a matter resolved by the reader.

In his argumentation Heyne relies heavily on Searle’s “precise distinction between works intended to be read and evaluated as fiction, and works intended to be read and evaluated as fact” (my emphasis) (482). However, as I have argued, this distinction is not that precise in Searle’s speech-act theory approach towards fictional discourse and the matter of the author’s intentions is a complicated one. Heyne notes that “it is essential to understand the exact truth-claims being made and how they fit into the author’s overall intentions” (488). Yet Heyne does not elaborate on the notion of intentionality or provide us with any means to explain how we as readers are to access or determine the intentions of the author.

In a later article, “Where Fiction Meets Nonfiction: Mapping a Rough Terrain,” Heyne rethinks his own initial position presented in “Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction.”30 Here he no longer views the author’s intention as the sole determinant whether a text is to be read as fiction or nonfiction. Heyne writes: “Genre conventions can be tremendously useful, but they are least useful in the most interesting cases. Nor do I think (as I once did) that we can comfortably rely on the single standard of authorial intention, which is just another way of insisting on the importance of genre” (Heyne 2001: 330-331) Now Heyne argues “that either author or reader may play a determinative role in whether a text functions as fiction

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30 This article is presented as a review and critique of Daniel W. Lehman and his view of literary nonfiction presented in the book Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge (Lehman 1997). The polemic between Heyne and Lehman continued with Lehman’s response to Heyne and, once again, Heyne’s response to Lehman in Narrative 9:3.
or nonfiction” (331). In other words, the author may write a narrative text with the explicit intention for it to be read as nonfiction, “by labeling it ‘nonfiction,’ by openly disputing other versions, and by exploiting all manner of other connections (or ‘accessibility relations’) between events as asserted by the text and the reader’s presumed beliefs about those events” (331). This intention, however, can according to Heyne’s new position be ignored by the reader who may choose to read a nonfiction text as fiction “for whatever experience it may convey and without reference to his or her own beliefs about historical events” (331). Consequently, Heyne argues that “readers can choose to approach a particular text as nonfiction, adopting an initial stance that would put the text in competition with other versions, and then for all practical purposes treat that text with the privileged status of fiction” (331). He proposes “that the sorting mechanism for fiction and nonfiction, something we all employ routinely every day, operates as a complex individual algorithm for each person, based on that person’s experience, belief, knowledge, and desire” (331).

The problem with Heyne’s new position is twofold. First, I oppose the idea that we can choose to read texts in whatever manner we feel like. From a pragmatic point of view, reading as a practice presumes a communicative rule-governed context. Successful communication demands that the interlocutors are conversant with the same set of rules; that they are in agreement. As to making sense of narrative texts the reader has to recognize the intentions of the author – the authorial communicative act – as manifested through the text. The concepts of author and reader should not be approached in this context in individual and psychological terms, as described by Heyne who includes a person’s experience, belief, knowledge, and desire in what he calls the sorting mechanisms for fiction and nonfiction. Secondly, he argues that we can read a text presented as nonfiction as fiction (and vice versa) for whatever experience it may convey. Yet, the only hint we get as to what Heyne ascribes to the phrase read as fiction or how he views the enterprise of experiencing fiction is that fiction is not read as nonfiction which can be identified “by a concomitant recognition of competing versions” (330). As in the case of Searle, then, Heyne does not provide any “positive” description of fictional discourse.

The question of why truth matters in nonfiction is given the following answer by Heyne: “When we care about establishing the truth, we will establish some truth, but how we do it is a much more complicated and ad hoc process than can be evoked by a simple image of direction, border, or edge” (331). Heyne’s answer is an explicit critique of certain theorists who have presented spatial or gravitational metaphors intended to describe the
difference between reading nonfiction and fiction. Primarily his critique is directed towards Daniel W. Lehman and his claim that if we believe, for some reason or another, that an author is depicting real lives instead of invented lives we are “reading over the edge” and thus become “implicated” (Lehman 1997: 2-7). For Lehman, the implicated reading of nonfiction is based on the criterion of the materiality of the subjects, that actual people rather than invented characters populate these narratives (see Chapter 5). However, Heyne notes, “Lehman does not offer any theoretical test for such ‘implication’; it must simply be experienced” (Heyne 2001: 324).

Even though I agree with Heyne that a qualitative difference between reading nonfiction and reading fiction lies in the reader’s recognition that a narrative text is committed to telling the truth and therefore stands in a competing relation with other texts sharing its reference world, I do not find that he provides any viable answer to the question of why truth matters in some texts and not in others. Heyne simply writes that when we care about establishing the truth, we will establish some truth and that the process of doing so is ad hoc and complicated, dependent as it is on the reader’s individual sorting mechanisms. I believe that it is possible to provide a more general answer to the question of why truth matters in the first place; why certain interpretative responses are relevant in one context and not the other. In the following I will therefore discuss what guides the interpretative process and why we come to process the contents of different narrative texts within distinct frames of interpretation.

Reading the Signposts: Forms and Interpretative Frames

For Dorrit Cohn, fiction and nonfiction are also separated on the basis of referentiality. Fiction is defined as a literary nonreferential narrative text in opposition to nonfiction which is considered to be a referential kind of narrative text. The difference is that “referential narratives are verifiable and incomplete, whereas nonreferential narratives are unverifiable and complete” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 16). In this section I will discuss how Cohn answers the question posed in the previous section, namely how we decide whether a narrative text is referential or not, or more specifically, how we can identify what she regards as “signposts” indicating a narrative’s fictionality, thus obliterating its referential constraints.

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In her essay “Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective,” Cohn sets out to “develop criteria of fictionality from within the confines of narratology [...]” and prove her thesis that “fiction-specific signals may be found within texts themselves” (my emphasis) (110). In objection to Hayden White’s claim that novels can pass for histories and vice versa on a purely formal or formalist level, Cohn argues that we can identify formal features which prevent this from happening. She criticizes White’s description of form as signifying fictional and historical narratives’ shared appearance as stories. Instead of approaching form as “structuration on the story level,” Cohn aims to identify and analyse fiction-specific formal features relating to the discourse-level (114). Consequently, the categories story and discourse are fundamental to her inquiry into the distinctiveness of fictional narratives. For this reason she expands the narratological bi-level of fictional narratives (story/discourse) to a tri-level defining nonfictional narratives (reference/story/discourse). For Cohn the bi-level model of fictional narratives “assumes emancipation from the enforcement of a referential data base” (viii) and is therefore a signpost of fictionality.

The second signpost concerns narrative situation. According to Cohn, the presentation of characters by accessing their minds severs fiction’s connections with the real world outside the text, since it signals an epistemological impossibility for a historian. In other words, the minds of imaginary characters can be known in ways that real people cannot and this creates a distinctly fictional epistemology. The last signpost concerns the narratological distinction between author and narrator. In fictional narratives, Cohn argues, the narrative voices can be separated from their authorial origin. In nonfiction, however, the author is the narrator.

The identified signposts are dependent upon a differentiation between what Cohn calls first- and third-person regimes. For example, the second signpost, concerning the presentation of a character’s mind and how it signals a distinctly fictional epistemology, only applies to third-person narratives. Even though this study is concerned mainly with the arguments relating to the first-person regime (as I will discuss more in Chapter 3), the difference between Cohn’s narratological approach and my own pragmatic understanding of the relation between formal features and fictionality prompts me to discuss each signpost individually (though not in chronological order). My main objection to Cohn’s model concerns her concep-

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32 White writes: “Readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by the similarities. There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal (or I should say formalist) terms.” (White 1978: 121-122)
tion of “fiction” which, as Eyal Segal argues, “suffers from a basic confusion, or lack of inner consistency […]” (Segal 2002: 702). Furthermore, I find her use of the concept of “signposts” to become more or less indistinguishable from what might be considered “defining features.”

Cohn’s presented signposts are said to allow us to distinguish between fictional and nonfictional (mainly historical) narratives, in the capacity of being fiction-specific textual features. Yet it is possible to argue that “there is a fundamental difference between her second criterion, based on the narrator’s ability to penetrate freely the consciousness of other characters (which testifies to his or her ‘omniscience’), and the two other criteria,” as Segal notes (702). He argues that the first and the third signpost – the absence of a referential database external to the text and the separation of the narratorial voice from the authorial origin – are not at all “signposts” in the sense defined by Cohn, but rather “consequences of fictionality (at least from the reader’s point of view; from the author’s point of view, they may be described as conditions)” (703). Segal states that the first and the third signpost “do not exist on the textual level but rather on the level of communicative framework – or ‘discourse pact’ – between author and reader; and they are not textual indicators by means of which the reader may arrive at a decision regarding the text’s fictional or nonfictional status but rather a conclusion following such a decision” (703).

As Segal points out, Cohn’s first and third signpost cannot be considered signposts in the sense of textual indicators. Fiction’s adherence to “a bievel story/discourse model that assumes emancipation from the enforcement of a referential database” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: viii), is not a signpost but what defines fictional narrative according to Cohn. Similarly, the separation between narrator and author is not a fiction-specific signal found within the text but what she considers to define fictional narratives in contrast to nonfictional narratives. In Cohn’s defence, one might acknowledge that she does present textual manifestations of these two criteria allegedly distinguishing fiction from nonfiction.

The question of a text’s referentiality or nonreferentiality can, according to Cohn, be determined in more than one way relating to the third-person regime but only through the onomastic identification between author and narrator in the first-person regime. In first-person narratives, the proper name signalling an equation or separation between the author and the

33 Cohn herself makes a differentiation between the second signpost and the two other signposts in the following way: “Of the three criteria I explore below, only the second is squarely embedded in discourse-narratological terrain: it concerns narrative situations (voice and mode)” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 110)
narrator is the only thing distinguishing fiction from nonfiction, according to Cohn’s view of first-person fiction. In historical narratives, the referential constraints become apparent when for instance an extratextual documentary base is acknowledged or archival sources identified. This is most often achieved through the presence of foot- or endnotes, quotes, bibliographies and references to different sources. “There is, as a rule, nothing that corresponds to this testimonial stratum in fictional narrative,” Cohn writes, yet she goes on to acknowledge that this rule has on occasions been broken by novelists and other fictional writers (115).

As textual features, the proper name connecting or separating the “I” of first-person fiction with the author or the text, and the use of bibliographies, notes, and other references, might by convention be considered to be “signposts.” However, it is important to note, as Segal does, that in “different communicative frameworks, the same textual elements will be read and interpreted differently [...]” (Segal 2002: 703). The proper name, as I argue in Chapter 3, does not automatically provide autobiographical reference even if the “I” in the text is onomastically identified as the author of the text; it does not establish the context of interpretation, but is assigned its function within it. The same goes for certain textual indicators of a referential database, for instance footnotes, which might be used in the communicative framework of a novel for various reasons and with various effects without indicating that we should read the text as narrative history.

Out of Cohn’s signposts, it is only the second one that Segal might consider a “signpost” in the proper sense of the word. He writes: “Narratorial omniscience can, indeed, be taken for a ‘signpost,’ namely a textual feature serving as a means of guidance or an indication of the text’s status (although [...] it is doubtful whether it is, in fact, such a permanent or obligatory indicator of the text’s fictionality as Cohn insists)” (702-703). Segal argues that we as readers are much more dependent upon cultural conventions, contexts, and communicative frameworks. He states that “the mere display of a narrator’s omniscience does not in itself suffice to turn even modern texts into fiction,” and he continues to claim that “within the framework of historical writing, it may turn a text into bad – or questionable, or problematic – historiography” (Segal 2002: 704). Furthermore, if we take into account other nonfictional texts besides just historical narratives, the use of FID has been identified in, for instance, conversational narratives and even journalistic writing.  

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34 See Monica Fludernik’s article “Fiction vs. Non-Fiction: Narratological Differentiations” (Fludernik 2001: 94-95).
For Cohn the use of narrative devices such as FID or internal focalization is, as I have explained, fiction-specific because these devices create a distinctly fictional epistemology; they demonstrate that “the minds of imaginary figures can be known in ways that those of real persons can not” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 118). The employment of these devices or techniques will therefore necessarily result in fiction. However, the problem with Cohn’s model is that she opts for “an epistemological criterion of fiction when her intention is to analyse discourse,” as Lars-Åke Skalin notes (Skalin 2005: 70). She argues that “only an imaginary narrator can know what goes on in the mind of an Other [...] (70), and in this regard it becomes clear that her conception of “fiction,” as Segal argues, suffers from a basic confusion or lack of inner consistency. Although Cohn approaches fiction through a specific generic meaning, as a literary nonreferential narrative text, her epistemological argument will make fiction synonymous with the “imaginary” and therefore “focus on the ‘wrong’ sense of the concept ‘fiction,’ as Skalin notes (Skalin 2005: 70-71).

So to clarify, even if I agree with Cohn that the presentation of the minds of others through the use of for instance FID might be a “signpost” (in the sense of a formal feature indicating a narrative text’s status), I disagree with her explanation as to why. Instead I would argue, as Skalin does, that FID “should not be taken as a criterion of fiction per se but as a construction congenial to the purpose of the language game of fiction” (73). In other words, FID might be a signpost of fiction, yet not because it presents what is in the minds of fictional figures but because we associate it with the rhetoric of fiction, or with what Skalin calls the “intentions of fiction” (71). As such, the narrative technique itself does not produce a fictional result. Certain textual elements, as Segal notes, can indeed function differently within different communicative contexts.

“If the text is to work as fiction,” Richard Walsh writes, “there must be some frame that situates it as such [...]” (Walsh 2007: 46). Fictionality, according to Walsh, is such “an interpretative frame that inflects and transforms the entire process of narrative comprehension” (Walsh 2007: 44). Similarly, for Skalin the concept of “frame” answers to “the sense-rendering pragmatic level” whiles the concept of “form” signifies “the instrumental linguistic level” (Skalin 2008: 208). Following from these

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35 In a different context, Skalin explains that frame is “chosen at the outmost level of in the sense-making act; it is not something seen but the very seeing, not the done but the doing [...]” (Skalin 2009: 42). Skalin writes: “Frames use forms in their service in semiotic representation. Forms can give a hint as to what frame is actualised, but forms do not determine meaning.” (55)
related views is the idea that forms cannot be exclusive to either fiction or nonfiction. Instead certain forms (stylistic devices, narrative techniques, etc.) can function (in the sense of inviting interpretative responses) differently within different frames. The relationship between forms and frames, however, can as I have acknowledged be considered to be reciprocal in the sense that forms might guide the readers towards a specific frame of interpretation and frames provide forms with their particular functions.

If we were to open a book of ambiguous status and immediately identify instances of internal focalization it might be an indication that this hypothetical text is to work as fiction (according to the intentions of fiction or the representational logic governing the practice of narrative fiction, as discussed below in part 2) This is one example of how formal features or narrative techniques might be considered to be signposts in the sense of textual signals guiding the reader or indicating a text’s generic or pragmatic status. Yet we do not rely solely on textual features, or paratextual features for that matter, when we determine how a narrative text is intended to be read. These features or “signposts” are subordinated a more fundamental criterion governing our search for the appropriate communicative context in the process of reading: the criterion of relevance.

Creating Context: A Question of Relevance

If we accept Walsh’s argument that if the text is to work as fiction (or non-fiction) there must be some interpretative frame that situates it as such, the question that arises is: How is the frame situated? Following Dan Sperber’s and Deidre Wilson’s relevance theory, Walsh argues that the presumption of relevance “drives the reader’s search for an appropriate interpretative context” (Walsh 2007: 30). Similarly, Michael Kearns, also influenced by Sperber and Wilson, states that the principle of relevance “defines a context within which interpretation can take place” (Kearns 1999: 28). In the following I will discuss how the concept of relevance can be useful to

36 What is here referred to as “frame” can also be related to what Roman Jakobson discussed as the “dominant” in poetic (literary) works: “The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components” (Jakobson 2002 [1935]: 82).

37 Kearns was prior to Walsh in recognizing that relevance theory could be useful to a rhetorical theory for narrative. Walsh acknowledges this himself when he states that Kearns’s book is notable for having recognized that “a rhetorical account of narrative, if not of fiction, may have much to gain from relevance theory” (my emphasis) (Walsh 2007: 21-22).
the discussion in this chapter concerning what guides us toward either a fictional or nonfictional frame of interpretation. I will argue that relevance might serve as a pragmatic “tool” in making distinctions between the communicative aims and sense-making operations of different narrative practices. Yet, in order to do so, I will first discuss different views of how the rule of relevance applies to communication in general.

In his essay “Logic and Conversation,” Paul Grice argues that the pragmatics of conversation is governed by a Cooperative Principle (CP) which is developed into four groups of maxims, i.e. rules for verbal communication. The idea behind his model is that in order for successful communication to take place the communicators must adhere to the CP and its maxims because what is actually said or stated may be supplemented by inferences or implicatures. The conditions of conversation are, according to Grice, governed by rules of truthfulness, relevancy, quantity, and manner. Receiving information about something, we expect the speaker not to tell us what he believes to be false, or provide us with any unnecessary information or irrelevant digressions. We also expect that the speaker’s manner, i.e. his style, should “be perspicuous,” as Grice’s supermaxim of manner reads. In other words we expect the speaker to avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and to be brief and orderly (Grice 1991 [1989]: 26-28). If, in a conversational context, we encounter a speaker who does not seem to adhere to or one who even seems to flout the CP we may as part of a communicative situation interrupt and ask the speaker for the point of certain unexpected digressions or demand clarification regarding certain information or a specific expression, and so on.

At this point one might ask why Grice’s model of conversational implicatures would be relevant in regard to literary or fictional narratives. An attempted answer can be found in Marie Louise Pratt’s speech-act theory of literary discourse, where Pratt finds use for Grice’s Cooperative Principle and the notion of relevance in interpreting literary works. Pratt’s model proposes that literature is a special kind of utterance called “display text” which is relevant by being “tellable” rather than informative.38 The speech-

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38 Pratt writes: “In making an assertion whose relevance is tellability, a speaker is not only reporting but also verbally displaying a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it. His point is to produce in his hearers not only belief but also an imaginative and affective involvement in the state of affairs he is representing and an evaluating stance toward it. He intends them to share his wonder, amusement, terror, or admiration of the event. Ultimately, it would seem, what he is after is an interpretation of the problematic event, an assignment of meaning and value supported by the consensus of himself and his hearers.” (Pratt 1977: 136)
act category of display texts includes both literary, fictional narratives, i.e. “novels,”39 and natural narratives as exemplified by the sociolinguistic studies of William Labov.40

However, because the term display text includes both fictional narratives and natural narratives, Pratt needs to account for all the occasions when literary or fictive discourse flouts or deviates from the CP and its maxims. “How do we know,” Pratt asks, “that these failures are of the kind that does not endanger the CP? In other words, how do we know that we are to assume the maxims and CP are being observed at the level of what is implicated, and that we are expected to resolve the violations by calculating implicatures?” (Pratt 1977: 171). Her answer is that the CP is hyperprotected in the literary speech situation, which means that the reader will regard violations of this principle as intentional flouting rather than authorial incompetence. The deviance “counts as a message,” Pratt claims. A message, she states, quoting Michael Riffaterre, that “there is something to discover” (210). As a consequence, Pratt distinguishes between the marked and the unmarked case for the novel genre. The marked case tells us that there is something to discover. The unmarked case on the other hand is recognizable when a novel’s “fictional speech situation reproduces the speech situation obtaining in real world narrative display texts [...]” (205). The novels she has in mind establish the norm and are read “as if they were real-world narrative display texts [...]” (207). The implicatures required to make sense of this kind of text “are all and only those we need to make sense of the author’s text and all and only those we would need if the fictional speech act were not fictional” (my emphasis) (210).

Following Pratt, Kearns also argues that the marked as opposed to the unmarked case for the novel genre indicates that there is something to discover, because “most of us have been conditioned by a lifetime of expecting that, in general, storytellers will be relevant, fully informative, and so forth” (Kearns 1999: 24). Kearns claims that the unmarked case “is one that goes unnoticed” (24). In other words, both he and Pratt suppose that readers always begin reading a novel with the assumption the literary speech situation is identical to that of a real-world narrative display text. This argument assumes that the ordinary speech situation presenting display texts, i.e. “natural narratives,” is the norm when we attend to fic-

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39 Regarding the term “novel,” Pratt explains that she uses it “as a convenient short form for literary narrative in general, that is, for the class of literary utterances which include novels, novellas, short stories, and narrative poems.” (51n)

tional or literary discourse, which is basically the same assumption that I criticized in my account of “standard” narrative theory in Chapter 1.

Both Pratt and Kearns make the mistake of perceiving fictional narrative text as if they were not fictional in a pragmatic sense. I do not agree with them that we begin reading a novel as if the communicative situation was identical to a real-world communicative situation. The norm of fictional discourse is not a speech situation governed by the rules of conversation – the CP and its maxims – as discussed by Grice, but rather norms distinct from natural narratives and everyday communication. Kearns argues that the unmarked case has been determined by our culture and that this explains “why a reader will feel the need to determine implicatures whenever the narrating voice of a more traditional novel violates one of Grice’s maxims” (24). Yet isn’t the marked case, deviations from the CP and its maxims as Grice defines them, rather the norm for novels (even traditional ones) and fictional discourse? I believe so, and in close proximity to my own point of view Walsh argues that the evaluation of relevance in fiction takes place within a different communicative context than the evaluation of relevance in nonfictional discourse.

Walsh’s application of the principle of relevance indeed elaborates on how it helps us determine the interpretative context of a narrative, its framework. The point of departure for his discussion on relevance is a rethinking of the hierarchical relationship between Grice’s first Maxim of Quality (“do not say what you believe to be false”) and the Maxim of Relation (“be relevant”). “It is the presumption of relevance,” Walsh writes, “not any expectation of literal truthfulness, that drives the reader’s search for an appropriate interpretative context” (30).

This reversal of the hierarchy between relevance and truthfulness is fundamental to the model of communication presented by Sperber and Wil-

41 After presenting the four different categories of maxims, Grice notes that in observing the CP some of the proposed rules for successful communication are of more urgency and importance than others. The manner of a wordy or mumbling speaker probably has fewer consequences than the impact on successful communication by someone who has just said something he or she believes not to be true. “Indeed,” Grice states, “it might be felt that the importance of at least the first maxim of Quality is such that it should not be included in a scheme of the kind I am constructing; other maxims come into operation only on the assumption that this maxim of Quality is satisfied” (Grice 1989: 27). This hierarchy is also transferred, argues Walsh, to Pratt’s theory of literary discourse. He states that Pratt’s conception of tellability makes “progress with the aspects of the Gricean model that emphasize relevance” but he criticizes her for being blocked by her assumption that “the issue of relevance is ultimately secondary to that of truthfulness, which precludes any direct authorial model of fictive discourse” (Walsh 2007: 23).
son, and which provides the basis for Walsh’s discussion on relevance in fiction. Walsh explains that the most important consequence of relevance theory, for his purposes, “is the new relation it proposes between the functions of relevance and truthfulness in communication” (26). In Grice’s theory, relevance is presented as a conventional maxim, but for the relevance theory it operates on the most fundamental level of communication. Sperber and Wilson write: “Grice’s principle and maxims are norms which communicators and audience must know in order to communicate adequately” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 162). In contrast to this view, they argue that the principle of relevance “is a generalisation about ostensive-inferential communication”42 (162):

Communicators and audience need no more know the principle of relevance to communicate than they need to know the principles of genetics to reproduce. Communicators do not ‘follow’ the principle of relevance; and they could not violate it even if they wanted to. The principle of relevance applies without exception: every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of relevance. (162)

Yet, ostensive communication does not only communicate a presumption of relevance, but a presumption of optimal relevance, which means that the audience will always try to maximize the relevance of the information being processed. It is the search for optimal relevance that determines the context of our comprehension or interpretation of an utterance.43

Walsh argues that from “a relevance theory perspective, the comprehension of figurative language (as all language) is understood as an inferential

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42 In Sperber’s and Wilson’s theory, communication is what they refer to as ostensive-inferential communication. “Inferential communication and ostension are on and the same process,” they write, “but seen from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience who is involved in inference” (54). Ostension means that a communicator “makes manifest an intention to make something manifest [...]” (49).

43 Sperber and Wilson write: “It is not that first the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed. On the contrary, people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: a context which will maximize relevance” (142). Context is here synonymous with an individual’s assumption about the world rather than the actual state of the world; “a subset of the individual’s cognitive environment, which in turn consists of all the assumptions manifest – available to perception or inference – at a given time,” as Walsh explains (Walsh 2007: 26), (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 15, 39).
process of filling out the linguistic code until maximal relevance is achieved (that is, up to the point at which the cost in processing effort exceeds the benefit in contextual effect, for the reader concerned)” (28). He goes on to state that “[c]riteria of truth enter into this process only to the extent that truthfulness is a condition of the particular contextual effects involved [...]” (28). If we connect this statement to the previous discussion on truth-claims, an author’s commitment to truthfulness can be said to be based on the reader’s presumption and evaluation of relevance. Commitment to truth is an effect of the interpretative framework, not what defines it.

According to Walsh’s relevance-driven pragmatic account of inferences in fiction, it is this particular understanding of relevance that impels the reader to hypothesize about the appropriate interpretative context. Because truthfulness is secondary to the principle of relevance, it allows him to propose a model with “a view of fiction in which fictionality is not a frame separating fictive discourse from ordinary or ‘serious’ communication, but a contextual assumption: that is to say, in comprehension of a fictive utterance, the assumption that it is fictive is itself manifest” (30). Walsh goes on stating that the “main contextual effect of this assumption is to subordinate implicatures that depend upon literal truthfulness to those that achieve relevance in more diffuse and cumulative ways” (my emphasis) (30). Fiction achieves relevance, he argues, “incrementally, through the implication of various cognitive interests or values that are not contingent upon accepting the propositional truth of the utterance itself [...]” (30). Walsh concludes that “reading a fiction requires an ongoing sense of relevance” and that “narrative development [in fiction] is only possible on the basis of an established sense of relevance” (31). Yet how should we understand this idea of relevance in fiction? How should this ongoing or established sense of relevance be characterized?

To this question Walsh provides an answer full of allusions to Sperber’s and Wilson’s theoretical vocabulary. He argues:

Relevant information, in fiction, is supplied by assumptions with the capacity to inform a cognitive environment that includes the assumption of fictionality itself, as well as a set of general assumptions that might be collectively labelled “narrative understanding” (which would include logical, evaluative, and affective subsets), and more specific assumptions relating to, for instance, generic expectations of the text in hand and the particulars of its subject matter. In this cognitive environment, the contextual effects that constitute relevance may be produced by new assumptions informing the project of narrative understanding in general (and the further kinds of understanding this may facilitate), or by assumptions enabling further infer-
ences from the narrative particulars, which will themselves contribute to an ongoing, cumulative experience of relevance (such cumulative effects being analogous to those that Sperber and Wilson term “poetic effects” in their discussion of how impressions may be communicated). (31)

From this statement alone it is quite hard to grasp what Walsh’s view of relevance in fiction, or relevant information in fiction, really entails. What I find to be his most important observation, however, is that fiction is dependent upon an established sense of relevance, yet our expectations of relevance when reading, for instance, a novel ultimately differ from our assumptions about relevance in ordinary communication or natural narratives. When reading fiction we do not expect, as Pratt or Kearns argue, that a real-world speech situation is the norm (as in the unmarked case of the novel genre) or a speaker who adheres to the CP and its maxims as defined by Grice in regard to the rules governing conversation. Walsh states that the goal of relevance renders possible inferences from fictional narratives inconsequential; inferences that would throw their “representational logic into disarray” (36). He also states that the contextual assumption of fictionality secures “the logic of fictive utterance” (36). These statements seem to imply that fictive discourse is governed by a representational logic fundamentally different from factual or conversational discourse.

However, in his discussion on relevance in fiction, Walsh only describes this representational logic in fiction through negations. In fiction, by the reader’s assumption of fictionality, some possible inferences – such as literal truthfulness or actual reference to real-world existents – are subordinated and not worth the effort of processing. This conclusion does not tell us too much about the “specificity of the fictional case,” to use Walsh’s own words (21). By specificity I intend narrative fiction’s otherness in relation to ordinary or “natural” narrative communication. It is to this end that I in the following part will focus on the difference between nonfictional narratives and narrative fiction as communicative practices governed by different rules and sense-making operations (or “representational logic”). Only in this way is it possible to explain why relevance is assessed differently in fiction and nonfiction, and therefore can be regarded as the guiding principle in our search for the proper framework.

44 For further discussion on relevance in fiction, see Chapter 3, p. 87-95. See also Walsh’s analysis of the first line in Franz Kafka’s The Trial (Walsh 2007: 33-37).
II. Narrative Fiction, Nonfictional Narrative

Narrative Theory and the Narrative Fallacy

In Chapter 1, I discussed how narrative theory’s aim to encompass all narratives within the same model of narrative communication or the same definition of narrative has led to a conceptualization of fiction and nonfiction which fails to treat these terms as denoting distinct communicative practices and, furthermore, that the standard theory assumes “natural” or nonfictional narrative as the paradigm when dealing with narrative fiction. In the following, I continue this discussion with the intention to discuss how fiction might be argued to possess a representational logic different from natural or nonfictional narrations.45

In the article “How Strange Are the ‘Strange Voices’ of Fiction?”, Lars-Åke Skalin discusses what he perceives as a theoretical conflict between narratology and poetics understood “in a stricter sense than the sense usually intended by narratologists” (Skalin 2011: 106). Skalin writes: “On the one hand, we have an approach to literary narrative which understands ‘narrative’ from the paradigm of natural narrative and therefore deems it possible to have a theory applicable to ‘all and only narratives’. On the other hand, we have an approach from an aesthetic point of departure with an Aristotelian paradigm of narrative fiction as mimesis, where mimesis is a practice that differs from the practice of natural narrating” (106). Skalin concludes that from the point of view of such a poetics, “the narratological approach might be accused of having committed a ‘narrative fallacy’ in its dealing with literary fiction” (106).

45 In a reaction against “Natural Narratology” as presented by Monica Fludernik (1996) and those narratologists who view ordinary realist texts or natural narratives “as being prototypical manifestations of narrative” (Alber et al. 2010: 114), certain narratologists have collectively proposed an “Unnatural Narratology.” What is said to unite the work gathered under the heading of Unnatural Narratology is “(1) the ways in which strange and innovative narratives challenge mimetic understandings of narrative and (2) the consequences that the existence of such narratives may have for the general conception of what a narrative is and what it can do” (115). Because the term narrative has a “mimetic bias” certain “unnatural narratives” are neglected within narrative theory or subjected to “mimetic reductionism,” argue the unnatural narratologists (114, 115). Although I will discuss (and to some extent agree with) some of the work belonging to the field of Unnatural Narratology, this study will not align itself with this branch on narratological studies. The reason is mainly because Unnatural Narratology only suggests “supplementary improvements of the current narrative theory,” instead of “a radical re-evaluation of standard narrative paradigm[…],” as Skalin argues in his discussion on the “strangeness” of narrative fiction (Skalin 2011: 103-104).
In the following discussion I will side with this critique of the narratological approach to fiction and put it in opposition to a view of fiction grounded in poetics in the narrow sense described by Skalin. More specifically, in the section below entitled “Mimesis and the Logic of Fiction,” I will juxtapose two different conceptions of fiction as mimesis; on the one hand a view of mimesis as formal imitation which is dominant within standard narrative theory and on the other hand a view of mimesis from the point of departure of Aristotelian poetics.

The problem at the heart of the narratological approach to narrative fiction is clearly expressed in the often presented view stating that fictional discourse should be understood as imitations of different nonfictional discourses. This view is sometimes referred to as the mimetic model of fiction and it is expressed in, for instance, Genette’s notion of “formal mimesis” (Genette 1993: 81), derived from Michał Glowiński’s concepts of “formal mimetics” (Glowiński 1977: 106). The (formal) mimetic view approaches homodiegetic fiction as imitations of autobiographical discourse and heterodiegetic fiction as imitations of “factual forms such as history, chronicles, newspaper accounts [...],” etc., as Genette argues. (Genette 1993: 81).

With this view the distinction between fiction and nonfiction becomes, as we have already noted, a matter of “the ontological status of the speaker,” as Cohn states in regard to first-person fiction; a matter of “his identity or nonidentity with the author in whose name the narrative has been published” (Cohn 2000 [1999] 31-32). Consequently, the concept of the narrator becomes fundamental to this mimetic model treating narrative fiction as if it was nonfiction. The narrator becomes obligatory in all fictional narratives because it functions to distinguish them from factual narratives and relieves the author from the responsibility of the “facts” of fictional discourse.

By refuting this view of narrative fiction as imitation of nonfictional discourses I view the “narrator” as a concept which may open up for a faulty model. I therefore begin my critique of the (formal) mimetic model by discussing the idea of the obligatory narrator in fiction.

Narrative Fiction and the (Un)necessary Narrator

In narrative theory, the idea that all narratives, fictional and nonfictional alike, require a narrator is a fundamental assumption. In commenting upon his systematization of (fictional) narratives in Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, Genette states (in Narrative Discourse Revisited) that the main point of his study, “beginning with its title, reflects the assumption
that there is an enunciating instance – the narrating – with its narrator and
narratee, fictive or not, represented or not, silent or chatty, but always
present in what is indeed for me, I fear, an act of communication” (Genette
1988 [1983]: 101). This is the standard view in narratology. The argu-
ments for the logical necessity of the narrator are many, yet in this context
I will focus on theorists who in different ways have come to question the
idea of the “narrator” in narrative fiction.46

Against the standard view of narrative communication, a minority of
narrative thinkers and linguists have argued for the thesis that narrative
fiction lacks a narrator. This view is often referred to as the “no-narrator
theory” and it is associated with the names Käte Hamburger, S.Y. Kuroda,
and Ann Banfield.47 Narratologists such as Seymour Chatman and Monica
Fludernik have also in certain contexts questioned the idea that all
fictional narratives require a narrator.48 More recently, Lars-Åke Skalin and
Richard Walsh have in distinct yet similar ways elaborated on the notion that
the narrator as conceptualized by narrative theory is an unnecessary con-
cept for the study of fictional literature and highly problematic when theo-
rizing narrative fiction in general.49

A critique against no-narrator theories has been that if we obliterate
the narrator from the fictional sphere, we cannot account for first-person fic-
tion and “the price to pay would be the loss of a unified model of fictional
expression” (Ryan 1991: 69). Henrik Skov Nielsen explains that “fictional
first-person narrative has always been an obvious problem for no-narrator
theories [...]” (Nielsen 2004: 135). It has seemed “impossible to make
room for fictional first-person narrative in a theory that does not have

46 For arguments regarding the logical and/or pragmatic necessity of a narrator in
narrative fiction, see for example Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s Narrative Fiction:
Contemporary Poetics (Rimmon-Kenan: 1988: 88), Roland Barthes’s “Introduction
to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” (Barthes 1977: 109), Michael Toolan’s
Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction (Toolan 2001: 3), or Dorrit Cohn’s
The Distinction of Fiction (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 127-129).

47 See Käte Hamburger’s The Logic of Literature (Hamburger 1993 [1973]), S.Y
Kuroda’s “Reflections on the Foundations of Narrative Theory – From a Linguistic
Point-of-View” (Kuroda 1979: 205-231), and Ann Banfield’s Unspeakable Sentenc-
es: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (Banfield 1982).

48 See the chapter “Discourse: Nonnarrated Stories” in Story and Discourse: Narra-
tive Structure in Fiction and Film (Chatman 1978: 146-195), Monica Fludernik’s
The Fictions of Language and the Language of Fiction (Fludernik 1993).

49 See Skalin’s “Den onödige berättaren: en fiktionologisk analys” [“The Unneces-
sary Narrator: A Fictionological Analysis”] in Berättaren: en gäckande röst i texten
room for the narrator” (135). This becomes notable, Nielsen acknowledges, in for instance Hamburger’s banishment of first-person fiction from the domain of true fiction, what she calls epic fiction.

Hamburger makes a distinction between fictions in the first- and third-person regime. For her there is a vital difference between epic fiction (third-person narrative) and first-person narrative. In epic fiction there is no subject of enunciation and consequently no narrator; “the narrative poet is not a statement-subject,” because he does not “narrate about persons and things, but rather he narrates these persons and things [...]” (Hamburger 1993 [1973]: 136). In first-person novels, on the other hand, the I “is a genuine statement subject,” yet his or her reality statements are considered “feigned” (312-13). Feigned is here distinct from fictive, and “designates something pretended, imitated, something inauthentic and non-genuine” (313). Fiction, however, “designates the mode of being of that which is not real: of illusion, semblance, dream, play” (313).

The distinction between epic fiction and first-person narrative with reference to the narrator is explained by Hamburger in the following way:

It is precisely from the perspective of the first-person narrative that it again becomes clear that fiction is not constituted through a “narrator,” but a narrative function, and that the concept “narrator” is in fact terminologically correct only for first-person narrative. For the first-person narrator does not “engender” that which he narrates, but narrates about it in the same manner as in every reality statement: as about something which is the object of his statement, and which he can only present as an object (or, in the case of persons, which he cannot also portray as subjects). (317)

Hamburger’s theory is then not at odds with the formal mimesis model in its entirety: first-person novels imitates autobiographical discourse (“For the origins of first-person narration lie in the structure of autobiographical statement”) (311) but third-person fiction does not imitate, for instance, biography or historiography. The first-person novel is “a mimesis of reality statement – which is obviously something different from mimesis of reality itself, which constitutes the fictional genre” (330).

The difference boils down to the notion that fiction (meaning third-person fiction) does not “have the structure of the as-if” but rather an “as-structure” (57-58). Fictional texts create the world to which they refer, while feigned first-person narratives possess the form of reality statement.
Therefore, first-person narratives need “the statement-subject, the first-person narrator” (315).50

Opposing the mimetic view of first-person narrative fiction as modelled after conventional autobiography, Nielsen questions “the idea of the ‘narrating-I,’ as the enunciating subject in first-person narrative” (Nielsen 2004: 135). The guiding question in his article is who narrates in first-person or homodiegetic fiction, and the hypotheses presented are “1) that in literary fiction, as opposed to oral narratives, one cannot be certain that it is the person referred to as ‘I’ who speaks or narrates, and therefore that 2) we need to posit an impersonal voice of the narrative” (133). The idea of a narrating-I as an enunciating subject encounters difficulties, Nielsen argues, when confronted with instances in such novels where the assumed homodiegetic narrator narrates something he or she “cannot possibly know [...]” (133) or presents “such a quantity of details in the narrative that it would be impossible for any real person to remember” (135). These instances, exemplified by certain narrative features, “transgress a mimetic model of first-person narrative fiction in which the narrator is believed to possess the same limits, possibilities, and techniques at the disposal of an author of a traditional autobiography,” Nielsen argues (136).

He explains his conception of the impersonal voice in the following way:

The impersonal voice of the narrative can move from character to character, limiting its range of insight, its vocabulary, and its point of view to that of one particular character in one passage and that of another character in the next. The impersonal voice of the narrative can say what a narrating-I cannot say, produce details that no person could remember, render the thoughts of other characters, speak when the character remains forever silent etc. (139-40)

In this definition, the impersonal voice seems quite similar to an “omniscient narrator.” The similarities are revealing because both the impersonal

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50 It should be noted that Hamburger also argues that some first-person narratives can “develop along the lines of fiction” (325) through a use fictionalizing forms. One such example is the occurrence of dialogue in the memoir novel. Through “the objectification of one’s own life-stages and the totality of the world-nexus established in retrospection [...]” and by the use of dialogue in order to “vividly re-create situations and episodes long past [...],” the memoir novel becomes fictionalized, according to Hamburger (325). She writes: “The fixed first-person narrator very closely approaches the narrative function as soon as he has the persons in his past exchange conversations with ‘himself’ in his earlier phases” (325).
voice and the omniscient narrator are narrative sources or agents within the frame of fiction (all-knowing, moving from one character to the next, limiting or expanding their view, etc.). These similarities indicate that this viewpoint, intended as an alternative to the standard narrator model, still does not rid itself of an underlying assumption which makes the postulation of a narrative agent other than the author necessary. The idea of the impersonal voice seems to have sprung out of what I am ready to regard as the widespread fallacy, namely to attribute everything in a work of fiction to a source within the fictional world or diegesis. Because the assumed narrating-I cannot know, some other source must be postulated in order to account for these instances or, as Nielsen calls them, transgressions.

In his critique of the concept of the narrator, Walsh states that “there is no room anywhere for a third agent that would be neither a character nor the real author” (Walsh 2007:84). The reasoning behind his claim begins with the argument that by “conceiving of a fictional narrative as issuing from a fictional narrator, the reader has cancelled out its fictionality, negotiated a mode of complicity with representation, and found a rationale for suspension of disbelief” (69). Disbelief, Walsh argues, is necessary for reading a work of fiction as fictional. For Walsh, the main problem with the idea of the “narrator” is that it functions as a step inside the frame of fiction, i.e. to establish a representational frame within which the narrative discourse may be read as something reported as fact rather than something invented or told as fiction. The effect, he explains, is “a kind of critical double vision that separates the intrafictional perspective from a larger sense of the fiction as a literary work (characterized by its style, technique, themes, symbolism, etc.) […]” (70). The narrator, “postulated simultaneously inside and outside representation, dissociates the author from the act

51 This critique against Nielsen’s idea of the impersonal voice is presented in a dissertation written in Swedish by Ulrika Göransson (Göransson 2009). She compares the definition of the impersonal voice to Prince’s definition of the omniscient narrator in Dictionary of Narratology, quoting the following two sentences: “A narrator who knows (practically) everything about the situations and events recounted. [...] Such a narrator has an omniscient point of view and tells more than any or all the characters know” (Prince 2003 [1987]: 68).

52 In more recent articles, Nielsen has shifted toward speaking about the real author instead of an impersonal voice, stating for example that “it makes sense in many contexts to talk about the author as the enunciator rather than an impersonal voice” (Nielsen 2011: 77). See also (Nielsen 2010).

53 Walsh is here alluding to Genette’s critique of the implied author and the claim that there is ”no room anywhere for a third agent that would be neither the narrator nor the real author” (Genette 1988 [1983]: 145).
of representation; the concept accordingly divides critical attention between the events and characters of the fictional world in their own right, and the literary ends they serve as representations” (84). Walsh, critical of this division, sees no conflict between “engaging with authorial fictive discourse and engaging with the story” (70).

However, there are inconsistencies in Walsh’s alternative, relating to what I have referred to as the narrative fallacy committed by narrative theory. In discussing the “main point” of Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, the notion of the necessary narrating instance as cited above, Walsh writes: “Indeed, to concede that a narrating instance is not implied by every narrative would be to concede to the linguistic arguments for non-narrated narratives advanced by Ann Banfield (1982) and others” (71). It is in this regard that Walsh position adheres to rather than deviates from the standard model, by treating examples of narrative fiction as narratives, which leads to the logical conclusion that someone must narrate them.

In objecting to the pretense (speech-act) model of fiction, Walsh states that “authors do not pretend to be narrating characters, they represent narrating characters” (77). In other words: “In first-person narration, authors do not imitate the narrating character, nor ‘the making of an assertion,’ but a discursive idiom” (77). Walsh’s claim is that “fictions are narrated by their authors, or by characters” (84). For him there is no intermediate position:

> The author of a fiction can adopt one of two strategies: to narrate a representation, or to represent a narration. I say this in full awareness of Genette’s criticisms of the concept of representation (1988: 42): indeed his point, that the term equivocates between “information” and “imitation,” is borne out by my own antithesis. “Representation” is a matter of (fictional) information in “to narrate a representation,” but a matter of (discursive) imitation in “to represent a narration.” (78)

These two strategies seem largely to correspond with first-person respectively third-person fiction. The author of first-person fiction is representing a narrating character while the author of third-person fiction is narrating a representation.\(^{54}\) Fiction, then, is narrated by authors or by characters, yet

\(^{54}\) Walsh writes: "Extradiegetic homodiegetic narrators, being represented, are characters, just as all intradiegetic narrators are. Extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrators (that is, ‘impersonal’ and ‘authorial’ narrators), who cannot be represented without thereby being rendered homodiegetic or intradiegetic, are in no way distinguishable from authors” (84).
the verb “narrate” is attributed two different meanings in this context. When an author represents a narration we should understand this as a discursive imitation, i.e. the representation of a narrating character through imitations of discursive idioms. To narrate a representation, however, is not to be taken as imitation but information. Does this mean that the author is informing about the fictional world? Probably not, yet Walsh’s conclusion might lead one to think so, when he for instance states that extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrators “are in no way distinguishable from authors” (84). In other words, we do not need the “narrator” because we can refer to the real author instead. Yet this argument seems to imply that the author has the same function as a heterodiegetic narrator, namely to inform about the fictional world, rather than assert something as fiction.

Walsh’s position is thus oscillating between being “inside” and “outside” of narrative theory’s standard model of communication. Walsh views fictions as narratives, first and foremost, and as such they must be narrated by someone; either a character or the author. From my proposed perspective, on the other hand, a work of fiction, for instance what we appreciate as a novel or a short story, is not narrated by a character (in homodiegetic fiction) or an author (in heterodiegetic fiction). Instead I use such verbs as “presented” or “communicated,” which I employ in order to avoid committing what is suggested as a narrative fallacy, that is, to approach paradigmatic examples of literary narrative fiction using the same rules we take to be operative in approaching paradigmatic non-fiction narratives. Tradition has made us adopt the term “narrative” for both cases, but this may be because of some superficial family resemblances. Looking deeper into the matter, we see that we have here a case of polysemy.

Mimesis and the Logic of Fiction

In the following, two opposing ways of perceiving mimesis (“imitation” or “representation” in Greek, designated by the word “imitatio” in Latin) are introduced in order to discuss what might distinguish narrative fiction from nonfictional narrative. These different conceptions of mimesis can be traced back to the origin of the concept as it was used by Plato on the one
hand and Aristotle on the other. However, I will mainly discuss Genette’s (Platonic) view of mimesis as language imitating language in relation to Hamburger’s and Skalin’s (Aristotelian) views of the term.

In Genette’s understanding of mimesis, the imitation of verbal narratives exists solely on the linguistic level. He is of the opinion that language can only imitate language, as opposed to for instance Erich Auerbach’s view that mimesis is imitation of reality and therefore closely tied to different conceptions of “realism.” Genette states that “mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 164). This logical but misleading conclusion results in the idea of “formal mimesis” mentioned above; the idea that fictional discourse imitates factual forms. What we might experience as mimesis of action and life in narrative fiction is, according to Genette, “the illusion of mimesis” (164).

Genette’s point of departure is Plato’s distinction between diegesis (or “pure narrative”) in which the poet speaks in his own voice and mimesis in which the poet speaks through his or her characters and pretends to be someone else. These two narrative modes identified by Plato can be said to correspond to what we today speak of as telling versus showing within novel-theory and narrative theory. Showing is, as is familiar to most critics of literature, the “scenic” or visual representation of actions and events in novels and other types of narrative fiction. Yet since Genette believes that a verbal narrative can only imitate other verbal narratives, the very idea of showing is illusory. A narrative cannot “show” the story it tells (164).

In opposition to Genette’s view of mimesis, Hamburger’s Aristotelian interpretation of the term refers to imitation of human reality in the sense that fictional literature “represents and ‘makes’ men in action” (Hamburger 1993 [1973]: 11-12). According to her, mimesis is not imitation of words but rather synonymous with “mimesis of men in action” (21). Hamburger notes that “[t]he concept of imitation has been given an all too naturalistic tinge in literary theory” (231), and she is sceptical towards the fact that mimesis “has been translated by imitatio and has become burdened with the sense of ‘copying’” (10). In Aristotle’s definition, the sense of imitation is contained but “far less decisive than the fundamental sense of representing, making” (my emphases) (11), argues Hamburger. With this view, fictional texts are not imitations of nonfictional discourses, but separated from the reality-statements of referential discourse. Hamburger claims that “narrative fiction grows out of the same creative and formative impulse as dramatic fiction (as Aristotle already saw), that the epic poet

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57 See Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Auerbach 1953).
does not narrate primarily for the sake of narrating, but in order to create a world of fictive characters – and this without detriment to the fact that the formative narrative function can seem to become independent and so to speak forget its task of producing fiction” (230-231).

In a similar way to how Hamburger contrasts reality-statement with mimesis as representation of men in action, Skalin presents mimesis as a practice which differs from the practice of natural (referential) narratives. He writes that the “faculty of ‘situating’ people, letting them do things and have thoughts, is a form of language use unique to mimesis” (Skalin 2005: 72). Skalin’s view of fiction is that of the Aristotelian poetics: “the purpose of narrative fiction is to present a mimesis praxeos kai bion, the imitation of life and action, as Aristotle saw manifested in tragedies, comedies, and heroic epic” (Skalin 2011: 105).

However, there are important differences between Hamburger and Skalin. As we remember from my discussion on the concept of the narrator, Hamburger distinguishes fiction in the third-person (fiktionales Erzählen) from novels in the first-person which she views as fictive speech (fingierte Aussage) or as constituted by feigned reality statements. Skalin, on the other hand, argues that first-person fiction displays the properties typical of mimesis, in contrast with natural narratives, to the same degree as third-person fiction (114). This dissension between Hamburger’s and Skalin’s conception of mimesis is related to the theoretical fundaments, that is, the theoretical position from which they aim to theorize about narrative fiction. Hamburger’s point of departure is literary language in relation to the general system of language. Skalin, on the other hand, criticizes Hamburger for arguing “from linguistic properties for the existence of a specific fictional discourse” (Skalin 2005: 72). He would have preferred if she had taken the reverse order of argumentation: “From an argumentation for the existence of a unique fictional discourse one could go on and argue how a battery of devices are taken into service in order to work out the ‘intentions of fictions’ in the most effective way. There is, accordingly, an affinity between discourse and design” (72-73). The essential difference, then, between Hamburger’s and Skalin’s view of fiction is that she identifies a text’s fictional nature on the level of linguistic form while he emphasizes the pragmatic relation between forms and frames, discourse and design.

The Aristotelian view of narrative fiction as mimesis presented by Hamburger and Skalin has been criticized in different ways. A common argument is that “[t]heorists like Hamburger and Skalin in practice come close to equating this (internally focalized) scenic representation with fiction,” as Christer Johansson argues (Johansson 2005: 255). Yet, the interpretation of mimesis proposed here in relation to Hamburger and Skalin should not
be mistaken as “scenic” representation in any formal or formalistic sense. Mimesis, as Skalin argues, refers to the practice of narrative fiction and its sense-making operations which are distinct from the sense-making operations of natural or nonfictional narratives (see Chapter 3, p. 87-90). The distinction I have proposed here between narrative fiction as mimesis and nonfictional (referential) narratives has in other words been intended to capture in general terms how fiction and nonfiction, as distinct practices (or language-games), communicate differently with readers.

Changing Frames and Borderline Aesthetics

Up until now I have argued for a distinction between fiction and nonfiction by discussing how different narrative texts come to invite different responses in accordance with the rules, expectancies of relevance, and the representational logic dominating fiction or nonfiction as communicative practices. In this concluding section I will test this distinction by connecting it to the idea borderline aesthetic in narrative literature. As discussed in Chapter 1, literary hybrids and borderline cases are often viewed as fiction and nonfiction at the same time, or as neither by erasing this distinction altogether. Here I intend to reflect upon the question whether or not we can read a narrative text as fiction and nonfiction at the same time.

This question has indeed been discussed by narrative theorists opposing the panfictionalist tendency inherent in the idea of “hybridization.” Marie-Laure Ryan, for instance, writes:

The possibility of hybridization does not necessarily mean that the two categories [fiction and nonfiction] are inherently indeterminate: the many shades of gray on the spectrum from black to white do not turn black and white into the same color. On the contrary, grays result from different proportions of two well-defined ingredients blended into a homogeneous color, or from various patterns of discrete black and white elements. To analyse the composition of these shades, we need a clear notion of what is black and what is white. By analogy, I believe that the innovative hybrids produced by contemporary literature will be better understood and more precisely described if we regard these experiments as a challenge to sharpen our definitions of fiction and nonfiction. (Ryan 1997: 165)

The problem with the metaphors Ryan uses to describe “innovative hybrids” is that fiction and nonfiction are considered to be categories that can be blended like primary colors in order to create new categories. But
we cannot define fiction and nonfiction as if these terms denoted something well-defined like primary colors; we can only characterize differences in practice and describe what it might entail to read a text as fiction or nonfiction. Instead of talking about “hybrids,” a term indicating that a text is read as fiction and nonfiction simultaneously, I prefer the concept of borderline aesthetics which acknowledges that narrative texts can invite different interpretative responses at different times.

In discussing what he calls “underdetermined” texts (presented as neither fiction nor nonfiction) and “overdetermined” texts (presented as both fiction and nonfiction), Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that James Frey’s book *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) is an underdetermined text that “can be read as fiction, nonfiction, or both at the same time” (Nielsen 2010: 285n), and that Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park* (2005) is overdetermined and “demands to be read as fiction and nonfiction [...]” (292n). Of course, the question that becomes inescapable here is the question which has guided this theoretical discussion, namely what it means to read as fiction and to read as nonfiction. The answer Nielsen provides is that nonfictional narratives are read as true while fictional narratives are read as invention.\footnote{Nielsen connects the distinction between reading fiction and reading nonfiction to Richard Walsh’s distinction between reading a narrative as report and reading it as invention. See (Walsh 2007: 69).} Regarding Frey’s book, Nielsen writes that it cannot be unambiguously described as nonfiction, yet also claims that it is equally clear that it is not “pure” fiction (285n). Regarding Ellis’s book he writes that it “contains true information about the author’s life” and that it “therefore seems reductive to see the book as pure fiction” (292). Reading a narrative as fiction, argues Nielsen, “we assume that the author has created a world that we should trust,” while reading a narrative as nonfiction, “we may question the accuracy of the narrative, and perhaps even investigate the facts [...]” (296). The difference, then, seems to be whether or not we take the author of a narrative to invent a world (purely non-referential) or to say something true about the existing world (purely referential) (297).

According to Nielsen, overdetermined narratives demand to be read “as both fictional and nonfictional” (297). Underdetermined narratives on the other hand are viewed as inviting “different readings at different times” (297). Yet *A Million Little Pieces* should according to Nielsen be read with the same “double vision” as *Lunar Park* (297). This point-of-view clashes with my argument that we cannot read with double vision treating a text as fiction and nonfiction simultaneously. However, I do agree as I have stated that a narrative text can invite different readings at different times.
What I have in mind are the instances in certain books where the dominant frame of interpretation changes, locally or globally.

As discussed earlier, framework can be seen as the sense-rendering level of a narrative text or as synonymous with a text’s interpretative context. The frame can also be seen as that which inflects and transforms the whole process of narrative comprehension, as Walsh notes (Walsh 2007: 44). For him fictionality is, as mentioned already, such an interpretative frame. Yet fictionality can also exist locally in a nonfictional narrative according to his rhetorical definition. Walsh states that fictionality should not “be equated simply with ‘fiction,’ as a category or genre of narrative: it is a communicative strategy, and as such it is apparent on some scale within many nonfictional narratives, in forms ranging from something like an ironic aside, through various forms of conjecture or imaginative supplementation, to full-blown counterfactual narrative examples” (7). He writes:

Conversely, much fiction serves communicative functions, of both non-narrative (essayistic) and narrative (documentary) kinds, which do not exclusively belong to the rhetoric of fictionality: think of the generalizing moral commentary of George Eliot, or the historical contextualizations of Scott. But the generic marker of all fictional narrative, literary or cinematic, is that the rhetoric of fictionality is the dominant framework for the communicative gesture being made, and therefore defines the terms in which it solicits interpretation.” (7)

Although my arguments regarding changing frames cohere with Walsh’s, I find his term “fictionality” problematic. When he states that fictionality in nonfictional narratives can be found in, for instance, various forms of conjecture or imaginative supplement it becomes too closely associated with the contents of a narrative being invented. Conjecture or imaginative supplement in nonfiction is not a sign of fictionality; it is simply conjecture or imaginative supplement. A nonfictional narrative can, however, include instances of fiction, for example passages or sections where the interpretative responses common to nonfiction are suspended and replaced by other responses conventionally associated with fictional communication. It is also possible that the interpretative frame changes altogether.59

59 See for instance William Maxwell’s So Long, See You Tomorrow (1980), a book that is both an autobiography and fiction, though not at the same time. Maxwell’s book begins as “a memoir,” yet after approximately the first four chapters the interpretative frame changes when the author goes from narrating about his own childhood to creating a past reality as narrative fiction in the sense of mimesis.
As Walsh notes, fiction often serves communicative functions that are not specifically fictional, or in his words, exclusive to the rhetoric of fictionality. Indeed, it is a common phenomenon that fiction, for instance a novel, includes essayistic or documentary parts, generalizing moral commentary, historical contextualization, etc. However, such “nonfictional” occurrences in a work of narrative fiction are often subsumed under the dominant framework, thus receiving their function within the literary and thematic structure of a particular fictional work. Essayistic sections, moral commentary, etc. are often included in novels so that they are motivated in relation to the work as a whole, aesthetically and thematically. Forms associated with nonfiction are in these cases used for literary purposes. Yet, nothing prevents a reader of fiction receiving factual information, that is, nothing prevents a novel or some other text we globally characterize as narrative fiction from including material we locally read as nonfiction.60

The way I approach “borderline aesthetics,” then, is that I do not restrict the term to a specific genre. I use it quite simply to describe how narrative texts or literary works might move between fiction and nonfiction, inviting a wide range of interpretative responses belonging to both communicative practices. This view might be connected to Roman Jakobson’s discussion on the multiple functions of a literary (or poetic) work (Jakobson 2002 [1935]: 84). For Jakobson, a poetic work has the aesthetic function as its “dominant,” yet it “has in addition many other functions” (83). He also argues that the aesthetic function is not limited to poetic works, but might be used in various nonfictional discourses – “an orator’s address, everyday conversation, newspaper articles, advertisements, a scientific treatise […]” (83) – otherwise dominated by the referential function of the language. Furthermore, certain books or literary works cannot be said to be dominated either by an aesthetic or a referential function, but rather combine these functions in different ways (see Chapter 5).

In conclusion: the idea of changing frames and borderline aesthetics is not a threat to the fiction-nonfiction distinction. Rather this distinction, understood in pragmatic terms, is the basis for any description of the protean nature of literary communication in both a fictional and a nonfic-

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60 Regarding his relevance-driven pragmatic and rhetorical model of fictionality, Walsh expresses a similar view: “Nothing in this model excludes the possibility of gaining factual information from fiction: fictionality does not admit of degree as a rhetorical set, but fictions do as representations. This distinction, between mutually exclusive communicative intentions (the fictive and the assertive) and the relativity of informative intentions, can accommodate the range of borderline cases that vex definitions of fiction: historical novel, roman à clef, fictionalized memoir, historiographic metafiction, hoax” (Walsh 2007: 36).
tional context. Without asking the questions of why we read a narrative text as fiction or as nonfiction, and how the meaning of the phrases as fiction and as nonfiction should be explained, we cannot fruitfully argue that some texts invite different readings at different times.

**Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this discussion has been to theoretically approach the relation among the concepts that constitute this chapter’s title, namely fiction, nonfiction, and borderline aesthetics. The aim has been to argue in favour of a pragmatic distinction between fiction and nonfiction which allows for the borderline and protean nature of literary and narrative communication. Consequently, I have argued that fictional and nonfictional communication demand different kinds of attention and invite different responses by being governed by distinct rules, expectancies of relevance, and sense-making operations. Yet I have also acknowledged that narrative texts might change their dominant frame of interpretation and that a work we globally read as fiction might locally be read as nonfiction, and vice versa, without creating “hybrids” conceived as a mixture of fiction and nonfiction.

In the following chapters, the questions I have discussed here on an abstract theoretical level will inform my readings of the Roth Books. This chapter has been intended to provide a theoretical frame in which my following analyses and argumentations are situated. In order to argue my thesis that the Roth Books can be said to exemplify how the author transforms his own life into writing which is both fictional and nonfictional, I will rely on the arguments presented here in regard to the questions of why we read a text as fiction or nonfiction, and what the differences are to read a work as being fictional or nonfictional, or both by moving along the borders between distinct frames of interpretation.
3. The “I” and the Other Philip Roth

Introduction

“What’s in a name?” asks Juliet famously in William Shakespeare’s classic play. If one took this question as a general philosophical inquiry into the nature of names, the answers would surely be various, depending on who is asking, in what context, and for what reason the question is put. In this chapter I pose the same question as Juliet in Shakespeare’s drama but with regard to the Roth Books. I ask: what is in the name “Philip Roth,” meaning: should the personal pronoun “I” and what is said about the character named “Philip Roth,” or simply “Philip,” be taken to refer to the author of these books, that is, to the man with a historical existence outside the texts, or should it not be taken so? The question has, of course, been one of the central concerns in discussions on the Roth Books.

Debra Shostak argues, as we noted in Chapter 1, that the “‘Roth’ in the text must always be read in quotation marks, even when seemingly most unmediated, in order to underscore the indeterminacy of the ‘Roth’ who appears in each narrative and to distinguish this narrativized ‘Roth’ from the man who writes the books and lives in Connecticut – a distinction the texts labor to obscure” (Shostak 2004: 159).61 She claims that “this ‘Roth’ not only is indeterminate but also should not be held to any standard of consistency across or within texts [...]” (291f). We also noted that David Brauner, discussing The Facts and Deception, the first of which is referred to as an autobiography while the second is discussed as one discusses novels, argues that “[r]ather than representing these different ‘Roths’ as more or less authentic versions of the author himself, Roth’s treatment of self-representation undermines the dichotomy between what he has called the ‘written and unwritten worlds,’ creating a realm in which, instead of ‘clear-cut differences between the two,’ they seem to converge and overlap” (Brauner 2007: 80). Richard Tuerk, discussing the same two books as Brauner, claims that they “can lead one to wonder which novelist is involved: the real Philip Roth or a fictitious character named Philip Roth?” (Tuerk 2005: 129). According to him, The Facts and Deception “question

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61 It is not evident if Shostak is referring solely to Deception and Operation Shylock – which she mentions previously in the passage – with the phrases “each narrative” and “the texts,” or if she is talking about the Roth Books in general, since she discusses more than just these two book in the chapter in question. However, it does not matter in this context because Shostak’s thesis about Roth’s fictions of self-exposure extends, I argue, to all five books discussed in this study.
the relationship between fiction and nonfiction at the same time that both blur that relationship" (129). He claims that it therefore “seems impossible to know where the character Philip ends and the real Roth begins” (131).

From these reflections one gets the impression that regardless of in which of the Roth Books the name appears (the name that binds the series together) we will face the same predicament: is it Philip Roth or is it not Philip Roth? The answer to this question is often that it is both at the same time or that we cannot know because the author intends to keep us in the dark by blurring the lines between fiction and nonfiction, between the real and the invented, and so on. Such reasoning, however, is yet another example of how the Roth Books are mistakenly treated as if they were a single consistent category of texts assumed to communicate with their readers in the same or a similar manner, rather than being seen as a series of individual works where the uniting issue – the name – is given substance in different ways and for different purposes.

As I aim to demonstrate in this chapter, the question as to why the author includes his own name in these books cannot be answered without attending to the books individually. If the name “Philip Roth” refers to the author with a historical existence outside the work in question or should be interpreted in some other way must be determined in regard to the communicative framework in which the name appears. In this chapter I discuss three of the Roth Books from the assumption that the name is not situated in an autobiographical context and therefore does not refer to the actual, historical author. Rather, in these works – Deception, Operation Shylock, and The Plot Against America – the name “Philip Roth” is given functions within a fictional context. It is used metafictionally in order to underscore and approach the thematic relation between life and literature, and as a way for the author to create effects of “realism.”

**Context and Concepts**

**What’s in a Name?: The Question of Onomastic Identity**

For many narratologists, such as Gérard Genette and Dorrit Cohn among others, the only thing properly separating homodiegetic fiction from autobiographical narratives is the criterion of onomastic identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, if the name of the author (found on the title-page) is the same as the name of the narrator and the major protagonist, we are dealing with a nonfictional narrative rather than a fictional narrative. In their view, the criterion of onomastic identity functions as a mark of genre or narrative
context; it signals how we should read a first-person narrative text: as fictional autobiography or nonfictional autobiography. This argument, as both Genette and Cohn acknowledge, is indebted to Philippe Lejeune’s discussion on what define the autobiographical genre.

Lejeune claims that “for there to be autobiography [...] , the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must be identical” (Lejeune 1989a: 5). We are told that the narrator and the protagonist “are the figures to whom the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance refer within the text [...] ,” and that “the author, represented at the edge of the text by his name, is the referent to whom the subject of enunciation refers by reason of the autobiographical pact” (21). The author is not a person, but “a person who writes and publishes” and consequently straddles “the world-beyond-the-text and the text,” becoming “the connection between the two” (11). For Lejeune, then, the only way to determine if we are reading autobiography is if the “responsibility for all enunciation is assumed by a person who is in the habit of placing his name on the cover of the book” (11). He explains: “What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name” (19).

In his article on fictional and factual narrative, Genette elaborates on Lejeune’s definition of autobiography by “exploiting the possibilities opened up by this triangular relation,” that is, the relation between author, narrator, and protagonist (Genette 1993: 69). Discussing the relation between the author and the narrator, Genette also connects his ideas to the speech-act theory of fictional discourse presented by John Searle, as discussed in Chapter 2. Genette states that it seems to him “that their rigorous identification (A = N), insofar as it can be established, defines factual narrative – in which, in Searle’s terms, the author assumes full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative, and consequently grants no shred of autonomy to any narrator whatsoever. Conversely, their dissociation (A ≠ N) defines fiction, that is, a type of narrative whose veracity is not seriously assumed by the author” (70). From this conclusion it is possible, Genette argues, to find five logically coherent figures.

In autobiography, author, narrator, and character are one and the same. In historical narratives, including biography, the author is identified with the narrator but not the character. In homodiegetic fiction, the author is dissociated from the narrator and the character that share the same identity. In heterodiegetic fiction, the author is dissociated from the narrator and the character, and the narrator is also dissociated from the character. And in heterodiegetic autobiography, the author is dissociated from the narrator but identical with the character. However, Genette acknowledges that certain texts of paradoxical status cannot be connected to any of these
formulas. For instance, the “intentional contradictory pact characteristic of autofiction (‘I, the author, am going to tell you a story of which I am the hero but which never happened to me’)” (76), results in a logically contradictory formula in which author is dissociated from narrator, yet both author and narrator are identical to character.

Genette’s discussion of the triangular relation between author, narrator, and character ends up with a reservation in which the equal signs in his formula are said to, in some cases, be used in “an obviously metaphorical way [...]” (77). He states that with “reference to the general regime of signs, we might also label these relations as semantic (A-C), syntactic (N-C), and pragmatic (A-N)” (78). Of these relations it is the one between author and narrator that concerns the possible distinction between fictional and factual narratives. However, he does not consider this to be an index “allowing us to distinguish fiction from nonfiction, for the relation A-N is not always as manifest as the relation N-C, which is grammatically self-evident, or as the relation A-C, which is onomastically self-evident” (78). In a footnote he then adds another reservation, stating that these self-evident relations are not always guaranteed either, because the hero’s name in a book may be left out or be “questionable” (78-79f).

Clearly Genette does not fail to see the limitations of his model. He is much more reserved in arguing for onomastic identity and the relation between author and narrator as a criterion for distinguishing fiction from nonfiction, or novels from autobiographies, than both Lejeune and Cohn. The latter recognizes this and notes that “Genette tends to draw the line between fictional and nonfictional narrative rather less firmly than I do [...]“ (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 125f). Cohn regards the separation between authors and narrators, as discussed in Chapter 2, as one of her three signposts of fictionality and consequently considers the equation of these agents as a sign of nonfictionality. In her discussion on first-person fiction, she argues that the only thing separating real from fictional self-narration, autobiography from homodiegetic novels, especially so-called autobiographical novels, is “the ontological status of the speaker,” by which she means “his identity or nonidentity with the author in whose name the narrative has been published” (31-32). Following Lejeune, Cohn refers to texts with a nameless narrator as “indeterminate,” yet this does not make her express any reservation about her thesis, as Genette obviously felt compelled to do when confronted with literary examples deviating from what can be explained by his model or incorporated into a simple “formula.”

I have summarized the standpoints of Lejeune, Genette, and Cohn in regard to the issue of onomastic identity because they are to some extent in conflict with the one taken in this thesis. The name on the title-page does
not determine whether we read a book as an autobiography or as an autobiographical novel. The reason the proper name is granted such a central function by these theorists is of course that they approach homodiegetic fiction from the (formal) mimetic model in which fictional narratives are viewed as imitations of factual forms and read as if they were nonfictional narratives. In this model, as discussed in Chapter 2, the narrator becomes an obligatory agent in narrative fiction. And the narrator’s equation with or separation from the author is taken, as we know by now, as a more or less definite sign of a narrative’s nonfictional or fictional nature. In opposition to this view, I assume the function of the name to be dependent on the authorial act behind a narrative text; if we take a narrative text to be an author telling about his or her life, or if the same author for some reason or another names one of his fictional characters after himself.

The name on the title-page can, in the capacity of being a paratextual sign, indicate to us how we are supposed to read a text by creating certain expectations. It cannot, however, determine with any certainty if the text should be read as fiction or nonfiction. It can only do so if we assume the formal mimetic model of fiction and view the separation of the author and the narrator as what defines fictional texts. Yet, the consequence will then be that many texts which are not read as nonfictional would be categorized as nonfiction. We would likely have to categorize all the Roth Books as nonfiction or, at least, argue that some books are nonfictional while others are “indeterminate” or simply not accountable for with this theoretical formula. This, as I aim to demonstrate, is not a viable approach to these texts or to the issue of onomastic identity in general.

Taken together, the Roth Books obviously present a problem for the model separating fiction from nonfiction on the basis of onomastic identification. This is clearly indicated by the Roth critics cited above, who all seem to view the name “Philip Roth” as more or less indeterminate. Yet, these critics do in fact also attempt to distinguish between the many “Roths” present in the Roth Books, yet fail to do so, as they acknowledge themselves. Most Roth critics, as I aim to demonstrate, oscillate between reading Roth within and without quotation marks. To a certain extent,

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62 This is noted by Monica Fludernik when she acknowledges that the model based on onomastic identity “crucially relies on the fact of there being a narrator in the first place,” because if “there is no narrator, there cannot even be a question of establishing his/her identity” (Fludernik 2001: 87). For Fludernik, however, as for most narratologists, this would not be a problem pertaining to first-person narrative fiction in which we can identify a narrating-I. However, as I will argue, what we might identify as a “narrating-I” in fiction should not automatically be equated with a “narrator” in the narratological definition of the word.
they make the same distinctions as Lejeune, Genette, and Cohn, between the author Philip Roth, the narrator Philip Roth, and the character or protagonist Philip Roth. Yet since these critics do not promote a firm line between autobiographical fiction and autobiography, as do the narratologists, the line between the many Roths (author, novelist, narrator, character, protagonist, etc.) becomes blurred, thus creating certain interpretative problems, which my following discussions will acknowledge.

Analysis and Argumentation

The Roth Books and the Problem of Paratexts

When the name of an author appears on the title-page of a book it becomes, as we have noted, a paratextual sign. Such signs may function as an indication of genre or interpretative framework. Yet, as I have maintained, neither the name on the title-page nor other paratexts can with any certainty separate fiction from nonfiction. With that said, I do not discard the notion of onomastic identification altogether but rather the idea that it can be regarded as a fairly stable criterion for distinguishing between texts, as in the models presented by Lejeune, Cohn, and to some extent Genette. Usually paratextual signs, as most would agree, function as signposts, guiding the reader toward a communicative context, but authors can also use them for other purposes, to subvert our expectation, etc.

Leaving the name aside for now, we can remind ourselves that Roth makes extended use in the Roth Books of paratexts: subtitles, prefaces, postscripts, and so on. The relation between text and paratexts translates into a question of what is “inside” respectively “outside” the “main text.” This might become an ontological issue, a matter of separating or equating the world-of-the-text and the-world-outside-the-text. To my mind, however, the relation between text and paratext is most fruitfully approached in pragmatic terms; there is no fixed distinction between what is inside and outside a world, but a fluid line dependent on the communicative purpose of different textual features (names, titles, labels, etc.).

In the Roth Books, this distinction between text and paratext is consciously made into an explicit concern by the author. Roth challenges this dichotomy between “inside” and “outside” in his use of prefaces, postscripts, etc. This will be a recurring issue in this chapter as well as in the following. I will begin my analyses, however, by taking a closer look at the issue of onomastic identity and paratexts with focus on Operation Shylock,
since this book most explicitly complicates any notion we might have about names and of how paratextual signs are supposed to function.

Paratextual Contradictions and the Tale of Two Philips

In Roth’s *Operation Shylock*, subtitled “confession,” paratexts might be said to misguide more than guide the reader. The author uses them to create certain expectations only to subvert those expectations. The paratexts of this book thus function very much in an ironic manner. Gooblar writes that the subtitle and the first line of *Operation Shylock’s* preface place “the book firmly within the conventions of nonfiction” and that this indicates that the book “is meant to be read as nonfiction” and that “the first-person narrator throughout is manifestly identical with the book’s author” (Gooblar 2011: 123). Then he adds: “And yet the plot of the book is so wild, so ridiculous, so contrived even, as to defy belief in its basis in fact” (123). Brauner similarly concludes that Roth is “perversely determined to present a work of fiction as autobiography, within the covers of the book as well as outside it” (Brauner 2007: 91). Kauvar too argues that Roth is once again adopting “the strategy of autobiographical discourse,” but notes that he subverts our expectations (Kauvar 1995: 431).

In the Preface to *Operation Shylock* we are told that for legal reasons a number of facts have been altered and some names have been changed. The book is said to be drawn from notebook journals and is described in the following way: “The book is as accurate an account as I am able to give of actual occurrences that I lived through during my middle fifties and that culminated, early in 1988, in my agreeing to undertake an intelligence-gathering operation for Israel’s foreign intelligence service, the Mossad” (OS 13). Yet, as Royal acknowledges: “Bracketing the story proper are two narrative qualifiers, each of which stands in stark contrast to the other” (Royal 2005: 78). *Operation Shylock* ends with a “Note to the Reader” in which we are told: “This book is a work of fiction.” And this note which concludes the book ends with the words “This confession is false.”

The relation between the Preface and the Note to the Reader has been frequently discussed, which is also the case with the relation between the first and the last line of the concluding note. Royal, for instance, states that “there is the ambiguous meaning behind the final admission”: “Is it the ‘confession’ of fiction uttered in the Note that is false, or is the entire text itself, that professes verisimilitude and whose subtitle bears the word ‘confession,’ that is false?” (79). Royal argues that “Roth gives the reader no indication of and is noticeably – in mischief? – absent concerning any tex-
tual clues” (79) regarding how to interpret this final note. Cooper reasons in a similar way: “With the last sentence, the disclaimer is possibly disclaimed. Since the title of the whole work includes the words, ‘A Confession,’ this last sentence can be read as saying either that the whole confessional work is false or that the confessional ‘Note to the Reader’ is false (and, therefore, the work true) (Cooper 1996: 255).

As we see from these discussions, Roth creates what could be referred to as paratextual contradictions, where different paratexts stand in conflict with one another. Roth cancels out by incongruities the possibility to read any paratext literally. After having finished the book, one will find that the Preface is juxtaposed against the Note to the Reader and that the result is a compositional contradiction that functions as a reference back to the central theme in the book: the “two-facedness” of all existence; a theme I discuss more in my analysis below.

Why a reader most likely gets the feeling of Roth subverting the expectations created by the insertion of elements associated with devices in conventional autobiographical writing is not (mainly) as Gooblar argues that the plot is so wild, ridiculous, and contrived. Of course, we might suspect that the information that he has been working as a spy for the Mossad is said by the author tongue-in-cheek or in order to alert our suspicions, yet reality has often proven to be stranger than fiction. A more consistent answer to the question of why we reject any strict autobiographical reading of Operation Shylock early on is because its author does not give any indication, beside ambiguous and contradictory paratexts, that his intention is to narrate about his own experiences during a certain time in his life and to present the narrative as an accurate account of actual occurrences. Instead the book displays many features that indicate its fictionality. It is noticeable in its formal features, in its conspicuous literary structure and lack of nonfictional evaluation, and not least in the way the narrating-I of autobiography is replaced by an experiencing-I typical of narrative fiction. All this will become evident from my analysis.

What I deem to be paratextual contradictions in Roth’s “confession” is most notably expressed by the author’s treatment of his own name as it appears on the title-page, in the preface, and then throughout the rest of the book. In Operation Shylock, the protagonist named Philip Roth meets “the other Philip Roth,” an imposter using his name and persona. The first sentence of the first chapter reads: “I learned about the other Philip Roth in January 1988, a few days after the New Year, when my cousin Apter telephoned me in New York to say that Israeli radio had reported that I was in Jerusalem attending the trial of John Demjanjuk, the man alleged to be Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka” (OS 17).
From the start, then, Roth plays with the idea of names as stable, coherent, and continuous references to persons or individuals in this novel. Throughout the book, names and naming are made into a central theme and the question of who is who is an acute concern for the characters as well as for the reader of the book. For example, in a scene in which protagonist Roth meets the girlfriend of his imposter, he says to her that he, the fake Roth, must stop using his name. The girlfriend answers by saying, “that’s like asking you to stop using his name” (99). Protagonist Roth gets more upset after her answer and calls his imposter a liar, stating it is a lie that they share the same name, his name, which causes the girlfriend to exclaim: “Your name! Your name! Do you ever, ever, ever think of anything other than your fucking name!” (99). If we should approach the book itself as an answer to this rhetorical question, we could indeed conclude that yes, the name is a constant preoccupation for the author as well as for his protagonist. “What’s in a name?” is a question that undoubtedly guides Operation Shylock, from start to finish.

The premise of the book is contained, or at least hinted at, in its first sentence. The author Philip Roth, sharing the historical Roth’s biography and literary credentials, becomes aware that someone is posing as him in Jerusalem, attending the trial of an alleged Nazi prison guard, John Demjanjuk, and promoting “Diasporism,” an idea grounded in an argument that the only way to avoid a second Jewish Holocaust is for the Jews to return “home” to Europe where they lived before World War II. In the book, the protagonist Roth wonders whether his imposter, whom he names Pipik, or Moishe Pipik, got the idea to pretend to be him during the trial or if he chose the trial for the publicity and the media coverage. The connection between the Demjanjuk trial and the identity-theft that happens to the protagonist can be formulated, as in the book, as “the identity issue at the heart of the case” (52). Visiting the court-room, protagonist Roth looks at the defendant and thinks: “So there he was. Or wasn’t” (62). This contradictory remark can be applied to the identity of “Philip Roth” as well. In the book, Roth is constantly mistaken for his imposter and as readers of the book we are prompted to ask whether or not the name refers to the author of the book, the man with a historical existence outside the text, or not.

Separating or equating the many “Philip Roths” in and outside Operation Shylock has proved to be a complicated matter for previous Roth criticism. I have earlier quoted Debra Shostak’s claim that the Philip Roth that appears in each text, for instance Operation Shylock, must always be read in quotation marks in order to underscore the indeterminacy of this “Roth” who appears in a narrative and to distinguish this narrativized
“Roth” from the real Philip Roth. In her analysis of *Operation Shylock*, however, the separation between the narrativized Roth and the author who wrote the book becomes blurred. This is notable, for example, when Shostak argues that the “the author seems to hold the position of subject,” or when she attribute the thoughts of “the narrator” to the “actual Philip Roth” (Shostak 2004: 178), or when she talks about “the ‘Philip Roth’ who narrates the novel” (my emphasis) (183). In other words, in her reading of the book Shostak does not remain faithful to her initial claim that we must distinguish “Roth” from Roth.

In approaching the same issue as Shostak, Mark Shechner discusses a passage in *Operation Shylock* in which “the character of Philip Roth, that is, Roth 1, [...] is impersonating his impersonator, Roth 2 or Pipik” (Shechner 2003: 142) (see also OS 156-157). Reading this passage, Shechner asks: “But does it matter if we are listening to Philip Roth the character or Philip Roth the author? Is there a separation between them that means something?” (143). His answer is negative. No, he cannot see that there could be a meaningful separation between the two. In a similar fashion, Royal summarizes *Operation Shylock* in the following paradox: “Roth structures the text so that author and subject become indistinguishable, and it appears that the subject writes the author as much as the author writes the subject” (Royal 2005: 77). This statement seems to relate to the paradox discussed by both David Brauner and David Gooblar as the author’s loss of authorial control.

Since Pipik has stolen not just the name “Philip Roth,” but also the protagonist’s biography and life-story, “[Philip] longs for the authorial power to take back his story,” argues Gooblar (Gooblar 2011: 126). When Pipik “disappears” from the plot-line about half-way through the book, this supposedly “restores Philip to the position of author [...]” (126). Gooblar writes: “With Pipik gone, Philip eases back into the role of the writer, and for that task, continuing the book’s seemingly endless succession of impassioned monologues, he find himself lectured on the writer’s ethical responsibilities” (126). Gooblar’s reasoning tends to blur the line between the author in the book, whose identity has been stolen, and the author of the book, the actual Philip Roth. If Philip is thought to be the author of the book, then the authorship concerning *Operation Shylock* is attributed to a character in this same book. Furthermore, if Philip is literally restored in the position of author that must mean that someone else – Pipik, I presume – has previously taken his place as the author of the book.

Many discussions on *Operation Shylock* seem to have sprung from a sense of uncertainty about what should be attributed to the internal perspective of the protagonist in the plot and what to the external position of...
the author as the producer of a literary work of fiction. This conflict is accurately captured by Brauner:

On the one hand, then, *Operation Shylock* is a novel about what one of its chapter titles describes as ‘The Uncontrollability of Real Things’ and the powerlessness of the novelist who gets caught up in a reality not of his making; a novel in which the novelist’s agency disappears and he ‘couldn’t have felt more like everyone else’s puppet’ (329). On the other hand, it is a novel that constantly draws attention to the ways in which characters are themselves puppets being manipulated by the author. (Brauner 2007: 114)

Here, the terms “novelist” and “author” signal a separation between the character in the book, the novelist Philip Roth, and the author of the book sharing the same name. Alan Cooper also attempts to make this distinction when he refers to the real Philip Roth – “the writer we have been talking about for the last few hundred pages” [in the monograph *Philip Roth and the Jews*] – as Roth while referring to “the interior narrator” as Philip (Cooper 1996: 260). However, Cooper’s distinction between the two does not seem valid on all occasions where it is used and it is hard to see what the real grounds are behind his distinction between Roth and Philip:

Beginning in the world of personal memoir, *Roth sets his namesake character* as a man overwrought by those suicidal effects of Halcion that *he had known following his own knee surgery*, and this is made even more *real* by his inveighing against the Upjohn company for placing the volatile tranquilizer on the market. From the perplexing haze of that *real* postsurgical nightmare, Roth slips into another, this time *fictive*, perplexity. Imperceptibly, *author becomes interior narrator*. And narrator Roth has heard about the double in Jerusalem, attending the Demjanjuk trial, propounding Diasporism, already said to have gained for Philip Roth the approval of Lech Walesa. *The sources of this information seem credible enough to further fog the already blurred line between fact and fiction.* Aharon Appelfeld, whom *Roth (both author and narrator)* is actually to interview shortly in Jerusalem, and a supposed cousin who lives there have both informed him of press stories about “him” in Israel. Still unsettled after the Halcion nightmare, *the Roth character* makes a series of decisions against his own interest that slowly pulls him into the aura of his double’s perverse logic. (my emphases) (259)

The distinguishing line between author and interior narrator becomes, as we see here, more or less indeterminate. It is not explained in this passage
when the name “Philip Roth” refers to the author of the book, the interior narrator, the namesake character, or all of them at the same time which causes us to wonder why these agents in or outside the text should be separated in the first place and on what grounds they are separated.

Margaret Smith shares this problem of attempting to separate Roth from Roth in “a fiction layered with Philip Roths” (Smith 2005: 101), but finds that she is unable to do so. She makes the following inventory: “There is Philip Roth author, Philip Roth as double, and Philip Roth as Jewish-American writer who also narrates the events of the novel” (101). Smith explains that Philip Roth the narrator “assures the reader that this is an accurate account of the facts” and that he “details as fact actual occurrences that he claims to have lived through in his middle-fifties” (101). Smith goes on to discuss the contradictory claims in the Note to the Reader which concludes the book and explains that “when Roth states that ‘This book is a work of fiction,’ he refers to parts of the text as being products of the author’s imagination, or facts used fictitiously, declaring finally, ‘This confession is false’” (101). Smith argues that the Note to the Reader is “presented outside the main body of text, thus creating an ambiguity as to which Philip Roth is speaking” (102). However, it is not explained why she attributes the Preface, which is also “outside the main body of text,” to the narrator, yet is ambivalent about who is speaking in the Note to the Reader. Probably because she feels that what is said in the preface about the text’s factual status is not seriously meant by its author.

As we can conclude from these discussions on Operation Shylock, it is important to distinguish between the author of the book and the novelist in the book sharing the same name. As we have seen, many Roth critics do indeed attempt to separate the author from the narrator and the protagonist, yet since these critics simultaneously resist establishing any firm distinction between fiction and autobiography, the many “Roths” in Operation Shylock tend to merge; author becomes narrator or character becomes author, or vice versa. As I explained in Chapter 1, much Roth criticism has tended to blur fiction and autobiography, either from one side or the other. However, in order to be able to separate rather than equate the personal pronoun “I” or the character identified as “Philip Roth” in Operation Shylock we need to be able to separate autobiography from fiction.

Fictional Autobiography or Autobiographical Fiction?

In his discussion on Operation Shylock, Royal writes: “The relationship between autobiography and fiction is most illustrative when it provides us
with a means to observe how authors construct their reality, thereby their lives” (Royal 2005: 88). He argues that Roth’s “confession” “provides us with a rich text in which to do so” and that it is indeed “a ‘confession,’ but one that tells us more about the self, and the very nature of narrative, than it does its subject” (88). Royal claims that “[a]utobiography, as well as fiction, isn’t so much a window into the true lives of individuals as a glimpse into the ways in which the author constructs his or her life” (88).

With this understanding of the shared nature of “fiction” and “autobiography,” Royal is able to argue that these concepts are two sides of the same coin: autobiography contains “fiction” and fiction contains “autobiography.” His claims carry a notable echo of Paul de Man’s often cited view that autobiography is “a figure of reading or of understanding, that occurs, to some degree, in all texts” (Man 1979: 921). This general idea can be found among other Roth critics as well, for example Ben Siegel who argues that whether it is his intention or not, “Roth is making the point that all fiction is ‘grounded in the autobiographical’” (Siegel 2005: 23). This could be a fairly uncontroversial claim if one means simply that authors of fiction in some way or another use their “experience” from life in their writing, but if it directs the focus away from a fictional work toward the author’s “construction of reality,” the object of interpretation becomes the person behind the work, not what he or she has created.

In discussing Roth’s “fictions of self-exposure,” among them Operation Shylock, Shostak argues that in his body of work Roth has “moved from making use of autobiography to foregrounding the problem of distinguishing fiction from autobiography [...]” (Shostak 2004: 168). As an example of how the author has gone about doing this, she mentions his “repeated use of first-person narration” which is described as “a device conventionally intended to heighten verisimilitude by lending the authority of experience to the voice that narrates it as eyewitness and participant” (168). According to Shostak, the first-person narrator, “by the enunciation of ‘I,’ collapses the distance between the participant in the story-events and the norms of the implied author, who in Wayne Booth’s terms, is ‘the sum of his [narrative] choices’” (168). She states that “the first-person narrator by definition promises to inscribe autobiography, to speak the authorial self in an unmediated fashion,” and that this “is the central conceit of all fiction narrated in the first person” (168). Shostak, then, does not just agree with the narratological idea that first-person fiction imitates autobiography; she takes it further and argues that this narrative form invites the reader to read autobiographically: “The autobiographical effect of Roth’s fiction, then, is overdetermined not only by his extra-textual self-references but also by the forms he chooses [...]” (168).
After this conclusion, Shostak notes that she has been “eliding an important distinction,” namely the one “between a narrative whose form represents an autobiographical act – the result of an author who chooses to narrate his or her life experiences – and a narrative interpreted by a reader as autobiographical” (168). However, in the sentences following this statement, the very distinction Shostak emphasizes is destabilized:

The former implies intentionality, and even if the life story is displaced into other characters and events – is fictionalized, that is to say – such a narrative represents an author’s efforts to construct a coherent perspective on the self and the self’s history in the world. Such a narrative may be considered either “autobiography” as typically conceived of, or following Eugene Stelzig, a work of “confessional fiction.” The type of narrative that must be distinguished from these is necessarily fictional, and in regard to the design of the work it matters little to what degree an author’s life story may be buried there. The act of deciphering the clues to an author’s lived experience, however, becomes central to the way in which the reader constructs the meaning of this sort of text, in part because the relation between text and author is emphatically undecidable. (168-169)

At this point, Shostak joins Royal and Siegel (or rather they join her since her monograph was published before their articles): “Any reader can perform an interpretative operation on any text that renders it ‘autobiographical’,“ she writes with explicit reference to de Man, “but certain texts are more prone to such a reading because they cue the reader to detect, accurately or otherwise, traces of the author in the narrative” (169). Her argument regarding Roth and his “fictions of self-exposure” then becomes the surmise that the author “offers both sorts of narrative, and sometimes within a single text” (169). And regarding the relationship between autobiography and fiction, she states: “If every autobiography is a song of myself, every work of fiction that posits displacement and difference from the authorial self is nevertheless a song of myself as well” (171). Yet, if autobiography and fiction are more or less indistinguishable from each other in the end, what does it mean that Roth offers both sorts of narrative? From Shostak’s argumentation it is hard to retain any meaningful distinction between “autobiographical” narratives in which an author narrates his or her experiences and “fiction” which seems to be defined through an author’s “fictionalizing” of his experiences, i.e. by transforming or displacing them into invented characters and events.

The key to Shostak’s view in this discussion on the relationship between fiction and autobiography is captured in the phrase “a narrative whose
form represents an autobiographical act” (my emphasis), quoted above. It is notable that she, as opposed to how I discussed the relationship between narrative forms and interpretative frameworks in the previous chapter, assumes that, for instance, a narrative text cast in the first person prompts or invites autobiographical readings. It is notable that she claims that the form represents the act and therefore translates all first-person fiction into not just formal imitation of autobiography, but “autobiography” in her sense of the word which is not really different from mine. Autobiography is determined by an autobiographical act which is the result of an author who chooses to narrate his or her life experiences or his or her life-story. So far we agree, yet for me the relationship between narrative form and the authorial act is reversed: any autobiographical reading is dependent on the reader identifying the authorial act as autobiographical. In other words, the reader must interpret the narrative as someone narrating about his or her life. This is what distinguishes autobiography from narrative fiction, not their common ground, as Shostak at one point acknowledges before retreating to her poststructuralist postion.

The question that demands to be answered now is how, in practice, we evaluate the authorial act and determine the interpretative framework.

Determining Relevance: Fiction versus Autobiography

In Chapter 2 I discussed how relevance can be seen as a guiding principle for establishing the communicative context and how fictional communication tends to flout the rules and norms of a “natural” speech situation. As I explained, fiction can be identified and characterized by the way it deviates from ordinary narrative communication and the relevance-criteria present in natural storytelling in which someone is telling something to someone else on some particular occasion and for some purpose. In autobiographical discourse, as I intend to discuss in this section by comparing The Facts with Operation Shylock, relevance is determined differently than in a work of narrative fiction. Contrasting Roth’s “novelist autobiography” with the author’s “confession” we can discern how what is included in an autobiography is made relevant in ways distinctly different from how we determine the relevance of what we encounter in for instance a novel or some other fictional text.

The Facts, as I have described the book in conscious opposition to how it is often discussed in Roth criticism, is a fairly conventional autobiography in which Roth, the author, is narrating (about) parts of his own life. The only reason we might have to characterize it as unconventional, which
is how it is introduced on the back of the book’s dust-jacket,\(^{63}\) is that Roth frames the autobiographical narrative with a letter-correspondence of sorts. As explained in Chapter 1, the book begins with a letter from Roth to his fictional alter ego Nathan Zuckerman in which he presents the motivation for writing the story of how he became an author, and it ends with “Zuckerman’s” reply in which he criticizes Roth’s attempt at autobiographical writing. The relation between the “letter-correspondence” and the autobiographical narrative has been much discussed and I too discuss the structure of the book at length in the following chapter. Therefore I leave this aspect of *The Facts* aside for now. My immediate focus is instead the autobiographical narrative itself and how Roth constructs a narration which adheres to what we come to expect of traditional autobiography regarding topic, motivation, chronology, and retrospection.

Despite displaying a typical self-consciousness concerning the project of autobiographical writing, Roth presents the motivation behind the book in the opening letter to Zuckerman, which I view as a preface of sorts. We are told that the book sprang out of a severe depression and that this is what led the author to his “nonfictional approach” (F 7): “In order to recover what I had lost I had to go back to the moment of origin. I found no one moment of origin but a series of moments, a history of multiple origins, and that’s what I have written here in the effort to repossess life” (5).

If we connect these words to the book’s subtitle we might say that the autobiographical narrative in Roth’s “novelist’s autobiography” answers the question “how I became who I am,” or more specifically, “how I became Philip Roth, Jewish-American novelist.”\(^ {64}\) This is not just a motivation pertaining to the author’s personal and psychological motives, but also a communicative evaluation indicating to the reader the point of the narrative and thereby how we as readers are to determine relevance in what we are about to read.

Turning to the autobiographical narrative which takes up approximately two-thirds of the book, we can note that each chapter – chronologically organized, taking us from the author’s childhood to the publication of his breakthrough-novel and the death of his first wife – answers the question

\(^{63}\) *The Facts* is the unconventional autobiography of a writer who has reshaped our idea of fiction – a work of compelling candor and inventiveness, instructive particularly in its revelation of the interplay between life and art* (F dust-jacket).

\(^{64}\) In Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as a genre, already quoted in Chapter 1, p. 12, it says that autobiography involves “a particular realization of that discourse, in which the question ‘who am I’ is answered by a narrative that tells ‘how I became who I am’” (Lejeune 1989b: 124).
posed above. From a consistently retrospective position, the “I” of the narrative text looks back and retraces the moments of origin which presumably made him who he is: his childhood during the war, his college experience, meeting his wife (who turns out to be “the greatest creative writing teacher” on account of her deceptiveness), and the publications of his first three books up until his critical and public break-through with *Portnoy’s Complaint* in the late sixties.

After this summarized sketch of the autobiographical narrative contained in *The Fact*, it should be clear that I take the text to correspond to what Roth himself calls a non-fictional approach. There is no reason why we should doubt that the “I” identified as Philip Roth should be taken to refer to the author of the book since the authorial act can scarcely be interpreted as anything but autobiographical, conforming to what we expect from a traditional autobiography, i.e. someone narrating in retrospection about his or her life in chronological order with the intention of constructing a coherent textual identity answering the question “how I became who I am.” Each chapter can be said to conform to this topic of presentation. With Skalin’s words, relating to natural narratives, one could say that “the details of the presented chain of events and circumstances are realized as having relevance for what has been intended by the sender and accepted by the receiver as being the topic of the narrative” (Skalin 2011: 105).

*Operation Shylock*, on the other hand, seems to refrain from such motivation and violate the principle of relevance of the kind characteristic of literary and mimetic fiction. The sentence in the preface which describes the book as an accurate account of actual occurrences the author lived through during a particular time in his life could initially be seen as stating a topic and a motivation analogous to the one found in the opening letter of *The Facts*. If his novelist’s autobiography answers the question “How I became the Jewish-American novelist Philip Roth” then his “confession,” one might assume, judging from the preface, answers the question “How I, Philip Roth, became a spy for Israel’s foreign intelligence service, the Mossad.” Yet, as we have mentioned, it becomes clear early on in the latter book that it deviates from the autobiographical frame set up in the preface and subverts our expectations. Instead of the backward-direction characteristic of autobiographical narratives, such as the main narrative in *The Facts*, the narration in *Operation Shylock* displays a direction forward, characteristic of narrative fiction, and the communicative act behind the work does not rely on topic or motivation as with natural or most non-fictional narratives. There is no topic organizing the speeches, the actions and thoughts of the “I” in the text. What we have is “a stream of life presented moment by moment as in drama” (116), as Skalin puts it in his discussion.
on first-person fiction as mimesis demonstrated with the example of Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885). With reference to Operation Shylock one might say we are metaphorically presented with “the uncontrollability of real things” as the Jungian phrase (that is the title of one chapter in the book) reads. Still, even if narrative fiction violates the principle of relevance governing ordinary communication and nonfictional communication, any given fictional work must, as was noted in the previous chapter, be dependent on some established sense of relevance. In Operation Shylock no single section of the book is motivated in regard to a topic of narration but rather in regard to the book’s composition as a fictional work, its literary and thematic structure.

The Sense of Direction: Relevance in Operation Shylock

In this chapter, and to a certain extent in the following chapters as well, I keep coming back to what Richard Walsh refers to as a “critical double vision that separates the intrafictional perspective from a larger sense of the fiction as literary work […]” (Walsh 2007: 70), or what Skalin divides into an “internal” approach and an “external” approach to fiction (Skalin 2011: 102). The internal approach is characterized by its “as if”-structure, by viewing fiction “as if informing about a world in which the reader is positioned” (102) while the external approach advocates an aesthetic view stating that “we appreciate works, such as novels and so on, and not worlds even if they are fictional” (117). Both Walsh and Skalin are concerned with a problem within narrative theory put forth by such concepts as the “narrator,” namely that the theory itself directs the focus of interpretation inside the frame of fiction.65

Determining relevance in narrative fiction should then be a matter of reading the sentences of a text with regard to the larger sense of the fiction as literary work. When determining relevance in fiction we understand what we are reading in relation to the sense-making operation governing the practice of fiction, and that this sense-making operation is dependent

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65 Skalin is critical of the idea that “[f]iction reading implies a ‘recentering’ into a possible world” and that “[b]eing in it the interpreter makes sense of it according to ‘the principle of minimal departure’. See (Ryan 1991: 48-60), and also (Walton 1990: 144-161) on the ‘reality principle’” (102n). Walsh is critical of the same conceptualization of fiction which claims that we read fictional narratives as “a willing suspension of disbelief” (Walsh 2007: 70). In objection to this view, he argues that “disbelief is essential to reading a work of fiction as fictional […]” (70).
on the acknowledgment that we are reading a literary work of fiction, characterized by its aesthetic properties, among other things.

That we determine relevance differently when reading fiction from when we are reading nonfictional or natural narratives was argued in the previous chapter with references to Walsh’s work. One important way to understand this difference is to comprehend the literary organization of the fictional work, how its “material” is made relevant by literary means. Except for a statement within parenthesis that the literary work is “characterized by its style, technique, themes, symbolism, etc.” (70), Walsh does not elaborate the literary, aesthetic aspect of fictions. Nor does he connect the idea of the literary work to his discussion on the relevance of fictions.

As a way to characterize what Skalin labels the “external” and “aesthetic” approach to fiction, he draws attention to one important and illustrative characteristic of literary works which he calls the “spatial” aspect of the work. Skalin writes: “This aspect draws attention to the relation between certain elements in a work of fiction, not its temporal dimension, which is the traditional plot, but so to speak in how they relate in the discourse seen as a plain surface such as we see a painting on a canvas” (122). The analogy leads him to refer to it as the “canvas-aspect,” he sees as related to what Roman Jakobson discussed as the principle of equivalence.66 Regarding the aesthetic approach, the painting in Skalin’s metaphor indicates, as he argues, “that appreciating literary fiction as art is paying heed to something real and not fictive” (122). In other words, “the real object of appreciation is the discourse as work and not ‘something told about’” (123) when we are reading a work of fiction.

Reading Operation Shylock, its “spatiality” can be illuminated through a look at the book’s literary and thematic structure which is linked to one leitmotif in particular: the doppelgänger. This motif is not just essential to the book’s plot but can be characterized as the main compositional principle of Roth’s work. Here we should remind ourselves that Operation Shylock, in early drafts before publication, was entitled Duality.67 This title, though not very catchy and quite blunt, goes to the core of Roth’s thematic concerns and his choice of the central motif.

Already in the quotes forming the book’s credo(s), usually a way for an author to establish the main themes in his or her work, the idea of duality is hinted at. “So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until

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67 For more on the early drafts of Operation Shylock, see (Shostak 2004: 121-122, 184) and (Gooblar 2011: 111-112).
daybreak” from Genesis 32:24 is the first one (OS 11). The second one is a quote from Søren Kierkegaard: “The whole content of my being shrieks in contradiction. Existence is surely a debate...” (11). With these quotes, Roth has from the start established some thematic issues present throughout the book, mainly the idea of inner contradictions illustrated by the idea of a “double.” That this notion of duality is present also in the book’s overall structure is clear just from a survey of its table of contents. Between the preface and the epilogue followed by the Note to the Reader, the book consists of two parts. Elaine M. Kauvar writes that “the entire structure of Operation Shylock – its permutations in tone, its dialectical strategies, its warring doubles – not only mirrors the interplay of unconscious and conscious realms but reflects the ‘vicious debate’ which for the author characterizes all of life (149)” (Kauvar 1995: 431). However, Kauvar does not approach Operation Shylock as a literary work in any aesthetic sense. Instead her focus on analytic psychology makes her analyse literary motifs and literary characters within a framework of that theory. For instance, she argues that “Jung’s theory suggests that Moishe Pipik images an unconscious feeling lodged in Philip Roth’s psyche” (436). Kauvar does not seem interested in Operation Shylock as a work of fiction, but rather reads the book like something akin to a case-study involving a real person.

The leitmotif of the doppelgänger is connected with the author’s thematic concern with duality and doubles in different ways, what in the book is referred to as “two-facedness.”68 In order to demonstrate how Operation Shylock is structured around “doubles” and opposites and to what end, we might look more closely at how this compositional principle is reflected in its representation of characters and in its major themes: the nature of identity and the relationship between subjectivity and reality, and between the writer’s words and the life the writer lives.69

By now, it should be clear that Operation Shylock is concerned with questions of individual and collective identity. Yet so far I have mainly

68 It should be noted, as Brauner among others has done, that “Operation Shylock was by no means Roth’s first treatment of the theme of the double either: from ‘Eli, the Fantastic’ (in which the protagonist exchanges clothes with an ultra-Orthodox Holocaust survivor in a symbolic act of identification with the history from which his own, thoroughly assimilated community had tried to dissociate itself) through the multiple doubling strategies of The Counterlife, it has been a leitmotif in his work from the start” (Brauner 2007: 94). Cooper writes: “A recurrent feature of all Roth’s writing had been the appearance of the doppelganger” (Cooper 1996: 252).

69 For a discussion on Operation Shylock in connection with Bakhtinian dialogism, see (Shostak 2004: 6-7, 10, 12-13). See also the discussion on Shostak’s main thesis in Countertexts, Counterlives in my introduction to Chapter 4, p. 121-122.
discussed the relationship between protagonist Roth and his imposter in the book, Pipik, the other Philip Roth. This is by far the most explicit way in which identity is made a central theme in the book, and it is in regard to the Roth-Pipik plot the doppelgänger-motif is first established. The relationship between the protagonist and his imposter puts forth many questions concerning the self and its other, individuality and authenticity, subjectivity and objectivity, etc. As protagonist Roth becomes involved in Pipik’s plot, he begins impersonating his impersonator, letting other characters mistake Roth for Pipik.

The name, Moishe Pipik, is of course not chosen by chance. For the protagonist in the book, the name springs out of his childhood: “Moishe Pipik – a name I had learned to enjoy long before I had ever read of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde or Golyadkin the First and Golyadkin the Second, a name that more than likely had not been uttered in my presence since I was still a child […], back when one or another of us pint-sized boys, having said or done something thought to be definingly expressive of an impish inner self, would hear the loving aunt or the mocking uncle announce, ‘Is this Moishe Pipik!’” (OS 115-116). This name, we are told, translates literally to “Moses Bellybutton” and it lacks a fixed meaning. In the protagonist’s account we are told that it “connoted something slightly different to every Jewish family […]” (116). And when Roth is explaining to his imposter why he refers to him by the name Pipik, he states: “Pipik was protean, a hundred different things” (185).

For Roth, the author, the name provides many links to his overall investigation into the nature of personal and collective identity. Royal, for example, explains that “it is no accident that […] the bellybutton, or the pipik, becomes one of the most striking images in Operation Shylock,” because it “can be seen as one our most primitive links to identity” (Royal 2005: 85). In the book, the name Pipik denotes if not a hundred, then at least several different things. For one, it is, as we know, the name protagonist Roth gives his double, the man posing as him and who is strangely identical to himself – at least physically. On a metaphorical level, it becomes the name referring to the “impish” inner self of the novelist in the book. In the Epilogue, protagonist Roth imagines a letter from Pipik’s girlfriend Jinx to himself, yet concludes that it can only be written by Pipik (OS 363). The imagined letter is interpreted as evidence of Pipik’s continued existence, and it becomes clear for the reader that “Pipik” in this context refers to something inside not outside the protagonist.

However, the idea of doubles is extended in Operation Shylock. It does in some way or another relate to all the book’s major characters. Most of them are not just themselves but also someone else. John Demjanjuk is
Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka, yet he is not. Jinx is Pipik’s girlfriend, nurse and recovering anti-Semite, yet she is also an embodiment of Roth’s dead wife. Smilesburger is an old jeweller but turns out to be a Mossad-agent. And the list goes on. Protagonist Roth also has other “doubles.” Some of these doubles connect with the book’s thematic concern with duality in different ways than the ones I have already established.

A recurring theme in Roth’s body of work is of course Jewish identity and in *Operation Shylock* this issue relates in several ways to the idea of duality and “two-facedness.” At one point in the book, Roth’s writer-colleague Aharon Appelfeld is described as his “double,” yet in a different way from how Pipik is his alleged double. In the scene in question Pipik wants to know why Roth takes Aharon seriously but not him:

> Because, I thought, of Aharon’s and my distinctly radical twoness, a condition with which you appear to have no affinity at all; because we are anything but the duplicates that everyone is supposed to believe you and me to be; because Aharon and I each embody the reverse of the other’s experience; because each recognizes in the other the Jewish man he is not; because of the all but incompatible orientations that shape our very different lives and very different books and that result from antithetical twentieth-century Jewish biographies; because we are the heirs jointly of a drastically bifurcated legacy – because the sum of all these Jewish antinomies, yes, we have much to talk about and are intimate friends. (200-201)

Here the idea of the “double” is connected with a kind of Janus-face; oppositions representing two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Aharon’s function in the book can then be said to be to represent the other side of Roth’s Jewish and artistic identity. Quite similarly, the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians occupies a special place in the book and its discussions on Jewishness. The political and religious conflict exemplifies another kind of “twoness” or two-facedness. Characters representing each side of the conflict are able through long speeches to defend their positions in opposition to the other.

Early on in the book, before protagonist Roth has met his imposter, he momentarily thinks that the double is a reflection of his many literary alter egos: “It’s Zuckerman, I thought, whimsically, stupidly, escapistly, it’s Kepesh, it’s Tarnopol and Portnoy – it’s all of them in one, broken free of print and mockingly reconstituted as a single satirical facsimile of me” (*OS* 34). Later on in the book, Roth once again reflects on the relationship between his novels and his existence, between impersonation in life and impersonation in literature: “I could understand the temptation to quash
oneself and become imperfect and a sham in entertainingly new ways – I had succumbed too, and not just a few hours earlier with the Ziads and then with Gal, but more sweepingly even than that in my books: looking like myself, sounding like myself, even laying claim to convenient scraps of my biography, and yet, beneath the disguise of me, someone entirely other” (180). This sentence, presented as the thoughts of the protagonist, can be interpreted as a comment on the book itself, as a metafictional reflection on what the author of Operation Shylock aims to achieve by including his name and scraps of his biography in a book, namely to create a literary character – someone entirely other – in the disguise of himself. “Philip Roth,” the protagonist, is therefore best described as a metafictional variation on the doppelgänger-motif and the idea of doing so constitutes a way for the author to further probe the many connections between the written and the unwritten world.

Forming the Act: Narrative Technique in Operation Shylock

Even if formal features and narrative techniques are never inherently fictional or factual, certain forms might be taken to be congenial with certain communicative practices, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In this section, I approach the relation between forms and frames with reference to Operation Shylock. More specifically I analyse Roth’s extensive employment of narrative techniques associated with a fictional language-game and argue that these techniques guide us towards a fictional frame of interpretation.

Operation Shylock is often characterized by what Brauner calls its “many long set-piece speeches” (Brauner 2007: 114). The characters are given much room to speak in their “own” voices, yet “whether the speaker is ‘Roth’ himself, Pipik, Posseski, Ziad, Supposnik or Smilesburger, the tone is always quintessentially Rothian” (168), as Brauner notes. Besides sections of monologues of varied length, Operation Shylock consists to a large degree of dialogue. Its descriptions of settings can also be filled with an overkill of details and information. The most striking feature of Operation Shylock, however, and what could be seen as a transgression of the limitations of traditional autobiography, is the many instances of free indirect speech. Therefore, the issue I will discuss here is the rendering of thoughts belonging to the “experiencing-I” through free indirect speech.

Henrik Skov Nielsen explains that the “great majority of the descriptions of free indirect speech either question or reject the idea that free indirect speech should also be able to take place in the first-person narrator’s rendering of her own previous thoughts” (Nielsen 2004: 138), yet he men-
tions Dorrit Cohn as an exception. Nielsen himself argues that “free indirect speech – as the phenomenon is known in third-person narrative – can also occur in first-person fictional narrative,” meaning that in “first-person narrative fiction the main character has a voice with idiolects and personal characteristics, and this voice may interfere in the presentation of the narrative just as the characters’ voices may interfere in the presentation of the narrative in the heterodiegetic mode” (138). For Nielsen, then, free indirect speech makes possible a kind of dual voice in first-person fictional narrative, meaning that the words and thoughts of the experiencing-I, distinct from the narrating-I, may appear and in a sense interfere in the presentation of the narrative.70

My intention here is not to subscribe to Nielsen’s view of free indirect speech in first-person fiction. What interests me regarding this discussion is the very notion of an experiencing-I, which underlines not just the difference between fictional texts and autobiographical texts but also contradicts or complicates the (formal) mimetic model of first-person fiction. By postulating a necessary homodiegetic narrator one must hold that first-person narrative fiction always has a narrating-I which presents itself at times as a narrated-I or an experiencing-I. Yet, this idea becomes problematic when, among other things, the thoughts of the experiencing-I are rendered in the text and these thoughts turn out to be mistaken, or in other instances when the experiencing-I remains oblivious to what the so-called narrating-I must know. This issue connects to what Skalin discusses as “the logic of the presentational perspective” and his argument that narrative fiction displays “a direction forwards without a previous backwards movement,” as opposed to natural narratives in which “such backwards operation motivates the subsequent forward moving narrative element as having been chosen

70 Nielsen discusses an example from Transparent Minds in which Cohn analyses a passage from Iris Murdoch’s novel A Severed Head (1961). In the example, the “narrator,” according to Cohn, believes he is about to get caught cheating by his wife: “We stood thus for a second, paralysed. Then I pulled myself roughly out of the embrace. / It could only be Antonia. She had changed her mind about going to the country, and had decided to come and look the furniture over before our interview tomorrow” (quoted in Nielsen 2004: 137, Cohn 1978: 166). Commenting on the passage, Cohn states: “Seconds later the narrator finds out that the intruder is not his wife after all. What happens here? The last sentence looks every bit like a narrative statement; yet it can only be the quotation of a (mistaken) thought of the moment” (166). Commenting on Cohn’s commentary, Nielsen argues that “one might also say that when Cohn writes ‘Seconds later the narrator finds out,’ she is being a bit imprecise, in that according to Cohn’s distinction between the narrating and the experiencing self (167), it must be the latter who seconds later (than the thought, not the narrative of it) discovers the mistake.” (137)
from a locus before them, that is, from a position from where the subject of the presentation is stated” (Skalin 2011: 105).

In *Operation Shylock*, the narrative perspective in the book aims mostly to reflect the experience of the protagonist and his entrapment in his own subjective reality. To achieve this effect, the author leaves the reader continually in the dark about what is going on since the protagonist, through whom everything that happens in the book is filtered, is himself oblivious to what is really happening. One of many illustrative examples is the scene in which protagonist Roth is standing in the doorway to his hotel room trying to get Pipik out of the room. Yet before he makes it up to his floor, Roth notices someone is following him:

When my quarry turned into the corridor off the landing I proceeded on up the stairs to the hotel’s top floor, where my room was situated midway down the hall. I moved as quietly as I could to the door of my room and listened there for sounds from within, while back by the staircase someone was standing and looking my way – someone who had been following only steps behind me while I had been following Demjanjuk’s son. A plainclothesman, of course! Stationed here by the police and watching out for John junior’s safety. Or is this the plainclothesman shadowing me, imagining that I’m Moische Pipik? Or is he stalking Pipik, thinking that Pipik is me? Or is he here to investigate why we are two and what we two are conspiring to do? (my emphasis) (OS 178)

These types of questions reflecting the protagonist’s thought-process are very common in the book. In this case Roth, the protagonist, turns out to be mistaken about the man watching him, and like him the reader is led to believe that the man is a plainclothesman. During the heated conversation between Roth and Pipik we are reminded that the man is still there: “While he spoke I glanced back towards the staircase, and there, to my relief, I saw just the person I was looking for [...] It was the plainclothesman.” (181). However, on the next page, Roth is approached by the man and the fact that his assumption about this stranger is mistaken becomes painfully (and comically, for us readers) obvious:

“Sure,” I said, and as the plainclothesman approached, I smiled to let him know that, although he was needed, the situation was not yet out of control. He leaned close to my ear and mumbled something. He spoke in English but because of his accent the softly uttered words were unintelligible at first.

“What?” I whispered.
“Want me to blow you?” he whispered back.

“Oh, no – thanks, no. My mistake.” And I stepped into the room and pulled the door firmly shut. (182)

As we can see the “plainclothesman” turns out to be someone who has mistaken Roth’s lingering in the doorway as a sexual invitation. The function of this shadowy character is among other things to underscore protagonist Roth’s paranoia and his inability to perceive reality outside his own mind, yet it is also compositionally and realistically motivated in the plot as a means for the author to explain why Roth the character goes into the room where his antagonist is lying on the bed.

Relating to the discussion about the “experiencing-I” in first-person fiction, a sentence such as “It was the plainclothesman” provides a clear indication of the problem. If we postulate a narrator who in retrospection narrates something he at the moment of narration knows to be false, it ultimately leads to the conclusion that the narrator is unreliable in an epistemological (rather than ethical) sense. If taken as a narrative statement in which someone is telling about something that happened it becomes false information, but the point here is not information but the author’s representation of a character’s train of thought. “It was the plainclothesman” would, with Cohn’s words, be a “quotation of a (mistaken) thought of the moment” (Cohn 1978: 166). This thought belongs to the character presented as an experiencing-I and cannot, without interpretative problems, be attributed to a narrator’s or narrating-I’s account of the situation.

It is not, then, a matter of narratorial unreliability but rather a case of the protagonist being a “fallible filter.”71 This becomes even more obvious

71 Seymour Chatman uses the term fallible filter, or fallible filtration, when “a character’s perceptions and conceptions of the story events, the traits of the other characters, and so on, seem at odds with what the narrator is telling or showing” (Chatman 1990: 149). Here, the term fallible filter simply refers to how we are alerted to a character’s misperception or misconception of events and situations in a fictional work. It is the author of the book, through his or her representation of character, who makes us aware of possible discrepancies between for instance this character’s perception, his or her subjective thoughts, and what other characters are said to perceive or think. This is quite comically pointed out in the book when the author lets the protagonist’s thoughts “telepathically” become his antagonist’s thoughts. First Roth the character ponders why no one is attempting to kidnap Demjanjuk’s son, then Pipik is said to plan this very kidnapping, telling Roth that it was he who gave him the idea. This metafictional feature, drawing attention to the text as an authorial construction, underscores the fact that behind the characters the author is pulling the strings, smiling in mischief.
in another example from the same chapter. In this scene, protagonist Roth is looking out his hotel window and sees “[a] figure, a man, running across the dimly lit pavement not twenty-five feet from my window” (OS 213). Roth sees the man running crouched over but recognizes him anyway: “I stood up at the desk. ‘Pipik!’ I shouted, flinging open the window. ‘Moische Pipik, you son of a bitch!’” (213). However, in the following passage it becomes clear that it is not Roth’s imposter running in the street, but someone else: “He turned to look toward the open window and I saw that in either hand he held a large rock. He raised the rocks over his head and shouted back at me. He was masked. He was shouting in Arabic. Then he ran on” (213). Protagonist Roth then sees several other masked men run by before the street is empty and he goes back to work at his desk. Obviously it is never stated explicitly that it is not Pipik, but likewise the effect should be that the reader should conclude that Roth, the protagonist, once again has read the situation wrong from the start.

What these examples illustrate is the view that the experiencing-I in first-person fiction cannot be seen as a version of the so-called “narrating-I,” his earlier self, but rather should be taken as independent of any naturalized narrative situation in which a “narrator” is telling about himself. With these things in mind, it becomes counterintuitive to view Operation Shylock either as autobiography in which someone is telling about his life or a fictional autobiography in which someone is pretending to narrate his life. Even if Roth, the author, includes what is usually referred to as a narrating-I in a present narrative situation – in sentences such as “I still have it. I am looking at it while I write” (my emphases) (OS 221) – we cannot conclude that the presence of such sentences, simply presenting the motif of narration, results in the presence of someone narrating the story from inside the frame of fiction, as if the book was an account of his past experiences (actual or invented) and that we interpret the text accordingly.

“Philip Roth”: A Narrating Character?

As should be clear from my previous discussion on Operation Shylock, I do not agree with those narratologists’ viewing the experiencing-I as a version of the narrating-I, as a previous self narrated in retrospection by a first-person narrator. This view is expressed by, for example, Göran Nieragden who argues that a homodiegetic narrator “has an identity on the story level (= the experiencing I)” and “one on the discourse level (= the narrating I), where he or she can function as focalizer” (Nieragden 2002:
Instead, I argue in favour of the view that what we might call an experiencing-I in fiction can hardly be seen as someone narrated about from a (natural) narrative situation because, as my examples from Roth’s “confession” aimed to demonstrate, there is no topic organizing the speeches, the actions and thought of the “I” in the text. What we have instead, as Skalin explains when arguing for the mimetic nature of narrative fiction in first-person and third-person, is “a stream of life presented moment by moment as in drama” (Skalin 2011: 116).

However, a possible objection to this argumentation might be that first-person narrative fiction often includes a narrative situation analogous to the one we find in a conventional autobiography, where someone, an “I,” acknowledges his retrospective position in regard to his earlier self. It is true, as I mentioned above, that Operation Shylock contains certain parts very similar to an autobiographical account where we identify a speaker narrating from a retrospective position about himself. However, what we might perceive as a “narrating-I” of this kind should not be equated, as I have argued, with a “narrator” in the narratological definition of the term. Rather, sections in first-person fiction where a character is narrating retrospectively about something should be understood instead as the author’s representation of a narrating character.

This is the argument regarding first-person fiction presented by Richard Walsh. Walsh, as we remember from Chapter 2, argues that “authors do not pretend to be narrating characters, they represent narrating characters” (my emphasis) (Walsh 2007: 77). His view of narrating characters becomes most evident, I believe, regarding the concept of covert narration as discussed by narratologists such as Dorrit Cohn. Walsh asks if there can “be such a thing as covert narration, even between passages of overt narration?” (80). His answer is that the idea of covert narration is built on the assumption that “narrating characters must have continuity of being […],” and that idea itself exemplifies “an instance of criticism internalizing a literal model of the logic of representation and then using it against the text itself” (80). The consequence of such notions as covert narration is that “even when the representation of a narrator is not sustained, the whole

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72 The matter of focalization in first-person fiction is not an uncontroversial subject in narrative theory. See discussion between Gerald Prince and James Phelan in New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective (eds. van Peer & Chatman 2001): “A Point of View on Point of View or Refocusing Focalization” (Prince 2001: 43-50) and “Why Narrators Can Be Focalizers – and Why It Matters” (Phelan 2001: 51-64).

73 See Cohn’s discussion on the narrator and covert narration in “Signpost of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 128-129).
discourse is interpreted as a unified narrating instance because the narrator, a local representational issue of the language, is translated into its global, literal source” (80). Walsh’s alternative is the idea of “an intermittent narrating character” (81). He argues that in representational terms, “any narrating character is the source of the narrative language, certainly: but then representation itself is only a product of the fictional deployment of the same language” (80). Therefore we need to “understand these relations hierarchically, in that the language of fiction is its means of representation, and representation is its means of ascribing that language to a narrator” (80). The idea of covert narration, on the other hand, assumes that we treat “a represented instance of narration as ontologically prior to the language doing the representing” (80).

Walsh considers his notion of the intermittent narrating character to be characteristic of “homodiegetic narrators” in general since, as he claims: “They are far from being ubiquitous presences […]” (81). His main example is Huck Finn and instances of direct speech in Mark Twain’s novel. In these parts Huck is not covert but completely absent, argues Walsh. Huck is not “a factor in the mediation of this language” (81). For Walsh, this example confirms his thesis regarding narrating characters, namely: “local elimination of the narrator rather than local creation of a narrator” (81).

Though I consider Walsh’s idea of (intermittent) narrating characters to be valuable regarding how a novel, as he puts it himself, “invokes a narrator in the interest of some local effect” (81), it becomes somewhat problematic to simply equate the “I” of first-person fiction with a narrating character. Walsh seems to characterize Huck globally as a narrating character, sometimes present and at other times absent, yet in what sense is he narrating? As we remember, to represent a narration in Walsh’s terminology is a matter of discursive imitation. If Huck, then, is a narrating character then Mark Twain is representing a character that is narrating. If we extend this idea to first-person fiction in general it would imply that characters such as Huck Finn are viewed as representations of someone performing the act of narration. However, as my examples from Operation Shylock made clear, the “I” in a narrative text we globally consider first-person fiction cannot simply be considered to be narrating at all times. My suggestion is therefore that the “I” in first-person fiction can be represented as a narrating character but should not be defined as such.

To continue this discussion I will in the following discuss The Plot Against America which I consider to be a first-person fiction in which the author to a large extent represents the “I” as a narrating character. To my mind, this book aptly demonstrates why first-person fiction in general cannot be seen as formal imitation of factual forms; as mimicking autobo-
graphical discourse. However, *The Plot Against America* also forces us to acknowledge that first-person fiction often makes use of formal features and conventions associated with autobiography in different ways.

**Autobiography, Formal Mimesis, and *The Plot Against America***

*The Plot Against America* has an outspoken counterfactual premise, as I acknowledged in Chapter 1. The book presents an alternative history of the years 1940-42 as well as presenting Roth’s own biography in a rewritten version. As Hana Wirth-Nesher notes, the author imagines an alternative history which “impacts directly on his personal family autobiography” (Wirth-Nesher 2007: 168). This fusion of counterfactual history and autobiography can be seen as Roth’s contribution to the novelistic genre of alternative history (as I discuss more in Chapter 4) and it has of course been the defining aspect for critics attempting to characterize Roth’s novel. Many critics have therefore focused on the relation between the actual, historical Roth and the counterfactual “Roth” presented as a child in the book. In his review of *The Plot Against America*, J.M. Coetzee states that “if the author Philip Roth had meant to write about a fictive child whose sole existence is between the pages of a novel, he would not have called that child Philip Roth, born in the same year as himself and of parents with the same name as his” (Coetzee 2008 [2007]: 233). Coetzee then goes on to claim that: “In some sense the young Philip Roth about whose childhood we read continues his life in the life of Philip Roth who six decades later not only narrates the child’s story but also writes it too” (233). Following Coetzee, Catherine Morley argues that “[y]oung Roth is a fabricated extension of the real, ‘unwritten’ Roth” (Morley 2008: 142), that “the child-narrator is based in some part upon Roth himself” and therefore “actually existed historically” (Morley 2008: 143).

Although it is easy to agree with the notion that the child portrayed in *The Plot Against America* is based in some part upon the actual author, I find it harder to reconcile with the idea that the child in the book in some sense continues his life as the real Philip Roth who wrote the book. In the following I will discuss how Roth’s novel resists being characterized as either an autobiography of the real, historical Philip Roth or as a “false

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74 In Chapter 4 I discuss the question of counterfactuality with reference to *The Plot Against America* and argue that for something to function as counterfactual it must counter the factual in the sense of replacing what happened with what could have happened. See Chapter 4, p. 144-155.

75 See also (Kauvar 2011: 142).
memoir” (Safer 2006: 150) or “fictional autobiography” (Wirth-Nesher 2007: 169), as some will have it. The Plot Against America, I aim to demonstrate, complicates attempts to interpret the “I” identified as “Philip Roth” as its narrator in the sense of a narrating agent and the source of the narrative discourse. If we interpret the book in this manner certain episodes and aspects of its overall construction would create interpretative predicaments which would not arise if we characterize the book as first-person narrative fiction in the mimetic sense promoted in this thesis.

The novel might be thought to begin as a rather typical memoir: “Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course, no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn’t been president or if I hadn’t been the offspring of Jews” (PAA 1). In some ways, the opening of the book is similar to the opening of the chapter entitled “Safe at Home” in Roth’s “novelist’s autobiography,” in which the autobiographer is chronicling his childhood. “Safe at Home” begins: “The greatest menace while I was growing up came from abroad, from the Germans and the Japanese, our enemies because we were Americans” (F 20). As we can see here, both openings establish the theme of fear, yet locate the source to this fear is different places. As such, the opening line of The Plot Against America can be seen as an allusion to The Facts. However, there is also a noticeable rhetorical, stylistic difference between the two openings: The Plot Against America begins in rather affective tone, making use of poetical alliterations and assonance, while The Facts has a more neutral tone describing the state of the nation.

Although the opening of The Plot Against America might not adhere to what we come to expect from a conventional autobiography, in style or rhetoric, the book bears other similarities with autobiographies such as The Facts. For instance, Roth employs such phrases as “unless I’m remembering incorrectly” (161) and similar formulas signalling autobiographical retrospection of the kind common in his novelist’s autobiography. As such, The Plot Against America has much in common with conventional autobiographical accounts in which someone is narrating about his or her life or his or her experiences during a particular period of time, for instance during childhood. However, the perspective in the book often deviates from what would be congenial with the autobiographical act governing autobiographical narratives. It is not possible therefore to argue that Roth has written a book in which a narrator in a present narrating situation is looking back, telling about his life, relating what he remembers, because this view is complicated not just by the fact that we at times are allowed to experience what the protagonist, the child “Philip Roth” experiences, to read the plot filtered through the main character, as in Operation Shylock,
but also by the shift from personal recollections to impersonal accounts of other characters and historical events.

The role of Philip the child-protagonist in the book and his relation to the adult (“narrator”) Philip Roth has been discussed frequently in Roth criticism. Elaine B. Safer, for instance, writes: “The events during 1940-42 are related from the vantage point of an adult Philip Roth who is, as it were, looking over the shoulder of young Philip Roth [...]” (Safer 2006: 149). She also states the “adult Philip is often sardonic and critical as he looks back on 1940-42” and that the “young Philip, who reacts to everything from a wide-eyed perspective, frequently gets involved in episodes that provide comic relief for the satire” (149). In other words: “Occurrences are presented in a straightforward manner, but fearfully enlarged, as they would be in the eyes of a young child” (149).

From these statements one might get the impression that young Philip is viewed as a focalizer to the adult narrator, yet further on Safer refers to “[t]he narration of young Philip” and “[t]he young narrator” (157). Similarly, Kaplan argues that the book is “[n]arrated by a young character called ‘Philip Roth’” (Kaplan 2011: 120) and Morley, as already mentioned, speaks of the “child-narrator” (Morley 2008: 143), both without any further explanations as to what it means that the book is narrated by a child, and how this narrator relates to the supposed adult “narrator,” whom Graham calls “the backwards-looking Philip” (Graham 2007: 138). Coetzee argues that “the mind through which the events of 1940-42 are mediated is that of a child” and that the “voice speaking to us is that of the child grown up, yet subjecting himself to the vision of his earlier self, and in return lending to the younger self a concentrated awareness that no child possesses” (Coetzee 2008 [2007]: 239). Coetzee is also of the opinion that the “modulation between youthful freshness of vision and adult insight is brought off with such skill that we lose awareness of who is speaking in our ear at any given moment, child or man” (240).

By how these critics comment on the narrative perspective in *The Plot Against America*, one can note a tendency to blur the distinction between narration and focalization, that is, between who speaks and who sees, according to Genette’s distinction (Genette 1980 [1972]: 186). Safer speaks about seeing events through the eyes of the young child (i.e. internal focalization) but then she refers to the same phenomenon as the young child’s narration. Coetzee argues that the voice speaking belongs to the adult, yet that the events are mediated through the vision of his earlier self, the child. According to him, this seems to result in a conflation between the voice of the adult and the voice of the child. If Roth’s technique in *The Plot Against America* was described with the use of narratological concepts, it would
probably result in a distinction between the adult narrator and the child focalizer, corresponding to the narrating-I and the experiencing-I. In my opinion, however, neither such a hypothetical narratological characterization nor the fusing of focalization and narration attempted by the Roth critics are sufficient as characterization of what goes on technically in this book. The portrait of Philip the child-protagonist in The Plot Against America can be divided by the use of two main narrative strategies used by the author. Either the child is portrayed as remembered by the adult Roth looking back on the child he once was or the young Philip’s experiences are rendered without the mediation of what I deem to be a narrating character. The difference can be illustrated by two examples.

What most Roth critics seem to view as the perspective of the child is, as stated, better described as an adult looking back on the child he once was. A passage which illuminates this clearly is the section in which young Roth sees Alvin, now an amputee, masturbating in the cellar of their house. Philip walks down the cellar-stairs and sees his cousin peering out of the horizontal window, watching the high-school girls walk home from school: “He was in his bathrobe, a hand to help him maintain his balance clutching the narrow sill. The other hand I couldn’t see. He was using it for something I was too young to know anything about” (my emphasis) (PAA 147-148). After Alvin has left the cellar, Philip walks down to the cellar once again and finds the “whitewashed wall” where Alvin stood “slick and syrupy with an abundance of goo” (148). We are told: “Since I didn’t know what masturbation was, I of course didn’t know what ejaculate was. I thought it was pus. I thought it was phlegm. I didn’t know what to think, except that it was terrible. In the presence of a species of discharge as yet mysterious to me, I imagined it was something that festered in a man’s body and then came spurting out of the mouth when he was completely consumed by grief” (148). In these sentences we are presented with the child’s experience from the perspective of the adult telling about what he remembers rather than what the child experiences immediately, as in the following scene when the young protagonist believes his father to be dead.

Coming home, Philip sees three police cars and an ambulance outside his house. Though he understands from the other children in the neighbourhood that it is his neighbour, Mr. Wishnow, who has committed suicide, the emergence of his mother, who should be at work, makes Philip revise what he knows. “The woman who emerged from the house accompanying the medic wasn’t Mrs. Wishnow but my mother. I couldn’t understand why she was home from work until it dawned on me that the dead father they were carrying away was my own. Yes, of course – my father had committed suicide” (168-169). Philip crosses the street to his mother and
the man being carried away: “When I saw that the sheet covering my father’s body and face couldn’t possibly allow him to breathe, I began to wail” (169). After this sentence follows a dialogue in which Philip’s mother is trying to comfort him, yet without understanding that the child believes it to be his father. Only when he runs after the ambulance, crying “He can’t breathe!” does the mother understand what is torturing her son.

With close similarity to my examples from *Operation Shylock*, most of what is happening in this scene is filtered through the eyes of the child, who is, in effect, a fallible filter: “When I saw that the sheet covering my father’s body and face couldn’t possibly allow him to breathe, I began to wail.” This and other similar examples are all that would motivate talk about a “child-perspective” in *The Plot Against America*. Otherwise, relating to form, the child is probably more accurately described as being portrayed by an author’s representation of a character narrating about his childhood, formally similar to how Roth writes about himself in *The Facts*.

By differentiating between these dominating narrative strategies in *The Plot Against America* I do not intend to argue that the mere occurrence of the type of scenic representation exemplified by the second example turns this text or any text into fiction. Just because a deictic relocation occurs and places the perspective in the “here and now” of the story in which events are coloured by the (mis)perception of the protagonist, it does not make something into fiction per se. What is clear, however, is that examples like this, where no speaker can be identified as the source of these child experiences, would create different (and probably puzzled) interpretive responses if we assumed the framework to be autobiographical rather than fictional. In the following section I will therefore discuss instances in the novel where there is no mediation by any character.

**Impersonal Perspectives, Paralepsis, and Narrative Fiction**

In certain sections, *The Plot Against America* resembles in its formal features a book of history more than any autobiographical account. During long stretches of the book we read passages relating what happens on the national level during the years 1940-42, pertaining to the presidential election, the war, the state of the country, and so on. In these sections the text imitates historiography by quoting newspapers, radio-programs, etc. Also when the author portrays family life in the Roth household the perspective often moves away from the protagonist and his perspective altogether. If taken as information presented by a narrator, one could react to that fact that it is never revealed how he, i.e. the “narrator,” obtained this knowl-
edge. This is not my intention here. Instead of using the epistemological criterion to argue that these episodes in *The Plot Against America* would make the work fictional, I argue that these episodes confirm the fact that we already interpret the book within a framework of narrative fiction. If we read the book as an autobiography, these episodes would likely create proof of an unreliable epistemology, making the author’s claims to tell the truth questionable. Similarly, if we read the book as a “fictional autobiography,” that is, as a formal imitation of autobiography according to the mimetic model of first-person fiction, these episodes would still make us question the “narrator’s” presentation of the fictional “facts,” rendering him unreliable.

A consequence of taking nonfictional narrative as the model for narrative fiction, for example a novel such as *The Plot Against America*, is that instances where the assumed narrator tells about something he cannot possibly know become “unnatural” and exemplify what is known as “paralepsis.” This concept can be described as “the phenomenon of a first-person narrator knowing and/or sensing something to which he/she should not have access by all that we as readers know about human cognition and perception” (Heinze 2008: 282). As we remember, Henrik Skov Nielsen attempted to solve this issue by proposing the hypothesis of an impersonal voice of the narrative. Ruediger Heinze, also discussing so-called violations of mimetic epistemology in first-person fiction, writes that there are “explanations that help to avoid or *naturalize this surprise*” (my emphasis) (283). Heinze’s explanations are all related to his argument that so-called first-person paraleptic narrators “are more easily naturalized than one would initially think, possibly because the readers’ capacities and anthropological need for naturalization/narrativization whatever is peculiar about a story is potentially unlimited” (293).

The arguments presuming paraleptic and unnatural narration are convincing only if the supposed operating context is factual narration according to the formula: someone telling someone else on some occasion and for some purpose that something happened. In *The Plot Against America*, there are quite a few examples which could be considered violations of the so-called mimetic epistemology of first-person fiction. Yet as I attempt to demonstrate we do not – by assuming the book to be what it proclaims to be: a novel – need to naturalize these episodes by attributing them to a narrator or an impersonal voice inside the frame of fiction.

In reading *The Plot Against America* we often get more information about the characters than would be possible if the knowledge-frame was an individual narrating-I. To illustrate this phenomenon one can use the example of how Alvin goes to Canada in order to join the Canadians fighting
the war against the Germans: “When he first ran off to fight Hitler, Alvin imagined that the quickest way to see action would be aboard one of the Canadian destroyers [...]” (PAA 88), we are told and further on in the same passage we read that Alvin meets a man in Montreal who makes him change his initial plans:

When he recounted for Alvin all the many ways the commandos taught you to kill a man, Alvin dropped his original plans and went to join up. Like the rest of the Canadian armed forces, the commandos were eager to accept qualified American citizens into their ranks, and so, after sixteen weeks of training, Alvin was assigned to an active commando unit and shipped to a secret staging area in the British Isles. And that was when we heard from him finally, receiving a six-word letter that read, “Off to fight. See you soon.” (89)

If we assume, as does Heinze among others, that these sentences issue from a narrating-I as the source of the narrative information, we would ask ourselves how he knows what he knows. If the passage had ended with the Roth family (“we”) receiving a letter “in which Alvin told us all about his experiences,” or something similar, it would not be an epistemological problem, according to this view. But how can a narrator know all that happened to Alvin without him present if all Alvin wrote was six words? A possible way to “naturalize” the information might be to assume that Alvin at some point in time told the narrator about his experiences in Canada and that Alvin possessed insight into how the Canadian armed forces reasoned when they admitted him into a commando unit. The more relevant question, however, which I will return to, is if we in fact feel compelled to do this as we read Roth’s novel.

Another example in the book which illustrates the same issue is found in the passages relating Herman Roth’s visit to the Newsreel Theater and his friend, the owner Shepsie Tirschwell, on his way home from work. Shepsie tells Herman he is moving to Canada because of America’s ties with Nazi-Germany. He describes the state of the country in a pessimistic manner to Herman which the latter afterwards keeps to himself:

In the wake of von Ribbentrop’s Washington visit – and the triumph it represented for the most dangerous of Lindbergh’s American supporters – this was Mr. Tirschwell’s forecast, and it was so much more pessimistic than anything my father was predicting that he decided not to repeat it to us or, when he got home from the Newsreel Theater for dinner early that evening,
to say anything about Mr. Tirschwell’s imminent departure, certain that the news would terrify me, rile Sandy, and set my mother clamoring to emigrate at once. (195)

In this passage, according to a natural framework, the “narrator” is telling something he is not able to know. There is “a jump from natural to non-natural knowledge” (Heinze 2008: 287), as Heinze would explain it. According to his typology, this constitutes a local paralepsis, which occurs in narratives which “take place in a natural frame (i.e. told by a first-person narrator whose paraleptic insight cannot be explained or rationalized) and are neither impossible (with the exception of the narrator’s paralepsis), nor illusory, nor do they stylistically flaunt their potential unreliability” (289). Heinze adds: “On the contrary, the narrators’ unusual knowledge is unobtrusive” (289).

Yet how is this impossible or unusual knowledge compatible with a natural frame? Why are these examples unobtrusive, not needing to be naturalized or narrativized according to a frame of natural narration? Why has no one reacted to the quoted passages from The Plot Against America, or considered it a “surprise,” claiming these instances in the text to signal, for instance, narratorial unreliability? Because, simply, these examples are only paraleptic if we assume a natural or mimetic model in which first-person fiction is modelled after natural or nonfictional narration. As I have stated, Roth’s book makes use of autobiographical conventions and features, by the author’s representation of “Philip Roth” as a narrating character, yet this does not make us read the book as an autobiography proper or as if it was an autobiography. Rather, as I have stated, it resists being conceptualized as an autobiography, actual or “fictional.”

As a final example to illustrate this issue and also to show a slightly different aspect of the narrative strategies Roth employs, we might look at an episode that moves close to what we commonly associate with the impersonal narrative perspective found in some third-person narrative fiction. An illustrative scene is the one in which the Roth family’s hotel reservation in Washington has been withdrawn. It stretches over several pages and everything is described in detail: dialogue, surroundings, the people in the lobby, etc. Yet the protagonist does not understand what is going on, we learn after a while:

“This is that goddamn Lindbergh!” my father said. “All you little fascists are in the saddle now.”
“Shall I call the District police, sir, or will you take your bags and your family and leave immediately?”

“Call the police,” my father replied. “You do that.”

There were now five or six guests aside from us in the lobby. They’d entered while the argument was under way and they were lingering to find out what was going to come of it.

It was then that Mr. Taylor stepped up to my father’s side and said, “Mr. Roth, you are perfectly in the right, but the police are the wrong solution.”

“No, that is the right solution [...]”

Mr. Taylor reentered the lobby on the run and without stopping bore down on the desk, where the manager was completing his call. In a lowered voice, he spoke only to my father. “There is a nice hotel not very far away. I telephoned them from the booth outside. They have a room for you. It’s a nice hotel on a nice street. Let’s drive over there and get the family registered.”

“Thank you, Mr. Taylor. But right now we are waiting for the police. I want them to remind this man of the words of the Gettysburg address that I read carved up there just today.”

The people watching all smiled at one another when my father mentioned the Gettysburg address.

I whispered to my brother, “What happened?”

“Anti-Semitism,” he whispered back. (68-69)

What is notable in these lines is that the scene as a whole does not seem to be mediated in any way by a narrating- or an experiencing character. The “I” seems to momentarily disappear. He is not covert but completely absent throughout much of the episode.

By now my arguments that *The Plot Against America* resists being read as an autobiography or a fictional autobiography should be clearly established. However, the question that remains is then why Roth, as Coetzee among others has noted, has written a book about a child that bears the same name as him, shares his year of birth, and is born of the same parents as Roth himself? To provide a brief, tentative answer to this question I would like to return to the opening of the book and my comparison between *The Plot Against America* and the opening of *The Facts*.

Roth alludes to his novelist’s autobiography not in order to trick the reader into reading *The Plot Against America* as autobiography itself but in order to makes the readers associate his counterfactual historical novel
with the conventions and truth-telling ambitions present in the nonfictional practice. When Roth himself, in the story behind the book, speaks about altering historical reality “while keeping everything else as close to factual truth” (“Story” C10), I interpret this against the novel itself and understand the statement as a way of saying that he strived to write “a believable fiction,” so to speak. When reading *The Plot Against America*, we do not perceive the book as the story of Philip Roth. Rather we appreciate that Roth has written “a realistic novel about imagined events,” as Coetzee notes (Coetzee 2008 [2007]: 242). In other words, we recognize that the author uses his name and scraps of his biography for purposes determined within the context of the work in question; it is done in order to heighten the sense of realism in the novel. This is also the reason why Roth included a postscript assuring the reader of the actual historical reality as contrasted with the presented counter-history, as I continue to discuss in Chapter 4.

**Naturalizing Deception: Reading a Novel as a Notebook**

What distinguishes *Deception* from the rest of the Roth Books is most notably its “form.” It consists almost entirely of dialogue without any exposition or commentary. Mostly the protagonist Philip speaks to a married English woman with whom he is having an affair, but he also converses with “what appear to be two Czechoslovakian women, one of whom he met when he visited Czechoslovakia, which was then still behind the Iron Curtain; a Polish woman; a male Czech expatriate; and a women who is Philip’s wife” (Tuerk 2005: 135). The protagonist, who is present in all dialogues, share, as we noted in Chapter 1, many traits and biographical attributes with the author of the book. As in *Operation Shylock* and *The Plot Against America*, Roth makes use of his own biography and includes references to his well-known persona and his oeuvre. In *Deception*, Roth also complicates the idea of onomastic identification further by omitting the first-person pronoun. There is no “I,” yet towards the end of the book the dialogues we have been reading are “motivated” in the text as notebook-transcripts, that is, as dialogues transcribed in detail by the protagonist (or the author, depending on the interpretative frame).

Gooblar states that “*Deception* reads like a writer’s notebook” (Gooblar 2011: 119); Brauner writes that the book “purports to be a series of dialogues from one of Roth’s notebooks” (Brauner 2007: 85); Cooper argues that it is a “novel in the form of a novelist’s notebook” and that the author, by revealing the dialogue to be his notes, is “denarrating the novel into notebook entries” (Cooper 1996: 241); and Tuerk proposes that “De-
Deception may not be a novel at all but an autobiographical account of part of Roth’s life in verbatim or almost verbatim transcripts of actual conversations” (Tuerk 2005: 136). In these descriptions Roth’s book is either a novel pretending to be a notebook or a notebook pretending to be a novel. Yet, as I will argue in the following, neither can Deception be viewed as an actual (nonfictional) notebook which the author for some reason published as “a novel” nor can it be viewed as a novel that should be “realized,” or rather “naturalized” by the reader “as if” being an actual notebook. Deception is instead read as “drama” in the mimetic sense, yet it should also be recognized to playfully and/or deceptively toy with the formal convention of narrative fiction as well as our readerly expectations in a typically self-conscious and, technically speaking, postmodern way.

It is in the penultimate chapter that it is “revealed” that the dialogues in the previous chapters are notebook transcripts of dialogues. Philip, the protagonist, is confronted by his wife who has read his notebook and now accuses him of having an affair. He defends himself by saying that the notebook is something he has been writing parallel to the novel he is working on and that all conversations with what appears to be an English mistress of his are made-up. Other conversations, however, are supposedly “real,” according to Philip. Concerning a talk with one Rosalie Nichols, which Philip told his wife about, he explains that he wrote down some of what they said to each other and invented the rest: “Some of what’s there is accurate reporting and it inspires what I would hope is accurate imagining” (D 176). The English woman, Philip says, is a figment of his imagination, a blueprint for a character in the novel he is working on (a novel that any reader familiar with Roth’s work will recognize as bearing certain similarities with The Counterlife). The wife in Deception objects: “But I’ve read those chapters, the manuscript chapters you gave me to read about the English woman – and this is not that English woman, this is not the model for that woman, this is the real woman! Don’t pretend they are one and the same!” Philip answers: “I don’t. One is a figure sketched in conversation in a notebook, the other is a major character entangled in a plot of an intricate book. I have been imagining myself, outside of my novel, having a love affair with a character inside my novel” (176-177).  

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76 Philip’s defense is of course an allusion to the scene in Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita (1955) where Humbert Humbert defends himself after Charlotte Haze has found his journal detailing his lust for her young daughter. Humbert says: “You are crazy, Charlotte. The notes you found were fragments of a novel. Your name and hers were put in by mere chance. Just because they came handy. Think it over. I shall bring you a drink.” (Nabokov 1992 [1955]: 102)
Further on in the chapter, Philip’s wife asks him if he has the intention of publishing the notebook – as it is:

“And are you going to publish that notebook? The novel and then the notebook [...] Is that the plan?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t you? Is that why the sections are interspliced like that, with all that Czechoslovak mirroring of everything, because you don’t know.”

“It’s occurred to me. I’m not sure what it adds up to, if anything. But of course I’ve thought of it.”

“To publish it as it is?” (182-183)

It is through these metafictional commentaries, then, that the author of Deception intrafictionally “motivates” the fragmentary conversations and the hop-scotch structure of the book as notebook transcripts. If taken literally it would mean that we as readers should realize, in retrospection, not just the previous chapters as notes, but also that these very lines we are reading as belonging to a notebook. Also, the final chapter, in which Philip again converses with his “real” or “imaginary” English mistress, would consequently be seen as consisting of transcribed or invented dialogues.

When Cooper, for example, writes that Philip “ignores [his wife’s] request and continues his imagined manuscript (that is, this book) and later comments on it as a real manuscript in a final conversation with his problematic British lover” (Cooper 1996: 233), he suggests that “the novel” should be realized by the reader as being “Philip’s” or Roth’s notebook (233). Smith, on the other hand, seems to distinguish between the “notebook” and the rest of Deception. She argues that the chapters of conversations detailing the affair appear “as an exterior text in which Philip, narrator, and by implication Philip Roth, writer, imagines himself to be having a love affair with the English female protagonist of his novel” (Smith 2005: 102). Referring to the lines in which Philip distinguishes between the women in his notebook and the one in his novel-in-progress, Smith states:

This explanatory sequence, rather like Operation Shylock’s end note, implies an existence outside the text that displays a so-called bona-fide experience of authorial intent, in which ‘the desire for her to exist exists.’ Thus, by definition, the novel Deception itself arguably cast an ambiguous shadow over the notebook’s said purpose as blueprint for the unnamed novel. At this point it is also possible to separate the contents of the notebook from
the text of Deception, as the narrative strategy of one fiction comments on the fictional processes of another. (102)

It is not clear what Smith means when she refers to “an exterior text” or “an existence outside the text” or speaks about the possibility “to separate the content of the notebook from the text of Deception.” Likewise it is not obvious what she intends with her references to “narrator Philip” or “Philip narrator” (102-103), which is (sometimes) distinguished from the “writer,” i.e. the “Philip Roth who exists outside the fiction” (102). However, it seems as if Smith views the “notebook” as a text within the text, a fiction within a fiction, preceding the chapter in which Philip and his wife discuss its content. The reference to Operation Shylock and its end note here implies that Smith separates the penultimate chapter with its metafictional elements from the rest of Deception. Yet, if the preceding chapters should belong to Philip’s notebook, why should we not also understand the conversation between Philip and his wife as notebook transcripts as well? How can we, to use Smith’s own term, differentiate between the “exterior” text and what would consequently be the “interior” text?

This problem is illuminated by Shostak in her discussion on Deception and the function of the puzzling metafictional chapter:

This metafictional chapter, in demoting the preceding chapters to a writer’s notebook, would claim the position of truth in the novel. It offers a frame for the rest, a “reality” in which the other dialogues supposedly exist only as entertainments, and its position near the end of the novel gives it the status of an endpoint. Yet there is no reason to accept this premise; rather, the argument in the chapter need be nothing more than another reflexive set of notebook musings. Likewise, the inclusion of the final chapter – one more belated conversation between Philip and the English mistress – destabilizes the reader’s apprehension of narrative “truth” because it encourages a reversal of the interpretation just offered by Philip in the preceding chapter. (my emphasis) (Shostak 2004: 222)

As in the case with Roth’s novel The Counterlife, with its Chinese-box structure of fictions within fictions within fictions, Deception also taunts the reader to try to differentiate between different ontological levels within the fiction, to separate the “real” from the “imagined.” The metafictional chapter might appear to claim a position “outside” the rest of Deception, or vice versa, yet as Shostak acknowledges, this interpretation is denied by the author. Roth deceives the reader, making us retrospectively realize the
text we have been reading as a notebook only to reverse this naturalizing strategy, deferring any attempt to determine a natural narrative situation from the dialogues in the book. Shostak claims that we are left without “an interpretative center for the novel as a whole” (222) and if I understand her correctly, she means that the metafictional chapter is not any more “real” than the notebook, and that Roth wants to “expose the deceptions implicit in readerly and erotic seduction towards the ‘real’” (222).77

Shostak, then, does not describe the notebook as a text within the text but rather approaches the novel as written in the form “notebook musing” which necessarily implies the existence of a “narrator” or the author of this notebook. Referring to Deception and Operation Shylock, she states: “Each novel advertises itself as a life history, offering its ‘I’ as both ubiquitous eye and actor, and I think we are to retain awareness of the speaker as simultaneously a conventional narrative mask and the historical Philip Roth” (158). Then, in the same chapter, she adds the following explanation, seemingly reversing her previous claims:

In this novel, Roth strips away the illusion of mediation provided by the narrator, who must be seen to weigh and interpret “facts” as he or she presents them. The uncontextualized presentation of speech gives the appearance of reportage rather than that of invention, deepening the credibility of the speakers, who seem to be offering themselves to direct apprehension, without prejudgment. Because the reader is confronted by the need to create the context of events within which to place the conversations “reported,” filling in the gaps of normal colloquy and supplying action and scene, the reader’s role is much more active than in most novels. (174)

The question discussed here by Shostak is how we are to contextualize the uncontextualized conversations in Deception.78 And it is possible to discern two seemingly conflicting ways of understanding “context” in her account; one in which the conversations of the book are read as reported conversa-

77 As acknowledged by many critics, the “deception” referred to by the title is not just the marital deception in the book, but also the deceptiveness of book’s “form” and the author’s intention to deceive the reader in different ways. Brauner notes that the title “serves as a warning about the reliability of any apparently authorial voice” (Brauner 2007: 85). Shostak writes: “The erotic betrayal stands for the epistemological betrayal experienced by readers whom a writer frustrates when he plants autobiographical clues in fictional narrative, and both betrayals are brought together in the titular figure of ‘deception’” (Shostak 2004: 175).

78 “Because Deception is entirely composed of such fragments of conversation, readers must supply the context for every exchange in the novel” (218)
tions written down by someone and one in which context is synonymous with a realization of the text as “drama,” or mimetic fiction in the Aristotelian sense argued for by Hamburger or Skalin, without any narrating agent behind each dialogue exchange. Yet, what might be interpreted as inconsistencies in Shostak’s analysis of Deception can also be taken to accurately capture the tension between its mimetic form and the self-conscious, metafictional play with the novel’s chosen formal structure. Although Shostak refers to the argument presented in this metafictional chapter of the book as “another reflexive set of notebook musings,” as quoted above, she does not read the novel Deception on the whole as if it consisted of notebook musings or transcripts, realizing the novel in retrospect to be a writer’s notebook. This becomes clear, for instance, in her analysis of the opening of the novel.

Deception begins, not surprisingly, in medias res:

“I’ll write them down. You begin.”
“What’s it called?”
“I don’t know. What do we call it?”
“The Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together Questionnaire.”
“The Lovers-Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together-Questionnaire.”
“You’re not middle-aged.”
“I certainly am.”
“You seem young to me.” (3-4)

79 In a different context Shostak provides a comparison between Deception and a play: “The novel – and our customary manner of reading – encourages us to incarnate the voices imaginatively, as we would in reading a play, but at the same time it refuses such incarnation by denying us conventional visual and generic clues. It insists instead on its status as purely aural text – or one that is visual only insofar as reading words on a page is a visual experience” (69). “The novel is distinct from a dramatic script in an important way: as we read the text of the play, it is always with the understanding that we are reading it only by half, only in its potentiality, and that its full realization – and hence, reading – requires staging. A play is always in transition toward embodiment. As a novel, Deception is not; it does not enter into the world except as a verbally produced imaginative figment” (280f).
Reading the beginning, “we find ourselves positing a context for the utterances [...]” Shostak notes (218). She does not, like certain other critics, argue that we supply what I take to be a naturalizing frame in which we read the “utterances” as if they in fact were written down, for instance, in a notebook. Shostak states that “we deduce that only two voices are speaking, probably lovers in bed [...]” and she claims that a “reader will probably tend more specifically to imagine this as a postcoital discussion, taking place after the tensions of physical desire have been relaxed, when the lovers feel playful and time seems leisurely” (218). Her analysis of the beginning clearly indicates that “positing context” becomes synonymous here with “supplying action and scene” as in reading mimetic fiction.

Now, if we were to return to the guiding question of this discussion, whether Deception really is to be read like a writer’s notebook or a novel in the form of a novelist’s notebook, my answer is that the text resists such a naturalizing reading strategy on the whole. Only in retrospection can these dialogues be realized as notebook transcripts. And even then, this naturalizing frame is complicated by the fact that these conversations supposed to display the metafictional function are also presented in dialogues identical as to form to the preceding ones. To read Deception literally as a notebook would be to position oneself within the fiction which would be to take on a similar role to Philip’s wife in the book. However, the author of the book invites us to read the text as a notebook only to “defamiliarize” the dramatic form and, as Shostak notes, expose the deceptions implicit in readerly and erotic seduction towards the “real.”

In the metafictional discussions in the penultimate chapter, protagonist Philip tells his wife that portraying himself as “implicated” is what he aims to do, what gets him where he wants to go with his writing, not to “compromise some ‘character’ [...]” (D 177-178). What these lines can be taken to express is that Roth in Deception and also in the other fictional works discussed in this chapter – Operation Shylock and The Plot Against America – includes his name, scraps of his biography, and allusions to his body of work for purposes which are not strictly autobiographical, yet relate to the author’s life. This notion of authorial implication will therefore be the subject for the concluding section of this chapter.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the relation between fiction and autobiography in the Roth Books with the point of departure in the name “Philip Roth” as it appears in these works. My general thesis has been that the
name is given substance and functions individually in each work. This is done in opposition to critics claiming that the “Philip Roth” in the Roth Books should never be taken to refer to the author of the books, and also in opposition to those who claim that the name always refers to the actual Philip Roth, and finally to those claiming both positions. I have proposed a distinction between works which could be characterized as autobiographical (or nonfictional) and works of fiction in which the author might be said to “implicate” himself or makes literary use of his name and his biography for some reason or another. My focus has mainly been on the latter category of texts, namely works of fiction in which the author uses his biography for literary purposes, exemplified by three of the Roth Books – Deception, Operation Shylock, and The Plot Against America. These books, as I have argued, resist being interpreted as autobiographical, that is, as being defined by someone narrating (about) his life. And they also resist being conceptualized as “fictional” or invented autobiographies.

The Roth Books, as should be obvious by now, put forth an issue constantly present in literary criticism, namely the question of the relation between an author’s life and works. The problem is discussed by Boris Tomashevsky in his essay “Literature and Biography.” Here he deals with the question diachronically and argues that authors in different periods have made literary use of their biographies, while authors in other periods have strived for anonymity. Tomashevsky proposes that we “consider how the poet’s biography operates in the reader’s consciousness” (Tomashevsky 2002 [1923]: 47). What I find illuminating about his discussion on these matters is at least two things. The first is that authors, centuries before postmodernist transgression of the lines between life and literature have (self-)consciously intertwined their biography with their writing, creating what Tomashevsky calls a “biographical legend” (55). However, the narrative techniques used by Roth in his method of implication can very well be viewed as “postmodern,” understood in a broad sense in connection with characteristics of postmodernist literature in general. Secondly, Tomashevsky is able to find a middle-ground between formalism and biographical criticism by acknowledging “the ‘literary functions’ of biography” (47). He contends that in certain books the juxtaposition of the text and the author’s biography plays a structural role: “The literary work

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80 “These biographical legends are the literary conception of the poet’s life, and this conception was necessary as a perceptible background for the poet’s literary works. The legends are a premise which the author himself took into account during the creative process” (51-52). Tomashevsky takes the examples of eighteenth-century writers such as Voltaire and Rousseau who “were not only writers but also public figures” (48), and he argues that their works were inseparable from their lives.
plays on the potential reality of the author’s subjective outpourings and confessions. Thus the biography that is useful to the literary historian is not the author’s curriculum vitae or the investigator’s account of his life. What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a literary fact “(55).

Philip Roth can undeniably be considered a writer (and public figure) that has fostered a biographical legend in and outside of his oeuvre. In the books discussed at length in this chapter – *Deception*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America* – we have seen that Roth is not writing autobiographically but rather alludes to his biography in different ways and with different effects. It is obvious that he, especially in *Deception* and *Operation Shylock*, plays with the line between author of the book and author in the book, what is “inside” and what is “outside” the text, etc. Yet, Roth’s allusions to his biography or to his body of work do not demand particular knowledge about his life, nor do they prompt us to interpret the person behind the books rather than the books themselves. In short, the author’s name and biography attain a literary function.

To answer the question of why Roth implicates himself, i.e. includes his name and scraps of biography in these works when he lacks the ambition to write autobiographically, is best done by suggesting that there is no single answer. In *Deception* and *Operation Shylock*, the biography mostly becomes a literary function grounded in the author’s metafictional concerns, thematically motivated by Roth’s examination of the relation between the written and the unwritten world. In *The Plot Against America*, Roth’s biographical allusions are motivated by the book’s “realistic” ambitions, by the author’s attempt to persuade the reader into believing in the plausibility of his counter-history (as discussed further in the following chapter). The point of this discussion, then, has not been to provide an exhaustive answer to the question of why the author includes his name and alludes to his biography, but rather to pose this question in order to be able to distinguish between works in which Roth writes about himself and works in which he, as Philip says in *Deception*, “implicates” himself.
4. Countertexts, Counterfacts, and Competing Versions

Introduction

Most critics concerned with the works of Philip Roth have in some respect been forced to deal with the fact that the author “keeps returning to the same themes,” as Debra Shostak acknowledges (Shostak 2004: 4). Attention has also been directed towards the many connections within Roth’s body of work, for example the recurring protagonists (Nathan Zuckerman, David Kepesh, etc.), how the author revisits similar settings (the streets of Newark, rural Connecticut, etc.) in several novels, and how he employs a kind of literary recycling of events and situations from one book to the next. In this chapter I discuss Roth’s method of rewriting by focusing on “countertexts” as variations or competing versions, and counterfactuality as a phenomenon in both fictional and nonfictional narrative practices. The focus throughout the chapter is Roth’s rewritings with regard to his strategy of literary recycling and his fondness for creating competing or alternative accounts of the same event or of his own presented story.

Shostak characterizes Roth’s oeuvre by developing a thesis that his “books talk to one another as countertexts in an ongoing and mutually illuminating conversation […]” (3). She describes the author’s compositional method in each work, and the compositional process from book to book, as dialogical, evoking the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. This method, she argues, allows Roth to provide “a variety of perspectives” on the problem of self-hood and subjectivity (6). Shostak claims that the method “embraces not only the conceptualization of one book in relation to another but also the plotting of a narrative and its development of character according to a fundamental principle that ‘overlapping subject-positions’ are brought to consciousness as they are made to speak to one another” (7).

This characterization of Roth’s body of work as dialogical is not entirely original, David Brauner notes (Brauner 2007: 6). Still, Shostak convincingly demonstrates how Roth keeps writing variations on related themes – selfhood, subjectivity, writing, masculinity, sexuality, etc. – and she observes his fondness for shifting narrative perspective in his work. Shostak also argues that the author has “adopted the stance of having no fixed position” (7) and claims that in “the open-endedness of Roth’s dialogical process […] lies the difficulty readers have had with wanting to pin him down […]” (14). According to her, Roth’s body of work, “his ‘book of voices,’ has grown around a related set of concerns about the individual subject, but he hasn’t solved any of them.” The reason is considered to be because “Roth’s fiction is not conclusive” (14).
Shostak’s description of what she refers to as Roth’s dialogical method is presented, at least in part, in opposition to certain critics, for example Milton Birmbaum and Robert Alter, who have criticized Roth for lacking “a clear direction” and “a moral center,” and for avoiding to take a stand regarding “urgent and even excruciating dilemmas” (6). She writes:

Implicit in these responses is a theory of fiction that would seem to require a novel to argue for a single position among the competing voices it transcribes, thereby offering the reader a vantage point from which to judge the fictive events. Fiction that accommodates this theory would have an identifiable normative voice, whether in the narrator or a character, and not a collection of mutually ironizing and self-cancelling voices. Roth clearly does not subscribe to such a theory […] (7).

Instead, according to Shostak, the author “seems to view the enterprise of fiction-making as multidimensional and many-voiced” (3).

Although I agree with Shostak’s critique of Birmbaum and Alter, I find a problematic aspect of her thesis to be that it reduces Roth’s body of work to “a variety of perspectives” (6) on “a handful of concerns” (14). From the description of Roth’s fiction as open-ended and non-conclusive one can easily get the impression that each book only provides “new” or “different” stand-points on the same issues in an ongoing discussion. I do not of course deny the possibility that an author, especially Roth, can and often will create intertextual relations between works in his oeuvre or with books written by other authors. The problem regarding Shostak’s discussion on Roth’s dialogical method is that the line between individual texts and Roth’s whole body of work becomes somewhat conflated. Furthermore, although she criticizes those who want to know where Roth personally stands, her argument that he has a stance of not having any fixed position still forces any discussion of his works to be about how Philip Roth and his books approach the thematic concerns which she has identified. The individual literary works might as a consequence become secondary to the author’s supposedly consistent compositional method.

The focus of attention in this chapter is related to the main topic in Shostak’s book, the matter of Philip Roth’s *countertexts*. The different sections in the chapter are concerned with Roth’s different kinds of rewritings. This topic is approached via discussions on mainly *The Facts*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America* since these works most clearly illustrate and complicate the issue in question. The topic of Roth’s rewritings is relevant to my overall theoretical discussion on how the principles
of interpretation differ between fiction and nonfiction – the latter type having an “openness” which is lacking in the former. The idea that a non-fictional (referential) narrative text is “verifiable and incomplete” while a fictional narrative text is “unverifiable and complete” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 16) as Dorrit Cohn puts it, will be discussed throughout this chapter. By examining rewritings and different relations between (Roth’s) texts, I intend to approach the matter of referentiality as the dividing criterion between fictional and nonfictional practices.

Context and Concepts I

Story and Discourse: Fictional Variants, Nonfictional Versions

The distinction between story and discourse, often described as the discrimination of the “what” and the “how” of narratives, provides the basis for the general theory of narrative which narratology strives to be. As Seymour Chatman explains: “Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (histoire), the content or chains of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse (discours), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated” (Chatman 1978: 19). Following from such reasoning comes an assumption that “the same story may exist in many different versions and, indeed, in many modes and media,” as Barbara Herrnstein Smith explains (Herrnstein Smith 1981: 210). Chatman argues that this “transposability of the story is the strongest reason for arguing that narratives are indeed structures independent of any medium” (Chatman 1978: 20). Every narrative, he argues, has a basic story which can be retold and relocated into different media.

Herrnstein Smith, critical of the dualist divide between story and discourse, distinguishes between “two major senses of narrative ‘versions’”:

1. Retellings of other narratives
2. Accounts told from a partial or particular perspective

In the first sense of narrative versions we find examples like “the King James version of Genesis, Shakespeare’s version of Plutarch’s Life of Antony, an abridged version of Clarissa, an expurgated version of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, a movie version of Barry Lyndon,” etc. The second sense is exemplified by “the star witness’ version of the shooting” and “my teenage daughter’s version of what happened in the girls’ bathroom at school on
Monday” (Herrnstein Smith 1981: 211). Although Herrnstein Smith does not specifically discuss fiction in relation to nonfiction these two descriptions correspond well with what I will be discussing under the terms *fictional variants* and *nonfictional versions*. In opposition to narratologists arguing that the “same story” can exist in different versions, I argue in favour of the view that in fiction there are no versions, only variants, since fictional discourse is nonreferential. A nonfictional account, however, always implies a *perspective*, partial and particular in relation to a referent, and therefore is “open” or subject to competing versions.

In the narratological, structuralist view of narrative, as expressed by for instance Chatman, the story (the signified or narrative content) is “complete” and discourse becomes a matter of narrative selection. In Genette’s model, as described by Walsh, “the distinction between the (complete, objective) fabula [story] and the (partial) sujet [discourse] of a fictional narrative is negotiated through a narrator (agent of the narrating instance) who, however incompletely or even unreliably, is communicating fictional facts” (Walsh 2007: 62). With this notion of story’s completeness, Walsh acknowledges, follows an idea of the selectiveness of discourse. The idea implies that the same fictional referent can be talked about in different and contradictory ways. Chatman writes that “the ‘complete’ account” is “never given in all its detail […]” and continues to state: “Thus *story* in one sense is the continuum of events presupposing the total set of all conceivable details, that is, those that can be projected by the normal laws of the physical universe. In practice, of course, it is only that continuum and that set actually inferred by a reader, and there is room for difference in interpretation” (Chatman 1978: 28).

In describing discourse as narrative selection, Chatman “unavoidably commits himself to a concept of the totality from which that selection is made,” as Walsh notes (Walsh 2007: 65). Yet, when Chatman refers to the practice of interpretation and emphasizes reader inferences he “shuffles between authorial and interpretative models of fabula in an attempt to reconcile two incompatible premises: that sujet is based on fabula, and that fabula is derived from sujet” (66). Walsh writes: “The author-oriented

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81 In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, the article on “Narrative Versions” written by Christian Moraru states that “the term ‘version’ and its cognates, ‘variant’ and ‘variations’, overlap with ‘adaptation’, ‘account’, ‘rendition’, ‘interpretation’, and ‘translation’” (Moraru 2005: 385). A narrative version is defined as a narrative which “takes up and alters a prior story, novel, epic poem, or tale” and the alteration involves, we are told, “a renarrativisation […], which may be reflected in titles, characters, conflicts, motifs, etc” (385). See also Gérard Genette’s discussion on palimpsests and “transtextuality” (Genette 1997 [1982]).
model insists upon the abstraction and logical priority of fabula as the basis for the selections and arrangements of the realized sujet; the reader-oriented model provides for the lack of any access to fabula except through sujet, by conceiving of fabula in pragmatic terms as an interpretative reconstruction” (66). In essence, the critique of the story-discourse distinction, presented by Walsh and before him by Herrnstein Smith, focuses on the idea that fabula or story can be conceived as independent of discourse, and that story is logically prior to discourse.82

These critical remarks undeniably complicate the notion that the “same” fictional story may exist in many different versions and in many modes and media. Herrnstein Smith, for instance, dismisses the narratological concept of basic story and explains that it “bears an unmistakable resemblance to a Platonic ideal form: unembodied and unexpressed, unpictured, unwritten and untold […]” (Herrnstein Smith 1981: 212). If this is what is meant by story, then it becomes, she writes, “literally unimaginable – for any mortal being” (212). Retellings of other narratives do not share the same structural basis, because for “any particular narrative, there is no single basically basic story subsiding beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be constructed in response to it or perceived as related to it” (217). Herrnstein Smith writes:

“Among the narratives that can be constructed in response to a given narrative are not only those we commonly refer to as “versions” of it (for example, translations, adaptations, abridgements, and paraphrases) but also those retellings that we call “plot summaries,” “interpretations,” and, sometimes, “basic stories.” None of these retellings, however, is more absolutely basic than any of the others. (217)

The primary example in Herrnstein Smith’s discussion on the relation between basic stories and narrative versions is one of Chatman’s own examples of “the translatability of story” (Chatman 1981: 118), namely Cinderella. According to Chatman, the story of Cinderella can appear “as verbal tale, as ballet, as opera, as film, as comic strip, as pantomime, and so on” (118). Herrnstein Smith on the other hand shows that Cinderella-variants have appeared in the thousands, “in some respects similar and in some respects dissimilar” (Herrnstein Smith 1981: 215). If we were asked to make a plot summary of Cinderella our individual summaries would

82 See also Chapter 9 in Jonathan Culler’s The Pursuit of Signs – Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction, entitled “Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative” (Culler 1981: 188-208).
probably resemble each other, yet the resemblance and similarities would reveal “not the uniformity of the intuitively apprehended deep-plot structure of all the versions of Cinderella but rather (1) the similarity of our individual prior experiences of particular individual tellings designated Cinderella; (2) the similarity of the particular ways in which almost all of us have learned to talk about stories generally; and (3) the fact that all of us, in attempting to construct a plot summary in this particular context and in connection with these particular issues, would be responding to similar conditions and constraints” (213). Moreover, each of these summaries would be new variants of Cinderella, abridged and simplified, but still retellings told for a certain purpose, argues Herrnstein Smith. There is no basic story of Cinderella, only more discourse.

Walsh comes to a similar conclusion when he too discusses the notion of transposing the “same story” into new mediums. Echoing Herrnstein Smith on this particular matter, he states: “To say that a film and a novel have the same fabula, or story, is to say that the same plot summary would serve for both, although of course a plot summary itself cannot be regarded as ‘story’ because it is a manifest narrative, with its own discourse features, and furthermore, it is not unique – it is always possible to summarize a narrative in a number of ways” (Walsh 2007: 63). Walsh concludes that such “narrative sameness is interpretative, posterior (however much anticipated and provided for by authorial or directorial intention), and it is negotiated in terms of actual versions, without recourse to an abstract structural congruence” (63).

To summarize, then, both Herrnstein Smith and Walsh react to the treatment of story as independent of and prior to discourse within narrative theory. Walsh, in fact, wants to invert the logical priority of the concept of story and reverse the meaning of these concepts: “[T]he distinction may still be conceived in terms of ‘what’ and ‘how,’ but with the poles reversed: sujet is what we come to understand as a given (fictional) narrative, and fabula is how we come to understand it” (68). In other words, story, however it is conceived, can only be known or apprehended or constructed through discourse.

Following from these assumptions, a Cinderella-variant or other fictional variants are not retellings of the “same story,” but constructed in response to another narrative or perceived as related to it, in the words of Herrnstein Smith. Fictional variants are not competing versions but co-existing ones. In nonfictional discourse, however, there is a commitment to external sources and referential claims which make a nonfiction narrative open to competing perspectives and multiple retellings. It is because of this insight that Cohn adds a level to the story-discourse distinction when deal-
ing with historical narratives. The bi-level of fiction, as we remember, is transformed into a tri-level: reference/story/discourse. Yet this “does nothing to solve the contradictions in the concept of story [...],” as Walsh notes. But “it does help to tease apart two different kinds of concern involved in narrative interpretation and obscured by the tendency to use fiction as the model for general theories of narrative” (67). “Dominant in the nonfictional case,” writes Walsh, “are criteria for assessing a narrative’s relation to the prior sources and intersecting narratives invoked by Cohn’s term ‘reference’” (67). In nonfiction, he states, “the role of fabula is to serve the reader’s evaluation of sujet in relation to (actual or hypothetical) alternative versions, with different sujet emphases, slants, or omissions” (67).

To put it simply, in nonfiction the discourse presents a perspective, partial and particular, of the events narrated. As Eric Heyne argues:

If the reader is prepared to assert an alternative version of events, to engage actively in a certain kind of dialogue, then we are dealing with something we might all be willing to call nonfiction. Put another way, we can recognize nonfiction by the concomitant recognition of competing versions. When we can talk about different stories competing, and when we genuinely wish to choose among them rather than allowing them peacefully to coexist, then we have left the realm of fiction. (Heyne 2001: 330)

Fictional variants, such as the many Cinderella-variants, are not competing versions of the “same story” because there is no basic story and “no limit to the number or nature of narratives that may sometime be seen as versions or variants of each other,” as Herrnstein Smith argues (Herrnstein Smith 1981: 218). Nonfictional versions, on the other hand, are narrative accounts told by someone from a partial and particular perspective, and for some reason or purpose. When, for instance, we are reading an autobiography we know, as we are told in The Facts, that there is always another text, a competing version or countertext to the one presented.

Analysis and Argumentation I

Reading The Facts as Fiction, or the Function of the Countertext

How the letter from Zuckerman relates to the autobiographical narrative in The Facts has been frequently discussed among Roth critics. This “countertext” presented at the end of the book poses several questions about the autobiography and it criticizes the author’s motives for writing autobi-
graphically. Many who have written about *The Facts* interpret this device as a way for Roth to turn his autobiography into a work of fiction and/or deny us the possibility to read the book as a factual narrative.

Brian Finney, for instance, states that in *The Facts* Roth has “collapsed autobiography into fiction” (Finney 1993: 372). According to him, “Zuckerman’s long letter at the end deconstructs the rest of the book, [and] recasts *The Facts* as a meta-autobiography [...]” (384). What Finney means by the concept of “meta-autobiography” becomes clear in his claim that the book’s ending “compels the reader to acknowledge the necessity of employing fictional and fictive devices in all forms of autobiography” (384), and further: “This is the whole point of the book, to show how ultimately you cannot separate the facts from the imaginative transformation they undergo as soon as they become part of a textual web, whether that web passes as fiction or autobiography” (374). Shostak similarly explains that “through the deft move of the framing device, Roth manages to pursue the point that self-exposure is always a work of fiction” (Shostak 2001: 176). Shostak refers to Finney’s arguments, but she also quotes Elaine M. Kauvar’s interpretation of this “framing device.” Kauvar claims that Roth, by including “Zuckerman’s” answer to his letter, “overturns the entire enterprise of the factual discourse” (Kauvar 1995: 415).

In opposition to this view, I will argue that Roth uses the framing letters to create a possibility for metatextual reflection on what it means for a fiction-writer to turn to the facts. I claim that the concluding letter from Zuckerman is a confirmation of the autobiographical narrative’s nonfictional or factual status, rather than any kind “fictionalizing” device. In other words, I will argue that the book’s structure is congenial with what the work claims to be: a novelist’s autobiography.

In the letter which opens this book, Roth presents his motivation for writing an autobiography but also displays a self-consciousness about the genre in which he has written about himself. The reason, Roth tells us, for writing about his life in this manner was a breakdown in the spring of 1987 when he, after a minor surgery, suffered an extreme depression: “In order to recover what I had lost I had to go back to the moment of origin. I found no one moment of origin but a series of moments, a history of multiple origins, and that’s what I have written here in the effort to repossess life” (*F* 5). Even though he speaks about getting at “the bare bones” and reaching “the structure of a life without the fiction” (6), Roth is in no way naïve about what his autobiographical project entails, which he is quick to mention: “Obviously the facts are never just coming at you but are incorporated by an imagination that is formed by your previous experience.
Memories of the past are not memories of facts but memories of your imaginings of the past” (8).

This self-conscious reflection on autobiographical writing does not suggest the impossibility of writing a truthful autobiography, as some Roth critics will have it. Derek Parker Royal, however, claims that the “ideas of autobiography and the coherent self are deconstructed from the very first page” (Royal 2005: 75). Yet, self-consciousness is hardly new in the history of autobiography, as James Olney among others has pointed out. Furthermore, Royal’s claim that Roth deconstructs autobiography has no real ground if we approach the concept the way the author himself does: “It isn’t that you subordinate your ideas to the force of the facts in autobiography,” Roth writes, “but that you construct a sequence of stories to bind up the facts with a persuasive hypothesis that unravels your history’s meaning” (8). Although Roth is highly self-conscious about the act of autobiographical writing, its constructedness, he still thinks that he is able to unravel his history’s meaning, or at least try to, by making it into a coherent structure. Roth’s intention is to “reconstruct” his life, to remember within a given narrative structure how he became who he is in the present, that is, the writer Philip Roth. This would go against Margaret Smith’s claim that The Facts “make no pretence of having a connection with the ‘facts’ of any particular history” (Smith 2005: 107).

The most important aspect of Roth’s preface-letter, however, is not how it presents the author’s psychological motivations or reflections on autobiography but how it indicates to the reader a nonfictional framework. Roth’s insistence on the referential function of his narrative is already explicit in the recounting of his motivations. The whole point of the book is not, as Finney contends, to show that it is impossible to sort out facts from fiction, or to collapse autobiography into fiction; its point lies rather in the matter of “remembering that when the events narrated here were happening we all were there, nobody having gone away or been on the brink of going away, never to be seen again for hundreds of thousands of billions of years” (9). As in Patrimony, what forms the background to the autobiographical narrative in The Facts is loss. Roth writes that his “mother’s death is very strong in all this,” that is, she plays an important role in the choice behind his “nonfictional approach” (9). So, if we assert this about

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83 James Olney writes: ”And I doubt that many people would want to argue that earlier autobiographers such as St. Augustine, Montaigne, or Rousseau were precisely lacking in self-consciousness or were without literary awareness and literary value, even though the tormented, hyperconscious modern self may not have existed in their days” (Olney 1980: 4).
the book, would it be possible to read it as “a work of fiction” or a text without any connection with the facts of a particular life-history? My answer is of course that this would be a reading counterintuitive to our comprehension of the author’s explicit purpose: to write autobiographically.

The chapter following Roth’s letter to Zuckerman is the Prologue. The author starts his narrative by returning to a time – “One day in late October 1944...” – when nobody in his family, as he writes, had gone away or been on the brink of going away yet. In the Prologue, Roth tells of his early memories of when his father had to be hospitalized because of an appendectomy, and how he survived the surgery. The chapter further underlines how death and loss form the background to Roth’s autobiographical narrative and his intent to remember that during the events narrated “they were all there.” He himself was an eleven-year-old boy living with his parents and brother, and he had an uncle named Bernie, disowned because he had gotten a divorce. But instead of holding on to the retrospective view of his childhood and family, especially his father, Roth brings us into the present where the same father, at the time of writing, “is trying to die” (17). “I naïvely believed as a child,” the autobiographer writes, looking back, “that I would always have a father present, and the truth seems to be that I always will” (16). In the Zuckerman letter at the end, Roth once again underlines the source of the “nonfictional approach,” but with the irony of his alter ego: “The gallantry and misery of your father as he approaches death, has so tenderized you, so opened you up, that all these recollections seem to flow from that source” (166). Because of the authorial communicative act being distinctly autobiographical, because of Roth’s commitment to a truthful description of childhood, it would seem not only strange, but misguided to perceive the Prologue as fictional, either in the sense of a specific kind of discourse or in the sense of its content being “made-up.” Yet how is it possible then that Finney can claim that the Prologue “has little to do with the facts”? (Finney 1993: 373).

When Finney reads the Prologue it becomes clear that his dismissal of *The Facts* as a factual narrative and his argument about its fictionality is based solely on his conception that “facts” can never be presented in writing without turning into “fictions.” First he attacks the sentence following the one quoted above about Roth’s father who, in the present, is trying to die: “Trying to die isn’t like trying to commit suicide – it may actually be harder, because what you are trying to do is what you least want to happen; you dread it but there it is and it must be done, and by no one but you” (17). What Finney reacts to is “Roth’s use of his imagination to see death from his elderly father’s point of view – or rather from how he believes he would feel if he were in his father’s shoes” (373). He adds: “Facts
of this kind can only be rendered satisfactorily through the artist's imaginative prism” (373). I would, on the other hand, not characterize the sentence as in any way relating “facts” or reporting about something to someone. Rather it is a general reflection upon our mortality. Roth identifies with the feelings his father may or may not have told him about. The experience belongs to him as much as to his father, but it relates to the fact of his father approaching death.

The second episode in the Prologue that Finney discusses is when Roth describes his bond to his mother, their intimacy during his childhood, expressed in a personally symbolic image. The author remembers his bond to his mother’s flesh, “whose metamorphosed incarnation was a sleek black sealskin coat into which I, the younger, the privileged, the pampered petpoose, blissfully wormed myself whenever my father chauffeured us home to New Jersey on a winter Sunday from our semiannual excursion to Radio City Music Hall […]” (18). Finney reacts to the idea that Roth’s mother is “imaginatively metamorphosed” by “a partly poetic use of language […]” (373). He concludes that the “Prologue, then, has little to do with the facts, although it never flouts or questions them” (373). Yet there is nothing in this passage that can be taken as fictional or a sign of fictionality. It is a metaphor, and as John Searle notes: “A metaphor can occur as much in a work of nonfiction as in a work of fiction” (Searle 1979: 60). A symbolic image, or use of poetic language, can of course be incorporated in a factual discourse under the overall frame, that is, Roth’s nonfictional approach.

The five chapters following the Prologue move chronologically from the author’s early childhood during the war, his high-school and college years, his beginning as a writer and his first disastrous marriage, to the publication of his breakthrough novel Portnoy’s Complaint and the death of his first wife during his mid-thirties. When Finney is reflecting on how the Zuckerman letter relates to the rest of the book, he argues that the interesting question which arises from its compositional structure “is whether Roth treats his autobiographical sections as targets put up to be shot down by Zuckerman, or whether he wrote the sections in a genuine attempt to get back to the facts only to realize by the end that he had failed because failure is implicit in every attempted act of autobiographical retrieval of the past” (Finney 1993: 378). His answer to this question should be clear by now. As opposed to my argument that we read the book as a nonfictional account which is not overturned by the introduction of the countertext but rather confirmed by it, Finney claims we cannot read it as a factual account because its factuality and truthfulness are questioned.

This strategy becomes notable when Finney analyses the first chapter, “Safe at Home,” and recognizes the author’s “original intent of getting
back to the facts,” but adds: “How much credence do these facts have on
the traditionally suspicious reader of autobiography [...]?”(374). He con-
cludes: “Overall the entire opening section is bland, anodyne, and pretty
unbelievable” (375). Yet when we read this section we have no reason to
be suspicious of the text in this way, and there is no reason to find it unbe-
lievable in any way. Roth has committed himself, as Finney recognizes, to
the factuality of his account, his original intent. Secondly – and this brings
me back to my point of departure, namely the function of the countertext –
the fact that we even can doubt or question the book’s factuality, the truth-
fulness of its presentation would indicate its nonfictionality and the possi-
ble existence of competing versions. As Heyne points out, it “would not
make sense to ‘doubt’ a work of fiction” (Heyne 1987: 480).

In the chapter “Girl of my Dreams,” Roth mentions the episode in his
novel My Life as a Man (1974) where Peter Tarnopol is tricked by Ma-
ureen Johnson into believing she is pregnant, and tells us that it “parallels
almost exactly how I was deceived by Josie in February 1959. Probably
nothing else in my work more precisely duplicates the autobiographical
facts” (107). This leads Finney to conclude that facts cannot be disenta-
gled from imaginative invention, and that it is impossible to tell autobiog-
raphy from fiction in the web of textuality. Yet, the distinction between the
two is clear if we approach the episodes as parts of different works, gov-
erned by distinct frames of interpretation, and not as matters of content.
One account aspires to be an accurate description of what happened be-
tween Roth and his wife, and the other is part of the fictional discourse of
the novel, not making assertions about the facts of any event in the past. In
the first account it becomes relevant to ask questions like: Is this an accu-
rate description of what happened? In the second “account,” it makes little
sense to doubt or make inferences into “what really happened” since the
fictional language-game places the episode in an aesthetic, literary compo-
sition, a novel, without making any reference, in this case, to the event that
Roth claims to be taken directly from his own life. “What one chooses to
reveal in fiction is governed by a motive fundamentally aesthetic,” we are
told in the Zuckerman letter. And Roth, the author, is here making a dis-
tinction between how we judge the novelist on the basis of aesthetics and
the autobiographer on ethical grounds (163) (See Chapter 5).

The countertext in The Facts attacks the autobiographical text on the
level of presentation. It focuses on the exclusions, the selective nature of it,
and Roth’s fear to hurt the people he writes about. In the letter, Zucke-
man’s voice scrutinizes some episodes of the autobiographical narrative
according to these objections. And here we can see, as I have argued, that
the countertext does not question the book’s “factual status” but rather its

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“factual adequacy,” to use the terms Heyne employs in his distinction between fact and fiction on the one hand, and good and bad fact on the other (Heyne 1987: 480). If a reader, in the book represented by Zuckerman, “is prepared to assert an alternative version of events, to engage actively in a certain kind of dialogue, then we are dealing with something we might all be willing to call nonfiction” (Heyne 2001: 330). If we indeed assert this, as Heyne encourages, then Roth is saying something about the nature of autobiographical discourse when he has Zuckerman claim that with autobiography there is always another text, a countertext, to the one presented. And this, I would say, is the main function of the Zuckerman letter. Roth ends his novelist’s autobiography by letting his novelist’s alter ego criticize his motives and the book’s lack of literary value.

Narrative Doppelgängers and Interpretative Frameworks

In the opening letter to Zuckerman Roth poses, as we have seen, the question – to himself and to his reader(s) – why he, after many years as a fiction writer should “claim biographical visibility now [...]” (F 4). His answer, as we remember, is presented by a recounting of a depression that Roth presumably endured in the spring of 1987. “I am talking about a breakdown,” he writes and proceeds by explaining that:

Although there’s no need to delve into particulars here, I will tell you that in the spring of 1987, at the height of a ten-year period of creativity, what was to have been a minor surgery turned into a prolonged psychical ordeal that led to an extreme depression that carried me right to the edge of emotional and mental dissolution. It was in the period of post-crack-up meditation, with the clarity attending the remission of an illness, that I began, quite involuntarily, to focus virtually all my waking attention on worlds from which I had lived at a distance for decades – remembering where I had started out from and how it all began. (5)

In the opening of Operation Shylock, Roth returns, one might assume, to his psychological problems which were caused by a regular intake of a sleeping pill called Halcion. Here he provides a more detailed description of the experience. 84 In this book we get the “particulars” omitted in The Facts. The story of the depression spans over several pages and presents a vivid account of the experience of a breakdown.

84 Philip Roth’s former wife Claire Bloom also recounts this episode in her memoir Leaving a Doll’s House. See (Bloom 1996: 193-197).
“What had happened was this,” we are told:

In the aftermath of a knee surgery, my pain, instead of diminishing as the weeks passed, got worse and worse, far exceeding the prolonged discomfort that had prompted me to decide on surgery in the first place. When I went to see my young surgeon about the worsening condition, he merely said, “This happens sometimes,” and, claiming to have warned me beforehand that the operation might not work, dismissed me as his patient. I left with only some pills to mitigate my astonishment and manage the pain. Such a surprising outcome from a brief outpatient procedure might have made anyone angry and despondent; what happened in my case was worse. (20)

In comparing these isolated passages to each other one might take for granted that they belong to “versions” referring to the “same event,” one being a brief account while the other is more detailed. If removed from their respective context there is nothing in these narrative text segments that would indicate that we should interpret them differently. To paraphrase Searle’s well-known statement, there is no textual property which will identify the text segments as either fiction or nonfiction. Yet, the two segments are put to use within distinct interpretative frameworks and therefore they come to attain different functions.

The first chapter of *Operation Shylock* begins, as we remember from my discussion in Chapter 3, with the story of how Philip Roth, in January 1988, learned about “the other Philip Roth,” a doppelgänger attending the John Demjanjuk trial in Jerusalem and spreading the idea of Diasporism, “the only solution to the Jewish problem” (18). After this introduction, we are given a background, what preceded this strange turn of events in the life of Philip Roth. “The calls from Israel had reached me at the two-room Manhattan suite where my wife and I had been living for nearly five months, as though aground on the dividing line between past and future” (19) – so the second section of the first chapter opens. In the following, the domestic situation is connected with Roth’s state of mind at the time, and then the story of his depression gets a long, detailed description. If we compare with the inclusion of Roth’s depression in *The Facts*, there is a notable difference in that we are never really told why he is telling us this. The presentation lacks the kind of retrospective motivation present in the nonfictional context. Why – we would probably ask if the frameworks were identical – should we bother to read several pages about his state of mind, and how is this description connected with the chapter opening about the doppelgänger in Jerusalem?
When reading the pages about the breakdown in *Operation Shylock* we will likely understand it as plot-background and as establishing the main themes in a fictional work. The violations of our expectancies of relevance in Roth’s “confession” and the forward direction of the narrative progression will probably guide us towards a framework governed by interpretative logic deviating from a typical nonfictional context. After the introduction about how Philip Roth learned about the existence of “the other Philip Roth,” we have already concluded that this book will in some way focus on the subject of identity and doppelgängers. When we read the depression section, then, we will evaluate the narrative development, or compositional progress, on the basis of some other established sense of relevance, for instance what Walsh calls “thematic relevance” (Walsh 2007: 31) and what I discussed as relevance pertaining to the fictional work. The only explicit reference to the doppelgänger of the introduction is this: “If anyone had telephoned then to say that Philip Roth had been spotted at a war-crimes trial in Jerusalem or was advertised in the Jerusalem paper as lecturing at the King David Hotel on the only solution to the Jewish problem, I can’t imagine what I would have done” (22). Instead, the themes of personal loss of one’s self to an other, the fragility of identity and uncertainty in our perception of reality are established on a different level and the motif of a doppelgänger is repeated and given a more general significance to the problem of identity. This becomes clear in this very long sentence, parts of which I quote here: “[...] half-convinced that I owed my transformation – my deformation – not to any pharmaceutical agent but to something concealed, obscured, masked, suppressed, or simply uncreated in me until I was fifty-four but as much me and mine as my prose style, my childhood, or my intestines; half-convinced that whatever else I might imagine myself to be, I was that too [...]” (27). In *Operation Shylock*, then, the first two sections of the first chapter, the one about “the other Philip Roth” in Jerusalem and the one about “the other Philip Roth” manifesting himself during and after his depression, are juxtaposed as a part of the narrative development in a fictional structure, as variations of themes and motifs.

Mark Shechner states that “truth is at issue” (Shechner 2003: 134) in Roth’s “confession,” yet as I have argued it would seem contradictory and contraintuitive to claim that the author is as committed to telling the truth in this book as he is in *The Facts*. In one case we have an author who is consistent with his nonfictional approach, while in the other case we have an author parodying the truth-claims associated with autobiography. In *The Facts*, Roth the autobiographer is sticking with his autobiographical intentions and interpretative relevance is determined accordingly with the dominant frame of interpretation. The author of *Operation Shylock*, on
the other hand, distances himself from the paratextual signs of nonfiction and the following commitment to truthfulness. Roth does not include himself in this book with the intention of writing about himself but as a metafictional variation of the doppelgänger-motif underpinning the theme of what it is to transform oneself into an other through the act of writing. The authorial communicative act, as demonstrated here, is then distinctly different in Operation Shylock from that in The Facts. Therefore we should not be led astray by occasional similarities in the use of certain form elements on the surface level. Set into the right interpretative context these “forms” are revealed to perform functions that differ considerably from one context to the other.

Events and Motifs as Functional Distinctions

Read as narrative text segments removed from each work, the account of the depression in The Facts and the lengthier description of a mental breakdown in Operation Shylock might, as noted previously, be regarded as referring to the “same event.” Yet, the very concept of “event” is in itself highly problematic. Louis O. Mink has stated that “we cannot refer to events as such, but only to events under a description; so there can be more than one description of the same event, all of them true but referring to different aspects of the event or describing it at different levels of generality” (Mink 1978: 145). Mink then asks: “But what can we possibly mean by ‘same event’? Under what description do we refer to the event that is supposed to sustain different descriptions?” (146) His main point regarding events is that the ordinary use of the term presupposes “some standard description of each putative event [...]” (146). However, there is no way of settling on standard description and so therefore “we cannot without confusion regard different narratives as emplotting the ‘same’ events” (147). “Events,” or more precisely, descriptions of events, Mink argues, “are not the raw material out of which narratives are constructed; rather an event is an abstraction from a narrative” (147).

In Mink’s view, then, events are abstracted from narrative. Similarly Walsh argues that narrative cannot be defined in terms of reference to events, since narrative discourse is “logically prior to the concept of the event, not consequent upon it” and “fabula is a construction of events from discourse, not their reconstruction” (Walsh 2007: 57). What Walsh is reacting to, as noted earlier, is what he refers to as “a nonfictional, and philosophically realist, notion of narrative events” (56), dominant within narrative theory and its treatment of fictional texts. Inspired by the Russian
Formalists and their focus on “literature’s specificity as an object of study, and its value as a cultural phenomenon” (55), Walsh intends to refocus the discussion on “fabula” and “events” to be about how these concepts relate to fictionality in particular.

The Formalists, as is well known, “perceived that fictional narrative is primarily driven by the dictates of art (however they might be conceived),” and according to Boris Tomasevsky the primary materials of fiction are not “events,” but “motifs” (55). Although Walsh is sympathetic with the Formalist approach, he considers their focus on art “inhibited their efforts to explain narrative representation [...]” (56). In his discussion on events he therefore puts the focus primarily on narrative representation as such. Walsh’s intention is to show that “the event cannot provide a basic structural unit upon which narrative discourse is grounded” and to argue that “[n]arration in any medium represents the event in process, not by invoking it as a narrative unit [...]” (57). In concluding, Walsh states: “Because narrative cannot be defined in terms of reference to events, neither can fabula be construed as the referent of sujet” (57).

Although I agree with Walsh’s critique of narrative theory’s approach to the concept of event, I do not find his re-evaluation of fabula to be sufficient in accounting for the interpretative differences pertaining to narrative events in fiction and nonfiction respectively. In essence, Walsh is arguing that events are constituted by narrative discourse, which I find is quite similar to Mink’s claim that events are an abstraction from narrative rather than its “raw material.” Mink, however, is referring to both “actual and imaginary events described in the ordinary language of narrative accounts” (Mink 1978: 146). Walsh, on the other hand, is discussing the concept of event with focus on the relationship between fabula and fictionality. Yet, I cannot see why his conception of the concept of narrative event should not apply to nonfictional narratives as well.

Similar to Walsh, my approach in these matters is inspired by the Formalist focus on fictional literature as art, but contrary to him I will use the distinction between “event” and “motif” in order to illuminate certain differences in our interpretative stance towards fiction and nonfiction. As noted, I agree that narrative theory has applied a nonfictional notion of events when analysing fiction. Yet by arguing that narrative discourse is logically prior to events, that fabula can only be constructed through sujet, we do not solve the problem at hand, namely that what we refer to as “events” in fictional and nonfictional texts tend to be interpreted within distinct communicative frameworks.

If we were to talk about the shorter and longer depression episode in *The Facts* and *Operation Shylock* as “events” we would remain on the
levels of narrative structure without any acknowledgment of narrative context. This problem is noticeable when for instance Mink argues that an event “is a function of particular narrative structures” (my emphasis) (147). He writes: “An event may take five seconds or five months, but in either case whether it is one event or many depends not on a definition of ‘event’ but on a particular narrative construction which generates the event’s appropriate description.” Mink claims that “in certain stories we can accept even something like the French Revolution as a simple event, because that is the way it is related to character and plot, while in other stories it may be too complex to describe as a single whole” (147). Stories are here seemingly synonymous with narratives in general, although Mink speaks about character and plot. It becomes clear that function, according to him, is generated by the narrative structure rather than its relation to a communicative context. Instead of viewing event as a function of a particular narrative construction, we should view event as a function of a particular framework. The distinction between “event” and “motif” is a consequence of how we perceive the text segments to be intended, that is, how they are supposed to function within their respective narrative context. For this reason it might be better to speak of event-function, dominant in non-fiction, and motif-function, dominant in fiction, which is what I will do after discussing “event” in contrast to the Formalist notion of “motif” presented by Tomashevsky in his essay *Thematics*.85

The conception of motif which Tomashevsky introduces is different from how I used the word previously when speaking about the doppelgänger-motif in *Operation Shylock*. In that sense motif “is a thematic unit which occurs in various works,” explains Tomashevsky, who then adds that these types of motifs “move in their entirety from one plot to another” (Tomashevsky 1965: 67). For the Formalists, a work of literary fiction is not composed of events, as Walsh noted, but of motifs which form the

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85 In Chapter 5 I argue that motif-function is not exclusive to fiction, but a feature present in certain nonfictional texts as well, what I refer to as *literary* nonfiction. Even if motif-function and event-function often correspond with how we pragmatically distinguish between fictional and nonfictional texts, it should be noted that exceptions to the rule exist. Also, event-functions in fictional literature might indicate what I would deem a change of frame, meaning a *local* effect pertaining to a nonfictional framework. Similarly, motif-functions in nonfictional work create, locally, a different focus of attention, akin to what we employ while reading literary, fictional texts, dominating temporarily over concerns of truthfulness and referential claims. For more on event- versus motif-functions, or how texts are able locally to change their global or dominant frame of interpretation, see Chapter 2, p. 67-71 and Chapter 5, p. 174-180.
thematic bonds of the work. Tomashevsky distinguishes story from plot and argues that “the story (i.e. the fabula) is the aggregate of motifs in their logical, causal-chronological order; the plot (i.e. sujet) is the aggregate of those same motifs but having the relevance and the order which they had in the original work” (68). A plot, he explains, is the artistic creation and “the aesthetic function of the plot is precisely this bringing of an arrangement of motifs to the attention of the reader” (68). Yet, even though this conception of motif differs radically from the types of transferable motifs, they “remain significant,” writes Tomashevsky, “precisely because they are also motifs in our [the Formalists] theoretical sense” (68).

This is not as paradoxical as it might sound. To illustrate what he means we can turn to my example from Operation Shylock. Already in the first pages, with the appearance of “the other Philip Roth,” the author establishes the doppelgänger-motif as a thematic unit reminiscent from various works, from ancient mythologies to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s short story The Double or films like Ingmar Bergman’s Persona or David Lynch’s Mulholland Drive, etc. Yet, when reading the opening of Operation Shylock it becomes clear, as I argue, that the first two sections of the book, the one about “the other Philip Roth” in Jerusalem and the one about “the other Philip Roth” manifesting himself during and after his depression, are motivated as motifs in a singular aesthetic, artistic, literary, fictional work. Tomashevsky notes that there are many different types of motifs (in the Formalist sense) within a work and the best way to specify how the depression episode functions in the book is to view it as a kind of “expository motif,” presenting plot-background and establishing the central themes.

Regarding the protagonist Roth’s breakdown in the book, Kauvar argues that this “event narratively befits the quest for identity with which Operation Shylock is concerned” (my emphasis) (Kauvar 1995: 432). Even if we argue from different theoretical positions, I believe we are in agreement. But instead of “event,” I would say “motif,” and instead of “narratively befits the quest for identity,” I would argue that the motif is compositionally motivated as part of a fictional work and its thematic bonds. This might seem like a wholly different interpretation, yet I believe we might share the same view of the function of the depression episode.

However, as I have argued, there is nothing distinguishing an event from a motif except the context of interpretation and what we perceive as the dominant function of a certain episode or isolated narrative segment. Instead of concluding, then, that the depression episode is a motif, or more specifically, an expository motif, it is more accurate to argue that this section of Operation Shylock has a motif-function as its dominant function. Comparing it with The Facts, we notice that Roth’s account of his depres-
sion is motivated in a completely different way. In his novelist’s autobiography, the presentation of his depression is the very motive for the whole biographical project. Reading about Roth’s breakdown we will therefore likely interpret this episode as an “event” in someone’s life rather than as a “motif” in someone’s fictional, artistic creation. And since “event” is a highly problematic term, as we have seen, it might be better to say that the episode has an event-function, meaning we take it to refer to and make certain truth-claims pertaining to the state of things in our actual world.

To summarize, the segments from Roth’s autobiography and his “confession” should not be considered “versions” of the “same event” since we most likely interpret their dominant functions differently within their respective framework. The author might have used “raw material” from his own life, yet how those experiences or memories are put to use in a narrative context is what prompts our interpretative responses.

**Operation Shylock and the “Missing” Chapter**

A strategy of analysis in this chapter and the previous one has been to read *The Facts* and *Operation Shylock* in tandem; to compare their many similarities in order to underscore the fundamental differences pertaining to each book. It should be clear that the beginnings of *The Facts* and *Operation Shylock* can be discussed as related with one another. This goes for the concluding chapters as well. As we remember, Roth’s novelist’s autobiography ends with the letter from Zuckerman in which the author challenges the veracity of his autobiographical account. His so-called “confession” also ends with a section in which the chapters we have previously read are subjected to scrutiny and critique. In the epilogue in *Operation Shylock*, entitled “Words Generally Only Spoil Things,” we are told that the final chapter of the book, supposedly detailing the operation Roth performed for the Mossad, has been omitted. The reason behind this alleged omission is presented as the advice of Roth’s “handler,” Smilesburger, who has read the “manuscript” and believes the eleventh chapter to be too compromising for both the author and for the Israeli Intelligence Service.

The epilogue concludes with the meeting between the protagonist Roth and Smilesburger in which the latter in different ways tries to convince the author of the manuscript to publish it as “fiction” or delete its final chapter, also entitled “Operation Shylock.” Smilesburger’s arguments oscillate, as the protagonist acknowledges, between stating that the manuscript includes information which “could lay the state of Israel open to God only knows what kind of disaster and compromise the welfare and security of
the Jewish people for centuries to come,” and stating that “the book presents such a warped and ignorant misrepresentation of objective reality [...]” (OS 391) that Roth’s literary reputation might be harmed if presented as a nonfictional account. When reading the scene in which Roth and Smilesburger meet, the reader already knows that the chapter they discuss is going to be omitted, yet in the scene in question the only hint as to the reason why is the rather ironic remark which concludes the whole book: “Let your Jewish conscience be your guide” (398).

Smilesburger presents the idea of publishing the manuscript without the ending in the following dialogue exchange:

“Here’s a better suggestion, then. Instead of replacing it with something imaginary, do yourself the biggest favor of your life and just lop off the chapter entirely.”

“Publish the book without its ending.”

“Yes, incomplete, like me. Deformed can be effectual too, in its own unsightly way.” (387)

If taken literally, then, these lines might lead the reader to conclude that Operation Shylock is an incomplete work, lacking its final chapter. This in turn would imply that there exists a complete version of the book, yet as I have argued in this chapter the very idea of “versions” is only applicable to nonfictional narratives, not narrative fiction. When David Gooblar writes that the final chapter has been “cut out of the published version of Operation Shylock” (Gooblar 2011: 127), his remark indeed implies that the final chapter exists but has been consciously “left out” of the book, leaving it incomplete. We are told that just “as Zuckerman argues with Roth in The Facts over whether to include the whole truth about ‘May Aldridge,’ and Philip argues with his wife about the revelations of Deception, here Philip and Smilesburger grapple over how much Roth puts in or leaves out about his adventures in Operation Shylock” (127). Gooblar discusses how the protagonist Roth questions Smilesburger’s arguments during their meeting and concludes by stating: “Here, Philip is absolutely committed to telling the whole truth of what happened to him, regardless of the effect his published work might have on the security of the Jewish state – or on his own security. And yet, Operation Shylock, as it is, contains no chapter detailing Roth’s mission for the Mossad” (128). The phrase “as it is” implies that another version, a more complete version of the book, exists or at some point existed. In connection with what I discussed in the previous
section, this would mean that Roth, the author, has omitted an episode or “event” which he might have included. Yet, in order to interpret the book and its ending in accordance with what it is, as a work of fiction, we must recognize that the epilogue does not contain an actual omission which renders the text incomplete but an “omission-motif” which resists the idea of further “completion” and enables the author to present a concluding discussion on the overall theme of transforming life into writing.

This brings me back to the discussion on how “completeness” and “incompleteness” have been attached to concepts of fiction and/or nonfiction in a more general sense. When discussing the story-discourse distinction above, I noted how “story” in Chatman’s account is viewed as complete while “discourse” is presented as narrative selection. The matter of selection is defined as “the capacity of any discourse to choose which events and objects actually to state and which only to imply” (Chatman 1978: 28). Chatman writes: “For example, in the ‘complete’ account, never given in all its detail, the ‘ultimate argument,’ or logos, each character must first be born. But the discourse need not mention his birth, may elect to take up his history at the age of ten or twenty-five or fifty or whenever suits its purpose. Thus story in one sense is the continuum of events presupposing the total set of all conceivable details, that is, those that can be projected by the normal laws of the physical universe” (28). Here Chatman expresses ideas which later have become the central assumptions in possible-worlds theory, and his conceptualizations of story clearly invoke the idea of a fictional world, based on the actual world and governed by what Ryan calls “the principle of minimal departure.” In fact, Chatman’s idea of the “aesthetic experience” relies on the assumptions that the “perceiver [i.e. reader] must at some point mentally construct the ‘field’ or ‘world’ of the aesthetic object” (27). In other words, the narrative content or “story”

86 In theories of narrative and fiction, the dichotomy between completeness and incompleteness is often discussed via the matter of “gapping” or the question of “gaps” in fiction. See the article on “Gapping” by Ellen Spolsky in Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (Spolsky 2005: 193-194).

87 Ryan explains: “Variously described as ‘the principle of minimal departure’ (Ryan 1991), the ‘reality principle’ (Walton 1990), and the ‘principle of mutual belief’ (Walton again), the principle states that when readers construct fictional worlds, they fill in the gaps [...] in the text by assuming the similarity of the fictional world to their own experiential reality [...] The principle of minimal departure presupposes that fictional worlds, like the PWs postulated by philosophers, are ontologically complete entities: every proposition p is either true or false in these worlds. To the reader’s imagination, undecidable propositions are a matter of missing information, not of ontological deficiency.” (Ryan 2005: 447)
consists of the objects and actions in real or imagined worlds to which the incomplete discourse refers (24).

For Chatman, then, the hypothetical world of the story, real or imagined, is complete but can never be recounted in all its detail. For some possible-worlds theorists, however, such as Lubomír Doležel and Ruth Ronen, fictional worlds are separated from actual worlds based on their supposed “incompleteness.” Ronen writes that the “absence of a complete referent underlying the fictional construct leaves many propositions ascribable to the fictional world indeterminable” (Ronen 1994: 114-115). “In reality, as opposed to fiction,” she argues, ”we assume that there are no gaps and that gaps in representation can be filled by reference to a complete, fully detailed and, at least in principle, available object” (115). Doležel argues that “denying incompleteness to fictional entities is tantamount to treating them as real entities” (Doležel 1998: 23). As a consequence he differentiates between world-imagining texts (I-texts) and world-constructing texts (C-texts): “Imagining texts are representations of the actual world; they provide information about it in reports, pictures, hypotheses, and the like. Constructing texts are prior to worlds; it is textual activity that calls worlds into existence and determines their structures” (24). He goes on to explain that the “pictures of the actual world provided by I-texts are constantly challenged, modified, or canceled by validation and refutation procedures” while the “fictional world cannot be altered or canceled once its creator has fixed the constructing text” (26).

In other words, Doležel argues that fictional worlds are incomplete and actual worlds are complete. When it comes to representation of worlds it is the other way around; imagining texts which reference to the actual world are incomplete while constructing texts which create the world to which they refers are complete or “fixed.” As opposed to Chatman, then, Doležel distinguishes between texts “imagining” actual existing worlds and texts constructing fictional worlds.

Of course, the concept of “world” in itself is very problematic and can be debated over endlessly. Important to note, however, is that the incomplete fictional world in Doležel’s account seems much less literal than in Chatman’s or Ryan’s use of “world,” whether real or imagined. The fictional world is not analogous to the actual world, as Doležel discusses the matter. “World” might be more a metaphor for the mental constructs and images we make while reading rather than an imagined universe “presupposing the total set of all conceivable details, that is, those that can be projected by the normal laws of the physical universe” (Chatman 1978: 28), as Chatman approaches the notion of “story.”
If we turn to *Operation Shylock* and the question of the “missing” chapter, the book’s “completeness” or “incompleteness” depends of course on how these terms are used and what theory of fiction lies behind their use. From Chatman’s point of view narrative representations in general are “incomplete.” Whether we read Roth’s “confession” as fiction or nonfiction, it would, in theory, be just one of many possible versions. Narratives, fictional and nonfictional, share the same structure, according to Chatman. For Doležel, whether a “world” is complete or incomplete depends ultimately on whether the text is an imagining or constructing text, whether it is open to being challenged and modified, or if it is “fixed.” In the end, the terms “completeness” and “incompleteness” are only meaningful if determined in a context, and this has been the point of this theoretical detour; to return to the example from *Operation Shylock* with a wider theoretical frame of reference and with an understanding of what it might imply to say that the last chapter of the book is “left out” or omitted.

So, is the last chapter missing or not? My answer: it depends on whether the omission is viewed as an actual gap which can be filled or if it is a motif of omission in a work of fiction. Actual gaps can only occur in a nonfictional or factual interpretative context. “Think of the exclusions, the selective nature of it, the very pose of the fact-facer” (*F* 164), it is said in the Zuckerman letter regarding Roth’s autobiographical narrative. And as stated earlier, the words attributed to Zuckerman at the end of *The Facts* often compare the nature of autobiographical writing with the nature of fiction-writing: “Even if it’s no more than one percent that you’ve edited out, that’s the one percent that counts – the one percent that’s saved for your imagination and that changes everything [...] With autobiography there is always another text, a countertext, if you will, to the one presented” (172). In the context of autobiography it makes sense to speak about exclusions, selectiveness, and incompleteness at the level of discourse, yet with reference to fiction, these terms would only be applicable to fiction-texts under the assumption that they go under the same paradigm as nonfiction, *as if* referencing a “world.” The incomplete discourse refers to *aspects* of the complete story, never given in full detail, as Chatman would argue. Roth’s explicit omission of his mission for the Mossad in *Operation Shylock* could then be said to draw attention to the fact that all fictions contain gaps. This view would represent an internal, intrafictional approach to fiction, treating it as analogous to nonfictional communication referencing events, people, places, etc. To state that the last chapter of *Operation Shylock* is left out of the *published version*, as Gooblar does, would then necessarily mean that the discourse and the
work as a whole is seen as incomplete: something has been edited out, an event, or more specifically, a chapter describing this event.

From Gooblar’s perspective it becomes problematic to explain the purpose of the so-called “missing” chapter. He notes that “Philip is absolutely committed to telling the whole truth of what happened to him, regardless of the effect his published work might have on the security of the Jewish state – or on his own security” (Gooblar 2011: 128), and yet the chapter detailing Roth’s mission for the Mossad is omitted. In other words, if taken literally the omission of the last chapter in Operation Shylock would not just render the work incomplete but also change the interpretative framework. To conclude that the author has edited out important information and that he acknowledges this himself would be to transform what I have argued is a work of fiction into a nonfictional narrative. The “eleventh chapter” of Operation Shylock does not become an actual gap which can be filled since the book in question does not refer to actual events and occurrences, despite what the ironic opening preface states. It is not uncommon that works of fiction explicitly “exclude” something from their composition or the “plot” conceived in the formalistic sense defined by Tomaszewsky. For example, a murder can occur on a blank page as in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s The Voyeur (1955). This does not mean that the murder-motif is not a part of the composition; it is presented in a certain manner in order for the author to achieve certain literary effects.

Similarly, the omitted chapter of Operation Shylock is a kind of omission-motif where what is “left out” of the book is compositionally motivated in relation to the author’s overall thematic, self-reflexive concerns: the connection between life and writing, subjectivity and objectivity, personal and collective identity, etc. Only if we view the omission as a motif, rather than as an actual exclusion, are we able to answer the question of the “missing” chapter in an adequate manner. The ending congenially concludes many of the thematic concerns emerging throughout the book that produced a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty, an effect which seems to be in line with the whole aesthetic vision informing Operation Shylock.

Context and Concepts II

Counterfactuality in Fictional and Nonfictional Practices

In our everyday lives, we engage occasionally in the activity of imagining how a change in the past might have produced a different state of affairs than that which is now the case. I can wonder how something might have
turned out differently if only this or that had happened instead of what actually did happen. For instance, at the end of a bad day I may look back and ask myself what would have happened had I acted differently from what I actually did. Or I might, being in the right mood, imagine how my life would have turned out if I had never attended that conference where I met the woman who is now my wife. These are everyday examples of what is called counterfactual thinking, when we “consider possible actions which might have prevented an event or caused a different event to happen” (Doležel 2004: 109). Counterfactual thinking centres around the question “What if?” and is present as a cognitive instrument in various disciplines and practices. In this section I focus on the matter of how counterfactuality is put to use within the practice of history and the practice of fiction-writing. Like Doležel, who has discussed counterfactual accounts in several articles and books, I take a closer look at how alternative histories are “construed by both historians and fiction makers” (110), in order to see whether the counterfactual method is employed in a similar way and with similar effects in these practices. This discussion on counterfactuality and counterfactuals is intended to provide a theoretical background to the following analysis of the function of “counterfacts” in The Plot Against America. In other words, before I approach the question of why Roth re-writes history and why he gives an alternative version of the official chronology of historical events presented in the Postscript at the end of his book, I discuss historical rewrites in a more general sense.

Alternative or counterfactual history is a thought experiment which Doležel describes in the following way: “[B]y changing or eliminating a factor of factual history it tests this factor’s significance” (Doležel 1999: 266). Therefore, it focuses exclusively “on simple yes/no situations: win/lose a battle, war, election, a power struggle; a leader assassinated/not assassinated” (266), etc. Implicit in the promotion of counterfactual thinking in history lies, as Doležel notes, “a strong argument against historical determinism, against the Hegelian claim that history follows some transcendent ‘laws’” (Doležel 2004: 111). History is viewed as the acting and interacting of human individual agents and groups of agents situated within a reality reliant on random factors. The value of counterfactual thinking, however, within the historical practice has been much debated by historians and some view it simply as a “parlor-game” while others argue

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that it is a serious method for understanding history and historical processes. Hugh Trevor-Roper, for instance, writes that at “any given moment in history there are real alternatives, and to dismiss them as unreal because they were not realized [...] is to take the reality out of the situation. How can we ‘explain’ what happened and why if we only look at what happened and never consider the alternatives, the total pattern of forces whose pressure created the event?” (Quoted in Doležel 1999: 265). As an example, he states: “I do not hesitate to say that in 1940-41 a mere accident, and one which might easily have occurred, could not only have reversed the outcome of the war, and transformed the subsequent shape of the world, but also have imposed upon the world a new synthesis of ideas and power, creating a new context for both politics and thought” (266). Similar to Trevor-Roper’s position, historians interested in alternatives to what we know happened in the past often take World War II as a point of departure and seem to ascribe to the same convictions as he does. To re-imagine the history of World War II has also been the dominant focus in major works of fictional counterfactual history, as I will discuss.

In sketching a brief history of alternative history, Adam Rovner argues that “the rise of academic historiography in the early nineteenth century coincides with the appearance of alternative history, suggesting an isomorphism between the Leopold von Ranke’s imperative to write history ‘as it essentially was’ and the desire to write freely what might have been” (Rovner 2011: 131). This idea of writing “freely,” however, must be discussed because, as Doležel emphasizes, counterfactual thinking within the historical practice cannot be based on “free-wheeling imagination” (Doležel 2004: 120) if it is to have any real value for historians.

In discussing counterfactual history and the history of counterfactuals, Doležel places the “two most important works” in this genre against each other – If It Had Happened Otherwise: Lapses into Imaginary History (1932), a collection of alternative histories edited J.C. Squire, and Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (1997), edited by Niall Ferguson. The difference between Squire’s anthology and Ferguson’s is that the former pursues the aim of re-examining great moments of history through “fictional imagination rather than historical research” (112). Doležel concludes that the contributions in Squire’s book purported to be “thought experiments in historical study” but are in fact “fictional narratives,” since they solely imagine an alternative history without any grounding in historical research (116). In Ferguson’s collection the counterfactual histories are exposed to certain restrictions which aim to give credibility to counterfactual thinking. According to the author, matters about which counterfactual questions are posed must relate to notions of plausibility, probability, or
credibility, and also be committed to some existing historical record. It is not necessary here to go into detail about Ferguson’s restrictions. I just want to note how he aims to make counterfactual thinking a serious option within the practice of history and how he opposes the idea of historians writing alternative history could do so “freely,” without restrictions grounded in the historiographic practice itself.

In order to determine the value of counterfactuality we must connect the question with a specific practice. When historians and novelists engage in the past they do not do it for the same sort of reasons. Alternative history does not erase the boundaries between their different practices, turning historians into novelists. Doležel states that the “historian’s counterfactual worlds are methodological aids; they do not question the factual historical worlds [...]” while the “fiction maker’s counterfactual history is a parody of classic historical fiction [...]” (Doležel 1999: 267). I concur with the overall idea that counterfactuality is intended to do different jobs in fiction and nonfiction, yet the idea that all counterfactual historical fictions are “parodies” of classic historical fiction needs to be discussed further. How we should approach counterfactuality in fiction is not solved with Doležel’s assumption. We need to look more closely at what really should count as counterfactual in a work of fiction and what motivates its being there.

These questions are of central concern since narrative fiction engaged with history often counters or contradicts official historical sources in some sense or another or makes deviations from what is known about a person, place, or event during a particular time, inventing information where it is lacking. This description of historical fiction might be true of almost all novels set in the historical past, yet the characteristics mentioned are more notable and exaggerated in postmodernist fiction. Brian McHale argues that “traditional” and “classic” historical fiction, exemplified by Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Leo Tolstoy is governed as a genre by certain constraints which are often violated in postmodern texts. These constraints are summarized in three categories. First, classic historical fiction, according to McHale, tries to avoid contradicting the facts of historical records concerning persons and events. One way of steering clear of a possible conflict with official records is to focus on “dark areas” in historiography, a step which gives to the historical novelist “a relatively free hand” (McHale 1987: 87) to invent information on matters on which existent sources are silent. Secondly, historical fictions in the traditional sense avoid anachronisms and contain “[a]n acceptable degree of faithfulness to the material culture of the past [...]” (88). Finally, the genre of historical fiction
is governed by notions of verisimilitude and plausibility. Traditional historical fiction is thus synonymous with realistic historical fiction.

Postmodernist historical fiction, on the other hand, often disregards these constraints, although many examples, according to McHale, “do indeed adhere to the ‘classic’ paradigm of constraints on the insertion of historical realemes” (89). To show how the norms of realistic historical fiction are flouted by typical postmodernist novelists, he mentions, among other examples, how Robert Coover in *The Public Burning* (1977) has Richard Nixon try to seduce Ethel Rosenberg at Sing-Sing Prison on the eve of her execution, or how Ishmael Reed superimposes twentieth-century technology on nineteenth-century history (telephone, television, automobile, aircraft) in *Flight to Canada* (1976) (89, 93). Anachronism and eclecticism are common features in the postmodernist way of dealing with history in fiction. By flouting what McHale views as the constraints of traditional historical fiction, especially by not evading well-explored areas of historiography and openly violating official records in this field, postmodern novels tends to “re-write,” or rather “re-imagine” history.

Elizabeth Wesseling divides what she refers to as “postmodernist counterfactual historical fiction” into two categories: “negational and confirmational parodies of history” (Wesseling 1991: 157). The “first category comprises novels which haphazardly transform history” while the “second category includes works which unfold alternate histories inspired, with varying degree of emphasis, by emancipating, utopian ideals” (157). Wesseling attempts to explain systematically why postmodernist texts adapt historical material, and also to answer the question whether the “departures from canonized history are merely haphazard, or motivated by some sort of political commitment” (157). As examples of negational parodies of history, she mentions John Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Peter Ackroyd’s *Chatterton* (1987), and Louis Ferron’s *Turkenwespers* (1977). Concerning Ferron’s novel Wesseling argues that his “evocation of fin-de-siècle Vienna is counterfactual,” but notes that “his alterations of history do not really disclose unrealized possibilities that belonged to the potential of the historical epoch in question” (162). We are told that “Ferron does not intend to articulate an alternate historical vision that envisages different outcomes of historical processes and brings about a different distribution of roles over historical persons and collectives” (162). This, however, is the aim of confirmational parodies of history, such as utopian counterfactual parodies which, according to Wesseling, “rewrite history from the perspective of groups that have been excluded from the making and writing of history” (162), or uchronian fictions which engage with history “in a way that derides the idea of interpretation as an impartial, or even subjectively
valid, quest for the truth, pointing out that our versions of history reflect political interests and function as instruments of power” (163). As examples of confirmational parodies, Wesseling presents, among other novels, Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Günter Grass’s *Der Butt* (1977), and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* (1981), and argues that the crucial question for these authors “is not how to get to know the past without falling subject to the delusion of objectivity, but how to wrest historical materials from the androcentric and ethnocentric contexts in which they are embedded” (181).

From this characterization of so-called postmodernist counterfactual historical fiction one can discern that certain fiction-writers have the freedom to rewrite history in different ways and for different reasons. As we can see, Wesseling’s use of the term “counterfactual” includes all kinds of deviations from canonized history which makes it too broad and general for my purposes here. In order to answer the question of what counts as counterfactual in a work of historical fiction, whether realistic or postmodernist, we need to start by specifying how counterfactuality is put to use in narrative fiction in general.

It might seem obvious to state that in order for an historical account to be counterfactual it needs to counter the factual, i.e. what we agree to be the established facts. This common sense claim is, however, a bit more complex than we might think. In essence, counterfactual histories are characterized by presenting *alternative* rather than *competing* versions of the past. In order for us to read something as counterfactual in a work of fiction, on the other hand, we need to recognize that the history presented is negating canonized or official history and that such a rebuttal is its intended function. Adam Rovner states that all counterfactuals rely “on the reader’s knowledge of what the facts really are […]” (Rovner 2011: 141), and argues that the genre of Allohistory, i.e. alternative history or counterfactual history, “draws its singular power from its doubly-directed structure of the *what-if* and the *what-is*” (150).

Following from this is the idea that counterfactuality, in order to be *counter*factual, is dependent on the historical record or the historical knowledge being negated. As opposed to historical fiction in general, counterfactual historical fiction is dependent on allusions to outside sources and other texts in order to present the intended reverse truth-claims. Rovner writes, concerning the counterfactual novel *IsraIsland* (2005) by Nava Semel, that the book “does ‘confirm’ the false starts of ‘lost events,’ but it also references the ‘landmark’ – verifiable history – from which we take our bearing and from which the novel derives its power” (142).
In her discussion on the historical novel, Dorrit Cohn argues that it is not easy to decide whether alternative versions of official history, such as the postmodernist examples discussed above, “are sociopolitically or aesthetically inspired, whether they are to be interpreted as ideological strategies or as artistic games“ (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 158-159). What is certain, however, according to Cohn, is that an individual reader’s reaction to these alterative histories “is conditioned by the degree to which the historical material concerned touches on his or her values and sensitivities” (159).

To strengthen her argument she presents two examples of historical novels deviating from official history: Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992) and J.M Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg* (1994). Cohn explains that when she learned about the ways in which Ondaatje’s novel does not adhere to certain historical documents concerning the titular character Laszlo Almasy, her initial admiration of the book dropped a few notches. In Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg*, Dostoyevsky and his step-son Pavel are characters. Pavel is dead when the novel begins and is mourned by his father. Yet, when Cohn learned that in reality the stepson survived the stepfather by several years, she assures us that it did not lessen her appreciation of the book. It may be true that individual readers react differently to certain historical novels based on their relationship to the historical material behind the book, but that is not the issue here. My point is that deviations from official history (what we can confirm by documents and historical records) in historical novels are not instances of counterfactuality if they are not intended to exchange what happened for what could have happened. From Cohn’s examples one can discern that her reading of *The English Patient* and *The Master of Petersburg* acknowledges that these books are not intended to function as alternative versions of the life of real life historical figures, yet when compared with historical sources they do deviate from what is known of history.

The distinction between historical fiction and counterfactual historical fiction is, as I have noted here, built on the reader’s recognition that the history presented by the latter category deliberately negates official history and that the very point of counterfactual historical fiction is such a contradiction. For instance, even an expert on Dostoevsky will acknowledge that the “point” of Coetzee’s book is not the Russian author never mourning his step-son, but the theme of mourning itself as fictionally represented by Coetzee. As Cohn notes, our appreciation and understanding of the novel is not dependent on the historical reality it draws inspiration from because, I would add, Coetzee does not intend to confirm or contradict the life and times of Fyodor Dostoevsky. A counterfactual historical novel, however, such as *The Plot Against America* is dependent on the fact that we know
that Charles Lindbergh never became the president of the U.S. When Coetzee’s work remains a “closed” work of fiction, the effects of Roth’s novel is dependent on the historical knowledge and historical sources which the author counters and contradicts, as I attempt to explain in the following.

**Analysis and Argumentation II**

**History and Counterfactuality in *The Plot Against America***

“In twentieth century American and British literature,” writes Rovner, “World War II and the fate of the Jews under antisemetic regimes has been one of the most frequent subjects for alternate histories” (Rovner 2011: 133). This is notable among historians as well as novelists. In Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and Robert Harris’s *Fatherland* (1992) both authors imagine a history in which the Nazis were victorious. Rovner himself focuses on two counterfactual novels very much concerned with the fate of the Jews and questions of Jewish identity, namely Semel’s *IsraIsland* and Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union* (2007). Roth’s counterfactual story, *The Plot Against America*, clearly aligns itself with other well-known allohistories presented by fiction-writers. However, there are significant individual traits in Roth’s counterfactual account of American history during the years 1940-42 in which isolationist and anti-Semitic aviation hero Charles Lindberg is the president of the United States, mainly the fact that the alternative history impacts directly on his personal family autobiography. The “what if”-question Roth poses in the book is “what if Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not get his third term in 1940 but was defeated, not by Wendell Willkie who in reality ran against FDR, but Charles A. Lindbergh?” The idea for the book came to Roth, as he describes it himself, when he was reading historian Arthur Schlesinger’s autobiography and came upon a sentence “in which Schlesinger notes that there were some Republican isolationists who wanted to run Lindbergh for president in 1940” (“Story” C10). When reading this sentence, Roth wrote down the following question: What if they had? And from this question, he explains, the book evolved.

In several articles concerned with *The Plot Against America*, the novel is connected with earlier rewritings of history in Roth’s oeuvre, such as *The Great American Novel* (1973) which tells the mythical story of a third major baseball league, or ”‘I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting,’ or Looking at Kafka” (1973). Here the author imagines an alternative destiny for Franz Kafka who remains unknown as a writer and becomes
young Roth’s Hebrew teacher and his aunt’s suitor. In The Ghost Writer, Roth has his protagonist Nathan Zuckerman fantasizing that the character Amy Bellette might be Anne Frank who survived the war. Yet, what sets The Plot Against America apart from most other counterfactual historical novels and Roth’s earlier rewriting of history is, as I noted above, that he makes use of his own childhood experiences – described truthfully in the chapter “Safe at Home” in The Facts – and imagines different ones within this counterfactual historical context. What if Charles Lindbergh had been elected president? How would this have affected the Jewish population in America? More specifically, how would this have affected Roth’s own Jewish family? These are the questions at the centre of The Plot Against America, a book very much concerned with the relationship between self and history, Jewish and American identity, and between what happened and what could have happened in the not so distant past.

In the previous theoretical overview, my aim was to argue that counterfactuality is put to use within both fictional and nonfictional practices but with different purposes. I also aimed to distinguish counterfactual historical novels from other historical novels which might deviate from official history without being counterfactual in the sense of referencing an historical event or the life of an historical person by purposefully contradicting what is established as known facts. In this section, the main focus is to look at why The Plot Against America should be read as a counterfactual novel in this sense, i.e. how Roth establishes a counterfactual framework and for what purposes the author employs a counterfactual method. One of my arguments is that the driving force behind Roth’s rewriting of history and his own autobiography is “realist” rather than postmodernist as it has been described by many Roth critics. Roth, I argue, aims to create a believable plot or story involving his actual America, not mainly engage with the practice of history on the level of metahistorical argumentation.

In several analyses, The Plot Against America is discussed as a critique of so-called conventional historiography and as an examination of the constructedness or potential fictionality of history, in accordance with typically postmodernist concerns. The novel is said to blur the boundaries between real and invented, and some have argued that its “false” history is so convincing that it erases the factual one. In previous approaches to the book it becomes clear that for the most part counterfactual histories are viewed by these critics as merely made-up histories, and therefore are equated with “fictions” in a general sense. This is notable, for instance, when Alan Cooper describes the book’s premise as “fictive” in the sense of made-up, rather than counterfactual in the sense of negating and con-
Consciously contradicting what is established as official history, Cooper writes: “The task that Roth performs so brilliantly in *The Plot Against America* is absorbing into the lived experiences of his own childhood the shock of this one fictive premise, which came perilously close to being actual history” (Cooper 2005: 242). He goes on to state that, as in the other Roth Books, the author “invites readers to accept the internal narrator as Philip Roth himself and the events presented as part of his own life story,” and then he argues that the “sureness of this characterization makes it irrelevant that the Lindbergh plot against America is a writer’s fantasy” (243). As we can see, Cooper does not distinguish between *The Plot Against America* and the other Roth Books. More interesting in this context, however, is his claim that the novel is intended to be read not as alternative history but as actual history. The sureness of the characterization, according to Cooper, makes us forget the book’s counterfactuality.

A similar claim is made by Elaine B. Safer who refers to the book as an “imaginative history” (Safer 2006: 147) and “a false memoir” (150), and states that “the imaginative reality seems to undo the factual one” (152). Safer writes that the “fiction seems to argue so well that it may convince readers that there are no ‘facts’ or certainties in this postmodern world” (152). If these statements by Cooper and Safer were just expressions concerning the novel’s realism, Roth’s (successful) attempt to make the alternative history a plausible one, it would not be all that problematic, but clearly their characterization of the book has wider implications than that. They both confuse a counterfactual historical novel with what Doležel calls “distorted history.” Doležel explains that unlike distorted histories, counterfactual histories “do not replace what actually happened with what did not happen” (Doležel 1998b: 802). Yet, as a “convincing fiction,” so to speak, this seems to be what Cooper and Safer argue that Roth’s novel achieves. The alternative history replaces actual history, and Cooper and Safer seem to argue that Roth’s counterfactual novel intends to deconstruct history, undo factual reality, and show us that there are no “facts.”

The argument that *The Plot Against America* and its reimagining of history presents a critique of so-called conventional historiography is probably most thoroughly expressed by Catherine Morley in her article *Memo*
ries of the Lindbergh Administration: Plotting, Genre, and the Splitting of the Self in The Plot Against America. Morley describes the book as “an examination of the constructed nature of storytelling, plotting, and narration” and argues that Roth is “self-consciously and self-reflexively playing games with genre, combining the fantastic with the realistic, in order to demonstrate to the reader the means whereby all history is subject to infiltration by the authorial consciousness through which it is filtered” (Morley 2008: 137). In other words, “Roth’s project in The Plot Against America,” according to her, “is less political parable than studied reflection on the impermanence and potential fictionality of history and, moreover, the memory of the writer” (138). In Morley’s account the author is “deliberately straddling an indeterminate borderland between fiction and reality [...]” (138) and “the ‘history’ presented within The Plot Against America is both fabricated and real” (144). In her analysis she contends that “Roth wants the reader to pay attention not to the story, but to the plot, to the way in which the events have been shaped and structured according to the dictates of the writer” (146). In other words, Roth’s project, his whole book, is just a way to tell the reader to pay attention to the constructed-ness, or in Morley’s words, the potential fictionality of history.

Similarly, Brauner argues that Roth’s novel blurs “the boundaries between what is real and invented, and between history and story” (Brauner 2007: 213), and he claims that the intention behind the author’s rewriting of history is “to challenge the conventional view of history as inevitable, fixed, predetermined, objective; to posit, through the imagining of alternative histories, an idea of history as provisional, precarious, indeterminate and subjective” (211). T. Austin Graham argues that “The Plot Against America makes a [...] challenge to the efficacy of standard historical views, implicitly arguing that the definition of what passes for instructive history must be expanded if it is to be truly useful” (Graham 2007: 124). Not only that, according to his interpretation it also “challenges traditional, empirical notions of history, suggesting that we may best illustrate the past’s lessons by creating a new past entirely” (127).

This way of characterizing Roth’s intention as meta-historical could be connected with the idea that alternative histories are “parodies” of either historiography or historical novels. Doležel, who, as we could see above, insists on a distinction between fictional and nonfictional uses of counterfactual histories, writes: “The fiction maker’s counterfactual history is a parody of classic historical fiction; the historical past provides actors and the stage for its ‘carnavalitiztion’ (McHale 1987, 90)” (Doležel 1999: 267). Wesseling, in her discussion on alternative histories in postmodernist historical fiction, states that parody “looms large in postmodernist historical
fiction, whose targets range from the classical historical novel to the methods and matter of official historiography” (Wesseling 1991: 178). In other words, the books “make fun of conventional ways for coming to terms with the past by means of hyperbole and inversion” (178).

Turning to The Plot Against America one can ask oneself if this really is Roth’s main goal, to make fun of so-called conventional or canonized historiography. Is his counterfactual history simply a parody of history or of the classical historical novel?

To answer these interrelated questions affirmatively would, to some extent, be to agree with the majority of Roth critics who argue that the author is criticizing history and demonstrating its constructedness or “fictionality.” My answer, on the other hand, is that Roth’s primary concern is not to criticize history or historiography but to demonstrate the potentiality of fiction, as art and as a particular narrative practice, and that his intentions are “realistic” rather than postmodernist.90 My way of answering these questions will be to discuss how Roth establishes a counterfactual framework and why he includes a postscript with the accurate historical chronology which the author contradicts in his novel.

A Historical Postscript: Plotting the Counterfacts

As noted earlier, Operation Shylock begins with a preface and ends with an epilogue, and the autobiographical narrative in The Facts is framed in a similar way, by the letter-correspondence which functions as an inventive preface and epilogue. In The Plot Against America, the narrative text is followed by a postscript which includes a note to the reader, a chronology of the most important historical persons who figure in the book, and other documentation, such as a real speech made by Lindbergh. Roth begins the

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90 One notable exception from the postmodernist interpretations is Timothy Parrish’s essay “Autobiography and History in Roth’s The Plot Against America, or What Happened When Hitler Came to New Jersey” in which he contrasts The Plot Against America with Hayden White’s view of historical novels and narrative history, and Linda Hutcheon’s concept of “historiographic metafiction.” Parrish focuses on the implications present in the novel’s ending, when the counterfactual premise is countered by the factual history, or so one might at least assume. He writes: “Roth, by contrast, seems to accept history as Tolstoy presented it in War and Peace: events that happen because they could not have happened otherwise […]. Roth reimagines the events of World War II in order to reinvent himself and to confirm history’s implacable inevitability” (Parrish 2011: 152). Parrish, however, does not direct his critique against the postmodernist readings of Roth’s novel, but towards the view of history that he discerns from the book itself.
postscript by stating that his book is a work of fiction and then announces that the postscript “is intended as a reference for readers interested in tracking where historical fact ends and historical imagining begins” (PAA 364). The author then presents a long list of the sources from which he has gathered the historical information for his book.

There is no convincing reason to be sceptical of Roth’s initial statement in the postscript. Elaine B. Safer, however, is of a different opinion: “This Postscript claims to help the reader. But its similarity to the Epilogue in the earlier Operation Shylock: A Confession throws doubt on its intent” (Safer 2006: 152). There is, as mentioned, a formal similarity between The Plot Against America and Operation Shylock, yet there is no reason to doubt the author when he claims that the book is a work of fiction or when he makes a distinction between historical facts and historical imaginings. Safer writes – after quoting the first line of the Postscript, the line stating it is a work of fiction – that one “may wonder whether in The Plot Roth, with his tongue in cheek, is helping the reader by pointing to what he terms historical ‘facts?’” (152). She continues by stating that she says this ironically because the imaginative reality seems to undo the factual one, and because the fiction, as I stated, argues “so well that it may convince readers that there are no ‘facts’ or certainties in this postmodern world” (152).

Morley argues that in the Postscript, The Plot Against America “declares its status as artifice, thus deliberately straddling an indeterminate borderland between fiction and reality, or between ‘written and unwritten worlds!’” (Morley 2008: 138). Similar to Safer, she has a problem with the beginning of the Postscript where she finds a tension between the declaration that the book is a work of fiction and the statement that the reference material will help the reader to see where historical fact ends and historical imagining begins. Morley writes that the “second sentence invites the reader to believe that there is a degree of historical fact within the book, whereas the first declares, unequivocally, that there is not,” and she interprets this alleged tension in the following way: “This uncertainty between the constituents of historical fact and historical imagining is part of a deliberately philosophical agenda on the part of the writer. It not only foregrounds the artificial nature of writing itself, but also draws attention to the complicity of the writer in the foundation of cultural histories and myths” (146). Brauner also has a problem with the same formulation, stating that the Postscript is “implying that the story contains historical fact and also, through the use of the oxymoron ‘historical imagining,’ that what is imagined may in some sense be historical, and that what is historical may in some sense be imagined” (Brauner 2007: 212-213). This leads Brauner to argue that Roth’s novel blurs “the boundaries between what is
real and invented, and between history and story” (213), as noted above. But is there a tension between the first and second line of the Postscript? Are the phrases “historical fact” and “historical imaginings” really blurring the boundary between the factual and the fictional?

When Morley argues that the first line declaring the book as a work of fiction is in conflict with the second line establishing a distinction between historical fact and historical imaginings she is, in a way, on to something. In works of historical fiction, as opposed to counterfactual historical fiction, the terms “historical fact” and “historical imagining” are of no use. When we read Coetzee’s The Master of Petersburg it is of no consequence for our appreciation of this novel whether we know or not where and in what sense the author is deviating from the official history of Dostoevsky’s life. A more recent example testifying to this feature is E.L. Doctorow’s novel Homer & Langley (2009). Its protagonists are the infamous Collyer brothers, two eccentric bachelors and recluses who after their decaying bodies were found in their family home full of newspapers and odd collectibles became American myths. On the title page, the book is declared a work of fiction and Doctorow has also taken liberties changing the lives of the Collyer brothers in significant ways. For instance, in the book Homer goes blind much sooner than in real life and he is portrayed as the pianist in the family while in reality it was Langley who played the piano, and so on. Yet, these deviations from the historical biographies of Homer and Langley Collyer are not meant to be counterfactual in the sense defined here: a deliberate contradiction of what we know to be official history. The deviations do rather exemplify the freedom granted to writers of fiction to use historical reality in any way that suits them.91

In the case of Doctorow’s novel, then, the distinction between historical facts and historical imaginings is irrelevant. In the case of Roth’s The Plot Against America, on the other hand, it is essential that we realize that this is counterfactual historical fiction, or else the very point of the work is lost. For this reason the author includes a postscript to make us aware, in detail, how he contradicts official history. The postscript emphasizes that this is a

91 In several interviews published around the publication of Homer & Langley, Doctorow answered questions regarding his “retelling” of the lives of the Collyer brothers and the book’s alleged “factual inaccuracies”: “This book is an active interpretation of the myth,” stated Doctorow. “These are my Collyer.” (Kurutz 2009). Regarding the writer’s right to take liberties with historical material, Doctorow stated to CBS News: “In fiction, you know, there are no borders. You can go anywhere. You can write as a reporter. You can do confession. You can sound like an anthropologist, a philosopher, a theologian, a pornographer. You can be anything and do anything.” (Braver 2010).
work of fiction dependent on historical knowledge and based on historical sources but at the same time, a knowledge that the author counters and contradicts. This is a creative act rather different from implying that there are no historical facts at all. In his essay presenting the story behind *The Plot Against America*, Roth calls the book “an exercise in historical imagination” (“Story” C11) and writes that he “felt obligated here to recognize where authentic lives and events are clearly bent to my fictional purposes” (C12). Roth states: “I don’t want any confusion in the mind of the reader about where historical fact ends and historical imagining begins, and so, in the postscript, I give a brief survey of the era as it really was” (C12).

Already in the very first sentences of the book, Roth establishes a counterfactual historical context and the “what if”-question guiding the narrative progress, although in reverse:

> Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn’t been president or if I hadn’t been the offspring of Jews. (*PAA* 1)

Brauner notes that Roth begins his book boldly because “a novel predicated on an alternative version of history actually opens by imagining an alternative to that alternative that is in fact our reality: a world in which Lindbergh never became President of the United States” (Brauner 2007: 201). This is true, and by his bold opening, Roth establishes the relationship between what-if and what-is, reminding us of “our reality,” a world in which Lindbergh was never President of the United States of America. The opening is trying to convince us of the plausibility of that we know to be historical imagining contradicting historical facts. Roth’s counterfactual account of America negates actual history by realizing a potential that lies dormant in the past. Therefore, his novel might be considered to be about American history; in certain ways it intends to say something about actual history by telling how it wasn’t but could have been.

In discussing the postscript and the intent behind its inclusion, Roth explicitly states in his essay on *The Plot Against America* that he presents “27 pages of the documentary evidence that underpins a historical unreality of 362 pages in the hope of establishing the book as something other than fabulous” (“Story” C12). Graham also speaks about the postscript as a way for Roth to highlight the “historical veracity” of the novel (Graham 2007: 122). Wirth-Nesher writes that the author includes the postscript “to persuade us of the plausibility not only of the Lindbergh presidency, but
also of the forces that would have been set in motion had this occurred” (Wirth-Nesher 2007: 170). In other words, the historical context we as readers know to be deviating from history as it really was must still have some degree of probability. We should not read the alternative history as replacing actual history, but rather as employing the dual or double-directed structure of counterfactuality, combining what-is with what-if. Roth’s book tells us that this did not happen, but that it could have, and therefore the author is more interested in infusing his work with realism rather than erasing the borders between invention and reality.

The most quoted lines in the book (even Roth himself quotes them at the end of his New York Times-essay) are the following:

"Turned wrong way around, the relentless unforeseen was what we school-children studied as “History,” harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic. (PAA 113-114)"

These scholars, referred to above, who interpret *The Plot Against America* as an inherently metahistorical novel criticizing conventional historiography, all use these sentences to underpin their argumentation. This is to some extent a critique of a certain kind of historiography but more importantly it is a way of indirectly highlighting the potential of fiction to include the terror of the unforeseen.92 History, actual or alternative, is forever looking backwards. Fiction, on the other hand, imitates the lives and actions of people with sense-making operations different from history,

92 Elaine M. Kauvar has argued – in her essay "My Life as a Boy: The Plot Against America" – that Roth “regards the truth that we associate with history as less true than the kind that fictional narrative can impart” (Kauvar 2011: 133). She argues that in *The Plot Against America*, as well as the other Roth Books, “there are two kinds of truths, ‘historical truth’ and ‘narrative truth,’ which are akin to [W. H. Walsh’s] designation of plain and significant narratives” (143). Even though the section in which Kauvar first presents this distinction is entitled “Plain Narrative versus Significant Narrative, or Fact versus Fiction” it is not explained how these narrative “types,” based on history philosopher W. H. Walsh’s ideas, are related to any distinction between fact and fiction. She writes: “For Walsh, historians who write a ‘straightforward statement of what occurred’ have written a ‘plain’ narrative, a narrative that should be distinguished from ‘significant’ narratives that seek not only to relate what happened but also to explain why it happened” (134). The distinction between plain and significant narratives is thus a distinction between different kinds of narratives belonging to historiography rather than a distinction between historical and fictional narratives.
making us experience a life as it is lived, or to paraphrase Käte Hamburger, making us experience fictive persons in their I-originarity, here and now, when the unexpected is not yet inevitable.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this chapter the notion of “rewritings” of different kinds has been the recurring theme in all my discussions. To approach the matter of rewrites, versions, variants, or variations, I have discussed this topic both in regard to theoretical concepts, mainly narratological, but also actual texts, primarily examples from the Roth Books which most clearly relate to this issue. What I have tried to achieve is a description of how rewritings come to mean different things depending on the communicative context in which the device is applied. In trying to distinguish the main difference between rewriting, for example, a “story” or an “event” in fiction and nonfiction I have used the concepts of variants and versions. In order for a text or narrative account to be a version, more specifically, a competing version it needs to be intended as such. This means that we recognize it as referring to and making truth-claims about a referent or referents in the actual world. The problem with the standard narratological distinction between story and discourse is that it uses this model of propositional speech, of referencing or speaking about, to approach fictional texts. As Richard Walsh notes, story (or, with his preferred term, fabula) cannot be construed as the referent of discourse (what he refers to as sujet). Yet, when reviewing Chatman’s discussion on story and discourse as the two levels inherent in all narratives, it becomes clear that his model, in compliance with that of standard narratology, considers fictional discourse as the fictional reference to a fictional story which is viewed as complete and objective. Following from this nonfictional approach to fictional texts we find an assumedly logical conclusion that the story can be transposed to other modes and media, and retold in other versions.

However, as I have argued with the help of certain critics of this conception of narrative levels, a fictional story cannot be perceived as independent of the discourse, i.e. the narrative text as such, and cannot exist in versions, only variants, meaning fictional variations displaying certain intertextual connections to other texts, narratives or works of fiction. A narrative account intended to be a competing version of certain events, on the other hand, always presents a perspective, partial and particular, in regard to a referent or several referents existing, as a consequence of how we perceive the communicative intent, independent of the discourse presenting it. As
Heyne notes, if we are prepared to “assert an alternative version of events, to engage actively in a certain kind of dialogue, then we are dealing with something we might all be willing to call nonfiction” (Heyne 2001:330). Then, as he adds, we have left the realm of fiction.

This chapter has in other words approached the notion of rewriting within fiction and nonfiction and distinguished between variants and versions based on the assumption that referentiality and, more specifically, truth-claiming is central to our perception of the distinction between fictional and nonfictional communication. I have also discussed the matter of rewriting official history which has engaged both historians and novelists. In both cases, in fiction and history, these alternative histories cannot be, I have argued, competing versions since they function by combining what happened with what did not happen. Therefore, one might speak of counterfactual accounts, generally, as alternative rather than competing versions of, for example, historical periods or biographies. Some theorists I have discussed have used competing and alternative versions as synonyms, yet in this context it makes sense to distinguish between these two terms.

Metaphorically speaking one might, as I have done, argue that what we as readers interpret as nonfiction displays an “openness” lacking within literary works of fiction, making these narratives subject to different kinds of inferences and responses. However, to simply attach the words “open” and “closed” to nonfiction respectively fiction and attempt to sort texts into these assumed categories tells us nothing about how they are intended to communicate with their readers or how the authorial communicative act might change or differ in the process of reading a certain text. Therefore we should acknowledge that a work of narrative fiction might depend upon interpretative operations akin to those more common in the reading of nonfiction. This I find exemplified by the type of counterfactual historical novels I have discussed, which are not making claims of truth about historical reality or engaging in competitive dialogue with other historical texts, but the opposite; they are telling us as readers what did not happen and in doing so they reference actual and official history in the reverse. Similarly, a work of nonfiction might foreground literary functions we conventionally associate with fictional literature, prompting to be read as a literary work with literary qualities, thereby further complicating any simple dichotomy between nonfiction and fiction as “open” versus “closed” works, and revealing to us the protean nature of literary communication.
5. Nonfiction and the Unseemliness of the Profession

Introduction

In the Zuckerman letter at the end of *The Facts*, Roth reflects in the voice of his alter ego upon the relation between writing autobiography and writing fiction, as I have discussed in Chapter 4. At one point in the letter, the author has Zuckerman explain to him the fundamental difference there is between being the author of a novel and being the author of an autobiography, a distinction that can be described in terms of ethics and aesthetics:

What one chooses to reveal in fiction is governed by a motive fundamentally aesthetic; we judge the author of a novel by how well he or she tells the story. But we judge morally the author of an autobiography, whose governing motive is primarily ethical as against aesthetic. (*F* 163)

According to this view, ethical and aesthetic judgements are assumed to be mutually exclusive responses toward a particular work and its author. A novel is not judged on ethical grounds because it is fiction and as such an object of aesthetic evaluation. An autobiography, on the other hand, claiming to give a true version of actual circumstances is not judged primarily on grounds that are aesthetic. To make statements about real things falls within the scope of ethics. By and large, this distinction made by Roth’s mouthpiece may be right, but applied to Roth’s own writing, particularly the Roth Books, it turns out to be too categorical and in need of certain modifications. This chapter sets out to suggest just this.

As I have argued throughout this study, fiction (e.g. a novel) and nonfiction (e.g. an autobiography) can be distinguished from each other on account of the interpretative responses that narrative texts invite by being presented as one or the other. As such, the dominating motives for an author of a novel could be argued to be mostly aesthetic while the dominating motives for an author of an autobiography mostly relate to ethical questions, for example: “How close is the narration to the truth? Is the author hiding his or her motives, presenting his or her actions and thoughts to lay bare the essential nature of conditions or trying to hide something, telling in order not to tell?” (*F* 163-164). These and similar question are clearly raised by the autobiographical narrative in *The Facts*, even before Zuckerman acknowledges that they are of fundamental importance to the author’s autobiographical undertaking. However, such questions are not a consequence of the interpretative framework governing the other books
discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. As argued with reference to for instance *Operation Shylock*, we do not evaluate the relevance of the content presented in a nonfictional, truth-telling context but rather on the basis of how each part connects aesthetically, thematically, and otherwise compositionally to the whole as a literary and fictional work. Truth is not an effect of the context of interpretation because we do not interpret the text as someone’s account of actual occurrences involving actual people.

The analytical focus in this chapter will primarily be the one Roth Book not discussed in the previous chapters, namely *Patrimony*. The reason why this book has not been more than mentioned up until now is because it cannot easily form a consolidation together with the texts characterized as fiction in Chapter 3, nor does it display the typical autobiographical patterns of *The Facts*. Instead, *Patrimony* seems to occupy a kind of middle ground between the truth-telling ambitions in Roth’s autobiography and the literary motives governing a work like *Operation Shylock*. In the following I will argue that *Patrimony* can be described as literary nonfiction. This is not necessarily a paradoxical notion because the concept of “literary” is rather vague and so is “autobiographical,” which will represent the category “nonfiction” here. One could, for example, see a difference between what is covered by the two terms “autobiography” and “autobiographical.” The former is commonly associated with a distinct genre: the autobiographer’s presentation of what is claimed to be a truthful testimony to his or her life. This intention gives to the text statements very much the character of reporting: “This is what actually happened, this is a true description of the circumstances at that time – believe me!” It is true that literary history has classified certain autobiographies as “literary”; this is most often done with reference to elegance in language and style. But the general character of the work is still considered to be a truthful testimony of events and circumstances, that is, it complies with what is generally expected from an autobiography. However, there is also the possibility to use “autobiographical” material in statements that are claimed to be true representations of life experiences but where the very point of what is presented is not informational and reporting. Instead these actual experiences may be used as material for contemplation over general themes such as those typical of literature. And certainly there would be no surprise if Roth, between the two poles of experiences turned into narrative fiction and experiences turned into autobiography, could write a text which makes room for contemplations similar to what is found in his fiction but in a form which says: this is actually true. As I try to show in this chapter, *Patrimony* could be regarded as such an example of literary nonfiction.
Furthermore, I also discuss a particular ethical issue in relation to the Roth Books, namely the question of depicting real people in narrative texts. Some critics have discussed ethics in Roth’s writing without explaining how this particular issue relates to the notion of referentiality. David Gooblar, for instance, writes: “I find in Roth’s investigation into autobiography in *The Facts, Deception, Patrimony*, and *Operation Shylock* not a solipsistic exercise of self-absorption but, instead, evidence of a renewed concern with the responsibilities of writing about others, and with the differing, often conflicting claims that aesthetics and ethics can exert upon the writer” (Gooblar 2008: 35). Although I agree with Gooblar that these four Roth Books (discussed by him under the heading of Roth’s “autobiographical” books) do not represent solipsistic exercises of self-absorption, I do not think his analysis of these works accurately highlights the difference between *writing about others* and *writing about writing about others*, as I intend to demonstrate. The difference is that in the first case we have an author who intends to write truthfully about actual occurrences and actual people, and in the second case we have an author who is reflecting on how authors use their lives as “material” for their fictional creations.

From an ethical point of view, as Zuckerman acknowledges, the difference between fiction and nonfiction could be that the former represents fictional characters and the latter depicts actual people. Therefore, nonfictional narratives raise ethical issues irrelevant to the interpretation of narrative fiction. Discussing the ethics of life writing, Paul John Eakin explains that life writers “are criticized not only for not telling the truth – personal and historical – but also for telling too much truth” (Eakin 2004: 3). Eakin notes that the interest in the ethics of life writing mostly comes out of “its perceived abuses and transgressions” (6). The ethical questions raised by nonfiction are thus related to how truthful a nonfictional account is and whether it can be considered a violation of someone’s privacy, etc.

Moreover, nonfiction “is a form of communication that purports to re-enact for the reader the play of actual characters and events across time,” as Daniel W. Lehman explains (Lehman 1997: 4). A nonfictional narrative “draws in its writers and readers as both historical agents and producers and consumers of texts” (7). In other words, in nonfiction the author, the subject and the reader are drawn into a referential field, and the reader is confronted with who and what is depicted: actual people and events. Lehman argues that even though “truth is slippery,” it is “always at issue when the text’s referentiality intersects material bodies” (15).

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93 “Life writing,” as Eakin acknowledges, was coined as an “umbrella term [...] to cover the protean forms of contemporary personal narrative [...]” (Eakin 2004: 1).
Approaching the ethics of narrative fiction, on the other hand, we might deal with different ethical issues. Ethics in fiction can relate to, as Liesbeth Korthals Altes notes, “the encounter with otherness, self-fashioning, values, responsibility, and violence” (Korthals Altes 2005: 142). However, it is not my intention in this context to engage in these complex discussions on narrative ethics or the ethics of narrative fiction, as it has been made a central issue within narrative criticism in the wake of the so-called “ethical turn.”

Nor will I discuss what some consider the ethical dimension of aesthetic form; what Booth and Phelan among others have discussed in their focus on narrative (as) rhetoric. When I touch upon the question of fiction and ethics it is solely with regard to texts where actual, historical persons are depicted in some way or another, a circumstance which makes questions of truth and reference relevant for the frame of interpretation.

**Context and Concepts**

**Approaching the “Literary” in Literary Nonfiction**

To describe a narrative text as literary nonfiction will inescapably lead our thoughts to a specific theoretical field and certain genres, also characterized as New Journalism, Literary Journalism, or Nonfiction Novels. As a generic concept, Literary Nonfiction has been given various definitions by different theorists aiming to convey “the hybrid nature of the texts” and “thus their paradoxical, threshold, problematic nature” (Anderson 1989: x). These texts have been said to belong to “a contemporary genre in which journalistic material is presented in the forms of fiction” (Hellman 1981: 1), and it has been argued that this body of writing “reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes truth claims to phenomenal experience” (Hartsock 2000: 1). A fairly common view is that the genre of Literary Nonfiction consists of narrative texts shaping factual content with the use of fictional or literary forms.

As I have already suggested, the term “literary” with reference to non-fiction” should not be equated simply with certain formal features, stylistic devices, or narrative techniques. “Literary” refers first and foremost to intention: how a narrative text is intended to function to produce certain interpretative responses. This means, in short, that these narratives draw attention to themselves as literary structures with certain aesthetic inten-

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94 For a brief overview, see the article ”Ethical Turn” in Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory (Korthals Altes 2005: 142-146).
tions without losing their function as nonfiction. The term “literary nonfiction” denotes narrative texts that, in being nonfictional, constitute referential narrations. And since literary nonfiction is governed by the referential act of an author in speaking about our shared reality, we as readers can always ask for a different version of the narrated events (for instance, a different perspective). However, when a story is told for a literary purpose (among other purposes), some responses normally regarded as pertinent to the reception of informative and reporting nonfiction become less salient while other responses get into the foreground. We are ready to take what is said as bona fide and since our attention is directed towards other things than “what happened” questions of evidence are not felt as dominating ones. I will discuss this kind of bona fide reception with regard to *Paternity*. The term literary nonfiction can thus be used to account for nonfictional texts that include, for example, lengthy or detailed descriptions, specific situational and experiential details, such as smells, sights, sounds, and other sensations. The main point to be made here is that in opposition to nonfiction told for mainly informative purposes, literary nonfiction does not foreground truthfulness and accuracy in detail to the same extent. Instead these narratives foreground aspects reflecting their literary intentions which create literary responses.

In Markku Lehtimäki’s pragmatic use of the term *literary nonfiction*, “both the poetic function and the referential function have an equally important role” (Lehtimäki 2005: 8). This claim is made with reference to Roman Jakobson’s thesis that in poetic works (or literary texts) the “poetic” function is not the only function but it is the *dominant* function. Lehtimäki writes: “In this way the poetic function draws the attention away from the message’s *referential* function, which is oriented to context and concerns the ‘aboutness’ of the message” (8). From the argument that these functions are equally important in literary nonfiction, one might infer that these texts then invite both aesthetic and ethical judgement.

A literary work, whether fictional or nonfictional, will solicit certain responses from the reader, creating an *attention* to its formal features, stylistics devices, symbolic and thematic structures, and other compositional aspects. Lehtimäki explains that a “traditional aesthetic definition of ‘literary’ consists of certain requirements, like personal style, figurative language, formal complexity, structural coherence, thematic interest, and semantic density,” and he argues that “when an author produces a text which he claims to be a literary work, he commits himself to having certain aesthetic intentions, and as the reader interprets a text as a literary work, he or she attributes to the author certain aesthetic intentions” (8). Furthermore, what might be said to mark literary nonfiction from other kinds
of nonfictional narrations is that while referring to particular experiences or events that the author claims to have occurred in reality, these texts also make use of the particularity of the nonfictional referents in ways that have general relevance.

A way to explain this combination of particularity and literature is to begin with Aristotle’s distinction between these two properties. According to Aristotle, “poetry [i.e. fiction] tends to express the universal, history the particular” (Aristotle 1997: 17). The distinction is explained in the following way: “By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages. The particular is – for example – what Alcibiades did or suffered” (18). In other words, the poet works with the possible (what might happen) while the historian works with the actual (what happened). Lehtimäki relates Aristotle’s distinction to Stein Haugom Olsen’s differentiation between topical and perennial themes: “Following Aristotle, one could say that topical themes are particular issues that belong to the concerns of historiography, whereas perennial themes are universal and therefore belonging to the field of poetry” (Lehtimäki 2005: 25). In Lehtimäki’s view, literary nonfiction does not just grapple with topical themes, such as the social or the political issues of the time, but are “also constructed upon perennial themes (ontological, philosophical, religious, and so on)” (25).

Narrative texts we read as literary nonfiction, then, demand a negotiation between the general and the particular, between aesthetics and ethics, and between the referential function and the poetic function. There are examples of literary nonfictional narrative texts where the poetic function and the referential function have an equally important role, when for instance the narration we take to refer to actual events and actual people also draws attention to the literary organization of the material, its function in the work of literature. Yet in a text we globally consider to be nonfictional one can also find examples of passages or episodes when for instance the referential function is suspended by the literary or poetic function, as I intend to argue in my analysis of Patrimony.

**Analysis and Argumentation**

**A True Story Told With the Strategies of Fiction**

The true story Roth tells in *Patrimony* concerns, as the title of the book suggests, the legacy of the father. It is a son’s story about his father, yet by
extension it is also son’s story about himself. *Patrimony* can therefore be regarded as belonging to a subgenre of life writing which Richard Freadman refers to as “the Son’s Book of the Father” (Freadman 2004: 122). Freadman claims that this subgenre consists of “books by sons about their fathers, but also about their relationships with their fathers” (128). He views them as “a sort of fusion of autobiography and biography” and argues that these books therefore can be termed “relational autobiography” (128). Although Freidman’s observations accurately describe *Patrimony* and connect the book to a larger body of writing within the broad field of life writing, they do not tell us anything about the particular way in which Roth chooses to relate the story of his father and their relationship. This is the focus of attention in the following discussion.

In Roth criticism, *Patrimony* has been somewhat marginalized among the Roth Books in discussions about the fiction-nonfiction distinction and how Roth supposedly conflates this distinction in his writing, according to the common postmodernist argumentation. As an example of Roth’s alleged postmodernist position in these matters, *Patrimony* has been less preferred than *The Facts, Deception, Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*. Only a few critics have linked it to what is considered to be Roth’s strategy of blurring fact and fiction, or transforming reality into “a work of fiction,” while most critics are less inclined to view Roth’s story of his dying father as some kind of postmodern game where truth becomes “truth” and facts are turned into fictions. Mark Shechner, for instance, claims that it “is a refreshingly nineteenth century kind of book” and argues that self-reflexive “talk about manipulative literary forms is nowhere to be found” (Shechner 2003: 127). Shechner writes:

Dissolving reality and speaking only through mask is fine, when the subject is yourself, but in writing about your father, you had better get real [...]. The “self” may be something you put together afresh every day, or every book, especially if you are a writer for whom self-consciousness is the breakfast cereal of your profession. But your father is your father, and postmodernism and magic realism simply won’t do. (127)

Similarly, it has been described by others as “almost classic in its linear structure and clear, direct, unaffected imagery” (Mellard 2005: 117), and as possessing a “seemingly unquestioned belief in the transparency of non-fiction writing [...]” (Gooblar 2008: 35). David Gooblar writes that the book’s status – fiction, nonfiction, or a mixture – is never in question: “There are no games being played here, no teasing hints that the author
should not be trusted, no web of textual reference to penetrate: this is, very simply, a faithful account of a father’s illness and death by a loving and loyal son” (35). Gooblar adds: “That Roth should leave aside, for the moment, the self-conscious courting of generic confusion seems appropriate given the subject matter” (35). Yet, as I aim to demonstrate in my discussion on the book, Roth can be said to be as self-conscious as ever in certain respects. _Patrimony_ is in fact a highly self-reflexive text very much concerned with its own (literary) form.

The way some critics emphasize the straightforward and unproblematic character of the book makes them overlook what really characterizes _Patrimony_: the literary composition of the book and the author’s use of narrative techniques usually associated with a fictional language-game in a work with clearly nonfictional intentions. Therefore, the relation between the book’s formal features and the author’s claim to write a true story has not been given any extensive attention. Elaine M. Kauvar, however, who views _Patrimony_ as “a kind of memoir,” has noted: “In [the book’s] narrative unfolding, Roth employs all the strategies of fiction to complete the portrait of his father begun in _The Facts_” (Kauvar 1995: 423). What Kauvar intends with the phrase all the strategies of fiction is not specified, but in her discussion she focuses on certain aspects of the book’s structure and certain central episodes which are the same episodes Alan Cooper views as “dubious” or as displaying “a certain fictive convenience” (my emphasis) (Cooper 1996: 244). These sections of the book will be discussed further in the following section. They involve a visit to the cemetery, a private scene in a bathroom involving Roth and his father, a comic taxi-ride, and two dream-narratives with which Roth concludes his book.

When Margaret Smith poses the question of how we are to read Roth’s true story she presents the following alternatives: “Is it a son’s account of his father’s last years, which is to be perceived as an autobiographical account of the son? Or is it simply a biographical account of the father’s death?” (Smith 2005: 109). Both her alternatives indicate that the book is read as being about the real world Roth and/or his father. Yet, this view is in conflict with Smith’s established postmodernist position:

Roth’s claim that the so-called novels _Deception_ and _Patrimony_ in particular are autobiography can be given some credence – when these texts are actually viewed as the autobiographical account of a literary process. They are autobiographical because they are the accounts of an author’s personal processing of imaginary material, or the self-conscious creations of mask through which each “confession” is rendered truly “false.” (112-113)
Even if Roth makes use of his imagination and although writing *Patrimony* involved an “imaginative process” (109), this does not make the material imaginary. As Smith acknowledges, Roth’s strategy in *Patrimony* involves at times a “recreation” of his father, yet to recreate the past and someone who once lived is not the same as making the past and the person depicted imaginary. Rather, it is a matter of the author presenting the past and his deceased father in a particular manner, as I will demonstrate.

Making Life Narratively Right

In the first chapter of *Patrimony*, the author narrates a story of an unexpected cemetery visit. He has got information from the doctor about Herman’s brain tumor. In order to get to his father and tell him the news, he takes his car but he happens to take a wrong turn and ends up on a road that leads him to the cemetery where his mother lies buried. Roth explains: “Though I wasn’t searching for that cemetery either consciously or unconsciously, on the morning when I was to tell my father of the brain tumor that would kill him, I had flawlessly traveled the straightest possible route from my Manhattan hotel to my mother’s grave and the grave site beside hers where he was to be buried” (20). As an appropriate ending of the first chapter of a book about death and dying, Roth then finds himself at a cemetery, like many of the protagonists in his novels, being reminded of the irrevocable absence of the dead, that they “are gone and, as yet, we aren’t” (21). In the episode there is also an explicit literary reference to Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick and a quote from Shakespeare’s play. In the third chapter, the author directs his thoughts once again to the cemetery visit and tells the reader what he thinks was behind it and why he in retrospect was glad that he ended up there: “I wondered if my satisfaction didn’t come down to the fact that the cemetery visit was narratively right: paradoxically, it had the feel of an event not entirely random and unpredictable and, in that way at least, offered a sort of strange relief from the impact of all that was frighteningly unforeseen” (74).

This description of the episode as being narratively right could, from a psychological point of view, be related to how some cognitive narratologists or narrative psychologists argue that we make sense of the world and create meaning in our lives. Roth would then be acknowledging that the randomness of life is ordered and made meaningful in narrative terms, thus

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providing a strange relief from the frighteningly unforeseen. In an interpretation of the episode, Kauvar interprets the author’s psychological motives for visiting his mother’s grave in this way: “In accord with narrative principles, the decision sprang from that ‘second reality’ where psychic truth resides, which brings a melancholy forepleasure that an even more melancholy event gratifies” (Kauvar 1995: 426). Kauvar views the cemetery visit, along with other aspects of the book, as access to the mind of Philip Roth. When interpreting the ending of the first chapter, then, she is not evaluating the conscious choices made by the author but rather the unconscious choices belonging to the individual. In other words, she is primarily interpreting the author’s mind, not his work.

I will not approach the phrase narratively right in psychological terms. Instead, I interpret the phrase in connection with the author’s construction of the narrative that constitutes the book. At the end of Patrimony, after Herman’s demise, Roth acknowledges that he has been writing the book all the time his father was ill and dying, in keeping with the unseemliness of his profession (P 237). Seen in the light of this revelation, we are apt to see a correlation between Roth’s motives, artistic, psychological, or otherwise, and his role as a writer. Whether he went to the cemetery because the episode would fit well into the narrative he was working on, or whether he in retrospect recognized that it could be employed in the story he wanted to tell is of no real consequence. Perhaps we would not accept that Roth never went to the cemetery, should that be revealed, but it is clear that we do not primarily take this episode as just the information of a curious fact. We can see and accept what Roth wants to do with the incident, significance being the relevant concern rather than information. We recognize that to end the first chapter with an episode like this one is narratively right in the sense of its being compositionally and thematically motivated in the narrative text as a literary whole.

It is the presence of episodes like this one that leads Cooper to argue that in Patrimony some scenes may seem “dubious” and “have a certain fictive convenience” because they deviate from the normal style in being more dramatic (Cooper 1996: 244). His examples are the episode of Herman’s “accident” which takes place in his son’s bathroom, to which I return below, and the episode detailing a cab-ride with a driver with father-issues to whom Roth pretends to be a psychiatrist. The latter episode begins in medias res: “First Avenue and Thirtieth Street,’ I told the driver the next day, ‘University Hospital’” (P 153). The episode then progresses as a sequence consisting mostly of dialogue, concerning among other things why Roth is in the cab and on his way to the hospital:
“You a doctor?” he asked, fixing me, I saw in the mirror, with that warlike smile.
“Yes,” I said.
“What kind?”
“Take a guess.”
“Head,” he said.
“That’s right.”
“Psychiatrist,” he said.
“That’s right.”
“At University Hospital.”
“No, up in Connecticut.”
“You head of the clinic?”
“Do I look like the head of the clinic?”
“Yeah,” he said authoritatively.
“No,” I said, “just one of the staff doctors. I’m content with that.”
“You’re smart – you don’t go chasing the buck.” (155)

As a result of this lie the cab-driver begins confessing to his passenger about his troubled relationship to his dead father, which leads to reflections on Roth’s part on the differences and similarities between the two men and their relationships to their fathers.

The other episode Cooper mentions is when Herman Roth, after being constipated as the result of an operation, has an “accident” in his son’s bathroom: “I beshat myself,” he said. […] The shit was everywhere, smeared underfoot on the bathmat, running over the toilet bowl edge and, at the foot of the bowl, in a pile on the floor” (172). The description of the disaster goes on, covering half a page in the book. Why this scene, according to Cooper, should possess a “convenience” more appropriate in for instance novels is because the author uses the episode to tie together the central theme of the book and also one of its main compositional principles, namely the son’s search for the legacy of the father.

After cleaning up the bathroom, Roth realizes that he is actually happy that the incident has occurred; for him it seems “right.” He explains: “And why this was right and as it should be couldn’t have been plainer to me, now that the job was done. So that was the patrimony. And not because
cleaning up was symbolic of something else but because it wasn’t, because
it was nothing less or more than the lived reality that it was” (176). In
summarizing the father’s legacy to the son and the objects which have
come to symbolize this legacy previously in the book, Roth states: “There
was my patrimony: not the money, not the tefillin, not the shaving mug,
but the shit” (176).

So how are these and similar episodes to be read? How do they function
within the frame of interpretation? From Cooper’s discussion on Patrim-
ony it remains unexamined how these “scenes” are to be approached in
the context of the book and what the consequences of their “dubiousness”
and their fictive convenience are. Cooper simply notes the similarity be-
tween the episode of Herman soiling himself and a scene in My Life as a
Man in which Maureen Tarnopol, Peter Tarnopol’s estranged wife, soils
Peter’s apartment with her faeces. Following Cooper, Smith also refers to
this scene in Roth’s novel and she goes on to connect the episode in Patri-
mony to the constipated father in Portnoy’s Complaint. Yet, the point of
these comparisons is not stated explicitly. Should these connections be-
tween Roth’s true story and his novels suggest that he has invented this
scene? And if this is the point, how does this affect our reading?

When we begin reading Patrimony it is with the expectation that we are
to be told a true story about the relationship between a dying father and
his son, told from the perspective of the son. That much we can gather
from the paratexts and the short text which presents the book on the back-
cover and the photograph on the front-cover showing Roth as a child to-
gether with his brother Sandy and their father Herman, standing one in
front of the other on the lawn outside the house where Roth grew up.96 In
reading the first part of the first chapter nothing makes us revise the expec-
tation that what we are presented with is Philip Roth’s true story about his
father and his filial relationship with this man.

Patrimony begins as follows: “My father had lost most of his sight in his
right eye by the time he’d reached eighty-six, but otherwise he seemed in
phenomenal health for a man his age when he came down with what the
Florida doctor diagnosed, incorrectly, as Bell’s palsy, a viral infection that
causes paralysis, usually temporary, to one side of the face” (P 9). Already
in the first words, then, the subject of the book is confirmed – “My fa-
ther...” – and in Patrimony, Roth might be said to examine the idea of the
Father in relation to his own particular father and their relationship. As
these lines also suggest, there is a consistent preoccupation on the author’s

96 This picture can be seen on the cover of the first edition of Patrimony published
in hardback and is also used on the cover of some paperback editions.
side with his father’s material body. A few pages further on we find the son contemplating the MRI-images of his father’s brain, in a similar fashion to how Hamlet contemplates the skull of Yorick, and this interest in the body can be said to culminate with the episode in Roth’s bathroom.

Returning to the episodes discussed above, I want to ask whether or not these sequences affect our reading by displaying what I would deem to be a narrative “rightness” or what Cooper deems to be a fictive convenience. If we read the book as a nonfictional (“true”) story, then how do the episode with the cab-driver and the episode in the bathroom conform to this frame of interpretation? In answering this question I want to reconnect this discussion to my discussion in the previous chapter on the difference between event-function and motif-function in different narrative texts. As my examples then aimed to show, what we in a nonfictional account take to refer to or function as an event in someone’s life is distinct from what we interpret as functioning as a motif (in the Formalist sense) in someone’s fictional creation. However, these different functions can also co-exist in a work and even be complementary at times.

How should the scene depicting the taxi-ride to the hospital be interpreted? We should notice that this is not fiction although represented in a form associated with dialogues in a novel. Instead, Roth presents to the reader how his fooling about with the driver, besides its amusement value, primarily leads to his going on contemplating the kind of themes that make this work into a compositional whole. Do we demand that the situation has actually occurred? Well, I think that we would not be happy to hear that it was just made up. That would probably disturb our sense of what language-game Roth is performing with us as his recipients. But, as I suggested earlier, since our attention is not governed by curiosity eliciting the question “what happened?” we are more than willing to suspend an inquiry into the truthfulness of the scene. We prefer the bona fide attitude here because we see the point the narrator is after; and it is for its points, not for its information, that we are willing to take part in this sort of game. We recognize a contemplation on the theme fathers and sons, more specifically Jewish fathers and Jewish sons. In reflecting on what the driver told him about hating his father and knocking out his father’s teeth by punching him, Roth concludes:

He actually did it, I realized, annihilated the father. He is of the primal horde of sons who, as Freud liked to surmise, have it in them to nullify the father by force – who hate and fear him and, after overcoming him, honor him by devouring him. And I’m from the horde that can’t throw a punch. We aren’t like that and we can’t do it, to our fathers or to anyone else.
We’re the sons appalled by violence, with no capacity for inflicting physical pain, useless at beating and a clubbing, unfit to pulverize even the most deserving enemy, though not necessarily without turbulence, temper, even ferocity [...] When we lay waste, when we efface, it isn’t with raging fists or ruthless schemes or insane sprawling violence but with our words, our brains, with mentality, with all the stuff that produced the poignant abyss between our fathers and us and that they themselves broke their backs to give us. Encouraging us to be smart and such yeshiva buchers, they little knew how they were equipping us to leave them isolated and uncomprehending in the face of all our forceful babble. (159)

As we can see, the scene in the taxi is motivated in the book in relation to the theme of patrimony manifested through Roth’s depiction of his father and the more general inquiry into the nature of a father’s legacy to his son. At the end of the book Herman is metaphorically transformed from “my father” into “the father,” sitting in judgement of what the son does (P 238). But, as I have said: this does not make the cab-episode into fiction. That it is not in our interest to inquire into its truthfulness does not mean that this aspect is impossible in this context. It is certainly part of the game that we can admire Roth’s ability to use actual experiences (although he may present them using a technique associated with fiction) for reflection on existential matters. However, that those two conditions are always present in literary nonfiction – authenticity and literary point – although operating alternately in the foreground, will be obvious when we turn to the question of the demands of ethics and decency.

The episode with Herman’s exploding bowels brings the immanent actuality into the foreground. This is because here the narrator can meet resistance from the audience asking: Since this really happened to an actual person, is it morally right of the teller to make the embarrassing accident public? Appreciating the cab-episode we may have the feeling that “this is in fact an authentic experience but it is not presented as fact.” But the episode with Herman’s bowels is so unsettling in its realism that here the sense of fact-presentation cannot be subdued. In other words, while having a central function in the composition of the work, by containing what might be considered a kind of epiphany and by linking together the symbols manifesting the theme of patrimony throughout the book, this episode can still be viewed as dubious or doubtful in several ways. In this case, as opposed to the scene in the taxi, it becomes relevant for us as readers to ask if Roth’s account is accurate, if it is truthful, and if so, if Roth creates certain ethical dilemmas by portraying his father in this intimate manner,
etc. This episode solicits both ethical and aesthetic judgement (the latter in the wider sense of “literary” as I use the concept in this chapter).

Recreating the Father: Ethics, Aesthetics, Literary Nonfiction

At one point in *Patrimony*, the author expresses explicitly what I take to be his literary nonfictional strategy. In this episode Roth is bathing his father and finds himself staring at the old man’s penis: “I looked at it intently, as though for the very first time, and waited on the thoughts. But there weren’t any more, except my reminding myself to fix it in my memory for when he was dead. It might prevent him from becoming ethereally attenuated as the years went by. ‘I must remember accurately,’ I told myself, ‘remember everything accurately so that when he is gone I can re-create the father who created me.’ *You must not forget anything*” (P 177). The act of writing the book which Roth makes an allusion to here is an act of remembrance. And in order to re-create the past, to make, as he is unable to at the cemetery standing by his mother’s grave, “the dead seem something other than dead” (21), he must remember accurately.

With this in mind we will not find it strange at all that Roth’s nonfictional account to a large extent consists of re-created situations complete with dialogues and representations of thoughts and thought-processes. This literary strategy – as I choose to call it in order to relate my argumentation to the earlier discussions on the book – is a strategy in which forms associated with fiction perform distinctly nonfictional functions. Roth’s book is a sort of witness account similar to the witness literature mentioned several times in the book, but it is concerned with personal rather than collective history. The mantra cited above – *you must not forget anything* – which is presented as a previous thought belonging to the narrator, is also the very last sentence of the book, though at this point in the book presented as an exhortation from the dead father to the son.

The last section of the book begins with this sentence: “I dreamed I was standing on a pier in a shadowy group of unescorted children who may or may not have been waiting to be evacuated” (234). As we see, there is no exposition, no introduction as to why Roth is suddenly retelling a dream he had or when he had it. After his awakening in the book, it is revealed that the dream actually took place on the day of his father’s second MRI, long before his death which we could read about in the section proceeding this one. In the dream, a boat – “a medium-size, heavily armored, battle-gray boat, some sort of old American warship stripped of its armaments and wholly disabled [...]” (235) – is floating towards the shore. On the pier
Roth is waiting for his father who he believes is onboard the boat, but after he wakes up he realizes that his father is the boat. “And to be evacuated,” he writes, “was physiologically just that: to be expelled, to be ejected, to be born” (236). Interpreting his own dream, Roth tells us: "I lay in bed till it was light, thinking of all the family history compressed into that snippet of silent dream-film: just about every major theme of his life was encapsulated there, everything of significance to both of us [...]” (236).

The second dream consists of his father returning to his son in a hooded white shroud telling him that he has dressed him in the wrong clothes for eternity, by which the dream-father means that the son has buried him incorrectly in a Jewish shroud instead of a suit. Awake, Roth realizes that the father had in fact been alluding to the book he had been writing all the time his father was ill and dying, “in keeping with the unseemliness of my profession” (237), as the author phrases it. The dream becomes a *mise-en-abyme* for the book itself, an image encapsulating what is entailed in writing a book about your father who no longer can tell his own story. As a writer you alone bear the responsibility of “dressing” your subject for eternity, that is, representing him for posterity.

Approaching these dreams I would argue that, in line with what I have stated earlier, the question of whether they are actually true or not is irrelevant or at least secondary to the question in which way they are narratively right or thematically relevant in relation to Roth’s intention to write about his relationship to his father. As such, the recounting of these dreams at the end of the book is likely not interpreted as a recounting of events, as a kind of dream-protocol, but rather as the representation of motifs with a function relating to the work as a whole. The reader will therefore not normally be inclined to psychoanalyse the dreams or the dreamer himself. Yet this is exactly what Kauvar does when she states that the two dreams “in irradiating the dreamer’s psychical reality shed further light on the artist’s subjectivity” (Kauvar 1995: 426). Contrary to Kauvar I argue that these two dreams are narratively right not in relation to the author’s psychic reality but regarding the literary narrative he has written. Truthfulness does not enter into the interpretative process since we hardly think of the dream-narratives as giving us factual information with the intention of any kind of factual enrichment. The dreams instead achieve relevance in relation to the author literary structuring of his material. Therefore, the ending of the book does not raise ethical questions relating to truth-telling, instead one of the dream, as we have noted, presents a metaphor for the ethical dilemmas inherent in Roth’s overall nonfictional approach. This method, however, does not exclude the possibility that Roth is able to relate something “true,” emotionally speaking, about his relationship to his father by
using these dream-narratives and presenting us with certain images in order to depict Herman.

To re-create the father, as Roth aims to do in *Patrimony*, does inescapably entail an ethical problem for the author: “Is my writerly re-creation accurate from the point of view of the re-created subject?” This is exactly the question which underlies the dream-father’s accusation of the son’s decision to dress him in one outfit instead of the other. And it is this ending that makes Eakin conclude that Roth “seems to have a bad conscience about his narrative of his father’s last years and illness [...]” (Eakin 1999: 182). The ethical question raised by the narrative is thus if the author telling his truth in fact has the right to tell his truth, even if it is accurate.

The central episode in *Patrimony* in which Roth cleans the bathroom his father has soiled with his faeces creates, as some critics accurately have pointed out, a particular ethical dilemma. The reason emerges clearly in the following dialogue exchange between Philip and Herman:

“Don’t tell the children,” he said, looking up at me from the bed with his one sighted eye.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” I said. “I’ll say you’re taking a rest.”

“Don’t tell Claire.”

“Nobody,” I said. “Don’t worry about it. It could have happened to anyone. Just forget about it and get a good rest.” (173)

For Eakin’s discussion on the ethics of life writing, this scene is pivotal “because it poses starkly the ethical dilemmas of life writing” (Eakin 1999: 185). He states that “Roth not only persists in publishing these private things, but even seeks to put an obedient face on this act of disobedience” (185). Comparing this scene to the episode in which Roth is bathing Herman, Eakin asks: “Which command should be observed? Should fidelity to the truth of the son’s experience take precedence over the father’s right to privacy?” (185). For Eakin, *Patrimony* seems to provide a kind ideal example of how life writers should deal with their ethical responsibilities. He claims it demonstrates that “transgression of privacy is not incompatible with the most profound respect for the integrity of the person” (182).

Discussing the ethics of life writing, Eakin presents a relational concept of identity. He argues that “in contrast to the supposedly self-determining model that autonomy predicates, a relational concept of selfhood stresses the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others” (161). From his proposed view of identity formation in
life writing, Eakin is able to answer his own question regarding the ethical dilemma posed by the bathroom episode in *Patrimony* like this:

To obey the father, to omit the episode of the shit, is to deny the son the climax of his story, by which I mean not only the rhetorical narrative he is writing but also the psychological narrative of identity formation it recounts [...] When Roth claims his father’s shit as his “patrimony,” he calls on us, in effect, to acknowledge that the circumstances of relational identity challenge our familiar notions of privacy and ownership. The public/private dichotomy [...] does not conveniently structure the relation between life writer and subject in a relational life like *Patrimony*, where the author shares the private world of his subject (and in some potentially compromising respects). (185, 186)

Although Eakin’s discussion on the ethics of life writing raises important and complex questions concerning identity, ethics, and writing, I react to the way he seems to feel compelled to defend Roth and also his method for doing so. Before concluding his discussion with the (exemplary) example of Roth, Eakin discusses among other books Kathryn Harrison’s controversial memoir *The Kiss* (1997) and the question he frequently poses is why Harrison wrote the book (152), what her reasons and motives for writing it might have been (150). Similarly, in his discussion on *Patrimony*, Eakin analyses the ending as an indication as to why Roth wrote the book: “By repeating here the command he formulated earlier in the episode in which he observes his father’s penis [i.e. “You must not forget anything”], Roth enhances its phallic authority: the son is under his father’s orders to write this ‘unseemly’ book!” (185). Here we can see that Eakin analyses Roth’s motives for writing the book in psychoanalytical terms and it seems as if Eakin feels compelled to legitimize Roth’s motives beyond how they are expressed in the book itself, since “the portrait of Herman Roth reads not as an act of violation but of respect” (184).

For me, the important issue to discuss in this context, as I have done, is why certain ethical dilemmas and ethical questions appear in the process of our reading of a certain text, and especially in certain episodes where ethics become the primary concern for us readers, not to argue in favour of one view of ethics in connections to nonfiction against another. A nonfictional account that depicts others will inevitably invite ethical judgements of different kinds. However, as I have intended to demonstrate by the example of Roth literary nonfictional strategy in *Patrimony*, a nonfiction narrative can at times suspend its commitment to truthfulness and the ethical responsibility that follows by foregrounding the narrative’s literary functions.
In nonfiction, especially the kind told for literary purposes, we can grant the author a certain room, so to speak, to invent, embellish, or to re-create the past with literary means, yet this poetic licence expires by the depiction of the other. To write about someone else is an ethical act by definition. The author of a relational auto/biography, to use Freadman’s concept, must choose to dress his subject in one outfit or the other and this choice always raises the question of the ethics of nonfiction.

Writing About Others or Writing About Writing About Others?

From my discussion on *Patrimony*, it might be possible to surmise that the line between ethics and aesthetics is not always as clear-cut as it is presented in the Zuckerman letter concluding *The Facts*. Discussing the ethics and aesthetics of Roth’s writing, Leland de la Durantaye argues that Roth renders it next to impossible to separate fact from fiction and ethics from aesthetics. This does not mean, however, that Durantaye embraces the postmodernist conflation of the terms fact and fiction (or ethics and aesthetics). Instead he is of the same opinion as me that the postmodernist view “demands that we ignore so much of what we find in Roth’s texts” (Durantaye 2010: 330). He writes: “If a given book has as its central theme the relation of fact to fiction, and we simply bracket all questions of the relation of fact to fiction in our reading of it, we are left with precious little” (330). However, since Durantaye holds the view that Roth’s writing makes it almost impossible to separate fact from fiction and consequently ethics from aesthetics, he must answer the question of “what are we to do in the cases where we are unable to make this distinction – where it seems to be part of the author’s project to render this distinction invalid?” (329). Durantaye’s answer, in the case of Roth, is that readers can use Roth’s “experimentation in shifting the boundaries between his life and his work’ for their own purposes, for seeking out their own sense of the relation between ethical and aesthetic judgement” (330).

The problem with Durantaye’s argumentation is that his generalizing claims blur the lines between the Roth Books but also the lines between them and his other works. According to Durantaye, Roth’s “fictions contain a great deal of fact” and his “facts [contain] a certain degree of fiction” (329). More importantly, by arguing that it is up to the readers to decide how to perceive the relation between ethics and aesthetics, he seems to suggest that all of Roth’s writing can invite both ethical and aesthetic judgement. However, this conclusion seems to contradict Durantaye’s earlier acknowledgement of “the violation of the privacy of others” as “an
ethical obligation associated with autobiography [...]” (326). He writes: “Putting the private lives of real people on display is surely different to displaying the private lives of fictional characters [...]” (326). Yet, if this is the case, there must be some way to distinguish between a text where Roth is putting the lives of real people on display and a text where he is solely displaying the private “lives” of fictional characters. To simply state that it is up to us to decide is not a viable answer.

In his analysis of Patrimony, David Gooblar arrives at a conclusion similar to the one I presented in the previous section. With reference to the episode in which Herman Roth haunts his son’s dreams, Gooblar writes: “Suffering his father’s condemnation in a dream is the reckoning Roth must face for leaving the realm of fiction and entering the ethical and moral dimension of non-fiction” (Gooblar 2008: 39). Although I agree with Gooblar that nonfiction creates a particular ethical and moral realm in which ethical considerations of others become relevant for the reader as well as the author, he makes the mistake of raising the same ethical question in regard to Patrimony as he does with reference to The Facts, Deception, and Operation Shylock. As I have noted earlier, Gooblar discusses the first four Roth Books as belonging to the category he calls Roth’s “autobiographical” books. Why the question of ethics is put forth by these books, he explains in the following way: “While Roth is ostensibly writing about himself, this essay will argue, he finds himself inevitably writing about other people, and the consequent ethical dilemmas lend these books a significant shared concern” (my emphasis) (35).

However, as I argued in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Roth does not write about himself, autobiographically speaking, in any way that is shared by all the books Gooblar refers to as “autobiographical.” Likewise the author cannot be said to write about other people in any way that is shared by these books. Yet, in discussing Operation Shylock, Gooblar writes: “Just as the claim to, or appearance of, non-fiction opens up the possibilities that Deception could expose Philip’s wife, that The Facts could expose ‘May Aldridge,’ and that Patrimony could expose Herman Roth, Pipik’s assertion that his narrative is nothing other than the truth threatens to expose, to implicate, and to invade the privacy of Philip Roth” (46-47). Here, it becomes clear that Gooblar does not make a differentiation between the actual invasion of someone’s privacy through the writerly depiction of other people and the literary motif of a writer’s invasion of someone else’s privacy in a work of fiction. To approach the differences be-

97 Gooblar’s essay was later published in a slightly revised version as the chapter "Nonfiction Writing” in his monograph The Major Phases of Philip Roth (2011).
tween these books, ethically speaking, we need to distinguish between texts where the author is writing about others and texts where he is writing about writing about others.

I have already discussed the ethical dilemmas created by *Patrimony*. Similarly, we know by now that *The Facts* raises certain questions regarding the depiction of other people, as acknowledged by the author himself in the voice of Zuckerman. The example mentioned by Gooblar in the quote above is the depiction of May Aldridge, whose real name (Zuckerman is able to speculate) is something else. By changing her name, we can conclude that the author is eager to respect the real person’s privacy. That we accept that the person depicted has a different name in actuality also confirms that we read it as someone’s account of someone else. This is not the case with cousin “Apter” in *Operation Shylock* since we most likely interpret this supposed name-change in line with how the author of this book is parodying the conventions of autobiography. May does not figure much in *The Facts*. She is depicted at the beginning of the chapter “Now vee May Perhaps to Begin” and then her portrait is commented on critically in the Zuckerman letter. Zuckerman is made to argue that the picture which Roth paints of May is too pretty, nice, and admiring:

I don’t like the way you treat May either. I don’t mean the way you treat her in life; I don’t care about that. I mean the way she’s treated as a subject here. Here you lose your head completely – here the poor plebeian Jew from Newark is so impressed: how calm she was, how patrician she looked, how the lines of her body bespoke guilelessness, nay, integrity, how very upper class her East side apartment was [...] I suspect that a lot about her class and her background and her taste, far from impressing you, positively disgusted you [...] Maybe you are still a little in love with her or like to think that you are. Maybe at fifty-five you are suddenly in love now with those years of your life. But her idealization did not occur at the time, did it? Her idealization is a necessity of this autobiography. *(F 181, 182)*

Further on in the letter we are told that the portrait of May “is not a false portrait but it is only half a portrait” (183). And in a way, Zuckerman’s commentary can be said to provide the other half of the portrait. As Gooblar explains, “Roth gets to have it both ways”; “presenting an idealized portrait of ‘May Aldridge’ (and thus protecting the real woman who might read the book), while apologizing to his other readers (and perhaps to his conscience), explaining that he is too hemmed in by restraint and decorum to tell the whole story” (Gooblar 2008: 41). What the treatment of May Aldridge demonstrates, as Gooblar also underlines, is “the ethical
conflict that arises when entering into life writing” (41). The two versions of May make us aware that the conflict between being truthful and being considerate of other people is always present for the author of nonfiction. Furthermore, it is possible to discuss which ethical issues are put forth by Roth’s consciously split treatment of May Aldridge, for instance how this conflicted portrait tells the truth without actually telling the truth.

In *Patrimony* and *The Facts* it becomes clear that the author must deal with ethical issues that are the lot of the author of nonfiction, and that he explicitly does so in each text. For Gooblar it seems that the same questions that are relevant to discuss in regard to these books and the author’s depiction of other people relate equally to *Deception* and *Operation Shylock*. Gooblar argues, as cited above, that *Deception* could expose Philip’s wife in the same manner as *The Facts* could expose “May Aldridge” or *Patrimony* could expose Herman Roth. Yet this implies that the conversations between the protagonist Philip and his wife in the penultimate chapter of *Deception* (discussed in Chapter 3) are read as actual conversations transcribed by the author, i.e. that we read the novel as a notebook.

After discovering his alleged notebook, Philip’s wife in *Deception* questions him about its content, as we remember. Among other things she inquires whether or not Philip has any intention of publishing the notebook as it is, without changing the name “Philip” to “Nathan.” The protagonist answers that he has thought about publishing it and that if he did publish it he would *not* change the name “Philip” to “Nathan.” Such a publication of the notebook, undisguised, would according to Philip’s wife be a humiliation since everybody would know that he had been cheating on her.

Philip answers:

“How could you be humiliated by something that’s not so? It is *not* myself. It is far from myself – it’s play, it’s a game, it is an impersonation of myself! Me ventriloquizing myself. Or maybe it’s more easily grasped the other way around – everything here is falsified except me. Maybe it’s both. But both ways or either way, what it adds up to, honey, is *homo ludens!*” (D 184)

And their heated argument ends with the following exchange of words:

“We are talking about a notebook, a blueprint, a diagram, and not about human beings!”

“But you are a human being, whether you like it or not! And so am I! And so is she!”
“She’s not, she’s words – and try as I will, I cannot f**k words! I’m going out – alone!” (186)

What the protagonist Philip says in these dialogues concerning the difference between actual human beings and people represented as words on a page is instructive if we want to conceive the difference between, for instance, a book like *Patrimony* and a book like *Deception*. We need to ask ourselves: Are Philip and his wife intended to be read as actual people arguing about ethical dilemmas following from the author’s entering into the ethical sphere of nonfictional writing (or at least confusing his readers into believing they are reading nonfictional writing)? Or is the penultimate chapter in *Deception* rather a metafictional motif in which the author is writing about depicting other people rather than actually depicting other people? My answer should be obvious by now, and since I do not find that *Deception* raises the same ethical issues as *Patrimony* or *The Facts*, I disagree with Gooblar that Roth’s novel in any literal way can be said to “expose” Philip’s wife who figures in the book.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the ending of *Operation Shylock* bears many similarities with the concluding part of *The Facts* and the penultimate chapter of *Deception*. At the end of Roth’s “confession,” as we remember, the protagonist Philip meets his Mossad-handler Smilesburger to discuss the manuscript bearing the same name as the book we are reading. Smilesburger advises Philip to publish the book without its final chapter and by the time we read about their meeting we already know that the eleventh chapter has been “omitted.”

For Gooblar, these similarities are treated as equal in relation to the ethical dilemmas they come to express. He writes, as noted: “Just as Zuckerman argues with Roth in *The Facts* over whether to include the whole truth about ‘May Aldridge,’ and Philip argues with his wife about the revelations of *Deception*, here Philip and Smilesburger grapple over how much Roth puts in or leaves out about his adventures [...]” (Gooblar 2008: 49). However, the difference between the dialogue between Roth and “Zuckerman” in *The Facts* and that between Philip and Smilesburger in *Operation Shylock* is, as I argued in Chapter 4, that the autobiography is nonfictional and thus open to competing versions while the “confession” is a work of fiction presenting not an actual omission but a motif of omission.

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98 Debra Shostak’s reflections on the ending of *Operation Shylock* and the “missing” chapter lead up to a similar conclusion to the one presented by Gooblar some years later. She argues: “By extension, Roth suggests that the novelist must adopt an ethics of representation” (Shostak 2004: 149)
In the first case, Roth is using the voice of Zuckerman to reflect upon the autobiographical narrative as such, its accuracy, its subjective distortions, and its other distinctly nonfictional features. In the second case, Roth is presenting the dialogue between Philip and Smilesburger, and consequently the alleged “omission” of the final chapter, as metafictional motif anchored in his thematic concern with the relation between life and writing. More specifically, this discussion about the writer’s responsibilities relates to another familiar theme in Roth’s oeuvre, a theme that is accurately captured in the title one of his nonfictional essays: *writing about Jews*.\(^9\)

The fact that much of the discussion between Philip and Smilesburger concerns how Philip’s writing might harm the Jews and the state of Israel is also acknowledged by Gooblar. He connects the discussion on “the ethical consideration confronted in Roth’s ‘autobiographical period’ and the considerations Roth was accused of disregarding in his earliest fiction about Jews” (51). Gooblar writes:

> In both cases the choice is figured as between being ‘acquiescent’ to what others define as ‘permissible,’ and ‘holding your ground’ and standing by your ‘artistic convictions’ [...] In those earliest battles, Philip claims, he was armed with ‘untested artistic convictions’; he tests them here. Non-fictional writing becomes a magnifying glass through which the practiced instincts and artistic decisions of an established writer come under close examination. Writing truthfully about his life and the lives of those around him, a project initially conceived of as a path back to sanity and stability, Roth moves into uncharted territory, and, if we are to believe *Operation Shylock*, to the edge of madness. Whether it be “May Aldridge,” Herman Roth, Philip’s wife and mistress, or Roth himself who are threatened with exposure, the consequences of the written word are examined in these four books as they had never before been in his fiction. (51)

Contrary to Gooblar, I find the example of Roth writing (nonfiction) about other people and the example of “writing about Jews” in his fiction to be distinctly different, particularly in relation to the question of ethics. The phrase “writing truthfully” comes to mean different things, of course, with reference to nonfiction on the one hand and fiction on the other, even when it comes to Roth’s writing. In nonfiction, writing truthfully about

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\(^9\) This essay is included in *Reading Myself and Others* and deals with the critical responses to Roth’s early writing and his way of portraying Jewish characters. In the essay Roth responds to the critique that his depiction of Jews could be considered anti-Semitic, “self-hating,” or to fuel Jewish stereotypes. (*RMO* 193-211)
your life and the lives of those around you is not a question of “artistic decisions” or “artistic convictions” as in writing fiction, but primarily a matter of ethical deliberations. For Gooblar, however, the difference between the two seems irrelevant. It is notable that he begins his discussion with analyses of *Patrimony* and *The Facts* and a focus on the ethics of nonfictional writing, and then towards the end of the essay argues that Roth’s four “autobiographical books” examine “the consequences of the written word” (51) and that they are “representations of the ethical dilemmas of writing” (my emphases) (50). Here the question of ethics is disconnected from the question of the referentiality of nonfictional writing.

**Fictionalizing Lives: Reality, History, and Fictionality**

In ethical terms, then, nonfiction differs from fiction because it “signifies narratorial operations on an actual body or bodies rather than on imaginary characters,” as Daniel W. Lehman acknowledges (Lehman 1997: 9). Nonfictional texts, as we have noted, create ethical considerations, both for the author and the reader, a condition lacking in fiction that does not depict actual, living or historical, persons. Yet, having stated this, I do not necessarily contend that a text we globally consider a fiction, for instance a novel of some kind, includes only imaginary characters. For this reason I will continue my discussion on the ethical dilemmas following from an author’s depiction of other people by approaching the question of how actual people might be included in fictional texts, and how these inclusions might create ethical concerns otherwise absent in narrative fiction.

In his monograph, Lehman mentions that fictional accounts sometimes makes use of “actual” names and characters (117). He writes: “Many realistic novels, of course, also have made use of actual characters or public events [...] to draw readers into the mimetic life of the text, a process that

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100 In ”Writing About Jews,” Roth discusses certain readings of his short story ”Epstein” and responds to the critique he received for the depiction of the protagonist and title-figure, Lou Epstein. Refuting the critical remarks made by a New York rabbi, David Seligson, Roth writes: “Obviously, though, his interest is not in the portrayal of character; what he wants in my fiction is, in his words, a ‘balanced portrayal of Jews as we know them’” (RMO 198). Roth goes on to draw attention to the rabbi’s “assumptions about the art of fiction” (199). He states: “Literary works do not take as their subjects characters and events which have impressed a writer primarily by the frequency of their appearance [...] The test of any literary work is not how broad is its range of representation – for all that breadth may be characteristic of a kind of narrative – but the depth with which the writer reveals whatever he has chosen to represent” (199).
can produce reactions that are similar to, but not identical with, the process of implication that I am attempting to describe in nonfiction” (27). For Lehman, then, realistic novels which make use of actual characters or public events should be distinguished from the kind of texts “in which the text’s referentiality grows from its depiction of actual bodies [...]” (20). However, Lehman does not provide an example of how a realistic novel makes use of actual names and characters without a reference to the actual person and his or her actual body. His main example in the context of contrasting nonfiction and realistic novels is a short story he once authored himself. The short story was based on a story he had covered as a journalist which concerned a woman’s disappearance and possible death. In writing the fictional story, Lehman was keen on getting all the details of the actual case right and therefore checked the historical facts of the case he previously had written about in the form of a journalistic narrative (in New Journalistic-style). Yet, in the short story he also “changed the name of the shooting victim (indeed made her no longer a victim), imagined her and other characters’ thoughts, and [...] gained imaginative access to conversations and scenes that would have been impossible to observe or at the very least would have been altered profoundly by the presence of an observer/intruder” (30). By the time the short story was finished, it was, as Lehman acknowledges, “about some other women and some other life” (31). He concludes: “The few readers of my fictional story cared deeply about the character but not her propositionality to real life; by contrast, even those readers of the newspaper series who had never before heard of Kimberly Jane Britts seemed strongly affected by the sense that the population of the world had been reduced by one and that the loss mattered because she had begun to live for them in the story that represented her history in her small southwestern Virginia community” (31).

Although Lehman’s example demonstrates how nonfictional material might be used to create (realistic) works of fiction, it does not really answer the question of how fiction (e.g. realistic novels) might use actual names

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101 Lehman explains his thesis about the implicated reading of nonfiction in the following way: “The resulting transaction among writer, reader, and subject, forces the nonfictional narrative onto a multireferential plane that I would call ‘implicated’: a term I use for the sense that it has of one being ‘deeply involved, even incriminated’ in both history and text and for the way it complicates more traditional or tidy literary notions of ‘ideal’ or ‘implied’ authors and readers.” (4)

102 At one point Lehman mentions that metafictional novelists such as Paul Auster sometimes include characters named after themselves in their novels. He take the example of Auster’s City of Glass and notes in passing that “the actual Paul Auster distances himself from his characterized presence in the novel [...]” (180-181).
and characters without implicating the readers and the author in the depiction of an actual life. To illustrate my point: what if Lehman had not changed her name? What if the character in the short story had been called Kimberly Jane Britts after the woman in the newspaper series? If I am not mistaken, that would have made all the difference for Lehman who argues that the name, Kimberly Jane Britts, “(then and now) signifies something outside the boundaries of the articles as well as inside their narratives” (30). Since Lehman does not provide any other example of a novel which uses an actual person, living or historical, who is transformed into a fictional character while still bearing the same name as the actual person and maybe sharing his or her biography, the line between realistic fiction and nonfiction seems to overlap for him on this particular issue. The presence of an “actual character,” referred to by his or her real name, seems to have the power to “nonfictionalize” fiction, as one can infer from Lehman’s discussion, instead of being subsumed within the rhetoric of fiction.

What I find lacking in Lehman’s discussion is, then, an account of how realistic fiction might include actual, real people without depicting them as such, without forcing a negotiation with referentiality and without demanding evaluation of this character’s propositionality to real life. Such a discussion on how authors of fiction are able to fictionalize actual people has instead been put forth by, among others, Käte Hamburger and Dorrit Cohn. In the following I will briefly summarize and discuss their main points in regard to this particular issue with reference to their common example of the inclusion of Napoleon Bonaparte in Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869).

The example of Napoleon in Tolstoy’s classic novel can be said to have become an almost canonical example in discussions on the ontology of the fictional world and the occurrence of real people in fiction and their relation to the other characters. Figures such as Tolstoy’s Napoleon have been given different labels or tags by different theorists discussing these questions. Terence Parsons, for example, would call the character Pierre Bezúkhov a “native” of the fictional world and label Napoleon as an “immigrant” while Ruth Ronen would view Pierre as an “imaginary” character and Napoleon as a “real-world counterpart” (quoted in Cohn 2000 [1999]: 152). Käte Hamburger, however, argues that as “subject-matter of a historical work Napoleon is portrayed as an object, about whom things are being stated,” while as “subject-matter of a historical novel [...] Napoleon becomes a fictive Napoleon” (Hamburger 1993 [1973]: 112). According to Hamburger, there is a process of fictionalization in a novel “which renders non-historical all ever so historical raw material [...]” (113), including actual, historical people such as Napoleon Bonaparte.
With similar claims, Cohn states that the “historian’s relationship to his human subjects is different in kind from the novelist’s” (Cohn 2000 [1999]: 155). She argues that Tolstoy’s representation of Napoleon at Borodino, employing “fiction-specific” techniques to render the historical figure’s thoughts, treats Napoleon “just like any other fictional figure [...]” (154). However, Cohn deviates from Hamburger’s view of historical novels when she argues that such novels prompt responses in readers which are based on historical expectations and prior knowledge concerning the “raw material” used by a novelist. That historical novels create certain responses related to the factual accuracy of the history presented is what separates this genre from other novelistic genres, according to Cohn.103

Although I agree with Hamburger’s claim that historical novels such as War and Peace fictionalize historical people such as Napoleon, therefore not urging the reader to evaluate this character’s propositionality to real life or historical facts, it is important to note that historical novels and other (realistic) novels including real people can also invite other responses which are dependent upon our historical expectations or even truth value. With an analogy to how I have differentiated between motifs and events by talking about motif-function and event-function, it might be possible to differentiate between individuals or people populating narrative texts as attaining a character-function or a person-function. And as I have discussed the difference between event-function and motif-function, the distinction between character-function and person-function should not be too categorically attached to the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. The cab-driver in Patrimony, for instance, might be used as an example of how a “character” in a nonfictional narrative might acquire a function more common to literary characters in fiction by being compositionally and thematically motivated rather than by being portrayed in a way demanding that we evaluate the portrayal in relation to truthfulness and the real world outside the text. Similarly, it is possible that someone in a work we globally read as fiction acquire a referential function, demanding the status of a real person outside the text, as I will discuss in the following.

Writing Lives in Fiction: Ethics and (Non)Fiction

Discussing Operation Shylock, David Brauner states that the novel “features characters whose names and roles imply a direct representation of

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103 Cohn perceives genre here in a “broad and elastic way” (162): “I would propose that it is on principle possible to read any novel as a historical novel” (161).
people who exist in the unwritten world [...])” (Brauner 2007: 92). He mentions Claire Bloom, Aharon Appelfeld, John Demjanjuk, and, of course, “Roth” himself (92). Though the book at first sight “seems grounded in the real world,” its “realistic framework can hardly disguise the surrealistic nature of [the] narrative [...]”, writes Brauner (92). As I argued in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Roth’s “confession” initially sets up an autobiographical frame only to subvert our expectations and guide our reading toward a different context of interpretation. In Operation Shylock, as I then demonstrated, we are not able to determine the authorial act as corresponding to someone narrating about his life and thus not able to read “Philip Roth” as a name referring directly to the author. Similarly, the names of the people Brauner mentions above do not automatically imply a direct representation of people who exist in the unwritten world. Even if the names correspond to actual, living, historical persons, they are in the novel reduced to “characters,” as Brauner notes, and their inclusion might mainly be said to create effects of realism rather than have a referential function.

Claire Bloom, Roth’s wife to whom the book also is dedicated, appears only briefly at the beginning of Operation Shylock in the form of a concerned wife, urging Philip not to go to Israel. Though the protagonist is intrigued by the idea of the doppelgänger running around pretending to be him, he does not let his wife know anything of his real plans or his fascination with his double. Claire’s plot-function in the book is then mainly a way for the author to relate the protagonist’s motives and his actual feelings toward the situation he finds himself in. John Demjanjuk, however, is not established as a character in any significant way. Rather, this “historical figure” functions in the novel as a surface on which the author and the protagonist can project themes, ideas, or thoughts relating to inner duality and the identity issue at the heart of Roth’s “confession.”

In contrast to the inclusion of Claire Bloom and John Demjanjuk, Aharon Appelfeld, Roth’s writer-colleague, is given a double status in the book since he is both a character in the plot and appears as himself in the interviews Roth includes in the book.

Debra Shostak writes:

Whereas the other explicitly historical figure, John Demjanjuk, serves neatly to reinforce the view of the performative self, Roth is unwilling or unable to erase Appelfeld into postmodernity. One might argue that the presence in Operation Shylock of Appelfeld and the excerpts from the New York Times interview Roth conducted with him contribute mainly to Roth’s strategy in authenticating the “nonfiction” illusion of the novel. Roth’s relationship to the representation of Appelfeld is far more complex, however. A survivor of
the Holocaust, Appelfeld is the living proof of a Jewish historical reality, a history that, for Jews, is an indelible fact and not a construction [...] Appelfeld provides an interruption of the real into the novel. (Shostak 2004: 149)

I both agree and disagree with Shostak’s observations. Appelfeld’s inclusion is partly tied to what Brauner calls the realistic framework, and what Shostak refers to as Roth’s strategy of authenticating the “nonfiction” illusion of the novel. However, as Shostak notes, Appelfeld’s inclusion does also provide “an interruption of the real in the novel.” Yet Appelfeld does not attain his double status as a character in the novel and a real, historical person solely by being a Holocaust survivor, as Shostak suggests.

There is no obvious reason why we should read the scenes in which Philip speaks to Aharon on the phone or when they meet in Israel and Philip speculates about his doppelgänger in the monologue opening the fourth chapter as “actual occurrences,” as it says in the ironic preface to the book. That the real, historical Philip Roth met with the real, historical Aharon Appelfeld and made an interview that was published in The New York Times on March 11, 1988 (as is acknowledged in The Note to the Reader at the end of Operation Shylock), is not sufficient as a reason for us to read all these episodes as “true.” However, I would argue that we read the interviews themselves, included partly in chapter three and chapter four, to some extent as documentation of the actual meeting between Roth and Appelfeld. The author of the novel has in other words included nonfictional entries which prompt us to read them as such, while still being thematically motivated within the work as such.

The main subject in the Roth-Appelfeld interviews is the relation between life and literature, or writing and experience, which of course connects to the main thematic concerns in Roth’s “confession.” Concerning the contents of Appelfeld’s book Tzili (1983), for example, Roth asks his colleague: “And did it occur to you ever not to fictionalize this material but to present your experiences as you remember them, to write a survivor’s tale as direct, say, as Primo Levi’s depiction of his Auschwitz incarceration?” (OS 85). Appelfeld answers: “I have never written about things as they happened. All my works are indeed chapters from my most personal experience, but nevertheless they are not ‘the story of my life.’ [...] The materials are indeed materials from one’s life, but, ultimately, the creation is an independent creature” (85-86).

What occurs when we encounter the interviews is that they demand a different mode of reading and thus temporally change the frame of interpretation. Yet, since these interviews cannot be considered Roth’s depiction
of Aharon, who is quoted in his own words, the inclusion of him in *Operation Shylock*, as a character and as a real person, does not present any obvious ethical dilemmas for the author relating to his depiction of other people. Furthermore, he is not presented in any compromising way. Similarly, the inclusion of Claire Bloom and John Demjanjuk does not function in the book as (truthful) representations of people in the actual world and therefore does not solicit the same ethical consideration from the author as his portrait of his father or his depiction of “May Aldridge.”

*The Plot Against America* is particularly interesting in relation to the issue of depicting real people in fiction because of its counterfactual framework. Even though it is a work of fiction, it is engaged with history (as I discussed in Chapter 4) in a very “real” way; it speaks about historical reality by replacing what happened with what could have happened. In this context, the author’s inclusion of actual, historical people demands in some cases that we read them as themselves and at the same time as other than they in actuality were. In other words, we might argue that Roth represents, at times, alternative versions of actual people, yet presents the depiction of these people as grounded in historical reality.

In *The Plot Against America*, the author mixes well-known historical figures with his immediate family and invented characters. Therefore, the “people” who inhabit Roth’s novel and at the same time claim an existence outside the text in the actual historical reality are limited. One such example is of course Charles A. Lindbergh, the famous aviator who is elected president in Roth’s counterfactual America. Though not directly depicted as a character in the book, Lindbergh’s presence looms over the whole story. As the factual presentation of Lindbergh in the Postscript suggests, Roth’s intention in *The Plot Against America* is to depict Lindbergh in a way that is fairly accurate according to historical sources, thus making his novel more realistic and its plot more believable (see Chapter 4). This is underlined by the inclusion of one of his historical speeches under the heading of “Some Documentation.”

The reason why Roth chose Lindbergh is explained by Brett Ashley Kaplan: “Lindbergh offers Roth the perfect model for a fascist president not only because of his own, historically accurate, proclivities toward Nazi Germany but more importantly for Roth because the flip side of America’s golden boy as fascist supports Roth’s general trope of exposing the undesirable double behind the happy façade” (Kaplan 2011: 120). Kaplan also notes that “Roth’s Lindbergh is depicted as a clever anti-Semite [...]” (119). And by depicting Lindbergh in this manner and by emphasizing the historical accuracy of the portrait, Roth inevitably invites us to ponder questions of truthfulness in our interpretations of the novel’s inclusion of the histori-
cal figure. While Lindbergh to some extent remains who he was, and is, historically, the aviator is re-written as someone else entirely (he was never president!). Therefore, it might be stated that Roth is not actually speaking about the real Lindbergh by referring to him as an historical being. Rather the author is presenting a “truthful” (i.e. probable) portrayal of Lindbergh as president. With an allusion to Nelson Goodman one might say that it is not a picture of Lindbergh, but rather a Lindbergh-as-president-picture.104

Roth’s inclusion of his own family in this book can of course also be connected to how Roth uses living or historical persons in his novel. In the story behind the book, Roth explains that writing The Plot Against America gave him the opportunity to bring his parents back from “the grave and restore them to what they were at the height of their powers in their late 30’s” (“Story” C10). Regarding the inclusion of his family in the book, the author writes: “I’ve tried to portray them as faithfully as I could – as though I were, in fact, writing nonfiction” (C10). Roth then adds that he has portrayed his brother “less faithfully,” that he had to “manipulate him a bit for the sake of the story” (C10).

Even though Roth’s words here seem to indicate that his family should be read in the same way as, for instance, the portrayal of Lindbergh, there is a vital difference between the historical figure at the center of the book and the characters who take part in the story. In Roth’s method of writing he might have strived to imagine his family as they could have been in the context where he situates them, yet he does not provide any means for us readers to assess how “faithful” he is, as he does in the case of Lindbergh.

T. Austin Graham accurately states that “while Roth’s characters are inspired by his own relatives, they have been changed utterly in this alternate vision, transformed into doubles of themselves” (Graham 2007: 141). In other words, we recognize that Roth depicts alternative versions of his family and that these representations do not invite responses pertaining to accuracy or truth value. For example, even though the character Sandy might be based on or inspired by Roth’s brother, the representation of this character need not be evaluated in relation to criteria of truthfulness or accuracy pertaining to the historical person Sanford “Sandy” Roth. Nothing separates him from any other fictional character.

This might be illustrated by the following scene in which Sandy meets the prominent Jewish leader and Lindbergh-follower Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, who is the author’s own invention, that is, one of the charac-

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104 In Goodman’s discussion of pictorial representation in Languages of Art, he distinguishes between representations that are denotational (a picture of so-and-so) and non-denotational (a so-and-so picture). See (Goodman 1976).
ters that lack any counterpart in real life. The rabbi works with and is involved romantically with Sandy’s and young Philip’s aunt, Evelyn, and for that reason he is invited to the Roth’s household for a dinner. Sandy has at the time of their meeting just gotten back from his stay at a tobacco-farm in Kentucky. He went there as a part of the program Just Folks which is described by Lindbergh’s newly-created Office of American Absorption as “a volunteer work program introducing city youth to the traditional ways of heartland life” (PAA 84):

“And you must be the boy,” he said to Sandy, “who’s made us all so proud.”

“I’m Sandy, sir,” Sandy replied, flushing furiously. [...] 

“And what was it like,” the rabbi asked, “to work there in the Kentucky fields under the burning sun?” He said “wuhk” for “work” and “buhning” for “burning” and “theyuh” for “there,” and pronounced “Kentucky” as it was spelled and not, as Sandy now did, as though the first three letter were K-i-n.

“I learned a lot, sir. I learned a lot about my country.”

[...]

Sandy got up and carried over to the rabbi’s chair the several sketchbooks that he’d filled with drawings during the summer and that he’d been holding in his lap since we’d all gathered in the living room.

The rabbi took one of the books and began slowly turning the pages.

“Tell the rabbi a little something about each picture,” Aunt Evelyn suggested.

“That’s the barn,” Sandy said. “That’s where they hang the tobacco to cure after they harvest it.”

“Well, that is a barn alright, and a beautifully drawn barn. I very much like the pattern of light and dark. You’re very talented, Sanford.” (103, 105)

In this scene it is not the brother of the author of The Plot Against America that introduces himself and later shows his drawings to the rabbi. Here, as in the rest of the novel, Sandy is a fictional character. Therefore, there is no meaningful distinction between Sandy and Rabbi Bengelsdorf. We do not need to distinguish between them by labelling one as a “native” of the fictional world and the other to be an “immigrant” in this world, as Terence Parsons probably would do, or to describe the rabbi as an imagi-
nary character and Sandy as a real-world counterpart, as Ruth Ronen probably would do. In *The Plot Against America*, Roth fictionalizes his brother, transforming him into a fictive “Sandy Roth,” thus rendering the raw material he has gathered from history and his own biography fictional.

This is in line with Hamburger’s view of the process of fictionalizing that occurs in historical novels, and as we can see from my quotes, both Sandy and the rabbi “exist” only at the level of the fictive discourse. We are not invited by Roth’s novel to evaluate Sandy in relation to his propositionality to the real Sandy Roth any more than we are prompted to interpret Rabbi Bengelsdorf as someone who existed and about whom the author states things. Roth’s depiction of Lindbergh, on the other hand, is dependent on being historically accurate in certain ways, therefore the author provide us with means – historical facts and documentation – by which to connect the Lindbergh who appears in Roth’s counterfactual history with the real, historical person.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has to some extent dealt with the relation between ethics and aesthetics. By starting with the view presented in the Zuckerman letter, where autobiography is said to invite only ethical judgement and fiction is said to invite mainly aesthetic judgement, I have argued that in certain nonfiction narratives the ethical and the aesthetic are intertwined. *Patrimony* has provided an example of what I consider to be literary nonfiction; a nonfictional narration we recognize as being told for literary purposes. In Roth’s “true story,” the ethics on nonfictional writing are made an acute concern for the author as well as the reader. At the same time the aesthetics of the literary work is constantly foregrounded in different ways. This intermingling of ethics and aesthetics is probably brought to its fullest expression in the episode where Roth cleans up the bathroom Herman Roth has soiled with his faeces, after swearing to his father that the incident would remain their secret. In the episode, the author probes the boundaries of privacy, literally portraying his father realistically in all his nakedness, while at the same time giving the events narrated a function above the realistic documentation by tying together the symbols the author has used to express the theme of patrimony, providing the particular – the shit, the lived reality – and the patrimony theme in a way that gives to the whole a sense of universal significance. In the scene, as in the rest of the book, Roth also employs narrative techniques and devices commonly associated with fiction in order to achieve distinctly nonfictional ends.
In my discussions on *Patrimony* and the other Roth Books I have approached the issue of ethics in a limited sense relating solely to the depiction of other actual people. As I have acknowledged, my aim has not been to discuss how we are to solve different ethical questions that arise in our reading of these five books, but rather to try to understand why certain ethical questions are relevant in one case and not the other, why we might feel that Roth transgresses certain ethical boundaries in one text while in another text he is freed from similar ethical judgements. To write about oneself, as I have argued, inevitably leads an author to write about others as well. Yet, in the Roth Books one must acknowledge the distinct difference between an author who is writing about himself and others and an author who is writing about writing about himself and others, that is, when Roth is presenting his work as nonfiction and when he is presenting his work as fiction thematically and metafictionally concerned with the connections between the written and the unwritten world.
Summary

This study discusses in different ways the theoretical issue of how to distinguish fictional from nonfictional narrative texts in connection with how this particular issue is manifested in Philip Roth’s five Roth Books: The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography, Deception, Patrimony: A True Story, Operation Shylock: A Confession, and The Plot Against America. Many critics have discussed the problem of fact and fiction in these works, and analyzed how Roth supposedly blurs the line between fiction and nonfiction and his reasons for this intentional indistinctness. Yet no study prior to this one has pointed out, as to the question of fiction and nonfiction, how the Roth Books actually differ in relation to each other. On the contrary, a tendency in previous Roth criticism has been to argue that these books, together or individually, conflate autobiographical writing and fictional writing, making it impossible for the reader to decide which elements in the text are facts and which are just invented. Following from this assumption is a view that the texts in the Roth Books series should be read according to the same kind of interpretative strategies, or rather, read as expressing the same theoretical (postmodernist) position: that a factual narrative text cannot be separated from a fictional one.

In contrast with that critical strategy I try, in my thesis, to show that the Roth’s Books cannot be seen as a mixture of fiction and nonfiction if these terms are in any way intended to describe how these texts are actually constructed with the intention that they be read in a certain way. In order to account for how the Roth Books individually communicate with their readers, I argue in favour of a distinction between fictional and nonfictional narrative texts grounded in pragmatics and narrative rhetoric. This pragmatic and rhetorical perspective is presented in opposition to what I describe as the “standard” paradigm in narrative theory, a paradigm with its origin in classical, structuralist narratology. One of the most significant presumptions of that theory is that all narratives, fiction as well as nonfiction, adhere to the same model of communication. In reasoning against that theory, I rely on a framework for my analyses where the terms fiction and nonfiction are conceived as distinct communicative practices, governed by different rules, norms, conventions, expectancies of relevance, and sense-making operations.

Throughout this study I strive to create a continuous dialog between my ongoing theoretical discussions with the point of departure in my chosen framework, outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, and my readings of the Roth Books. In Chapter 3 I deal with the relation between fiction and autobiography in the Roth Books starting out from the name “Philip Roth” as it
appears in these works, especially in *Deception*, *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*. My general thesis is that the name has a specific function in each work separately; therefore I propose a distinction between those works in the Roth Books series which could be characterized as autobiographical and those works of fiction in which the author might be said to “implicate” himself or to make literary use of his name and his biography. These latter books, I try to demonstrate, resist being interpreted as autobiographical and they also resist being conceptualized as “fictional autobiographies” in the sense of being formal imitations of a particular nonfictional discourse. In Chapter 4 I discuss Roth’s method of rewriting personal and collective history in different variants and/or competing versions. My examples are *The Facts*, which has a rather conventional autobiographical set-up, while *Operation Shylock*, and *The Plot Against America*, although making use or the author’s name, are works of fiction. Throughout this chapter the focus of attention is the idea of “rewritings” and the question of referentiality as the dividing criterion between fictional and nonfictional narrative practices. I present a distinction between “variants” and “versions” grounded in the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. In Chapter 5 I approach the relation between ethics and aesthetics as manifested in Roth’s true story about his father, *Patrimony*, which I argue should be read as literary nonfiction. Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate the necessary link between ethics and referentiality in Roth’s nonfiction. In order to understand why we might feel that the author of the Roth Books transgresses certain ethical boundaries in one text and not in another, I emphasize the necessity of distinguishing between such texts where the author’s intention is to present a truthful account of himself and others and such ones where the theme of transforming life into literature is made the dominant concern in his self-reflexive fiction.

My guiding idea in this thesis is that for any proper characterization of the Roth Books, individually as well as how they relate to each other, it is necessary to maintain the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. I show that if these notions are conflated we will not be able to account for the different kinds of interpretative responses that these works, due to how they are individually composed, invite from the reader. The relation between fiction and nonfiction is made a dominating concern for readers in appreciating these books, considered by some to be “literary hybrids” but discussed in my thesis as instances of Roth’s “borderline aesthetics.” Although some of these books and similar works which at times might invite responses belonging to both fictional and nonfictional frames of interpretation, such an oscillating between frames does not erase the boundary between two modes of reading. On the contrary, the possibility of frame
changes within works built on a “borderline aesthetic” is a necessary condition for the intended effects. My thesis argues consistently that such an aesthetic is no threat to the fiction-nonfiction distinction, whether in general or in these particular texts. Rather, this distinction, understood in pragmatic terms, is the basis for any description of the protean nature of literary communication in fictional and nonfictional narrative texts.
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