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The Visual Apologetics of Philip Roth's *Pastoral America*

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ABSTRACT. This essay analyzes the iconic intertexts that structure Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997). Situating the novel in relation to the memory boom of the 1990s, I argue that, when read through the pictures that guide it, *American Pastoral* reflects a post-Cold War apologetics that rationalizes as much as it repents for the violence of the Vietnam War.

If the sense of lived time is being renegotiated in our contemporary cultures of memory, we should not forget that time is not only the past, its preservation and transmission. [. . .] Perhaps it is time to remember the future, rather than simply to worry about the future of memory.

—Andreas Huyssen

The first edition of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997) displays a burning photograph on the cover. Young men and women pose outside a midcentury New Jersey soda fountain. They are smiling and drinking bottles of Coke. The signs on the storefront announce the merchandise found inside: Pittsburgh Paint Products, Hoffman Beverages, Salada Tea, and Coca-Cola. Two men standing in the back make faces at the camera, while two others lean nonchalantly in the doorway. The photo captures what seems to be an afternoon of carefree socializing on this small town's main street. But the flames eating at the picture strike a more ominous note. They rise into the white-lettered title, as if setting fire not only to this scene but also to the very idea of this scene, the pastoral. And yet on the back cover of the book, beneath praise from Cynthia Ozick and others, is the same photograph enlarged and intact. The dust jacket is a fitting one. Roth's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel reflects on how images frame our cultural memory of the post-World War II United States. In doing

so, it challenges the notion that this period offers, in Newt Gingrich's words, "a clear sense of what it meant to be an American" (7). But it also underscores how this idyllic picture of midcentury clarity reemerges undamaged at the end of the Cold War. The flames, that is to say, bite at the edges of the image, but it is nonetheless still there, whole even, at story's end.

American Pastoral is narrated by Roth's alter ego, Nathan Zuckerman, who reconstructs the story of his childhood hero, Seymour "Swede" Levov, a small-town sports star and later Newark businessman who struggles to understand his daughter's commitment to the radical antiwar protests of the 1960s. Scholars emphasize that *American Pastoral* works to de-exceptionalize the Vietnam War, less the moment "American innocence was lost" than a continuation of the state's long history of war-making and militarism.¹ Yet little attention has been paid to Zuckerman's reliance on images to reconstruct the story of Seymour Levov. Roth's novel may de-exceptionalize the Vietnam War. When read through the pictures that guide it, however, the story also reflects an apologetic framework that rationalizes as much as it repents for the atrocities of the Cold War era.

Zuckerman understands Seymour's life through images—children's book illustrations, cultural icons, television footage, and family photographs. The emphasis on determinant images speaks to what Andreas Huyssen calls the "hypertrophy of memory" at the end of the century: in an information age in which memory is itself an industry, it is more difficult than ever to distinguish usable pasts from disposable ones and thereby act in the interest of a more just future (29). What, then, does Roth's literary memory achieve exactly? I aim to suggest that Zuckerman's allegorical recreation of Seymour and his family's life—Seymour embodying the so-called greatest generation and his daughter the 1960s counterculture²—frames a Cold War apologetics that reflects the historical acknowledgements of the Clinton administration. Zuckerman, that is, conveys remorse for the actions of his generation while nonetheless excusing them. What else, he asks, could the goodhearted liberal Seymour do? His interpretation of the pictures in Seymour's life, as controlling technologies of memory,³ reinforces the idea that Seymour lacks agency and thus culpability in the 1960s as he does in the 1990s. In reading the iconic intertexts of *American Pastoral*, I first discuss the apologetics and hypertrophic memory of the 1990s, the decade in which Roth wrote his American Trilogy. I then analyze the images to which the novel refers to suggest that this network of pictures depoliticizes and apologizes for Cold War militarism. In conclusion, I consider how Zuckerman's story, as a "pastoral," speaks to the timeframes of peacetime and wartime.

COLD WAR APOLOGETICS AND HYPERTROPHIC MEMORY

At the 1992 Democratic National Convention, Bill Clinton accepted the party's nomination for president by articulating what he called his "New Covenant with America." Clinton's New Covenant was his "vision" for a

post-Cold War United States in which the nation could recognize its past wrongdoings and thereby remake itself as a liberal multicultural. “[For] too long,” he declared, “politicians have told the most of us that are doing all right that what’s really wrong with America is the rest of us—they. Them, the minorities. Them, the liberals. Them, the poor. Them, the homeless. Them, the people with disabilities. Them, the gays. [. . .] But this is America. There is no them. There is only us” (Clinton, “Address”). The New Covenant was a call to acknowledge the misdeeds of the past and thereby enable a multicultural “us” to coalesce and move forward into a brighter American future. Yet, as Donald Pease points out, Clinton’s New Covenant performed amends-making more than it set about changing the actual workings of the state or the structure of society: “Clinton’s ostensible embrace of a Third Way [. . .] enabled him to conceal the structural violence at work in his programmatic elimination of welfare state institutions in the name of market imperatives” (73). Clinton acknowledged “them” but continued the policy work that cast these citizens as such to begin with.

Clinton’s New Covenant characterizes what Cathy Schlund-Vials refers to as Cold War apologetics. This framework transforms issues of militarism and imperialism into ones of humanism and universality. “Premised on a two-sided understanding of apology (as an expression of remorse and an excuse for problematic action),” she notes, “and rooted in argumentation (rhetoric), these apologetics seemingly reconcile (after the fact) the failures of US foreign policy by way of an ostensibly universal humanism and humanitarianism” (77).⁴ To apologize, in this sense, is to acknowledge and yet rationalize the transgressions of the state. The trick is to turn concerns about embedded structural processes—the military-industrial complex, for instance—into abstract discussions of generalized human suffering and rights. The Clinton administration carried out an apologetic campaign that relied on this maneuver, acknowledging Cold War-era state violence while nonetheless masking the enduring legacy of such violence through appeals to American universality: “There is no them. There is only us.” What Cold War apologetics achieve, then, is less relief for the greatest sufferers of Cold War militarization—Korean and Southeast Asian refugees; disabled veterans, many of whom are homeless; the urban poor—than the rehabilitation of the white American subject whose innocence was lost during Vietnam (Pease 71–72; Schlund-Vials 79).

The end of the Cold War also brought about a related interest in cultural memory, often described as the “memory boom.” The desire to acknowledge repressed chapters in the nation’s history came with a twinned fear of forgetting in a culture understood to be “amnesic.” Memorials were built in cities across the country, camera and camcorder sales skyrocketed, and filmmakers and novelists began mining the recent historical past for material. Two assumptions emerged from this memory industry: first, that the national culture is one of forgetfulness or amnesia; and, second, that memory is always democratic, whereas history is necessarily tyrannical. But, as Huyssen contends,

this “boom” made cultural memory in the United States less amnesic than hypertrophic; the marketing of memory and memory objects—photographs, memorials, keepsakes, gift-shop fare—made it harder than ever to determine what are and are not “usable pasts” (29). Memory is neither altogether good nor bad. But it is necessary and should be deployed with the future, not only the past, in mind. The danger, as New Covenant apologetics suggest, is that hypertrophic memory can be a way to distract American citizens from the ongoing actions of the state.

American Pastoral, in which Zuckerman looks back on the post–World War II years from a 1995 high school reunion, bears the marks of this hypertrophic memory in how the narrator negotiates the past through iconic images and family photos. These images are, for Zuckerman, determinant technologies of memory; they not only record Seymour’s life but also control it. This reading of Seymour—symbolizing a generation of American men—thereby casts him as less an actor in the early Cold War political culture than as one well-meaning liberal who could not change the times in which he made his life. It is a story of national change and foreign policy that ends in a consideration (ironic or not) of abstract human morality: “What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?” (*Pastoral* 423). It acknowledges the wrongdoings of the Cold War while nonetheless masking their legacy. The pastoral is, after all, not just a “literary work portraying rural life” but also a “rural idyllic scene or picture” and the act of “play[ing] at being a shepherd” (“Pastoral,” *OED* def. 1.3a, 1.3c, and 2). The pastoral is the performance and *picturing* of the ideal. It is created and maintained through acts of memory. Zuckerman’s story of Seymour’s life is thus best understood as a crafted idyllic picture that is tarnished and yet rehabilitated through apologetics and hypertrophic memory.

PICTURING THE PASTORAL, DEPOLITICIZING THE COLD WAR

American Pastoral is not Seymour’s story per se but rather Zuckerman’s account of the World War II generation’s “fall from grace” that he projects onto Seymour.⁵ The novel begins with the narrator at his forty-fifth high school reunion. Zuckerman reconnects with his childhood friend Jerry Levov, Seymour’s younger brother, from whom he learns that Seymour died of prostate cancer days earlier. Zuckerman is shocked to hear that Seymour’s daughter, Merry, bombed a New Jersey post office in 1968 in protest of the Vietnam War, killing a local doctor before going on the run. “His life,” Jerry tells him, “was blown up by that bomb. The real victim of that bombing was him” (68). This is the frame through which Zuckerman comes to read Seymour’s life; the duty-bound Seymour is the “real victim” of the 1960s counterculture. It is he, not his daughter or the Southeast Asians for whom she understands herself to be acting, who must be rehabilitated and redeemed. Zuckerman’s apologetic retelling of midcentury American history does not ignore the complexity of its memory but rather uses it to acknowledge and then rationalize and reconstruct.

Zuckerman sets out to determine what led to his childhood hero's demise. He visits the abandoned Newark building that once housed Seymour's glove factory and then his country home in the fictional town of Old Rimrock. He tracks down photographs of his wife, Dawn, who won the title of Miss New Jersey in 1949 and later became a model homemaker, and old articles about Seymour's baseball accolades. Zuckerman nonetheless admits, "Of course I was working with traces; of course essentials of what he was to Jerry were gone, expunged from my portrait, things I was ignorant of or I didn't want; of course the Swede was concentrated differently in my pages from how he'd been concentrated in the flesh" (76). The frame story fades entirely pages later, transforming into a third-person account of Seymour's midcentury life. But Zuckerman first emphasizes the constructedness of this story, as "concentrated differently" in his writing than in Seymour's "flesh." His retelling of his childhood hero's "fall" is characterized as a "portrait" from which details are "expunged" for one of two reasons: they are either lost or undesirable to Zuckerman. Looking back on images of the Levovs from the post-World War II years, the narrator describes his story as itself a picture that is incomplete. Zuckerman's anxiety that some of Seymour is lost and forgotten begets a desire to rescue what he can of this history from erasure. Yet some of these "traces," he admits he "didn't want" and therefore "expunged" from his account. This picturing of Seymour's pastoral life is thus a contradiction in desires; Zuckerman desires to remember out of a fear of forgetting, but he also desires to erase "things [. . . he] didn't want" from the portrait he is creating. This is a hypertrophic yet apologetic act of memory. That is, Zuckerman's retelling embodies an outward ambition to reclaim the non-idyllic details of Seymour's life—the shameful chapters of US history—but in the interest of redeeming the white American liberal and thereby maintaining the existing state of affairs.

Not knowing Seymour personally, Zuckerman assembles the man's personality from what Jerry tells him, a small number of superficial interactions, and a book series that he takes to be emblematic of Seymour Levov's moral center. Zuckerman recalls seeing John R. Tunis's eight-book series on the Brooklyn Dodgers in Seymour's childhood bedroom. This led him to read the entire series as a teenager—and then reread it after his high school reunion—all the time imagining the books as characteristic of Seymour. He focuses on the first book in the series, *The Kid from Tomkinsville* (1940), which tells the story of a goodhearted and humble rookie pitcher from Connecticut named Roy "Kid" Tucker. The hardworking Roy rises through the Dodgers ranks to become a star before an accident ruins his pitching arm. Remaking himself as a right fielder, he again leads the Brooklyn team, this time into the World Series, only to face yet another career-ending injury at the end of the book. "Needless to say," Zuckerman reflects, "I thought of the Swede and the Kid as one" (9). This association, for Zuckerman, comes through in the book's illustrations. These black-and-white sketches, he writes,

with just a little expressionistic distortion and just enough anatomical skill, cannily pictorialize the hardness of the Kid's life, back [. . .] when major leaguers looked less like big healthy kids and more like lean and hungry workingmen. The drawings seemed conceived out of the dark austerities of Depression America [. . .] what image after image makes graphically clear is that playing in the majors, heroic though it may seem, is yet another form of backbreaking, unremunerative labor. (7–8)

In Zuckerman's view, these illustrations are all about the burden of duty. There is no glamour in Tunis's baseball story. Instead, these pictures convey the ethos of the working class. These are "lean and hungry workingmen" carrying out "backbreaking, unremunerative labor." In an early illustration, Roy is pitching in one of his first team workouts with the Dodgers (see fig. 1). His arm is cocked at an acute angle and his face is dark and unsmiling. To Zuckerman, these features speak to the "dark austerities" of Depression-era labor. He assumes these books had a determining effect on Seymour's personality. Seymour, in Zuckerman's reimagining of him, is a man with a distinct sense of responsibility to his family and country. Although he is in fact an enterprising capitalist who runs factories in Newark and later Puerto Rico, his labor is characterized as that of working-class New Dealers sacrificing their bodies for a common good. He sees life as Roy sees baseball: it is difficult and thankless work that must be done. There is no room for the indulgences of his daughter's generation in this austere reality.

Zuckerman's account of Seymour through the lens of Tunis's baseball fiction reinforces the idea of his guiltlessness. Seymour could not do more than carry out his duty to Merry. He could not block her from bombing the post office. Understanding Seymour as under the control of these children's book illustrations engages Cold War apologetics that, as Schlund-Vials puts it, "emphasize universality over specific circumstances and privilege affect over US foreign policy failures" (78). The dozen illustrations that run throughout Tunis's *Tomkinsville* do not distinguish one player from the next. They are all sketched in just the same way, "lean and hungry," to further reinforce the idea that the Brooklyn Dodgers are not all that different from ordinary workers; they are undertaking the everyman's duty of feeding their families and getting by as best they can. Although Zuckerman characterizes Seymour as embodying his generation, any consideration of Cold War militarization is lost amid the message of "common humanity" that underlies Zuckerman's account of the good but damaged Seymour. His life, not unlike the Kid's, is derailed due to chance and circumstance; he is not to blame, nor is anyone else for that matter.

The illustrations of Roy Tucker, in Zuckerman's account, are determinant technologies of memory for Seymour. They more than influence his life; in Zuckerman's story, they altogether structure it. Huyssen characterizes this absorbing and circular understanding of the past as hegemonic at the end of the twentieth century. The temporal and spatial contractions of the digital age, he writes, beget hypertrophic memory that can mystify human agency: "Memory as re-presentation, as making present, is always in danger of collapsing the constitutive tension between past and present, especially where the imagined



Fig. 1. Illustration by Jay Hyde Barnum from John R. Tunis, *The Kid from Tomkinsville*, illus. Barnum (New York: Harcourt, 1940; print; 39). Courtesy of the family of Jay Hyde Barnum.

past is sucked into the timeless present of the all-pervasive virtual space of consumer culture” (10). The danger is that the post-Cold War memory industry enables memory that becomes an end in itself. We remember out of a fear of forgetting and nothing else; we consume for consumption’s sake. In the same way that Zuckerman consumes and is consumed by Seymour’s story—his

narration does not explicitly return after the early chapters—he understands Seymour himself as a consumer first and foremost. His life is the mirror image of the pictures he encounters and emulates.

Zuckerman's hypertrophic picturing of the post-World War II United States goes beyond Seymour. He understands each generation of the twentieth-century American immigrant family as an "image" that speaks to the next. He describes Merry's transgression as the "disruption of the anticipated American future" in which she, as a Jewish American, would be able to "live unapologetically as an equal among equals" (*Pastoral* 85). Merry, he relates, "was to have been the perfected image of [Seymour] as he had been the perfected image of his father, and his father the perfected image of his father's father . . . The daughter who transports him [. . . into] the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk" (86). Not only does Zuckerman understand Seymour as determined by American icons, he also accounts for the Newark businessman's relation to his family as pictured, as a series of images that should relate to him in a specific way. Whereas Seymour continues the Levov family's march toward integration with their American "equals," Merry denies this imagery. She contests the picturing of the pastoral that structures Seymour's midcentury ideal. Merry—representing the 1960s antiwar counterculture—is an unassimilable image, the "counterpastoral" to the "anticipated American future." This organizes (by way of Zuckerman's story) Seymour's attitude toward his daughter. He does what he can to picture her in a way that accommodates his pastoral imaginary. But he cannot construct her ("perfect" her) to fit his idyllic portrait of Cold War-era domestic life. If Seymour is denied agency and thus culpability, then Merry is further denied it as no more than an image in her father's eye.

Throughout his account, Zuckerman imagines Seymour to be looking for the root of Merry's radicalism in the images of her childhood. He begins with her fascination with Catholic trinkets, gifts from his mother-in-law, and then recalls Merry's interest in Audrey Hepburn during the early 1960s. These are idols that seem harmless but that, he nonetheless assumes, dictate and symbolize her personality. Merry, who struggles with her weight and an enduring stutter, shares little in common with Hepburn's turn as the outgoing, rube-turned-socialite Holly Golightly in Blake Edwards's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961). But she simulates her onscreen persona to her father's delight:

Every newspaper she could get hold of she combed for the film star's photograph or name. [. . .] daintily walking to her room like a wood sprite, smiling with meaningful coy eyes into every reflecting surface [. . .] She bought the soundtrack to *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and played it in her bedroom for hours. He could hear her in there singing "Moon River" in the charming way that Audrey Hepburn did, and absolutely fluently. (95)

There are many strata of picturing and pastoralizing in this scene. Seymour imagines Merry's Audrey Hepburn phase as the realization of his pastoral ideal in Old Rimrock. In Zuckerman's retelling, she assumes the task of picturing

herself as the “perfected image” of her father. The centrality of the soundtrack reinforces this linear family progress. On the front of the album is a photograph of Hepburn in character seated at a restaurant for tea. She is wearing a black dress and a tiara, as if a princess in some royal American family. The tiara also calls to mind Dawn’s Miss New Jersey crown. Merry is straining to picture herself within her parents’ (and the nation’s) image of the pastoral ideal, consulting “every reflecting surface” to monitor this constructed self-portrait. Merry understands, as her father does, that the pastoral is by definition an “idyllic [. . .] picture” that one must “play at” and construct in order to be realized.

The song Merry is singing in her bedroom, Henry Mancini’s “Moon River,” epitomizes the pastoral as a musical genre. Composed for the film, the song conveys a nostalgic longing for an unreal somewhere that is located at once in the past and future, that memory “where the imagined past is sucked into the timeless present of [...] consumer culture” (Huyssen 10). This nostalgia is underscored in the film, in which Holly sings “Moon River” on her Manhattan fire escape. In the scene, the filmmakers use a soft-focus filter to reinforce the pastoralizing sentiment of the song. In the rest of the film, Holly is in a dress and heels. But in the “Moon River” scene she wears jeans and a headscarf, further summoning an idyllic rural setting outside the city. The irony is of course that Holly comes from a working-class Texan background and is acting the part of the Manhattan socialite. Merry, conversely, is from an upper-middle-class family and performing her father’s pastoral ideal. Marita Sturken notes that films and images can function as a screen, à la Freud, both as “an object that hides something from view” and a “surface that is projected upon” (Sturken 44). Merry is projecting her desires onto Audrey Hepburn, thereby hiding her own struggles behind “meaningful coy eyes,” while Seymour is projecting his desires onto Merry, whom he imagines as his own “perfected image,” thereby masking the history of a family that could not always “live unapologetically as equal[s] among equals.” This is not to say that memory is detrimental. Rather, Zuckerman’s hypertrophic memory of the Levovs fails to distinguish usable pasts from depoliticized memory screens, instead reflecting his own apologetic desire to expunge from his portrait “things [he] was ignorant of or [...] didn’t want.”

In contrast to Merry’s interest in Audrey Hepburn, the televised images of the Vietnam War constitute, for Seymour, the source of his daughter’s counterpastoral. In particular, Seymour is consumed with the memory of watching the Mahayana Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc burn himself to death on the evening news with Merry and Dawn in 1963: “when he remembers [Merry] sitting there and seeing that monk going up in flames [. . .] he is sure he has unearthed the reason for what happened” (*Pastoral* 152). Zuckerman describes Seymour’s understanding of the monk’s self-immolation as similar to a “performer in a circus”: “this shaven-headed monk somehow made it look as though flames, instead of assaulting him from without, were

shooting forward into the air from within him, not just from his mouth, however, but in an instantaneous eruption from his scalp and his face and his chest and his lap and his legs and his feet” (153). Although Quang Duc was protesting Ngo Dinh Diem’s persecution of Buddhists specifically—Diem had imposed Catholicism on many South Vietnamese institutions, including the military—the monk’s burning became a generalized antiwar icon in the United States and elsewhere. Seymour’s reading of the television image of Quang Duc is striking in the agency it lends to the Vietnamese monk. The flames are not “assaulting him” but rather “shooting forward [...] from within him.” Comparing the monk to a “performer in a circus” and the act itself to a “circus stunt,” Seymour underscores what he sees as Quang Duc’s command of the international stage. The “shaven-headed monk,” not Diem or the US military backing him, is the one dictating history. This, then, becomes a way in which Zuckerman’s memory manages to address the traumas of the Cold War without assigning institutional culpability. If anything, Quang Duc in this picturing of the counterpastoral is the agent of destruction, the source and not the casualty of the flames.

The image of the burning monk on television also recalls the smoldering photograph on the book’s dust jacket. The centrality of the burning monk to Zuckerman’s account of the Levovs correlates Quang Duc’s protest (foreign policy) to the decay of the idyllic midcentury image (domestic life). The Vietnam War, Pease emphasizes, resisted the frame of American exceptionalism, the psychosocial fantasy through which citizens had come to “disavow” the transgressions of the state: “When televised on the evening news, incidents in the Vietnam War refused to become referents in the composite fantasmatic event that cross-identified Columbus’s discovery of the New World with the American colonists’ successful revolution against the British Empire” (57). Citizens could not construe the military effort in Southeast Asia to fit the official mythology of the nation. It thereby signaled not only a material and human trauma but also the destruction of this exceptionalist understanding of the nation that reaches back to Columbus and the American Revolution. Seymour locates his estrangement from this imagined ideal in the image of the burning monk, “the reason for what happened.” And yet Zuckerman’s retelling does not further penetrate the significance of the image. It is the image itself, not Cold War militarization, that becomes the root cause of the counterpastoral; it is the monk from whom the flames shoot forward. He focuses on Quang Duc’s “perfectly upright” posture, as if suffering no pain at all, “setting the air on fire while no harm at all befell him” (see fig. 2). Instead, it is Seymour’s family that is victimized by the image: “no pain registered on anyone on camera, only on Merry and the Swede and Dawn, horrified together in their living room” (*Pastoral* 153). Seymour and his family alone recognize and *feel* the horror of the self-immolation, and the Vietnamese civilians in the background, who Seymour notes fail to register the horror of the scene, confirm his goodness, the universality of his empathy. In Zuckerman’s



Fig. 2. Photograph of Thich Quang Duc by Malcolm Browne. Used by permission of the Associated Press.

rendering, affect and a depoliticized account of human tragedy substitute for questions of geopolitics and militarization. He conducts a post-Cold War apologetic reading of the iconic scene, rehabilitating the image of Seymour's generation as marked by well-meaning humanitarianism, not militarism; the white American's national fantasy, his pastoral, here becomes the true casualty of the Vietnam War.

Zuckerman reads this television image as a determinate technology of memory. When more Vietnamese monks duplicate Quang Duc's protest, Merry watches them all, mesmerized: "she just sat transfixed before that set for minutes on end, her gaze focused somewhere else than on the flickering screen, focused inward—inward where the coherence and the certainty were supposed to be, where everything she did not know was initiating a gigantic upheaval, where nothing that registered would ever fade away" (156). This account of Merry's "transfixed" gaze speaks to the hypertrophic memory industry of the 1990s, in which Clinton's New Covenant encouraged the acknowledgment of past transgressions and during which Roth wrote the novel. Yet Clinton's vision, alongside the corporate marketing of memory, also led to a surfeit of memory that stood to distract as much as to redress. In the late twentieth century, Huyssen argues, the emphasis on trauma in memory studies reinforced the notion that the present is "repetitively haunted by the past" while deprioritizing how cultural memory might also be mobilized in the interest of the future (8). Merry is characterized here as caught in a tangle of traumatic memory objects—television footage and photographs—that

registers an enduring change in her “inward” self. Although Seymour notes that after that year she did not again mention the burning monks, he assumes that she continues to fixate on and encircle the iconic image of Quang Duc, a past by which she is haunted.⁶ Zuckerman concludes that this counterpastoral picture conjures for Merry what Roland Barthes once called the “punctum,” a disturbing and poignant element that takes hold of and “wounds” someone where it might not others (Barthes 26). Filtered through Seymour’s account of his daughter, though, this punctum wounds not Merry so much as it does his picture of the pastoral.

It is not surprising that Seymour’s story is told through analyses of pictures, since Zuckerman begins his research of the Levovs’ “fall” in the photographic record he finds in local media. Upon learning from Jerry of Seymour’s death, he finds what images he can of the Swede and Dawn’s idyllic life in Old Rimrock. “I was able,” he writes,

to get the New Jersey Miss America Pageant office to dig up a glossy photo of Mary Dawn Dwyer, age twenty-two, being crowned Miss New Jersey in May of 1949. I found another picture of her—in a 1961 number of a Morris County weekly—standing primly before her fireplace mantel in a blazer, a skirt, and a turtleneck sweater, a picture captioned, “Mrs. Levov, the former Miss New Jersey of 1949, loves living in a 170-year-old home, an environment which she says reflects the values of her family.” (76)

It is from these serene images that the narrator works to trace the origin of Merry’s counterpastoral bombing and the end of Seymour and Dawn’s charmed marriage. These images are the burning photos of Zuckerman’s allegorical bi-generational story. Both images of Dawn emphasize the performance of her and Seymour’s life: the modeling that the Miss America pageant entails continues into Dawn’s life as a homemaker, “standing primly” at her fireplace as if acting out this scene of propertied country life. The emphasis on the age of the Levovs’ “170-year-old home” also reinforces the picturing of an American pastoral. Built in 1791, the house dates to the original “greatest generation,” the leaders of the American Revolution, thereby underscoring their claim to the “perfected image” of the “anticipated American future.” They are no longer a Jewish American man and an Irish Catholic woman but rather epitomize American universality realized, “liv[ing] unapologetically as [...] equal[s] among equals.” It is fitting that Roth chose the 1949 Miss New Jersey pageant to be Dawn’s moment of triumph. That year’s Miss New Jersey, Kathleen Crowley, became a famous television actress after finishing sixth in the Miss America pageant (see fig. 3). Crowley is most recognized for her role in the Old West drama *Maverick* (1957–62), a series that celebrated the morality and rugged individuality of American cowboys. Although sharing little of Crowley’s biography otherwise, Dawn Levov acts out this same identity of stable and longstanding American belonging and “values.” She too is *playing at* a specific understanding of Americanness.



Fig. 3. Photograph of Kathleen Crowley at the 1949 Miss New Jersey Pageant. Courtesy of the Miss America Organization.

Looking through the midcentury photos of Seymour and Dawn, Zuckerman returns once again to Tunis's *The Kid from Tomkinsville*. He rereads Tunis's fiction as he analyzes the Levov family photographs, comparing his own story of the Swede to that of the Kid. Of Roy "Kid" Tucker, he writes of an "orphan whose only fault, as a major leaguer, is a tendency to keep his right shoulder down and his swing up, but a fault, alas, that is provocation enough for the gods to destroy him" (76). Equating Seymour with Roy, Zuckerman again emphasizes the Swede's (and his generation's) lack of culpability. Examining the pastoral images of his and Dawn's life in Old Rimrock, he finds no

identifiable faults that might have led to Merry's counterpastoral. Seymour, like the Kid, has no shortcoming worse than a "tendency to keep his right shoulder down and his swing up." These Cold War apologetics are successful because they are grounded in one person's life (humanism rather than realpolitik) and because they admit to wrongdoing without actuating change (fault that is not "provocation enough" for more than symbolic atonement). The photos of Seymour and Dawn enable Zuckerman to picture a pastoral that itself becomes the victim of the Cold War era. It foreshadows the apologetic final sentence of Zuckerman's account: "What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?" (423). Seen through the family photo album, it would seem nothing. And yet it is not easy to discern what exactly has been "expunged" in order to construct this portrait. What usable pasts might be in its margins?

During the final scene of the book, a dinner party with other affluent Old Rimrock residents, among them Dawn's paramour, Seymour meditates on his marriage. He does so by recalling family photographs. Learning that night of Dawn's infidelity, Seymour summons not memories of them together but images of his wife as Miss New Jersey:

In one of their photograph albums there was a series of pictures he used to like to look at back when they were first married and even on occasion to show people. They always made him so proud of her, these glossy photos taken in 1949-50 [. . .] pictures of her opening the department stores and the auto showrooms [. . .] more like a princess was supposed to look than any of a whole string of European princesses whose photographs he'd seen in *Life*. (404-6)

Zuckerman crafts Seymour's knowledge of his wife as entirely mediated through idealized images. Even upon learning that Dawn is cheating on him, Seymour is still able to conjure the idyllic pictures of their pastoral early marriage, these images that "made him so proud." This is not only his understanding of Dawn in their mid-adulthood, the decade in which the dinner party occurs, but also when they were newlyweds. He would look at these photos and share them with others during the 1950s, as if her photos were more revealing of Dawn than Dawn herself. In her study of family photographs, Marianne Hirsch suggests that these images are located in the "space of contradiction" between myth and reality; they are held in tension between the dominant ideology, the "familial gaze," and counterhegemonic acts, "familial looks" (Hirsch 8, 11). In Zuckerman's retelling of the Levovs' family history, Seymour contributes a familial gaze that imposes specific subject positions on his wife and daughter. His readings of their family photo albums constitute them in relation to his ideal, the pastoral he is picturing. Merry's bombing and Dawn's infidelity are the counterpastoral "looks" he struggles most to assimilate to his idealized life in Old Rimrock. The ideological content of an image is constituted both by the photographer and the spectator (Hirsch 7). Zuckerman, as the latter, reads an apology *onto* these midcentury family photographs that enables the reconstruction of a lost ideal.

Seymour's turn to these technologies of memory, his family photo albums, also speaks to the production of hypertrophic memory. Unable to act on behalf of his marriage, he instead reflects on a series of old photos of Dawn. In doing so, he treats her as a commodity among commodities. In his memory, she materializes amid department stores, auto showrooms, and *Life* magazine clippings. This is the hazard of uncritical memory in which the past is re-presented and "sucked into the timeless present of the all-pervasive virtual space of consumer culture" (Huysen 10). Seymour is portrayed as more interested in redeeming an imagined past than in acting in the present for the sake of the future. This timeless stratum is negotiated by recalling the national past, associating Dawn with the "values" of the revolutionary-era house and Seymour with the "backbreaking, unremunerative labor" of industrial workers. But it is also constructed through Zuckerman's reference to the "European princesses" in *Life*: Dawn seemed "more like a princess was supposed to look" than actual royalty. Zuckerman thereby anchors Seymour's idyllic image of his wife in a historical discourse that creates a sense of continuity and stability. She is the "perfected image" of American royalty; she is consumable; and she is always re-presentable through his familial gaze.

Although Zuckerman's reimagining of Seymour's life weighs the destruction of a constructed ideal, as the book's cover suggests, Roth's frame story speaks more clearly to the way in which this ideal is reconstructed at the end of the Cold War. Prior to his reunion, Zuckerman has dinner with Seymour to discuss a tribute the Swede is writing to his late father. Although the narrator later learns of the man's cancer, his failed marriage, and his daughter's post office bombing, Seymour entertains him with photographs of his three sons and second wife: "There was one photograph of the boys with their mother, a good-looking fortyish blonde, advertising manager for a Morris County weekly" (*Pastoral* 23). Seymour Levov has successfully reconstructed the pastoral he had imagined for himself in Old Rimrock. His second wife manages the advertising in the same publication in which Dawn "primly" stood by her fireplace in 1961, suggesting a greater control of this second Levov family pastoral. This pictured ideal is reinforced by Seymour's account of his family's vacation home in Puerto Rico, not far from his factory there, where the boys "loved [. . .] water-skiing, sailing, scuba diving, catamaraning" (28). He tells Zuckerman he had "hung on" as long as he could in Newark and was currently doing the same in the Caribbean, considering relocating to East Asia for a more "abundant and cheap" labor force. Seymour here apologizes for abandoning his home city but only to rationalize the necessity of this relocation—similar to Clinton's elimination of welfare state institutions, this is Cold War apologetics with a neoliberal bent. The Swede uses Cold War apologetics in the interest not of challenging the American pastoral but of reconstructing it, this time at a Caribbean vacation home instead of Old Rimrock, New Jersey. In the turn-of-the-century memory industry, Roth's late fiction makes clear, the pastoral is no longer charred by Vietnam but is rather being re-presented through apologetics and commodified memory.

PASTORALIZING WARTIME, MILITARIZING PEACETIME

The pastoral, as a “rural idyllic scene or picture” and the act of creating this picture, tends to obscure the distinction between past and present. It occurs in the imagined past and in the present act of picturing. In Zuckerman’s case, the pastoral registers both in the 1950s (the pictured) and the 1990s (the picturing), thereby setting it in contradistinction to the counterpastoral of the Vietnam War. There are two different timeframes here: peacetime, the pastoral; and wartime, the counterpastoral. The apologetic memory of the late twentieth century, though acknowledging the transgressions of Cold War militarization, is built on the idea of a peacetime that existed prior to the “American berserk” in Vietnam and one that has emerged since. The pastoral thus *brackets off* a recognized wartime from the idealized preceding and succeeding peacetimes. This bracketing in fact facilitates the picturing of the pastoral. When Zuckerman looks at Dawn’s Miss New Jersey photos and the later images of Seymour’s second family, he recognizes them as idyllic precisely in their contrasting relation to the image of Quang Duc burning to death in a Saigon street. The binary logic of pastoral-counterpastoral and peacetime-wartime sustains the idea that militarization continues to be an exceptional timeframe in the United States, not an enduring and integral feature of American life.

The Cold War more than any military conflict before it, Mary Dudziak notes, challenged the categories of wartime and peacetime; and yet, “contemporary thinkers find ways to fit that era into preexisting conceptual boxes,” thereby ignoring a “period of state-building akin to the New Deal era” (69, 91). Casting the Vietnam War as a bracketed wartime period enables the pastoralizing and depoliticizing of the time both before and after it. In the latter case, this logic facilitates the disregarding of institutional structures and economic channels established during this prolonged stretch of American militarization that began in 1947 with the passage of the National Security Act. Even prior to the ongoing War on Terror, warfare stood as a defining characteristic of the United States. The so-called “small wars” scattered throughout the post-Cold War era occur during “peacetime,” thereby reinforcing the idea that war—and the choices that warfare entails—is today the domain of the state alone. The pastoral is understood as such because it is not some named counterpastoral. Peacetime is understood as such because it is not some named wartime. Clearly, there is gradation here, but the categories are nonetheless meaningful, calling for specific action or inaction from American citizens.

Roth’s *American Pastoral* traces how the pastoral is constructed, challenged, and reconstructed in the second half of the twentieth century. The text does so through photographs that are understood to be determinant and hypertrophic technologies of memory. These images apologize for the transgressions of the Cold War but nonetheless ignore their legacy in the nation’s present. The pastoralized peacetime of Seymour Levov’s life is unsettled in the counterpastoral

military effort in Southeast Asia. And yet this counterpastoral, as a contrastive wartime, comes to further enable the picturing of the pastoral in the post-Cold War national imaginary. Nathan Zuckerman asks what is wrong with the Levovs. The time, wartime, is the reply. This ensures that the American subject—and his idealized image of the nation—is the victim and not victimizer of the counterpastoral Vietnam War. This hypertrophic memory, as Roth's fiction dramatizes, prioritizes the rehabilitation of an American pastoral on either side of Vietnam. In doing so, it masks other usable pasts and distracts from the enduring legacy of this traumatic history. What is lost in the apologetics of the memory industry is less the past than the struggle for the future.

NOTES

1. Aimee Pozorski contends that the original trauma of Roth's work is the Revolutionary War, not the Vietnam War, emphasizing that the latter is "not a singular event in this country" (90). Sandra Kumamoto Stanley and Clare Sigrist-Sutton both point out that naming Merry and her generation as the "counterpastoral" to Seymour's pastoral integrates her within her father's "symbolic order" as a "neutralized threat" (Stanley 5–6; Sigrist-Sutton 63). Derek Parker Royal meanwhile argues that Roth's American Trilogy—*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000)—emphasizes the "fictitiousness of any mythologized national Eden" (202).

2. Sigrist-Sutton suggests that this allegorical structure runs the risk of reducing "the decade's many triumphs in civil rights and women's rights" to a "familial and psychological drama" (54).

3. I use the term "technologies of memory" as defined by Marita Sturken: "cultural products—public art, memorials, docudramas, television images, photographs, [...] even bodies themselves [...] that] embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory's production" (10).

4. Schlund-Vials theorizes Cold War apologetics in relation to Roland Joffé's film *The Killing Fields* (1984) and the reportage of Sydney Schanberg on which it is based.

5. Royal notes that many early critics of the novel failed to recognize that Seymour's story is "more or less a fabrication, the result of Zuckerman's nostalgically induced musings" therefore making the "storyteller, not the story, [...] our primary novelistic focus" (199).

6. Kathleen MacArthur connects this recursivity to Cathy Caruth's theory of "traumatic reenactment" (24). To this reading, I might add that Zuckerman's story also fits into the post-Cold War nexus of memory, consumerism, and nostalgia.

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