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Faith in Fiction: American Literature, Religion, and the Millennium

A Dissertation Presented

by

Liliana M. Naydan

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation examines treatments of religious faith in American fiction written in the 1990s and in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The springboard for my analysis is what historians have identified as the paradoxical nature of recent religious history in America. By the 1990s, an era marked by millennial anxiety, America can be understood as a nation comprised of devout believers governed by Christian evangelical and fundamentalist ideologies, but it can also be understood as a wholly secular nation that has opted for devotion to the fruits of late capitalism alone. Putting Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim fictional works into dialogue with one another, I argue that authors writing about America interrogate this apparent paradox. In the process, they become literary theologians of sorts, reinventing orthodox or "centered" faith as a decentered way of thinking and being that thrives in a middle space between orthodoxy and doubt. Both *fin de millénaire* authors like Philip Roth, John Updike, and Don DeLillo as well as authors who write in the aftermath of 9/11, such as Mohsin Hamid and Laila Halaby, represent believers in America as endorsing hybridity by fusing secular elements of postmodern life with the sacred, but not to ends that fulfill them unequivocally. In the age of terror, an age marked by intolerance toward Islam and all things apparently Islamic, both the authors who write about America as well as the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Americans that they fictionalize must continue to grapple with the changing nature of what it means to be a believer in America. They must determine not only whether increasingly polarized American politics preclude opportunities for hybridity, but also whether believers who resist orthodoxy can and will remain part and parcel of the post-9/11 American narrative.

For my mother and father,
Roxanne and Michael Naydan

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Introduction:

Faith in Twentieth-Century American Literature

and Millennial Anxiety in 1990s American Culture

For better or worse, faith has always been part and parcel of American national identity. In a general sense, early American colonists were believers in what history came to know as the American Dream: they believed that through hard work, success in the New World would be possible. More specifically, these settlers believed devoutly in a Protestant God and in fusing Protestant theology with politics. As John Winthrop affirmed on the flagship *Arbella* in 1630, the settlers' errand in the New World was a religious one: the Puritan colonies would "be as a city upon a hill" (216), with the eyes of the world upon them as they entered into a new covenant with God to prepare the world for Christ's Second Coming. Although the face of American belief has transformed since the colonial period, Puritans have at least in part influenced the ways in which Americans continue to think and behave. As Sacvan Berkovitch argues in *The American Jeremiad* (1978), "[n]ot all at once but within the first half century [Puritans] established the central tenets of what was to become (in Raymond Williams's phrase) our 'dominant culture'" (xiii). Even with threats to faith like Charles Darwin's work and the emergence of Higher Criticism[1] in the nineteenth century, the tendency for Americans to be

[1] As Karen Armstrong explains, Higher Criticism of the Bible

> represented the triumph of the rational discourse of *logos* over myth. Rational science had subjected the *mythoi* of the Bible to radical scrutiny and found that some of its claims were "false." The biblical tales were simply "myths," which, in popular parlance, now meant that they were not true. The Higher Criticism would become a bogey of Christian fundamentalists, because it seemed a major assault upon religion, but this was only because Western people had lost the original sense of the mythical, and thought that doctrines and scriptural narratives

religious or at least conceive of themselves as religious has remained steadfast. In 1910, the term "Fundamentalist" was born with the publication of the first of "The Fundamentals" (1910-1915)—a series of twelve pamphlets comprised of essays that attempt to counter religious skepticism by underscoring the fundamentals of Christian faith. By the 1970s, evangelical Christians, who spent years essentially in the underground following the embarrassments of the Scopes Monkey Trial, reemerged not only as a faithful force, but as a politically active body with which to be reckoned.[2] Indeed, in the waning moments of the second millennium, at a time when dominant elements of popular culture in an age defined by excess might suggest that faith had become passé, the Gallup International Millennium Survey reported that eighty-seven percent of respondents identified themselves as "followers of some religion," and nearly two-thirds of respondents viewed God as "very important" in their personal lives (Carballo).

But how have believers sustained faith alongside the emergence of increasingly secularized twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture? And how has faith changed as the times have changed? In 1957, Paul Tillich defined faith as "the state of being ultimately concerned" (*Dynamics* 1), a quintessentially centered way of thinking and being in that "[i]t happens in the center of the personal life" and "is the most centered act of the human mind" (*Dynamics* 4). God is at the center of the Judeo-Christian universe; He is the stabilizing force that gives meaning to

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> were *logoi*, narratives that purported to be factually accurate and phenomena that could be investigated scientifically. (95)

[2] As Christian Smith explains,

> Evangelicals were virtually invisible on the radar screen of American public life prior to the mid-1970s. While numbering in the tens of millions and growing in adherents and institutional strength, American evangelicals had for decades blended into mainstream American life. But the 1976 election of the "born-again" President Jimmy Carter and the rise in the late 1970s of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority changed all that. Evangelicals found themselves on the American cultural and political map, and they have remained conspicuous throughout the decades since then. (1)

life and to history. However, in late twentieth-century existence as it is represented by Derridian poststructuralists, endless play and destabilized peripheries replace the ordered, centered, and stable world that contemporary American believers attempt to maintain. According to William Butler Yeats's quintessentially modern statement, the center cannot hold; but for late twentieth-century American thinkers to whom Derrida's poststructuralist theoretical perspectives speak, there may be no center to speak of anymore.[3]

To consider religiosity in the contemporary American period is to consider the way in which the decentered times affect the centeredness of faith—the way in which devout religious belief seems to be something of a paradox in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century America. Indeed, as historian Patrick Allitt observes, "[r]ecent American religious history is paradoxical" in that "America is, in one respect, the great exception to the rule of secularization in the Western industrialized nations" (xi). It is a country in which "[s]pectacular new churches enhanced the landscape; well-funded and religiously motivated groups like Moral Majority intensified the religiosity of American political life; and spiritual seekers found an ever-growing range of religious groups from which to choose" (xi). Concurrently, however, contemporary America is, for Allitt, "profoundly secular," a nation in which "commerce, science, and technology [operate] entirely without reference to the divine" and "[c]itizens who [want] nothing to do with religion of any kind rarely [find] it impinging on them" (xii). It is the sort of place that invites if not cultivates late capitalism, which critics have identified as standing in

[3] For instance, see Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (delivered in 1966 at a conference on structuralism at Johns Hopkins University), which critiques structuralism and ideas that function in accord with structuralist terms and/or emerge out of structuralism (like those relating to religion and faith, I suggest). In the piece, Derrida posits that "[t]he center is not the center" and that "it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no center" following the event Derrida terms a "*rupture*" (878, 879, 878).

opposition to religion.[4] It is the sort of place that invites postmodernity to eradicate traditional notions of God and devout faith.

Faith in Fiction aims to explore the place of faith in fictional representations of decentered contemporary America on the eve and in the wake of the third millennium. It considers how authors who feel America's palpable religious underpinnings negotiate traditional, institutionalized religiosity with American post–World-War-II secularity and examines how they fashion institutional religious belief as a way of thinking and being that, for better or worse, can and does exist beyond the bounds of the center. On the eve of the millennium, which serves as the subject of the first three body chapters of this study, Philip Roth, a Jewish author, John Updike, an Episcopalian who was raised a Lutheran, and Don DeLillo, who was raised a Catholic, attempt to fuse centered religious faith with late capitalist elements of modern-day existence: postmodern narrative, Hollywood, and the American media and the Internet. Thus, they attempt to forge new ways of believing that occupy a middle space between resolute, traditional, institutional devotion and utter skepticism, transcending the belief-doubt binary as well as traditional understandings of what it means to be a faithful adherent of an established religious tradition. In the wake of the apocalyptic 11 September attacks, Mohsin Hamid and Laila Halaby—authors of Islamic heritage upon whom the fourth and final body chapter of this study focuses—emerge in opposition to authors who continue to present faith as hybrid, calling hybrid modes of believing into question. They suggest that decentered faith may be necessary, but byproducts of late capitalism fail to provide a fruitful foundation for such faith, particularly for Islamic Others attempting to live in America. Ultimately, this study concludes with a

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[4] For a consideration of postmodern theory's opposition to traditional religiosity, see Brian D. Ingraffia's *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow* (1996). As Ingraffia argues, "[w]hereas modernism tried to elevate man into God's place, postmodern theory seeks to destroy or deconstruct the very place and attributes of God" (1).

meditation of the future of what I characterize as a fractured twenty-first-century American nation that must develop a post-9/11 narrative alongside the post-apocalyptic space that is Ground Zero. I suggest that artistic renderings of America continue to explore the fruits of hybridity, moderation, and temperance, thereby sustaining the capacity to temper increasingly fanatical elements of existence in the new millennium.

Devotion, Doubt, and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Literature

Over the course of the twentieth century in America, scientific revolution and social change have come to function as two of the greatest challenges to traditional modes of religious faith. At the turn of the century, industrialization transformed the face of the nation. As Henry Adams suggests in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1906), the dynamo, representative, for Adams, of science in general, came to supplant the Virgin Mary, who previously had inspired a sense of mystery and the metaphysical.[5] With the rapid technological advancements of the Cold War era, when Russians and Americans sought to possess the most sophisticated weaponry and means by which to attain intelligence, seemingly countless inventions—televisions, washing machines, and dishwashers—became commonplace in American households. Furthermore, these households emerged in suburban neighborhoods that in and of themselves came to threaten

[5] According to Adams, "[s]ymbol or energy, the Virgin had acted as the greatest force the Western world ever felt, and had drawn man's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done" (325). However, by the start of the twentieth century, Adams observes that "[t]he new American man must be either the child of the new forces or a chance sport of nature" (416). For Adams, these "new forces" are part and parcel of the invention of the dynamo, which he views for the first time at the Great Exposition of 1900. As Adams puts it, "the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross" (318).

religious faith: as Alan Wolfe explains, "[f]rom the moment suburbanization began to expand exponentially in the 1950s and 1960s, critics wondered whether strong religious commitments could be sustained among middle-class Americans" (39). America thus developed its foundations as the quintessentially modern or postmodern, technologically advanced, and technology-driven place it remains to this day.

Many twentieth-century American authors inevitably came to address explicitly or implicitly the relationship between faith and modernity, and fiction that preached the value of faith emerged in opposition to fiction that expressed skepticism of traditional religious institutions and the benefits they offered in a scientifically advanced age. At one pole of this faith-doubt binary in contemporary American fiction are openly religious authors who subscribe devoutly to the tenets of their respective organized religions, most notably Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and Cynthia Ozick at one end of the literary spectrum and Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins at the other. O'Connor and Percy, both Catholics, wrote fiction that very much sustains a moral center. In a letter written on 4 April 1958, O'Connor observes that "[a]ll my stories are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it" (*The Habit* 275). She depicts morally questionable characters such as the cantankerous grandmother and the Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1955) and Tanner in "Judgment Day" (1965), but she sees God's grace as being available to everyone, even these reprehensible characters. Similarly, Percy's fiction reflects his resistance to modernity and the value of Catholicism in his life after his 1947 conversion to that religion. Critics view him as a philosophical novelist, and works such as *The Moviegoer* (1961) and *The Second Coming* (1980) contemplate twentieth-century man's fallen condition and send a message of salvation to readers. Likewise, Ozick writes fiction that engages her Jewish faith much in the way that O'Connor and Percy engage

Catholicism, believing that Jewish literature must be rooted firmly in the religion's law, texts, and traditions, and that it should instill moral and communal values for Jewish readers. In *The Shawl* (1990), for instance, she uses Rosa, the novella's protagonist, to critique behaviors like idolatry that she views as detrimental to Jews. With a heavier hand than O'Conner, Percy, or Ozick and an unprecedentedly large readership, evangelical Christian minister Tim LaHaye and Christian Writers Guild[6] owner Jerry B. Jenkins, masterminds of the sixteen bestselling novels that comprise the *Left Behind* series (1995-2007), attempt, in their fictionalized representations of Revelation, to warn Americans of the eternal suffering that lies ahead for them if they continue to deny Christ as their savior. Arguably more religious propaganda than art, the *Left Behind* novels and the industry of multi-media spin-offs that rose up around them express not only the faith the authors themselves have as born-again Christians, but the voice of evangelical Christian America on the whole.

Even though twentieth-century America remains filled with believers, the enterprises of representative authors like O'Connor, Percy, Ozick, LaHaye, and Jenkins run counter to the literary movements that emerged in the authors' lifetimes. If the intellectual landscape of the times is defined by Nietzsche's nineteenth-century declaration of God's death in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) and a fragmentation of narrative that arguably marks the death of the master narrative, as Henry Adams anticipates fearfully at the onset of the twentieth century and as Jean-François Lyotard declares in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), these authors are lagging behind the postmodern times, which Frederic Jameson characterizes as "effortlessly secular" (387). They resemble medieval authors or perhaps Early

[6] According to Jerry B. Jenkins's website, the Christian Writers Guild "aims to train tomorrow's professional Christian writers and has more than 1,000 members worldwide" (www.jerryjenkins.com).

Modern ones such as Milton, who invokes the Holy Spirit as his muse in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* (1:1-26), his great Protestant epic and expression of his own personal devotion to God. They are never skeptical of the faiths to which they adhere, nor are they skeptical of traditional notions of goodness propounded by those belief systems; instead, they are the literary champions of their religious traditions, reinforcing established belief systems and suggesting that faith continues to redeem man.

Adhering more to the increasingly skeptical tenets of intellectual twentieth-century existence are American authors who either limit the degree to which they address the subject of religion or employ their fictional works to critique organized religion, particularly Christian fundamentalism and evangelicalism. To usher in the twentieth century, naturalists such as Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris portrayed the world as chaotic and godless, and man as struggling against nature while exhibiting an animalistic brutality that defines his condition. God does not save man for American naturalists, nor is man necessarily able to save himself because his environment remains so harsh and often dooming to him. Subsequently, more overt critiques of organized religion emerged. For instance, Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) portrays a Christ-like advice columnist who attempts to save the masses. West overtly satirizes Christianity and belief in God and suggests that Christianity cannot exist in any meaningful way in a twentieth century characterized by cynicism. More dramatically and with harsher criticism directed at American evangelicals, Sinclair Lewis, who wavered between belief and doubt as a teenager but ultimately became a critic of organized religion, represents religious institutions as inviting corruption in *Elmer Gantry* (1927). In the novel, which was eventually made into a popular 1960 film, he depicts a womanizing college athlete who becomes an evangelical minister because religion gives him money, power, and the kind of prestige he desires. Faith has no

redemptive function for Lewis; instead, it is a means by which power-hungry individuals can manipulate the American masses.

Yet authors who focus on the extremes of faith and doubt, aggrandizing one over the other definitively, fail, inevitably, to track the changing nature of religious faith in twentieth-century America. As John A. McClure observes, the postmodern moment in the late twentieth century has seen a "process of resacralization" in the wake of modernity, and "new spiritualities" as opposed to wholly traditional ones are emerging ("Postmodern/Post-Secular" 144, 141). Just as nature functioned as the means by which American Transcendentalists could conceptualize God, so, too, do elements of the contemporary landscape enable late twentieth-century writers to conceptualize religion. As authors such as Don DeLillo and John Updike in particular have suggested throughout their fiction, it is in this era that automatic teller machines, televisions, movie theaters, and supermarkets joined churches as means by which Americans could experience community and transcendence. Instead of adhering devoutly to the tenets of any given orthodoxy or questioning it entirely, many Americans as they are represented in contemporary American fiction find themselves, I would suggest, in a middle space between faith and doubt. Such a "middle space" between binary opposites, to use Charles Altieri's term (498), is, for Altieri, one that focuses on real-life experience. "The main problem in Derridean thought," according to Altieri, "is an obsession with a single set of opposites it established as constitutive of all considerations of meaning" (490), and there exists a "middle space between origins and ironic self-conscious fictive reflections on the emptiness of our figures" (498); there exists a "realm of middles" (492) that reflects the way in which "literary language" connects with "ordinary experience" (489). The "realm of middles" Altieri imagines informs the religious middle space that I describe as existing in fiction—a middle that exists between the poles of

devotion and doubt as they are defined by orthodoxies that have historically housed believers, but a middle in which very real forms of religious belief continue to reside.

What kind of believers are these fictionalized, hybrid types? In a superficial sense, they might find some semblance of their real-life counterparts in New Age believers like those that Wade Roof describes in *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (1993). Indeed, in fiction, belief that exists in such a middle space often appears as amorphously spiritual—what Dwight Eisenhower conceived of when he observed that "American institutions made no sense without 'a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is!'" (qtd. in Allitt 31). As McClure argues in *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007), a study of faith in literature that very much paves the road for this one, many contemporary fictional works portray conversion experiences that "strand those who experience them" in what he identifies as "ideologically mixed and confusing middle zones" (*Partial Faiths* 4). For McClure, "postsecular religiosity […] wants nothing to do with the comprehensive maps and scripts that are essential to sacred systems of domination" (17).

By contrast, however, I suggest that belief that exists in a middle space might be seen as constituting a revised and reinvigorated version of its orthodox antecedent. The kinds of believers with whom I am concerned in this study are descendants of orthodoxy even if they reject elements of orthodox religious tradition, and they remain, to varying degrees and to various ends, invested in understanding the orthodoxies from which their decentered faiths spring. Appearing as something like real-life mainstream Protestants, liberal Catholics, and Reform Jews even if they no longer practice religion formally in any capacity, they are less-than-wholly traditional without opting out of tradition for the freedom of amorphous spirituality. Furthermore, they tend to resemble the "quiet" believers that Wolfe identifies in *One Nation*

After All (1998) (51): they are believers who appreciate "[m]oderation and tolerance" and "try to find the centrist position between two extremes" while "attempt[ing] to carve out private spaces in which people can do what they want so long as others do what they want" (72).

In forging the terms for this middle space, the authors I address function much like Leslie Marmon Silko's shaman Betonie (from her 1977 novel *Ceremony*), who sees the necessity of creating "new ceremonies" in order to "[keep] the ceremonies strong" for new generations of Native Americans in need of religion (126). On the eve of the millennium, Roth, Updike, and DeLillo become literary theologians of sorts, attempting artistically to reinvigorate the traditions from which they emerge in order to reinvent institutionalized faith as something that organically exists in the modern and postmodern world. They write works that consider crises of faith, attend to millennial time, and bear apocalyptic undertones that reflect elements of 1990s popular culture. In the post-apocalyptic aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Hamid and Halaby portray characters who come to America attempting to find equivalents to the "new ceremonies" Silko describes, but they fail in their efforts. Hence, as I have suggested, Hamid and Halaby write critical responses to works like those that Roth, Updike, and DeLillo write on the millennium's eve, suggesting that decentered faith has consequences, especially for non-Christian Others in an American nation that grows increasingly intolerant.

As critics and reformers of religious traditions and spirituality in general, Roth, Updike, DeLillo, Hamid, and Halaby inevitably operate in a much larger context of fiction writers who sustain an interest in faith in America. Indeed, numerous late twentieth century authors have engaged in similar literary enterprises: in the 1950s, Jack Kerouac, raised a Catholic, reflected on Catholicism and Buddhism in his fiction; in the 1960s and 1970s, Philip K. Dick, a Quaker who converted to Episcopalianism, considered the metaphysical and theological dimensions of

contemporary existence in his science fiction. And, needless to say, the list goes on: E. L. Doctorow (1931 -), Toni Morrison (1931 -), Robert Coover (1932 -), Thomas Pynchon (1937 -), Ishmael Reed (1938 -), and (as I have already suggested) Leslie Marmon Silko (1948 -), to name what I consider to be a very important cohort, have all contemplated issues involving American religion, in some cases as operating essentially beyond the bounds of orthodoxies—as "spirituality" in a general sense—and in others as operating in terms of the orthodox traditions from which the authors emerge individually.

At Millennium's End in America

As evidenced by works like those written by Roth, Updike, and DeLillo in particular, religion and faith take on a heightened sense of urgency in the mid-to-late 1990s, a period that, as Samuel S. Cohen points out in his study of 1990s fiction, emerges at "the end of the Cold War" with "the fall of the Wall" (4)—at the end of a period that taught the masses to fear nuclear apocalypse. Americans living in the 1990s revised the sense of an ending that the Cold War heretofore provided in what might be characterized as more overtly religious terms. When atom bombs no longer functioned to entertain the American apocalyptic imagination, the millennium seamlessly took their place. Hence, despite the Cold War's official conclusion, apprehension characterized the *fin de millénaire* along with the literature that emerged in this period in America. Indeed, in a predominantly Protestant America, prophecy belief, which, according to Paul Boyer, "usually comes embedded within a larger religious matrix that goes by the label 'evangelicalism' or (to use a somewhat more specialized and restrictive term) 'fundamentalism'" (3), spread into conventionally more secular spheres of existence. Millennial anticipation if not

outright millennial anxiety became part and parcel of everyday American culture in the 1990s as secular and religious Americans alike entertained the notion that an end of days was nigh.[7]

The emergence of such millennial anxiety was no surprise since history has come to show similar phenomena when noteworthy dates approach. In medieval Europe, for instance, the year 800 and, subsequently, the year 1000 functioned as two of numerous target-dates for the Millennium in a theological sense (Baumgartner 48). However, once those dates passed, Christians did not hesitate to set new ones. As long as prophecy remains less-than-wholly fulfilled, believers continue to trust that an apocalyptic end is on the horizon. Eventually, the year 2000 became just such a target-date, not only for devout Christians per se, but for masses of religious and secular late twentieth-century Americans alike. Technically, the second millennium would not occur until 1 January 2001, as even pop-culture icons in America acknowledged. The quintessentially scientific F.B.I. agent Dana Scully memorably points out the correct date of the second millennium in the season 7, 28 November 1999 episode of the 90s television classic, *The X-Files* (1993-2002). However, the 2001 date lacked the symbolic status that Americans appeared to seek and even need—a point that Scully's partner and iconic true

[7] Although the millennium by no means signifies apocalypse in theological terms, the distinction between the millennium (and millennialism) and the apocalypse (and apocalypticism) has been blurred. For theologians, the Millennium (with a capital "M") "refers specifically to the 1,000 years during which Christ will reign on earth as foretold in Revelation 20" and "more broadly, it can also refer to any period of peace and transformation of human society for the better" (Baumgartner XI). In a non-theological sense, however, the millennium merely refers to a thousand-year period. By contrast, the term apocalypse refers to the events described by St. John the Divine in the biblical book of Revelations, among which are the Second Coming of Christ and a destruction of the earthly world that enables the souls of devout men to reunite with Christ in heaven. As Richard Landes explains, "[t]he obviously important role of apocalypticism (signifying imminence) in bringing millennialism to light has tended to blind many to the distinction between the two terms" (10).

believer,[8] agent Fox Mulder, is quick to underscore. As Mulder remarks in response to Scully's observation, "Nobody likes a math geek" (season 7:4).

It is, without question, the year 2000 that came to loom large in the apocalyptic imagination of 1990s Americans. Throughout the late 1990s, late-night talk show host Conan O'Brien infused the year with mystical import in his "In the year 2000" sketches, with Richie "LaBamba" Rosenburg singing "in the year two-thousaaaand" in a falsetto as O'Brien and sidekick Andy Richter, each clad in black robes and armed with a laughably ominous tone, prophesied imagined futuristic events. The popular media called attention to the year 2000 as opposed to 2001 as well: Arnold Schwarzenneger, who began the 90s with a now famous performance in the apocalyptically-oriented *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991),[9] ended the decade by starring in *End of Days* (1999)—as biblically-named, alcoholic ex-cop Jericho Cane, battling Satan in New York City on New Year's Eve of 1999. And, ultimately, Americans celebrated the night of 31 December 1999 as though it *was* the last night of the millennium. The lede of the 1 January 2000 *New York Time*s top story read that New Yorkers "joined the festivities" in Times Square on the night of 31 December 1999 "to celebrate the conjunction of a new year, a new century and a new thousand-year cycle of history" and "put aside" the technicality that the millennium was "still a year off" (McFadden A1). To paraphrase R.E.M.'s 1987 hit song that anticipated the apocalyptic anxiety of the upcoming decade, it was the end of

[8] "I WANT TO BELIEVE," the text that appears at the bottom of a poster (picturing a UFO) that hangs on Mulder's office wall in the television series' episodes, became a pop-culture catch phrase and a symbol of the spirit of the series, as evidenced by its incorporation into the title of the second, spiritually-oriented feature-length movie to spring out of the show: *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* (2008).

[9] The blockbuster's title contains clear religious connotations, as does its subject: heroine Sarah Connor and her Christ-like ten-year-old son, John, must defend the planet from Skynet's terminators, robotic assassins who aim to annihilate the human race.

the world as Americans knew it, and they felt fine,[10] partying, as Prince predicted they would in his own musical representation of Judgment Day, like it was 1999.[11]

The fervor with which Americans regarded the approaching millennium and apocalypse was reflected throughout the popular media as numerous television shows and movies addressed the subjects either as laughable or as feasible and hence frightening. On the one hand, the 14 April 1999 episode of *The Simpsons* (1989-), "Bible Stories," presented apocalyptic doom playfully, portraying Homer, Marge, Bart, and Lisa Simpson as sleeping through the apocalypse and descending into hell by episode's end.[12] On the other hand, apocalypse managed to take on more frightening implications in movies that presented it as associated with cosmic or natural disasters, upon which Americans arguably came to focus because of the emergence of climate change as a concern.[13] In 1998, Morgan Freeman captivated audiences as U.S. President Tom Beck in *Deep Impact* (1998), which portrayed members of the spacecraft Messiah as saving the earth from a comet's devastation. The plot of *Armageddon* (1998) was not all that different from

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[10] The song "It's the End of the World as we know it (And I Feel Fine)" appeared on R.E.M.'s 1987 album, *Document*.

[11] The lyrics to Prince's apocalyptic single "1999" (1982) suggest that the human race is "out of time," hence the speaker asserts that "tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999" (Prince).

[12] Similarly, *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (1999) managed to make fun of apocalypse while reflecting the degree to which Americans appeared to be fixated on it. The movie, based on the television cartoon series (1997 -), portrayed Satan and his demons as emerging from hell to rule the earth before comically abandoning their efforts as per the one wish that Satan grants to Kenny, one of the show's regular characters. Likewise, the first three seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), which aired on the eve of the second millennium, present apocalypse lightheartedly: Buffy Sommers, the show's heroine, *continually* attempts to fend off the end-of-days. Although the third season (1998-1999) concludes in an apocalyptic battle with Buffy defeating the demonic Sunnydale, California, mayor, Richard Wilkins III, by the middle of the show's fourth season, apocalypse returns as something to be ridiculed. When Rupert Giles, Buffy's mentor, informs Buffy and her friends that once more "it's the end of the world," they respond, in accord and in disbelief, with an exasperated "Again?!" ("Doomed").

[13] Climate change emerged as a concern for Americans particularly following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the creation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

that of *Deep Impact*, and despite *Deep Impact*'s earlier release date, *Armageddon* did better at the box office,[14] suggesting that Americans had not yet had their fill of apocalyptic narrative. The movie's title, which alludes to the site of the final battle that is prophesied to take place between Christ and the Antichrist, portrays Harry Stamper, played by action-movie superstar Bruce Willis, as detonating a bomb on the surface of an approaching asteroid, sacrificing his own life while saving the world.

For Americans, the possibility of widespread computer system failure accompanied anxiety regarding sudden and astonishing natural catastrophe. By the 1990s, computers and modems had become commonplace in many American households, and computer users came to fear Y2K, or the year 2000 problem, which predicted that computers would crash when the clock struck midnight on 1 January 2000. Although Jerome and Marilyn Murray identified the potential existence of a Y2K computer programming problem in their 1984 book, *Computers in Crisis*, the American public only began to express concern about the problem on the eve of the millennium. The *New York Times*'s first extensive story about Y2K, "Computer Crunch at the Millennium," was printed on 26 January 1997 and included a comprehensive question-and-answer section. In the piece, journalist Robert A. Hamilton attempted to explain the issue in layman's terms for a readership that was only learning about the implications of the predicament for the first time: "The basic problem is that computers are programmed to recognize the last two digits in a year," he observed. "1996 is read as just 96. So at the turn of the century the computers will read 00, meaning malfunctions in the making" (Hamilton CN3). Countless newspaper, magazine, and tabloid articles followed Hamilton's, and they addressed everything from the way in which air traffic control would be affected by the millennium bug to the way in

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[14] *Armageddon* grossed $201,578,182 domestically whereas *Deep Impact* grossed $140,464, 664 domestically (*The Numbers*).

which Y2K was implicated in biblical apocalypse.[15] Even evangelical fundamentalist cleric and televangelist Jerry Falwell eventually commented on the crisis, observing, in "A Christian's Guide to the Millennium Bug" (a VHS tape that was available for order via his personal webpage), that Y2K was potentially the work of God.

The palpable sense of hysteria that emerged as the millennium approached proved to be most devastating when true believers who were eager to embrace the Millennium in a religious sense were involved. Indeed, news stories about religious fanaticism fueled the fire of millennial anxiety and anticipation in the 1990s. The now infamous fifty-one-day standoff in 1993 between the F.B.I. and Branch Davidian leader David Koresh at the Mount Carmel Center in Waco first appeared in the *New York Times* on 1 March 1993,[16] and the story remained in headlines until well after the siege's tragic 19 April 1993 resolution in part because its peculiar Millennialist connection mesmerized Americans. Authorities who arrived at Mount Carmel merely hoping to seize Koresh's stockpile of firearms soon learned that Koresh believed himself to be the modern-day messiah enacting the prophecies of Revelation and that the firearms were intended to arm his Christian soldiers for the apocalyptic battle between good and evil. Similarly, the sense of the approaching end of the world prompted the Heaven's Gate mass suicide. On 26 March 1997 in Santa Fe, California, thirty-eight members of the Heaven's Gate group were found dead with the group's founder, Marshall Applewhite, who insisted that the group's members needed to kill

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[15] For example, the *Weekly World News* associated apocalypse with the Y2K computer crisis in a seventy-six-page collector's edition that exclusively addressed the imminent second millennium. The words "MILLENNIUM PROPHECY" appear in bold, gold letters on the cover above an illustration of two foreboding angels, one of whom holds an unraveled scroll while the other holds an hourglass that indicates that time has nearly run out for humanity. Below them, the question, "ARE YOU READY FOR THE END TIMES?" appears, and in the bottom-left corner of the cover, the publication's top stories are indicated: the issue promises to address "The TRUTH about" biblical Armageddon, Rapture, and the Y2K crisis (21.8).

[16] Sam Howe Verhovek's "4 Federal Agents Are Killed in Shootout With a Cult; A messianic sect with a cache of weapons and a lookout tower" (A1).

themselves and subsequently board a UFO flying in the wake of the Hale-Bopp comet in order to escape the earth before it was recycled. As Todd S. Purdum explained in the front-page *New York Times* article that informed Americans of the tragedy, the group "appeared to believe that the Hale-Bopp comet now streaking across the sky was their ticket to heaven" (A1).

Even events that had nothing whatsoever to do with the approaching millennium were interpreted as apocalyptic or in more general biblical terms. For instance, the Monica Lewinsky scandal of Bill Clinton's second term as president took on apocalyptic proportions in the American imagination as evidenced by Roth's portrayal of the scandal in *The Human Stain* (2000).[17] Likewise, as Allit observes, the story of Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy who floated safely from Cuba to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in November 1999, was seen as bearing religious undertones. Many anti-Castro Cubans viewed Elian as "a divine messenger, an angel-child, whose miraculous survival on the hazardous passage to America had been guarded by an escort of dolphins" (250). As a result of such events, late twentieth-century Americans even witnessed the creation of the Millennium Watch Institute in Philadelphia and the Center for Millennium

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[17] Roth first makes mention of the Monica Lewinsky scandal early in the novel, establishing it and the summer of 1998 (during which the scandal reached a peak) as wholly chaotic:

> It was the summer in America when the nausea returned, when the joking didn't stop, when the speculation and the theorizing and the hyperbole didn't stop, when the moral obligation to explain to one's children about adult life was abrogated in favor of maintaining in them every illusion about adult life, when the smallness of people was simply crushing, when some kind of demon had been unleashed in the nation and, on both sides, people wondered "Why are we so crazy?" when men and women alike, upon awakening in the morning, discovered that during the night, in a state of sleep that transported them beyond envy or loathing, they had dreamed of the brazenness of Bill Clinton. I myself dreamed of a mammoth banner, draped dadaistically like a Christo wrapping from one end of the White House to the other and bearing the legend A HUMAN BEING LIVES HERE. It was the summer when—for the billionth time—the jumble, the mayhem, the mess proved itself more subtle than this one's ideology and that one's morality. It was the summer when a president's penis was on everyone's mind, and life, in all its shameless impurity, once again confounded America. (3)

Studies at Boston University, scholarly centers that attempted to track the ideas and actions of groups that viewed the year 2000 as having metaphysical and prophetic significance. However, much millennial anticipation inevitably flew under the radar of these centers as Americans throughout the nation managed to manifest, in their own unique and perhaps less public ways, their intense desire to know what the wonder-inducing year 2000 would bring.

American Fiction in the 1990s and After 9/11

In large part, the prospect of the year 2000 attained a sense of importance in the popular and literary imagination because it provided the sort of sense of an ending that all lovers of great stories crave. As Frank Kermode famously argues in *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), readers desire ends because fictional narratives move, like the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, toward a dramatic ending that satiates the reader's "hunger for ends and for crises" (55). As Kermode explains, "the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world" (28) and we "make sense of our lives" by way of "fictions of beginnings, fictions of ends, fictions which unite beginning and end" (190). However, when the stuff of fiction was made flesh on 11 September 2001, the harsh if not atrocious realities of ends made manifest inevitably impacted Americans and the authors who fictionalize them in a somewhat different way. Although 1 January 2000 came and went without a literal bang despite all the millennial anticipation that preceded it, 9/11 most certainly did not, and Americans as well as the authors who fictionalize them were forced to continue the narrative of life after the end—after the point at which the space for narrative has seemingly run out.

In the broadest sense, this study might be seen as treating the year 2001 as a potential hinge in literary renderings of faith in fiction written about America. In other words, I see Roth, Updike, and DeLillo as engaging in similar literary endeavors before the millennium, and I see Hamid and Halaby as responding to Updike and DeLillo in particular after 9/11. What unites the three body chapters that respectively address Roth, Updike, and DeLillo is that they begin by examining each author's treatment of faith over the course of the late twentieth century and then proceed to focus on novels written in the 1990s—novels that convey the millennial anxiety and the impulse to believe that Americans appeared to be experiencing as the millennium approached. In particular, apocalyptic anxiety pervades Roth's *American Pastoral* (1998), Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), and DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), each of which presents an artistic rendering of events of cataclysmic proportions: Roth portrays Merry Levov's bombing of the Old Rimrock post office and the way that it devastates her father's pastoral existence; Updike presents Jesse Smith's attempted reenactment of the Second Coming of Christ in a standoff that is modeled after the historical Waco, Texas, siege of 1993; and DeLillo depicts historical and fictionalized events involving the onset of the Cold War at the moment of the Soviet atom bomb test of 3 October 1951. Furthermore, each of these texts represents a reconsideration of the function of faith (for characters in the text, religious institutions, and/or the authors composing the fictional works) at differing stages of time as a Judeo-Christian might understand it—stages of time that inform the structure of this study, which moves loosely from Genesis to Revelation and beyond. Indeed, the final body chapter of this study examines post-9/11 America as post-apocalyptic through considering novels like those by Hamid and Halaby. Just as Roth, Updike, and DeLillo perform similar literary-theological work before the millennium, fusing the sacred with the secular, Hamid and Halaby, who both critique faith in

capitalism in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) respectively, perform similar literary work after it.

In Chapter 1, "In the Beginning was the Story: Suffering and the Jewish Impulse to Tell and Retell in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," my argument centers on the relationship between suffering and storytelling in Roth's *American Pastoral*. This argument emerges out of Timothy Parrish's observation that Roth's novel constitutes "a kind of tribal narrative" ("The End" 85-86). Putting *American Pastoral* into conversation with "The Conversion of the Jews" (1959), "Defender of the Faith" (1959), and "Eli the Fanatic" (1959), works that underscore the inescapability of the Jewish tradition circa World War II, I propose that Roth rethinks the value of Judaism and even stages some semblance of a return to his Jewish heritage. By presenting *American Pastoral*'s story of a fallen and suffering Jew as a modern-day story of the biblical Adam or Job, Roth essentially dovetails his postmodern authorial impulses to write parodies with more traditional talmudic or midrashic ones. As a professed atheist, Roth by no means suggests that devotion to traditional Judaism or faith of any kind is an unequivocally good idea. However, he does suggest that Judaism's literary tendencies afford opportunities for transcendence and thereby have real value, particularly for writers. Ultimately, Jewish narrative and traditional Jewish ways or reading, telling, and retelling enable less-than-devout Jews like Roth and his alter-ego, narrator Nathan Zuckerman, to cope with their own incarnations of suffering in the modern world. Furthermore, they enable them to ascribe order and meaning to what would otherwise be a meaningless and chaotic late twentieth-century existence.

In Chapter 2, "Dark Sparkling Redemption in John Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies*," I consider how Updike—a lifelong, practicing Protestant—reflects upon time's relative middle, meaning history as it manifests itself for believers seeking redemption. Exploring the

relationship between Updike's early works and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, I track the author's reconsideration of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. By way of his four Rabbit novels, which he wrote earlier in his career, Updike famously distinguished himself as a believer in belief. He argued in accord with mainstream Protestantism that faith, not good works, is what makes a man good. But faith alone suddenly fails to suffice in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. Dramatizing the debate between temperance and fanaticism as it surfaces over the course of the modern, Hollywood-driven twentieth century, the novel is indicative of a noteworthy shift in Updike's thinking. For Updike at millennium's end, the only justifiable believer is the temperate one who can embrace the twentieth century's developments as fruitful, not mere signs that a fast-approaching apocalyptic end is in store.

In Chapter 3, "The End in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*," I read *Underworld* as a chronicle of the American apocalyptic imagination from the onset of the Cold War to the millennium's end, arguing that DeLillo uses the novel as a means by which to comment on the commodification and fate of eschatology as it emerges out of the Catholic tradition. Throughout fiction that consistently showcases the means by which Americans attain transcendence via the seemingly mundane, DeLillo borrows from Catholic theology, eventually coming to represent the late-capitalist news media as commodifying, appropriating, and propagating the Catholic apocalypse as something endless. In *Underworld*, DeLillo portrays the novel's structure and everything from waste to sixteenth-century Flemish art as implicated in the endless end, and, eventually, he demonstrates the means by which the Internet finishes the job of commodification that the news media began, disintegrating palpable experiences and further flattening apocalypse. Although DeLillo refuses to characterize this endless end as having lost its transcendent features,

he posits that the nightmarishness of the cycles in which the end comes to exist inhibits the rejuvenating qualities inherent to Catholic apocalypse.

In Chapter 4, "After the Apocalypse: Faith for the Muslim Other in Post-9/11 Fiction," I consider the Muslim Other in fiction written by authors of Islamic heritage in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001—attacks that made manifest a version of apocalypse after the year 2000 passed in the absence of cataclysmic events. Putting Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* into dialogue with one another and with 9/11 novels written by Roth, Updike, and DeLillo, I suggest that forging a fruitful middle space for belief appears to be easiest for Christian Americans after 9/11. The Muslims that Hamid and Halaby portray in their fictional works lack devout faith in Allah, and they attempt to fill voids in their respective existences by believing devoutly in capitalism as Americans believe in it. However, believing in capitalism never provides them with authentic experiences of transcendence. Unable to write vibrant, faithful narratives for themselves in what is a predominantly Christian, post-9/11 nation, the protagonists of these novels shun the capitalist American Dream by returning to their Islamic homelands, even if they do not appear to return to devout Islamic faith. Even though they appear to continue to need a means by which to experience transcendence and a focus in life like that which religion provides—some semblance of a fulfilling middle space for faith—the means by which they might attain transcendence remains unknown, as does the future of the Muslim Other's relationship with America.

Faith in Fiction concludes with "Up From Ground Zero: America and American Literature in the New Millennium," which considers post-9/11 America as traumatized by 9/11 yet poised to begin anew—poised to establish a new American narrative for the new millennium by rebuilding alongside Ground Zero. I consider both the future of American literature and the

future of the relationship between fanaticism and moderation. With regard to literature, I argue that American authors who merge image with text have the opportunity to reinvent American literature as a hybrid type itself, akin to the sort of hybrid believers I discuss in this study. However, other post-9/11 literary texts, which focus on domestic tragedy instead of grappling more directly with 9/11 itself, suggest that American authors struggle with addressing 9/11 much like Jewish authors struggled with addressing the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath. Unlike fiction that portrays hybrid types—fiction that reflects the value of compromise—the American masses appear fractured in 9/11's wake. Circumstances following the attacks appear to have exacerbated ideological and religious divisions that existed prior to the collapse of the twin towers, and to the present day, political groups continue to talk at cross purposes. Hence, even though many Americans may continue to desire a happy conclusion to the story of 9/11, a satisfying sense of closure remains elusive. The only certainty afforded to Americans is that American fiction will continue to invigorate the kind of imagination of the Other that is necessary in order to understand and eventually move beyond the limits of religious difference.

Chapter 1:

In the Beginning Was the Story:

Suffering and the Jewish Impulse to Tell and Retell in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*

Philip Roth sustains a unique authorial voice in large part because of the complicated nature of his relationship with his Jewish heritage. As Alan Cooper observes, "[f]rom all indications Roth was thoroughly comfortable among Jews during his family years" (10): he was raised by first-generation American Jewish parents in the predominantly Jewish Weequahic section of Newark, New Jersey; he was educated in prayer-book Hebrew; he attended a high school that was almost exclusively Jewish; and he vacationed at Bradley Beach with other Jewish families. Yet, addressing a Jewish audience in Israel in 1960, Roth indicated a thornier relationship with Judaism, observing that he sees himself not as "a Jewish writer" but as "a writer who is a Jew" (qtd. in Ozick, "Toward a New Yiddish" 158). As such, Roth has consistently opted against reinforcing the tenets of Judaism as an author like Cynthia Ozick does, instead presenting Jews who aim to assimilate in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant American culture—Jews who, for better or worse, strive against the confines of their Jewishness. Furthermore, he has presented Jews according to what some of his harsher critics have identified as damaging stereotypes. As Harold Ribalow notoriously remarked in response to Roth's early fiction, Roth "writes out of hatred more often than not" and his work is "open to the charge of anti-Semitism" (13).

Although his "works have no Talmud, no Jewish philosophy, no mysticism, no religion" (Appelfield 14), I argue that Roth, a self-professed atheist who appeared to take some semblance of comfort in renouncing his faith, came to reconsider his Jewish past as part of what Mark

Shechner calls “a spiritual meltdown during the second half of the 1990s” (142), a point at which, despite his continued assertions that he remains satisfied with the fruits that his atheism affords,[18] Roth perhaps came to worry, even if just a little, about the fate of his own faithless soul. After 1989, a year during which Roth suffered a heart attack and watched his eighty-six-year-old father die of brain cancer, he comes to focus on death as a subject in much of his work. In his 1991 memoir, *Patrimony*, he chronicles his father’s death, showing how it moves him toward a reconciliation of sorts with his Jewish past: to pay tribute to his father’s life, he must attend to his father’s Jewish faith, and to do so, he buries his father in the traditional Jewish burial shroud. Likewise, death emerges as a persistent theme in Roth’s fictional works of the 1990s, most notably *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995), which portrays puppet master Mickey Sabbath attempting, “at the approach of the end of everything” (3), to cope with his beloved mistress’s death, and *American Pastoral* (1997), in which aging narrator Nathan Zuckerman, Roth’s infamous alter-ego, struggles with the inevitability of death, the looming fate that confronts him.

American Pastoral, the novel upon which this chapter focuses, presents fast-approaching ends not only in terms of death, but in terms of the end of the second millennium. Roth’s reader encounters the sixty-two-year-old Zuckerman, who has just recovered from surgery to treat prostate cancer that has left him impotent and incontinent, in 1995, on the eve of his forty-fifth Weequahic High School reunion. For Zuckerman, who realizes that his generation is undoubtedly dying, “the truly important thing, the delight of the Sunday afternoon” of his reunion is that he has yet to “[make] it onto the ‘In Memoriam’ page” (55). Perhaps even more

[18] For instance, in a discussion of religion in a 2006 interview with Terry Gross that aired on *Fresh Air* on National Public Radio, Roth observes that he sees “religion [as] the problem.” As he continues, he notes that in writing *Everyman* (2006), he “wanted to write about what seemed to [him] far from unordinary, which is the secular life.” Indeed, as Roth sees it, people in America lead “deeply secular lives” and “in many ways, the glory of America is its secularism” (*Fresh Air*).

traumatizing than learning of the death of his peers is, for Zuckerman, learning of the death of Seymore “the Swede” Levov, his childhood idol and hero, a god of sorts—a “household Apollo” who provided hope for the Jewish youth of Weequahic in the post war period (4). The Swede’s death suggests to Zuckerman that his own death may be drawing near, and he is left only with questions about his own future: If the god-like Swede is unable to survive prostate cancer despite undergoing surgery that initially appears to have treated it, what are the chances that Zuckerman will survive it? If the Swede is unable to live to see the day of his fiftieth high school reunion, what are the chances that Zuckerman will live another five years, to the year 2000, to see his own?

Emerging out of Timothy Parrish’s observation that *American Pastoral* constitutes “a kind of tribal narrative” in which “Roth employs Zuckerman to imagine the type of story that might be told by a Jewish writer rather than by a writer who is a Jew” (“The End” 85-86), this analysis examines the means by which Roth stages some semblance of a return to his Jewish beginnings by suggesting that Jewish narrative and traditional Jewish ways of reading, telling, and retelling enable Jews to cope with suffering in the modern world of *American Pastoral*. Putting “The Conversion of the Jews,” “Defender of the Faith,” and “Eli the Fanatic” in conversation with *American Pastoral*, I explore the means by which Roth portrays the Holocaust as reinforcing the notion that Judaism is a fact, not a choice—a religion that eventually comes to bind the identities of his protagonists save one: The Swede. By apparently escaping the confines of Judaism, the Swede manages to do what Roth’s earlier protagonists cannot, though rejecting Jewish tradition fails to fulfill him unequivocally. A retelling of the biblical Book of Genesis and the Book of Job, *American Pastoral* interrogates not only the source of the Swede’s suffering, but the age-old origins of suffering according to the Jewish tradition. If the heroes of

Roth's early stories suffer because they, like Jews during the Holocaust, cannot escape their Jewish identity, the Swede, a fallen and suffering version of Adam or Job, may well suffer as a result of rejecting Judaism, suggesting that neither faith—be it faith in America, faith in radicalism, or religious faith—nor faithlessness—a rejection of traditional devotion—offers viable means by which the contemporary Jews Roth fictionalizes can transcend the consequences of the fallen condition. Instead, suffering's only real remedy, at least as Roth presents it, appears to be narrative itself—the ability to understand the present according to stories that define the Jewish past. Ultimately, I suggest that it is through narrative that less-than-wholly-devout Jews, namely Roth himself and Zuckerman as his alter-ego, are able to develop Jewish identities without denying their postmodern authorial impulses; it is through knowing and retelling traditional Jewish stories that they are able to ascribe order and meaning to what would otherwise be a meaningless and chaotic late twentieth-century existence.

God's Chosen People: Faith and Identity after the Holocaust in "The Conversion of the Jews," "Defender of the Faith," and "Eli the Fanatic"

For better or worse, history has come to show that Jews are bound to Judaism regardless of whether they opt to practice the religion devoutly. Before World War II, they were bound to Judaism exclusively because of the sacred myth of the Jews as God's chosen people—a myth that functions as a springboard for literary considerations of Jewish identity like those that Roth writes. The myth, which first appears in Genesis 12:3, depicts God telling Abram that He "will make of [him] a great nation" by blessing him and making his "name great," by "blessing those who bless [him]" and by cursing "him that curses [him]," and it suggests that Jewish identity in

and of itself is an intrinsic blessing of sorts (Genesis 12:3).[19] During and after World War II, however, Jews became bound to Judaism because of what Hitler and the Nazis identified as intrinsic, racial characteristics. Indeed, the emergence of Nazism certainly prompted many Jews to question what exactly it means to be chosen by God,[20] and, more to the point, to what degree being chosen is a privilege by the middle of the twentieth century, after the faith-crushing devastation of the Holocaust.[21] Might Judaism, whether it is understood through the lens of the biblical myth of chosenness or through Hitler's warped conceptualization of race, be viewed as a

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[19] All citations from the Hebrew Bible in this chapter come from *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). In subsequent chapters, I quote the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

[20] David S. Ariel provides a relevant consideration of the meaning of chosenness in *What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism* (1996), explaining that "[c]hosenness was sometimes seen as innate and inherent in the Jewish people; at other times, Jewish thinkers believed that chosenness required Jews to regularly reaffirm the covenant and the duties that go with it" (118).

[21] The Holocaust caused many Jews to question the nature of the Jewish God in which they had believed if not to lose faith altogether, and considering the various ways in which Jewish theologians responded to the atrocity helps characterize the range of ideas that emerged among the Jewish masses. For instance, in *After Auschwitz* (1966), Rabbi and Professor Richard Rubenstein reflected the skepticism toward Judaism that emerged, arguing that intellectually responsible Jews must accept that God is not omnipotent and that He does not have a hand in the evolution of history. In other words, God is not the deity of the Hebrew Bible that Jews have believed Him to be because He allowed Jews to suffer at the hands of Hitler, and, furthermore, the Jews are not His chosen people. By contrast, other theologians reflected the means by which many Jews attempted to preserve and reinforce traditional Jewish theology by integrating the Holocaust into extant ideas about God and faith. For instance, the liberal Jewish theologian Ignaz Maybaum attempted to justify suffering in his much criticized work, *The Face of God after Auschwitz* (1965), which proposed that the Holocaust was just one of a long line of instances in which the Jews as God's chosen people had to endure suffering to atone for the sins of mankind. Hence, for Maybaum, Hitler functioned as an instrument of God during World War II just as oppressors of Jews in the Bible functioned as God's instruments. Similarly, in *Faith after the Holocaust* (1973), Orthodox rabbi and theologian Eliezer Berkovits attempted to justify retaining belief in God by proposing that God chose to remain veiled from Jews during the Holocaust in order to enable humanity to retain freewill, even if that freewill resulted in the realization of atrocities perpetrated against them.

curse as opposed to a blessing? And, if so, is attempting to opt out of the narrative of Jewish history even an option?

Roth ponders these among other key questions of Jewish identity in three stories from *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*, which, I suggest, functions as a clear antecedent to *American Pastoral* not only because it addresses the same post–World-War-II historical moment, but because it constitutes Roth's most sustained meditation on the subject of Jewish faith prior to *American Pastoral*'s publication. Generally speaking, "The Conversion of the Jews," "Defender of the Faith," and "Eli, the Fanatic" consider what it means for Jews to be Jewish at different stages of their lives: as children (such as Ozzie Freedman), as twenty-something adults (such as Sergeant Nathan Marx), and as established adults starting families (such as lawyer Eli Peck). More to the point, however, these stories consider the means by which Roth's protagonists come to cope with their Jewish heritage as Americans living in the aftermath of the Holocaust—in the aftermath of the problematization of identity that the Holocaust generated. Although Roth strategically avoids explicitly mentioning the Holocaust in *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*—in fact, the word "Holocaust" does not appear a single time in the entire collection—the atrocity functions as an absent presence, a palpable backdrop for the identity crises that his Jewish characters suffer as they attempt to negotiate the degree to which they identify as Jewish, a point that may well be non-negotiable.[22] Ultimately, I argue that the protagonists of Roth's three stories find it difficult if not impossible to abandon Judaism entirely, even if they opt

[22] For a more in-depth consideration of how the Holocaust figures in Roth's work, see Steven Milowitz's *Philip Roth Considered*, which argues that "the issue of the Holocaust and its impact on twentieth-century American life" is, for Roth, "a central obsessional issue" (ix). See also Michael Rothberg's "Roth and the Holocaust," which argues "that it is less the Holocaust and its impact on American life that obsesses Roth than the unbridgeable distance between the Holocaust and American life—and the inauthenticity of most attempts to lessen that distance" (53).

against practicing the religion's traditions devoutly. Although they struggle against the confines of the sacred myth of chosenness, although they struggle against what anti-Semites might perceive as their inherent race, for better or worse, they are unable to escape the historical narrative that defines their Jewish identity.[23]

In "The Conversion of the Jews," Roth suggests that reinvigorated post-Holocaust Jewish institutions function as oppressive forces for young American Jews, binding them to a Jewish tradition that, in the aftermath of World War II, is governed by religious leaders who feel they must prioritize efforts to retain a cohesive Jewish identity among Judaism's youth. In the story, thirteen-year-old Ozzie Freedman expresses increasing frustration with Rabbi Marvin Binder, his Hebrew school teacher and a symbol, for him and certainly more so for Roth, of unwavering devotion to the Jewish tradition. Unlike Binder, who behaves in accordance with the tenets of Judaism, Ozzie is defined by his independent thinking, and he resists devout faith because he sees it as lacking reason. He expresses his frustration when he asks Binder a series of questions about God, the most pressing of which involves God's omnipotence. As Ozzie sees it, if the God in which Jews believe is truly omnipotent, capable of creating "the heaven and earth in six days" and making "all the animals and the fish and the light in six days" (140-41), then He should, as Ozzie puts it, be able to "let a woman have a baby without having intercourse" (141). Thus, Ozzie overtly asks whether an omnipotent God can manifest a virgin birth, but his line of thinking intimates another question: whether God could have intervened in the Holocaust to save the Jews.

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[23] In "American-Jewish Indentity in Roth's Short Fiction," Victoria Aarons makes an argument similar to my own, suggesting that "[w]hat Eli and the entourage of other Roth characters try and inevitably fail to create is an alternate identity, an impossible exchange that will protect them from themselves, that is, from themselves as Jews" (10).

Roth's story is very much about a crisis of faith, and it characterizes Judaism not as something inherent, but as something inescapable because of the degree to which it is imposed on children. Just as European Jews involved in the Holocaust had no real choice as to whether they were identified as Jews, children in Roth's story have no choice in whether they practice Judaism because retaining Jewish identity becomes so important to Jews in the Holocaust's aftermath. As Roth portrays it, the attempt to instill belief even becomes overtly violent. The narrator refers to Ozzie's question about God's omnipotence as a "transgression" (142), and the question is met with physical aggression on two occasions. First, Ozzie's mother slaps him after he confesses to her his question of Binder: "For the first time in their life together she hit Ozzie across the face with her hand" (143). Similarly, when Ozzie next returns to Hebrew school and asks Binder his question again, Binder (either intentionally or accidentally) hits Ozzie in the face, giving him a nosebleed that prompts him to flee the classroom for the building's roof. Whereas Ozzie does not believe as an orthodox Jew might, he devoutly ascribes to the notion that Binder does not "know anything about God" (146). Like an Israelite in Exodus, Ozzie Freedman seeks to be a freed man. He seeks liberation from bondage, only it is not a pharaoh that binds him but his own ancestral roots.

Even though Ozzie manifests a valiant resistance to his own Jewish heritage, he ultimately fails to escape Judaism's grip. After Binder strikes him, Ozzie runs to the school's roof "to get away" (151), and, once on top of it, observing the Jewish masses that gather below, he even manages to employ his Jewish oppressor's aggressive tactics, in this case coercing them into reciting a tenet of Christian theology. Even though Ozzie has no intention of jumping, they fear he will jump, thus they concede to his demands, pronouncing that God "can make a child without intercourse" (157, 158) and that they believe in Jesus Christ. Ozzie's mother even

promises never again to “hit anybody about God” (158). However, mere nightfall and exhaustion lead Ozzie back into the fold of the religion he attempts so staunchly to resist.[24] Tired from the day and from what Roth characterizes as a futile struggle that clearly fails to change anyone’s mind, Ozzie leaps from the roof of the building “right into the center of the yellow net that glowed in the evening’s edge like an overgrown halo” (158) because jumping constitutes the fastest way down. By story’s end, he is not a man unbound, nor is his resistance to Judaism characterized as anything other than vain and childlike. Presumably, his destiny does not hold the freedom he seeks but an increased sense of awareness, as he matures, of the degree to which he is bound to the narrative that defines the faith of his forefathers.

In “Defender of the Faith,” Roth further alludes to the impact the Holocaust had on the Jewish Diaspora by portraying the increasing pressure Jews put on one another to remain loyal not only to the Jewish God, but to one another as Jews implicated in the inescapable, unfolding narrative of Jewish history. The story portrays the identity crisis Sergeant Nathan Marx experiences as a result of his conflict with fellow Jews—particularly Sheldon Grossbart—in his training company at Camp Crowder, Missouri. Grossbart, a seemingly devout Jew who observes the mitzvot and maintains close ties with Larry Fishbein and Micky Halpern, other Jewish members of the training camp, invites Marx to re-embrace Judaism and abandon the cold “infantryman’s heart” he has developed (161). Indeed, Grossbart attempts to convey to Marx the key lesson of the Holocaust as he sees it: that Jews “have to stick together” (174), to use Fishbein’s words, and that Jews in Germany suffered at the hands of the Nazis because they “didn’t stick together. They let themselves get pushed around” (174). Grossbart forces Marx to

[24] As the narrator puts it, “it was the beginning of evening” and “[f]rom the street it sounded as if the boy on the roof might have sighed” (158).

come to terms with his identity—to determine whether his heart is that of an American soldier or that of a Jew—and Marx is touched by Grossbart's voice, which

> had reached past the dying [he'd] refused to weep over; past the nights in German farmhouses whose books [they'd] burned to warm [themselves]; past endless stretches when [he] had shut off all softness [he] might feel for [his] fellows, and had managed even to deny [him]self the posture of a conquerer—the swagger that [he], as a Jew, might well have worn as [his] boots whacked against the rubble of Wesel, Munster, and Braunschweig. (170)

Marx attends the Friday night Sabbath services, sitting in the back row, and even realizes that "after all those years," he still knows the words to "Ain Kelohainu" (meaning "there is none like our God"), a well-known Jewish hymn (172).

As Marx becomes increasingly influenced by his renewed Jewishness, his rejuvenated sense of being an actor in a Jewish drama, he comes to recognize the way in which Grossbart lacks an authentically Jewish heart, and he opts to defend the Jewish faith from hypocrites such as Grossbart by rebuking him. Marx, who discovers that Grossbart has used his Jewish connections to obtain a weekend-long furlough and deployment to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, instead of the Pacific, exposes Grossbart as being a selfish "schemer and a crook" (196), not a devout believer. In response, Marx becomes an authentic defender of the Jewish faith—precisely what Grossbart has falsely purported to be all along—and, like Ozzie Freedman, he does so by employing the oppressor's tactics. He contacts Sergeant Bob Wright under the pretense of doing a favor for another Jew, a pretense that Grossbart himself repeatedly employs, and he convinces Wright to allow Grossbart to retain his soldierly dignity by deploying him to the Pacific with the rest of the members of his training camp. Although Grossbart feels betrayed by Marx's actions, which Grossbart identifies as murderous and anti-Semitic, Marx recognizes that as long as Grossbart continues to see "some profit for himself" in allying with Fishbein and Halpern (200), his authentically Jewish friends, his presence in the Pacific will inevitably help all

three of them survive. Furthermore, Marx recognizes that he cannot deny his Jewish identity—that he must resist the "impulse to turn and seek pardon for [his] vindictiveness" toward Grossbart and accept what he identifies as his inevitable fate (200): to live first and foremost not as a soldier in the U.S. Army but as an ethical Jewish man who defends his Jewish brothers.

Just as Marx must confront the fact that he simply cannot choose to deny his Judaism, so, too, must Eli Peck from "Eli, the Fanatic" face the same reality: that he is implicated in the narrative of Jewish history as it unfolds; that Judaism permeates depths well beneath his assimilated exterior; and that he must support his fellow Jews, particularly those who have suffered and survived the horrors of the Holocaust and emigrated to his hometown of Woodenton. An attorney representing the townspeople of his "modern community" (256), Eli overtly works to assimilate any and all unassimilated Jews: he urges Leo Tzuref, the director of the town's yeshiva, which houses eighteen orphaned children who have survived the Holocaust, to close the school because it purportedly violates the town's zoning laws. The children, who utter what Eli describes as "half-dying shouts" as they play on the school's grounds (250), are persecuted not only by Hitler in Germany and by the citizens of the purportedly free American country in which they seek asylum from the atrocity, but also by other Jews, who, like Nazis, seek to deport them. Eli's request to oust the children from the town is rooted in what Roth characterizes as deep-seated anti-Semitism: the townspeople see religious and cultural differences as intolerable; even Eli, a Jew himself, sees his own Judaism as intolerable. Indeed, as Eli points out to Tzuref,

> what most disturbs [his] neighbors are the visits to the town by the gentleman in the black hat, suit, etc. Woodenton is a progressive suburban community whose members, both Jewish and Gentile, are anxious that their families live in comfort and serenity. This is, after all, the twentieth century, and we do not think it too much to ask that the members of our community dress in a manner appropriate to the time and place. (261-62)

Thus, the "progressives" of Woodentown conflate assimilation with what they perceive as modernity. Even superficial expressions of anything less than total assimilation—the black garb of a Hasidic Jew affiliated with the yeshiva—constitute black marks on their community. Religion, particularly Judaism, is archaic and a threat; it has no place in the modern world as they define it.

Eli's underlying Judaism reemerges despite his efforts to annihilate all traces of it. When Eli merely puts on the Hasidic Jew's garb, he comes to recognize that his assimilated Americanness runs only as deep as the surface he presents, the clothes he wears. His speech takes on religious intonations as he observes that "God helps them who help themselves" (287); "Shalom," he whispers to a Gulf gas station attendant before mysteriously "zoom[ing] off towards the hill" (288). The members of the community in which he lives, including Miriam, his pregnant wife, reflexively perceive him as mad. It does not occur to them that the Hasidic clothes Eli wears at long last reflect his inner link with Judaism with greater accuracy. At the story's conclusion, when Eli meets his newborn son at the hospital, the hospital staff fails to recognize that he is in fact the child's father, and they drug him in an attempt to cure his delusions. As the narrator observes, "[t]he drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached" (298). In other words, the devout Judaism of Eli's soul is not treatable per se because it is not a disease. Although the fate of the school remains undetermined, Judaism constitutes Eli's authentic, inescapable identity, as it does for Ozzie Freedman and for Sergeant Nathan Marx. Hence, Roth's reader can safely assume that he will inevitably opt against continuing to persecute his own people.

The Indigenous American Berserk at Millennium's End and the Search for the Origins of Human Suffering

American Pastoral comprises a notable reconsideration of the era during which Roth composed and set the works included in *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*. Indeed, with the goal of interrogating the potential consequences of renouncing Jewish faith in the disordered and seemingly secular mid-twentieth century, Roth imagines what his early stories characterize as apparently impossible: that opportunities to transcend Judaism's binding forces *did* come to present themselves. If the works of *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* address the way in which Jews remain at least in part if not wholly in the fold of Judaism regardless of their personal attempts at rebellion against the religion in the Holocaust's aftermath, *American Pastoral* addresses the problem of Seymore "the Swede" Levov's unprecedentedly easy abandonment of religious tradition. He altogether forsakes the Jewish-American community from which he emerges; he completely renounces his Jewish roots, escaping the confines of the myth of chosenness by successfully opting to be an all-American archetype rather than a Jew. When Roth's reader encounters the Swede at his life's end, he is an assimilated, secular American who exhibits nothing characteristically Jewish: his appearance is Aryan, like that of the master race Hitler envisioned; he lives outside the Jewish neighborhood in Newark; and he opts to worship football rather than practice the religion of his forefathers. He even has a shiksa as a wife. Yet the "realistic chronicle" (89) of the Swede's life that Zuckerman imagines while dancing with Joy Helpern to the Pied Pipers' "Dream" at his forty-fifth high school reunion is a tragedy of apocalyptic proportions, at least for the Swede: according to Jerry Levov, the Swede's brother, the Swede's daughter, Merry, is responsible for the 1968 bombing

of the Old Rimrock post office. With the knowledge of that bombing as his springboard, Zuckerman proceeds to envision the way in which the ironically-named Merry explodes the idyllic, post war, pastoral existence in which her father has rooted his own identity. As Zuckerman describes it, Merry "transports" her father "out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk" (86).

Despite the Swede's own ability to transcend the limitations of a Jewish existence, Zuckerman, a "nonbeliever" by all accounts (*Zuckerman Unbound* 195; *The Anatomy Lesson* 42), has, after his illness, returned to a religious understanding of life and makes the Swede an actor in a quintessentially Jewish tale. In that *American Pastoral* functions as a pastiche of two stories from the Hebrew Bible, both of which probe the nature of human suffering, it transcends the limits of didactic allegory,[25] becoming a story that is pertinent to the Jewish people on the whole.[26] On the one hand, Zuckerman alludes to the story of the fall of man as it appears in Genesis 1:3, when Adam disobeys God by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree and must endure the pain of exile from Eden as a result. As Esther Benbassa explains in her commentary on Adam's fall, the story is significant in that "[e]vil and suffering, which culminate in death, are the consequence of the actions of man (Adam), who is supposed to have turned from God" (6).

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[25] As Gary Johnson argues, "Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* is not an allegory, but a novel about constructing allegories. We have, in this case, a primary narrative, one of whose themes is the construction and interpretation of allegory" (238).

[26] Similarly, in "Philip Roth, Jewish Identity, and the Satire of Modern Success," Murray Baumgarten suggests that in *American Pastoral*,

> [i]n reconstructing the story of father and son, Nathan confronts the complexities of his own American and Jewish experience. Nathan in this novel writes not the story of one man but of three American Jewish generations: a sad spiral of immigrant achievement by the father, second-generation success and ascent to the inner heart of American life by the son, and third-generation repudiation of their values by the daughter. (291)

The Swede is reminiscent of the biblical Adam, living not in an edenic garden, but in America's Garden State with his aptly-named, former beauty queen wife, Dawn Dwyer, a modern-day version of the biblical Eve. Likewise, the section titles of Roth's novel—"Paradise Remembered," "The Fall," and "Paradise Lost"—suggest that the story of the Swede is, like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a retelling of the story of the fall from the Book of Genesis. On the other hand, Zuckerman retells what David S. Ariel refers to as "the most significant treatment of the issue of suffering in the Hebrew Bible and in all of world literature" (103): the Book of Job, which portrays Satan's test of Job's faith in God. Like the Book of Job, to which Zuckerman alludes in his characterization of John R. Tunis's 1940 baseball novel, The *Kid from Tompkinsville* (9), a book the Swede and Zuckerman both appear to have read in their youth, Zuckerman's narrative asks why suffering exists in the world, particularly for the Swede, a Job-like figure who initially appears to live a perfect life.

If, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton aims to "justify the ways of God to men" (1:26), Roth aims to probe the justness of human existence, which seems inevitably to result in human suffering. In telling the story of the Swede, Zuckerman addresses precisely what the lapsed protagonist utterly opts to ignore: he asks whether there are metaphysical consequences for losing faith; he considers whether there is a cost for breaking with Jewish tradition, for not "sticking together" in the wake of the Holocaust, to paraphrase Fishbein; he ponders whether man suffers senselessly or because of sin. In the story of the fall in Genesis, a clear cause and effect relationship exists between sin and suffering. Adam sins through disobedience by eating the forbidden fruit, and as punishment man is banished from edenic paradise and doomed to suffer and die. Yet such a relationship between sin and suffering does not exist in the Book of Job. Job is, according to the text of the Tanakh, "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1), yet God

wholly permits Satan to test him—to subject him to suffering as a test of faith despite the uprightness of his character and his unwavering devotion to God. Like Jewish theologians who ask why God allowed the Holocaust to occur, Roth asks his reader to consider why suffering occurs, and, specifically, whether the Swede's suffering is deserved. Has the Swede sinned as Adam has, and can his suffering, as Zuckerman initially suggests, be traced back to "a single transgression" (89)? Or is the Swede, like Job, a virtuous man who does not deserve the fate that has befallen him?

On the one hand, Roth suggests that suffering may be the mere product of a disordered universe, an option that neither the Book of Genesis nor the Book of Job presents. Early in the novel, Zuckerman comes to realize that history does not move along a trajectory toward unequivocal greatness, despite the sort of idealism that pervaded America in the immediate aftermath of World War II—the sort of idealism Zuckerman expresses in the speech he writes but does not give at his high school reunion.[27] He comes to see, during "those few hours of time" at his reunion, that "the chain of time, the whole damn drift of everything called time" is "as easy to understand as the dimensions of a doughnut you effortlessly down with your morning coffee" (46). Like a doughnut, history comes full-circle, hence things may get better, at least for a while, but they eventually and inevitably get worse. During what has been termed the American Century—the century during which America rises to a position of dominance on the globe—the American ethos paradoxically plummets, in large part due to the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, events to which Roth pays particular attention in the novel. Because

[27] The speech, which Zuckerman only writes after leaving the reunion, presents an idealized narrative of an ordered universe. In the speech, Zuckerman suggests that out of the horrors of World War II, Americans are able to emerge and "start over again, en masse, everyone in it together" (40). As he argues, 1945 is the moment at which "the clock of history [was] reset" in order to allow Americans to "escape, above all, insignificance" (41).

order does not emerge as history progresses, and, more to the point, because no pattern exists for when and how things get better or worse, history is inevitably chaotic and human suffering in a world governed by chaos retains the potential to increase exponentially.

On the other hand, Roth suggests that clear reasons for the Swede's suffering may indeed exist. In accord with the Jewish sense of history he attained from his upbringing—the idea of history as being continually commemorated and re-experienced through Jewish texts that describe the trials of the Israelites as God's chosen people[28]—Zuckerman probes the history of the Levovs, the genesis of Merry's transformation into the Rimrock Bomber, and the Swede's subsequent fall to determine whether a clear cause produces the effect of suffering as it does in the story of the fall of man. He asks why the Swede falls, what causes his suffering, what causes Merry to plant the bomb and become a monster in her own right. Zuckerman suggests, initially, that incest (like that which Adam and Eve arguably commit) must be the lone transgression—the Swede's metaphorical apple, the cause of his fall: the Swede, who satisfies an eleven-year-old Merry's request to "kiss [her] the way [he] k-k-kiss[es] umumumother" during a summer drive home from the beach (89), looks toward the "anomalous moment" when he seeks "the origins of their suffering" (92). Yet the novel presents a laundry list of possibilities as the source for the fallen condition that defines the Levov family. For instance, Jerry suggests that the fall evolves out of Merry's stutter—that "to pay everybody back for her stuttering, [Merry] set off the bomb" (73). Rita Cohen, who claims to be Merry's friend, proposes yet another possibility: that Merry becomes the person she becomes because she has spent "[s]ixteen years living in a household

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[28] For a more detailed discussion of how text and ritual form Jewish memory and a distinctively Jewish sense of history, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982), which suggests that text and ritual become so vital to the Jewish sense of history because the Hebrew Bible's "injunctions to remember are unconditional, and even when not commanded, remembrance [for the Jewish people] is always pivotal" (5).

where she was hated by [her] mother" (137). In other words, bad parenting causes disobedience, as it does in another story about a monster that happens to retell the myths of Genesis and *Paradise Lost*: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).[29] At one point, the Swede even surmises that all their problems began with a night of watching T.V. news. According to the Swede, Merry arguably turned to violence because she witnessed the 16 June 1963 self-immolation of the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc on television and it traumatized her (152). For the Swede, as for Zuckerman, the possible causes for the fallen condition are practically endless.

Most significantly, Roth proposes that the Swede's rejection of his Jewish heritage—his faithlessness—causes Merry's transformation into the Rimrock Bomber and the Levov family's fall. Unlike the biblical Job, a God-fearing believer who suffers without real rhyme or reason, the Swede as Zuckerman portrays him lacks faith in God. Like *Goodbye, Columbus*'s Brenda Patimkin, who "is nothing" according to her Orthodox Jewish mother (*Goodbye, Columbus* 89), the Swede, an older, male, yet equally myopic version of Brenda, opts to live a secular life: he is, as Zuckerman suggests, "[a] man to whom practicing Judaism means nothing" (314). Furthermore, as the Swede sees it, Johnny Appleseed is "the man for [him]. Wasn't a Jew, wasn't an Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestant Christian" (316). Zuckerman suggests that the problem may be that "the Swede should have listened to his father and never married [Dawn]. He had defied him, just that one time, but that was all it had taken" (385).

By marrying Dawn, who is apparently as "post-Catholic" as the Swede is "post Jewish" (73), the Swede inevitably fathers a daughter who is not Jewish in accord with Jewish law, but, more to the point, she lacks any real ties to her Jewish roots. Even though neither the Swede nor

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[29] For a consideration of monstrosity as emerging out of bad parenting, see Mary Poovey's "My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism," which discusses the way in which the monster "is denied the luxury of an original domestic harmony" because he has no natural family (337).

Dawn practices Judaism or Catholicism respectively when they meet, the union does result in a "religious impasse" (386) that the Swede's father, Lou, very clearly foresees breaking apart from the very moment that Dawn meets with him to discuss her intention to marry his son. As the narrator explains, "[w]hat had gone wrong for Merry was what her Jewish grandfather had known would go wrong from the morning of the meeting on Central Avenue" (391). Dawn may initially indicate that her intention is to let her child with the Swede grow up to "decide which [religious faith] he likes better" (399), yet Merry grows up more Catholic than Jewish. According to Zuckerman, Dawn's mother would take her "to pray at St. Genevieve's whenever Merry was visiting Elizabeth," and eventually she becomes an idolatrous sinner by Jewish standards: "Little by little, Catholic trinkets made their way into [Merry's] room" (93). Zuckerman explains that "[f]irst there was the palm frond bent into the shape of the cross that Grandma had given her after Palm Sunday," and eventually "came the candle, in thick glass, about a foot tall, the Eternal Candle" (93). Roth's novel builds toward the revelation that Dawn, like her mother, attempts to foster Merry's Catholicism, defying Lou's wishes by having Merry baptized. Lou is left to wonder "if it wasn't the secret baptism that all along lay behind the screaming that scared the hell out of the whole family during Merry's first year. Perhaps everything bad that had *ever* happened to Merry, not excluding the *worst* thing that happened to her, had originated then and there" (390).

The Problem of Faith

Zuckerman never seems to settle on a clear cause for the Swede's fall and his suffering: chaos and certain transgressions may be to blame, as may the Swede's rejection of Judaism. Yet

Roth appears to condemn devotion just as much as he does doubt. The paradox of *American Pastoral* is that choosing to live with resolute faith in the novel proves to be just as problematic as choosing to live a life of utter faithlessness. Over the course of the novel, Roth criticizes blind faith, be it faith in religion or some other ideology. In particular, he focuses on three forms of belief—extreme nationalism, political radicalism, and extreme religiosity—and, ultimately, he suggests that though believing blindly may provide the believer with a simple means by which to construct an identity, it fails to spare the believer from suffering at the very hands of what he or she believes.

In *American Pastoral*, Roth critiques extreme nationalism and the nationalist believer in America for his inability to see the faults inherently present in the nation's foundation. The Swede, who does not believe in a Jewish God or have any interest in upholding the Jewish tradition, retains a blind and extreme faith in America, and he devotes himself to the American dream as though it is his religion. He is Roth's quintessential nationalist just as Rabbit Angstrom is John Updike's in the Rabbit tetralogy. Ironically named, Seymour does not see more but less, and the novel repeatedly draws attention to his blindness. In Zuckerman's words, the Swede's disorder is his "inability to draw conclusions about anything but exteriors" (30). The America of Roth's novel is anything but idyllic, yet the Swede sees it through rose-colored glasses. Merry, who sees America as "frightening," accuses him of having "no idea what this country is" (276). He turns a blind eye, for instance, to the questions raised by the Watergate scandal and to America's involvement in the war in Vietnam, and he ignores the exploits of the American capitalist system that Merry so vehemently critiques—a system that leaves Newark in ruins after it has milked its lower-class American workforce for all it is worth and moved on to exploit more profitable labor markets in Puerto Rico and eventually the Far East (26). He does not see the

anti-Semitism that his father sees; he sees no flaws with the country whatsoever, let alone that his own family is a victim of its oppression. He remains a believer in the American Dream and, as the narrator attests, he sees "violent hatred of America" as "a disease unto itself. And he loved America. Loved being an *American*" (206). Indeed, "everything that gave meaning to [the Swede's] accomplishments had been American. Everything he loved was here [in America]" (213).

Just as Roth critiques nationalists for the obtuseness of their views of America, he critiques radical Americans who wholly condemn the nation without seeing the way in which it has played a positive role in history. On the surface, the obedient Swede may appear quite different from his radical daughter, yet much as the Adam of Genesis and of *Paradise Lost* is created in God's image, Merry as ideologue and metaphorical apple does not fall far from her father's family tree. As Zuckerman observes, "Merry was marked unmistakably by the eyes. Within the chiseled-out, oversized eye sockets, the eyes were [the Swede's]" (266). And Merry's eyes, like the Swede's, are blind, metaphorically. She is blind in her faith, and initially she devotes her life to the extreme political left. Even though the Swede seems to envision, if not hope, that Merry will grow up to be a secular, assimilated American, the ambiguity of Merry's religious identity in her childhood arguably makes an ideologue and political fanatic of her. She believes in the anti–Vietnam-War radicalism, exhibiting her devotion to the political left by reading communist pamphlets that function much like religious scripture for her. As Zuckerman describes it, she "hid out" in the libraries "to read the newspapers and to study the revolutionary thinkers, to master Marx, Marcuse, Malcolm X, and Frantz Fanon, a French theorist whose sentences, litanized at bedtime like a supplication, had sustained her in much the same way as the ritual sacrament of the vanilla milk shake and the BLT" (261). Yet Merry is

anything but a hero for Roth because she makes no real difference through her radical efforts; instead, he portrays her as merely a misguided child, a small-scale terrorist who becomes a spiritual leader for other misguided radicals. The imagined, saint-like[30] Angela Davis[31] who appears to the Swede "[a]t the kitchen table one night" (160) suggests that "Merry, at sixteen, is at the forefront of the [anti-imperialist] movement, a Joan of Arc of the movement" (160). Similarly, Rita describes Merry as a divine being worthy of her worship: Merry "is an overwhelming force" (175), a "divine" being whose anguish "sanctifies her" (176), and Rita is her devoted "Disciple" (176). For Roth, however, Merry merely functions as a caricature of a spiritual leader.

Finally, Roth critiques extreme religious devotees for their inability to think critically about the function of belief and what it means to be good in the modern world. The most extreme believer of Roth's novel is Merry, who eventually shifts the focus of her blind faith from political radicalism that leads her to bomb and kill to fundamentalist Jainism that leads her to attempt to preserve all life. But Roth also condemns Lou Levov for his blind faith in Jewish tradition. Lou believes devoutly in the Jewish God of his forefathers and in what he views as traditional Jewish notions of right and wrong. Near the novel's conclusion, which portrays the events of a 1973 dinner party at Swede and Dawn Levov's Old Rimrock home, Lou Levov and Marcia Umanoff, a literature professor and one of the Levovs' guests for the evening, discuss the story of the fall of man, and their discussion illuminates the nature of Lou's blind faith as it contradicts Marcia's more insightful way of thinking about the nature of sin. Marcia, who views

[30] The narrator describes her as "St. Angela" (165) and notes that her appearance to the Swede resembles Our Lady of Fatima's appearance to "those children in Portugal, as the Blessed Virgin did down in Cape May" (160).

[31] Davis, an African American academic, communist, and activist, in the early 1970s fell victim to investigation by the Counter Intelligence Program and stood trial for the murder of Supreme Court Judge Harold Haley. She was ultimately found not guilty.

sin as beneficial, believes that the story of the fall conveys that "without transgression there is no knowledge" (360). Her view of the fall as fortunate—her ability to embrace the notion of *felix culpa*—renders religious faith obsolete. This idea infuriates Lou, the patriarchal, traditional Jewish father who argues that the story teaches man to obey God or suffer the consequences. As Lou tells Marcia, the story of Adam and Eve suggests nothing other than the fact that "when God above tells you not to do something, you damn well don't do it—that's what. Do it and pay the piper. Do it and you will suffer from it for the rest of your days" (360). Because Lou believes that all suffering stems from disobedience, he becomes an overbearing father and grandfather to his children and grandchildren, urging them to keep the Jewish faith and reject American culture that, in his view, does nothing other than aggrandize a pornographic movie like Linda Lovelace's *Deep Throat* (1972) instead of teaching a traditional and, as he sees it, infallible sense of moral right and wrong.

The true believers of Roth's novel inevitably suffer at the hands of their extremist and blind devotions. The Swede may feel like an American and he may love America, but his Americanness only runs skin-deep. He remains ostracized by Bill Orcutt and his WASPy, pure-blooded, Ivy-League American friends during their weekly touch-football games, and he loses his wife to Orcutt, who retains an insider WASP status in America that the Swede will simply never be able to attain despite his efforts to abandon Judaism for devout Americanism. Similarly, Merry's radicalism leads her to suffer by living underground: she travels to Chicago, where, at the age of seventeen, she is "[h]eld captive and raped and robbed" (258), and upon returning to Newark and becoming a fundamentalist Jain, she lives in squalor, "even worse than her greenhorn great-grandparents had" (237), in a dilapidated room of a house that the Swede describes as "a wreck marooned on a narrow street where there were only two other houses left"

(243). Her body appears just as wasted as her living conditions: as Zuckerman describes, "she did not bathe because [as a Jain] she revered all life, even the vermin. She did not wash, she said, so as 'to do no harm to the water'" (232), and as a result, she hurts herself. Similarly, Lou's devout Judaism leads him to suffer at the dinner party at the novel's conclusion, when the family's guests view him as a self-absorbed, deluded know-it-all, desperate to retain and propagate his outdated views because he fails to realize, as Marcia suggests, that "social conditions may have altered in America" since the days he so deeply idealizes (354). When Lou uses the party as an occasion to attempt to save the alcoholic Jessie Orcutt, Bill's wife, from her own alcoholism, he inadvertently drives her toward collapse. Beneath Lou's obedience to rules and religious tenets, violence like Merry's waits to explode: Roth's novel ends with the drunken Jessie Orcutt stabbing Lou in the face with the very fork he had been using to feed her, and Lou, the last of the true believers, is devastated along with "[t]he old system that made order," which, the narrator asserts, "doesn't work anymore. All that was left was fear and astonishment, but now concealed by nothing" (422).

The Art of Retelling: Traditional Jewish Approaches to Narrative and Roth's Postmodernity

For Roth at century and millennium's end, neither faith nor doubt appeared to offer any solution to the suffering that emerged in the devastating wake of the Second World War. What, then, is Roth's argument about the value of belief, given that *American Pastoral* constitutes a return to the subject? More to the point, what, for Roth, is the lasting value of Judaism, given that he questions both devout believers as well as skeptics of the Jewish tradition? I would argue that instead of imposing a moralizing message onto *American Pastoral*, urging his reader to view

faith or doubt in any concrete qualitative terms, Roth purposefully leaves the issue ambiguous, and he uses the novel to stage his own return to the Jewish roots of his past by underscoring the importance of narrative in his own life and in the lives of the Jewish people.[32] I suggest that for Roth, stories themselves, and the act of telling and subsequently retelling them, function as a means by which to recuperate and reinvent traditional Judaism. Furthermore, it is the act of retelling traditional Jewish stories that enables Roth finally to see Judaism as compatible with the postmodern moment that defines him as an author. Ultimately, Roth realizes that narrative itself provides him with the opportunity to develop an identity that embraces both his authorial postmodernity and his distinctly Jewish authorial tendencies.

As opposed to representing the depthless, late capitalist aesthetic that Fredric Jameson suggests is representative of postmodernism, *American Pastoral*, like many of Roth's other works, such as *The Breast*[33] (1972) and *Everyman*[34] (2006), comprises a postmodern work of fiction in that it parodies extant (and, in this case, traditional) texts, notably, as I have argued, the biblical story of the fall of man and the story of Job's senseless suffering. As Linda Hutcheon argues in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), postmodern fiction such as *American Pastoral* is historiographic and metafictional, using historical or literary narratives not to romanticize them nostalgically but to challenge them, to push them to new limits in order to move beyond them. Hutcheon defines parody not as "the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit," but as "that seemingly introverted

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[32] Although he does not broach the subject of narrative and storytelling, Parrish makes a similar argument in "The End of Identity: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*," which suggests that through identifying with the Swede, Zuckerman "explore[s] the deleterious consequences of forsaking one's Jewish origins" (87).

[33] Roth's *The Breast* is a postmodern parody of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915).

[34] Roth's *Everyman* is a postmodern parody of the anonymous late fifteenth-century morality play of the same name.

formalism" that simultaneously works both to "enshrine the past and to question it" (26, 22, 126).

Paradoxically, the cutting-edge, literary, postmodern work that *American Pastoral* performs resembles what traditional Jewish narratives do for devout Jews. As Ariel observes, "Judaism is not a religion of fixed doctrines or dogmas but a complex system of evolving beliefs" (4) that changes as the world does in part because each generation retells and appropriates biblical narratives. According to Ariel,

> Each generation retells the sacred myths of the Jewish people. In each telling of the story, we relate to the narratives told by previous generations while modifying and changing them. For example, the sacred myth of the Exodus from Egypt became the basis of the Passover Seder and the Haggadah, the written account of the Exodus. Each Passover, the story of how God freed the ancient Israelites from Egypt in order to give them the Torah is retold. In each retelling, however, we find new significance or read new meanings into the narrative […]. The narrative is each generation's way of saying what is significant to it. (7)

Inevitably, retelling biblical narratives enables Jews to reconsider the importance of those narratives to Judaism just as postmodern retellings enable postmodern authors to reconsider the meanings of the texts they parody.

In Judaism, perhaps the finest examples of these sorts of contemplations of traditional texts are found in the rabbinical tradition. The Talmud, the compilation of rabbinic discussions that interrogates and expounds upon the stories of the Tanakh, ponders the meaning or meanings of laws and stories while simultaneously underscoring the very value of that contemplation. Midrash, too, engages traditional Jewish texts, and, as George Robinson observes, it, "like the Talmud, is part of a 'book' that is never finished" (359). According to Reuven Hammer, "Midrash is both process and product. It is a method of study and interpretation of the Bible and it is the name given to the literary works that emerge from that study" (14). Both the Talmud and the Midrash showcase rabbis as "masters of the art of storytelling" (Hammer 41), and they

exemplify the way in which rabbis continually struggle to clarify, define, and redefine the tenets of their own religion. Indeed, they demonstrate how important it is for all Jews to grapple continually with traditional narratives in order to give those narratives meaning in the present day and in order to give the present day meaning in terms of Jewish history.[35]

Beyond the scope of the rabbinical tradition, storytelling and retelling has remained part and parcel of Jewish identity as Jews opt to conceive of it, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust. Peninnah Schram describes Jews as "a storytelling people" (33) and observes that because storytelling has "remained an integral part of Jewish religion and society," it "continues to be an ongoing, effective way of transmitting a cultural heritage and thereby of sharing the values of a people" (33).[36] Indeed, storytelling has served a particularly important function by virtue of preserving the memory of the Holocaust for Jews. Although, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, many survivors were unable to confront the trauma of the past by discussing it, as evidenced by the fact that it took Elie Wiesel over ten years to publish *Night* (1955), Jews can now see evidence of the trauma the atrocity caused in "photographs, historical documents and oral or written testimony (of which there has been a veritable flood, though surely a fraction of what has been lost)" (Sicher 64). Be they stories of the Holocaust that are retold, first-hand accounts, or fictional imaginings that attempt, through the medium of art, to make sense of how such an incomprehensible atrocity could have possibly occurred, narrative comes to function as the site of Jewish memory and the means by which the Jewish people can cope with the atrocity.

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[35] As Hammer explains, "Scripture is not only the story of the past; it is also seen as the key to understanding life today and the assurance of the future" (35).

[36] For Jews, storytelling obviously does not function altogether differently than it does for any other cultural, ethnic, or religious group. However, as I will argue, an understanding of Jews in particular as a storytelling people pervades Roth's own understanding of Jews and thereby influences him as he composes his fiction, especially *American Pastoral*.

Despite Roth's early assertion that he is "not a Jewish writer" but "a writer who is a Jew" (qtd. in Ozick, "Toward a New Yiddish" 158), he has increasingly worked to preserve the function of the Jewish narrative for Jews, and, I argue, it is through his attention to the value of storytelling—through struggling with Jewish stories in accord with the very meaning of Israel[37]—that he retains an identity as something more along the lines of a faithfully Jewish writer. Roth, who often presents his protagonists as narrators of stories, has consistently demonstrated an interest in storytelling as a subject in his works, many of which envision alternate histories and retold and reinvented stories.[38] He explicitly articulates his own fascination with Jewish narrative as inevitably intertwined with Jewish identity through Zuckerman's voice in *The Prague Orgy* (1985), an epilogue to the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy that depicts Zuckerman's search in Prague for the unpublished manuscript of a Yiddish Czech writer. For Zuckerman, Prague is a quintessentially Jewish city—one that he "imagined the Jews would buy when they had accumulated enough money for a homeland" (62)—a city in which "one would hear endless stories being told" (63). As Zuckerman suggests, stories are "the national industry of the Jewish homeland, if not the sole means of production (if not the sole source of satisfaction), the construction of narrative out of the exertions of survival" (63). As Zuckerman continues, stories are "the national anthem of the Jewish homeland. By all right, when you hear someone there begin telling a story [...] you ought to stand and put your hand to your heart" (64).

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[37] The Hebrew word *yisrael*, or Israel, the name given to Jacob after his struggle with God in Genesis 32, means "'you have striven with beings divine'" (Ariel 110), or, put more simply, it means "to struggle."
[38] For example, in *The Ghost Writer* (1979), Roth portrays Zuckerman as imagining a story about Anne Frank's life that picks up where her *Diary* leaves off. More recently, in *The Plot Against America* (2004), Roth depicts an alternate biography for American aviator Charles Lindbergh that envisions him as defeating Franklin Delano Roosevelt to become the nation's thirty-third president.

By virtue of broaching the chaotic form of the Talmud[39] or the Midrash and by virtue of attending to biblical narrative,[40] *American Pastoral*, a book about Zuckerman as a Jewish storyteller, itself comes to function simultaneously as a retold Jewish story, a postmodern novel, and a contemporary religious text—a talmudic or midrashic work of sorts.[41] In the novel, Zuckerman knows and retells Jewish narratives in order to find relief from his own suffering, which results not only from what he views as his life's imminent end in the aftermath of his prostate surgery, but, I would suggest, from an abandonment of Judaism that leaves him uncertain of his own soul's fate. As storyteller and reteller, he longs to "discover a substratum" of the Swede (38), "to imbue Swede Levov with something like the tendentious meaning Tolstoy assigned to Ivan Ilych" (30). He knows bits and pieces of the Swede's actual story, and to supplement what he knows, he turns to what he arguably knows best, what is engrained in his imagination since his Jewish boyhood: the Hebrew Bible. Just as the Jewish sages who wrote midrashim made "connections between verses and stories so that an even richer tapestry [could be] woven" (Hammer 40), he combines two Bible stories into a single text that functions as a commentary. Like a devout Jew, Zuckerman struggles to find contemporaneous meaning in the books of Job and Genesis by way of discovering meaning in the text that is the Swede himself.

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[39] In her introduction to Emmannuel Levinas's *Nine Talmudic Readings* (1990), Annette Aronowicz comments on the Talmud, observing that the "impenetrability" of the Talmud is due to its "allusive, elliptical, seemingly incoherent style, so different from the expository logic that Western, university-educated readers expect" (ix). Along the same lines, Robinson observes that "[a]t first glance, the Talmud appears to be a chaotic amalgam of legal rulings, folktales, instructions for observance, dialogues between disparate religious figures (many of them not identified by name), maxims and sayings, even medical advice" (310).

[40] According to Robinson, "any time we gloss a biblical text ourselves, we are creating new *midrashim*" (359).

[41] Daniel Boyarin connects rabbinical exegesis with more contemporary theoretical movements, arguing that midrash functions as "interpretation and indeed as a model for interpretation" that finds a counterpart in contemporary literary theory (xi). As Boyarin explains, "literary theory is the discourse where fundamental issues, once part of theology and other branches of philosophy, are being thought through" (x).

As a result, and in accordance with what Ariel sees as emerging out of retold Bible stories, he generates a definition for what is significant to his own generation, which, reflexively, is retelling itself.

Roth contrasts Zuckerman with the Swede as a lapsed Jew who is unable to make sense of his own suffering because he knows no traditional Jewish narratives—because he cannot see himself as a player in a traditional Jewish story or history. According to Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, *American Pastoral* as "Roth's great American Novel tells a cautionary tale in which 'pastoral innocence' provides the means of perpetuating rather than challenging 'the benign national myth' and, ultimately, of escaping rather than confronting the burden of history" (19). Zuckerman may be a lapsed believer, and his own lack of faith may reflect the status of Roth's belief, but, as the subjects of Zuckerman's narratives to date suggest—Anne Frank, the Jewish father, suffering, lost Yiddish manuscripts—he, like the author who imagines him, remains unable to escape his Jewish past; he remains dedicated to confronting history's burden in ways that the Swede simply cannot fathom confronting it. Zuckerman cannot live the kind of "counterlife," to appropriate the title of Roth's fifth Zuckerman novel, that the Swede is able to live. He may resent his Jewish past and the degree to which it defines his audience and his authorial senses, yet he remains, at his core, a Jewish artist.

It is only near the conclusion of *American Pastoral* that the Swede stages a return to his Jewish past, and he does so through retelling—the means by which Zuckerman stages his own return. As the novel progresses toward its apocalyptic end, the Swede has the experience of retelling the story of Merry's terrorist acts to Sheila Salzman, Merry's former speech pathologist and the Swede's former mistress. As the narrator describes it, the Swede began

> [s]eeing so much so fast. And how stoical he had always been in his ability not to see, how prodigious had been his powers to regularize. But in the three extra

> killings he had been confronted by something impossible to regularize, even for him. Being told it was horrible enough, but only by *retelling* it had he understood how horrible. One plus three. Four. And the instrument of this unblinding is Merry. The daughter has made her father see. (418; my emphasis)

The passage suggests that the paranomastic metaphor of the Swede's name becomes realized: by the novel's conclusion, Seymour finally comes to see more. Like a devout Jew gaining insight into a Jewish myth by retelling it, retelling the story of Merry's experiences moves the Swede beyond the confines of the "futureless box" that has confined his mind (337); it moves him definitively toward revelation.

Whereas Zuckerman is able to sustain the fruits of his revelation, his visionary narrative of the nature of the Swede's superficial existence, the Swede is not. Zuckerman, who attains a rewarding connection with his Jewish past, goes on to retell numerous stories, becoming, in the two other works that comprise what critics have called Roth's American trilogy—*I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000)—more of an observer who retells the experiences of other Jews in order to find meaning in his own life and the lives of his fellow Jews as opposed to a self-involved, suffering protagonist, as he appears most prevalently in *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981) and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983). On the other hand, what the Swede sees—that life is chaos and that history is "utterly improbable" and "order is minute" (418)—proves to be unbearable for him. Instead of emerging out of the experience of his revelation as a new man, he reverts back to his "futureless box" to shelter himself from himself (337). He becomes the man Zuckerman encounters at the novel's beginning: a bland "human platitude" incapable of embracing any aspect of his Jewish identity because he cannot "run counter to anything" (23), especially the ubiquity of the WASP American culture that Roth consistently critiques. He becomes what Zuckerman and Roth himself would become if they did not ceaselessly struggle with their own Jewish pasts and identities—if they did not struggle

toward the goal of reviving Jewish tradition as something relevant to the contemporary world that their uniquely Jewish and postmodern authorial tendencies must inevitably embrace. Neither Zuckerman nor Roth blindly believes in Judaism, but both opt against rejecting it entirely. Instead, as storytellers, they forge a new path that enables them to be at least a bit more devoutly Jewish through faithful reverence for traditional Jewish narrative and its function for Jews in history and, inexorably, in Judaism's future.

Chapter 2:

Dark Sparkling Redemption in John Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies*

Many of John Updike's works address the intricacies of religious belief in the late-twentieth century, perhaps because Updike himself was always a believer. The son of a faithful deacon, he grew up Lutheran, later converted to Congregationalism, and eventually converted to Episcopalianism. Experiencing an existential crisis in 1956, Updike deepened his interest in Christianity by reading theology that helped him cope with the despair he felt at the time. In particular, he read Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth extensively, and he came to identify Barth as the twentieth century's most compelling and persuasive religious thinker. In his reading of Barth, he focused on works from the theologian's middle phase, such as *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (1958), and he developed a Barthian understanding of God as "Wholly Other" (*totaliter aliter*)—what he has called "God the Creator" and the "God who throws the lightning bolt" (Winkler 33). Updike's personal faith along with the fruits of his more academic, theological pursuits are palpable in his fiction. Although he was always quick to note that he preferred not to be viewed as a Christian writer, he never denied that Christianity helped form his authorial sensibilities: as he explained in a 1985 interview with Willi Winkler, he wanted, in his work, "to describe the world as the Psalmists did" (Samuels 175). And as he put it more than a decade later, after being presented with the Campion Medal by the Catholic Book Club in 1997, Christian faith not only gave him "comfort in [his] life," but it gave him, "[he] would like to think, courage in [his] work" ("Remarks" 4).

Updike's novels and short stories consistently expose the complicated relationship between faith and morality in a contemporary American world that has redefined the scope of

what it means to be "good." Updike's fiction leaves his reader to determine the moral uprightness of his characters, to establish, as he puts it, "what is a good man," or, more generally, "what is goodness" itself (Rhode 50). According to Catholicism's doctrine of justification, which is based in part on the well-known passage from James 2 that suggests that "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24), good works have the power to redeem any man: good behaviors make a man good, hence they enable man to attain salvation. However, with the dawn of the sixteenth century and the early phase of the Reformation, Catholicism's doctrine of justification came into question when theologians focused on the writings of Paul, who argues in his letters to the Galatians and Romans that men are saved by faith, not works. John Calvin became a proponent of election by predestination, whereas Martin Luther, focusing on the individual, asked how the sinner might be able to enter into a personal relationship with God—how the individual might be able to lead a sinful life but become "good" by way of faith. The Lutheranism of Updike's upbringing and the Episcopalianism to which he ultimately converted later in life adhere to the understanding of justification by faith alone as Luther developed it in the Reformation: *sola fides*, or faith alone, not good works, comes to determine what makes a good man; it is faith alone that determines whether an individual is justified.[42]

As Updike represents the relationship between faith and good works in the fiction he composed near the end of the twentieth century, the approaching millennium and the anxieties about the apocalypse that accompanied it were without question very much on his mind. *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996) is titled after a verse from Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," which portrays the Second Coming of Christ as Civil War Union heroes envisioned it

[42] Note, too, that Barth eschewed the notion of predestination and came to adopt a more liberal theological perspective, arguing that election is possible through Christ because Christ takes all sin on Himself to provide the opportunity for universal salvation.

following the Union's victory. Furthermore, the novel concludes with a manmade apocalyptic event: Jesse Smith, a Christian zealot who believes himself to be Christ returned to earth for the Second Coming, attempts to realize the prophecies of Revelation when he engages the commune that he has established in a violent standoff with Colorado authorities. Similarly, *Toward the End of Time* (1997) portrays a post-apocalyptic America that has survived nuclear war with China only to have its civilization wholly unravel and government collapse, and it tells the story of a sixty-year-old narrator who, in 2020, suffers from delusions that accompany his own end of days: by the novel's close, Updike's reader is left to surmise that narrator Ben Turnbull will likely die from prostate cancer in the imminent future.

Perhaps more overtly than any other novel Updike composed in his long literary career, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* is a book about faith, and in considering belief in terms of the end of time as he does in the work, Updike, I propose, is led to reconsider the efficacy of *sola fides*—whether faith alone will indeed successfully redeem man at time's end. In Updike's early works, perhaps best represented by the Rabbit tetralogy, good works mean very little; hence faith alone seems to suffice. But it fails to suffice in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, which not only juxtaposes faith with good works, but contrasts different kinds of believers with one another. If the novel is read as an argument about the doctrine of salvation, Updike concludes that faith still trumps good works. However, by way of exploring differences between ways of believing, Updike makes a noteworthy shift in his thinking, suggesting that not every type of faith is inherently good: only the *right* kind of believer can be justified.

For Updike, fanatical belief, specifically as it has emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, is dangerous. Even though a fanatic's faith is true, the intensity of that true belief creates the potential to transcend the bounds of what Updike views as characteristically

good and hence justifiable. Ultimately, in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, it is temperance that proves to be justifiable for Updike, and he goes to great lengths to advocate for it, deviating from his characteristically Barthian tendencies by showing his reader that God intervenes in human affairs: near the novel's conclusion, Updike's God overtly assists the temperate believer, not the fanatic. Furthermore, Updike advocates for temperance by way of his allusions to biblical and cinematic narratives, both of which provide scripts, so to speak, for the thoughts and actions of believers. He makes reference to the biblical Book of Esther, which suggests that God exists in the world even in the absence of clear evidence of His existence. Likewise, he turns to Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937) for the key message of temperance in all things that he presents in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. Thus, Updike attempts to bridge the apparent divide that fanatical believers, especially early fundamentalists, created between believing in God and embracing the developments of the twentieth century as fruitful, not mere signs that an increasingly immoral American nation is rapidly devolving in the face of a fast-approaching, apocalyptic end.

Justification by Faith or by Good Works in the Rabbit Tetralogy

As a Barthian, Updike does not inherently link morality to Christian faith, and he illustrates the disconnect between behavior and belief by way of heroes like Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, who behaves badly yet believes devoutly.[43] The sexually promiscuous protagonist of the Rabbit tetralogy is a quintessentially average citizen, and, for Updike, he functions as a national symbol of sorts—for a nation that Updike characterizes as predominantly Protestant,

[43] For a discussion of Updike's understanding of the relationship between morality and faith and a more in-depth analysis of how that relationship plays out in his novels, see Bernard A. Schopen's "Faith, Morality, and the Novels of John Updike."

white, middle-class, and male.[44] Rabbit consistently exhibits depraved behavior, continually acting on his instincts rather than adhering to conventionally moral ways of thinking and being. In *Rabbit, Run* (1960), he cheats on his pregnant wife, Janice, with Ruth Leonard and leaves Janice for a period—an abandonment that stems from his inability to temper his own sexual urges, and that, Updike suggests, is in part responsible for the death of his infant daughter, Rebecca. His behavior fails to improve in the novels that follow: In *Rabbit, Redux* (1971), he becomes entangled with a runaway teenager and harbors a fugitive in his home, which burns down when he leaves for the night to satisfy yet another itch, with Peggy Fosnacht, the mother of his son Nelson's closest friend. In *Rabbit is Rich* (1981), he dreams of having sex with the delectable Cindy Murkett but settles for the dependable Thelma Harrison when the group of friends with whom he and Janice travel to Florida decides, for one time only and with no-strings-attached, to swap sexual partners. Finally, in *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), in what Janice refers to as "monstrous" and "the worst thing [Harry has] ever done," Rabbit has sex with Pru, Nelson's wife, his own daughter-in-law (394, 393). When Janice confronts him about the affair, he flees to Florida instead of facing his family to mend the rift that the sexual encounter has created, and he dies of a heart attack before he is able to make amends.

Although Rabbit's behavior is immoral by conventional Christian standards, he remains a true believer in God. He is, as Peter J. Bailey puts it in *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed* (2006),[45] "Updike's least doctrinal Christian" (66), but his faith does not waver. As Bailey continues,

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[44] Updike's work has received criticism for being misogynistic, as evidenced by Mary Allen, who complains that Updike reinforces a "worn dichotomy" by presenting women as "sexual and stupid (human)" or as "frigid and intelligent (inhuman)" (95).

[45] Note that *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed* is arguably the most thorough consideration to date of faith in Updike's work. In it, Bailey examines what he argues is a "reluctantly expanding secularism of Updike's aesthetic," suggesting that faith diminishes in importance in Updike's work over the course of his career (33). By contrast, this analysis argues that Updike's faith does not diminish per se; instead, it merely changes.

"[his] faith is a complex psychic dynamic born out of his best and worst impulses, a belief system formed out of itself and its own negations and contradictions" (69). Evidence of Rabbit's strong faith exists throughout the four novels. Rabbit attended a Lutheran Sunday school in his youth, and in his adult life, he prays continually. We first see him pray when he asks God for forgiveness after initially cheating on Janice with Ruth in *Rabbit, Run*. He even suggests, in a conversation he has with Ruth the morning after they sleep together, that the existence of God seems "obvious" to him, and the world around him essentially functions as evidence of God's existence (79).[46]

God is wholly other for Rabbit, yet traces of Him exist throughout the material world. As Rabbit declares in a conversation with Peggy Fosnacht, "God is everything that isn't people" (*Redux* 94). And as Rabbit thinks to himself in the moments before having sex with Pru, God is what enables man to attain transcendence: "Without God to lift us up and make us into angels we're all trash," he observes (312). God, in other words, is the transcendental of which Rabbit sees evidence in the vast material. Unlike Dale Kohler, the graduate student in Updike's *Roger's Version* (1986) who attempts to *prove* God's existence by way of studying nature, faith alone suffices for Rabbit, who needs no actual evidence of God. (Indeed, with proof of God's existence, faith ceases to be faith. By way of confirmation, belief becomes verifiable knowledge.) For Rabbit, God exists in seemingly bland things because he believes Him to be there, and Rabbit's ability to see God's presence in ordinary things enables him to understand the world as having metaphysical significance; God exists in the material world for Rabbit as He

[46] Rabbit asks Ruth, a non-believer, "[w]ell now if God doesn't exist, why does anything?" (*Rabbit, Run* 79)

existed in nature for American Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau.[47] For instance, Rabbit views a perfect golf swing in *Rabbit, Run* as something transcendent: "That's *it*!" he exclaims as he watches the ball curve through the air perfectly (116). Even Rabbit's extreme promiscuity might be explained by way of his strong faith in God. Updike often conflates sexuality with religion, and in *Couples* (1968), he diverges from traditional Christian views by proposing that sex is the emergent religion. As Freddy Thorne explains, "People are the only thing people have left since God packed up. By people I mean sex" (*Couples* 145). Promiscuous sex, then, and particularly Rabbit's licentious behavior, should not necessarily be categorized as inherently sinful; instead, for Updike, something spiritual may emerge out of sexuality.

Rabbit as a true believer can perhaps best be contrasted with Jack Eccles, the Episcopalian minister whom Updike introduces in *Rabbit, Run*. Marshall Boswell draws a distinction between Rabbit as a "Knight of Faith" and Eccles as "a pastoral shepherd" (58). Whereas Rabbit is concerned with the otherworldly, Eccles is concerned with the worldly. Counter to Episcopalian teachings, which adhere to the notion of justification by faith alone, Eccles attempts to be a good man by way of behavior. In *Rabbit, Run*, he focuses his efforts on attempting to mend Rabbit's broken marriage to Janice. He critiques Rabbit's abandonment of Janice as selfish, yet throughout the novel, he remains enthralled by Rabbit, if not utterly obsessed with him. Indeed, by virtue of believing so devoutly, by virtue of sustaining such staunch faith, Rabbit sustains precisely that which Eccles wholly lacks.

[47] As James A. Schiff argues in "The Pocket Nothing Else Will Fill: Updike's Domestic God," Updike's God exists in a uniquely domestic realm, essentially infusing the everyday things of the late twentieth century with transcendental value just as the American Transcendentalists infused nature with divine worth.

Eccles may attempt to behave morally in life, but it is his faithlessness that distinguishes him for Updike, particularly in contrast to Reverend Kruppenbach, the Angstroms' Lutheran minister. As the oracular narrative voice of *Rabbit, Run* describes it, Eccles "forges God's name on every word he speaks. He steals belief from the children he is supposed to be teaching. He murders faith in the minds of any who really listen to his babble" (133). On the other hand, the seemingly less sympathetic Kruppenbach advocates for faith alone, and it is Kruppenbach whom Updike applauds. In *Rabbit, Run*, Kruppenbach reprimands Eccles, observing that Eccles sells God's message through deeds "for a few scraps of gossip and a few games of golf," and he observes that if Eccles truly understood his role, he would "be home locked in prayer" making an "exemplar of faith" of himself (146). Kruppenbach's harsh critique of Eccles proves to be substantial: Rabbit, not Eccles, ultimately saves his own marriage, to whatever degree one might view the marriage as saved.

When Updike's reader and Rabbit see Eccles next after *Rabbit, Run*'s conclusion—riding a neighborhood bus in *Rabbit Redux*—Eccles affirms what the reader has always suspected of him: he has been a hypocrite. His wife has left him and taken his two daughters, and the church apparently has asked him to leave the ministry due to indiscretions that Eccles avoids describing to Rabbit. (Despite his advocacy for good works, evidently Eccles has not lived such a moral life after all.) In a sense, Eccles is a changed man. According to the narrator, "In the clergyman's eyes there is something new, a hardened yet startled something, naked like the pale base of his throat, which lacks a clerical collar" (171). Yet Eccles recognizes that he has perhaps lacked faith all along. He comments on his loss of faith to Rabbit: "I'm not sure I believed it then," he says of Christianity. "I believed," he continues, "in certain kinds of human

interrelation" (171). But for Updike as a true believer, Eccles's faith in "certain kinds of human interrelation" is something quite different from real faith in God.

If Rabbit functions as Updike's representative of true faith and Eccles functions as his representative of good works, faith clearly triumphs over good works as a means by which to attain justification, according to the Rabbit tetralogy. Eccles's deeds appear superficial when the reader compares them with Rabbit's true belief. When Rabbit dies at the tetralogy's conclusion, readers are left to judge Rabbit's life much as God might judge it. Based on works alone, Rabbit appears unredeemable: his actions in life render his virtues questionable at best. But Rabbit's faith may sufficiently result in his justification. The narrator of *Rabbit at Rest* asserts that although Rabbit's faith has been transformed as he has aged and encountered different experiences, it remains intact near the end of his life: Rabbit no longer prays quite as much as he did when he was younger, but it is as though he is "in [God's] hand already" (409). When Rabbit suffers his fatal heart attack on the basketball court, the narrator suggests that he has grace despite his transgressions: he appears angelic as the pain spreads across his back "like clumsy wings" (460). From the point at which Updike introduces Rabbit to the final moments of Rabbit's earthly existence in the novel, Rabbit doubtlessly believes.

Faith in the Face of Modernity and the "above all American" Hollywood Movie

Updike views the tension between faith and good works as a problem particularly relevant to twentieth-century America as it is presented in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, which begins with the Presbyterian Reverend Clarence Wilmot's loss of faith in God—a loss of faith that proves to be particularly devastating because Presbyterians believe that faith alone saves.

After Clarence's fall from grace, described as "a visceral surrender, a set of dark sparkling bubbles escaping upward" and a "ruinous pang" (5), Clarence begins to argue that good works, like faith, have the power to redeem. In his conversation with Elias Orr, whom he visits on the parishioner's deathbed at Barnert Memorial Hospital, he suggests that even though Orr has not "enjoyed a palpable experience of the living Christ," good works can justify him in God's judging eyes: "What we can do, Mr. Orr, is to do good to our fellow man and trust in the Lord and enjoy His gifts when they are granted to us. I do not see how any deity can ask more of us than that" (45). Clarence's argument articulates the nature of faithless religious devotion as Eccles might explain it in *Rabbit, Run*. Orr, however, disagrees with Clarence's argument because it suggests that just about everyone can be justified by God. For Orr, salvation is anything but an easy thing to attain. According to Presbyterianism, justification necessitates authentic faith; a man must experience a vision of the living God to find himself among the elect. As Orr expresses the Calvinist theology out of which his own Presbyterian denomination springs, "How can you be saved, if you can't be damned? Answer me that. It's part of the equation. You can't have good without the bad, that's why the bad exists" (46).

However, in the American twentieth century as it is represented in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, faith, an "old formula" that invites "hallucination and hysteria" (44), becomes difficult to retain. Clarence's fall, emblematic of the Wilmot family's fall, and the Wilmot family's attempt to regain grace might be read as an allegorical representation of twentieth-century man's attempt to retain or regain belief in the face of revolutionary scientific discoveries. In other words, Updike positions the twentieth century itself as a challenge to the Wilmots in their efforts to redeem themselves. In the early 1900s, industrialization transformed the face of the nation, and, as Henry Adams intimates in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1906), the dynamo, representative

for him of science in general, comes to replace the Catholic Virgin, who previously had inspired a sense of mystery and the metaphysical. As a result of technological advancements, particularly during the Cold War era, Americans see developments in nuclear technology that render a manmade apocalypse a real possibility. Ultimately, Adams's awe-inspiring dynamo gives birth not only to items like refrigerators, telephones, and televisions that become commonplace in households like those of the Angstroms or Wilmots, but the "above all American" Hollywood movie (104), which presents Christian America with what James A. Schiff refers to as an array of "larger-than-life gods and goddesses" (*Revisited* 45) to worship in place of Christianity's one true God and Christ, His son.

To develop his position on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Updike dramatizes the conflict between faith and modernity, especially movies, at the moment when Clarence experiences his fall, which occurs in 1910. The seemingly insignificant year is pivotal in American religious history because it marks the publication of the first of *The Fundamentals*, thereby providing a historical marker for the onset of the tension between faith and the twentieth century's technological, scientific, and social developments. The publication of *The Fundamentals*—in Hollywood's Los Angeles home—led to the formal emergence of fundamentalist Christianity in America, which involves what is perhaps a more devout belief, conceivably on the verge of something fanatical. That Clarence falls from grace at the moment when Mary Pickford falls in a faint from the summer heat while filming a close-up scene for *A Call to Arms*, a medieval period piece "centered about a lost jewel beyond price" (3), suggests a correlation between the rise of fundamentalism and the rise of twentieth-century media culture.[48]

[48] In "Updike, Film, and American Popular Culture," Schiff discusses the importance of movies and religion in American history as Updike presents it in *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. Schiff proposes that "The single moment which yields these two synchronous events is highly symbolic

As Karen Armstrong suggests, fundamentalism emerges at a moment when modernity comes to challenge faith; hence it constitutes a sort of response to the times. In Armstrong's words, fundamentalists "are convinced that they are fighting for the survival of their faith in a world that is inherently hostile to religion. They are conducting a war on secular modernity" (vii).

As Updike presents it, conservative believers viewed modernity and Hollywood in particular as a source of moral corruption. The times, as the novel's narrator puts it, are "Godless" (6), and, much like a fundamentalist might, Stella, Clarence's wife, "blame[s] the moving pictures—those, and cigarettes"—for the deterioration of America's youth (31). Similarly, albeit nearly a century later, Jesse, the Christian fanatic who founds the Temple of True and Actual Faith, rejects modernity in a characteristically fundamentalist spirit, referring to modern America as "King Gog," and asserting that movies and the Hollywood industry on the whole are "the Devil's work" (380). Jesse's critique of Hollywood encompasses a critique of modern education, evocative of the one Christian fundamentalists expressed when they attacked John Scopes in 1925 for teaching evolution in Tennessee.[49] Jesse sees public schools as shunning religion. Instead of teaching morality, these schools teach "children [of the modern world to] learn to adore the devil-gods of rock music and licentious television commercials"; they teach them to "worship images on a screen until nothing means squat" (421).

Conservative critics like Stella and Jesse are not wrong in their assessments per se. Many of the twentieth-century Americans Updike portrays in *In the Beauty of Lilies* certainly are

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and points to a dominant theme in the novel: the rise of cinema, which through its powerful projection of images has inspired faith and devotion, and the related decline of religious faith" (141).

[49] Note that Updike's narrator makes mention of the Scopes Monkey Trial in the "Teddy" section of *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, observing that "Scopes was found guilty of evolution and fined a hundred dollars but the famous witness and speechifier against him, William Jennings Bryan, right away upped and died" (165).

depraved as a result of the modern times in which they live, and, more to the point, as a result of Hollywood. Essie Wilmot, Clarence's granddaughter, may, like Rabbit, be a true believer in a Presbyterian God, observing that she has "trouble understanding how people could doubt God's existence: He was so clearly there, next to her, interwoven with her, a palpable pressure, as vital as the sensations on her skin, as dependable as her reflection in the mirror" (354).[50] But also like Rabbit, she behaves reprehensibly throughout the novel. Her parents feed her vanity by worshipping her in her youth,[51] and they certainly move her, at least to some degree, to pursue fame in Hollywood as Alma DeMott. Hollywood enables Alma to indulge her vain impulses, providing her with an extensive opportunity to be watched and admired. But it simultaneously strips her of much of her identity. She changes her appearance and, like her "fair and beautiful" namesake from the Book of Esther (Esther 2:7), she changes her name.[52] When she strives to launch her career, she uses her own sexuality to attain recognition. She makes sexual advances on her cousin, Patrick, during her visit to New York City, demonstrating her lack of moral limits, and in order to improve her career, she carries on an affair with her agent, Arnie Fineman,

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[50] In what might be considered her most skeptical moment in the entire novel, Alma feels abandoned by God when she travels on a plane for her screen test with Columbia Pictures: "Her stomach cried out that God had left her, He didn't exist, she was going to fall to the earth below as from a hideously tall tree and never be any more than the nameless girl in the Pillsbury ad" (325). However, the moment passes and her faith remains intact. On various occasions, Alma continues to feel God's presence in her life, and she continues to express her faith through prayer. Notably, like the golfing Rabbit in *Rabbit, Run*, who feels the transcendental "it" in his golf swing (116), Alma feels "something from God […] flow into her face" as she poses before the camera (336). What flows into her face may or may not be of divine origin, but as a staunch believer, Alma wholly believes that it is.

[51] Teddy Wilmot and Emily Sifford, Essie's adoring parents, are ever aware of their daughter's beauty: soon after Essie's birth, Teddy catches his crippled and thereby imperfect wife in a secret act of worshipping the almost too perfect baby, Essie, like an idol, "[s]oftly, greedily squeezing" her and, with "a glance of guilty surprise," presenting him with "a watery plea that he ignore in her worship the something shameful" (226).

[52] According to the biblical book, Hadassah changes her name to Esther upon entering King Ahasasuerus's kingdom as his wife.

despite the fact that, earlier in the novel, she identifies him as "a little kike shit" (316). Furthermore, her desire to be exceptional—one that resembles Rabbit's[53] and is not inherently bad per se—inhibits her ability to serve as a good and loving mother to her son. Alma, whose name, ironically, means "nourishing" in Latin, is, according to the narrator, "clearly miscast" as a mother (360), and, focusing solely on success in her vocation, she does little to assure a stable upbringing for Clark, who comes to live a life that is similarly depraved. As a failed scriptwriter who operates a ski lift to make a living, Clark drinks, takes an array of drugs, and even masturbates to a pornographic video that stars an actress who resembles Alma. He is a sinner, plain and simple, and before eventually joining Jesse's Temple of True and Actual Faith in what might be seen as an effort to turn his life around, he has what the narrator identifies as "a profound need [...] to fall and fall into the gauzy substance of oblivion, the bottomless world beneath the waking world" (391).

Updike suggests that Protestant fundamentalist fanatics like Jesse appear incapable of recognizing the fact that apparently depraved behavior like Alma's or Clark's does not preclude real faith—that real faith, according to the Protestant theology out of which Christian

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[53] In *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit recalls being an extraordinary basketball player in high school, and he is dissatisfied when he is in his twenties because he has failed to meet the expectations he established for himself in his youth. As Rabbit remarks in a conversation with Eccles, "I played first-rate basketball. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second rate" (92). Likewise, Essie, aspires toward stardom and something great—toward a realm that Updike's narrator refers to as heavenly:

> She loved her Sifford grandparents, poking along together in their well-kept greenhouse, but they were earth to her, fragrant and friendly humus; it was the dead, unearthly grandfather she aspired to. In his unreality he held a promise of lifting her up toward the heavenly realm where movie stars flickered and glowed and from which radio shows, with movie stars as guests, emanated. When Essie prayed to God, she felt she was broadcasting a beam of pleading upward to a brown cathedral-shaped radio and her shadowy grandfather was sitting in a chair beside it listening. (270-71)

fundamentalism springs, does not, with the end of justification in mind, necessitate works of any kind, let alone good ones. Like a typical Protestant, Jesse believes in justification by faith alone, explaining to his followers in the Colorado commune that "[f]aith as small as a grain of mustard seed will see you through, but only faith" (477). But, as Updike suggests, for fundamentalists like Jesse, faith and deeds are one and the same. In other words, fundamentalists are wholly invested in deconstructing the faith-works binary by manifesting faith in the world through human actions. As Malise Ruthven explains, "fundamentalist action involves, almost by definition, the appropriation of the divine will, and as a 'Defender of God' the fundamentalist militant claims the right to act on His behalf" (93-94). Jesse may *claim* to adhere to the doctrine of *sola fides*, but because deeds are written in prophecy, he inevitably values the actualization of those deeds as well.

Updike is able to explicate the paradoxical connection fundamentalists come to make between faith and works by casting Jesse as a parody of Branch Davidian religious sect leader David Koresh and portraying the standoff at Jesse's ranch as a parody of the 1993 siege in Waco, Texas, which resulted in a devastating fire that killed seventy-six people. As the son of Seventh Day Adventist parents, Jesse emerges out of a similar religious background as Koresh, who was raised in the Seventh Day Adventist church before joining and eventually leading the Branch Davidian sect at Mount Carmel. Something that distinguished Koresh among religious fanatics was the way in which he read the Bible, and Jesse reads the sacred text much in the way Koresh did. Like Koresh, he places a clear focus on millenarianism, the idea that the end as Revelation describes it is nigh,[54] and he is very much what Ruthven refers to as "a 'textual literalist'" (203),

[54] For a more robust interpretation of how Koresh read the Bible and Revelation in particular, see Eugene V. Gallagher's "'All I am is Religion': David Koresh's Christian Millenarianism," in which Gallagher explains that Koresh

meaning that, like a typical fundamentalist, he believes that the Bible is the actual word of God, a sort of blueprint or script for God's metaphysical plan as it is being enacted in the physical world.

Jesse repeatedly takes steps to manifest the script of biblical text as reality because, as the novel's narrator puts it, he believes, likely because it is the millennium's end, that "[t]he time had come to convert faith into deeds" (439). For example, he asks "that white robes be made for his disciples, to be worn at Bible study, in accordance with Revelation 7:9, wherein multitudes stand before the Lamb 'clothed with white robes'" (435). The white robes are made and worn because Jesse requires only the cooperation of his followers, not that of the outside world. However, when he attempts to reenact a dialogue that Christ has with Pontius Pilate when a state trooper visits the ranch asking questions about the children living there, the trooper fails to play his part. The trooper asks whether Jesse is claiming to be "God Himself," and Jesse responds to him with Christ's scripted words from the Gospel of Luke: "Thou sayest it" (422). But the trooper fails to respond with Pontius Pilate's scripted response. Instead of saying "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4), he simply says that "[t]here's laws against false allegations and claims" (422).

Though Jesse appears to reject modernity and movies in particular, he is, somewhat like fundamentalism as a movement, a derivative of the modern times he scorns.[55] Updike

> brought a simple but powerful interpretive scheme to the Bible. He first posited the primary importance of Revelation. He then asserted that the Bible, in all of its books, proclaimed the same message. Since the message of the Bible was presumed to be identical to the message of Revelation, Koresh could therefore appeal to any text in any part of the biblical corpus in order to flesh out his reading of Revelation. (200)

[55] As Armstrong explains, "[f]undamentalism is not a conscious archaism, as people often imagine; it is not a throwback to the past. These fundamentalisms are essentially modern movements that could take root in no other time than our own" (viii), as evidenced by the various

characterizes him as not all that different from Alma: he is implicated in an existence that engages all the things he purportedly loathes about Hollywood. He operates his temple according to values that executives in the movie industry might have, glorifying sex and violence above all else, only he presents his transgressions as the will of God. According to Updike's narrator, Jesse "had become obsessed by impregnating as many of the Temple women as he could, so his seed would be richly represented in the hundred forty-four thousand of the saved after the Day of Reckoning" (399). Likewise, Jesse justifies his immense collection of illegally acquired guns by way of his faith. Although some of the guns have permits, Jesse observes that those that lack them "have their permits in the accounting of the Lord of Righteousness, stamped and dated right there where He sits on His mighty throne" (397). Moreover, like Koresh, who "presented himself not only as the prophet of the imminent apocalyptic drama but also as the crucial actor in it" (Gallagher 202), Jesse sees himself as an actor in God's drama, if not an enactor of it, ushering in if not enacting the Last Judgment according to Revelation 5. When he tells Clark the story of his call to faith, Jesse is, the narrator notes, "caught up […] in a movie of his past" (404). And, along the same lines, the whole of Jesse's vision of himself as God's agent in the Day of Reckoning is evocative of a movie in which Jesse functions as the star. Revelation constitutes the movie script he enacts, and reporters in trucks positioned at the standoff record events to be televised for the masses. According to Fred Dix, an F.B.I. spokesman with whom Alma speaks, even Jesse himself has become a fan of the broadcasts—a fan of media representations of his own life experiences. As Dix explains, the members of the commune have

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ways in which fundamentalists rely on modern technology, i.e., Christian fundamentalists broadcast their beliefs broadly via television on Pat Robertson's *700 Club* (1966-present) or Sheila Schuller Coleman's *Hour of Power* (1970-present).

"been dropped a couple of Zeniths. Our Jesse over there's become quite the addict, I understand. Their electric bill comes to us, and it keeps going up" (466).

Updike has presented religious hypocrisy like Jesse's before, not only in the Rabbit tetralogy (albeit to a lesser degree) via the actions of Eccles, but in *S.* (1988), the final work in Updike's *Scarlet Letter* trilogy. Much like Jesse, who takes advantage of his followers at the temple, the Arhat of *S.*, an apparent religious fanatic who establishes an ashram in the Arizona desert, takes advantage of Americans such as Sarah Price Worth, the novel's protagonist. Like Jesse, who encourages members of the Temple of True and Actual Faith to break connections with anyone not affiliated with the group, the Arhat attempts to keep members of his ashram disconnected from the media and, more generally, the outside world, which views his establishment critically. When Sarah leaves her husband for the benefits that Buddhism might afford and first arrives in the vicinity of the ashram, she expresses surprise that townspeople view the Arhat as a hippie and a scam artist. However, she eventually discovers the truth about him: that the ashram he has created really is just a cultic parody of a real Buddhist ashram, that the ashram exists only as a business venture that enables the Arhat's sexual and financial exploits. Ultimately, Sarah finds that even the Arhat is not all that he has claimed to be: His name is actually Art Steinmetz. He hails from Watertown, Massachusetts, not India, and he studied sales engineering and business administration at Northeastern University.

What becomes obvious is that Updike's previous parodic treatment of apparent zealotry fails to address the very real societal threat that religious fanaticism and extreme hypocrisy like Jesse's can pose. Jesse differs from the Arhat in his degree of self-awareness, and the key distinction between the two characters involves belief itself: Artie believes in capitalism, not something transcendent, and he knows himself well enough to realize this fact—he knows that

the ashram he has created is a sham. On the other hand, Jesse believes in God. Thus he is incapable of viewing the Temple of True and Actual Faith through a critical lens. Whereas Artie "the Arhat" understands that he has created a parody of something authentically spiritual, Jesse believes he has created the real thing. As a result, Updike can mock Artie, but Jesse's enterprise remains far from laughable.

The paradox in which Jesse has involved himself—believing he is an agent of God but not fulfilling prophesy—pertains to the whole of fundamentalism. As Ruthven suggests, "By collapsing myth into history, by taking action on God's behalf, the fundamentalist paradoxically affirms the supremacy of the human will" (94). In other words, Jesse's will is his own, not God's, thus when Jesse makes efforts to usher in the Day of Reckoning, the Last Judgment never comes. The narrator describes Jesse as "disheartened and distracted" when "the convergence of thousands of converts and untold numbers of angels, ushering in the new Heaven and Earth that Revelation promised had not come about" (471). And even though the American masses witness tapes of Jesse speaking, "[t]he world remained insufficiently perturbed. It rolled on, untransformed" (472). Unable to comprehend why God's word is not manifested in deeds in the world, Jesse finds himself "lost amid his texts" (475). In Christian explication of prophecy, Jesse may be the tree from which the branch of David, and so Christ, emerges, but Updike's Jesse does not resemble the root of the tree, nor is he Jesus, even though his name is paranomastically similar; he ultimately functions only as a corruption of Christ and his message.

Justification by Temperate Faith Alone

In *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, Updike suggests that fanatical perpetrators of religious violence, like Jesse, who value Revelation above all other biblical books and focus on the actualization of the Word as deed, are lapsed in large part because they lack an understanding of the sort of world that the biblical narrator presents in the Book of Esther, a clear source text for Updike's *fin de millénaire* novel. Paradoxically, the very peculiar biblical book, of which Esther "Essie" Wilmot's namesake is the heroine, is less known for what it says—that Ahasuerus's Persian queen Esther uncovers a plot against the Jewish people, saves them from it, and enacts revenge against the culprit—than for what it fails to say: that it is by virtue of God's grace that Esther is able to save the Jews. In other words, the book, which makes no mention whatsoever of God or His actions, is, in accord with a Hebrew understanding of the name "Esther,"[56] a book about what is hidden, and it is theologically important precisely because God and His work remain shrouded in mystery.[57] Indeed, the book presents the world and ideal believers in that world as Barth and Updike as Barth's devotee understand them: the world is "the good but fallen place for God to carry out our redemption," and the true Christian believer is a relatively temperate one in that he "can let the world be the world" (Webb 148). Thus, the book teaches its reader a very Barthian lesson that Updike surely loved: that believers must have faith in the fact that God works in the world, as He does in the biblical book, without overt evidence of His divine actions.

In lieu of overt instruction from heaven, in a world like that of the Book of Esther, Updike's believers turn to Hollywood, which, for him, is not an institution to be scorned as

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[56] The root of the name "Esther" is "hester," which means "hidden" in Hebrew.

[57] As John L. McKenzie explains,

> The whole story [of the Book of Esther] exhibits the providence of God, which preserves his people from annihilation. The means by which His providence operates in this book are human plans and actions. The divine action is hidden and no marvels are related. Yet the Jews escape. (247)

fundamentalists scorn it, but a quintessentially modern institution to be celebrated.[58] Notably, Hollywood's pantheon of icons does not outright replace Updike's one true Christian God. When characters in Updike's novel rely on movies alone as a means by which to attain transcendence, Hollywood only offers them parodies of the authentic experience of it. For example, after Clarence falls from grace, after he feels wholly "hollow" and comes to view the universe as "a pointless, self-running machine" (73, 74-75), he seeks voyeuristic solace from the images produced by the movie projector, and, at least to a certain extent, Hollywood delivers. The novel's narrator observes that, for Clarence, the movie theater "was a church with its mysteries looming brilliantly" and the "manufactured visions" he witnesses in the theater "filled him" (105, 107). However, movies by no means replace God for Clarence, who never manages to continue his career in the ministry[59] or recover from his fall: he dies an unequivocal disbeliever who lacks God's grace, and the Wilmot family remains in need of real salvation. Along the same lines, movies provide Essie/Alma with a mere parody of everlasting life. Essie, whose full first name means "star" in Persian, comprising what is arguably a better-known understanding of "Esther" than "hidden," aspires toward stardom and something great—a "heavenly" Hollywood "realm where movie stars flickered and glowed and from which radio shows, with movie stars as guests, emanated" (270-71). When film production companies begin

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[58] Jack DeBellis provides an extensive consideration of the importance of movies in Updike's life and oeuvre in "'It Captivates…It Hypnotizes': Updike Goes to the Movies." According to DeBellis, Updike has always been a movie-lover, but, more to the point, film "enriches his art" (169): Indeed, Updike has "used film as an aid" throughout his career as a writer (169).

[59] As the narrator of *In the Beauty of the Lilies* expresses it, religion "for most men" is "this gamble in the back of their minds, with little to lose but an hour or so on Sunday mornings. But for [Clarence], alas, it was a livelihood, and his manhood's foundation" (35). Clarence's loss of manhood as a Wilmot—a member of a family that can trace itself "back to near the beginning" of the United States (110)—has extended ramifications. By this moment in American history, Americans like Teddy Roosevelt had established Americanness itself as rooted in manhood and virility; hence Clarence is not only less of a man by virtue of his fall, but less of an *American* man.

using fireproof cellulose acetate film, Alma attains only some semblance of the transcendence she seeks: “the world would never lose Alma DeMott. She would always be there, in some archive or rerun, in eternal return perennially called back to life” (336). Yet as the novel progresses and as Alma matures, the narrator observes that she comes to recognize that “what had once seemed to her absolute immortality turned out to be a slow dissolution within a confused mass of perishing images like a colorful mountain of compressed and rotting garbage” (465).

Instead of providing authentic transcendence in and of themselves, movies, as Updike portrays them, steer believers in the direction of devout faith (and even deeds, for whatever they are worth), as best evidenced by the fact that Updike himself appears to have found a model for how to believe in a movie, *Lost Horizon*, a 1937 Frank Capra film (based on James Hilton’s 1933 novel) that tells the story of writer, soldier, and diplomat Robert Conway’s experience in the earthly paradise of Shangri-La. Updike’s narrator repeatedly makes reference to the film, covertly alluding to it in his discussion of the film industry switching from cellulose nitrate, which is “intensely flammable and prone to turn into chemical mush in storage,” to cellulose acetate, which “does not burn and will last theoretically forever” (336). Notoriously, Capra’s film suffered as a result of the industry’s use of cellulose nitrate: Capra burned the first two reels of the film after an ill-received preview, and several reels of the nitrate negative deteriorated by the 1960s. Furthermore, the narrator makes explicit reference to *Lost Horizon* as a movie by which the young (and already vain) Essie has been traumatized because, in the film, “the pretty woman’s face very frighteningly crumbles into old age when they take her out of their magic valley in the mountains” (237). Updike’s narrator refers to Maria’s crumbling face on several

subsequent occasions (245, 250, 312), and makes his final reference to *Lost Horizon* when he observes that it is being remade as a musical (431).

Because *Lost Horizon* traumatizes Essie, Updike's reader is certainly inclined to view the author's references to the movie as negatively charged. Indeed, the image of the crumbling face, evocative of the argument of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), might be understood as commenting on the tragedy of art's demise in a modern era that distinguishes itself by replacing authentically sacred things with mundane ones. As Benjamin explains, "[t]he cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity" (235). Along the same lines, Updike's allusion to the movie might underscore the apparent similarity between Shangri-La and the Temple of True and Actual Faith or the historical Texas compound after which Updike models it. In other words, Shangri-La could certainly be seen as an early twentieth-century antecedent to the kind of horrifying commune that Jesse or his historical counterpart, Koresh, come to lead.

However, because *In the Beauty of the Lilies* attempts to bridge the gap between faith and modernity, not separate the two as early fundamentalists did, I suggest that Updike alludes to *Lost Horizon* because he sees it as providing a model for believing in the modern times. Unlike the residents of Mount Carmel or the Temple of True and Actual Faith who scorn modernity, Shangri-La's residents embrace it. As the High Lama reveals, Conway's arrival in the earthly paradise—the result of a plane crash in the Himalayan Mountains—is orchestrated, and he is brought to Shangri-La specifically because of his knowledge of the modern world—because, as the dying High Lama's successor, he will be able to connect the oasis with modernity. More to the point, Shangri-La distinguishes itself in Updike's literary imagination because its residents

practice temperance. There is only one mention of religion in the entire film, and it occurs in a conversation Conway has with Chang, a Shangri-La resident, when Conway asks Chang to expound upon the religion that the people of Shangri-La follow. Chang responds, "We follow many. To put it simply, I should say that our general belief was in moderation. We preach the virtue of avoiding excesses of every kind. Even including excess of virtue itself." Chang elaborates, observing that they "find, in the valley, it makes for better happiness among the natives. [They] rule with moderate strictness and in return [they] are satisfied with moderate obedience." The result, Chang explains, is that the people of Shangri-La are "moderately honest and moderately chaste and somewhat more than moderately happy" (Capra).

In Updike's novel, the seemingly lapsed believers, those who revel in the apparent depravities of Hollywood via their less-than-moral deeds, are the model ones because they are able to do what twentieth-century American fundamentalists and fanatics like Jesse cannot. They sustain faith in the face of modernity, even in accord with it; they understand Updike's key message of temperance in all things; they, like Updike, opt against hypocritically scorning movies, looking to them instead as a means by which to approach understanding an unknowable, Barthian divinity and a world like that which the Book of Esther portrays, one where a Barthian God's providence remains concealed. Ultimately, Updike's novel reaches fruition as a contemporary Book of Esther when Updike's Esther, by fictionalized divine decree, becomes its heroine. Paradoxically, even though I argue that Updike does not come to view deeds as being more valuable than belief, meaning that faith *of the right kind* in *In the Beauty of the Lilies* continues to trump good works, the Wilmot family is redeemed through Alma's prayer for Clark's actions. That Updike's God prefers Alma's mode of thinking about modernity and faith to Jesse's becomes apparent by way of His response to her prayer.

Understanding the kind of prayer Alma offers and the point at which she expresses it in the novel enables an understanding of why Updike's God likes (and chooses to answer) her prayer. Only *after* Alma comes to grasp more clearly the relationship between the transcendental nature of film and real transcendence, only *after* she tempers her view of Hollywood in accord with what Shangri-La's residents would endorse, she prays to God, asking Him to save Clark:

> *Dear God, forgive me for my mistakes, my selfishness. Always I was seeking to do Your will, that my talent not be hidden, that my light would shine forth. Forgive me if I could have done more for Clark. Save him from this sadness, this farce. Give him back to me as he was, helpless and so eager at my breast. Forgive me if I should have nursed him longer, as you know I had committed to* Cream Cheese and Caviar *and Newman wasn't available later. Dear Lord, make me again the young mother I was; let me pour into him all the love his little being needed. Heal our lives and take us back and make us all perfect. Do the impossible, Lord, for him, as You have done for me. Rescue him from that terrible house. Reach down, so that none but I can see. I will not tell. Let me love You again. Amen.* (467-68)

Alma's prayer may not be perfect in that she continues to express concern for herself, but perfection per se is something that the God of the Bible often does not seek.[60] In contrast to Jesse, who essentially attempts to hijack history from God in order to attain personal stardom, she does what she has previously failed to do: sustaining the kind of true faith she demonstrates throughout the novel, she tempers her vanity, relinquishing all control to God and coming to see a metaphorical camera lens as focused on something other than herself.

In a conversation with the fallen Clarence early in the novel, Thomas Dreaver, the young presbytery moderator, suggests that "[w]hat evaporates can recondense," and by the conclusion of Updike's novel, it does: Updike suggests that God answers Alma's prayer by portraying "a flock of sparkling dark immaterial bubbles," like the bubbles that previously ascended from Clarence, descending into Clark. Alma may never have taken Clark to church, "except for a

[60] Consider, for instance, how the God of Genesis works with Abraham and Jacob, characters who struggle with Him and are less than entirely obedient.

crowded funeral or two" (408), but Clark's heroism, as the novel's narrator portrays it and, apparently, as God has rendered it, resembles the heroism of an action movie hero, suggesting that cinematic influence—essentially, years of watching movies—guides Clark's faithful actions. As Stacey Olster observes, the Christ of Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is "a figure of inspiration who 'was born across the sea,'" but the movies that inspire Clark to "effect a salvation that is of this world, not the next, are a homegrown product, pure and simple" (211). Whereas Jesse struggles to manifest the words of Revelation as reality, God's will almost effortlessly manifests itself for Clark, perhaps precisely because Clark does not attempt to seize the reigns of history from Him. After the bubbles descend, Clark attains a divinely inspired "hyperclarity" (484), which resembles something of a conversion to faith, and he is instantly transfigured into an agent of God. Unlike Essau, his new biblical namesake at the temple, whom Clark views as a "rube" (398), and more like Essau's brother Jacob[61] or even Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose movies teach Clark about the kinds of guns that Jesse stockpiles,[62] Clark struggles with Jesse, shooting him twice and killing him before dying from a gunshot wound himself. The bubbles themselves remain enigmatic: they may be grace, they may be faith, they may be divine knowledge of some kind. Updike opts not to specify. But the ultimate function of the bubbles is clear: they allow Clark to bring an end to the standoff and they enable him to redeem the fallen Wilmot family line as a living instrument of salvation.

In an introduction to the novel, Updike all but stated that he orchestrated a divergence from his Barthian tendencies, observing that he "was trying through his throng of identities to tell a continuous story, of which God was the hero" and that he "invited Him in, to be a character in

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[61] Note that the biblical Jacob is characterized by his cunning behavior and his willingness to struggle with God

[62] When Clark first sees Jesse's immense gun collection, the narrator observes that Clark "guessed, from Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, that [what he saw] was an Uzi" (400).

[his] tale, and if He declined, with characteristic modern modesty, to make His presence felt unambiguously, at least there is space in this chronicle plainly reserved for Him, a pocket in human nature that nothing else will fill" (*More Matter* 831). Thusly, the God of *In the Beauty of the Lilies* is not *quite* the Barthian God that Updike has presented in his earlier works,[63] at least for his readers. Paradoxically, Updike shows evidence of God's existence to his reader precisely because he aims, by millennium's end, to underscore the fact that authentically transcendent things must remain in the realm of mystery, not be made flesh by fanatical believers like Jesse who futilely aim to hijack history from God by rendering deeds as the stuff of faith. Nonetheless, God's work in the world remains ambiguous for Updike's characters, as it does for the characters of the original Book of Esther, and Essie/Alma is the heroine of Updike's book because she understands the sort of lesson that the biblical book teaches: that believers must be able to sustain faith without overt evidence of God's involvement.[64] Updike's narrator does not explicitly indicate that Alma's prayer has been answered: Alma simply *believes* that God has intervened, as her subsequent prayer, in which she thanks God "*for letting* [her] *son become a*

[63] Prior to publishing *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, Updike consistently made it a point to leave divinity in the realm of mystery—to leave the ways of God unknown to man and to retain the image of God as Barthian. For example, in *Roger's Version*, there exists no evidence of God, and Updike ridicules Dale Kohler for committing himself to proving God's existence through computer science. Similarly, in the Rabbit tetralogy, Rabbit repeatedly laments the fact that God does not intervene in human affairs—that He refused to lift the little rubber stopper to save the Angstroms' baby Rebecca from drowning. As Rabbit observes in *Rabbit Is Rich*, "[a] volume of water still stood in the tub many hours later, dust on the unstirring gray surface, just a little rubber stopper to lift and God in all His strength did nothing" (203).

[64] This reading offers an alternative to that which Peter J. Bailey provides in *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed*, which suggests that the ending of *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (and, hence, the novel as a whole) is sorrowful because it "so profoundly dramatizes how unlikely we are to recognize religious epiphany when we see it—in life or on television" (219). By contrast, as I have argued, the real theological value of God's silence in the book is understood through the lens of the biblical Book of Esther. God's silence, therefore, has religious worth because it represents real-world experiences. Believers do not see God's involvement, yet they continue to believe that God remains a living presence in His creation.

hero at the end" (488), suggests. And, perhaps as per her original request, none but Alma, who sees only through faith that God has helped her, come to know of God's involvement, "*none but* [Alma] *can see*" that God has "*reach*[ed] *down*" (468). As her father, Teddy, turns on the evening news, the events of the standoff are flattened by the television, both literally and metaphorically. The survivors emerge "squinting, blinking as if just waking up" (491); they emerge, as though out of a movie theater, aware of reality once again, but unaware of God's active participation in their salvation. Hence, they are unaware of a quiet miracle made manifest in a modern world that Updike characterizes as only apparently devoid of genuinely transcendent phenomena.

Chapter 3: The End in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*

The religious undertones in Don DeLillo's fiction certainly stem from his strong Catholic background: he was raised by Italian Roman-Catholic parents who emigrated to New York City; he attended Cardinal Hayes High School, a Catholic school for boys in the Bronx; and he continued his education at a Jesuit institution, Fordham University, where he majored in communication arts and also studied history and theology. Even though DeLillo no longer formally practices the religion of his upbringing, it clearly continues to influence him.[65] He often portrays Catholics in his works, from nuns working on the outskirts of society, as in *White Noise* (1985) and *Underworld* (1997), to the president of the United States, as in *Libra* (1988). As DeLillo explained in a 1982 interview with Thomas LeClair, he is "interested in religion as a discipline and a spectacle, as something that drives people to extreme behavior" (10), and Catholicism in particular seems to drive DeLillo's artistic imagination. DeLillo remarked in the same interview that "[b]eing raised a Catholic was interesting because the ritual had elements of art to it and it prompted feelings that art sometimes draws out of us" (10). Ultimately, writing itself comes to function as a spiritual act for DeLillo, arguably filling the void that his abandonment of Catholic ritual left. In a 1999 interview with Maria Moss, DeLillo observed that his writing "brings [him] closer to spiritual feelings than anything else" and that it is "the final enlightenment" (158).

DeLillo's personal interest in spirituality and the palpable presence of the transcendental in his work render him somewhat of an anomaly among his postmodernist contemporaries.

[65] According to Amy Hungerford, "traces of DeLillo's Catholicism "can be found everywhere in DeLillo's novels, interviews, and essays: in his choice of words, in his subjects, in his imagery, in the ways he understands faith, belief, agency, guilt, redemption, and human relations" (343).

Although DeLillo has resisted being called a postmodern author because he feels he has been influenced by modernists such as James Joyce in particular, he remains, according to many critical assessments, quintessentially postmodern, if not a "homespun American theorist of postmodernism" in his own right (Knight 39). His subject is always postmodern America itself, or, as John N. Duvall puts it, "how America became postmodern" (*Introduction* 2), how it came to be the late capitalist realm depicted by Frederic Jameson in his theoretical writings. However, late capitalist America fails to paralyze DeLillo's heroes or render their lives meaningless. As Jesse Kavadlo explains, even though "radical postmodernism is a doctrine of disbelief, DeLillo's recent body of work ultimately suggests the need, and desire, *for* belief" (10). Faced only with what is postmodern, material, and mass-produced, but longing for something unique and otherworldly, DeLillo's heroes come to see religion as operating beyond traditional, institutional bounds. They see the mysterious and the sublime in the postmodern, watching television as though they are worshipping shrines, reading tabloids as though those tabloids are sacred texts, and taking trips to photographed barns or waste management facilities as though they are making religious pilgrimages.[66]

DeLillo continually considers mystery in his works,[67] on occasion as the stuff of detective fiction or political thrillers,[68] but more often than not, he considers it in terms of his Catholic

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[66] In "The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo," Paul Maltby considers how a Romantic and hence quintessentially unpostmodern "metaphysical impulse […] animates [DeLillo's] work" (260), arguing that "DeLillo endeavors to preserve the credibility of visionary experience and, in particular, to validate the visionary moment as the sign of a redemptive order of meaning" (274).
[67] For an analysis of mystery in DeLillo's fiction, see John A. McClure's "DeLillo and Mystery," which argues that "[i]n DeLillo's work it is only by coming to terms with permanent mystery, by accepting finitude and fragility, and by reasoning from this position that humans are able to live less anxiously, act more responsibly, and make contact with the mysterious benignities that circulate in the world" (167).
[68] Consider, for instance, *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978), *The Names* (1982), and *Libra*.

heritage,[69] from which I suggest he initially gets a sense of apocalypse. Unlike typical Catholics, who tend to downplay the importance of prophetic speculation,[70] DeLillo has expressed nothing short of a fascination with apocalypse as a mystery of faith.[71] And, as the second millennium approached, apocalypse appeared to be increasingly on DeLillo's mind. To usher in the last decade of the twentieth century, he published *Mao II* (1991), which presents elements of millennial anxiety as pervading American culture. The novel opens with what protagonist Bill Gray identifies as "millennial hysteria" (80): Master Moon of the Unification Church holds a ceremony at Yankee Stadium to marry six-and-a-half thousand couples that see the world as implicated in an end of days and look forward to time's abrogation. DeLillo's subsequent novel, *Underworld*, published on the eve of the second millennium, overtly addresses the anxieties of nuclear technology being developed during the Cold War, and it covertly responds to nearly ubiquitous millennial anxiety at the twentieth century's end.[72] The novel's title suggests the classical world's term for the realm of the dead, but the novel mainly portrays late capitalist America, which, from its origins at the beginning of the Cold War to the end of the twentieth

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[69] For Catholics, mystery relates to religious faith, and performing sacraments in the material world enables some semblance of a transcendent experience, a communion with grace. The mysteries of faith, or *Mysterium fidei*, suggest that supernatural Truth upon which theological doctrine depends—Truth that necessitates faith because it transcends earthly knowledge—is essential to faith itself. Indeed, a clear divide between the mundane and the divine must exist in order for Catholic mysteries, which involve atypical moments when the divine occupies the realm of the ordinary, to inspire faith. Without mystery, man has only the profane material, only facts to know and nothing to believe in per se; without mystery, the Catholic Church has nothing to mediate, and faith itself is rendered obsolete.

[70] Even though Catholics affirm the Second Coming in the Nicene Creed, Paul Boyer explains that "Catholic theology ha[s] favored an allegorical or historicist reading of biblical apocalyptic" as a result of Augustine of Hippo's views (62).

[71] DeLillo's very imagination, as Jeremy Green suggests, is apocalyptic in that it "sees in unconnected events the coherent signs of an ending" and "interprets history in accordance with categories drawn from theology and metaphysics," thereby "hinting at the presence of a dark and meaningful narrative behind the humdrum contingencies of the quotidian" ("Last Days" 129).

[72] As Elizabeth Rosen puts it, "*Underworld* is a meditation on the end" (99) and "a meditation on the place of apocalyptic thinking and eschatology in our lives" (100).

century, is stark, polluted, and fallen—something out of Greek or Roman myth, a living American realm of the dead that, with the Soviet Union's development of the atom bomb, is perpetually poised on the brink of annihilation.

This chapter focuses on *Underworld* as a chronicle of the American apocalyptic imagination from the onset of the Cold War to the onset of the information age, and it considers DeLillo's characterization of apocalypse as personal, universal, and, above all else, as existing in a nightmarish, endless cycle for Americans who appear incapable of considering the possibility of life everlasting in addition to endless death. I argue that throughout his fiction, most notably in *Americana* (1971), *End Zone* (1972), *White Noise*, and *Libra*, DeLillo borrows from and comments on the Catholic eschatological tradition. And, I suggest, he presents the late capitalist news media and subsequently the Internet as commodifying, appropriating, and propagating the endless end. Whereas the end in Catholicism creates the possibility for terrifying eternal death *or* purification leading to joyful eternal life, the end as DeLillo presents it in *Underworld* only manifests the possibility for cycles of terror. Ultimately, the structure of *Underworld* itself constitutes a cycle of apocalypse, a dooming and seemingly inescapable loop. The end presented in the novel's epilogue resembles the Bruegelian doomsday that appears in the novel's opening pages, and these two visions of devastation literally and metaphorically frame the terms for waste in the Cold War–era American wasteland that *Underworld* showcases. Just as Bruegel critiques sixteenth-century Catholicism in his painting, DeLillo critiques the Catholicism of Cold War America and the Cold War itself, characterizing each as poised for rebirth. However, in the world of DeLillo's novel, only perversions of renewal appear possible. By the conclusion of *Underworld*, with the end of the Cold War and the onset of the information age, some semblance of peace is attained, but DeLillo questions whether true peace in "all its meanings" can be

realized if it is only conceptualized through the depthless and dead realm of cyberspace (827). Although the rise of the Internet does not preclude opportunities for transcendence through seemingly mundane means for DeLillo, it does come to threaten the possibility for resuscitating the purifying effect of apocalypse, thereby finishing the job that news broadcasting begins in the Cold War's nascent stages.

The Endless End in DeLillo's Fiction

In large part, DeLillo's understanding of apocalypse—at least the initial one he develops—comes from his Catholic upbringing. He has said that "there is a sense of last things in [his] work that probably comes from a Catholic childhood" (Passaro 81), during which he would have learned about Apocalypse from the Bible. Suggesting that he understands narrative in biblical terms,[73] he observes, in *Libra*, that "[t]here is a tendency of plots to move toward death" (221), and he reiterates the idea in *White Noise*.[74] Furthermore, DeLillo would have learned about apocalypse from *The Baltimore Catechism* (1891), the standard textbook, in three parts, for Catholic schools in America until the late 1960s, and the textbook used by Sister Edgar in *Underworld*. For a Catholic, Apocalypse is Revelation. Part 1, Lesson 14 of the 1941 revised edition of the work defines the nature of Apocalypse, stating that the bodies of the dead will be physically resurrected at the end of time, meaning that they "will rise from the earth and be

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[73] Frank Kermode famously makes the argument that the Bible shapes our understanding of narrative in *The Sense of an Ending* (1967). In this seminal work, Kermode suggests that the Bible, moving from Alpha to Omega, genesis to apocalypse, influences literary narratives by providing a paradigm of apocalypse that "continue[s] to lie under our ways of making sense of the world" (28).
[74] As Jack Gladney puts it in one of his academic lectures, "[a]ll plots tend to move deathward" (26).

united again to their souls, nevermore to be separated" (Deck, *The Creed* 14: 176). Those "who have died in the state of grace and have been purified in purgatory, if necessary" will be "rewarded in heaven" with a vision of "God face to face," and they will experience eternal peace, "shar[ing] forever in His glory and happiness" (Deck, *The Creed* 14: 186). On the other hand, sinners will face the terrors of hell, where they will be "deprived of the vision of God and suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity" (Deck, *The Creed* 14: 185). For better or worse, the Catholic Apocalypse constitutes the abrogation of human time and the eternal restoration of sacred time.

This Catholic conceptualization of Apocalypse as the culmination of Revelation dovetails effortlessly in DeLillo's work with an understanding of apocalypse as cataclysmic event that reflects the historical events of the nuclear age. DeLillo's America was shaped by the Cold War, during which school children engaged in duck-and-cover exercises designed to help protect them from nuclear fallout. DeLillo witnessed the communal anxiety of Americans during the Cuban Missile Crisis and he saw powerful politicians and government agencies operating in secret emerge as forces that could bring on manmade versions of apocalypse. Indeed, intelligence agencies seem to be bearers of apocalyptic mystery to him: they are, as he suggests in a 1993 interview with Adam Begley, "like churches that hold the final secrets" (106), and the atomic weapons they control have "enormous biblical power" (Billen). In the wake of 6 August 1945, it is apocalypse by way of the atom bomb, by way of technology, not necessarily via an all-powerful God, that comes to permeate the human imagination as DeLillo conceives of it. In his 1988 interview with DeLillo, Anthony DeCurtis inquired about the "apocalyptic feel" of DeLillo's books, and DeLillo explained that his books reflect history as he understands it: "This

is the shape my books take because this is the reality I see. This reality has become part of all our lives over the past twenty-five years. I don't know how we can deny it" (73).

Apocalypse comes to pervade the shape of *Underworld*, as evidenced by the fact that any number of instances in the novel might be characterized as apocalyptic in scope. For example, the traumatic event of Nick Shay's history toward which the narrative evolves—the moment when, as a teenager, he accidentally shoots and kills George Manza—functions as an apocalyptic moment for him. It marks the end of a youth marred by immature, meaningless existence from which he is able to move forward to face entirely new ends. Nick reforms himself following the shooting, through incarceration in a detention center and a Jesuit education that helps make him into the successful and responsible man the reader initially encounters. Similarly, the Cuban Missile Crisis takes on apocalyptic proportions for the Americans of DeLillo's novel. Lenny Bruce's joke that "[w]e're all gonna die!" (507) in the comic acts that DeLillo fictionalizes[75] manifests the ever-present anxiety of the American people during the historical moment of the crisis. Yet just as Nick Shay moves on from the apocalyptic crisis of the shooting, so, too, do historical Americans and those whom DeLillo fictionalizes: they live to face all new ends of time.

Apocalyptic "endings" such as these are ubiquitous in *Underworld* because the narratives that comprise the novel—narratives broken up by several jumps in time—cycle simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand, DeLillo tells certain stories in a traditional, linear fashion, moving from the story's clear beginning to its end. For instance, the Manx Martin sections progress teleologically, illuminating the movement of the Bobby Thomson home-run baseball in

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[75] For a consideration of Lenny Bruce's fictionalized apocalyptic monologues in *Underworld*, see Elizabeth Rosen's "Lenny Bruce and His Nuclear Shadow Marvin Lundy: Don DeLillo's Apocalyptists Extraordinaires."

the hours of its seemingly unknown history toward the moment at which it surfaces. On the other hand, DeLillo tells other stories in reverse chronological order, creating a narrative structure that, as DeLillo notes in an interview with Gerald Howard, duplicates "the countdown voice we associate with a nuclear test" (122). In these reverse-chronological narratives, the plot moves toward illuminating mysteries of the past as opposed to illuminating events as they roll onward toward the future. Most notably, DeLillo shows us the fifty-seven-year-old Nick of the novel's relative present—some time in 1992—near the novel's beginning, and as the novel progresses, he illuminates the mysteries of Nick's past to show how the Nick of the present comes to exist.

As Frederic J. Baumgartner notes, eschatology in a traditional sense "fosters a linear view of history: The divine power that created the present world in the distant past will end it some time in the future" (2). But history in DeLillo's apocalyptic novels moves, paradoxically, in teleological cycles, destabilizing traditional, linear narrative. In one sense, even though Catholic theology suggests that apocalypse constitutes a definitive end, there is still something quite Catholic about DeLillo's characterization of reality as cycling through endless end times. If, as Amy Hungerford argues, DeLillo mystifies the language of his novels using the screens and barriers of the Latin mass,[76] he also uses the cyclical structures of Catholicism to shape his sense of time. The apocalyptic end, for a devout Catholic, marks a point at which purification takes place, much as it takes place at baptism. Catholic believers attain rejuvenated existence on a heavenly plane; they attain everlasting life after death through lifetimes of devotion, repeating rituals, spinning through rosaries and liturgical cycles, continually undergoing the phases of the

[76] As Hungerford explains, "DeLillo […] transfers a version of mysticism from the Catholic context into the literary one […] through the model of the Latin mass" (343), which historically has been "described by its opponents and its advocates in similar terms: both spoke of 'screens' and 'barriers' and lack of transparent meaning" (357).

Sacrament of Reconciliation, sinning, experiencing guilt, and regaining purity of conscience through confession and penance. Similarly, DeLillo's heroes, lapsed believers and very often lapsed Catholics, move through endless cycles of personal and communal apocalypse. Moreover, what DeLillo portrays reflects a reality that has emerged since Christianity's early beginnings. Countless believers have believed that the end is nigh and they will continue to believe it exists on the horizon as long as prophecy remains less-than-wholly fulfilled. They continue to set dates for Judgment Day, and when those dates pass, set new dates.

In another sense, however, DeLillo's characterization of eschatology as cyclical is inevitably implicated in postmodernity. As Jean Baudrillard suggests in "The Anorexic Ruins," his 1989 consideration of the fall of the Berlin Wall as an apocalyptic end of history, a definitive end has become an impossibility in the postmodern epoch because "[e]verything has already become nuclear, faraway, vaporized. The explosion has already occurred. The bomb is only a metaphor now" (34). In other words, apocalypse has become the stuff of conventionally Baudrillardian simulacra and simulation. It is possible that man might attain some semblance of meaning from endless ends he encounters (just as Camus's Sisyphus attains meaning through the absurd act of endlessly rolling a rock up a hill), yet those endless ends may numb the masses with time, not rejuvenate them as Catholic ritual or apocalypse rejuvenates the devout believer, particularly when the mass media of DeLillo's texts propagate them.

As I have suggested, Catholic theology inevitably incorporates the endlessness of both death and life, but the characters of DeLillo's novels pervert the Catholic tradition, seeing it as focusing on the deathlessness of death exclusively. In his initial consideration of apocalypse in his first novel, *Americana* (1971), DeLillo identifies the idea of the endless end as emerging out of medieval Catholicism. The novel portrays the superficial protagonist David Bell's search for

his own place amid a beginning and an end that, he hopes, will help him establish a sense of his own identity and give some degree of meaning to his predominantly depthless existence. David searches for the origins of America itself, traveling west in what he refers to as "a religious journey" to create a documentary of the Navajos (49). He puzzles over potential ends, particularly when he stumbles upon a bit of fifth-century Catholic theology in a memo sent out by the Mad Memo-Writer of his office. The Mad Memo-Writer quotes from Book XIII, chapter 11, of St. Augustine's *City of God*, a work that addresses the earthly conflict between what Augustine terms the City of Man and the City of God. Augustine, who develops a theory of successive world-cycles in Book XII and in Book XIII proceeds to consider the origins of man's fall and its implications, concludes, in chapter 11 of Book XIII, that "*never can a man be more disastrously in death than when death itself shall be deathless*" (99). The Protestant David, who lacks a familiarity with Augustine and fails to understand the meaning of his words, becomes mesmerized by the quotation and solicits Ted Warburton, a colleague who he discovers is the mysterious Mad Memo-Writer himself, to explain Augustine's idea to him. Warburton, who proposes that Augustine is arguing that "death never dies and […] man shall remain forever in the state of death" (101), fails to recognize that Augustine is attempting to explain the nature of eternal punishment in hell in particular, that there is a flip-side of deathless death in hell: everlasting life in heaven. Nonetheless, Warburton's perversion of Augustinian theology becomes central in DeLillo's fiction, which eventually comes to portray man as living in the kind of eternal hellish state that Augustine originally imagines as a metaphysical complement to the heavenly city.

Similarly, *End Zone* (1972), which presents football players living, in many ways, as medieval Catholic monks, addresses the perversion of Catholic theology in the modern world.[77] Gary Harkness, a college football player and the novel's first-person narrator, finds an opportunity to start his career and life anew following his accidental killing of an Indiana freshman safety during a football game, but his experience leads him closer to death than authentic rebirth. At Logos College, he plays for the god-like Coach Creed, who, like the Catholic statement that outlines unbending principles for faith, provides a firm framework for existence for Gary and the other players, looking down on them from on high in a coaching tower and demanding nothing short of perfect obedience. The college's name suggests the beginning of time as it is described in John 1:1,[78] the most famous of the openings to the four canonical gospels of the New Testament. But Gary, who perhaps remains unable to recover from the trauma of the Indiana player's death, attains meaning and direction in his life by meditating on the end, not the beginning. He asserts that his life means "nothing without football" (22), a sport that is based on driving toward end zones, and he obsesses over death and the apocalyptic end that nuclear warfare brings. He reads and rereads a book he discovers on nuclear annihilation, a modern-day Book of Revelation of sorts, finding "pleasure in the contemplation of millions dying and dead" (21); he becomes attracted to Myna because she wears an orange dress with a nuclear "mushroom cloud appliquéd on the front" (41); and, in affair-like encounters at a nearby motel, he repeatedly visits Major Staley, his Aspects of Modern War professor, to hear him deliver passionate sermons about nuclear annihilation that suggest

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[77] For a more thorough consideration of apocalypse in *End Zone*, see Joseph Dewey's "DeLillo's Apocalyptic Satires," which considers *End Zone* and *Ratner's Star* (1976) as "companion texts" in that they comprise "coming-of-age narratives" that present adolescents as "edg[ing]" toward revelation (pun intended)" (54).

[78] Replacing the English word "word" for "logos," the term used in the original Greek text, John 1:1 suggests that "[i]n the beginning was logos, and logos was with God, and logos was God."

that "[t]here's a kind of theology at work [with nuclear weapons technology]" and that "[t]he bombs are a kind of god" (80).

Apocalypse as DeLillo represents it in the novel appeals to Gary for the same reason that it appeals to the Catholic believer: it brings about the opportunity for a new beginning through purification.[79] In other words, life comes full circle, so to speak, when existence begins anew on a heavenly plane. Just as the Catholic believer cycles toward rejuvenation, Gary and the other football players at Logos move through cycles in life. Their football practices involve day after day of repeated drills, and every football practice "ended as it had begun," according to Gary: with "two laps around the goal posts" (62). Indeed, as Gary puts it in a moment of contemplation, "[t]he thing to do […] is to walk in circles. This is demanded by the mythology of all deserts and wasted places. A number of traditions insist on it" (42). Likewise, Coach Creed sees the cyclical element of what has traditionally been viewed as linear apocalyptic time: even though Creed is described as "a man of destiny" whose "whole identity [is] dominated by some tremendous vision" (57) and "who [is unfolding] his life toward a single moment" (54), he recognizes that "things return to their beginnings" and create "a long circle from there to here" (200). In other words, Creed may always have an end in mind, but he recognizes that just as the end zone at which a football team begins its drive mirrors the end zone toward which it drives, the metaphorical end does not so vastly differ from the beginning.

Ironically, even though *End Zone* addresses the rejuvenating nature of the end, the novel concludes without a traditional dénouement. The word of Revelation is not made flesh, and

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[79] As Augustine argues, Judgment Day cleanses man for entrance into God's Kingdom: He suggests that "some shall in the last judgment suffer some kind of purgatorial punishments" and "those who shall be purified shall then please the Lord with sacrifices of righteousness, and consequently they themselves shall be purified from their own unrighteousness which made them displeasing to God" (*City of God*, Book XX, chapter 25).

DeLillo, as Mark Osteen argues, "deconstructs conventional plot structure" (161), starving his reader of a conventional ending just as Gary starves himself of nutrients in the novel's closing paragraph. The novel concludes with Gary's obedient albeit somewhat melodramatic attempt to purify himself by fasting, according to a bit of advice given to him earlier by Coach Creed. Creed, who sees the Catholic Saint Teresa of Avila as "a remarkable woman" because "[s]he used to eat food out of a human skull" in order to "remind herself of final things" (202), suggests that Gary engage in extreme asceticism: "self denial" that will enable him "to attain moral perfection" (201). The reader sees only the end result of Gary's fast: "High fevers burned a thin straight channel through [Gary's] brain," and "[i]n the end they had to carry [him] to the infirmary and feed [him] through plastic tubes" (242). In his weakened condition—in the infirmary receiving nourishment through synthetic tubes—Gary resembles a womb-bound fetus being fed through a maternal umbilical cord, but he has not really been purified or reborn. There exists no indication that he recovers from the trauma of killing the Indiana safety to carve some sort of new meaning out of his life. Approaching the end only leads him to the certainty of other, likely devastating, ends.

In part, definitive ends are rendered impossible in DeLillo's work because the mass media continually present the masses with visions of apocalypse, commodifying and further perverting the rejuvenating element of a cyclical mode of existence that originates in Catholicism for DeLillo. The airborne toxic event of *White Noise*, which comes at the novel's mid-point and hence fails to constitute a definitive end in any real sense, seems less than wholly real because it manifests a version of what the masses see daily on T.V. news programming that regularly airs footage of "floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes" (64). In *Mao II*, Scott, novelist Bill Gray's assistant, suggests that Bill sees the news functioning as "an apocalyptic force" that

"provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe" for the American masses (72), and the problem is that "[w]e don't even need catastrophes, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warnings" (72). Bill's position does not differ drastically from DeLillo's. As DeLillo suggests in a 1993 interview with Maria Nadotti, "I imagine people, individuals, watching their t.v. screens and having their own private apocalypses because right in front of them they have vivid images of real earthquakes and the like" (114). Personal apocalypse has even replaced universal apocalypse as a result of television, which, for DeLillo, becomes "a kind of instrument of apocalypse" and "[induces] an apocalyptic sense in people that has nothing to do with the end of the millennium" (Remnick 143). The legacy of Catholicism is at stake by virtue of the media's consumption of Catholicism's cyclical form. A Catholic end of days that results either in everlasting death or life dissipates. In its commodifed form, the endless end only provides perversions of rebirth and renewal.

In American national history and national memory, it is the repeated play of the recorded footage of the Kennedy assassination, on which DeLillo's *Libra* meditates, that initially presents the kind of media-driven endless end that *Americana* and *Mao II* recognize as initially emerging out of wholly Catholic origins. In *Libra*, Kennedy's personal apocalypse, the death of America's only Catholic president, takes place at the novel's end, and it constitutes not only "the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" (181), bringing about devastation on a national scale, but, to rephrase and to reappropriate Stephen Dedalus's words to Mr. Deasy in the Nestor chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), the nightmare from which America is still attempting to awake.[80] As radio personality Weird Beard suggests, people may be saying that Kennedy is "[n]ot tough enough to lead us to Armageddon" (382), yet it is precisely the effect of

[80] In the Nestor chapter of *Ulysses*, Dedalus tells school headmaster Garrett Deasy that "[h]istory […] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (34).

apocalypse that results from his death. Because it is the media that drive the Cold War–era nation of DeLillo's *Libra*, Americans must relive the traumatic moment of Kennedy's assassination in the absence of any purifying reward. Near the novel's conclusion, DeLillo portrays Beryl Parmenter as watching the news footage of Lee Harvey Oswald's death "over and over" (445), and years later, chronologically, historian Nicholas Branch continues to study the Zapruder video frames meticulously. Time, in America, seems to enter into a closed, inescapable, and nightmarish loop at the moment of Kennedy's execution. And the event proves, as Jack Ruby speculates it will, to be (at least for Americans) even "bigger in history than Jesus" (428): unlike Christ, who is prophesied to bring only one purifying end at some future time, the apocalyptic footage of Kennedy's assassination provides Americans with a framework for creating and consuming the endless end ad infinitum with no particularly positive result.

In the Beginning Was the End: Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Triumph of Death*

In *Underworld*, DeLillo returns to the era that gives birth to the commodified endless end: he examines the Cold War and the apocalyptic anxiety that came to pervade the consciousness of the American masses, and, as Leonard Wilcox argues in his consideration of the return of the Lacanian real in the novel, he examines "the belated effects of the bomb, both individually and socially, in [a] postwar America" that is finally able to consider the source of its trauma (122). It is no surprise that DeLillo's beginning literally and metaphorically constitutes a portrait of the end. He opens *Underworld* with "The Triumph of Death," a prologue that enables him not only to connect the Bobby Thomson home run with the second Soviet nuclear test, but a Catholic-inspired vision of terror with postmodern, mass-produced notions of apocalypse.

Through the section, DeLillo creates a freeze-frame around a historical moment that functions, for him, as the beginning of a Cold War–era that comes to propagate notions of the end as imminent. The section was initially titled "Pafko at the Wall" and was published independently in the October 1992 issue of *Harper's*. The revised title cites Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting of the same title, and it indicates a purposeful change of focus on DeLillo's part: with the revision, the focus of the opening of DeLillo's novel, and, ultimately, that of the novel on the whole, shifts in the direction of apocalypse.

The Triumph of Death, like the news media of DeLillo's earlier fiction, presents apocalypse as exclusively devastating, not rejuvenating in any sense. As Peter Thon notes, *The Triumph of Death* "is not so much death as *violent* death" (292). Bruegel paints a landscape with figures from all classes encountering Death and his skeleton army, which wreaks havoc on the sixteenth-century European landscape. In the painting's foreground, skeletons attack and seize the living, making them suffer for their sins in life. Some men are caught in a net; in the face of approaching armed skeletons, others flee into an open vault with a door marked with a cross, presumably a trap designed to capture them. In the background, executioners hang and slaughter men; a ship sinks in the sea; smoke from raging fires blackens the sky. As Perez Zagorin observes, "*The Triumph of Death* contains a fearsome vision of a sinful humanity attacked and overwhelmed by armies of skeletons and cadavers in a fiery landscape of apocalyptic devastation lacking any sign of redemption" (95).

Arguably, the vision of the end that Bruegel illustrates lacks the rejuvenating element of the Catholic Apocalypse because Bruegel may have been a lapsed Catholic who was more interested in critiquing sixteenth-century events than portraying Catholic Revelation. Bruegel lived during the Protestant Reformation, a time of great political and religious unrest in Europe

when many Dutch Catholics were abandoning their allegiances to Rome for Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anabaptism. Because little is known about Bruegel's life,[81] many scholars remain unable to conclude whether he remained loyal to Rome, particularly when they consider possible historical references for *The Triumph of Death*. For instance, Peter Thon, who argues that Bruegel was sympathetic to religious reform, suggests that *The Triumph of Death* functions as "Bruegel's bitter indictment of the Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands" in the 1560s (296), when Spanish Catholics, fearing the demise of their own religious tradition, persecuted religious dissidents in an attempt to revive allegiances with Catholicism. As Thon remarks, "the skeleton armies of death represent the Spanish soldiers and executioners. Their regime in the Netherlands *is* the Triumph of Death" (295).

The kind of Catholicism that emerges with the Spanish Inquisition is an undeniably terror-driven Catholicism at its worst, precisely the kind of Catholicism that DeLillo critiques and with which Cold War–era America appears able to identify. The end as it appears in Bruegel's painting is one that the late capitalist media can easily market. And they do. *The Triumph of Death* as DeLillo presents it—as a color reproduction printed in the pages of *Life* magazine—would actually have existed on the 3 October 1951 date on which the New York Giants played the Brooklyn Dodgers for that year's National League pennant. *Life*, then owned and published by TIME Inc., creating an interesting metaphor that DeLillo may have considered, printed a two-page color reproduction of Bruegel's representation of time's demise just two days before, in its 1 October 1951 edition. The image served as one of several illustrations for "The

[81] Essentially everything we know about Bruegel's life comes from a brief biography in Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*, or *Painter's Book*, published in 1604. All else is speculation based mostly on interpretations of his work.

Prado: Great Madrid Museum Houses Spain's Royal Art Treasures," a story about the museum, in which Bruegel's original painting continues to hang to this day.

Neither the story about the Prado nor the reproduction of Breugel's painting managed to make the *Life* magazine cover, which is graced with a pristine image of then Princess and future Queen Elizabeth II to illustrate an article concerning her visit to the United States; but Bruegel's reproduction, pried from what Walter Benjamin refers to as its "sphere of authenticity" (220), receives an arguably more interesting placement in the publication: it appears as *Life* magazine's centerfold. Hugh Heffner's *Playboy* had not yet emerged, but upon its appearance in 1953, a mere two years after the historical moment that DeLillo considers in the prologue, its two, facing, central pages (where it first placed Marilyn Monroe and where it continues to place images of the most desirable women of the day) became notorious for brandishing sexuality. According to DeLillo's late twentieth-century perspective, *The Triumph of Death*'s appearance as the centerfold certainly would have signified what DeLillo views as a contemporary fetishization of death and eschatology. Like Norman Mailer, who depicts an American army general as comparing the projectile of a bomb to "the flank curve of a man or woman's breast" (570) in *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), or like Stanley Kubrick, who associates sex with the atom bomb in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), DeLillo presents death as sexually charged. Terror-inducing apocalypse, in the context of the magazine, in the world of DeLillo's novels, and, more generally, in the aftermath of World War II, is what Americans appear to desire most.

DeLillo's presentation of the Bruegel reproduction in *Underworld* suggests both the endlessness of apocalypse that his earlier fiction alludes to as well as the ubiquity of late twentieth-century waste, the ruinous end-point of all material things. As a reproduction, the

image reinforces the notion of the end as inherently endless. The painting itself freezes time in a moment of metaphysical devastation, suggesting that the apocalypse might be understood as a continuous condition, but in the postmodern age of mechanical reproduction, the problem of the end's endlessness is manifold: Bruegel's image of a frozen end of time during which, as the caption to the reproduction puts it, "two skeletons [on a stark hillside] toll the death knell of the world" (66), can be reproduced incessantly, arguably feeding the human desire for apocalypse. The ease with which the image can be reproduced also explains why, a mere two days after its initial publication in *Life*, the reproduction of the work of art has *already* joined the heaps of garbage "coming down from all points" at the Polo Grounds in upper Manhattan (44), where F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover, who actually attended the game, according to DeLillo's "The Power of History" (1997), finds it "lighted and stuck" to his shoulder (41).

Hoover's initial and distinctively intimate encounter with the reproduction of Bruegel's painting, which takes place at the moment when Bobby Thomson hits the game-winning home run, takes on particular significance because of the controversy surrounding Hoover's own reign as F.B.I. director from 1924 until his death in 1972. Like Death personified, the historical Hoover functioned as an all-powerful gatekeeper of dark secrets and mysteries who, like Death as the fictionalized Hoover sees him, was "peaked for blood" (41). Under Hoover's authoritarian rule, particularly during the Cold War era that DeLillo depicts, Hoover became a bizarre father of Cold War anxiety, increasing the F.B.I.'s range of responsibilities by developing systems of surveillance that persecuted innocent individuals for purportedly leaning too far to the political left. In DeLillo's text, the reader meets Hoover on the brink of the formal onset of the Cold War, and hence on the brink of his full emergence as the Hoover whom history has come to know. DeLillo's younger Hoover may ask himself "why a magazine called Life would want to

reproduce a painting of such lurid and dreadful dimensions," yet Hoover "can't take his eyes off the page" (41). He sees its similarity to the present day, observing that Death "presses people in haunted swarms to the entrance of some helltrap, an oddly modern construction that could be a subway tunnel or an office" (41). And Hoover remains mesmerized by what he sees, even sexually aroused by it: "He finds a […] dead woman in the middle ground, straddled by a skeleton. The positioning is sexual, unquestioningly" (50). Furthermore, as the Giants fans erupt in chaotic celebration over their team's victory, clearly mirroring the scene of Bruegel's image, Hoover, who has, by this point, stowed the magazine pages to take them "home to study further" (54), fondles them, sending "his hand into his pocket to touch the bleak pages hidden there" (55). Like Bobby Thomson, who hits home for the Giants, the Bruegel reproduction and what it represents hits home for Hoover, tapping into the paranoiac tendencies that he already possesses—tendencies that will fuel the self he inhabits as the Cold War era progresses.

What DeLillo presents by way of Hoover's encounter with the Bruegel image, therefore, constitutes a literal and metaphorical link between life and death. Facing death in the image leads Hoover not to authentic purification, but to a perverted birth as the Hoover that history has come to know. To put it another way, he finds his life's twisted direction as he meditates on the image. He finds death sexy—as something that relates to the life-giving act of sex—and it is death that defines the terms by which he will come to frame Cold War–era America. Furthermore, the timeless baseball game ends with a bang as the Cold War begins with one. The "shot heard 'round the world" of October 3, 1951, like the original after which it is named—fired in 1776 at the Battle of Lexington and marking the onset of what became the American Revolution—leads to a rebirth of America. Whereas the original shot eventually steers America toward cleansing itself of British occupation—to freedom through nationhood—the shot of 1951

leads the nation not toward purity, but into a wasted era of incessant enslavement to a capitalist system in which death dictates human fears and desires.

Cycles of Life and Death: The Afterlife of Waste in *Underworld*

The link between life and apocalyptic death that DeLillo establishes in the prologue through his portrayal of *The Triumph of Death* is evident throughout the body of *Underworld*, which, like DeLillo's earlier fiction, expresses the nature of apocalypse as cyclical. In the midst of the Cold War era as DeLillo presents it, Klara Sax observes that very little difference exists between *Children's Games*, a Bruegel painting of life at its start, and *The Triumph of Death*. As Klara articulates, "I don't know what art history says about [*Children's Games*]. But I say it's not that different from the other famous Bruegel, armies of death marching across the landscape" (682). Both, for Klara, are "unwholesome" (682). Likewise, life and death are linked in DeLillo's portrayals of the development of twentieth-century nuclear warfare. As Nick Shay explains to Marian, his wife, and Brian Glassic, his colleague and Marian's secret lover, makers of early nuclear bombs needed to "mate" a "male element" with a female one, putting a cylinder "into an opening in the sphere" in order to create the bomb's "core material" (791). And these bombs emerge through perverted births out of womb-like locations in the earth, like the one in the New Mexico desert where Nick Shay's brother, Matt, works. Just as the Hoover of history is born as he fondles an image of death in his pocket, Matt Shay gives birth to nuclear weapons that cause death in his own Pocket, a government-sponsored "underground operation […] where weapons were conceived and designed" (404).

In the novel, DeLillo most overtly connects beginnings with endings by way of waste, the material remains at the apocalyptic end of commodified existence. Inevitably, the Cold War–era creation of nuclear weaponry leads to the ubiquity of not only nuclear waste, but to a thriving, consumer product-producing American economy that drives toward a Jamesonian late-capitalist, mass-waste-producing destiny. The waste management executive Nick Shay says that by the twentieth century's end, "[y]ou see [waste] everywhere because it is everywhere" (283). The world of DeLillo's novel constitutes a wasteland of Bruegelian proportions: "men in moon suits bury drums of nuclear waste" in deep, secret desert locations (122); Brian Glassic, Shay's colleague, witnesses mountains of it decomposing at the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island, "the organic, ever growing and shifting" mountain that represents "people's habits and impulses, their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their indulgences […]" (184). When baseball memorabilia collector Marvin Lundy smells human excrement as he walks the streets of San Francisco in search of the Bobby Thomson home run ball, the scent "move[s] him in strange ways" (307). Indeed, because waste is ubiquitous, it takes on metaphysical qualities. As waste theorist Jesse Detwiler suggests, no longer is a holy afterlife on the horizon of earthly existence: garbage is the "scenery of the future," and "[t]he more toxic the waste," the more "ominous and magical" its nature (286). Waste, in other words, is the new, impure symbol of apocalypse.

Material things in DeLillo's novel move through perversions of rejuvenation through the process of recycling. Things themselves experience mini-apocalypses, so to speak, and they are literally and metaphorically cleansed in order to be reborn in the physical world just as the Catholic's soul is cleansed and restored through the process of reconciliation. Recycling enables garbage to be born again—to reenter existence in a new life cycle on earth and subsequently to

face countless other ends. According to David H. Evans, Nick Shay, both as a professional waste manager and in his personal life, primarily concerns himself with "the reintegration of garbage back into the productive-consumptive system" (120). Shay observes garbage in the recycling process at one of his company's facilities as "[flying] down conveyer belts, four hundred tons a day, assembly lines of garbage, sorted, compressed and baled, transformed in the end to square-edged units, products again, wire bound and smartly stacked and ready to be marketed" (809). The recycling process his company engages in prompts Nick to describe himself and his colleagues as "Church Fathers of waste in all its transmutations" (102) who, as Evans suggests, engage in "converting or transubstantiating" junk (120). At home, Nick and Marian engage in similar rituals of recycling, "[separating their] waste into glass and cans and paper products. Then [they do] clear glass versus colored class. Then [they do] tin versus aluminum" (89). In the novel Marvin Lundy observes that the Cold War is "the one constant thing; it's honest; it's dependable" (170), and I would say that it is particularly so because it generates the waste that comes to function as the literal foundation of the late twentieth century. The Cold War may give DeLillo's Americans something to believe in and a perverted sense of the end, but it is waste that gives them a perversion of life everlasting. Whereas the Catholic sinner's soul is liberated from venial sin through confession and eventually through apocalypse, waste in DeLillo's novel becomes trapped in the physical world, in a seemingly inescapable late capitalist economy.

The end of the endless apocalyptic cycle in which waste is involved only definitively ends if capitalism itself sees its own doomsday of judgment in accordance with the millennial

progression of economic history that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels envisioned.[82] Repeatedly in the Manx Martin sections of DeLillo's novel, a black street preacher references the apocalyptic verses of Matthew 24, asserting that "[n]o one knows the day or the hour" (140). Yet as the preacher continues, he seems to contradict himself. He points to the American dollar bill, which pictures "Masonic codes" (354), and proposes that the Freemasonic founders of an American nation that emerges as so staunchly capitalist knew the future time of apocalypse. As the preacher asserts,

> "This is webs and scribbles all over the bill, front and back, that contains a message. This is not just rigamarole and cooked spaghetti. They predicting the day and the hour. They telling each other when the time is come. You can't find the answer in the Bible or the Bill of Rights. I'm talking to you. I'm saying history is written on the commonest piece of paper in your pocket." (354)

Freemasons may or may not have attempted to encode the secret of time's end in the spiritually-charged design of the American dollar bill, but the American dollar certainly does impact time's end in DeLillo's work because it constitutes the globe's most powerful piece of currency in what becomes known as the American Century. The American dollar drives the economic cycle in which the waste that Nick recycles participates.

Waste that escapes recycling to varying degrees in the novel—waste, notably, that in some way becomes implicated in death or a dramatic ending—takes on a more meaningful and sacred sort of afterlife as art or a priceless, modern-day, sanctified relic. For instance, the *original* Bruegel painting, which is absent from the body of DeLillo's text, is not for sale: as the *Life* magazine article indicates, it remains part of the Prado's permanent collection. Yet the economic cycle retains some grip over the seemingly transcendent thing: the masses who do not

[82] For a consideration of apocalyptic thought in the work of Marx and Engels, see Ernest L. Tuveson's "The Millennarian Structure of the Communist Manifesto" in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions* (1985).

visit the Prado are able to view its vision of devastation through cheap reproductions such as the one Hoover encounters. Similarly, the decommissioned B-52 bombers that were built to carry nuclear weapons during the Cold War are not recycled for scrap; instead, Klara Sax paints them and creates an outdoor art installation out of them in the Arizona desert. To see Klara's installation, Nick and Marian must travel across the country and then by hot air balloon. It is all but inaccessible. Yet the media enable the masses to consume some semblance of it through a flattened image: TIME Inc., which publishes Bruegel's painting in *Life*, also publishes a cover story about Klara's project.

In DeLillo's novel, the Bobby Thomson baseball, whose fame endures by virtue of its involvement in one of the most dramatic endings in baseball history, most successfully seems to escape consumption by the masses: it becomes, in its life after the game's apocalyptic ending, a priceless, modern-day Holy Grail. For Cotter Martin, the ball's original owner, the ball is sacred and "not for sale" (55), but Manx, his father, sees only economic worth when he steals it from his son: he fails to distinguish it from any and every other material thing in the world. The sinful act of unrightfully inserting the ball into the economic cycle paradoxically devalues it: Manx sells it for a mere $32.45 because he has no evidence that it is the real ball, and, as a result, the ball comes to exist in a realm that is dependent on blind, uncorroborated faith. All future baseball fans who seek out the ball, including Nick, are left to believe that the dirty, mundane, mass-produced thing before them is not just *a* ball, but *the* ball; they are left to have faith in the ball's true origins because those origins can no longer be traced definitively. Nick observes that the ball is "the only thing in [his] life that [he] absolutely had to own" (97), and, as a Dodgers fan, he seeks it out because it reminds him of the apocalyptic end his team faced, "[t]o commemorate [the Dodgers'] failure" (97). A clear true believer, he buys it for the small fortune

of $34,500, and certainly will not sell it in his lifetime. Hence, even more than the Bruegel painting or Klara's installation, which both receive media coverage because they remain verifiable by the machinery of the twentieth-century economy, the ball lives an afterlife as priceless and also relatively free from the economic cycle, thereby demonstrating DeLillo's departure from Jameson, who posits that absolutely *everything* produced is inevitably implicated in the capitalist economy.

Perhaps because so few material things escape the economic cycles of late capitalist existence, man appears incapable of seeing beyond the endless ends of the physical world toward a Catholic conception of everlasting life as opposed to endless death. Just like the landscape wastes away as it houses radioactive remnants of weaponry, traditional believers have been devastated by Cold War anxiety. Most characters in the novel engage in parodies of belief because an "array of systems" has "[displaced] religious faith with paranoia" (241). Their spirits, like waste, are recycled through mundane means. Baseball, not belief in God, comes to connect families and communities, and the "faith and passion of the fans" enables stadiums to function as modern-day churches, even sites for miracles such as the Bobby Thomson home run. Furthermore, the atom bomb has replaced God for DeLillo's Americans. As radar bombardier Louis Bakey explains, a bomb-dropping simulation exercise leads his body to glow "like the touch of God" (613). Indeed, as Louis flies through the simulated detonation, he feels as if he is "flying right through Judgment Day" (613).

Traditional believers operating outside the mainstream, late capitalist culture function as relics, much like the ball, amid the vast fallen masses who attempt to recycle their souls through mundane experiences. People outside the Bronx streets walked by Sister Edgar regularly judge her appearance as that of a faithful believer, even though she seems to have lost real faith, and

they see her as “a quaintness of ages past” (240); Albert Bronzini’s dying Catholic mother, “with a religious medal dangling” around her neck, is a woman “on display” (687), a symbol, even, for the dying true believer. The true believer becomes a spectacle in DeLillo’s late capitalist world because she has all but wasted away: Rosemary Shay, Nick and Matt’s self-proclaimed Catholic mother, who “didn’t have time, herself, to [pray the rosary] every day” because of her busy schedule (757), finds the sight of her elderly neighbor Bettina routinely “saying the rosary in the basement room with her friends” to be “amazing and strange and impressive” (756).

Just as the Bobby Thomson ball manages to transcend the economic cycle, the characters of DeLillo’s novel need to escape the mundane systems that offer them perversions of renewal for a system that offers some semblance of authentic spiritual rebirth. Nick articulates this mass need best, suggesting that he is “ready for something new, for a faith to embrace” (282). He continues to consider the Catholicism of his past as a means by which he can attain salvation: while “in correction” (299), he reads “books about God” to help himself recover from the trauma of accidentally shooting and killing George Manza, and in the relative present, he continues to ruminate over the suggestions of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century religious work written by an anonymous Catholic mystic who attempts to provide spiritual guidance for contemplative prayer. Yet the Catholic Church in its Cold War condition does not provide Nick with the faith he desires, for it, too, appears in need of rebirth, arguably since at least the time of the Spanish Inquisition of Bruegel’s painting. In the Cold War–era Catholic “tradition” in America, Catholic school students rehearse duck-and-cover exercises seemingly just as often as they pray, and Sister Gracie, “a soldier, a fighter for human worth” (249), and Sister Edgar, “a junior G-man” who “protect[s] a set of laws and prohibitions” (249), seem to have abandoned the contemplation of real religious mystery to function as parodies of agents of war and the

government. When Sister Edgar is on her own, she thinks of the horrors of Edgar Allen Poe and the textbook Catholicism of *The Baltimore Catechism*, not the mysteries of the rosary or the New Heaven and Earth that will arise at the Second Coming. And when we see her with Sister Gracie in the Bronx, she performs routine good works: the two sisters make their rounds through underprivileged communities, helping the masses who appear as devastated as the sinners of *The Triumph of Death*, but failing to inspire them to religious faith. By the twentieth century's end, the Catholic Church lacks the vibrancy and mystery it once possessed. As an institution, it belongs, like Nick, among fallen masses that appear poised for rejuvenation.

In the End Was the Word: Cyber-Millennium and the Death of the Real

Endless cycles of nearly inescapable waste may constitute an obvious end-result of a Cold War–era that commodifies and perverts the traditionally Catholic cycles of renewal, but DeLillo, who consistently works to identify multiple if not endless ends, recognizes cyberspace, where he concludes the epilogue and hence the whole of *Underworld*, as yet another end-result of the Cold War. By 1969, the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency, which, during the Cold War, was responsible for developing secret, high-tech weapons, created ARPANET, the nation's first major computer network and the antecedent to the Internet of the modern day. Initially, ARPANET was intended to provide a means by which to maintain command and control following a nuclear attack by connecting computers at government research sites across the nation. In its contemporary usage, the Internet, which emerged for general public consumption by the masses in the mid-1990s (when DeLillo wrote and published *Underworld*), enables similar ends on an infinitely grander scale: it facilitates communication

and the free flow of information, fostering connectivity (which critics have universally identified as a key subject of *Underworld*); it helps to control the damage of the nuclear age by, in some ways, diminishing waste production through the creation of a virtual realm; and it constitutes a space for life after the bomb's detonation that DeLillo presents as a parody of everlasting afterlife, to which, traditionally, Catholics escape after lifetimes of following the various cyclical practices of religious devotion. Ultimately, *Underworld* comes full-circle, ending, as it begins, with the triumph of death. By creating a virtual space for the apocalyptic materialization of divinity, the Internet renders real Catholic revelation intangible and Catholicism seemingly beyond resuscitation.

Some semblance of salvation at life's end initially appears possible through the Internet, which DeLillo characterizes as a near-mystical invention. It is Nick Shay who searches the web in the novel's final pages. He visits a site that his son, Jeff, mentions at the dinner table, "seventeen letters" (807), "*http://blk.www/dd*" (810), followed by "*dot com miraculum*" (807), to see something that once would have been impossible: previously unconnected people connected via the online debate about "a miracle that took place earlier in the decade" involving "a young girl [Esmerelda]" who "was the victim of a terrible crime" (808). Once Nick enters the website, what he actually sees remains unclear: the narrative point of view switches from his own to that of Sister Edgar, and once Nick types his first keystroke, DeLillo's reader sees her with Sister Gracie en route to the site of the purported miracle, a now cleared Bronx billboard that formerly advertised Minute Maid orange juice. The billboard appears to serve as yet another example of late-capitalist American mass production, consumption, and waste, but it enables Sister Edgar to be born again. Sister Edgar, who has consistently critiqued church reform, "Pentecostals seeking to receive the gift of the Spirit, laying hands, shouting out words, prophesying—the whole

rocking socking package that makes Edgar want to run and hide" (814), stands in the crowd and sees Esmerelda's face as the train passes by, suddenly feeling "something break upon her. An angelus of clearest joy" (822). Like the Pentecostals she formerly scorns, she engages in a physical expression of spirit: "She embraces Sister Grace. She yanks off her gloves and shakes hands, pumps hands with the great-bodied women who roll their eyes to heaven" (822).

DeLillo's reader inevitably faces the very question that purportedly drives the website's existence: is the miracle authentic, or is the vision, as the unmoved Sister Gracie suggests, a mere "trick of light" (821)? Duvall suggests that "[d]espite Sister Edgar's conviction that the source of the revelation is God, the novel strongly implies that [Bronx graffiti artist] Ismael Muñoz is responsible for the image of Esmerelda" (Underworld*: A Reader's Guide* 61). Perhaps he painted the billboard, just as he used to mark the train cars that now illuminate it. More to the point, the miracle fails to operate on a wholly transcendent plane. Like *The Triumph of Death* and Klara Sax's painted bombers, the miracle of Esmerelda's face attains media coverage. Television trucks film the masses who gather at the billboard two nights after Sister Edgar visits it, surely playing and replaying the scene on the nightly news, and a mere night after Sister Edgar's pilgrimage, vendors appear en masse to "sell laminated images of Esmerelda printed on prayer cards" and pinwheels that "never stop spinning" (823), like the all-consuming cycles of the capitalist system they feed by virtue of their sales. Furthermore, the Internet reports the miracle to Nick.

On the other hand, the authenticity of the miracle may not much matter; what matters is that the staunch Sister Edgar, "a figure from a universal church" (822), who appears anything but able to be emotionally touched throughout DeLillo's novel, is finally moved. By moving Sister Edgar, the miracle attains credibility because a traditional authority recognizes it. At the same

time, the miracle does the seemingly impossible, symbolically moving what DeLillo characterizes as a Catholic Church in need of resuscitation. Sister Edgar, whose faith has been reduced to performing good works and feeding the fear of children in the Cold War–era, finally remembers what it means to believe; once again, she is enamored with mystery, the seemingly mundane infused with transcendental spirit. She dies soon after, bearing witness to the vision of Esmerelda, and enters not into heaven, precisely, but to a place that Gerald Howard calls a "very Catholic conception of cyberspace" (128): following Nick's second keystroke in the pages of DeLillo's novel, the reader learns that she virtually lives on, "not naked exactly but […] open—exposed to every connection you can make on the world wide web" (824).

Nick may suggest that "[t]he real miracle is the web" (808), and Ismael may echo his thought, observing that a personal god and a personal computer are virtually the same thing,[83] but DeLillo is somewhat critical of the information age. Although he represents the Internet as enabling transcendence as supermarkets and automatic teller machines enable it in his earlier works, he suggests, simultaneously, that it leaves contemporary humankind, such as Sister Edgar, not in heaven necessarily, but still in "the grip of systems" (825). DeLillo has explained that he named Sister Edgar as he did in order to "to make the comparison" with J. Edgar Hoover (157), but by the novel's conclusion, Sister Edgar no longer resembles Hoover because the vision of Esmerelda clearly transforms her, enabling her to experience authentic spiritual rebirth. It is the Internet that revitalizes the G-man Edgar of old, bringing her full-circle and linking her, by virtue of her name with a mere "click, a hit" (826), with the great G-man of history and of the novel's prologue. Hence, the spiritual rebirth brought on by the experience of witnessing Esmerelda's face, which the reader sees through Nick's Internet search, is literally and

[83] As Ismael puts it, "Some people have a personal god, okay. I'm looking to get a personal computer. What's the difference, right" (813)?

metaphorically flattened by the computer screen that mediates Nick's Internet access, and all traces of the movement of the immobile—the resuscitation of Catholicism through Sister Edgar's revelation—disappear. In the depthless annals of the Internet, demystified Catholicism remains steadfast.

The novel's end mirrors its beginning in a number of ways, enabling DeLillo to continue presenting apocalypse as a purifying force that exists in a cycle. In the parodic afterlife that the world of the web creates, endless ends remain inescapable perhaps because, as DeLillo puts it earlier in the novel, "[a]ll technology refers to the bomb" (467). DeLillo, who opens the prologue with second-person narration, observing that Cotter Martin "speaks in your voice, American" (11), comes full-circle, closing the epilogue with another second-person address: he conflates Nick as an Internet searcher going to a website about the atom bomb with the reader and, arguably, with himself as author as well. As DeLillo expresses it,

> When you decide on a whim to visit the H-Bomb home page, [Sister Edgar] begins to understand. Everything in your computer, the plastic, silicon and mylar, every logical operation and processing function, the memory, the hardware, the software, the ones and zeroes, the triads inside the pixels that form the on-screen image—it all culminates here. (825)

And it is precisely the bomb that "you" see at the H-bomb site, exploding endlessly, "[s]hot after shot, bomb after bomb" (826). The atomic bomb explosions on the H-bomb site resemble, in their perpetuity, the endlessness of Bruegel's frozen moment of apocalypse in *The Triumph of Death*. Furthermore, if Sister Edgar were living, she might die again and again, bearing witness to the site's explosive content: in contemporary terms, her life would end, but in Elizabethan ones, she might experience something that mirrors the sexually charged experience the other Edgar has as he fondles the Bruegel reproduction in his pocket. Thus, the Internet provides nothing new: it provides no vision of life as endless; it merely recycles the endless end that

television news initially hijacks from Catholicism and markets to the American masses, offering it a virtual plane on which to operate.

It seems only appropriate that DeLillo struggled a bit with writing an end to his meditation on apocalypse and its endlessness. According to his 1999 interview with Maria Moss, he had planned to conclude *Underworld* with Sister Edgar's response to witnessing the ever-exploding atom bomb—when "[t]he jewels roll out of her eyes and she sees God" (826)—but, like Lenny Bruce, *Underworld*'s prophet of apocalypse who defers completing his fictionalized 29 October 1962 comic act because he "wasn't sure how to end" it after the Cuban Missile Crisis concludes peacefully (632), DeLillo defers the end of *Underworld*. If, according to a simple English translation of the beginning of the Gospel of John, there was only the word in the beginning, according to *Underworld*, DeLillo's own postmodern gospel, there, too, is only a word at the end. At some point during his final three to four weeks of work on the novel, DeLillo asserts that he "[came] up with a single word, 'Peace'" (Moss 157). He convincingly asserts that "the word […] is not meant ironically, it's meant seriously" (Moss 157), and he views the word as illustrating "[w]hat happens between Sister Edgar and J. Edgar Hoover" (Moss 156)—a communion, of sorts, or a "fitting together, a binding together" that is, at least "to some degree," about redemption (157).

I would argue that it illustrates a bit more than that.

Nick's contemplation of the literal last word of the novel suggests that a very real challenge exists to reviving a rejuvenating Catholic tradition in the information age. I suggest that the word "Peace" alludes to the Millennium[84] in a Catholic context—the city of heaven about which Augustine speaks, an eternal kingdom where life, not death, triumphs; where "[t]rue

[84] For Christians, the Millennium is the thousand-year period of peace on earth as it is described in Revelation 20:1-6.

peace shall be" and "where no one shall suffer opposition either from himself or any other" (Book XXII chapter 13). The word offers to provide a religious revelation for Nick and for the "you" with which DeLillo has conflated him. Nick is aware that the "single seraphic word" on the computer screen has many meanings (826), and in its Catholic context, it may even be the elusive word that Nick seeks since reading *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which advises against seeking God through knowledge (which runs rampant in the information age) rather than blind faith and love, and recommends, in its seventh chapter, that we develop "a naked intent that fixes us to the idea of God" around "a single word. Even better, a single word of a single syllable" (295). As Nick and "you" glance away from the computer monitor "for a moment" and see an "offscreen, unwebbed" world, in which "the tissued grain of deskwood" is "*alive* in light," the "tenor of things" is "thick *lived*," and "the apple core [goes] sepia in the lunch tray" (827; my emphasis), the impossibility of "imagin[ing] the word on the screen becoming a thing in the living world, taking all its meanings […] out into the streets somehow" ensues (827). Symbolically, peace literally and metaphorically can only seem to exist in a mystical, virtual state. In the end, the word is *not* made flesh; it remains, in form, "only a sequence of pulses on a dull screen" (827), and, for better or worse, the endlessness of apocalypse in a reality that itself is dying with the continuous expansion of cyberspace remains the only remotely tangible Truth.

Chapter 4:

After the Apocalypse: Faith for the Muslim Other in Post-9/11 Fiction

On 11 September 2001, Americans were jolted into a new era in history that remains dominated by debates involving religious faith. Against the backdrop of a notoriously clear, blue sky, airplanes piloted by al-Qaeda terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and an open field near the small American Main-Street town of Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing over three thousand people and realizing the sort of devastation that had come to exist—after the year 2000 had come and gone without a literal bang—almost exclusively in the apocalyptic American imagination. Within the span of a single horrifying day, the "nuclear, faraway, vaporized" "metaphor" of devastation dissolved; instead, 9/11 was, according to Jean Baudrillard, "the absolute event, the 'mother' of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have ever taken place" ("The Anorexic Ruins" 34, *The Spirit of Terrorism* 4). Manmade apocalypse was again made a reality,[85] apparently bearing the power to change the face of America and the fiction that authors writing about America produced in the years that followed.

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[85] American newspaper stories reflected the ways in which the popular American imagination connected the terrorist attacks with the biblical end of time. In *The Christian Science Monitor*, Joe Stein, a construction worker in Los Angeles watching the events of the day unfold on CNN at a breakfast eatery, is quoted as observing that "[t]his really does look like the apocalypse" (Tyson 3). Similarly, in the lead story of *The New York Times* on Wednesday, 12 September, journalist Serge Schmemann associated the vision of chaos in New York with medieval Dutch paintings that portray biblical subjects such as the Last Judgment, noting that "[s]cenes of chaos and destruction evocative of the nightmare world of Hieronymus Bosch, with smoke and debris blotting out the sun, were carried by television into homes and workplaces across the nation" (A1). Likewise, Geraldine Baum and Paul Lieberman of the *Los Angeles Times* suggested that "[p]eople likened [the terrorist attacks in New York] to a bomb, to midnight, to a hurricane and finally, when the air was choked with soot and smoke, to hell" (A1).

Although the 9/11 attacks reflect a clear hostility between al-Qaeda and America as the former conceive of it, experts writing about the attacks have been unable to agree on a specific reason for them,[86] and among the only certainties Americans have are very general ones. On the one hand, the attacks had *something* to do with globalization as the late capitalist world has manifested it. Al-Qaeda, which "constructs itself as simultaneously the militant vanguard and the most faithful fragment of an international religious community" (Lincoln 75), rejected global capitalism by destroying the twin towers, gargantuan emblems of that which they loathe. On the other hand, the attacks clearly had *something* to do with religion, the age-old conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West. In the most basic sense, the attacks pitted believers against one another, realizing the sort of prescient theoretical predictions that Samuel P. Huntington put forth in the 1996 publication of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.[87] The Christian nation that Puritan settlers established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may have put God's name on the lips of children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in American classrooms and in the hands of their parents, carrying the nation's

[86] In *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (2006), Lawrence Wright intimates, simply by virtue of his focus on biographies of terrorists and events that well predate 9/11, that the personal histories of al-Qaeda members, the interplay of those histories, and sheer circumstance, to a degree, caused the atrocity. By contrast, in *The Age of Terror: America and the World after September 11* (2002), Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda suggest that it is wholly possible that "[i]n striking against targets nearly 7,000 miles away from his Afghan lair, part of bin Laden's intention was to stir up populations closer to home" not only "against the Great Satan, but against their own repressive, corrupt, frightened rulers" (xv). Fred Halliday presents yet other causes in *Two Hours That Shook the World: September 11 2001, Causes and Consequences* (2001), arguing that the 11 September attacks were generated by what he terms "the greater West Asian crisis" (26), which he views as having "three general features": a "new pattern of linkages between hitherto separate conflicts" in Iran, Afghanistan, and the sub-continent; "the crisis of the state in this region"; and "the emergence of a new, transnational and fundamentalist Islam" (38).

[87] In the book, which expounds upon a 1992 essay Huntington delivered at the American Enterprise Institute and "The Clash of Civilizations," a 1993 article he published in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington argues that "[i]n the post–Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural" (21).

currency, but America was now viewed as godless, condemned by Islamic al-Qaeda terrorists who diverged from the foundations of Islam to engage in *jihad* as they misunderstood and continue to misunderstand it[88]—terrorists who claimed that *they* were the ones who believed devoutly—that *they* were the ones with God on their side.

Hence, the narrative that generations of Americans had come to embrace—one based on the supposition that America is a new Eden, the "city upon a hill" of which Winthrop speaks in "A Model of Christian Charity" (216)—is ruptured with the 11 September attacks. As Don DeLillo suggests in "In the Ruins of the Future," his essay on 9/11, "[t]he narrative ends in the rubble" of the World Trade Center (34). The new reality that confronted many Americans after 11 September, one that would inevitably be part of the "counter-narrative" that Americans would have to generate in the wake of 9/11 ("In the Ruins" 34), suggested that Americans alone were

[88] As Malise Ruthven notes, the hostility that al-Qaeda's members harbor toward the Western world "is widely presumed to be the outcome of [its] fundamentalist views" (2), yet Islamic fundamentalists who comprise the network believe very different things from most Muslims, even those who might be characterized as fundamentalists. Islam is a peaceful religion that teaches equality and justice, suggesting that all people are equal before God. As Annemarie Schimmel explains, it prescribes "[f]ive main religious duties," known as pillars, to devout believers: the first pillar, "the profession of faith, *shahāda*," is the most important one, and "basically the foundation of the others" (34); the second is ritual prayer; the third is "the alms tax," known as *zakāt*, which functions as "a protective measure against both capitalism and communism, provided it is distributed by taxing the wealthy and supporting the needy" (35); the fourth is fasting "[d]uring the whole month of Ramadam, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar year" (35); and the fifth is "the pilgrimage to Mecca," the *hajj*, which is "performed during the last lunar month" (37). Al-Qaeda, founded in Afghanistan by Osama bin Laden during the Afghan war of 1979-1989, seeks to establish an Islamic state and glorifies violence under the guise of what Schimmel refers to as "[t]he so-called Holy War, *jihād*, (literally 'striving, exertion' in the way of God)," which "was never made a pillar" (35). For most Muslims, *jihad* involves not only engaging oppressors in armed aggression, which the Quran forbids, but also engaging in other types of struggles: with "one's self" or ego; with "one's wealth and intellect"; and with "one's greed, bad intentions, and lust" (Sardar 75-76). But al-Qaeda members consider *jihad* primarily in terms of their aim to "destroy America," which they view, on the whole, as inherently antithetical to Islam. They seek to annihilate the nation that Iranian religious leader and politician Ayatollah Khomeini referred to as the "Great Satan." Thus, they comprise, as Ziauddin Sardar observes, a "particular sort of Islam" that the majority of Muslims do not even necessarily regard as Islamic in spirit (101).

not exceptional—that, as DeLillo observes in his 9/11 novel, *Falling Man* (2007), "God's name was on the tongues of killers and victims both" (134). Just as al-Qaeda hijackers followed meticulous instructions "drenched in piety" (Lincoln 11), urging them to "[p]ray during the night and be persistent in asking God to give [them] victory" (Lincoln, "Appendix A: Final Instructions" 97), to "strike" the American "non-believers" exclusively "for God's sake" and not their own (Lincoln, "Appendix A: Final Instructions" 102), Americans in and around the World Trade Center, on United Airlines Flight 93, in the Pentagon, and watching the surreal horrors of the day unfold before their eyes on their television screens prayed to God for safety and strength, for comfort and guidance through what historians have arguably come to know as American history's most tragic day.

This chapter focuses on the authorial response to the ruptured narrative of old, the narrative in the rubble, considering the means by which American authors generated new narratives—stories written in the aftermath of the end, the point at which narrative space appears to have run out. The genre we have come to know as the "9/11 novel" explicitly or implicitly addresses the events of 11 September, attempting to understand terrorism, to capture, to whatever degree it is possible, the palpable distress that came to pervade American culture following the attacks, the palpable life-changing *feel* of the event. More to the point, many of these novels address the changing place of faith in America. Whereas insiders to Christian American culture—Christian authors such as Don DeLillo and John Updike—seem to argue that some semblance of transcendence is possible through seemingly mundane, modern means in post-9/11, late capitalist America, Philip Roth, Mohsin Hamid, and Laila Halaby, relative outsiders, or what Emmanuel Levinas might refer to as "Others," suggest that non-Christians are wholly lapsed and unable to write vibrant, faithful narratives for themselves in a modern, predominantly Christian,

post-9/11 nation dominated by late capitalist ideology. Thus, the new narrative that emerges out of the rubble comprises nothing short of a schizophrenic one as Americans and the authors who fictionalize them attempt to contend with challenges to the traditional understanding of what it means to be a believer in America.

Inside and Out: Middles for Christians and Non-Christian Others in 9/11 Novels

DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) suggests that even though 9/11 prompts clear crises of faith[89] and even though al-Qaeda terrorists appear to believe more staunchly than the masses of Americans the book fictionalizes, transcendence without orthodoxy for Americans remains wholly plausible, as it is in so many of the novels that DeLillo composed on the eve of the millennium. Characters in *Falling Man* question their faith, most notably Lianne Glenn, the estranged wife of Keith Neudecker, a 9/11 survivor: in the aftermath of 9/11, she wants nothing more than "to snuff out the pulse of the shaky faith she'd had for much of her life" (65). Yet eradicating her faith proves to be an impossibility because the apparently mundane world of DeLillo's novel remains a sacred one in which even a laundry room resembles a "monk's cell

[89] As Patrick Allitt explains, "[m]any police officers, firefighters, and relatives of the victims told reporters that the horror made them doubt God, at least for a time" (253). More commonly, however, Americans seemed to experience an intensified need for faith, inundating places of religious worship after hearing news of the attacks. An article published in *The New York Times* on 15 September 2001 observes that although New York City clergy members were "hardly as visible as the rescue workers sifting through debris in New York and at the Pentagon, they [were] deeply involved in the aftermath of the tragedy," because, as Reverend Forrest Church observes in the article, "[t]he deep hunger to be together" was so pervasive and "palpable" (Niebuhr B6). Indeed, the need to worship—to find solace in the comforting fold of religion—was felt not only by New Yorkers and those living in Washington D.C. or Shanksville, but by Americans throughout the country. According to *The News-Gazette*, "[i]n Champaign-Urbana as across the land, churches, synagogues and other places of communal sharing filled to overflowing" the night of 11 September (Bloomer and Wood A1).

with a pair of giant prayer wheels beating out a litany" (151), and poker constitutes "a forbidden religion springing up again" as players congregate "[l]ike early Christians in hiding" in southwestern American deserts reminiscent of the Holy Land (203). DeLillo's believers might best be typified by Lianne's father, Jack, who, in his life, had remained "devoted to the Latin mass as long as he didn't have to sit through it" (68), and who failed to make a "distinction between Catholics and lapsed Catholics" because "the only thing that mattered was tradition" (68). In the aftermath of 9/11, the terrorists may appear to be the more staunch believers, as "God's name" is "on every tongue throughout the countryside" they occupy (172), but in actuality, they may not be that different from the purportedly lapsed Americans they condemn: Hammad, the fictionalized terrorist of DeLillo's novel, expresses interest in the profane when he steps "over the prone form of a brother in prayer as he [makes] his way to the toilet to jerk off" (80). And, by the end of the novel, it is Lianne who appears to experience the most profound religious moment of DeLillo's text, in a church, even if she feels transcendence not necessarily from the orthodoxy of her act, but from the crowd, the community. As DeLillo describes it, "[s]he was stuck with her doubts but liked sitting in church" because of "a sense of others. Others bring us closer. Church brings us closer" (233). The *mysterium tremendum*, God's immanent presence, remains "possible" (236), as does authentic albeit untraditional religious experience.

Similarly, Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), which conveys a message analogous to the one that *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996) expresses on the eve of the millennium, suggests that real faith fails to exist in the utter absence of the modern, late capitalist moment because engaging in modernity enables the true believer to attain a mature sense of God and thus a fully developed and sustainable faith. Updike characterizes Ahmad Ashwamy Mulloy, the eighteen-year-old

protagonist of *Terrorist*, as viewing himself as a true believer who is following the straight path. In actuality, however, Ahmad is quintessentially immature, idealistic, and gullible—able to be "influenced by the wrong people" in his youth and in his young adulthood (239).[90] Although Ahmad is American-born, the son of Teresa Mulloy, a lapsed Catholic-American mother of Irish heritage, and Omar Ashwamy, a lapsed Muslim from Egypt who abandons Ahmad when he is only three, he rejects his mother's insider white American heritage. He attempts to find, in Islam, "a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning" (99). Such an effort in and of itself is juvenile, as is Ahmad's utter vilification of cinema for being "saturated in despair and unbelief" (70) and, more broadly, his vilification of America as a fallen, capitalist realm rife with sinners who "lack true faith," who are "unclean" and "not on the Straight Path" (3). Ahmad sees the world in terms of a naïve, good versus evil binary, in which Muslims are good and Westerners are evil. Thus he fails to recognize that the purportedly faithful Muslims who employ him to martyr himself for the one true God by bombing the Lincoln Tunnel after the anniversary of the 11 September attacks are also driven by money: they eagerly collect "quantities of green American currency" from the inside of an ottoman Ahmad delivers to them after obtaining a job as a delivery driver for the Chehab family at Excellency Furniture (194). More to the point, they eagerly cast him as what Jack Levy, Ahmad's former high school guidance counselor, calls "a fall guy" (309). By the end of the novel, after Ahmad narrowly avoids bombing the tunnel—hearing Jack's counsel as Jack rides

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[90] Ahmad is precisely the sort of youth experiencing a crisis of identity that Eboo Patel, an American Muslim from India, describes in *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (2007). As Patel explains,

> [a]s we [Muslims] grow older and seek a unified Muslim way of being, it is too often Muslim extremists who meet us at the crossroads of our identity crisis. They say, "Look how Muslims are being oppressed all over the world. You, who are living in the belly of the beast and indulging in excesses, have only one way to purify yourself: to become death and kill. (13)

with him and the rigged bomb in the truck and seeing innocent children playing in the back of a bronze V90 station wagon bring him to the revelation that "God does not want to destroy" (306)—Ahmad despairs that Americans "have taken away [his] God" (310). But it is only the God of his naïve youth that dissipates. If Ahmad is to remain a true believer, if he is actually to follow any semblance of an authentic Straight Path, Updike suggests that he must do so without shunning the reality of his multifaceted identity and the modern times that inevitably help to define it.

In *Everyman* (2006), by contrast, Roth suggests that the sort of transcendence through traditional Jewish stories that he portrayed as possible on the eve of the millennium has become an impossibility in the wake of 9/11, an era dominated by a sort of American Christianity and late capitalist ideology that Roth characterizes as didactic and lifeless. The novel parodies the fifteenth-century English morality play of the same name—a play that attempts to teach its audience to perform good deeds because they alone accompany man beyond the grave. Like his medieval counterpart, Roth's protagonist has lived a life of sin, and at the moment of his death several years following the 9/11 attacks, which are mentioned only in passing, he has no particularly good deeds of which to speak. The novel begins with the nameless protagonist's funeral and proceeds to describe his faithless life as an advertising executive. The nameless protagonist believes that "[r]eligion [is] a lie" (51); he believes only in the human body. As the narrator explains, if he were ever to compose "an autobiography, he'd call it *The Life and Death of the Male Body*" (52). Yet despite Roth's and his protagonist's expressed secularism, a palpable void presents itself for Roth's reader because the protagonist has lived a materialist, hedonistic life with no real dénouement. Furthermore, the narrator describes his life in a flat, moralizing, matter-of-fact tone. Even though traditional Judaism may not provide a significant

means for attaining transcendence as Roth or his protagonist sees it, Roth invites his reader to ponder whether the nameless protagonist could have made more of his life by escaping the clutches of capitalist American culture—by making a spiritually richer if not more culturally Jewish (as opposed to WASP-ish) story for himself. This sort of spiritually rich life might enable the novel's narrator to transcend the Christian allegorical mode he parodies and to engage in the sort of vibrant Jewish storytelling that invigorates Zuckerman's imagination on the eve of the millennium in *American Pastoral* (1997). Indeed, as I have argued, this sort of Jewish storytelling previously kept Roth connected to his traditional Jewish cultural roots if not his religious ones and enabled transcendence by way of seemingly secular means.

At the time that Kristiaan Versluys wrote *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009), his consideration of 9/11 fiction, he wondered whether emerging "9/11 fiction will remain the preserve of male white writers or whether it will be marked by more gender and ethnic diversity" (183), and a more diverse body of 9/11 fiction does indeed emerge. As the son of Jewish immigrants, Roth may be a relative outsider to Christian America, but he is not nearly as "Other," to use the Levinasian term upon which Versluys bases the final chapter of his book, as either Mohsin Hamid or Laila Halaby. Neither Hamid nor Halaby is an American author definitively: Hamid was born in Pakistan, spent nearly half his life living in the United States, and now divides his time among New York, London, and Lahore; Halaby was born in Lebanon to a Jordanian father and an American mother and now resides in Arizona, where she has spent most of her life. Both Hamid and Halaby appear to shun Islamic fundamentalism in their own lives, yet, to varying degrees, they remain interested in Islam as a subject in their fictional works. As Hamid asserted in a 3 June 2009 interview that aired on National Public Radio, he was "raised as a Muslim" but he is not defined by his "religion or [his] nationality. We are complex

beings," he said, "and this aspect of people often gets lost" ("Novelist"). Similarly, Halaby expresses her interest in religion with respect to social justice, not the sort of fundamentalist Islam that Westerners often view as oppressive to women. As she explained in a February 2008 interview, "the one thing that has always stuck with me"—the one thing she would "want Americans to know about the Quran"—is a progressive one according to American standards: "that in the eyes of god, we are all equal" and that "Islam is a very egalitarian religion" ("Conversation").

In their 9/11 novels, Hamid and Halaby contend, like Roth, with the problem of being non-Christians occupying an ill-fitting, Christian American narrative in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, and they portray forging a middle space for faith as impossible in a post-9/11 America that is pervaded by elements of modernity and capitalist ideology. On the surface, the problem in both novels is that the lapsed Islamic protagonists fail to adhere to the most basic tenet of Islam, the first and most important of the five pillars of Islamic faith, which requires Muslims to declare the two parts of the *shahāda*—that there is no god but God and that Mohammed is God's messenger. More to the point, however, the problem is that they believe in profane, material, and what traditional Muslims view as quintessentially American things. In the absence of faith and in the devastation of 9/11, both Hamid's and Halaby's protagonists find themselves occupying post-apocalyptic American spaces from which they must escape in order to forge identities that adhere more harmoniously with the Islamic religious background that continues to pull at them. These characters most certainly do not view American late capitalism or modernity as being egregiously inimical—the way al-Qaeda's members view it—nor do they view religion, let alone fundamentalist Islamic faith, as being characteristically good per se. The characters of the novels opt against continuing to worship the false god of American late

capitalism that initially prompts their respective immigrations to America, but they opt against returning to their Islamic roots definitively. Thus, both authors suggest that a middle space for faith is wholly necessary. But outsiders to American Christian culture, especially those who emerge from Muslim backgrounds in the anti-Islamic aftermath of 9/11, must look beyond America, not within it, to forge any sort of meaningful middle.

Capitalism's Fundamentals in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), which takes the form of an awkward, uneasy conversation between Changez, the first-person Pakistani narrator, and an unnamed American at a café in the Old Anarkali district of Lahore, Pakistan, functions as a dramatization of the ideological conflict between the Islamic East and the American West in a post-9/11 era characterized by instability and uncertainty. The novel was originally composed prior to 9/11, but Hamid revised it to focus on al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks on America and the emotions that emerged in their wake. In the novel, Changez relates his experience in America to the unnamed American—an experience that ranges from just before to just after 11 September. He describes his experience as a competitive student at Princeton University; the acquisition of his first job at Underwood Samson, a high-stakes consulting firm; his attempt at developing a relationship with Erica, a quintessentially American girl who is unable to recover emotionally from the death of her former boyfriend, Chris; and his eventual abandonment of the American Dream and departure from America for his home of Lahore following the 11 September attacks. In essence, what the aptly named Changez describes are the changes he experiences as a result of his identity crisis: no longer is he able to conceive of himself as a believer in capitalism, which he

characterizes as the real object of American fundamentalist faith; instead, he must negotiate the religious background of his upbringing with the capital-driven reality of a globalized modernity in order to attempt to generate a new, more fulfilling identity.

Though the novel's title suggests that Hamid intends to address religious fundamentalism, presumably in its Islamic form, Hamid's use of the terms "fundamentalism" and "fundamentals" in the novel indicates that his prime concern involves fundamentalist faith in American capitalism. Erica's father may make the first mention of fundamentalism in the novel, critiquing Islamic fundamentalism by observing, in a conversation he has with Changez, that Pakistanis have "some serious problems" with it, but Changez only discusses fundamentalism in terms of his position with Underwood Samson, a firm that runs on a "guiding principle" that is "drilled into [employees] since [their] first day at work" (98). As Changez explains, the company urges its employees to "*focus on the fundamentals*" by paying "a single-minded attention to financial detail" (98). Like *Moth Smoke* (2000), Hamid's first and only other novel to date, much of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* might be read allegorically.[91] For instance, Erica

[91] Set in 1998, the year during which Pakistan performed its first nuclear tests in response to neighboring India's tests, *Moth Smoke*, which functions as a critique of the effects of globalization on Pakistan, can be read as an allegory of the historical narrative of Mughal prince Aurangzeb's rise to power. Hamid explains his historical reference to the Mughal Empire in a 24 July 2000 interview published in *Newsweek*:

> In 17th-century India, the Emperor Shahjahan's eldest son, Darashikoh, a cosmopolitan, wine-drinking poet, was heir to the throne. But he was killed by his brother, Aurangzeb, a general with orthodox Islamic views. That conflict over succession took Mughal India in a direction that was not sustainable. The rigidity of Aurangzeb's puritanical fundamentalism could not contain the diversity of India. ("A Call to Arms for Pakistan")

Furthermore, Hamid explains his allegorization of history:

> My story posits that Pakistan faces a similar choice today. But my Aurangzeb represents the entrenched elite—an impediment to the country's development. Darashikoh in my story is his opposite, the violent backlash to that system. He's secular, but his angry reaction stands for Pakistan's religious movements, its violent crime. ("A Call to Arms for Pakistan")

might be read as an allegorical representation of Am*erica* and her dead boyfriend, Chris, might be a representation of the death of the kind of fundamentally *Chris*tian nation that *Chris*topher Columbus envisioned in his efforts to expand *Chris*tendom. But no allegory resonates quite as poignantly as that of Underwood Samson, U.S., representative of the United States, focusing exclusively on the details of money. By suggesting that Underwood Samson sustains a fundamental belief in details pertaining to money and making a profit, Hamid essentially argues that America has transcended its characterization as a nation in which faith and capitalism go hand-in-hand,[92] becoming far more a capitalist nation than a Christian one. It is what Changez refers to as "systematic pragmatism" that "underpins [American] success" (36-37). It is the nation's "pragmatic and effective" capitalist system, not God, that binds Hamid's Americans together by the twenty-first century (4).

Hamid presents America and American values as undermining the ideology that a practicing Muslim might hold. Like many twentieth- or twenty-first-century immigrants to America, Changez arrives with the hope of realizing the American Dream: he aims to acquire an education and get a job, thereby escaping the swiftly diminishing social class of his Pakistani family. Although he never appears to express any semblance of devout Islamic faith, he thanks God upon hearing that he has received the Underwood Samson job offer because it will make his "concerns about money and status things of the distant past" (14). However, the life he lives after starting the job at "the Underwood Samson pantheon" separates him more and more from his Islamic roots (42). Changez continues to drink even though he is fully aware that "alcohol

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[92] Max Weber first makes the argument that the rise of capitalism can be attributed to the Calvinist belief that hard work has moral value in *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* (1905), and Sacvan Bercovitch returns to this concept as a springboard for his consideration of the rhetorical strategies of the New England Puritans in *The American Jeremiad* (1978). As Bercovitch argues, "[d]rawing on the very precariousness of their experience, the American Puritans […] forged what was to become a framework for national identity" (29).

was illegal for Muslims to buy" (27) and, more significantly, he defies the first pillar of Islam, coming to worship money, not the one God, admitting that he is now able to spend more of it in an hour "than [his] father earned in a day" (37).

Paradoxically, the capitalist system that initially attracts Changez simultaneously repels him in his subconscious mind, and when the World Trade Center is attacked, Changez's repressed emotions regarding America's success at the expense of other nations and what is representative of a mass, deep-seated desire for apocalypse emerge. While traveling on business in Manila, Changez witnesses what he initially perceives as a film airing on television, but "as [he] continued to watch, [he] realized that it was not fiction but news" (72). Like the Pakistani characters of *Moth Smoke* who smile about the prospect of apocalyptic doom when India tests nuclear weapons in 1998,[93] Changez "stared as one—and then the other—of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then [he] *smiled*" (72). In the body of fiction produced in response to 9/11 thus far, Changez's unsettling smile finds its most notable counterpart in the joyous outbursts of Marshall and Joyce Harriman in Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006): Marshall and Joyce, in the process of bitter divorce proceedings, each initially believes that the other has been killed in the terrorist attacks.[94] But what

[93] In the novel, Aurangzeb, or Ozi, visits his childhood best friend, protagonist Darashikoh, or Daru, to tell him that India "tested three [nuclear weapons]. A hundred kilometers from the border" (88). As Daru describes it, Ozi is "grinning. And in spite of the spasms ripping quietly through [Daru's own] back," he notices that he, too, cannot help but smile (88). The notion that nuclear explosions are happy events is then reinforced later in the novel: when Pakistan tests nuclear weapons in response to India's nuclear tests, Lahore's hippest residents are portrayed as celebrating at "Armageddon" or "[i]nitiation" parties (122).

[94] When Joyce witnesses the tower in which she knows her husband works collapse, she feels "something erupt inside her, something warm, very much like, yes it was, a pang of pleasure," and she is forced to cover "the lower part of her face to hide her fierce, protracted struggle against the emergence of a smile" (3). Likewise, when Marshall learns of the crash of United Airlines Flight 93—the flight he knows Joyce has been scheduled to take from Newark to San

distinguishes Changez's reaction from the personal sense of satisfaction that Marshall and Joyce respectively feel is the way in which his pleasure represents the sort of unspeakable pleasure that all lovers of stories inevitably feel when disaster strikes. Even after Changez realizes he is witnessing actual events in real-time, he continues to describe what he witnesses as though he is a literary critic analyzing a narrative, observing that he feels satisfaction upon witnessing "the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (73). His response suggests that he reads American history as a sort of story in need of a dénouement—as a narrative in need of the kind of apocalyptic ending that Frank Kermode argues all fictional narratives move toward in *A Sense of an Ending*.[95]

Hamid suggests that the transformation Changez experiences following the attacks—the realization of the metaphor of his name—comprises not only a rejection of capitalism, but a loss of spiritually charged faith in it. Changez explains that he certainly "*wanted* to believe" in what he terms "the firmness of the foundations of the new life [he] was attempting to construct for [him]self in New York" (93). As he continues, "at least I wanted not to disbelieve with such an intensity that I prevented myself as much as was possible from making the obvious connection between the crumbling of the world around me and the impending destruction of my personal American dream" (93). The destruction of the World Trade Center as a symbol of the attempted annihilation of American late capitalism, Changez's false god, renders him the reluctant fundamentalist of the novel's title at this point. Initially he continues to go through the motions of "faith" by working at Underwood Samson, but neither his job nor his American existence

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Francisco—he heads toward home "nearly skipping" with glee amid the masses of bereft New Yorkers (20).

[95] According to Kermode's seminal work, the structures of fictional narratives mimic the structure of the Bible, which moves from Genesis to Revelation, toward a dramatic ending that satisfies what Kermode characterizes as the reader's inherent "hunger for ends and for crises" (55).

fulfills him as real faith potentially could. Hamid's America becomes increasingly hateful toward Islam as Muslim men begin to disappear, "perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse" (94), and Changez becomes increasingly Muslim in appearance if not spirit: after visiting his family in Pakistan, he returns to America with a beard, and after a conversation with Juan-Bautista, the chief of a publishing company in Santiago, Chile, he comes to identify himself as a modern-day Janissary. Whereas Janissaries originally were, as Juan-Bautista explains to Changez, Christian boys "captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in the Muslim army," fighting to "erase their own civilizations" (151), Changez is, metaphorically, a Muslim *captured* by America and its promise of the American Dream, fighting against the principles of his homeland as a member of what he eventually views as a vast corporate American army.[96] Ultimately, Changez determines that his "days of focusing on fundamentals were done" (154), and he leaves the objects of his former spiritual devotion, Underwood Samson and the Unites States, for his home in Lahore.

Hamid does not argue that Muslim piety—a clear-cut declaration of the *shahāda*—functions as an easy answer for Changez's identity crisis, yet he does suggest that devotion to the West, America, and capitalism fails to provide a potential means by which modern Middle Eastern men and women can develop spiritually rich lives, the sort of middle space for faith that insiders to Christian American culture can develop in America. Changez's revelation, the sudden "broadening of [his] arc of vision" (145), leads him not to faith in God, but toward recognizing that he has "always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world" and that he no longer wishes to facilitate the American empire's "project of domination" (156). When Changez arrives home, he is not described as having attained faith; instead, the

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[96] As Changez puts it, he refuses to trim his beard after returning from Pakistan because he does "not wish to blend in with the army of clean-shaven youngsters who [are his] coworkers" (130).

reader is merely told that he acquires a position as a lecturer at a Pakistani university and that he organizes demonstrations advocating for "greater independence in Pakistan's domestic and international affairs, demonstrations that the foreign press would later […] come to label anti-American" (179).

Hence, faith functions as an absent presence in Hamid's text. The reader seeks to understand what Changez actually believes, and in the absence of that knowledge, the reader even suspects Changez of having become an Islamic fundamentalist who has turned to terrorism: Changez's mysterious scar, which he purportedly acquires on his arm at "a training camp" (46), his unsettling openness with the stranger at the café, and his failure to provide details about his narrative when the companion asks for them[97] produce a palpably anxious tone in the novel. That tone, I suggest, intentionally mirrors the anxiety that characterizes the post-9/11 world as Hamid sees it, and by the novel's conclusion, the reader is wholly disoriented, able to believe in either of two "realities."[98] On the one hand, the reader can suspect Changez of being what Versluys terms the "ultimate Other" (176), a terrorist who has merely recited a wholly unreliable yarn to his American companion, who is a spy. On the other hand, the reader can view Changez and his companion as Other in a more benign sense, as altogether un-American but innocent, the mere product of the reader's own post-9/11 prejudices and paranoid tendencies. Because both realities are equally plausible, the only sure thing that the age of terror seems able to offer is the

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[97] As Changez explains, he "cannot now recall many of the details of the events [he] has been relating," but he observes that it is only "the thrust of one's narrative that counts, not the accuracy of one's details" (118).

[98] Hamid presents his reader with a similarly ambiguous situation in *Moth Smoke*, where, by the novel's end, the reader, positioned as a judge or jury, is invited to determine whether Daru is "[g]uilty or not" of the murder of a young boy (236). However, I would argue that the degree of disorientation that is experienced after coming to the conclusion of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* far exceeds that which is experienced upon finishing Hamid's earlier novel. *Moth Smoke* overtly directs the reader toward sympathizing with rather than condemning Daru, who more often than not is rendered as "the victim of a shadowy conspiracy" (235).

sense that believing wholly in anything whatsoever and knowing anything with any degree of certainty has been rendered an impossibility.

The American Dream and Arab Identity in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) explores the means by which contemporary Arabs negotiate the ideological differences between the spiritually rich Arab world and secular America in an unstable, post-9/11 age of terror and intolerance. In writing the novel, Halaby, much like Hamid, did not set out to comment on the effects of 9/11 on Arabs living in America. As she explains in a February 2008 interview with Jayne Benjulian, she wanted to write a novel that explores "what would happen to a very successful immigrant who had something happen to him—an accident"; she wanted "to explore [an immigrant couple's] relationship." What she discovered, however, is that "there was no way [she] could write about these professional Arab people without giving a nod to 9/11"—a nod that, she admits, "got bigger and bigger" as she continued writing. Fusing the "[o]nce upon a time" language of American Disney fairy tale movies with the language of traditional Arab folktales that begins the novel (50),[99] Halaby tells the story of Salwa, an American-born Palestinian from Jordan who works as a banker, and Jassim Haddad, a Jordanian hydrologist—married immigrants who settle in Tucson, Arizona, which functions as a secular reflection of the their sacred desert homeland. Like many immigrants, including Changez and the immigrants from the fictionalized West Bank town of Nawara as Halaby portrays them in her first novel, *West of the Jordan* (2003), Salwa and

[99] Halaby, whose sustained interest in Arab folktales stems in large part from her experience as a Fulbright scholar studying "folklore and its role in people's lives" ("About"), begins her novel with the phrase "kan / ya ma kan / fee qadeem az-zamaan," which she translates for her reader as "*They say there was or there wasn't in olden times a story*" (VII).

Jassim arrive with the hope of realizing their American Dream: they seek wealth and a quintessentially American way of life that eludes them in their Middle Eastern homeland, and though they initially acquire some semblance of the life they seek, their American Dream becomes a nightmare as a result of the fallout from the 11 September terrorist attacks. As American dreamers, Salwa and Jassim are unable to envision American existence as transcending the capitalist ideals that drive them and they are unable to write a fruitful American story for themselves—one that has a quintessentially American happy ending.[100] Halaby suggests that lack of faith in God paired with idolatrous worship of modernity—material things that attempt to function as substitutes for God—devastates the characters and their marriage. Ultimately, the only wealth America can potentially provide for Salwa and Jassim is monetary, not spiritual. Thus, Halaby's novel argues that Arabic and American narratives cannot merge: in the absence of their homeland and their Islamic faith, Salwa and Jassim can only suffer the horrifying results of quintessentially American, detrimental fragmentation and disconnection.

In the broadest sense, *Once in a Promised Land*, like Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, functions as a critique of the materialistic tendencies of late capitalist American existence. Halaby portrays Americans as dishonest and disconnected: America is a land where "no one said anything" or "intruded in other people's business"; they just "sat on the front lawn waiting for the aftermath, the hideous carnage of advantage taken" (181). However, Halaby's America is able to seduce immigrants away from their cultural and religious roots with the

[100] The subject of American happy endings interested Halaby prior to the publication of *Once in a Promised Land*. In *West of the Jordan*, the story of the minor character Sameer's experience in America does not end with everyone "happy and doing the right thing" (87). Indeed, it is an aberration for an Arab story to have a happy ending according to Soraya, one of the four young, female cousins who narrate the novel. Commenting on a story she overhears her mother's sister-in-law, Dahlia, telling, Soraya observes that "[t]his one's a happy-ending story, for a change" (112).

promise of living the American Dream and acquiring wealth. Indeed, Jassim and Salwa marry because each admires the other's connection to America and respective Americanness, at least as their less-than-wholly American eyes see it. First and foremost, each sees the other as enabling a move to America. Through a flashback narrated from Jassim's perspective, Halaby's reader learns that the possibility exists that he merely proposes because he subconsciously desires American citizenship: as the narrator observes, after Jassim proposes, "in the very back of [his] mind, in only the faintest lettering, was the idea that Salwa's American citizenship would enable them both to stay. Forever, if he chose" (70). Likewise, through a flashback narrated mostly from Salwa's perspective, the reader discovers that Salwa accepts Jassim's proposal because she likes the idea of Jassim's job in America and signs of his wealth. As a banking and economics student with tastes that "are far too expensive for the likes of Hassan" (241), her pipe-dreaming boyfriend, she meets Jassim at a lecture she opts to attend because the flier for the lecture indicates that Dr. Jassim Haddad is "*from America*" (238-39). His lecture, which characterizes the conflict between Israel and Jordan as being about the control of water, leaves Salwa "transfixed" (249). Although Hassan views Jassim as "thin" and "average-looking," he wears "an expensive-looking suit," understands power, and hails from the nation Salwa loves best (249). When he proposes within a matter of days of their meeting, Salwa accepts, sacrificing her relationship, her home, and, perhaps inevitably, her religion for the promise of wealth and a life in America.

Using Salwa and Jassim as examples, Halaby attempts to demonstrate the means by which the profane comes to replace the spiritual in a twenty-first-century American nation that appears, on the surface, to be concerned with money above all else. Salwa and Jassim may live in a 9/11 era when "[m]any people clutched to the promise of *gardens beneath which rivers*

flow" (VII), part of the Quranic vision of the afterlife devout Muslims will experience,[101] but Salwa and Jassim opt against clinging to such a vision. From the start of the novel, Halaby positions Jassim and Salwa as non-practicing Muslims who attempt to compensate for the absence of devout faith through secular means. Salwa, the more lavish of the two, feels that she is "missing something" in her life because her faith in God is hypocritical: she occasionally prays and asserts that she believes in the first half of Islam's first pillar when she observes that "[t]here is no god but God" (89), but, enamored with the sort of "high-class American style" that Halaby critiques in *West of the Jordan* (216),[102] she consistently worships capitalism as a false deity, attempting to fill the palpable void she feels through predominantly secular if not overtly materialist means. Salwa, nicknamed "Queen of Pajamas" by her family (47), shops incessantly, buying drawers-full of silk pajamas that symbolize "leisure" to her (47); she attends classes to acquire a realtor's license that enables her to sell huge homes to wealthy Americans; and, when all else appears to fail, she secretly stops taking birth control pills, thinking that "having a child will fill that void" (10). Likewise, Jassim fills his day with secular rituals that mirror those he might perform as a practicing Muslim. Although Jassim is less overtly materialistic than Salwa, the narrator definitively observes that "Jassim did not believe in God" (3), and demonstrates that he, too, engages in ways of being that defy the first pillar. On 11 September, which begins as a day like any other day for Jassim, he "washed his face, brushed his teeth, and relieved himself, the beginning of a morning ritual as close to prayer as he could allow" (3). As his day proceeds according to the rigid schedule he has established for himself, he makes his ritualistic drive in his

[101] See, for instance, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's translation of the Quran 2:25, which states that "those who believe and do good the news" will have, in heaven, "Gardens graced with flowing streams."
[102] As Hala, one of the four young, female cousins who narrate the novel, asserts, "high-class American style" is just "[h]igh-class American blah, no soul, no colors" (216).

$50,000 Mercedes toward his ceremonial morning swim. Indeed, "driving alone in the dark, alone anywhere, anytime, filled Jassim with peace and pleasure" (3). Driving is his "secret drug" and "secret god" (3), and water, not his creator or his wife, is his "first love" (63). As the narrator observes, over his many years of swimming, Jassim's "lung capacity increased as his belief in God dwindled" (46).

The al-Qaeda terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center certainly viewed themselves as attacking the Great Satan, those whom they perceived as secular Americans, but by targeting the twin towers, great icons of secular American capitalism, these terrorists inevitably changed the lives of all those who reaped capitalism's purported benefits, including lapsed Muslims attempting to live the American Dream. Although Salwa and Jassim live thousands of miles from New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, the 11 September attacks rupture the routines of their lives and reveal the consequences of their spiritual austerity. Eventually, the attacks force the couple into addressing the problem they experience—that of feeling less-than-wholly fulfilled and attempting to fill spiritual voids through secular means—but not before setting each of their lives spiraling into apocalyptic chaos. As the omniscient narrative voice explains at the start of the novel, Salwa and Jassim have "[n]othing and everything" to do "with what happened to the World Trade Center" (VIII).

The tragedies that befall Salwa and Jassim leave them collapsing, so to speak, arguably mirroring the collapse of the first and second World Trade Centers. When Salwa learns that she has conceived a child and subsequently miscarries, she initially tells Jassim nothing, and she distances herself "from God and from all she knew to be right in the world" by cheating on her husband with her younger co-worker, Jake, who, unbeknown to her, is a drug dealer with no emotional interest in her (184). When Salwa decides she wants to end the affair and travel home

to Jordan to reset her moral compass, Jake, detoxing from crystal meth, attacks her, throwing her down the stairs of his apartment complex after slicing and maiming her face with a picture frame. Jassim's collapse, which begins after he learns the distressing news of Salwa's pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage, mirrors Salwa's. Driving home from the Fitness Bar, he accidentally hits and kills Evan Parker, a sixteen-year-old anti-Islamic skateboarder. But he says nothing of Evan's death to his wife. He tells her only that he had a car accident and opts to disconnect from Salwa and his routine. He secretly stops swimming and spends his mornings performing a more capitalist American and even less spiritual ritual: he drives aimlessly around the neighborhood of Evan's mother, Mary, and eats greasy American breakfasts at Denny's so that he can interact with Penny, a waitress he finds attractive and eventually kisses. He tells Salwa about Evan's death only after an F.B.I. investigation ensues, but he opts against telling her that the F.B.I.'s "witch hunt" causes him to lose his job (224). Without faith, without family, without America, and without money, both Salwa and Jassim are robbed of everything that ever seemingly meant anything to them.

Halaby portrays the 11 September attacks as revealing that Arabs cannot pass as Americans easily if at all—that the American identities they appear to create for themselves are mere facades because they fail to understand America entirely. Neither Jassim nor Salwa ever necessarily blends among the masses of predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. For instance, the schizophrenic Salwa, born in America but raised in the Holy Land, consciously has to "appl[y] her Made in America face" when she visits the doctor about her pregnancy (60). Similarly, even though Jassim is in "America, where men did not wear Speedos unless they were serious swimmers" (110), he continues to wear a conspicuous one at the pool. These palpable differences between the masses and the Haddads are exacerbated following the

9/11 attacks, which reveal the prejudices of many Americans. A radio broadcast blares a presumably white, Christian, conservative American man's rant about "nothing being done about all those Arab terrorists. In the name of Jesus Christ! They live with us. Among us! Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us" (56). Likewise, Jack Franks, who reports Jassim to the F.B.I. merely because the latter is an Arab, demonstrates his own ethnocentric ignorance by observing that his daughter, Cinda, met a Jordanian man and "converted. She's an Arab now" (6). Even Penny demonstrates little understanding of international politics: though she is less overtly prejudiced than Jack or the man on the radio, she believes that her affection for Jassim has "nothing to do with" the fact that she wants to "blow up Osama and all his buddies" because Jassim is "from Jordan, not Afghanistan" (281).

As Halaby presents it, relatively privileged, educated, upper-middle-class immigrants like Jassim and Salwa fail to understand the modern American world or American capitalism despite their commitment to it; they fail to understand the lower end of the class hierarchy that exists in the nation—the dramatic range of the social ladder. Prior to the 11 September attacks, Salwa and Jassim manage to contain their existence within a relatively elite bubble, aware of things that the narrator terms "American sex" and "American romance" (158, 188), but blind to the stark realities of American poverty. Salwa first encounters a portrait of lower-class existence when she visits Jake's apartment complex, composed of "a series of identical misshapen two-story cubes painted different shades of brown to blend in with the desert" (206). Upon her arrival, she leaves her purse in her car, thinking that she will do the ethical thing—cancel their dinner date—and return to the car in a matter of moments. But she remains with Jake, and while she dines on a cheap lasagna dinner he prepares and sleeps with him on "a stack of two futons" (210), her car window is shattered and all her cash is stolen from her purse. Jassim, too, encounters and

internalizes the lower and lower-middle American classes when he dines for the first time at Denny's, "an American Institution" (168), and, eventually, when he drives through what he eventually terms "Mary Parker's America" to meet Mary Parker and apologize for killing her son (275). As he approaches the crooked screen door of what he will come to see is her dark, cigarette-scented home, he sticks out like "a beautiful cancerous growth in his pressed dress pants and Armani tie" (194). Although Salwa and Jassim have, by this point, spent several years living in America, they only now confront the less-than-picture-perfect multifaceted reality of it.

Regardless of social class, capitalism pervades Halaby's quintessentially modernized America: Halaby presents lower- and lower-middle-class Americans as engaging in mass consumerism just as more economically advantaged couples like Salwa and Jassim do. When Jassim returns to Mary Parker's neighborhood, he goes to a yard sale at a house with a gas-guzzling, "massive SUV" in the driveway and sees that the home's residents are selling "Coke bottles, razors, pantyhose, doilies, potholders, table mats, glasses, mugs…an endless quantity of knickknacks, of unnecessary items in very good condition" (255). Likewise, when he accompanies Penny to buy a frying pan at Wal-Mart, his first time in the quintessentially American store, he sees what he identifies as "the ways of the poor" because he "assumed that the people shopping in Wal-Mart were poor, all of them" (276). Jassim is able to find a "better-quality" frying pan in the store (279), albeit mixed with cheap ones sold in bulk, representative of the excess of all things material that characterizes Halaby's America, which, like Wal-Mart, has "too much eyeliner and too much everything" (277).

Notably, the novel does not suggest that the pervasiveness of late capitalism precludes religious faith for Muslims living in America. Indeed, Muslims *can* retain their Islamic identity in the face of modernity; they just need to remain devoutly Muslim instead of attempting to forge

a middle space for faith for themselves, and they need to avoid buying into the sort of elitism that characterizes Jassim and particularly Salwa. Salwa prays for things she needs, like the bleeding to stop during her miscarriage, but she fails to lead the kind of spiritually rich, devoutly Islamic life that her Jordanian friend Randa leads. Whenever Salwa is under duress, she turns to Randa, who, when Salwa is miscarrying, kneads out "what Salwa had been avoiding for close to three years now: that she was not happy in her life" (91). Randa's devotion to Islam, her ability to lead a traditional life despite late-capitalist American temptations, enables her to retain "centuries of wisdom, knots of history and meaning" in her fingers and a sense of her homeland in her house (91), where over a warm stove, she makes Arabic coffee for Salwa, stirring in cardamom pods and seeds to create the taste of home, as though she had "reached across the continental United States, stretched her arm across the Atlantic, and put the pot back on the burner" (283-84). She sees the value of retaining a complete connection with her religious and cultural heritage, and when Salwa confesses her infidelity with Jake to her, she advises Salwa to return home to Jordan to regain a sense of her Jordanian, Islamic identity. Likewise, Jassim encounters a Jordanian Muslim couple shopping for a pan in Wal-Mart just as Penny shops for one. The narrator observes that the Muslim woman's hair was "covered with a white scarf and her body in a gray dress that reached the floor," and "[w]hereas Jassim had been eaten by the West, this woman and her husband had not left home" (278). They, too, manage to retain devout faith that does not occupy a middle space in the face of late-capitalist American temptations to believe in something other than wholly traditional Islam.

Halaby suggests, by way of the form and content of the “After” section of the novel, that Salwa and Jassim eventually cease repressing their latent desires to return to Jordan[103] and that their return is for the best. Using the language of an Arab folktale—the language with which she begins the “Before” section of her work and the language Halaby’s reader encounters when Salwa remembers her grandmother telling her stories of the heroic Nus Nsays and the wicked witch-like ghula when she was a child—Halaby relieves Salwa of her futile effort “to force everything to fit into an American tale” (159). She relieves her of her effort to shape her life as a fairy tale that is rooted in the lie of the American Dream—a fairy tale of which Salwa simply cannot be the princess she desires to be.[104] Within the bounds of the “After” section, Salwa and Jassim are allegorized as a young maiden and a nightingale respectively, and with the help of a folktale version of Salwa’s former boyfriend, Hassan, who takes on a role that resembles that of the cunning Nus Nsays, they are able to break the ghula’s spell over Salwa. The folktale concludes by allegorizing Jake’s attack on Salwa—the attack that leaves her body beaten and her face maimed by the picture frame. According to the narrative, Hassan severs the threads that enable the ghula to control the maiden, but accidentally stabs her in the process. The nightingale then proceeds to cut “the last of the threads,” he “transform[s] into an ordinary man,” and he “lift[s] up the unconscious and damaged maiden,” carrying “her home across land and sea”

[103] When Salwa suspects she is pregnant, “a thought she had not had before” occurs: She realizes that she and Jassim “*cannot live* [in America] *anymore*,” that she cannot raise a child “*away from everything* [she] *know*[s],” but she “force[s] it away” repressing her instinctive sense that America inhibits her ability to lead a rich life with her husband (54). Likewise, after his car accident, Jassim feels “unsettled in his beloved America and longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arabs” (165).
[104] As the narrator puts it, Salwa’s parents “paved her future with the hope of glass slippers and fancy balls, not understanding that her beginning was not humble enough, nor was her heart pure enough, for her to be the princess in any of these stories” (317). Note, too, that this idea resembles one that Halaby presents in *West of the Jordan*, in which Soraya explains that an American movie would not have an Arab as a “superhero,” but “would show the super American guy knocking the scummy Arab flat on the ground” (60).

(335). Although Salwa's grandmother had never told the young Salwa who the ghula was "supposed to be" despite Salwa's inquiries (98), the ghula's identity as America personified becomes apparent by the novel's close. It is America, or at least the enchanting myth of America in which Salwa comes to believe, that no longer has power over her imagination and desires; it is this toxic, late-capitalist America that has been defeated.

For Halaby, as for Hamid, the solution to the problems and identity crises that lapsed Muslims face in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks is not necessarily a life of devotion. Indeed, in Halaby's novel, God does not exist definitively: things happen by "fate or luck or coincidence" (67), by "[t]iming or the stars or God's will" (159), not necessarily according to the supremacy of God's will as it is played out through freewill and predestination. However, by transporting Salwa and Jassim into a traditional narrative that returns them to the true promised land of the novel's title—the Holy Land of the east, not its western simulation, a land of false promises that Salwa initially and mistakenly envisions as her own personal "Promised Land" (49)—Halaby provides the Haddads with the opportunity to forge new identities that may or may not involve the religious beliefs of their respective upbringings—to forge a meaningful middle space outside and without America. This opportunity alone does not render Halaby's ending happy per se, as Halaby suggests at the novel's close. Indeed, Halaby's novel has no "*they lived happily ever after*" because "it [is] and it [isn't]" an "*American fairy tale*" (335). Instead, like Hamid's work, Halaby's novel ends with ambiguity, once again the only certitude that a post-9/11, post-apocalyptic world can offer, particularly for the Islamic Other.

Conclusion:

Up From Ground Zero: America and American Literature in the New Millennium

Fiction like that which Roth, Updike, DeLillo, Hamid, and Halaby write implicitly and explicitly opposes ideological views like those that drove the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Whereas religious absolutism and political animosity led al-Qaeda to attack the United States, the recognition of the need for compromise seems to have prompted the authors upon which *Faith in Fiction* focuses to write works that explore the middle space between religious fanaticism and utter skepticism. At bare minimum, the works these authors composed on the eve of the millennium and in the wake of 9/11 recognize the need for hybridity. More to the point, however, these works retain the capacity to encourage it (to whatever degree fiction encourages ways of thinking and being). By tracing fictionalized means through which to attain transcendence beyond the traditional bounds of religious institutions, Roth, Updike, DeLillo, Hamid, and Halaby not only observe the existence of authentic middle spaces in the lives of the Americans they fictionalize, but they urge their readers to see value in moderation as opposed to extremism.

Regardless of whether Americans express enthusiasm about embracing these kinds of temperate attitudes in their own lives, they seem to exhibit a desire to rebuild something in the wake of such a horrifying apocalypse: confronted with the vacant space left by the collapse of the towers, they seem to seek to fill a lingering void that is both literal and metaphorical.[105] By

[105] Without question, friends and relatives of victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks live with what I term a lingering void in their day-to-day lives in that they have lost their loved ones, but, I argue, this void has been represented as being pervasive, affecting Americans en masse. Evidence of this notion exists, for instance, in the text that appears on the back cover to the collection of essays titled *Trauma at Home: After 9/11* (2003), edited by Judith Greenberg. This text reads

November of 2001, efforts to fill the physical empty space at Ground Zero began. Long before the rubble was even cleared from the site of the 11 September terrorist attacks, New York Governor George Pataki established the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and charged it with the responsibility of overseeing the process of rebuilding. But the group's task has proven to be far from easy. Even after Studio Daniel Libeskind won the bid to design the site in 2003, the future of Ground Zero appeared and arguably continues to appear somewhat stunted due to what the *New York Times* characterized as "political lassitude and financial squabbling" ("Sept. 11, 2010: The Right Way to Remember" A18). Although the site became one toward which thousands of Americans and international tourists alike have made what resembles a religious pilgrimage since the time of the attacks, too much time passed before construction on the National September 11 Memorial and Museum and the foundation of the 1,776-foot One World Trade Center or "Freedom Tower" began in 2006. For years, Ground Zero has remained a post-apocalyptic space, a gaping wasteland that has come, for better or worse, to serve as the heart of what many view as America's greatest city.[106]

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that the 9/11 terrorist attacks "[i]nitially […] created a sense of paralysis and a narrative void. Now we find ourselves struggling as a nation to remember and rebuild." Likewise, Mary L. Dudziak explains in the conclusion to *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (2003) that "September 11 is remembered as an American event" even though it is "a contested memory" (213). Furthermore, this notion of a lingering metaphorical void that Americans aim to fill is particularly evident in New York City's commemoration ceremonies, which have involved the "Tribute in Light"—an art installation that projects light up from where the twin towers once stood—and the reading of all the names of the dead—an act that makes of the dead an absent presence. I argue that these ceremonies that attempt to fill the void exist not only for the friends and relatives of the victims, but as a means by which America on the whole can commemorate the tragedy. Indeed, the anniversary of 9/11 continues to make newspaper headlines nearly a decade following the attacks.

[106] American authors like E.B. White and Roger Angell, for instance, have portrayed the significance of New York in their literary works. As White and Angell observe in *Here is New York* (1949), which could be seen on display in many New York City bookstores following the 11 September attacks, "New York is not a capital city—it is not a national capital or a state capital. But it is by way of becoming the capital of the world" (55).

The metaphorical void that arguably accompanies the literal one for many Americans is formed by the residual trauma[107] that resulted following 9/11 as well as the feeling that 9/11 marks the end of an era, and, in literature, it is perhaps best expressed by DeLillo. In "In the Ruins of the Future," DeLillo observes that the 9/11 terrorist attacks devastated the old, binaristic, Cold War–American narrative—what DeLillo terms the narrative "in the rubble" (34). If real-life Americans at all resemble those of DeLillo's essay, they, too, might be seen as needing what DeLillo terms a "counternarrative" (34), or at least some semblance of a new narrative that might in part function to fill the void left by the destruction of the narrative of old.[108] Yet fashioning such a narrative has proven to be just as difficult as rebuilding at Ground Zero. The problematization of narrative in novels by Roth, Hamid, and Halaby—the fact that the outsider characters of these novels find themselves in ill-fitting late-capitalist American stories—certainly may signify nothing new: outsider characters who fail to fit into mainstream society appear throughout American fiction. However, the incongruities between Americanist stories and otherable or othered characters that these authors underscore in the post-9/11 period inevitably reinforce the notion that generating a rejuvenated narrative poses a real challenge. Hence, historical Americans, like those of contemporary fictional works, may be left to ask what

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[107] For personal albeit academically-informed discussions of 9/11's traumatic effects, see Ann Cvetkovich's "Trauma Ongoing" and E. Ann Kaplan's "A Camera and a Catastrophe: Reflections on Trauma and the Twin Towers," both of which are published in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*.

[108] In an exploration of the degree to which the events of 9/11 were "transformative" for "the United States and the world" (2), Dudziak provides a historian's credence to this more literary notion, observing that "[f]or historians, moments of historical change give the story of the past a narrative structure. They provide breaks that enable periodization into one age or another, into what came before and what came after" (2). Furthermore, she describes the tension between an evolving narrative and the stagnant nature of what I term a lingering void, observing that "[h]aving settled into our imaginations, the series of events that transpired on September 11, 2001, continue to play out, although the moniker itself, September 11, seems frozen in time" (214).

the future of America holds. In an age of anxiety,[109] an age of terror,[110] an age marred by the collapse of the twin towers, the Western world's great beacons of capitalism, Americans must contemplate what kind of future can even attempt to replace the grand past of the American Century. What kind of nation and narrative of a nation will emerge in the new millennium? How will hybridity and moderation fare in it? And how will the story of 9/11 conclude? Is the sort of quintessentially "*American fairy tale*" ending that Halaby describes in *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) even available to Americans anymore (335), or does the anxiety generated by 9/11 eradicate the possibility for genuine contentment and closure? These are the questions that this conclusion explores.

As the whole of this study has suggested, the end of an era in American history that the 9/11 attacks dramatize (or at least the sense that an era was coming to an end) was inevitably set into motion in the decades before the collapse of the twin towers, and the era's end, if it has actually ended, involves far more than the spectacle of al-Qaeda's attack on capitalism. Indeed, in the 1989 essay "The End of History?" that was expanded into the 1992 book, *The End of*

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[109] According to a Pew Survey conducted from 4-7 November 2010, Americans continue to fear the threat of terrorism following the 9/11 attacks and "there is little evidence that close calls in this country or terrorist attacks overseas have led to a fundamental change in the public's worries about terrorism," meaning that anxiety has neither declined nor increased ("Despite Years of Terror Scares, Public's Concerns Remain Fairly Steady"). Ultimately, the survey found that "[o]nly about a quarter of Americans (26%) say that the danger of a major terrorist attack is less now than it was before 9/11. About as many (28%) say the danger is greater while 43% say the danger of an attack is about the same as it was at the time of the 9/11 attacks" ("Despite Years of Terror Scares, Public's Concerns Remain Fairly Steady").

[110] It may be an overstatement that Americans live in an age pervaded by terror rather than an age that faces terrorism, but in historical works about the 11 September attacks, scholars have suggested that Americans at least *felt* as though an age of terror had begun. For instance, in the introduction to *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*, Dudziak explains that "[a]mong the sea of American flags, among the memorial displays around the world, amid the developing international crisis, many felt that the United States, and perhaps the world, had entered a new age of terror" (2). Furthermore, titles of publications like Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda's *The Age of Terror: America and the World After September 11* (2001) reinforced the notion that 11 September 2001 marked the onset of an age of terror as opposed to an age of terrorism.

History and the Last Man, Francis Fukuyama considered the pervasive "feeling that something very fundamental has happened in world history" by the Cold War's conclusion (3), and he suggested that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented the triumph of Western neoliberalism, the "final form of human government" that came to mark history's end in that it signified an end to "mankind's ideological evolution" (4).[111] Along the same lines, the end of the 1990s marked the end of an era in that the information age as DeLillo portrays it in *Underworld* (1997) emerged. Echoing earlier arguments like those made by Leslie Fiedler, John Barth, and Alvin Kernan, Sven Birkerts prophesied that books were doomed in *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (1995), and contemporary novelists, in all likelihood responding to the same kinds of technological and cultural developments, even came to fear the death of the novel as a genre. As Jonathan Franzen put it in his 2002 essay, "The Reader in Exile," "[f]or every reader who dies today, a viewer is born" (165). Similarly, critics have prophesied the death of postmodernism as a literary movement. Historian Minsoo Kang declared its death in "The Death of the Postmodern and the Post-Ironic Lull" (2005), an essay published in the exhibition catalog for a University of Missouri – St. Louis art exhibit, *The Post-Ironic Lull: A Show and a Discussion*. Subsequently, and in part in response to Kang's claim, the journal *Twentieth-Century Literature* published a special issue on the death of postmodernism in the fall of 2007. The issue included essays that, according to Andrew Hoberek's introduction, "propose

[111] Notably, in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, which to some degree showed that the West had not overcome ideological opposition, Fukuyama revised his claim, but for its focus on government alone. In *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), he focuses on the role of science in history, observing that "there can be no end to history without an end of modern natural science and technology. Not only are we not at an end of science and technology; we appear to be poised at the cusp of one of the most momentous periods of technological advance in history" (15).

new models for understanding contemporary fiction in the wake of postmodernism's waning influence" (233).

However, more likely than not, print books, novels, and postmodernism are not altogether dead, and announcements of these deaths lack insight into more gradual developments that literature and culture experience naturally. Observing that "[t]he novel has been dead for nearly as long as it has been alive" (13), Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that the "endless—and ostensibly meaningless—circulation and recirculation of the tale of the novel's demise" suggests that "these obituaries and rebirth announcements might serve different cultural purposes" (11)—ones that I view as inherently linked with the end-times mentality that drives the human imagination, particularly circa the year 2000. Instead of experiencing an end of days, literature may simply be in the nascent stages of a period of transformation. As Jeremy Green suggests in *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (2005),

> The fiction of late postmodernism embraces—with a measure of anxiety, with a modicum of hope—cultural and social change, and makes of altered conditions new kinds of fiction, writing in such a way as to grasp the contradictions and involutions of the new media environment. For the reader willing to take up the challenge of this writing, the novel continues to offer insight, inquiry, and critique in full measure. (18)

Similarly, Julien Bringuier and Madelena Gonzalez argue that "[f]ar from signaling the redundancy of the novel form or its death, this new challenge [in the aftermath of 9/11] would seem to indicate that generic experimentation is at the heart of its renewal" (236). Thus, a new kind of art is, according to at least a handful of arguments, poised to emerge in the post-9/11 period. With regard to fiction about America and faith, this new kind of art is manifested not only out of the imaginations of literary stalwarts like Roth, Updike, and DeLillo, but out of the imaginations of more diverse authors that push Americans to address issues involving religious diversity and colonialism—those of Islamic Others like Hamid and Halaby, and also 9/11

novelists like Slimane Benaïssa, who writes *The Last Night of a Damned Soul* (2003), and Yasmina Khadra, who writes *The Attack* (2006).

More to the point, this new kind of art has the power to transcend the bounds of text alone without altogether killing books. In the post-9/11 period, hybridity sets the terms for "textual" reinvention, and books, like faith on the millennium's eve, emerge as things that exist in a middle space. As preeminent theorists of the relatively new field of visual rhetoric have suggested, image and text function as ideal complements to one another, and image does not degrade text or compromise literacy as critics like Birkerts fear. According to Mieke Bal, "[i]t is not the novel that is obsolete but the idea that narrative and imagery are essentially different cultural expressions" (1291). For Bal, "[n]arrative and image need each other as much as cultures need them" (1291). Like text, image is, as Roland Barthes suggests in "Rhetoric of the Image," a thing to be read and interpreted, not just "an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language" (32). And in the world of new media—the kind of cyber-world that emerges at the end of DeLillo's *Underworld* on the eve of the millennium—image and text have a seemingly endless space in which to manifest their rich interaction. As Mary E. Hocks and Michelle R. Kendrick suggest, new media are not merely "a battleground between word and image," but a fertile ground for what is a "dynamic interplay that *already exists* and has *always existed* between visual and verbal texts" (1).

A prime example of an innovative 9/11 work that attempts to reinvent the novel by fusing image with text is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), which portrays nine-year-old protagonist Oskar Schell's attempt to cope with his father's death in the World Trade Center collapse. The novel aims to capture what Bringuier and Gonzalez argue is "the essentially visual dimension of the event" of the collapse of the World Trade Center (226)—

the resemblance the event had to the countless images of apocalyptic atrocity that Americans have seen on television[112] and in action and science fiction movies.[113] And, more generally speaking, the novel aims to capture the increasingly image-driven culture of America—a culture in which images of all kinds, particularly those of atrocities like 9/11, are replayed for the viewing masses ad infinitum like the footage of the Kennedy assassination or the Oswald assassination, the latter of which is represented at the end of DeLillo's *Libra* (1988) as being rerun "[o]ver and over" on television (445). For Foer, as for critics like Hocks and Kendrick, image does not impede narrative: as Mr. Black, one of the characters Oskar encounters in the novel, puts it (in words that might resemble Foer's), he "believe[s] in the story" (164). In other words, narrative retains power in an age in which image comes to dominate the popular imagination. It retains power even after the image of the collapsing twin towers burns itself into the mind's eye of every horrified American television viewer after 9/11.

Foer is not alone in his effort to marry image and text in the 9/11-inspired art he produces. Much as Foer manages to reinvent the novel as a hybrid thing, Sid Jacobson and Ernie

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[112] As John Updike puts it in a short piece he wrote for the *New Yorker* immediately following the 9/11 attacks, which he witnessed "[f]rom the viewpoint of a tenth-floor apartment in Brooklyn Heights" ("The Talk of the Town" 28), "the destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers had the false intimacy of television, on a day of perfect reception" (28).

[113] Consider, for instance, A.O. Scott's 9 August 2006 review of Oliver Stone's blockbuster movie about 9/11, *World Trade Center* (2006). In the review, Scott connects the events of 9/11 with Hollywood movies that long-preceded Stone's rendition of the already-cinematic events of 9/11, observing that

> [i]t was impossible to banish the thought, even in the midst of that day's horror and confusion, that the attacks themselves represented a movie scenario made grotesquely literal. What other frame of reference did we have for burning skyscrapers and commandeered airplanes? And then our eyes and minds were so quickly saturated with the actual, endlessly replayed images—the second plane's impact; the plumes of smoke coming from the tops of the twin towers; the panicked citizens covered in ash—that the very notion of a cinematic reconstruction seemed worse than redundant. Nobody needed to be told that this was not a movie. And at the same time nobody could doubt that, someday, it would be. (E1)

Colón reinvent a non-fiction work about 9/11 in what might be seen as an attempt to represent better what becomes an increasingly more confusing and convoluted story of the day: they illustrate the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States' *9/11 Commission Report* (2004). As 9/11 Commission Chair Thomas H. Kean and Vice Chair Lee H. Hamilton put it in the foreword to *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* (2006), their solely prose-based work aimed "not only to inform our fellow citizens about history but also to energize and engage them on behalf of reform and change, to make our country safer and more secure" (ix). And the *Graphic Adaptation*, which they see as adhering "to the findings, recommendations, spirit, and tone of the original commission report," has the power to enable "readers of all ages, especially those unfamiliar with the original report," to "learn more about the events of 9/11" (ix). It transcends the limitations of text alone, not only *telling* readers the names and histories of the terrorists, but *showing* their faces—in little, eerily innocent-looking cartoon illustrations. It not only *tells* readers the timeline of events, it *shows* them the timeline: in rows that represent the courses of the four hijacked airplanes—rows that run parallel across the *Graphic Adaptation*'s opening pages, ending, one by one, with the devastation that emerged when each hijacked plane reached its final destination.

Paradoxically, however, the apparent renewal toward which texts like *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* gesture functions as a *return*, so to speak. In his introductory remarks to *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004)—yet another 9/11 work that merges image and text—Art Spiegelman describes the comix he created as a return on a personal level, observing that he had "spent much of the decade before the millennium trying to avoid making comix, but from some time in 2002 till September 2003 [he] devoted [himself] to what became a series of ten large-scale pages about September 11 and its

aftermath" ("The Sky is Falling"). In a broader sense, however, the creation of hybrid works that employ both image and text suggests a return to an earlier historical moment. As Spiegelman explains, the post-apocalyptic space of "Ground Zero had marked a Year Zero as well" ("The Sky is Falling"), one that I suggest is evocative of the origins of books as the Western world knows them. The hybrid artistic works that Foer, Jacobson and Colón, and Spiegelman produce resemble ancient and medieval illuminated manuscripts, the most famous of which are medieval illuminated Bibles or portions of the Bible, for instance the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. Although the connection between the art forms demands further consideration, the main difference between the older form and the contemporary one, of course, regards the object of sanctification. No longer are holy texts alone revered through the process of illumination; today, as the authors upon which this study focuses suggest, artists can treat that which is seemingly mundane as retaining some semblance of a religious aura that justifies illumination.

Just as works that combine image with text revisit an older form in order to engage in a sort of post-9/11 process of renewal, less apparently cutting-edge 9/11 novels—those that address the anxiety that emerged as a result of the terrorist attacks through the lens of domestic scenarios—suggest a paradoxical kind of literary rejuvenation that is evocative of an earlier literary-theological dilemma. In the aftermath of 9/11, characters in novels like Anita Shreve's *A Wedding in December* (2005), Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2006), Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2007), and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008) struggle with personal relationships, indicating that authors opt to represent domestic scenarios instead of confronting the reality of the atrocity of 9/11 head on (whatever such a head-on approach to writing about 9/11 might entail). This problem of portraying 9/11 is evocative of the kind of problem that philosopher Theodor W. Adorno

identified with regard to representing the Holocaust in art. “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” wrote Adorno (“Cultural Criticism and Society” 34). And, likewise, it might be viewed as barbaric to create art about 9/11, which historians like Patrick Allitt[114] and novelists like DeLillo[115] characterize as a faith-shaking event. In the aftermath of 9/11, it certainly appears that it was somehow easier, to use Schwartz’s novel as an example, to write about how a thirty-four-year-old protagonist deals with the past trauma of her twin sister’s death and the less-than-ideal relationship she sustains with her boyfriend, Jack. It was somehow easier for authors to address domestic subjects, not the socio-political implications of 9/11.

However, the fact that these novels focus on domestic scenarios does not by any means limit the political impact they can have, for deeply personal moments very much sustain the potential to become deeply political ones. In film, this notion is best evidenced by Michael Moore’s award-winning documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), which, at points, includes real-life, personal narratives of Americans who have been impacted by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror as part of Moore’s effort to incriminate George W. Bush and his administration. With greater subtlety, this notion is evidenced in fiction via the subject of the concluding pages of Kalfus’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*. Although the novel focuses on the stuff of contemporary domestic tragedy—the bitter divorce proceedings of Marshall and Joyce Harriman—it comes to present a politicized vision of what unites the post-9/11 American

[114] As Allitt explains, “[m]any police officers, firefighters, and relatives of the victims told reporters that the horror made them doubt God, at least for a time” (253).

[115] In the aftermath of 9/11, Alzheimer’s patients in DeLillo’s *Falling Man*’s (2007) question their faith in God, asking, in their writings, “How could God let this happen? Where was God when this happened?” (60). As the narrator continues, “Benny T. was glad he was not a man of faith because he would lose it after this” (61). Likewise, as she attempts to recover from the trauma of the attacks, Lianne Glenn, the wife of a survivor of the attack on the World Trade Centers, observes that she wants nothing more than “to snuff out the pulse of the shaky faith she’d had for much of her life” (65).

family. In Kalfus's satirized and absurdly surreal America—a nation that evinces the disorder (or health condition) of total disorder (or chaos), to highlight the double-meaning of Kalfus's title—that which has yet to be written in the annals of history appears as reality: the elusive Osama bin Laden is captured, all while the Harriman children celebrate wearing "Death to Terrorists!" T-shirts and snack on ice cream cones (236), at long last united with their parents in what is some semblance of a real family. Indeed, bin Laden's capture within the dream-like concluding pages of Kalfus's text suggests that, according to his own literary imagination, it is this capture alone that can finish a narrative for Americans that is apparently without end—the narrative that the events of 11 September 2001 set into motion.

Inevitably, however, neither the most effectual intelligence agencies nor the most devout faith that there exists a happy American ending for the story of 9/11 will ensure the happy ending of bin Laden's capture that Kalfus imagines Americans as desiring. Ultimately, there may not even exist the sort of uniquely American happy ending that Halaby describes in *Once in a Promised Land* even though fictionalized and real Americans alike may perpetually continue to long for one. In lieu of the ending that Kalfus envisions, there remains staunch disagreement about what exactly might provide a satisfying sense of closure from an American perspective for Americans. Following the collapse of the twin towers (albeit not because of their collapse per se), liberal and conservative Americans who have been at odds throughout contemporary American history appear even less willing, if not altogether unable, to listen to one another.[116] They speak in different languages, so to speak, creating a reality in the aftermath of the collapse of the twin towers that, ironically, is evocative of that which the biblical narrator describes

[116] Evidence of this extreme polarity exists in a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, which found that President Barack Obama, elected in 2008, had "the most polarized early job approval ratings of any president in the past four decades" ("Partisan Gap in Obama Job Approval Widest in Modern Era").

following the erection of the Tower of Babel. Preeminent religious scholar Martin E. Marty's observation that Americans need "education about the faiths of strangers" in the aftermath of 9/11 becomes ever apparent as newspapers cover plans for ceremonial Quran burnings[117] and resistance to building an Islamic center[118] within the vicinity of Ground Zero (10). Yet Americans very much continue to need education about one another's differing faiths and ideologies.[119] As fractured political groups continue to talk at cross-purposes, they exacerbate ideological and religious divisions that existed long before the collapse of the twin towers.[120]

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[117] Terry Jones, a pastor at the Christian Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida, had planned, for the ninth anniversary of the 11 September terrorist attacks, to burn copies of the Quran. The burning was to be part of what he termed "International Burn a Koran Day," but due, in large part, to widespread protest in the U.S., Jones canceled the event. For more information about Jones's plan and opposition that emerged to it, see Damien Cave's "Far From Ground Zero, Obscure Pastor Is Ignored No Longer," published in the *New York Times* on 25 August 2010.

[118] Controversy over the construction of Cordoba House, which was eventually renamed Park51 and is sometimes referred to as the "World Trade Center mosque" or the "Ground Zero mosque," emerged in May 2010 and is ongoing.

[119] See the "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey" conducted by the Pew Research Center. According to the "Executive Summary" of the survey,

> On average, Americans correctly answer 16 of the 32 religious knowledge questions on the survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. Atheists and agnostics average 20.9 correct answers. Jews and Mormons do about as well, averaging 20.5 and 20.3 correct answers, respectively. Protestants as a whole average 16 correct answers; Catholics as a whole, 14.7. Atheists and agnostics, Jews and Mormons perform better than other groups on the survey even after controlling for differing levels of education.

[120] Evidence of the fact that such divisions existed before 9/11 is perhaps made most apparent by members of the extreme Christian right attacking other Americans in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 as opposed to blaming al-Qaeda terrorists. During a 13 September 2001 broadcast of Pat Robertson's *700 Club*, the Christian fundamentalist Reverend Jerry Falwell asserted that the terrorist attacks were God's way of punishing America for allowing the American Civil Liberties Union, pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays, and lesbians to ignite God's wrath. According to Falwell, God could have chosen to stop the terrorists, but, instead, He "lift[ed] the curtain" and permitted the events of 11 September to take their course. Indeed, the attacks of 9/11 were a means by which to punish what he viewed as the disbelieving American masses—hypocritical believers or "secularists" who altogether disbelieved—those who advocated for what he termed "an alternative lifestyle" as opposed to a lifestyle and belief-style that adhered with the fundamentals of Christianity (*700 Club*).

Furthermore, in that members of each camp cannot "imagine each other" (66), to use Amos Oz's phrase, they broach ways of thinking and being that are evocative of fanaticism in its nascent stages—fanaticism that Oz characterizes not as exclusive to extremist incarnations of religious faith, but as essentially ubiquitous in the contemporary world.[121]

If, as W.E.B. Du Bois posited in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "the problem of the Twentieth Century" was "the problem of the color-line" (1), the problem of the twenty-first century, if works by authors like Roth, Updike, DeLillo, Hamid, and Halaby are indicative of it, may well be the problem of the multitude of lines that divide believers of different kinds. These lines not only render Islam and Christianity as juxtaposed, they divide temperance from the kind of ubiquitous fanaticism that Oz describes. The cure that Oz envisions in *How to Cure a Fanatic* (2006)—a remedy to the problem of fanaticism that involves "imagin[ing] each other" (66)—may appear simplistic or even idealistic at first glance, but for all its simplicity, it may not even be realizable in the modern world. However, it is precisely fiction that fosters the kind of imagination that Oz describes—that, as evidenced by DeLillo's Hammad or Updike's Ahmad Ashwamy Mulloy, even brings to life what Kristiaan Versluys refers to as the "ultimate other" (176), the terrorist. Indeed, with a subtlety that eludes fanaticism, it is fiction that forges the hybrid types and middle spaces that, at bare minimum, continue to have the opportunity to set the terms for American history as it evolves over the course of the new millennium.

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[121] According to Oz, "[f]anaticism is older than Islam, older than Christianity, older than Judaism, older than any state or any government, or political system, older than any ideology or faith in the world" (41). And, as Oz suggests, "fanaticism is almost everywhere, and its quieter, more civilized forms are present all around us and perhaps inside of us as well" (50).

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