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# "The Past Undetonated": Nostalgia and Storytelling in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*

Tanguy Bérenger

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After all, what they sit around calling the "past" at these things isn't a fragment of a fragment of the past. It's the past undetonated—nothing is really brought back, nothing. It's nostalgia. It's bullshit.

Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*, 61

- 1 While much of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* is concerned with the 1960s, the novel opens with a grandiose evocation of the Jewish neighborhood of Weequahic in Newark, New Jersey in the 1940s. Now in his sixties, the narrator Nathan Zuckerman conjures up the vibrant atmosphere of his hometown during World War II, fifty years earlier. The novel begins with a description of his childhood idol, Seymour "Swede" Levov, a teenager depicted as a mythical hero worshipped by the entire community. He stands as the epitome of Jewish assimilation with his prowess in football, basketball, and baseball—the holy trinity of American sports. His exploits serve as the catalyst for the hopes and fears of the neighborhood while the war rages on abroad. The first pages of the book are idyllic in tone; Zuckerman is depicting a paradise, as is made clear from the title of the first part of the novel, "Paradise Remembered," evoking Genesis by way of Milton. However, the tone is also elegiac, as the narrator mourns the disappearance of a world to which he can no longer return.
- 2 This bittersweet recollection is clearly seen through the soft focus of nostalgia, characterized by both pleasure and pain. The word "nostalgia" was coined in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by a Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer, to describe the affliction suffered by Swiss mercenaries who fought abroad and longed for their native Alps. He coined the word by combining the Greek words *nostos*, meaning "to return home," and *algia*, meaning "pain." Homesickness was not something new, but Hofer located its

effects in the body. He identified it as an actual disease whose symptoms included "persistent thinking of home, melancholia, insomnia, anorexia, weakness, anxiety, smothering sensations, and fever" (qtd. in Smith, 510), with potentially fatal consequences. While certainly not as extreme, Zuckerman's nostalgia presents an idealized version of his hometown, but one that he readily admits is a fantasy. In fact, when he finds out that the Swede's later life did not conform to the perfect American Dream trajectory he had anticipated but led to a tragic downfall brought about by the bomb his daughter Merry planted to protest the Vietnam War, he decides to imagine a "realistic chronicle" (Roth, *American Pastoral*, 89) of his story, which takes up most of the novel. Is then the initial nostalgic vision just a mistake to be dismissed or amended? I argue that it plays a crucial role in the construction of the novel, since it contains the creative drive that propels the main narrative.

## Past and present

- 3 To understand the nostalgic outlook of the narrator of *American Pastoral*, one needs to take a look at his immediate context. The story has a frame narrative in which Zuckerman attends his 45<sup>th</sup> high school reunion, a particularly fitting event for reminiscing and reevaluating the past. The narrator confesses that the reunion stirs up within him a whole range of memories and emotions. But is this outpouring actually brought about by the past? Common sense leads us to believe that the causes of nostalgia are to be found in the past, but actually it has little to do with how good or enjoyable one's past actually was, and everything to do with how frustrated one is in one's *present* conditions. Fred Davis, in his study *Yearning for Yesterday*, argues that "Whatever in our present situation invokes it, nostalgia *uses the past* [...] but it is not the product thereof" (10-11). The vision of the past that is thus created is determined by present concerns and shaped by the perceived contrast between past and present situations.<sup>1</sup> During the course of the first part of the novel, Zuckerman informs the reader that he chose to live a secluded life in a remote part of the Berkshires, effectively retiring from the world as an active participant. Furthermore, a recent bout with prostate cancer left him both impotent and incontinent. It is no wonder in these conditions that the writer would turn to the past for consolation. Interestingly, these personal circumstances also correspond to another major cause of nostalgia identified by Fred Davis—transitional periods. He observes that people are more prone to nostalgia in certain pivotal moments in life such as the passage from adolescence to adulthood, because such periods are rife with uncertainty and doubts. These events and emotions "pose the threat of identity discontinuity [...] that nostalgia seeks, by marshaling our psychological resources for continuity, to abort or, at the very least, deflect" (34-35). Nostalgia is thus inherently connected to identity construction; it is a positive process which helps reassure the self that it is as capable of surmounting present or future difficulties as it was in the past.
- 4 However, Davis notes that "unlike the nostalgia of the young, that of the old is a nostalgia without end; for, with only an occasional exception, society sees to it that there is no place for them to go but down" (67). In this case, nostalgia cannot help one adapt to life changes, but it could potentially assuage the fear of one's mortality, since it allows the elderly to dwell positively on their lives. In fact, at Zuckerman's high school reunion, one of the main subjects of conversation between the participants is

the threat of cancer and dying. The narrator wryly comments on this preoccupation: "Let's speak further of death and of the desire—understandably in the aging a desperate desire—to forestall death, to resist it, to resort to whatever means are necessary to see death with anything, anything, *anything* but clarity" (47). In this context, nostalgia appears as one such reaction against the inevitable prospect of death, as what Blaise Pascal would call "diversion" (*divertissement*), the tactic of evasion people naturally adopt to fend off the distressing facts of life: "Not having been able to conquer death, wretchedness, or ignorance, men have decided for their own happiness not to think about it" (Pascal, 44). For Zuckerman and his former classmates, nostalgia offers a safe haven, a welcome but only temporary respite from the thought of their mortal condition. Conversely, one can also think of nostalgia as a reaction against the irreversible nature of time. Vladimir Jankélévitch argues in *L'Irréversible et la nostalgie* that the object of nostalgia is not the actuality of one's past, but precisely the fact that it is past, what he calls the "pastness" of the past (357, my translation). It is *because* one cannot return to one's childhood that it appears so desirable. Thus nostalgia could be seen as a reaction to both the irreversible nature of time (the fact that the past is past) and the inevitable prospect of death, as a desperate attempt to avoid these unpleasant realities.

## A Golden Age?

- 5 By longing for his hometown, Zuckerman is of course also yearning for the days of his youth. Childhood is a privileged object of nostalgic investment because of its bridging of the gap between then and now—it is past and can never be relived, yet it continues to shape and inform our present identity. For the narrator, his childhood is synonymous with a few defining characteristics which seem to contrast starkly with his current situation. Zuckerman now lives the life of the "lonely writers" (35) up in the woods, whereas his evocation of Weequahic is characterized by a definite sense of belonging to a community. From the very first paragraph, the narrator places himself in a collective, with the possessive "our":

The Swede. During the war years, when I was still a grade school boy, this was a magical name in *our Newark neighborhood*, even to adults just a generation removed from the city's old Prince Street ghetto and not yet so flawlessly Americanized as to be bowled over by the prowess of a high school athlete. The name was magical; so was the anomalous face. Of the few fair-complexioned Jewish students in *our preponderantly Jewish public high school*, none possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask of this blue-eyed blond born into *our tribe* as Seymour Irving Levov. (3, emphasis mine)

- 6 Zuckerman merges his own experience with that of the entire Jewish community of Weequahic. He paints a tight-knit neighborhood with a strong sense of cohesion, and it seems he is precisely longing for belonging. Nostalgia is actually one of the means through which a generation or a community coheres, for, as Davis explains, it "mediates the selection, distillation, refinement, and integration of those scenes, events, personalities, attitudes, and practices from the past that make an identifiable *generation* of what would otherwise remain a featureless demographic cohort" (111). Nostalgia is at the crossroads of the personal and the collective; it connects individual biography with the biography of whole communities or nations through a highly selective way of remembering and forgetting. Historical transitions such as World War

It provoke a range of responses shared by millions of people, but this collective process necessarily involves getting one's history wrong.<sup>2</sup> Hana Wirth-Nesher notes a glaring absence in the opening chapter of *American Pastoral*: "the Holocaust is not mentioned anywhere in Zuckerman's nostalgic rhetoric about growing up in a homogenous Jewish neighborhood in the 1940s" (29). This discordant reality does not accord with the picture of success that the narrator depicts and is thus completely left out. By focusing solely on the Swede and his athletic feats, Zuckerman is staking a claim to belonging to the community and taking part in its myth-making. He goes on to describe how "something powerful united us. And united us not merely in where we came from but in where we were going and how we would get there" (44). This teleological narrative, however, is blind to the atrocities of history.

- 7 A similar tendency emerges from the character of the Swede's father, Lou Levov, founder of the glove-making company Newark Maid and the other great nostalgic figure of *American Pastoral*. The patriarch sees history only through the prism of how it affects his business. When Newark Maid is about to go under, he rejoices over the involvement of the United States in World War II: "The war came along and saved us. Government contracts" (346). This is the beginning of a golden age for him, but it comes to an abrupt end in the sixties, a watershed moment marked by the twin disasters of "the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the arrival of the miniskirt, and together that was the death knell for the ladies' dress glove" (349). Oblivious to the fate of the nation, Lou's heart bleeds for the death of his beloved glove. In fact, glove-making encapsulates the values of this idealized lost world and all the weight of tradition. Lou extols the conscientious, hard-working ethics of the industry, its loving trade talk passed on through the generations, and its focus on community: "Most of the glove businesses have been family businesses. From father to son" (130). In reality, his ruthless management of the factory completely belies his words. There is nothing familial in the way he runs his company, except for his paternalistic attitude. His nostalgic longing, however, is passed from father to son, coalescing around a sacrosanct image of the family business of days gone by.
- 8 Furthermore, Weequahic, as Zuckerman describes it, is a world that makes perfect sense and where everything is accounted for. This, of course, is not possible in the confused and turbulent present, but it is only achievable through the distance that separates us from past events. The past appears as a fixed entity, as David Lowenthal points out: "Nothing more can happen to the past; it is safe from the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal. Because it is over, the past can be ordered and domesticated, given a coherence foreign to the chaotic and shifting present" (62). Zuckerman pushes this ordering of the past to the extreme, and in the elated speech he writes after the high school reunion, he depicts a neighborhood where everybody knows everybody intimately and where every sign and every detail is known and understood:

About one another, we knew who had what kind of lunch in the bag in his locker and who ordered what on his hot dog at Syd's; we knew one another's every physical attribute—who walked pigeon-toed and who had breasts, who smelled of hair oil and who oversalivated when he spoke; we knew who among us was belligerent and who was friendly, who was smart and who was dumb; we knew whose mother had the accent and whose father had the mustache, whose mother worked and whose father was dead [...] (43)

- 9 This passage expresses a deep nostalgia for a sense of totality, cohesion and order, for a world in which knowledge is absolute. Once again this concern is motivated by the current preoccupations of the narrator. Zuckerman is indeed now convinced that there is no such thing as certainty, asserting later in the narrative that the Swede "learned the worst lesson that life can teach—that it makes no sense" (81). So how can the narrator reconcile these two contradictory positions—a yearning for life making absolute sense, and the belief that it makes no sense at all?

## Nostalgia and Fiction

- 10 Zuckerman's way of dealing with this discrepancy is acknowledging the illusory nature of his nostalgia. From the very start of the narrative, Zuckerman uses words such as "magical," "fantasy" (3), and "delusionary" (4) to describe the Swede and the neighborhood. Levov's brother, Jerry, is even more blunt, describing the reunion as a pointless exercise in "bullshit-nostalgia" (72). During the high school reunion, while the participants are sharing memories, Zuckerman realizes that things were not what they appeared to be at the time. He does not remember Ira Posner, a former classmate who used to hide the fact that he had a brother put in an institution (54). Nor did Zuckerman know that his sweetheart Joy Helpen did not want him to come home with her because she did not want him to find out that she shared a bed with her widowed mother while her brother slept in the kitchen (84). Gradually behind the veneer of nostalgia a darker and more contrasted picture begins to show. These individual revelations erode the notion of absolute knowledge that Zuckerman rhapsodized about in his speech and instead support his claim that "getting people right is not what living is all about anyway. It's getting them wrong that is living" (35).
- 11 Roth casts further doubt on his story by repeatedly referring to other narratives in the opening pages of *American Pastoral*. Levov is successively called a "household Apollo" (4), a "god" (5), and even "Zeus" (17). Besides Greek mythology, Zuckerman also parallels the Swede's story with the Book of Job and *The Kid from Tomkinsville*, a juvenile baseball novel with tragic overtones (7-9), as well as Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (30-31). The extent of this intertextual interplay unsettles the story and seems to imply that any ordering of the past in narrative is ultimately a form of storytelling. When trying to make sense of the Swede's life, Zuckerman resorts to familiar myths and stories. According to Hayden White, histories are indeed "symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that 'liken' the events reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture" (91). Such undermining of his own narrative allows Zuckerman to yield to the temptation of nostalgia while simultaneously keeping it at a distance and making the reader aware of its simplifications and distortions. This delicate balance is at the heart of what Linda Hutcheon has described as "postmodern nostalgia": "In the postmodern, in other words, (and here is the source of the tension) nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, and ironized." In the case of *American Pastoral*, this conflicting dimension of nostalgia reveals a deep-seated ambivalence on the part of the narrator, which he uses as material for his fiction.
- 12 In fact, though it is dismissed as a fantasy, the initial vision of a golden age still hangs over the rest of the novel; it is repeated and reflected under different guises, and this is made possible by the very structure of the narrative. During the high school reunion,

Zuckerman chooses to reconstruct his version of the Swede's later life as a tragedy. To do so, he decides to try and become one with Levov, to focalize on his point of view and erase his own presence from the text. Nonetheless, Zuckerman's presence can still be felt in the distance between his point of view and the Swede's and in the many parallels between their lives. Levov's pastoral consists in his buying a huge stone country house in rural New Jersey and living out the American Dream with his wife and daughter. It stands as counterpoint to Zuckerman's own pastoral, his nostalgia for his hometown—as illusory as the Swede's, yet seemingly as inescapable. Although the object of their yearning is different, there are similarities. They share a comparable desire for belonging, as Jerry explains to his brother: "You longed to belong like everybody else to the United States of America? Well, you do now, big boy, thanks to your daughter" (277). In addition, Levov's pastoral fantasy is also characterized by a clear sense of order which is completely shattered by his daughter's act of terrorism, leaving him picturing "the whole of his life as a stuttering mouth and a grimacing face—the whole of his life without cause or sense and completely bungled. He no longer had any conception of order. There was no order. None" (93). Both men also seem to lament the fall of Newark. If their hometown was a paradise in the 1940s, it is described as hell in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of the 1967 riots: "It was Newark that was entombed here, a city that was not going to stir again" (219).<sup>3</sup> Understandably, the Swede—as Zuckerman imagines him—yields to a nostalgic tendency of his own:

The Swede was giving in to the ordinary human wish to live once again in the past—to spend a self-deluding, harmless few moments back in the wholesome striving of the past, when the family endured by a truth in no way grounded in abetting destruction but rather in eluding and outlasting destruction, overcoming its mysterious inroads by creating the utopia of a rational existence. (122–23)

- 13 Return, of course, is impossible, since one can never go back in time and, besides, nostalgia conjures up a past that never was, "the past undetonated" (61). Merry's character represents this impossibility of return. She is the one who effectively detonates the Swede's life and destroys his illusions. But even before her teenage rebellion, there is something in her that is both uncontrollable and unaccountable. Her stuttering disrupts the flow of language and signals a crack in her father's narrative even as it unfolds. Furthermore, her speech impediment is also a stark reminder of the failings of nostalgia. According to Susan Stewart, nostalgia is "the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions" (23). Hence, Merry's perpetual repetition of consonants can be seen as a cruel parody of the Swede's yearning of the past and his inability to relive it. In fact, Merry's brand of 1960s leftist radicalism consists in overthrowing the order that is central to nostalgic and utopian thinking, and introducing a Dionysian sense of complete chaos. She opposes everything that her father stands for, including his reliance on family values: "All you can think about, all you can talk about, all you c-c-care about is the well-being of this f-fucking l-l-little f-f-family!" (107) This clash of opposites leaves the Swede rudderless: "There was no order. None. He envisioned his life as a stutterer's thought, wildly out of his control" (93). All the more reason for him to seek refuge in an idealized past.
- 14 The Swede's and Zuckerman's nostalgic longings may be both illusory, but they are not of the same order. Fred Davis has identified three orders of nostalgia, the first of which he calls "simple nostalgia," a straightforward yearning to return to an earlier time that is deemed superior. The second order, which he calls "reflexive nostalgia," is a tendency to "question, deflate, correct, and remind" (21)—in other words, to ask



oneself, "was it really like that?" The third order, "interpreted nostalgia," consists in directing analytically-oriented questions concerning the source and purpose of the nostalgic experience—in other words, "why am I feeling nostalgic?" Davis explains that they function as analytical categories and do not exclude the fact that people frequently move from one "level" to another in no specific order while experiencing nostalgia. However, it seems that the Swede's nostalgia is firmly restricted to the first order—a sincere wish to return to the past—as futile and illusory as his earlier "utopia of a rational existence." Zuckerman's nostalgia, on the other hand, navigates between the different orders and reveals a fundamental underlying tension that cannot be resolved.<sup>4</sup> This dynamic is clearly at play in the speech Zuckerman writes after the reunion, in which he exalts the boundless energy of his generation:

Despite the undercurrent of anxiety—a sense communicated daily that hardship was a persistent menace that only persistent diligence could hope to keep at bay; despite a generalized mistrust of the Gentile world; despite the fear of being battered that clung to many families because of the Depression—ours was not a neighborhood steeped in darkness. (41)

- 15 Zuckerman regularly inserts concessive clauses throughout his panegyric, as if anticipating criticism, yet these small reality checks are systematically overrun by his nostalgic inclination. This back-and-forth movement reaches a climax in the following passage:

Am I wrong to think that we delighted in living there? No delusions are more familiar than those inspired in the elderly by nostalgia, but am I completely mistaken to think that living as well-born children in Renaissance Florence could not have held a candle to growing up within aromatic range of Tabachnik's pickle barrels? (42)

- 16 The extravagant claim of the comparison and the painstaking way it is prefaced reveal the fundamental workings of Zuckerman's nostalgic process: it is a constant oscillation and tension between knowing that nostalgia is an illusion and giving in to a desire to believe. This irrational desire to believe is the irreducible core of nostalgia; it is a suspension of disbelief—an almost *unwilling* suspension of disbelief. This is precisely what makes nostalgia so appealing for a fiction writer: it is a creative force that he can exploit and channel through a different kind of narrative, one over which he has more control. This transition resembles the progress from involuntary memory to fiction that governs Proust's method in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Roth playfully recreates the famous *madeleine* scene by having Zuckerman devour the *rugelach* he receives at the reunion, which unfortunately does not dissolve his "apprehensiveness of death" (47), as was the case with his illustrious literary predecessor. For Proust, it is only through fiction that the essence of time contained in the involuntary surge of memory can be regained.<sup>5</sup> As Dorrit Cohn explains, "involuntary memory is merely the precondition—necessary, but insufficient—for recreating the past through narration. The narrative process itself, by contrast, is emphatically conscious, deliberate, and intellectual" (146). Similarly, nostalgia and fiction share common ground, and this affinity allows Zuckerman to operate the transition between his nostalgic musings and his artful reinvention of the Swede's story.
- 17 Music plays a key part in this transition, as Zuckerman begins dreaming his "realistic chronicle" while dancing at the reunion to a popular song from his childhood, "Dream," by Johnny Mercer, whose lyrics, which serve as one of the novel's epigraphs, enjoin listeners to dream so that their fantasies "might come true." From its early



history on, nostalgia has been associated with music,<sup>6</sup> and today it remains a favorite tool of researchers who study the phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Music bridges past and present, it is infinitely repeatable yet it also makes us aware of the impossibility of return, as Zuckerman reveals when listening to a piece by Rimsky-Korsakov in *The Humain Stain*: "The musicians had indeed laid bare the youngest, most innocent of our ideas of life, the indestructible yearning for the way things aren't and can never be" (207).<sup>8</sup> However, music liberates the narrator to elaborate another creation, one in which he will "desimplify" (*American Pastoral*, 20) his initial nostalgic vision. The "catatonic forties beat" (84) of the song plunges the narrator into a trance-like state in which dreams, memory and nostalgia become the fodder from which his fiction arises.<sup>9</sup>

- 18 For Zuckerman, nostalgia is only the first stage of the creative process, but it contains the very spark from which his fiction emerges. The yearning to return to the hometown and its golden age actually turns into a yearning to travel further, as Jankélévitch illustrates when he argues that there is a natural progression from "closed" to "open" nostalgia. Closed nostalgia is the illusion that homecoming is the conclusive cure that will restore everything that the nostalgic felt lacking in his or her exile, as if the return could simply cancel out the departure. But the nostalgic's desire is not so easily satisfied, since it is directed toward an open-ended destination. Thus the homeland is actually just a pretext, the "symbolic and metaphorical localization of an indeterminate desire" (Jankélévitch, 360, my translation). This lack cannot be named and cannot be fulfilled but it urges us onward, as Susan Stewart argues: "this point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire" (23), in a language highly reminiscent of Lacan's *objet a*, the ever absent cause of desire. Fiction is the place where Zuckerman's nostalgia takes him to continue this journey. Like his character, Philip Roth could not wait to leave the strictures of his family home and neighborhood when he left for college. Yet he found himself perpetually revisiting his hometown of Newark in his novels, as in *American Pastoral*. But it is not so much an expression of a wish to return to his childhood home as a desire to explore this locale further in a fictionalized setting, as a starting point for storytelling. In *The Tenants*, Bernard Malamud has his protagonist, the writer Harry Lesser, profess that "Home is where my book is" (11). This sentence could be a creed for Roth or his *alter ego* Zuckerman, for whom the true homeland is fiction, both as a point of return and a point of departure.
- 19 Fiction, however, is not a place without contradictions. Narrative is the medium through which Zuckerman creates and explores the past, but in a certain sense he is also its captive. In fact, the narrator defines himself as "a man who would be seeking his solace, like it or not, nowhere but in sentences" (65). Roth describes a man who has retired from the world and only lives to tell other people's stories, with fiction as the only medium at his disposition. Narrative is thus opposed to the unmediated experience of the world, which remains tantalizingly out of reach. This opposition between writing and living is further explored in *Exit Ghost* (2007), the epilogue to the whole Zuckerman series. In this novel, a visit to New York after eleven years of absence throws the aged writer back into the turmoil of the city. The narrator is haunted by ghosts from his past while also reminded of another kind of torment, "The pain of being present in the present moment" (137). Ultimately, Zuckerman prefers to exile himself from lived experience in favor of the unlived realm of fiction, despite its

limitations. Narrative, like nostalgia, is indeed a double-edged sword: it provides consolation but it remains only a palliative; it is both the disease and the cure.

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## NOTES

1. The tension in nostalgia derives precisely from the impossibility of resolving the juxtaposition of then and now, which Svetlana Boym illustrates in cinematic terms as "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface" (xiv).
2. "To forget—and I would venture say—to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical study is a danger to nationality" writes Ernest Renan in "What Is a Nation;" (qtd. in Boym, 15).
3. Zuckerman's description of the "pyramids of Newark" (219) is almost biblical, as Mark Shechner points out: "As the Jews once lamented Jerusalem, Roth laments Newark" (166).
4. Svetlana Boym suggests another typology which may also apply here, the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia: "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately. [...] Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt" (xviii).
5. "By rapidly devouring mouthful after mouthful of these crumbs whose floury richness—blended of butter and sour cream and vanilla and cream cheese and egg yolk and sugar—I'd loved since childhood, perhaps I'd find vanishing from Nathan what, according to Proust, vanished from Marcel the instant he recognized "the savour of the little madeleine": the apprehensiveness of death. "A mere taste," Proust writes, and "the word 'death' . . . [has] . . . no meaning for him." So, greedily I ate, gluttonously, refusing to curtail for a moment this wolfish intake of saturated fat but, in the end, having nothing like Marcel's luck" (*American Pastoral*, 47). Interestingly, Roth does not quote from *Swann's Way* (*Du côté de chez Swann*), the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, in which the madeleine scene originally appears, but from *The Past Recaptured* (*Le Temps retrouvé*, translated more judiciously as *Time Regained* by Andreas Mayor), the final volume—when Proust's narrator reflects on the earlier episode in the larger context of his decision to write fiction (*Remembrance*, 995–96). By referring to this passage – a remembrance of a remembrance—Roth echoes Zuckerman's own process of turning the initial memory into another form of fiction.
6. In his 1767 *Dictionary of Music*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau discusses the Ranz des Vaches, a traditional folk melody from the Alps "so generally beloved among the Swiss, that it was forbidden to be play'd in their troops under pain of death, because it made them burst into tears, desert, or die, whoever heard it; so great a desire did it excite in them of returning to their country" (266–67).
7. See for instance Barrett et al., "Music-Evoked Nostalgia: Affect, Memory, and Personality."
8. *The Human Stain* is also suffused with nostalgia evoked by songs from the 1940s. See Morley; and Shechner 154–173 for further discussion on the role of music in the American trilogy.
9. It is tempting to draw a parallel with another Proustian creation, the "little phrase" of Vinteuil's sonata, which stirs up the narrator's emotions and gives him the intuition that art is the medium through which he will be able to express the ineffable and transcend time: "nothing

resembled more closely than some such phrase of Vinteuil the peculiar pleasure which I had felt at certain moments in my life [such as] when I tasted a certain cup of tea.

Without pressing this comparison farther, I felt that the clear sounds, the blazing colours which Vinteuil sent to us from the world in which he composed, paraded before my imagination with insistence but too rapidly for me to be able to apprehend it, something which I might compare to the perfumed silkiness of a geranium. Only, whereas, in memory, this vagueness may be, if not explored, at any rate fixed precisely, thanks to a guiding line of circumstances which explain why a certain savour has been able to recall to us luminous sensations, the vague sensations given by Vinteuil coming not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville), one would have had to find, for the geranium scent of his music, not a material explanation, but the profound equivalent, the unknown and highly coloured festival (of which his works seemed to be the scattered fragments, the scarlet-flashing rifts), the mode in which he 'heard' the universe and projected it far beyond himself" (*Remembrance*, 642–43).

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## ABSTRACTS

This article explores the nostalgia for 1940s Newark exhibited by Nathan Zuckerman in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. In the first part of the novel, the narrator presents an idealized version of his hometown characterized by a tight-knit community and a clear sense of order, contrasting starkly with his present situation. Although Zuckerman acknowledges the illusory nature of his fantasy, he cannot help but indulge in it. This ambivalent reaction is actually the creative spark from which the main narrative emerges.

Cet article examine la nostalgie pour le Newark des années 1940 qu'exprime Nathan Zuckerman dans *American Pastoral* de Philip Roth. Dans la première partie du roman, le narrateur présente une version idéalisée de sa ville natale, marquée par une communauté soudée et une impression d'ordre, qui tranche avec sa situation présente. Bien que Zuckerman reconnaisse la nature illusoire de cette chimère, il ne peut s'empêcher d'y céder. Cette réaction ambiguë constitue en réalité l'élément déclencheur du récit principal.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*, nostalgie, narration, illusion, temporalité

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