

CONFIGURATIONS OF THE POLYPHONIC SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS: THE COMPLEXITY OF CULTURAL MEMORY IN PHILIP ROTH'S THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA

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Abstract: This article focuses on deconstructing the polyphonic competing voices running into Roth's authorial voice. His transatlantic narrative voice is in fact haunted by different sub-consciousnesses of his authorial mind. The corollary of the aggregation of these voices springs from the formation of a contrapuntal environment in the novel. This double-voiced discourse which in Bakhtinian terms is famous with "other-voicedness" finds a condition within this study through which voices can move in and out of the novelist's central narrative voice in an attempt to orchestrate the characters' ideologies.

Keywords: Jewishness, self, polyphony, consciousness, transgredient space

Introduction

What makes *The Plot Against America* shine in Roth's oeuvre is its artistic blurring of the lines between fact and fiction. It is of paramount of importance for Roth to orient his literary works more and more toward the quality of verisimilitude. And in doing so, he is so punctilious that it is really hard to take on an animadversional approach when judging the verisimilitude of his works. As a course of fact, in *The Plot Against America*, Roth has so abstrusely interwoven the two notions of fact and fiction that the act of labeling the novel as implausible or unreal could be only done by reviewers who at their best could have a shallow reading of the novel. What is going to be tackled in this study is scrutinizing the verisimilitude that Roth manipulated in all constituent elements of the novel, especially in characterization.

Polyphonic Orchestration of Characters' Ideologies

To construct novel's characters as real as possible, Mikhail Bakhtin emphasizes that the author's prerogative voice has to be dismissed for the benefit of the characters' *self-conscious*. Upon gaining awareness and thus autonomy, characters will not emerge as puppets (passive avatars) at the hands of the author. In this regard, in *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he states that

“the verisimilitude of a character is verisimilitude of the character's own internal discourse about himself in all its purity but, in order to hear and display that discourse, in order to incorporate it into the field of vision of another person, the laws of that other field must be violated, for the normal field can find a place for the object-image of another person but not for another field of vision in its entirety.

Some fantastical viewpoint must be sought for the author outside ordinary fields of vision.” (54)

In *The Plot Against America* Roth has crafted the incorporation of each character’s internal discourse to his field of vision mainly through two strategies: on the first level, he holds together a plurality of consciousnesses into his text by unmerging and displacing his authorial voice. It is as if the novel stages a platform for the interaction and conversation of distinct ideologies imported by each character. In the midst of all characters’ verbal exchange Roth does not interfere even at the crucial moments. When in the first chapter Lindbergh’s name is getting on everybody’s tongue, Herman Roth shouts a series of questions: “What the hell did he [Lindbergh] do?” “What the hell did he do *that* for?” “Has he completely lost his mind?” (*Plot* 46). All these questions are just partly answered by Alvin’s short and witty remarks, whereas the reader is in need of knowing the answers to these questions. Further, the narrator, Philip, holds the reader’s curiosity unanswered by ironically jumping to the next paragraph and speaking about something else. Secondly, for a more excellent translation of the psychology of his characters Roth creates a kind of dialogue with them, and thenceforward exploits characters’ words into the text of the novel. Bakhtin believes that upon such dialogues, the character is “represented” and not “expressed.” When the characterization is developed as such, he or she “does not fuse with the author, [and] does not become the mouthpiece of his [author’s] voice” (*Problems* 54). Hence, there is no surprise in the fact that no character could be found in the novel that is incontrovertibly serving the Roth’s authorial intention, nor again in the fact that authorial interference on behalf of Roth could be traced after all of the verbal exchanges.

Philip Roth has no interest in staging the characters of the novel unidimensionally, even though, it would have served his thematic emphasis if he did so. In his appraisal of the novel, Steven G. Kellman believes that it “is a secular American Jew’s nightmare about the ascendancy of fervent Christians who define American identity in terms that exclude the Roths of Weequahic” (116). Therefore, the Christians, the majority who run anti-Semitic discourse into the novels setting are unexpectedly not portrayed as utterly diabolical characters. When government programs such as Homestead 42 and Just Folks dispersed and disintegrated Jewish families of Newark, Wishnows (Roths’ Jewish neighbor of the down floor) become superseded by an Italian Catholic family. This new neighbor of Roths are not limned as indifferent and neutral to what is going on to the Jews. When the shockwaves of Lindbergh’s presidency threat Jews’ security in the neighborhood, in an act of sympathy, Mr. Cucuzza and his son went to Roths floor with some “gifts:” “Joey’s gift was the cake, Mr. Cucuzza’s was a pistol,” (256) by which Herman could take care of his family. Likewise, this Roth’s resistance against one-sided portrayal of characters goes to Jews of the novel. In doing so, he does not stage Jews as wholly aggrieved minorities. Uncle Monty, Aunt Evelyn, and Rabbi Bengelsdorf, for example, so get on very well with Americans that have nothing for not being regarded as collaborators. One implication of this potpourri of characters is the space that he creates between himself (as the author) and his artistic creations. By this space, his characters achieve a self-consciousness that would make them no longer the carriers of authorial intentions. Bakhtin refers to such self-consciousness “as the artistic dominant in the structure of a character’s image, [which] presupposes a radically new authorial position with regard to the represented person” (*Problems* 57). By fortifying his characters by such consciousness and thus autonomy, Roth’s narrative voice emerges just as one of the many voices of novel’s polyphonic orchestration.

That Roth pictures his characters as heterogeneous is in fact an endeavor to emulate

the stratification and multifariousness of truth. For Roth, to whom fiction is/should be a facsimile of real life, employing diversity at the level of characters is substantial. The diversity that he assigns to his characters becomes more tangible when each character's personal traits become discretely analyzed. As post-war novels mostly stress the "polyphony or heteroglot possibility, hybridity, and post-nationality; and a sense of the profoundly unstable and precarious nature of the self in an ever-evolving national space," (Morley 549) *The Plot Against America* is a host of numerous Weltanschauungen.¹ In the novel, each character adheres to his or her own view on life and enters into the city of ideas that Roth has architected for the novel. This discursive quality of worldviews traces back to the political preference of the characters. In other words, "Politics is where ideological differences between people come to the fore, where different viewpoints collide, and where each side tries to state its case as convincingly as possible" (Verhaeren 44). In the story, after a family dispute Bess notices Philip's discomfort and curiosity with the inconsistency of characters. She asks: "What do you want to know?" When Philip answers "What everyone's yelling for," she underscores the significance of worldview in man's life by replying: "Because everybody sees things differently.... Because there's a lot on everyone's mind" (*Plot* 175). As a polyphonic novel, *The Plot Against America* offers a range of feasible definitions for being a Jew. Employing such variety makes Roth's position dynamic in narrating the story. In *Reading Myself and Others* he admits that "For me, one of the strongest motives for continuing to write fiction is an increasing distrust of 'positions,' my own included" (68). From this perspective, the reality that he offers emerges as spectral. Considering reality as such, each character's personal traits merit analysis through a critical myopic lens. In the novel, Roth has summed up each character's concept of reality, a reality that each pries out according to his or her own particular worldview: Herman Roth reveals one plane of the spectrum that is located between assimilation and a complete identification with Jewishness. He is a fierce American Jew, who as an indigenous refuses to give up fighting for the democracy and freedom and yet at the same time he fights for the right of country's minorities including Jews, a race that according to Lindbergh locked that democracy and freedom onto stalemate. Rabbi Bengelsdorf stands in another place of that spectrum. He is so Americanized that many regarded him as a quisling man, as a Jew who "just guaranteed Roosevelt's defeat!" (*Plot* 45). Aunt Evelyn, Rabbi Bengelsdorf's wife, set aside everything with the Jews and works in the Office of American Absorption, an office which designs programs which either consciously or unconsciously have anti-Semitic intentions. Being like this, she hardly can be regarded as Jewish when compared to her sister, Bess. Young Philip calls her "estranged aunt" when he is asking about the dinner that his aunt had at White House with president's guests; Mr. von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister. Bess is a moderate character who just wants to flee to Canada when she found out that the religious tolerance that the United States offered was just a tantalizing hope. Sandy epitomizes a character who is discontent from Jewishness and to cope with it, he recurses to "self-congratulation." After participating in Just Folks program and working in the farmlands of Kentucky, he is so satisfied with the experience that the Office of American Absorption uses him as a model to encourage other Jewish boys to participate in such programs. Alvin who cannot stand the discrimination and anti-Semitic discourses, chooses to fight. He runs away to Canada to join the army and fight Nazis. Taking into account the behavior of each of above mentioned characters and indeed of

¹ A German Claque for "worldview," composed of *welt* (world) and *aushauung* (outlook) emphasizing the cognitive gravitation of one individual toward world through which each notion is ontologically and epistemologically comprehended.

all other characters like Walter Winchel, Mrs. Wishnow, uncle Monty, and Earl Axman unveils how each character yields his or her own self-consciousness, and that how Roth's authorial resolution becomes obliterated. In this way, his polyphonic narrative mode in the novel becomes subsumed with multiple points of view. Debra Shostak believes that this strategy allows Roth to "take up a variety of perspectives on the issues that engross him, at times in clear opposition to one another and at other times along a continuum. He gives full voice to each perspective, which may appear literally or in dialogue, in the monologue of a character or narrator, or displaced into action or narrative form" (6). By characters improve with such extent of autonomy, two interrelated points need explanation here: the unity of the work and the position of the author. In the novel, each viewpoint is set in a way that no one's can surpass the other's. They are insurmountable since each is "equally developed, equally persuasive, and put forth with the same rhetorical force" (Verhaeren 44). In such environment, novel's text holds an *anti-theological* sense that resists against centripetal forces of unity. This justifies why the novel flouts any facile judgment and why the author does not allow himself to interfere in the dialogues of the characters. The novel abounds in examples of inconclusive disputes between Herman and Rabbi Bengelsdorf, Herman and Alvin, Sandy and his parents, Bess and Aunt Evelyn, and Alvin and uncle Monty. Therefore, when Roth discards characters' arguments (by not giving any authorial and moral encompassing judgement) the novel will have no room for the binary of privileged/unprivileged ideology. This writing off makes *The Plot Against America* "dialogic rather than dogmatic." Shostak maintains that "[Roth] refuses to imagine such positions in simple binary terms, which might allow one perspective to gain interpretive privilege over another, nor does he work varied viewpoints through a dialectical process toward a synthesis" (6). With all this, Roth is in fact dramatizing the complexity of reality. To him, reality is not that easy to be grasped by any binary, but rather, it is a mirage, so to speak, always changing shape. Once in an interview with Mervyn Rothstein, he admits that his "impulse is to problematize material... I like when it's opposed by something else, by another point of view" (qtd. in *Countertexts* 6).

After all, the last part of the analysis of the characters goes to the main character of the story, Philip Roth. What makes his position special here is that this character is the hero, the narrator, and shares the same name with his creator. As the story's hero, Philip, contrary to the heroes of the conventional novels is not a glamorized superman who can deal with any problem, but he is just a seven-year-old Jewish boy who is frightened with the plight that he and his coreligionists experience in fascist America: "Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn't been president or if I hadn't been the offspring of Jews" (*Plot* 10). One main reason for characterizing the protagonist as such is that in polyphonic novels the main character is not the holder of authorial intentions. By this not being author's mouthpiece, the protagonist appears just like the other characters because his voice is orchestrated at the same level with other's in the contrapuntal stage of the novel. To Bakhtin, the hero is not a fixed determined subject, but a "particular point of view on the world and on oneself" (*Problems* 47). He is capable of interpreting his own self as well as his surroundings. What is important for a polyphonic novelist then "is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself" (47). Throughout the story, young Philip describes how the world (America) appears to him with his own childish point of view. With the Lindbergh's administration, other characters react with their own mature eyesight, in the meanwhile, all that young Philip can do here is playing the game "I Declare War" (33). Philip as the narrator also turns out as an iconoclastic character when

compared to conventional novels: like his heroic version, in this role he does not take on a fixing image. He is subsumed with a sum of subconscious selves. That is why when analyzing the narration within the “higher unity” of the novel, the overlapping images (partly a seven-year-old boy, partly a historian, and partly the authorial Roth) come into the sights.

One significant feature that the characters of this novel share in common is their dynamic personality. As the novel closes, many characters are not those whom they were at the beginning. It shows that Roth delineates the diversity of characters not only at the large scale of novel’s society, but he does register this diversity at the level of each single character’s personality as well. Such stunning strain of bringing vastly dissonant voices in a single narrative platform endorses and lauds the polyphonic quiddity of Roth’s masterpiece.

Dialogue in Artistic Creation

In the genre of novel, dialogue plays a constructive role. What is meant here by dialogue is twofold: it refers to the relation that characters establish through their verbal exchanges alongside with the special kind of dialogue that the novelist has with his characters. Both senses of dialogue aim at a very transcendental goal. In the previous part it has been said that each character enjoys his or her own autonomy by the self-consciousness that they achieve from their creator. But how this autonomy is really fulfilled when they are written by an author? The answer lies in the role that dialogue plays in the novel, especially the role of the latter sense by which the author manages dialogue with his artistic creations. An explanation of the autonomy (selfhood) that one achieves in life provides a good starting point for expanding and explaining the role that dialogue plays in the answer of the above-mentioned question.

One cannot get a fully image of his *self* in private. It means that it is impossible for man to conceive of himself outside of the relation that links him to the others. Bakhtin believes that “In life, we do this [conceiving of self] at every moment: we appraise ourselves from the point of view of others, we attempt to understand the transredient² moments of our very consciousness and to take them into account through the other” (qtd. in *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* 94). All external as well as internal apprehension of self take shape under the auspices of man’s surroundings. In this regard, “the others” gain a quintessential position in self-understanding. Tzvetan Todorov corroborates that “we can never see ourselves as a whole; the other is necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself” (95). Provided that one keeps his individual in private, he will lose himself since he is in lack of understanding of his self, since being (“*être*”) is to be accessed through the other (“*autre*”) (97). Now it becomes clear why Bakhtin molded “being” on the theory and critical procedure of dialogue: he avers that “Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to responds, to (dis)agree” (*Problems* 293).

By applying the process of self-understanding to the genre of novel, more specifically to its characterization, author’s position merits examination, hence the ground for answering the posed question becomes prepared. Based on what has been mentioned so far, if the author be regarded as the transredient space around one character, that character will come into an understanding of himself. In the process of characterization, the author has to undergo a transcendental metamorphosis: he objectifies his fictive avatar in his mind so much so that he himself would become that very character. In this way, he begins to live the life of the

² A term Bakhtin uses to comment on the inside out space spreading around one’s ego.

character. There, he makes dialogue with the character and thenceforward makes a return to restore his position as the novelist. It is through this process that he can first come into a fully understanding of his characters and then fulfill their autonomy. Accordingly, such author can never be charged as the determiner or finalizer of the characters. In designing characters, he is not the architect; all he can do is being “the other,” the transgredient space around their consciousness.

Regarding the characterization of *The Plot Against America* from this vantage point, it becomes unveiled that how Roth was successful in managing dialogue with his characters. The spectral qualities that characters offer, shows how much Roth has devoted his authorial position for the sake of making his characters as objective as possible. He could have easily colonized his characters and made them serve his intention. If he did so, he could even intensify the tragic nature of the novel, but as a polyphonic novelist to whom the fallacies of conventional art including monotony, delusion, distortion, and finalization have been debunked, he prefers to revere the autonomy of the characters and to show life as it really is.

In *The Plot Against America* Roth elevates the concept of dialogue by taking it one step further so as to install character-character dialogue to the author-character dialogue. This ancillary dialogue, through which both senses of dialogue are interrelated, makes characters define and invent one another. Bakhtin believes that dialogue

“is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically.” (qtd. in *Routledge Dictionary* 52)

When Sandy’s satisfaction with the Just Folks program does not appeal to his father, Herman, he becomes lectured by his father. In one of his many dialogues, Herman puts his views on “henchmen” across his son: “You know nothing about von Ribbentrop, you know nothing about Göring, you know nothing about Goebbels and Himmler and Hess—but I do know” (177). The Nazi’s relentless policies is divulged as it becomes clear that the programs of the Office of American Absorption were part of Himmler’s prescription “to inaugurate in America a systematic process of marginalization that will lead in the foreseeable future to the confiscation of all Jewish wealth and the total disappearance of the Jewish population, their appurtenances, and their property” (293). Although it is hard for Sandy, he abandons everything with Kentucky and begins getting on with girls. As Philip observes, “Sandy’s friends were suddenly the girls his age, the teenage girls whom he knew from school but had never examined so covetously before” (229). But the most instructive example for this kind of character-character dialogue is one that takes place in novel’s broad socio-political framework between the “Christian countrymen” as the majority, and American Jews as the minorities. Philip believes that the corollary of this dialogue, the image that Jews earn from it is a distorted image: “rather than *truthfully* acknowledging us to be a small minority of citizens vastly outnumbered by our Christian countrymen, by and large *obstructed* by religious prejudice from attaining public power, and surely no less loyal to the principles of American democracy than an admirer of Adolf Hitler” (22 emphasis added). Roth feels that this image is nothing more than a misrepresentation, because the mirror that the majority hold before them does not (want to) reflect a whole Jewish image, and if it does, the image is distorted and

prejudiced. Feeling uneasy with this mischievous image, Roth writes in *The Counterlife* (1986): “The treacherous imagination is everybody’s maker – we are all the invention of each other, everybody a conjuration conjuring up everyone else. We are all each other’s authors” (126). The misrepresented (treacherous) picture of Jewishness makes the novel a host of inconsistent selves. No one in the novel – from Rabbi Bengelsdorf to young Philip – can be regarded as a typical of Jew. After the frustration that comes along with earning a distorted image of the self, each character is no longer able to rule over his self by his own pre-existing origin. In consequence, he will receive and inhabit respectively different influences and dissonant voices. This explains the contrapuntal quality that ranges over the characters of the story. The narration of the novel relies on a series of tensions arisen from different voices each of which acts as an author who takes on, so to speak, different heads for the creation of each character. Upon this spectacular authorial position, Andrew J. Connolly writes: “he is more interested in exploring the productive tensions fostered by a troubled experience of origins that never attain absolute authority over him” (105).

What is more, the dialogic stream that flows in the Rothian fiction is not limited exclusively to his own previous works; his fiction does acquiesce to the works of other writers too. The case study of this research, for instance, falls to a certain degree in the patterns of Sinclair Lewis alternative history, *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935). Roth alludes to this title by the “high-pitched voice” of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia who is praising the killed leader of the anti-Lindbergh movement, Walter Winchel, while standing beside his coffin: “It can’t happen here? My friends, it is happening here – and where is Lindbergh? Where is Lindbergh?” (276). Roth also includes Lewis’s real-life wife, Dorothy Thompson, into his story. Additionally, he enumerates the concept of “What if they had?” while studying the autobiography of Arthur Schlesinger, which is one of the main building blocks of his alternative history.

Apropos of the preceding remarks, it is felicitous here to sum up Roth’s references to his own previous works and/or to the works of other writers in the literary device, called *intertextuality*³, a narrative strategy to which he recurses to defy the concept of fixed meaning in fiction. Through dialogues, once again, Roth’s authorial position appears as irresolute. His voice, irrespective of being in possession of the prerogative of authority, underdoes many deeds so that it could become on a par with the voice of other characters. One certain implication of this state of equipoise is the open-endedness toward which he gravitates his fiction: he does not accommodate “self-cancelling” and finalizing voices, but he does voice a series of polyphonic and autonomous ideas so as to create a *carnivalistic* atmosphere in which everybody’s voice is orchestrated with a joyful sense of plurality and relativity.

Roth’s Metafictional Heteroglossia on History

Heteroglossia, sometimes referred to as polyglossia or multiple meanings, generally denotes the existence of various voices or socio-ideological interests that concurrently and dialogically merge into one another. When it is developed in novel, a variation of meanings which in turn can be interpreted in different ways comes forward. Meaning is basically influenced and generated by spatial-temporal factors; consequently, when it is formed, it is ceaselessly subjected to de/regeneration. Within the story, young Philip gets two completely

³ A “literary word” verbalized through intertextuality, describes Julia Kristeva, “as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings” (qtd. in “Roth, Literary Influence, Postmodernism” 84).

different visions on America as he is exposed to different contexts: in the first chapter of the novel, when Frank D. Roosevelt is president, Philip conceives America a “homeland for three generations” (13). He says:

“I pledged allegiance to the flag of our homeland every morning at school. I sang of its marvels with my classmates at assembly programs. I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without giving a second thought to my affinity for the Fourth of July fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-header. Our homeland was America.” (13)

But such view on America is further drastically changed when he is placed into another spatial-temporal environment. In their family trip to Washington D.C., Roth (the author) runs an anti-Semitic discourse into the scenario: Roths are insulted and pointed from the passerby, and worse, they become “evicted” from the very hotel which Bess had reserved long before. When his parents went to talk with manager about this incident, Philip feels as “alone.” He asks Sandy “What happens?” “Anti-Semitism” becomes his reply. Further, he feels so insecure and “alien” that when the police (who came to solve the problem) ask him “Whattaya got there?” he answers: “‘My stamps,’ I said, but just kept going before he could ask to see my collection and I had to show it to him to avoid arrest” (71). Text cannot be finalizing and unitary because it is hinged on historical moments and particular environments, and yet if any claims so, it has ideological and/or political intentions(s) for sure. Nonetheless, even as centripetal forces of unitary undertake the process of finalization, they have to pass through disuniting domains of heteroglossia. Bakhtin asserts that alongside with “the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry their uninterrupted work” (*Dialogic Imagination* 265).

Established historical accounts are replete with centripetal forces of language. In this field of study, the historian, for the narration of a particular given moment has to finalize everything in that moment. In this manner, the language of history directs a forcible imposition on events, and hence a distortion of them. Whatever picture be rendered by history, it must be noted that through the passage of time, the ferocity of historian’s monologic account will be incontrovertibly debunked. But quite on the contrary, postmodern novel employs a language that would unremittingly undergo external pressures. The language of novel is not exclusively an emanation from author’s mind. Calling such language “libertarian,” Raman Selden argues that it is appropriate for “those writers whose work permits the freest play of different value systems and whose authority is not imposed upon the alternatives” (40). In novel, the author has/shows no tendency to dictate his views and ideologies onto the text. He stratifies novel’s language by introducing his text new and different spatial-temporal settings.

Roth’s 2004 postmodern novel, *The Plot Against America*, becomes suspicious of monologic history. On this kind of history, he writes:

“the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as ‘History,’ harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic.” (107).

In this novel he interplays different voices to question history and issues that come along with its unidimensional narration. The thematic arrangement of the novel refuses chronological patterns, instead it registers “concerns that all speak to the production and meaning of subjectivity: masculinity, embodiment, and male sexuality; Jewish American identity; the American subject’s relationship to contemporary American history; and

storytelling as a mode of action combining invention and pseudo-autobiography” (Bonnie Lyons 144). Novel’s concept of history bears heavy touches of social heteroglossia. Roth emancipates many long held voices trapped in the monologic regime of established historical accounts. In doing so, he first concocts an alternative history by introducing Charles Lindbergh as the president of the United States, and then, like his autobiographical tetralogy⁴ he introduces a “Philip Roth” as the protagonist of the novel; a character who shares with him a number of biographical, psychological, and historical experiences. Actually, by changing the spatial-temporal qualities of history Roth brings a completely different account of America 1940-42, and through this alternative historical moment he unveils new horizons of meaning omitted in historical textbooks. He creates a convoluted juxtaposition of views in this “counter-history” to produce multiple meanings.

Roth’s recourse to metafiction in *The Plot Against America* is a very smart decision. As a polyphonic novelist he should be wary with the alert that if he is to lay the foundation of his novel on “other-voicedness,” the new meanings that are going to come along with it has to be so valid and autonomous that would never be gainsaid by their counterparts. So, for the case of alternative history, a genre in which facts are de/regenerated, metafiction will be a good sacrilege in which Roth can seek the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction. The reliability of the protagonist’s accounts becomes potentially highlighted when it is merged with Roth’s autobiographical voice, a quality of fiction whose foundation is only laid in metafiction. And political possibilities of America 1940-42 fortify the historical other-voicedness of the novel. Novel’s heteroglossia provides the context for the formation of an interanimating relationship between fact and fiction, a fusion through which new and valid interpretations of history come into being. Upon the strength of this coalescence, Jason Siegel writes:

“*The Plot Against America* does not merely imagine what would have happened if America had become a fascist, anti-Semitic, isolationist state; the novel claims that America was such a state to some degree and that we ignore this aspect of history if we limit our definition of historical truth to a factual chronicle of events and outcomes.” (134-35).

Conclusions

In keeping with the spirit of Bakhtin’s polyphonic theories and that of Philip Roth’s narrative strategy, the following remarks are presented by way of conclusion. In the examination of the contrapuntal techniques in the construction of *The Plot Against America*, this research offered lots of examples of how this American Jewish novelist unveils the generic layers and polyphonic voices regarding the identity of Jews as the minorities of the United States and the problems that come along with their assimilation. Since the section of theoretical framework, it has become clear that Roth’s centrifugal voice in the novel is seeded by the monologic (in historical sense) and oppressive (in socio-political sense) forces of unity. The segregation and suffocation of American minorities (read Jews) are further corroborated by expatiating upon notions such as ideology, identity, poly-subjectivity, and the Otherness. Further, when the foundation for the analysis of Roth’s polyphonic narrative strategy was laid, I examined and tackled the contrapuntal orchestration of ideologies, double-voiced discourse, and stratification of language. Regarding the ideological struggles between Judaism and

⁴ Four consecutive novels of Philip Roth; *The Facts* (1988), *Deception* (1990), *Patrimony* (1991), and *Operation Shylock* (1993) are famous within Roth’s autobiographical tetralogy.

Americanism, Roth's recourse to other-voicedness then becomes justified as an endeavor to give voice to the very long held truths omitted/ensconced in the historical textbooks, and to explain how polyphonic orchestration in fiction contributes to make reader consider and reconsider the inconsistencies of any monologic account. To sustain and investigate the above-mentioned hypotheses, the critical lens becomes next adjusted on the concept of history and the issues that come along with its established accounts. In his attempt to stand against the deterministic and monologic qualities of history, he introduces an alternative history to the novel and unearths the myth of historical inevitability therewith. The narration of this alternative history blurs the lines between fiction and reality because of being accoutered by a metafictional (pseudo-autobiographical) hindsight which is subsumed with a double-voiced Philip (Roth) as the story and history teller.

Roth's novel, *The Plot Against America*, is more difficult to join the conventional, sequential manner that many of Roth's novels employ. The reader is forced to follow other coherent resources. Following this strategy, one basic feature emerges; the 'polyphonic writing' through which the novel examines the limitations of a collective discourse on Jewishness through other-voicedness. Roth registers other-voicedness into his fiction because he wants to open up new horizons of meaning by means of his literature. In this way, the reader will be well apprised of all of the nuances of his surrounding world. By applying this polyphonic narrative strategy, Roth voices ideologies and scenes long held in the monologic genre of history.

The Plot Against America is entirely self-subversive, combining a number of different tropes, Bakhtinian concepts and stratified languages within a single novel and extrapolates that there is no interpretative model that can enclose the Jewish-American otherness. Insofar as this study explored Roth's interest in the re-invention of history, it focused on textual polyphonic sub-consciousness. In this novel, the use of polyphonic tropes is tightly knit to the spread of multicultural society conventions. As such, the interpretative issue extends beyond matters of the plot. Metafiction thus becomes an authentic milestone of the whole novel; hence the dissemination of interpretations offered by the text becomes a form of authorial playfulness. One of the main dilemmas met by critics in search for a plausible critical perspective on Roth's novel is that Roth predicts most of the analytical approaches within his novels. Therefore, the textual self-interpretation bears a key role in *The Plot Against America*. This self-reflexive interest in metafiction appears most conspicuous when Roth's way of examination reaches a postmodern meaning of textual interplay.

The subversive plot of the novel constantly interferes into the analysis of the characters. A thematic restiveness means that no single theme is prevailing while stylistic variation is more extensive. In this light, there seems to be no readily apparent and coherent strategy for analyzing them. Nonetheless, this study argued that the polyphonic metafiction represents a way of analysis with enough flexibility to account the alternative history within the novel. As a result, this study had a more ambivalent attitude towards conceptual frameworks, and required a methodology that adjusts this kind of skepticism in terms of its plausibility. In order to create a way of analysis specific to the narrative in this novel, this study based itself on the Bakhtinian context that Roth's novel initially emerged from. What is more, experimental and tentative approach to Bakhtinian methodologies is one which this study aimed to echo.

Rather than analyzing the uses of polyphony for a critique of Roth's novel, this research used a Bakhtinian ground to develop a network of concepts, ideas, and interrelations: it first considered in detail certain ideas, and then analyzed how these ideas can influence

Roth's novel and how the interrelations help to enable a more dynamic shape of literary analysis. As such, Roth developed a way of approaching its historical and theoretical diversity without limiting himself to a core set of ideas. He gravitated his analysis toward polyphonic renderings of life. Therefore, the particular lens that best fitted these stringent requirements within this study was the Bakhtinian theory.

In ensuring a strong methodology for this study, polyphony encompasses a miniature history of discourse analysis, ranging from the rhetoric of interanimation to Marxism, and being popularized through Bakhtin's dialogical theory. Within these lines, polyphony brings forth an interpretative pattern that tackles its paradoxical power while authorizing the critic to preserve a sort of skepticism towards the concept itself. As a literary tool, it can function as a method of enabling new types of analysis. By interpreting a text through the lens of the polyphonic discourse, a reader is granted the opportunity to consider polyphony as a host of new interpretative connections and possibilities.

As a framework rich in potential interpretations, polyphony invites the reader to simultaneously (re)consider the Roth's alternative history. This requires a permanent sense of shifting foundations. In other words, it is only through other-voicedness that this form of analysis can keep itself pertinent and functional as a method. This study re-directs itself through the network of themes that an analysis of polyphony helps establish. It constantly seeks new ways of approaching *The Plot Against America*. In doing so, different methods including the historical context, close reading, and discourse analysis plus a number of theoretical perspectives that offer interconnected ways of depicting American Jewishness are used.

This research thus argued that Roth's metafictional contrapuntal strategies applied within this novel – self-reflection, oblique prediction, intertextuality, reflection, carnivalization etc.– merge and generate a polyphonic approach in demonstrating Roth's wide knowledge of the ongoing ambiguities, practices, and theories ensconced in the standard (monologic) history. In highlighting all these plausibilities as well as ambiguities, Roth elaborates his own perspective as in a profound agreement to the tragic flaws of his narrator. It is this angle of Roth's fiction – his subversive playfulness – that this study has attempted to mirror.

Due to the existence of few scholarly articles on the polyphonic quality of *The Plot Against America*, the direction for future studies is still wide open. The need for more research on the Bakhtinian reading is felt in Roth's entire cannon now that his "struggle with fiction is over" (Philip Roth Society). Some researchers may be tempted to re-adjust their critical lenses on the novel by reading it through a political rhetoric, psychoanalytical approach, and post-national study; virtues unmitigatedly infiltrated the historical and fictional scenarios of the novel.

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