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Counterfactual History and Diasporic Identity in Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*

Abstract: *The Plot against America*, a 2004 novel by acclaimed American author Philip Roth, starts out from a counterfactual premise, i.e., that aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh defeated Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940 election, running on an isolationist platform summarised in the slogan “America first!” The novel is a masterful exploration of trauma and the perception of history viewed through the eyes of a young boy, the author’s alter ego, Philip, who is also the narrator, and who sees his family and others around him question their place in society and their identity as American Jews in a world swiftly turning against them.

Keywords: Philip Roth; *The Plot against America*; Jewish Identity; Resistance; Counterfactual History.

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Introduction: Roth’s Counterfactual History

At the heart of Roth’s 2004 novel, *The Plot against America*, is the exploration of what it means to identify not just as a Jew, but as an American Jew, in a fictionalised America that slides deeper into fascism and antisemitism.¹ The novelist imagines an alternative, or a counterfactual past in which acclaimed aviator (and notorious antisemite) Charles Lindbergh defeats Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1940 election, running on an isolationist platform to keep the US out of World War II.² But the novel is not merely a tale of what might have happened in a relatively distant past; it is also about the present – or about a much less distant past. Despite the author’s claims, one can find in the novel parallels to the policies of the Bush administration in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, while some of the radical rhetoric spewed forth in the book by characters such as Lindbergh himself, Henry Ford or Burton K. Wheeler could have easily found its place in Donald Trump’s America. The novel, and its televised adaptation in the

form of a 2020 widely acclaimed eponymous HBO miniseries, confronts the reader (or viewer) with perhaps the most peculiar and insidious feature of a dictator's rise – how it all appears so dull until, suddenly and distressingly, it is not.³

The main purpose of the present contribution is to examine how Jewish identity is represented in the novel and how its main characters try to resist against (or accommodate to) the rising tide of antisemitism and violence brought about by Lindbergh's election in 1940. In order to do that, I will first look at the representation and implications of counterfactual history in Roth's work in this introductory part, while the main body of the paper will be dedicated to the analysis of the main characters in relation to their own Jewish identity and to the circumstances in which they find themselves, primarily through the lens of textual analysis. Even though the main focus of my investigation will be the novel itself, I will also make occasional references to *The Plot against America* miniseries, which is a largely faithful and impactful televised adaptation of the book.

Although the book is, in essence, an alternative history, it is nonetheless rooted in many historical facts and includes an entire host of characters modelled after real life figures,⁴ as evidenced in Roth's lengthy postscript; Roth may have invented his plot, but he did not have to invent antisemitism in America, so in this sense, his novel is not merely just an "exercise in historical imagination".⁵ As Alvin Roth, the narrator's cousin, claims in the miniseries, referring to American antisemites, "They've always been here, but now they have the permission to crawl out from under the rocks."⁶ The events are narrated

from the perspective of the young Philip Roth, the author's alter ego between the ages of 7 and 9 (which makes the book an incomplete *Bildungsroman*),⁷ who, as a much older man, recounts the memories of those events taking place in the span of 2 years (1940-1942). The novel, predicated upon a counterfactual premise, boldly opens by imagining an actual alternative to that alternative (which was to the reader, historically speaking, the reality): "Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn't been president or if I hadn't been the offspring of Jews."⁸ Alongside an imagined political history ("if Lindbergh hadn't been president"), young Philip imagines a personal history in which his very Jewishness would be erased, something he attempts to do several times in the course of the plot.⁹ He goes from growing up in a loving, relatively carefree Newark home to experiencing feelings of intense dread when he realises how much of his life depends invisibly yet decisively on politics. All the things he had taken for granted were quickly overturned by the policies of the Lindbergh Administration which he experiences first hand during the family trip to Washington. Moreover, political disagreements between his father Herman and cousin Alvin tear the family apart, his father loses his job and the overwhelming crisis destroys the central pillar of his mindset, i.e., his pride in seeing himself as an American.¹⁰

The perpetual fear evoked at the start of the novel persists right through the end, in a circular fashion, forming the title of the last chapter: if American history resumes its normal course with the election

of FDR for a third term (which makes for a “happy end” of sorts), the Roth family history is forever affected by the consequences of the “perpetual fear” instilled by the Lindbergh administration:¹¹ even though young Philip does not become an orphan (as he sometimes imagined), his “other self”, the book’s most tragic figure, Seldon Wishnow, actually becomes one, after his mother is killed during an antisemitic riot in Kentucky.¹² The book also represents, for the novelist, an opportunity to bring his family back to life, to engage with his own family history and to imagine how his parents, living at the time in the Weequahic section of New Jersey (just like their real-life counterparts), would have reacted to the growing antisemitism around them. In fact, the novel seems much more concerned with this aspect rather than with the one that would have logically resulted from the book’s central premise, i.e., analysing America’s tendency to confirm the problematic tyranny of the majority.¹³ Although the Lindbergh presidency Roth describes is imaginary, the antisemitism of the real-life Lindbergh was not, nor was the support for his nomination as presidential candidate within the Republican Party at the time, as the Postscript makes clear. The plot in the novel’s title has a double meaning: on the one hand, it refers to the enduring antisemitic accusation that Jews “plot” to destroy their host societies, and on the other, to the “plot” of the Lindbergh administration to orchestrate a fascist takeover of American institutions and to eventually relocate American Jews away from the cities, in an ostensible bid to help them be more “American”, but in reality to break up the political influence they have in terms of voting patterns.¹⁴

This measure brings to mind the myth of colonising the American West through the original Homestead Act of 1862, which enabled tens of thousands of people to claim up to 160 acres of government land for settlement.¹⁵

In an essay entitled “The Story behind *The Plot against America*”, Roth recounts how he was inspired to imagine the novel’s counterfactual premise by reading Arthur Schlesinger’s autobiography, *A Life in the Twentieth Century. Innocent Beginnings, 1917–1950*, where the Republican desire to nominate Lindbergh for presidency is mentioned. Roth adopted this premise as fact, while at the same time maintaining as many historical realities as he could and labelling his work an “uchronia”,¹⁶ unlike the genre of science fiction, whose focus is the future, counterfactual histories, or uchronias, remain anchored in the past, where the plot is driven by certain established facts, but then diverges from the known historical flow.¹⁷ Roth’s novel drew many critical comparisons to Sinclair Lewis’s 1935 book, *It Can’t Happen Here*, a dystopia about totalitarianism in a small New England town.¹⁸ In both books, the fragility of democratic institutions and universalist political ideas is exposed. This is a scenario now replicated in real life, as the consequences of Trump’s presidency, the storming of the Capitol in January 2021 and the deep divisions in contemporary American society can attest. Back in 2004, when the book was written, the parallels with the reality of the times did not go unnoticed:¹⁹ Lindbergh’s rhetoric recalled President Bush Jr.’s clipped and declarative oratory, both men had ambitious zealots as vice-presidents, while programs like “Just Folks” and Homestead 42” (programmes intended to

break up Jewish families, weaken Jewish culture and identity and minimise the voting power of Jewish constituencies across the US) lend themselves easily to comparisons with the Patriot Act or Homeland Security. However, Roth himself, in his 2004 essay, denied his intention of hinting at such parallels, by saying that

Some readers are going to want to take this book as a roman clef to the present moment in America. That would be a mistake. I set out to do exactly what I've done: reconstruct the years 1940-42 as they might have been if Lindbergh, instead of Roosevelt, had been elected president in the 1940 election.²⁰

In any case, the book and the miniseries based on it also serve as a reminder that democratic institutions should not be taken for granted and should be protected through permanent vigilance, especially considering that American history does have a tendency to periodically fall prey to extremism and intolerance, as evidenced through the Salem witch trials, the Red Scare, McCarthyism, or the January 2021 insurgency, to mention but a few examples.²¹ In this respect, the book can also be seen as a satire on the country's over-reliance on institutions designed to safeguard democracy, but which instead crumble because of fear, passivity and conformity.²² A nation of laws can exist only as long as those elected to office are committed to upholding them, otherwise, they become just things written in books, with no meaning whatsoever.²³

In an interview published shortly before he died in 2018, when the Trump

presidency was in full swing, Roth argued that, despite the fact that he never intended his novel to be a political allegory, the parallels between his imagined world and contemporary reality were hard to ignore: a demagogic president who openly expresses admiration for a foreign dictator; a surge of right-wing nationalism and isolationism; polarization; false narratives; xenophobia and the demonization of others.²⁴ One scene in the HBO miniseries actually shows Lindbergh giving a victory speech after winning the election, telling his enraptured audience, "Tonight, we have taken back America", a phrase that would not be out of a place at a MAGA rally.²⁵

The Plot against America is every secular Jew's worst nightmare about the rise of a fervent strand of Christianity that defines American identity in such a way as to exclude the Roths of Weequahic and uses counterfactual realism to expose the power of history and its impact on the lives of those who lived through it.²⁶ The history narrated in the book is both fabricated and authentic and, like its subject matter and its narrator, is split and contested, as the collective memory of the American Jews may not always be that of the larger nation.²⁷ Roth creates a world in which familiar, known things become threatening and dangerous and, by choosing to tell the story through the eyes of his young alter ego, he makes both his hero and the reader feel the full extent of the menace.²⁸ The novel excels at showing how embracing fascism leads to the quiet corrosion of morals and freedom, and the miniseries, encouraging viewers to draw parallels between the past and present, is equally commendable in this respect.²⁹ The warning that Roth expressed in his 2004 essay, namely that "all

the assurances are provisional, even here in a 200-year-old democracy. We are ambushed, even as free Americans in a powerful republic armed to the teeth, by the unpredictability that is history", still rings true today.³⁰

**Jewish Identity, Resistance,
Accommodation and Conformity
in *The Plot against America***

Practising Resistance: Herman Roth

Herman Roth, modelled after Roth's own father, is one of the novel's towering figures and is perhaps the most outspoken one in terms of expressing his identity as an American first and a Jew second. In fact, his main strategy of resisting the rising antisemitic danger is to cling to his American identity and to hope that his country will protect him³¹ – that is, until his wife Bess reminds him that this is no longer his country – it is now the country of the America firsters. Herman is painfully aware of what Lindbergh's election as president means, because he is able to see clearly what his political platform will mean for the Jews: it will legitimise antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence precisely because Lindbergh is seen as a hero and his many admirers will seek to emulate his example. Yet, despite this awareness, one could argue that Herman practises some kind of selective blindness (or, better said, disbelief), both when it comes to the corruption of several Newark Jewish leaders (such as Steinheim) and to America's rapid slide into fascism, continuing to argue for a long time that Lindbergh was "the other", not them. His disbelief also makes him hesitant to admit that Lindbergh's policies

are a symptom of a much deeper problem, rather than a temporary glitch that will disappear with Lindbergh's exit from the political stage.

Herman is the head of a (mostly) secular Jewish family, who clearly identify themselves as American-born citizens, but who still retain traits of Jewish cultural identification. Moreover, despite being well assimilated into American society, cannot escape being labelled "outsider Jews" by insider Gentiles spurred on by Lindbergh's election and its accompanying antisemitism.³² Herman becomes acutely aware of this "outsider" status after the Homestead 42 Act starts being implemented. This Act ostensibly offers "relocation opportunities" for Jewish families, moving them to the rural interior of the country, but in fact it is an attempt to break up Jewish communities around the country, isolate Jewish Americans, and thus encourage assimilation into the American "mainstream". The Act essentially forces American Jews to detach themselves from their cultural and religious centres, from their neighbours and family members, and from the traditions and gatherings that define secular cultural Judaism in America – to which the Roth family themselves subscribe. Roth's indictment of such measures is not just limited to the fictional events of the novel: by employing these scenarios, Roth more broadly decries the idea that American Jews must blend in or forgo their long-held rituals and traditions in order to truly be a part of American society.

One of the novel's most dramatic scenes, in which Herman plays a pivotal role, occurs during the family's trip to Washington D.C. after Lindbergh's election, in an attempt to prove (to himself,

most of all, perhaps) that, despite the new president, the US still adheres to democratic ideals. Roth uses this episode to illustrate the failure of Kantian universality, i.e., his categorical imperative that one should act only in accordance to maxims which can become universal laws practiced by everyone.³³ The family are initially inspired by the sight of America's great monuments to freedom and tolerance: "Inadvertently, we had driven right to the very heart of American history, and whether we knew it in so many words, it was American history, delineated in its most inspirational form, that we were counting on to protect us against Lindbergh."³⁴ They see the face of Lincoln as "the face of God and the face of America all in one",³⁵ but they are very quickly made aware that they actually do not belong in this patriotic paradise, when one of the lookers-on calls Herman a "loudmouth Jew". Later on, when they are expelled from their hotel simply for being Jews, Herman tries to defend his family by quoting Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, only to be met with derision and sneers. Despite being treated this way, Herman does not renounce his beliefs in the ideals upon which America was built – and this is evident towards the end of the novel, when Herman and Sandy, the eldest son, risk their lives on a perilous drive to Kentucky to save the orphaned Seldon, not out of a recognition of his own foreignness, but out of the Lincoln-inspired belief that "all men are created equal" and are entitled to basic human rights.³⁶

Herman also calls out his relatives, his sister-in-law Evelyn and her new husband, rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, for being traitors to their own people by supporting Lindbergh's Just Folks programme and thus

contributing to the implementation of his antisemitic agenda out of opportunism. He accuses Lionel of siding "with pharaoh", an allusion to his family's Confederate past. Herman's integrity thus inoculates his own wife and younger son Philip, but does not extend to his relatives³⁷ or even to his older son Sandy, who becomes a willing participant in the Just Folks programme and the poster boy for the Office for American Absorption. Sandy's antagonistic attitude and his accusation that his father is nothing but a "narrow-minded ghetto Jew" who cannot see the value of Lindbergh's plan are sources of deep sorrow for Herman, who sees his own family tainted and torn apart by the rise of fascism. In fact, seen through the eyes of young Philip, Herman's true heroic quality is his loyalty to his family,³⁸ a fact repeatedly tested by Sandy's and cousin Alvin's hostility towards him.

Throughout the novel, Herman remains a firm supporter of FDR, radio commentator Walter Winchell and New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, figures in whom he places his faith, refusing to show accommodation to the new administration even when his livelihood is threatened and he loses his job, being forced to appeal to his brother Morty (whom he accuses of "voting with his wallet" when he looks the other way at Lindbergh's antisemitism because "business is good"³⁹) for help.⁴⁰ The novel can also be seen, in a sense, as a tribute to Herman's idealism, honour and optimism and Roth repeatedly uses his father as a counterpoint to the so-called patriots who have taken over the country: his staunch belief in universal civil rights stands in sharp contrast to the majority's grotesque antisemitism and mob violence.⁴¹

Practising Resistance: Bess Roth

The figure of Bess Roth, lovingly constructed by the novelist to evoke his own mother, is a luminous, yet more discreet presence in the book than her husband Herman. Also, unlike him, she identifies more strongly with being Jewish, perhaps on account of her experiences growing up in a mostly Gentile neighbourhood in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where she and her family were singled out for being the only Jews; as she puts it, "ours was the house where the Jews live."⁴² It is clear from the way she speaks about her past that she felt very much alone growing up and, once antisemitism picks up steam after Lindbergh's election, she feels once more isolated and frightened, which is why she keeps urging her husband to leave for Canada and safety. Through the character of Bess, Philip Roth raises questions about the dangers of isolationism within the Jewish diaspora in the US, perhaps in an attempt to make the reader reflect on which is the safer path: assimilation, expressed through the character of Herman, or a more visible attachment to one's own heritage and community, more conspicuous in Bess's case.⁴³

She is painfully aware of what Lindbergh's election means for her Jewish family and, unlike her husband, harbours little hope that America will protect them; she practices what might be called "resistance as warning": in a poignant early scene of the HBO miniseries, during a conversation with Herman in which she expresses her fears,⁴⁴ she asks him in disbelief how he can see who these people (Lindbergh's supporters) are and yet have so little sense of what they are capable of. Later on, in the novel chapter entitled "The Winchell Riots", she succinctly and accurately sums up their

plight when she tells Herman, perhaps as a way to forcing him to confront their situation head on, "Well, like it or not, Lindbergh is teaching us what it means to be Jews. We only think we're Americans."⁴⁵ For her, the situation is all the more painful considering that her only sister's choice to side with the Lindbergh Administration and take an active role in the Office for American Absorption creates a rift between them that will probably never heal and will lead to estrangement, bitterness and resentment.

It is perhaps for this reason – fear of losing any more family members to the political divide – that she tries to act as a peacemaker, especially between Herman and his cousin Alvin and Herman and Sandy: "Her job was to hold our world together as calmly and sensibly as she could: that was what gave her life fullness and that was all she was trying to do."⁴⁶ Bess also practices resistance through compassion, primarily manifested towards the little orphaned neighbour boy, Seldon Wishnow, whom she takes into their home after his mother is killed in the antisemitic Louisville riots. Although Bess might appear as a less developed character in the novel than, say, her husband or even the young narrator Philip – perhaps because the reader is given less time to spend with her, the way in which the novelist affectionately evokes his mother and makes us empathise with her often quiet desperation makes Bess Roth stand out amidst Roth's remarkable arsenal of Jewish mother figures.

Practising Resistance: Alvin Roth

Of all the characters in the novel, Alvin displays the most overt form of resistance, as he beats up the Nazi sympathisers from the beer garden and volunteers to

enrol in the Canadian army and fight in World War II, in his own words, “to kill Nazis”. The character of Alvin appears to be somewhat more developed in the HBO miniseries than in the novel, in the sense that he is given slightly more agency, especially when it comes to expressing his identity: unlike Herman, who proudly proclaims he is an American, or Bess, who most likely sees herself in terms of a more hyphenated Jewish-American identity, for Alvin there is no ambiguity: being Jewish, he says, is not a matter of choice. He identifies as a Jew because he was born a Jew.

Interestingly enough, the novel Alvin argues, towards the end of the book, during a fight with Herman, that at first he did not pay much attention to Lindbergh’s rise and the danger he represented: he only went to fight him because “you (Herman) sent him”.⁴⁷ But when Herman accuses him that, given his ties with the Jewish underground, he lives a lavish lifestyle and does not care about “what is happening to the Jews”, Alvin explodes in a fit of rage in which he proclaims that “I wrecked my life for the Jews! I lost my fuckin’ leg for the Jews! I lost my fuckin’ leg for you!”⁴⁸ Therefore, he proves that his attachment to his Jewish identity is very strong and he is willing to sacrifice dearly for it – even though he is not blind to the fact the Jews themselves are not without fault, something illustrated by the corruption of community leaders like Steinheim, for whom he worked at one time. He is also keenly aware, early on, of what Rabbi Bengelsdorf is trying to do before the election, namely “koshering Lindbergh for the goyim”,⁴⁹ giving them moral permission to vote for the aviator hero despite his antisemitic rhetoric. Seen through the lens of this argument, Alvin’s heroic gesture is denied a significance that would go beyond the

familial realm and it suggests how the novel tends to conflate the possibilities of history in a broad sense with the author’s personal drama.⁵⁰

The reason behind his violent clash with Herman, in a chapter aptly entitled “Bad Days”, is also over what resistance truly means: for Alvin, resistance is not simply sitting in an armchair listening to Walter Winchell, it is actually taking up arms against the oppressors, as he did. The miniseries Alvin, in a deviation from the novel’s Alvin, even gets involved in a plot to kill Lindbergh (although the viewer does not get to see whether the plot succeeded or not) – something that is not included in Roth’s book, where Lindbergh’s plane vanishes into thin air and the *deus ex machina* intervention of First Lady Anne Morrow Lindbergh helps restore order. Philip Roth chooses to explore at some length the antagonism between Herman and Alvin, thus in a sense reducing “history” to the conflicts experienced within the Roth family – therefore, one could argue that the novel’s most exciting and perplexing conflict does not oppose Lindbergh and Roosevelt, or Jews and antisemites, but rather the two characters mentioned above.⁵¹

Rebelling against Identity: Sanford Roth

When the novel begins, Sandy is a young teenager with remarkable artistic inclinations and talent. He is at an impressionable age – the perfect target for the Lindbergh administration’s Just Folks program, which is specifically aimed at young Jews who may harbour frustrations towards their parents, their religious lives and their own identities, tapping into those frustrations and insecurities to assimilate

them and separate them from their communities. For a young third-generation Jewish-American such as Sandy, his Yiddishkayt (Jewishness) without the Yiddish has, for a long time, carried a negative connotation, standing for all the limitations he saw himself being subjected to.⁵²

Sandy is presented in stark contrast to his father, as he staunchly admires Lindbergh, the aviation hero, which causes numerous fights with Herman.⁵³ Sandy's manifest resistance is rather directed against his own family and Jewish identity, not against the antisemitism taking hold across America. He tries to escape his Jewish identity by assimilating into the American mainstream when he takes part in a six-week Just Folks programme and lives with an American family on a farm in Kentucky throughout the summer, where he foregoes, among others, the kosher laws of his upbringing and starts indulging in bacon. He also starts referring to his family as "you people" or "narrow-minded, frightened, paranoid ghetto Jews"⁵⁴ and, during a heated argument in which he informs his parents that he intends to go to the White House with his Aunt Evelyn to the state dinner in honour of Ribbentrop, he even calls his father "a dictator worse than Hitler".⁵⁵ Evelyn becomes his close ally, as he always sides with her against his family and accepts her request to participate in the Office for American Absorption programme, praise its merits and even becomes a recruiter for Just Folks.⁵⁶ Sandy adopts her thinking and that of her husband, Lindbergh sycophant Rabbi Bengelsdorf and relishes the opportunity to tell the people of Newark about his enlightening experience among Gentiles of Kentucky, among whom he spends his summer. In this sense, Sandy becomes a more or

less conscious temporary collaborator with the regime, which for him means emerging from insignificance, an illusion that had trapped so many Jewish revolutionaries at the start of the 20th century.⁵⁷

Given his newly-acquired insights into the world beyond Newark, his involvement with the OAA and his daring to sample non-kosher food, Sandy considers himself more knowledgeable than his father, whom he sees as an armchair critic hanging on to Walter Winchell's every word. His parents' suggestion that he might simply be manipulated into engaging in pro-regime propaganda is dismissed as a manifestation of "Jewish paranoia" – Sandy sees these warnings as attempts on their part to tie him down and spoil "his fun".⁵⁸

It is only towards the end of the novel, when he embarks with his father on the journey to Kentucky to rescue Seldon and sees the horrors of violence close up that he realises the seriousness of the threats against the Jews and it dawns on him that no matter how hard he tries to fit in, the antisemites will still see him as a Jew – so denying or suppressing his identity is not going to guarantee his safety. This second journey represents, for Sandy, a kind of de-initiation meant to show him the limits of his comprehension of the world and help him on the path to maturation. However, the author chooses to leave Sanford's development in limbo, thus suggesting the reversibility of every initiation.⁵⁹

Accommodation, Conformity and Opportunism: Lionel Belgelsdorf

Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf is undoubtedly one of the novel's central characters and represents an intriguing case

study in sycophancy, conformity and opportunism. He is the character most willing to abide by the assimilationist policies of the Lindbergh Administration. Originally from South Carolina, from a family with a notable Confederate past, he is the leader of a large Newark congregation and a prominent figure in the community, despite being seen as controversial and self-hating (or at least self-denying) because of his affiliation with and closeness to Charles Lindbergh. When Aunt Evelyn becomes his fiancée, the Roths find themselves forced to invite him into their home and listen to his lengthy speeches about the singularity of American Jews and the “great opportunity” they have to “participate fully in the national life of the country. They need no longer dwell apart, a pariah community separated from the rest.”⁶⁰ Bengelsdorf thus serves as a learned, erudite mouthpiece for the regime and he takes it upon himself to spread messages encouraging assimilation and loyalty to the “American homeland” among his congregation, his neighbourhood and his in-laws to foster an anti-hyphenate, flag-waving American identity.⁶¹

Whether he is a true believer in the truth of such messages or whether opportunism plays a part in his decisions is something that Roth leaves open to interpretation – but what is clear is that he is guilty of disseminating dangerous stereotypes about Jews “living apart” from the American mainstream in which they refuse to participate. His acceptance and encouragement of programmes such as Just Folks is used to foreshadow the more serious threats to come for the American Jews under the Lindbergh Administration. He does sometimes come off as an ambitious

social climber who supports Lindbergh in exchange for what he sees as power and influence; his condescendence to his fellow temple-goers and his cringing obeisance to the WASPs in the White House are quite transparent. He professes over and over his identity as an American Jew, using it as an explanation for why he votes for Lindbergh and he sees America as the best hope for the Jews: “I am here to crush all doubt of the unadulterated loyalty of the American Jews to the United States of America. I offer my support to the candidacy of Colonel Lindbergh because the political objectives of my people are identical with his. America is our beloved homeland. America is our only homeland. Our religion is independent of any piece of land other than this great country, to which, now as always, we commit our total devotion and allegiance as the proudest of citizens. I want Charles Lindbergh to be my president not in spite of my being a Jew but because I am a Jew—an American Jew.”⁶² He preaches allegiance to the country, without realising he has been blind to the difference between loyalty and unquestioning acquiescence to the will of a dictator. He supports Lindbergh’s anti-war position, arguing that it is not America’s war, despite the plight of European Jews – as Alvin argues, Bengelsdorf is “koshering Lindbergh for the goyim”,⁶³ helping to launder his antisemitic image by assuring his congregation that the aviator does not have anything against the Jews and his political pronouncements are just that.⁶⁴

The Office of American Absorption is his own creation, showing that not only does he manifest very little resistance to the regime’s discriminatory policies, but that he actively contributes to them through accommodation and opportunism, being

willing to turn a blind eye even when he is openly insulted by infamous antisemite and secretary of the interior Henry Ford at the White House state dinner to honour von Ribbentrop. He even explains the aims of the OAA to the Roths, claiming that “The Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of their civil rights and did everything to exclude them from membership in their nation. What I have encouraged President Lindbergh to do is to initiate programs inviting Jews to enter as far into the national life as they like—a national life that I’m sure you would agree is no less ours to enjoy than anyone else’s.”⁶⁵ Bengelsdorf’s way of interpreting Kantian ideals through the “Just Folks” and “Homestead 49” programs expose how easily the concept of abstract equality can be used “to erode the solidarity of the Jewish family”,⁶⁶ and thus serve a power-interest that wants to identify and eliminate foreignness rather than tolerate it.⁶⁷

Bengelsdorf persists in his support for Lindbergh to the bitter end, trying to explain away his actions to his diminishing congregation, claiming that the president was being blackmailed by the Nazis and that his antisemitism stemmed from sheer ignorance⁶⁸ – and he ultimately pays the price for his actions when he is arrested by the FBI on charges of conspiracy against the government for trying to exert influence on Mrs. Lindbergh.⁶⁹ The Rabbi is a typical example of a lethal combination of over-confidence to the point of gullibility and an excessive fondness of power which breed complicity and conformity,⁷⁰ turning him into a tragic figure of (mostly) his own making. As such, he brings to mind equally tragic figures of Judenrat-type collaborators (or other turncoats, like a Quisling or a Petain, for that matter⁷¹) who went

down the slippery slope of the enjoyment of power⁷² without realising that such a path can have only one ending.

*Conformity and Weakness:
Evelyn Bengelsdorf*

Evelyn is first introduced to the reader as a typically assimilated young Jewish woman who dwells very little on her Jewishness – as we later find out, she cannot even read Hebrew. As the plot advances, Evelyn turns out to be an anxious, ethically malleable person who marries Bengelsdorf for wealth, security (having grown up fatherless) and a brush with celebrity, after a string of failed romances with various Gentile, sometimes married men. Ever since meeting Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, she starts gravitating in his orbit and eventually becomes his wife and professional partner, as he hires her to oversee the government initiative known as Just Folks by which young Jews are sent to spend a summer in the American Midwest. Evelyn displays a high susceptibility to conformity, as evidenced by the fact that she unquestionably buys Lionel’s explanation that the programme and the office that enforces it, the OAA, is designed to pass along the “good American values” to “city folk”, without seeing (or refusing to see) its sinister fine print. Of course, “city values” has long been a euphemism for Jewish culture, but she pretends not to hear that particular dogwhistle because her star is on the rise.⁷³ She manifests more solidarity with her economic class rather than with her religion – a type of cognitive dissonance that makes possible the oxymoronic concept of influential Jews supporting a fascist cause. She believes that her position will

bring her the affirmation and influence she sought her entire life.⁷⁴ If one regards Bengelsdorf as a Judenrat-type collaborator, Evelyn represents the specifically female type of corruption known from literary representations of Judenrat mistresses – secretaries who would make changes in lists of deportations (just as she does when Philip asks her, substituting their neighbours, the Wishnows for the Roths on the OAA “relocation” lists), usually in return for gifts and favours. Both Lionel and Evelyn are thus characters trapped in patterns of Jewish history, and the existence of such patterns in the novel is perhaps the narrative refraction of the later Roth’s conception of Jewish identity as historically conditioned.⁷⁵

In her willing naivete, she claims to her family that Lindbergh cannot possibly be antisemitic because Lionel would not support him if he were and, when confronted with strong rational arguments, Evelyn – just like Sandy – accuses Herman of being narrow minded: young Philip recalls a scene when “Their disagreement only grew more passionate during dinner, my father maintaining that Just Folks was the first step in a Lindbergh plan to separate Jewish children from their parents, to erode the solidarity of the Jewish family, and Aunt Evelyn intimating none too gently that the greatest fear of a Jew like her brother-in-law was that his children might escape winding up as narrow-minded and frightened as he was.”⁷⁶ In the end, after Lionel is arrested, her entire life unravels and she becomes a weak and pathetic victim of both circumstance and her own choices, turning up on her sister’s doorstep only to be shunned by Bess and reduced to hiding in the Roths’ basement, where

young Philip discovers her half-starved and shaking in fear. The young narrator recalls that “she’d abandoned herself to the same credulity that had transformed the entire country into a madhouse: the worship of Lindbergh and his conception of the world.”⁷⁷ In the end, she suffers the same fear that Philip and his family experienced for most of the novel – and through this fear she is, in a sense, reunited as a Jew with her Jewish family.⁷⁸

Ultimately, hers is the path of least resistance: she is willing to turn a blind eye to antisemitism while she and Lionel pursue their agenda of social climbing⁷⁹ and she even accommodates Nazi foreign minister, von Ribbentrop, agreeing to dance with him at the White House state dinner where the Bengelsdorfs are paraded around like token Jews. She does not object to this and goes along with it quite willingly, thinking that such an attitude would keep them safe and insulated from antisemitism, that discrimination and violence are things that only happen to “other Jews”. Evelyn, just like her husband, is the novel’s other tragic figure: her world falls apart in the end, but the reader is left to wonder whether this will finally force her to confront her complicity with Lindbergh’s administration and the part she herself played in her own downfall.

*The Ambiguities of Identity, or
Growing up Jewish in Weequahic:
Philip Roth*

It is young Philip’s voice that the reader hears throughout the novel, it is his thoughts and impressions that colour our understanding of events and, in choosing to have his younger self narrate the plot

through the recollections of the mature author, Philip Roth offers us a unique perspective into how a young boy is forced to grow up and confront what it means to be both Jewish and American. However, the first person narrative is infused by subjectivity and its reliability is sometimes tenuous; nevertheless, it serves as a counternarrative to the American (i.e., Christian) historiography he reads in his schoolbooks.⁸⁰ He is caught up in events beyond his control and, as he confesses, "I wasn't at all like Sandy, in whom opportunity had quickened the desire to be a boy on the grand scale, riding the crest of history. I wanted nothing to do with history. I wanted to be a boy on the smallest scale possible. I wanted to be an orphan".⁸¹ Yet history brutally enters his existence not in the abstract sense of remote events one hears about on the radio, but in the very real sense of circumstances profoundly altering his family's future.⁸² The implications of those historical events that emphasise how so much of daily life depends invisibly, but decisively on politics,⁸³ are not lost on the young boy: despite reassurance from Aunt Evelyn that the OAA was an innocent initiative designed to encourage minorities to blend into the American mainstream, he can clearly see "the only minority the OAA appeared to take a serious interest in encouraging was ours".⁸⁴

On several occasions throughout the novel, Philip wishes he were an orphan, because he understands that all the misfortunes of his family stem from their being Jewish and imagines that, were he not Jewish himself, he would feel less frightened. The feeling of dread he experiences stands in stark contrast to the security he had known all his life, right up to Lindbergh's

election, which "assaulted, as nothing ever had before, that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents in an American school in an American city in an America at peace with the world."⁸⁵ This confession shows he is forced to start thinking of himself as Jewish, as different, as the other, after a whole lifetime of taking his American identity for granted and exposes the idea of the golden age of American Jewry as something of a myth: young Philip, passionate about collecting stamps of prominent American figures and landscapes, instinctively knows that there will never be a Jewish president or a Jewish figure on a stamp.⁸⁶ His stamp collection represents the innocent dream of America as a beacon of freedom but for Philip, this dream vanishes twice, once figuratively (when it dissolves into a nightmare of Hitlers and swastikas) and the second time literally, when the stampbook vanished on the night he ran away from a home that no longer felt safe.⁸⁷

Before Lindbergh's election, Philip's world revolved around his family and his stamp collection, which emphasised his devotion to his country, the United States; but when he starts becoming aware of his identity as a Jewish boy, being an alien becomes his main concern and fear becomes his central emotion which distorts everything around him, making things appear grotesque and dangerous: when his cousin Alvin returns from the war, Philip is terrified to discover the stump that now replaces his severed leg and this dread stifles any pity he could have felt for his cousin's plight.⁸⁸

The gradual and acute awareness of his Jewish identity, to which he had given little thought before 1940, makes him wish

to reinvent himself as someone else: specifically, as an orphaned Catholic boy without any family ties when he attempts to gain entry into a newsreel theatre to watch footage of his Aunt Evelyn at the White House by claiming he was sent by one of the nuns to do a report on president Lindbergh; later on, putting on some clothes stolen from Seldon Wishnow, he runs away from home in the middle of night, hoping to be taken in by the same Catholic orphanage, but gets kicked by a horse, losing both his consciousness and his precious stamp collection. Finally, towards the end of the novel, assuming the name of "Philip Flanagan", he orphans himself once more when he makes plans to leave and go to Elizabeth, seeking employment at a pretzel factory where handicapped children work.

Philip's impulses to flee are not motivated by opportunism, pragmatism, or even by a romantic idea of self-liberation, as is the case with his brother Sandy; rather, they are the expression of a growing nihilistic impulse to wipe away all traces of his family history and his own identity.⁸⁹ The traumatic impact of Lindbergh's election, expressed in the novel's opening lines, is deeply felt by Philip and irrevocably changes his family. For Philip, the palpable manifestation of this trauma comes in a series of nightmares in which the American historical figures in his stamp collection, celebrated names in America's march to freedom and democracy,⁹⁰ suddenly turn into images of Hitler, and beautiful pictures of American landscapes are marred by huge black swastikas. Philip sees the impact of antisemitism on his parents: he witnesses his mother's panic and the emotional disintegration of his father at the news that Alvin had lost his leg in

the war, and these episodes destroy one of the cornerstones of his previously secure childhood, the myth of parental invulnerability.⁹¹ The young boy gradually loses all the points of reference he could previously depend on – his family, his secure environment, *his* America (italics mine); he will never again be able to look in the mirror and see just another American boy.⁹²

Philip's mental development is forcibly accelerated (he says, "I'd never before had to grow up at a pace like this"⁹³) and the only strategy he can think of to work through this trauma is pretending to be someone else by changing his Jewish identity. His trauma is later on compounded by the guilt he feels at having caused the relocation to Kentucky of the Wishnows, their unfortunate next-door neighbours, after he asks his Aunt Evelyn to put their names on the list instead of his own family. In this sense, one could argue that Philip suffers from something called "survivor's guilt", described most notably by Primo Levi in his seminal essay, "The Grey Zone", in which he warns about the difficulty of people in extreme circumstances being neatly divided into the clear-cut categories of victims and perpetrators.⁹⁴ In a somewhat ironic twist, after spending much of the novel wishing to be parentless so he could get adopted by someone else, in the end, Philip himself ends up being a parent of sorts to an orphaned child, young Seldon, whose friendship he shunned on many previous occasions, preferring the company of the more worldly and sophisticated Earl Axman, with whom he goes on "tracking adventures" to follow Christian men around and observe them.⁹⁵ As Philip Roth argues in his 2004 essay, Seldon is "the responsibility that you can't get rid of. The more you want to get rid of him, the less

you can, and the less you can, the more you want to get rid of him. And that the little Roth child wants to get rid of him is what leads to the tragedy of the book."⁹⁶ Such an act, which might be, in any other historical times, without meaningful consequences – a mere child's whim who does not want to befriend "the weird kid", leads to a catastrophic outcome for Seldon, proving once more that politics and circumstance affect lives in indelible, unpredictable ways.

Conclusion: Can It Happen Here, Now?

The Plot against America, like several of Roth's previous novels (*American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*, *I Married a Communist*), deals – among other major themes – with the idea of loss, in this case, the loss of faith in the country's democratic institutions that crumble under the nation's fear of a war with Nazi Germany and illustrates how easily people can fall prey to irrational behaviour because of a sense of fear⁹⁷ fuelled by a political discourse designed to serve a certain agenda.

Contemporary America, especially in the wake of Donald Trump's presidency who, during his time in office, often engaged in stoking people's fears about immigration, minorities and America's place in the world, seems more divided and angrier than ever, a place where moderation and rationality have been abandoned in favour of violence and radicalism. Read through the lens of the present, *The Plot against America* often eerily appears to describe events that the average American can see on the nightly news: from violence against minorities to attacks against synagogues, and from white supremacist and neo-Nazi rallies to the storming of the

Capitol with the blessing of a president who refused to accept one of the basic mechanisms of democracy, the peaceful transition of power. To answer the question posed in the title of Sinclair Lewis's novel (and in the subtitle of this concluding section), yes, it can happen here – and now. The violence and irrationality Roth describes in his counterfactual history may be imagined, but the daily reality of contemporary America is certainly not – and from this perspective, both the novel and the miniseries it adapts should be read as warnings.

Those who think that the novel actually has a happy ending, since order and the normal path of history are restored, should not forget that the book's conclusion hints at two significant and simultaneously contradictory American impulses: "on the one hand, the susceptibility of American individualism to the cult of celebrity, and of American faith in democracy to a tyranny of the majority, leading to a particular vulnerability to unscrupulous politicians who win widespread popular support and gain a grip on the three branches of government; and, on the other, the distinctively American sense of freedom, stiffening the will to resist such political depravities, a will that's integral to the country's values, heritage, and history."⁹⁸ The true drama at the heart of the novel and the miniseries, which makes them both so compelling, is the clash between the two.

The series makes it even more evident that the grand political stage and intimate life are inseparable; identity itself is inextricable from the currents of history. Both representations' mighty psychological weight rests upon a terrifyingly delicate balance of circumstances that depend on the whims of chance. By illustrating the

toll of big political ideas on every member of the Roth family, the novel and its televised adaptation remind us that the Jewish protagonists exist as little more than a remote idea to many and can easily be substituted for other groups, other minorities stripped of their personhood by a political regime. By often depicting the Roths in

very ordinary circumstances – listening to the radio, talking baseball, eating dinner or collecting stamps – the book and the series show us just how average they can be. For them, these activities are so normal and for the reader or viewer, they feel so normal⁹⁹ – it is what any American would do. So how could it possibly happen here, now?

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NOTES

1. Unlike in Roth's earlier works, e.g., *Goodbye, Columbus*, where threats to Jewish identity seem to come from within the Jewish identity itself, here the menace clearly comes from outside, from mainstream American society and from the US government. See David Brauner, *Philip Roth*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 193, and Timothy Parrish, "Autobiography and History in Roth's *The Plot against America*, or What Happened When Hitler Came to New Jersey", in Debra Shostak (ed.), *Philip Roth. American Pastoral, The Human Stain, The Plot against America*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2011, p. 123.
2. In Roth's own words, his intention was to write "a counterhistory, or countermythology, to challenge the mythic sense of itself the country had [in the 1950s]". See Philip Roth, *Reading Myself and Others*, New York, Vintage, 2001, p. 78.
3. Charles Bramesco, "It Can't Happen Here': The Horrifying Power of *The Plot against America*", in *The Guardian*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/mar/30/the-plot-against-america-philip-roth-tv-hbo>.
4. Timothy Parrish, *art. cit.*, p. 199-200. See also Derek Parker Royal, "Roth, Literary Influence and Postmodernism", in Timothy Parrish (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 32.
5. Ginevra Geraci, "The Sense of an Ending: Alternative History in Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*", in *Philip Roth Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2011), p. 195. See also Claudia Franziska Brühwiler, *Political Initiation in the Novels of Philip Roth*, New York and London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 38.

6. Robert Lloyd, "Review: 'The Plot against America' Depicts a Familiar Crisis. That Doesn't Make It Great TV", in *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-03-16/hbo-plot-against-america-philip-roth-david-simon>.
7. Patrick Hayes, *Philip Roth: Fiction and Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 209.
8. Philip Roth, *The Plot against America*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, p. 1.
9. David Brauner, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
10. Richard Brody, "The Frightening Lessons of Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*", in *The New Yorker*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frightening-lessons-of-philip-roths-the-plot-against-america>.
11. Timothy Parrish, "Roth and Ethnic Identity", in Timothy Parrish (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 140. See also Alan Cooper, "It Can Happen Here, Or All in the Family Values: Surviving *The Plot against America*", in Derek Parker Royal (ed.), *Philip Roth. New Perspectives on an American Author*, Westport, Prager, 2005, p. 242.
12. David Brauner, *op. cit.*, p. 207. By creating the character of Seldon, Roth wanted to impart a little bit of the tragedy of European Jews and draw attention to the horrors of the Holocaust.
13. Timothy Parrish, *art. cit.*, in Debra Shostak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 128. As the author argues, "The power of the book comes not from imagining a Nazi America but from Roth's ability to convey how quickly events occurring outside of a family's control can terrify its members." The phrase "tyranny of the majority" is commonly attributed to John Adams, one of America's Founding Fathers, who warned against an inherent weakness in any democratic system in which the majority may pursue its own goals at the expense of minority factions. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his *Democracy in America*, and later John Stuart Mill, in his 1859 *On Liberty*, discuss this issue at length.
14. Hana Wirth Neshet, "Roth's Autobiographical Writings", in Timothy Parrish (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 168.
15. Ginevra Geraci, *art. cit.*, p. 190.
16. Philip Roth, "The Story behind 'The Plot against America'", *The New York Times*, September 19, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/books/review/the-story-behind-the-plot-against-america.html>. His intention was also to impress upon the reader the fundamental precariousness of history. (See also Dan Shiffman, "The Plot against America and History Post 9/11", in *Philip Roth Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009), p. 62).
17. Naomi Sokoloff, "Reading for the Plot? Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*", in *AJS Review* 30, no. 2 (Nov. 2006), p. 306.
18. Elaine M. Kauvar, "My Life as a Boy: *The Plot against America*", in Debra Shostak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 110. However, one important difference in this respect is that Lewis's work imagines what might happen in the future, while Roth's reflects on what might have happened in the past. See Elaine B. Safer, *Mocking the Age. The Later Novels of Philip Roth*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 148.
19. Dan Shiffman, *art. cit.*, p. 61.
20. Patrick Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 204-205, and Philip Roth, *art. cit.*
21. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
22. *Ibidem*, p. 152.
23. Alex Bilmes, "David Simon: 'There's Nothing to Do but Have the Fight'", in *Esquire*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/tv/a33274502/david-simon-plot-against-america/>. As Simon, the creator of the HBO miniseries argues in the interview, "when you metastasise intolerance, anti-Semitism always comes along. Once the white supremacists get all excited and hot and bothered, the Jew-hate comes along, no problem."
24. Charles McGrath, "'The Plot against America' Imagines the Rise of an Intolerant Demagogue", in *The New York Times*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/arts/television/plot-against-america-hbo-david-simon.html>.
25. Alex Bilmes, *art. cit.*
26. Jennifer A. Glinka, "History and the 'I' Trapped in the Middle: Negotiating the Past in Roth's *The Ghost Writer* and *The Plot against America*", in *Philip Roth Studies* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2012), p. 133. See also

- Steven G. Kellman, "It Is Happening Here: *The Plot against America* and the Political Moment", in *Philip Roth Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2008), p. 116.
27. Catherine Morley, "Memories of the Lindbergh Administration: Plotting, Genre and the Splitting of the Self in *The Plot against America*", in *Philip Roth Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2008), p. 144.
 28. Yael Maurer, "If I Didn't See It with My Own Eyes, I'd Think I was Having a Hallucination': Re-imagining Jewish History in Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*", in *Philip Roth Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2011), p. 52.
 29. Noah Berlatsky, "HBO's '*The Plot against America*' Has a Warning that (Almost) Makes You Forget about the Coronavirus", NBC News, March 16, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/hbo-s-plot-against-america-has-warning-almost-makes-you-ncna1160396>.
 30. Philip Roth, *art. cit.*
 31. As the character Herman Levin (as Herman Roth is named in the miniseries – one of the few notable changes from book to screen) argues after Lindbergh's election, "This is my country. This one the Jew haters are not getting", an oblique reference to the situation occurring at the time in Europe.
 32. Jennifer A. Glinka, *art. cit.*, p. 139.
 33. Patrick Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 206.
 34. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 58.
 35. *Ibidem*, p. 63.
 36. Patrick Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
 37. Alan Cooper, *art. cit.*, in Derek Parker Royal (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 249.
 38. Alex Hobbs, *art. cit.*, p. 130.
 39. Noah Berlatsky, *art. cit.*
 40. Dan Shiffman, *art. cit.*, p. 64.
 41. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
 42. Roth, *The Plot*, p. 16.
 43. Shiffman, *art. cit.*, p. 67.
 44. Berlatsky, *art. cit.*
 45. Roth, *The Plot*, p. 391.
 46. *Ibidem*, p. 64.
 47. *Ibidem*, p. 454; see also Alan Cooper, *art. cit.*, in Derek Parker Royal (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 249. Earlier on, Alvin claimed he had volunteered to fight "because there is a war going on" (p. 298).
 48. *Ibidem*, p. 454.
 49. *Ibidem*, p. 65.
 50. Timothy Parrish, *art. cit.*, in Debra Shostak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 130.
 51. *Ibidem*, p. 129.
 52. Leona Toker, "Between Dystopia and Allohistory: The Ending of Roth's *The Plot against America*", in *Philip Roth Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 44.
 53. Lucy Mangan, "*The Plot against America* Review – Fascism Grips in Taut Political Allegory", in *The Guardian*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/jul/14/the-plot-against-america-review-fascism-grips-in-taut-political-allegory>.
 54. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 297, 347.
 55. *Ibidem*, p. 297.
 56. The Office for American Absorption, as the name suggests, was the government agency responsible for implementing the Just Folks and Homestead 42 programmes.
 57. Leona Toker, *art. cit.*, p. 47.
 58. Claudia Franziska Bruhwiler, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
 59. *Ibidem*, p. 34.
 60. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 167.
 61. Dan Shiffman, *art. cit.*, p. 67.

62. *Ibidem*, p. 57-58.
63. *Ibidem*, p. 65.
64. Charles Bramesco, *art. cit.*
65. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 173.
66. *Ibidem*, p. 135.
67. Patrick Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
68. Judy Berman, "HBO's Philip Roth Adaptation *The Plot against America* Is Essential Viewing for All Americans", in *Time*, March 13, 2020, <https://time.com/5802828/plot-against-america-hbo-review/>.
69. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
70. *Ibidem*, *loc. cit.*
71. Derek Parker Royal, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
72. Leona Toker, *art. cit.*, p. 46.
73. Charles Bramesco, *art. cit.*
74. Derek Parker Royal, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
75. Leona Toker, *art. cit.*, p. 46.
76. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 135.
77. *Ibidem*, p. 537.
78. Timothy Parrish, *art. cit.*, in Debra Shostak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 130.
79. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
80. Jennifer A. Glinka, *art. cit.*, p. 131, 135.
81. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 356.
82. Claudia Franziska Bruhwiler, *op. cit.*, p. 40. See also Ginevra Geraci, *art. cit.*, p. 194.
83. Richard Brody, *art. cit.*
84. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 135.
85. *Ibidem*, p. 14.
86. David Brauner, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
87. Debra Shostak, "Introduction", in Debra Shostak (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 95.
88. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
89. *Ibidem*, p. 202-203.
90. Ginevra Geraci, *art. cit.*, p. 189.
91. *Ibidem*, p. 205.
92. Claudia Franziska Bruhwiler, *op. cit.*, p. 23, 30.
93. Philip Roth, *The Plot*, p. 265.
94. Leona Toker, *art. cit.*, p. 46.
95. David Brauner, *op. cit.*, p. 208. This attraction towards white Christian America is undercut, however, by what Philip views as the intractable antisemitism upon which it is built, a history that in his mind goes from Christ to Hitler to Lindbergh. While his adventures following Christians (in the eponymous book chapter) show his desire to reach outward and achieve a broader identification with America, he discovers that the limits of "permissible flight" are quite low indeed. (See Dan Shiffman, *art. cit.*, p. 68).
96. Philip Roth, *art. cit.*
97. Elaine B. Safer, *op. cit.*, p. 160, 167.
98. Richard Brody, *art. cit.*
99. Charles Bramesco, *art. cit.*