

***Exploring the Vault: Jewish Ethnicity
and Memory in Philip Roth's The Ghostwriter***

To say that Jews are recognizable by their writings may sound racist, but much is being said today about the notion that writing may be a “vehicle by which to think through ... ethnic identity” (Budick 1). I intend in this paper to contribute to the discourse on ethnicity, multiculturalism, and Jewish identity arguing that ethnicity must not be suppressed. If a mindset exists among the majority culture which advocates denying the Jewish writer an honest expression of the self, such an attitude demeans the entire corpus of writing coming out of such a culture. Especially for Jewish writers, acceptance on their merit as ‘hyphenated Jews’ conscious of their dual heritage has been slow in coming, and the negative attitude toward Jews, Jewish culture, and the Jewish experience has left an indelible stamp on Jews as a people and as individuals.

Minority writing may be seen as a genre with a moral message. In America, if its message is accepted by the white, dominantly Christian majority, it may “transform [the American’s] idea of America” (Budick 6). In Budick’s view such a process is unavoidable, and in the end America will recognize that individual “integration” is no longer “invisible,” at least on “the cultural level,” something which I interpret as an acceptance of the existence of hybridity and the multicultural nature of America (7). This puts a great responsibility on the ethnic minority American writer, for according to Budick’s argument paving the road to ethnic integration and the acceptance of multiculturalism is up to the ethnic minorities themselves. Budick sees Jews and African-Americans as the perfect candidates to build the necessary models of dialogue which would make possible

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“a more general debate between Christians and Jews and a more local, American conversation between blacks and whites” (Budick 11). Nevertheless, Jewish writers remain at a disadvantage because of the complex way Jews are perceived by the dominant culture. In *The Ghostwriter*, Philip Roth illustrates how issues of voice and ethnicity are affected by pressures brought to bear on Jewish writing.

The Ghostwriter was published in 1979, but the story is set in 1956 and revives the controversy surrounding the dramatization of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* on Broadway. In this paper I will refer to this book as the Diary. Anne Frank's Diary was first published in Holland in 1947 under the title *Het Achterhuis van Anne Frank*. It was translated into many languages and became the “symbol of the persecuted Jewish child” (Ravvin 63). Its commercial success brought about the decision to adapt the Diary for the stage and Broadway. The subsequent controversy surrounding the stage version raged around the point that the play had virtually ignored the fact that the Franks were Jews. However, the dissenting voices that protested the Hollywood-type adaptation failed to have an impact on the character of the play. Almost twenty years later, and more than a decade after the Eichmann trial, Philip Roth revived the controversy in order to address the question of Jewish identity, and the way artistic freedom is curtailed by denying the writer's ethnicity. Roth points an accusing finger at those who presume to underplay the role of Jewish identity in the tragedy of the Frank family. He also returns the focus on the injustice of allowing ethnic identity to be the basis for any kind of judgment by another group.

Today we may take it as a given that the Shoah was a “centering” experience which left its mark on Jews everywhere (Cohen 1). More importantly, however, immediately after the Shoah it seemed that killing six million Jews, one and a half million of them children, had actually shaken the entire Western world. Therefore, it is disturbing that the Jewish aspects of the Jewish persecution were underplayed in order to assure a sympathetic reception by the general public, or boost box office revenue. Books such as *Beyond Marginality*, *Breaking Crystal*, and *In the Shadow of the Shoah* delve into the question of Jewish identity as influenced by the Shoah with a focus on literary expression. Nevertheless,

שנתון "על" – תשס"ד כרך ט'

interest in and sympathy with Jewish ethnic expression apparently remain problematic, and Jews continue to look over their shoulders at the majority culture. Cynthia Ozick warns against this phenomenon and writes that, “[if] we blow into the narrow end of the shofar, we will be heard far. But if we choose to be Mankind rather than Jewish and blow into the wider part, we will not be heard at all; for us, America will have been in vain” (Ozick 177) Similar to Ozick’s assertion, in *The Ghostwriter*, Philip Roth “blows” into the narrow end of the shofar and takes on both Jews and Gentiles who are willing to sacrifice Jewish content for the sake of a more palatable, universal outlook.

Until Ravvin, little focus has been placed on the character of Anne Frank in Roth’s novel. Critics may have been more comfortable treading familiar ground. According to Joseph C. Voelker, *The Ghostwriter* is the fictional Nathan Zuckerman’s “bildungsroman,” since he finds his stride in the novel (Voelker 89). Considering the large number of characters-as-writers in the novel, and his eventual emergence as a writer, it may be asked whether this book is indeed a “bildungsroman” in terms of Zuckerman. Perhaps it is more a *kuenstlerroman* for him and a *bildungsroman* for Anne Frank, since Roth restores her. The novel gives us Zuckerman, a fledgling writer, and admirer of the Russian born Lonoff, whose creative juices have essentially run out. He now teaches young college students. Lonoff, who no longer needs to prove his genius, is looking for a new young talent, and Zuckerman is visiting Lonoff in the hope of earning the old man’s patronage. Lonoff also has a young houseguest, an emaciated, yet hauntingly beautiful young woman who eventually reveals herself as Anne Frank. Her status in the household is unclear. Zuckerman reads the girl’s suffering in her body language, and becomes obsessed with her. In Roth’s novel Anne Frank returns to life. This gives her a completely new status. Suddenly she has a future, is no longer a dead victim but a survivor, and if the novel is to be taken literally, even an avenger.

The title of the book is also ambivalent. Literally, a ‘ghostwriter’ is a writer who helps a famous person to produce an autobiography, but here we have multiple layers of ‘ghosts writing.’ Philip Roth, the flesh-and-blood author writes the fictional life of Nathan Zuckerman. In *The Ghostwriter*, Nathan Zuckerman

rewrites Anne Frank's life. This is another ambiguity: is he her ghostwriter or is she a ghost who writes? The book allows Anne Frank to relate events not laid down in her diary but anchored in the collective Jewish suffering of the concentration camp. Roth presents Anne's story through the narrow end of the shofar.

In 1956 Anne Frank's Diary was performed on Broadway, and Roth's conceit of giving voice to a dead girl, a ghost, in order to redress the issue of the Jewish content of her existence is laudable. However, *The Ghostwriter* was hardly universally acclaimed. Some critics condemned his book as a "falsification of the Holocaust" (Shatzky 107-110). I believe the shoe is on the other foot. In Roth's eyes, taking away the salient Jewish aspects of the Diary and portraying Anne as simply a young girl growing up in occupied Holland are a great injustice done to the Jewish People. Indeed, others thought so as well, for initially two theatre versions of the diary were written, and the difference between the two versions lay in the emphasis on and adherence to Jewish content. Criticism about the subdued Jewish content of the version put on the stage fell on deaf ears in 1956. Two decades have to pass before any attention is once more focused on Anne's Diary. With *The Ghostwriter* Roth picks up the gauntlet to restore the play's Jewish content in keeping with the chain of events of the Shoah. Roth tells his reader how Anne Frank enters the Broadway Theater and watches the audience watching her story (Roth 84). Anne's reaction opens up the moral dilemma of distorted history and places the guilt for her death on those who condone such distortions. This scene with Anne watching the audience watching the play, with Roth watching them both with the help of his fictional Zuckerman, and the reader watching all of them, creates the sense of vertigo at the edge of the abyss suitable to the fearful events of the Shoah. First of all, with Anne in the theater, the audience becomes part of the events. In a sense they are now the actors and their reaction motivates Anne rather than the plot of the play. She suddenly understands that the play's powerful impact is largely fueled by the fact of her death, and if the fact of her survival became known, she would be shorn of the power that now makes the people flock to the theatre to see the play (Roth 85). In other words, unless she is dead, the audience won't come to the theater. This

notion points an accusing finger at a society which even as late as 1956 still allows Jewish Shoah survivors to languish in DP camps in Germany since they have no American relatives who can sign affidavits for them.

The Ghostwriter is wholly a search for Anne's Jewish identity. When Zuckerman uses the biographical material of his relatives for his stories, his father is greatly insulted by the unflattering portrayal of the family, yet the former insists that a story must be true to itself and not bend to the will of others, and he rejects his father's notion that his stories are bound to draw any negative reaction from the Gentiles (Roth 86-88). He wants his stories to remain as they are, while his father wants an idealized version of the family. "You didn't leave anything disgusting out," is the elder Zuckerman's accusation, and adds, "You made everybody seem awfully greedy, Nathan." When the son agrees that this is the case, and that people really were that way, his father is upset and dismisses Zuckerman's version with the comment "That's one way of looking at it" (Roth 86). This discussion is a parody of the debate around the two versions of the Anne Frank story. The father wants an idealized representation, while the son wants to let the reader judge his characters as they are. Not even Judge Wapter, a father figure to Zuckerman and a symbol of authority in the community, can change Zuckerman's mind (Roth 95). Wapter adds a postscript to his letter to Zuckerman in which he claims that the "Broadway production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*" was "an unforgettable experience" (Roth 102). Wapter is happy with the universalized version, which explains why his opinion about Zuckerman's writing should be discounted. When the conversation shifts to "what the goyim may say", Zuckerman becomes even more stubborn. He refuses to distort his stories in order to sanitize his portrayals of Jews in his stories. He believes that this desire to idealize is the result of anti-Semitism and should not be encouraged (Roth 102). Mordechai Richler writes about this 1950s mindset in 1970. Again I emphasize the fact that this is post-Eichmann's trial. In Richler's words, "Jewish writers, fearful of being branded exotics, their fictions confined to the parochial narrows, learned to lacquer their unmistakably Jewish characters with bacon fat in the earnest hope of floating them into mainstream" (Richler 111).

Zuckerman is both Roth's alter ego and the ghostwriting mouthpiece for Anne Frank, the message being that even if Anne's voice is gone, others will write her story and remain true to it without fear of the reaction from the general public. Idealization has no place in this kind of narrative, and if Anne's story has been distorted to the point of insulting her memory there is nothing wrong with reviving her in fiction. Seen through the prism of Jewish identity, bringing Anne to life hardly insults her memory. Ravvin agrees that Roth does not desecrate it. In Ravvin's words, *The Ghostwriter* is "an important effort that examines the way in which aspects of the Holocaust have been received... since the Second World War" (Ravvin 64). Ravvin is adamant in his claim that anyone daring to take up writing of the Shoah must be "vigilant" in his or her treatment of the various "political, ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic questions raised by the Nazi genocide" (65). Moreover, Ravvin insists that such writing must carefully avoid giving in to the pressure of opening up the text to create a greater appeal by imbuing it with "broader context" (65). Again, the notion of the short end of the shofar legitimizes Roth's treatment of the events. His outrage at the way Anne Frank's play is robbed of Jewish content, enables him to enter the "vault" of Jewish literary allusion, rather than allowing the shadows of "historical documentation" to disenfranchise the characters' ethnicity (Ravvin 19).

Meyer Levin labored to this end in 1956, but the climate was not right at the time. The Goodrich-Hackett's hollywoody script was chosen over Meyer Levin's. This choice may be interpreted with the help of a 1952 article by Bruno Bettelheim about the popularity of Anne Frank's Diary. Bettelheim starts out by saying that the very scope of the cruelty perpetrated on the Jews by the Nazis was so horrendous as to be virtually unbelievable (Bettelheim 246). Bettelheim suggests three possible reactions to knowledge of the Nazi crimes. The first is rationalization: any person who could do something so horrible must be "insane or perverted." This leaves most human beings innocent and clears them from any collective guilt. Second, the reports about acts of mass murder, torture and medical experiments on human beings were denied or declared exaggerations. The Nazi propaganda machine used this tactic in order to cast into doubt any reports of atrocities. The result was that people accepted a watered-down version

of the reports. Third, even if reports were believed, they were quickly repressed, and the lack of publicity ensured that the details would soon be forgotten (Bettelheim 246). These mechanisms, according to Bettelheim, influenced not only people's opinions, but also their attitude to the survivors. In turn they even affected the way writing about the Shoah and the death camps were received (247).

Anne Frank's Diary was extraordinarily attractive to the general public because it virtually made no mention of horror. The reader finds an entire family living together; children study math and literature; a boy and a girl discover themselves and each other; and all this creates an illusion of normality and romanticizes the Shoah. It is a statistical fact that Shoah testimonies of death and violence were much less popular (Bettelheim 247). Perhaps this is so because such tales forced people to deal with facts which were too uncomfortable to face. It was uncomfortable to know that Anne died because she was Jewish, and her death for vague reasons made it more palatable. However, it is important to remember that Anne never denies the family's Jewishness or underplays its importance to their predicament. Throughout her Diary, she mentions their Jewishness as the one and only reason for the family's incarceration in the Annex.

In *The Ghostwriter*, Anne Frank survives the war, and it should come as no surprise that this survival is kept secret in the book. Anne does not even tell her father that she is alive (Roth 59). She understands that her survival would have shattered the myth of a heroic child and her tragedy. In John Leonard's words, "her witness would be sullied" (85). Bettelheim claims that the most important step to increase one's chance of survival was to accept that circumstances were indeed extraordinary and as such demanded extreme action, but Otto Frank clung to symbols of normal life. The Diary projects this pseudo-normality, and readers may easily fail to grasp the Frank family's dire predicament. By maintaining routine the Franks created a measure of "business as usual", and by denying that death lay outside their door, they were able to retain "some sense of balance" (Bettelheim 256). When Bettelheim dwells on the uncanny success of the Anne Frank story, he insists that the "uncritical response" to the Diary is due to the Frank family's desire to continue their "usual daily attitudes and activities,

although surrounded by a maelstrom apt to engulf [them] at any moment” (247). Taking Bettelheim’s classification of the way people deal with atrocity, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the success of the play and the movie based on it are largely the result of a simple, human wish to “forget the gas chambers... by glorifying the Frank family’s retreat into an extremely private, gentle, sensitive world” (247). The less mention is made of the Franks’ Jewishness, the easier this process becomes. Bettelheim would therefore agree that the play twists the spirit of the Diary since the latter never denies the Frank’s ethnicity. Anne unequivocally remains true to herself and her Jewish roots, and never allows that only very few people are responsible for the killing going on. She lays the blame for her suffering upon all mankind by declaring that “[t]here’s in people simply an urge to destroy, an urge to kill, to murder and rage” (Diary 244-5).

The Secret Annex stands in the heart of Amsterdam, and its occupants can look down on the city, but they are physically removed from its daily life. Emotionally they try to do the same. The reader can easily identify with this routine. The Frank’s ambience is also more palatable than – say- finding a hiding place in a pigsty or a hayloft, as some Jews did. In the Secret Annex, after all, only a pane of glass separates the family from the rest of the world. The situation seems normal, comic at times, tense at others, but the reader can imagine himself there. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the glass pane of the attic window and the secret door through which the family’s Gentile rescuers come and go are the only physical barriers between the outside world and the Frank’s tiny Jewish ghetto. Unfortunately, flimsy as these barriers are, they might as well have been an electrified fence. The Franks are prisoners inside the Annex, but they pretend that they are not. Moreover, it is undeniable that the only reason they are there, and the only thing that sets them apart from the general public is their Jewishness, and this is also the one and only cause for their predicament. Take away the Franks’ Jewishness and there essentially is no story. They could have come and gone through the secret door, could have opened the glass window in the attic, and could have ridden away on one of the bicycles parked near the entrance to the complex. In other words, underplaying the Jewish character of

their persecution would seem to be a questionable, if not stupid choice, which distorts the entire story.

So why did Otto Frank prefer the Goodrich-Hackett script? According to Meyer Levin, Otto Frank did not want to “bring home the Holocaust experience in too much of its Jewish essence” in the play (Ravvin 72). Arthur Miller wrote about Broadway’s negative attitude to an emphasis on Jewishness immediately after the war. In the late 1940s, his plays are rejected because of overtly Jewish content (Miller, “Concerning Jews Who Write” 10). Meyer Levin had to deal with a similar reality in the 1950s. But Otto Frank was a survivor who had lost his entire family because they were Jews. How could he make such a statement? It boggles the mind. What other essence is there in the killing of Jews? Otto Frank played into Broadway’s needs, but recently some new facts have come to light concerning the man’s tragic existence which may explain a great deal. A recent book about his life suggests that he was the victim of blackmail, and many of his decisions were motivated by a deep desire to keep controversy at bay. In my opinion the poor man was completely guilt-ridden. It appears that Otto Frank’s firm may have had some dealings with the German army during the occupation of Holland. This information emerges from Carol Ann Lee’s biography of Otto Frank entitled *The Hidden Life of Otto Frank*. She claims that Frank’s fear of exposure forced him to act according to the wishes of a Dutch Nazi, who may well have been responsible for the betrayal and subsequent death of most of the family (Shulevitz 31). This claim, outlandish as it seems and in spite of the fact that the accusation of cooperation with the Germans was a spurious one considering that most firms could not survive without dealing with the Germans, has a certain logic to it. How else to explain Otto Frank’s willingness to distort his family’s story or the startling pronouncement about underplaying the Jewish content of the Shoah? What Shoah survivor could possibly claim that his suffering was the result of anything but a “Jewish essence?” It is also incomprehensible that Otto Frank would have willingly allowed the cynical exploitation of his daughter’s innocence by putting words in her mouth which he knew to be lies. Therefore, the idea of blackmailing a broken man seems a definite option. Otto Frank’s biography further states that Anne’s

father did not know that his blackmailer had also been his betrayer. I find it impossible to believe that he could have kept silent and continued to pay his blackmailer had he known.

A major distortion of the play concerns Anne's well-published belief in the goodness of mankind. It may be her most famous line, but it is the line of a child who continues to hope for a better world and can therefore write that "...in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart" (Frank 236-237). This line, taken out of context, became the most controversial one of the play, and Bettelheim and Roth both labored to reinstate the meaning of this line as written by Anne. Goodrich-Hacket turned it into a kind of slogan for the entire play by repeating it several times. When the Broadway Anne elaborates on her family's suffering, she puts down their predicament to the human condition and universal suffering. The play virtually disregards the fact that the family's Jewishness is the one and only reason for their persecution, and allows only that in our cruel world suffering is meted out to different groups in turn. Now, she apologetically admits, it is simply the turn of the Jews to suffer (Levin 168). Levin sees the fictional Anne's speech as a distortion of the diary, and therefore an affront to the flesh and blood Anne, the victim of Nazi persecution of the Jews. He turns to the narrow end of the shofar by quoting the diary.

More than twenty years after the play's production on Broadway, Philip Roth picked up the gauntlet thrown down by Meyer Levin and condemned the universalized script. Roth's multilayered narrative goes to the heart of Jewish identity. *The Ghostwriter* is written by a champion of the Jewish People who refuses to accept a play about Jewish suffering in an atmosphere in which it "was not a time to come forward with a play about Jews" (Miller, "Concerning" 9, Crandell 87). Quoting Arthur Miller's words here is a sad irony because what is the Anne Frank story about if not about Jews? Underplaying the Jewish content gives the entire script a sinister aura, since it takes away the essential meaning of the suffering and murder of six million people. Allowing for the persecution of the Jews as a natural outcome of 2000 years of anti-Semitism may be a very bitter pill to swallow, and to take responsibility for such events is a lot to ask. It is much easier to view the Shoah as an extra-historical event, since it allows one

שנתון "לע" – תשס"ד כרך ט'

to ignore its lessons. Bettelheim says that human beings ignore things they cannot face. Miller's fictional character Joseph Keller makes a similar observation: "I ignore what I gotta ignore" in relationship to his own actions (Miller, *All My Sons* 52). Ignoring the unpleasantness makes us all get along. No one rocks the boats. No one makes accusations. No wonder, then, that Philip Roth is unpopular when he refuses to ignore the facts.

The Ghostwriter is a defense of Anne Frank, her amputated childhood, capture, and death. It is an affront to the girl's suffering to proclaim the play "a portrait of adolescence" (Brooks ix) since that statement implies that Anne did not even die, or that her final two years placed her in an environment that was normal and conducive to adolescent mental health and growth. Moreover, it is an affront to the girl's suffering and the suffering of other girls like her if one allows the myth that the Frank family was only marginally Jewish. After all, the Franks' religious observance was never a question here. The Nazi strain of anti-Semitism was based on genetics and not ritual. Nuns died in Auschwitz because they had a Jewish mother. Ravvin also takes great exception to the play's hint that the Franks are more Christians than Jews. In his view, this is a sinister exploitation of their assimilation.

The prop used to bring home this message is a Christian Bible given to Anne as a "Chanukah gift from her father". In the Diary Anne explains that Chanukah is a kind of "Jewish Christmas." However, the play overemphasizes the gift to create the impression that the Franks' Jewishness is completely negligible (Ravvin 73). This attitude ignores that fact that the Franks' measure of Jewish religious observance is not the issue. Their predicament was solely the result of their Jewish ancestry, a fact completely beyond their control. Nevertheless, the play presumes to define the family's ethnicity based on religious observance.

This point of view denies the Franks the right to possess a Christian Bible and yet continue to see themselves as Jews. In other words, the play denies the family the right to define its own ethnic identity, should they wish to do so. In my opinion, however, the gift needs to be seen in the wider context. Otto Frank wants to give his children a normal environment that allows them to look ahead and plan their future within the context of the greater society. Giving Anne a

Christian Bible does not suggest that she should become a Christian, or that Frank wished he were one. After all, he gives it to her on Chanukah, and the fact that the family celebrates this holiday should prove that they are aware of Jewish tradition. Otto Frank may have chosen a puzzling gift for his daughter, but whether such a gift is appropriate was entirely his prerogative. In the Diary there is no confusion. Anne writes that the gift was intended “to give me something new to begin... Daddy asked Koophuis for a children’s Bible so that I could find out something about the New Testament at last”. When Margot seems “somewhat perturbed” by his choice for a Chanukah gift, Otto agrees that “Jesus ...doesn’t go with Chanukah” (Frank 102). This is hardly a pronouncement by a person interested in changing his daughter’s religious beliefs. Moreover, the children’s Bible also includes the Hebrew Scripture, a fact ignored in the play. Most of all, Anne writes that it was a hardship to light the candles. “Because of the shortage of candles [they] only had them alight for ten minutes, but it is all right as long as you have the song”, referring to Maoz Tsur (Frank 51). From the Diary it emerges that the family knew something about the halahic aspects of the holiday, and that Chanukah was a yearly celebration. Anne goes on to describe that in the Annex they celebrated Sinterklaas, a non-sectarian gift-giving event typically Dutch, which is celebrated on December 5th, and that “none of [them] had ever celebrated” this event before (Frank 52). Most likely they did so because their Dutch rescuers had little gifts for them. In my opinion there is a sense of definance in celebrating Chanukah in the Annex, and therefore, interpreting this Christian Bible as an overt act in denouncing Judaism is wrong, both factually and morally. Drawing this conclusion is detrimental to the freedom of every individual to determine his/her own hybrid identity. The extent of the Frank family’s ethnic multi-culturalism is apparent from the fact that Otto Frank reads the plays of Goethe and Schiller to his daughter, and his wife presses “her prayer book” with its German translation into Anne’s hands (Frank 39). In other words, the Franks do not deny their Jewishness, although they seldom discuss it. I believe, therefore, that Philip Roth takes great exception to the notion that the Broadway play treats Anne’s life as “an exalted comment on the human spirit” (quoted in Graver 89), since it represses the fact that the subjects of persecution and oppression are Jewish. I believe this to be the *The*

שנתון "על" – תשס"ד כרך ט'

Ghostwriter's main reason for being. It brings back the repressed-- literally. Anne is a ghost brought back to life to fight for its people. This theme of the ghost-fighter appears also in Hong-Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts*, and in De Lange's *A Trek for Trinie*. In both cases the repressed rises to stand up for their clan. Roth allows the ghost of Anne Frank to speak and gives Anne the platform ironically denied her on the Broadway stage.

Roth's book is not popular. It does not entertain, is hard to read, and difficult to understand without some historical background. Ravvin writes that critics "looked upon [it] as one of the author's scandals" (64). Some even denounce the book as a "falsification of the Holocaust" (Schatzky 107) and accuse Roth of writing it "for personal gain" and in total disregard of the "known historical record" (Schatzky 110). I must ask why the Broadway play was not condemned with the same argument, since it certainly did all the above. Jewish identity cannot be defined by socio-cultural attitudes popular at a given time. Jewish definition cannot be hidden or distorted to please anyone who is made unhappy by an individual's definition. But, as Norman Mailer writes, "a minority man grows up with a double image of himself, his own and society's" (Richler 83). This statement must have been abundantly clear to Roth. He addresses this notion of approval and disapproval of the Jews and Jewish life (Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* 151). To illustrate his displeasure with Jewish self-consciousness, he publishes his responses to letters from disgruntled (Jewish) readers. One such letter complains about a Roth character called Epstein, an adulterer. The reader cannot fathom why Roth would choose such a protagonist. Roth's portrayal, according to the letter-writer, will reflect badly on the Jews, for people will see adultery as "a Jewish trait" (Roth, *Reading*, 151). Roth responds: "Anna Karenina commits adultery with Vronsky, with consequences more disastrous than those Epstein brings about. Who thinks to ask "Is it a Russian trait?" (Roth 151-2). In response to the criticism that he cannot write this way in America, and that only in Israel his works may be judged on literary merit alone, Roth argues that this mindset underscores how complicated it is to be a minority. In America, a Jew cannot be portrayed as an adulterer because too many non-Jews might see Jewish adultery as a "trait" (Roth 152). However, Jews have long

been concerned with the reaction of the majority culture. This is part of our conditioning. Miller and Levin were defeated by the strength of public opinion, and Philip Roth too must deal with what the Gentiles will say: Jews opposed to Roth's conceit of reviving Anne Frank claim that she is an icon, a martyr, who represents the noble resistance of the Jewish People before the onslaught of the Nazi killing machine. This is all quite true, but the protest is lodged to the wrong address.

With *The Ghostwriter*, Roth does not portray Jews who are idealized and pure, nor will he condone the trampling under of a fellow Jew's Jewish identity. Roth sees the play as a betrayal to the spirit of Anne's diary, and an affront to the Jews. He wants to set the record straight. For this he needs some kind of continuity between Anne and the rest of the Jewish People. He establishes it by placing Anne in the Biltmore hotel in New York (Roth, *The Ghostwriter* 88). Anne has arrived in the United States incognito and expects to keep her true identity hidden. As long as she is a [dead] victim of the Nazi persecution, she has a platform. Her Diary is read. But, if she were alive, she would be only one more survivor. Many are still living in DP camps. They are not particularly popular, nor do they enjoy much help from Gentile humanitarian organizations. Few countries open their borders to the survivors of the death camps. America refused to issue them visas until 1952 (Encyclopedia Judaica, see under "Displaced Persons"). Their countries of origin were at times hostile, or indifferent at best. Anne's conclusion that she must remain dead if she wants her voice to be heard is quite understandable. So she "lives at the Biltmore and keeps to herself" (Roth 89).

The Biltmore Hotel is an old establishment, and indelibly bound up with the history of the Jewish People, for this hotel was the location for a significant Zionist conference in 1942, and it lent its name to the declaration of policy which became a cornerstone of the Zionist movement. The position paper, "The Biltmore Declaration" called for recognition and acceptance of a Jewish national identity. The public debate among the Jewish community was similar to that of the Jews in Vienna nearly a hundred years earlier when they struggled for emancipation. Jewish suffering would end only when Jews would be allowed to

decide their own fate. Situating Anne Frank at this hotel draws a clear analogy between her Diary and the subsequent play, which because of its universalized context had become the property of the general public and was no longer a Jewish story. In order to return her story to her she needs an advocate – a champion. This is Philip Roth, or rather the fictional Nathan Zuckerman. The symbolism of her residence places her within a wholly Jewish setting. She draws strength from what happened there before. The Biltmore Conference is the precursor of Anne's call for Jewish control over her life story, and from the hotel Anne speaks in a purely Jewish voice. Roth attempts to convince his reader that he knows Anne's true story, and that it is different from the one told on Broadway.

Ironically, Roth, like Goodrich-Hackett, picked the most famous line of the Diary, but he returned it to Anne. In *The Ghostwriter*, Anne, now called Amy, comes to New York to see her play, and after she catches a "matinee performance" she retreats to the "Biltmore Hotel" to plan her strategy (122). Her plan to tell her father that she is alive is shattered when she realizes that it will kill interest in the diary. In spite of its flaws, the play is keeping her mother and sister alive, and based on her post-war experience, Anne/Amy realizes that no one is interested in her as a person. She imagines how someone would come out on the stage night after night to let the audience know that she was actually alive and "doing very well" and how the women who had been so affected by her story would suddenly scream "oh no" (124). She cannot face this possibility and decides that even her father can't know about her survival. She even considers suicide as a solution. By suggesting that her death keeps her writings alive, Roth passes a very severe judgment on a world that is not interested in people at all. It wants to be entertained and use such entertainment as a means of keeping the truth at bay.

And what about Anne's enduring belief in the goodness of man? In the play this is the crux, and allows the audience to go home feeling they are in no way to blame for what happened to the girl. This is in keeping with Bettelheim's essay, and if Anne is dead, there is no need to worry about her. But in *The Ghostwriter*, Anne understands that no one has learned a thing from her suffering. As a

survivor she is of no importance. *The Ghostwriter* places Anne inside a world which cannot take responsibility for what has happened to her. This is so even when people appear to be sympathetic. “Miss Gidding, who was a young teacher in the school north of London” continually tried to get Anne to tell her about Europe and the concentration camps (Roth 130). Under the guise of being interested, the teacher pesters the girl for information and “finally”, asks her why it is that “for centuries people have hated ...Jews.” Anne explodes at this question for it places the responsibility of this hatred at her feet. After the camps she is no longer willing accept such responsibility. She answers, “Don’t ask me that! Ask the madmen who hate us,” and from that moment on she counts Miss Gidding among those with whom she wishes to have no contact (Roth 131). Eventually, she can no longer bear even the slightest contact with Gentiles. At that point she escapes to America and for the first time comes face to face with her Diary (Roth 135).

Roth presents the girl’s narrative as a symbolic mirroring of handing down knowledge through the generations. Anne tells Lonoff who tells Zuckerman and the reader with an admonition not to forget. *The Ghostwriter* twice proves that Anne belongs to the Jewish People and wants her people to remember her story. Roth now turns to the question of the Franks’ Jewish identity and that puzzling Christian Bible. From the Diary we know that Margot was infuriated about the book. Anne also describes her older sister as the more ‘Jewish’ one. Margot wanted to be a nurse in Palestine, while Anne had no such ambitions. Possibly Anne was less aware of her Jewishness because of her age, and perhaps she thought it did not solely define her. After all, she does write: “the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews” (Frank 241, Roth 142). In *The Ghostwriter* this sentence reads like an accusation. Is it imaginable that Jews are not really considered people? In a way this might explain why Jewish suffering is not good material for theatre: it simply cannot touch anyone else. The Diary offers no answer, but *The Ghostwriter* does. Could it be that Jews had invited disaster upon themselves, writes Roth, “by stubbornly repudiating everything modern and European, not to say Christian?” (Roth 144) The idea that six million men, women, and children deserved to die for being Jews is too mind

boggling, but it becomes even more terrible when the Jewishness of the victims is subsequently ignored in order to entertain. Roth accuses the Broadway theatergoers of being “obtuse” by refusing to see that “what had been done to the Frank family” had been done to them “just for being Jews,” and that this had made them the “enemy.” Roth says that what set Anne apart from the Gentile world was a short candle lighting ceremony, and this is what earns her the death sentence. As Roth relates, the chain of events is Anne Frank receiving the Christian Bible from her Jewish father as a gift on a Jewish holiday. Her life is forfeit for celebrating “a harmless Chanukah song” and its attendant candle-lighting ceremony, which involves a few words in Hebrew. By celebrating “a ceremony lasting about ten minutes” the Franks deserve to die. Roth sees no need to discuss the propriety of giving a Christian Bible to a Jewish child. Instead he foregrounds the Chanukah celebration as the trigger. Anne died not because of the book her father gave her, but because of the candles they lit. “This is the horror. And the truth” (Roth 144). Therefore, ignoring the family’s Jewishness is wrong. It ignores an essential truth, which in Roth’s view is another horror and crime.

The final straw is the notion that Anne might still “believe that people are really good at heart” (Roth quoting the Diary 146). The audacity of assuming that a girl who had gone through such horrors would not learn to hate or feel anger or a need to avenge her murdered people is too much for Roth and he will not stand for it. He makes Anne repeat her line and denounce it. She has lost everything, including her childish beliefs. She cannot even go back to her father, for it would destroy that little bit of her story the world is willing to listen to. Roth makes Anne twice a victim. She is twice murdered. Once at the hands of the Nazis and the hatred of the Gentile world for the Jews, and once because her Jewish essence is denied to her on Broadway. According to Roth, Anne is tired of being a victim and wants revenge. She would kill if she could. Roth validates these feelings in the heart of the revived Anne/Amy. Her only responsibility is to the dead, he writes. That is why she chooses to remain dead herself. “In print, their status as flesh and blood” could be restored. The Diary keeps them alive. Yet she knows most of her family is gone, and she longs to avenge them. She wants,

according to Roth, “an ax” and “not print” (147). Her pen is too easily bent to the whims of a general public, and so she prefers a real weapon now. Roth’s fictional Anne Frank, the concentration camp survivor, no longer feels any connection to that line about the goodness of people. Life has taught her otherwise, and the fact that the play keeps her imprisoned behind those childish words infuriates her. Anne wants to give vent to her own murderous hatred and rage. She wants to start killing, splitting heads. Her only problem is that she lacks an intended victim. In the end, Anne understands that the only weapon she has been given “to wield is *Het Achterhuis, van Anne Frank*. And to draw blood with it” would serve no purpose (146-47). And “so she renew[s] her belief in the power of her less than three hundred pages”. I emphasize here that it is not the play that she believes in but the Diary itself (147). Anne takes the high moral ground here. She will protect her dead family, the people who saved her, her father, and “all that had met the fate that she had been spared” (147). How ironic this line, for Anne, of course, had not been spared and it is Roth who is her mouthpiece. *The Ghostwriter* shows that the world has ignored the true lesson of the Diary, which is that Anne should have never even set foot in the Annex. She should have been able to finish school and live her life naturally.

To me, the power of Roth’s book is in its treatment of Jewish identity. Anne Frank is dead. Her Diary has been perverted and her story altered. The changes have stolen away the essence of her suffering. Anne would not have suffered had she been Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or Buddhist. Accepting this truth is all that is needed to prevent more suffering for the Jews, but in an ironic reversal, Roth puts the burden for preventing the denial of the Jew’s right to define themselves squarely on the Jews of today.

At the end Anne/Amy is not Anne Frank after all. Anne/Amy practically evaporates at the end of the book. She disappears into the white light of the snow without revealing her true identity (Roth 175). It is even unclear whether she is a survivor of the Shoah, although her Jewishness is never in question. But even that does not matter. Roth has established the notion of a collective memory for the Jewish people. Moreover, in Zuckerman’s fantasy, Anne has a future. Nathan falls in love with her. Marrying Anne would certainly please his parents he

muses, for which girl could possibly be more Jewish than her. He thinks about having children with Anne, and symbolically at least, this ensures the continuity of the Jewish People (170-71). Even more than that, embracing Anne as part of himself strengthens Zuckerman's own Jewish identity. *The Ghostwriter*, then, is a defense of a person's right to self-definition. By offering Anne what history denied her, Roth makes a case for the notion that Jewish identity must be the property of the Jews. In no way may it ever be an imposed identity.

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