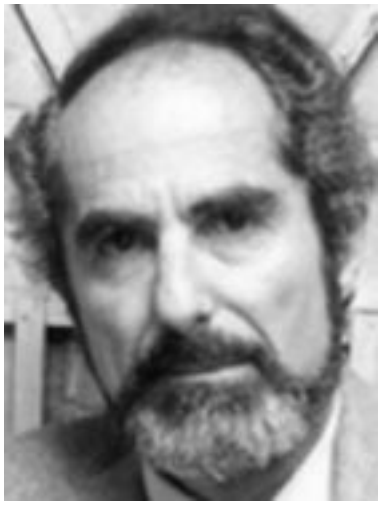
Philip Roth's *I Married A Communist*: Re-thinking the Cold War

Larry Schwartz



Philip Roth

There could be no more fortuitous time to consider Philip Roth's Cold War novel, *I Married A Communist* (1998). The "War on Terror" shows how quickly and deeply hysterical, mindless patriotism can invade both public and personal discourse -- replicating the nightmarish destructiveness that is Roth's concern in *I Married A Communist*. The "War on Terror" resembles a re-tooled "War on Communism" complete with its internal security legislation, color-coded terror alerts, sleeper cells, and detention centers, and even an evil, mustachioed dictator (often labeled a current-day Stalin). The hyper-propagandizing news media have helped to justify a "Fatherland" bureaucracy and an invasion of foreign countries. It has triggered my own memories of growing up during the height of the Cold War terror campaign: I routinely practiced hiding under my school desk (in a New Jersey suburb well within the "death zone") in case the Russians launched an A-bomb attack at Manhattan; watching the Strategic Air Command B-52 over-flights to remind us of both the threat and the protection; pledging a new allegiance "under God" each day to counter Communistic atheism; and viewing the TV adaptation of *I Led Three Lives* to see the menace and insidious possibility that my next door neighbor could be a Communist agent.1 I even had the chance to stand atop our town's football stadium late one fall night in 1957 to spot Sputnik and see that the Russians had evil intentions for the heavens as well -- only later to realize I had witnessed the genesis of Star Wars.

Such deep-seated memories are part of the long, pervasive legacy of postwar anti-communism which Roth explores and evokes in *I Married A Communist* (*IMC*).2 And I am suggesting a reading of this novel which may seem at first glance disproportionate to such memories and to Roth's nostalgic rendering of late-1940's progressivism. However, in the context of commonplace and mind-numbing attacks on communism, his novel is freshly revisionist. In *IMC*, Roth sets aside obligatory obeisance to anti-communism in

favor of endorsing a "social democratic" egalitarianism espoused by the postwar left. He is sympathetic to Murray's radical unionism and to Ira's radical politics. Roth doesn't condemn or belittle the progressive politics of the late-1940's: that unions should be activist and strong; that the "little guy" should be protected; that Lincoln (Ira's theatrical career originated in his role as Abe Lincoln at union sponsored rallies -- a giant-sized, intense folk hero) was a fine model for social conscience.

Though Murray is more heroic and complete, Roth does not depict Communist activity itself as evil, deranged, or inhumane. Rather, he portrays unrepentant communists as sympathetic characters in the novel. Roth's hatred is reserved for the "red scare" tactics by careerist politicians, both liberals and conservative, whose amorality combined with murderous ruthlessness to destroy so many. His disdain is for America's failed promise during the Cold War. Roth admires the "united front" at the end of the World War II -- which means not just approval of Norman Corwin and Howard Fast but also of the CPUSA and its denunciation of the American ruling class. In these terms, Roth sees the Communist vision for the U.S. as positive -- communists not as "foreign agents" but American "democrats." This was the Communist Party "line" at the end of the war -- more a platform for a party of anti-fascists and union activists than for revolutionaries.[3] In short, Roth refuses to be mindlessly anti-communist. However, I think Roth's revisionism can and should be pushed further -- toward a re-interpretation of the past and present in the context of renewed American imperialism defended, in part, by a new red/terrorist scare. If the novel has a flaw it is Roth's failure to comprehend the full malevolence of American capitalism and imperialism.

What Roth has Nathan Zuckerman present is a recollection of adolescence -- rebellion, high passion, and abrupt abandonment -- and a paean not only to Ira but also to Murray and his endurance, an elegy to their spirit of resistance to political corruption. Nathan embraces the legacies from that era: the album of records of the Soviet Army chorus including the work song "*Dubinushka*" given to him by Ira as a way for Ira to say he was in the CP without saying it; Norman Corman's *A Note of Triumph*, a book written to celebrate the success of the united front in defeating fascism, two CP pamphlets from the 1940's given to Nathan in 1951 by Johnny O'Day, Ira's CP mentor (he first course of the Marxist study series *Theory and Practice of the Communist Party* and James Allen's *Who Owns America?*; and perhaps, Nathan's country house, his cloister (which he says reminded him of Ira's shack in rural Sussex County).

"Listening to Murray," Nathan says, "I couldn't help but be overtaken by memories of being with Ira, memories I didn't even know that I continued to have" (89).[4] The recollections of Ira and Newark flood back to Nathan but in a nostalgic register which he shares with Murray. With great sympathy, they listen together to the old recording of "*Dubinushka*":

> ". . . the song seemed to be traveling to us from a remote historical past. . . . 'Heave-ho! Heave-ho! Was out of a distant place and time, a spectral residue of those rapturous revolutionary days when everyone craving for change programmatically, naively -- madly unforgivable -- underestimates how mankind mangles its noblest ideas and turns them into tragic farce. . . . As though human wiliness, weakness, stupidity, and corruption didn't stand a chance against the collective, against the might of people pulling together to renew their lives and abolish injustice. Heave-ho." (75)

Nathan recalls his own seduction by, infatuation with, and betrayal of Ira. He learns from Murray that it involved a reciprocal seduction. According to Murray, Nathan was the child that Ira never had the chance to become, smart, studious, and beloved by his parents and the child Eve refused to have. Nathan was attracted to Ira's physicality and argumentative nature, and his "larger than life" role as radio star and husband to a celebrity. Also he was thoroughly mesmerized by Ira's boldness to say anything, to be free "from the need to please." Murray was the brilliant man, the intellectual, the man who taught Nathan how to "box with books" (78), the "essentialist" but Ira was the fire. Nathan saw Ira as the incarnation of Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine*, single-minded, heroic, revolutionary, "audacious on behalf of his convictions:" The man who said, "'My only friend is the revolution.'" (25-28).

> ". . . That was Paine as Fast portrayed him, savagely single-minded and unsociable, an epic, folkloric, belligerenta bitter caustic man, often drunk, frequenting brothels, hunted by assassins, and friendless. . . . *He did it all alone*. There was nothing about Paine that could have been more appealing, however unsentimentally Fast depicted an isolation born of defiant independence and personal misery . . ." (25).

For Nathan, the freedom embodied in uncompromising adherence to ideals was intoxicating, addictive -- a quality he saw in Tom Paine, Ira, and O'Day. As a teenager at war's end, Nathan listened on the radio to Norman Corwin's celebration of the Allied victory, how the "little men," ordinary men joined together to defeat fascism. Corwin was an internationalist who celebrated the united front, especially the ties to the Soviet Union: "We've learned that those most concerned with saving the world from communism usually turn up making it safe for fascism."[5] For Nathan, Ira was the incarnation of that spirit. Later, Ira's radio program "The Free and the Brave" continued Corwin's theme. There was Ira playing Abe Lincoln and mouthing off as Howard Fast's Tom Paine. Ira rises out of the Newark tenements, runs off to the mines of northern New Jersey, hoboes through depression America, stevedores in the Army in Iran, joins up with O'Day in the United Electrical Workers Union. Nathan is enraptured:

> "I'd never known anyone so immersed in his moment or so defined by it. Or tyrannized by it, so much its avenger and its victim and its tool. To imagine Ira *outside* of his moment was impossible . . . the America that was my inheritance manifested itself in the form of Ira Ringold. What Ira was saying, the not entirely limpid or unrepetitious flood of loathing and love, aroused exalted patriotic cravings to know first-hand an America beyond Newark, sparked those same native-son passions that had been kindled in me as a boy by the war. . . ." (189)

Nathan recreates Ira idealistically, in a vision that America could be reformed: Joined together "progressive" forces of the New Deal, the unions, and even the CP would be able to continue the coalition that destroyed the Nazis and tamed the Japanese imperialists and to create a country that fulfills a promise of equality for Blacks, guarantees protection for workers, and ends anti-Semitism.

It is not until late in his first semester at the University of Chicago and after turning away from Ira, that Nathan actually takes the train through the industrial steel "heartland" to visit O'Day. "This was an America that I was not a native of and never would be and that I possessed as an American nonetheless" (226). O'Day has been fired and blacklisted, relegated to handing out leaflets he has written at the factory gates in a CP eviscerated by

the Smith Act trials, the FBI, and an anti-communist union leadership that helped carry out the rank and file purges of activists and communists. O'Day lived alone, ascetic, and pure, still burning with indignation at the oppression of industrial capitalism. What Nathan recalls and ennobles is O'Day's discipline:

> "Now I understood what Ira was doing in the shack. Now I understood the seed of the shack and the stripping back of everything . . . that left a man lonely and monastic but also unencumbered, free to be bold and unflinching and purposeful. . . . There was a firm impression to be taken from this room: the connection between freedom and discipline, the connection between freedom and loneliness and the connection between freedom and punishment." (227-28)

What Nathan sees on his one-day visit is a man who "has no choice, whose commitment is absolute, no evasions. He is depicted as single-minded and uncompromising -- no hypocrisy here. This was a man who lived his life by his convictions, "a wily shrewdness, and however utopian the goal, a deep practicality . . ." (231). He is driven and convincing in a way that Ira never had been, a man of unflinching intensity, "The most dynamic, the most unshatterable, the most dangerous" (232).

> When you're seventeen years old and you meet a guy who has an aggressive stance and who has it all figured out idealistically and . . . ideologically . . . who instead is claimed by nothing but his idea, who is responsible to nothing but the idea, who understands almost mathematically what he needs to live an honorable life, then you think as I did, *Here is where I belong!* " (235)

O'Day gives Nathan two pamphlets, Allen's *Who Owns America?* and the Party's first course, *Theory and Practice of the Communist Party* both of which argue that reform is possible, that there is an oligarchy that can be undermined, and that one can be both an American (in the nativist, patriotic sense) and a communist. As Allen explains, "It will not take too long for [the people] to see through the subterfuges of the Robber Barons and their assorted helpmates. They will distinguish more easily between the fakers of democracy and the real champions of democracy."[6] There is no call to revolution here, rather a demand for the continuation of the liberal New Deal and united front alliances to push for democratic reforms. Indeed, the Party platform is not much different. Class struggle is not central and though the critique of capitalism is on target with the CP leading the way:

> "It fights together with all democratic elements to protect and extend democratic rights and liberties, and to defend democracy from the attacks of fascism. . . . It promotes the coalition of all anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, and anti-monopoly labor and progressive forces for independent political action, for the building of a people's party in the U.S. . . . The Party organization leads the fight against every injustice, every wrong suffered by the people. The Communists, as good Americans, dedicate themselves daily in practice, in action, to promoting the welfare and happiness of the American people -- today, while they are committed to socialism, the ultimate liberation of all mankind."[7]

Roth refuses to accept clichés and simplistic slogans which dominate most commentary about the left and the cold war. For example, in a widely cited text, *The*

Culture of the Cold War, Stephen Whitfield sets his entire analysis within the context that while "Communist generally called themselves 'progressive,' I refer to them as Stalinists -- not because I am oblivious to the harshness of the term but because that is precisely what they were." And furthermore, he explains:

> . . . The animus against Communism was not concocted of phantasms, it was rooted in reality. If judged in the light of liberal democratic ideals, of the promise inherent in personal autonomy and the conventions of ordinary decency, Communism was an evil. . . .8

Instead, Roth evokes complexity and tension about progressive and communist politics through Nathan's interrogation of the variety of views about Ira. Murray says that Ira is no communist. Johnny O'Day, agrees and sees him as a phony or worse because Ira wasn't radical enough. Ira, himself, never admits to Nathan that he is a communist. Eve (or rather Eve and her ghostwriters, the Grants) declares for sure he was a communist. Nathan knows in 1997 that Ira was a communist, but still isn't at all clear what that meant. Nathan knows that Communist Party members were punished for their beliefs, but so too were union activists like Murray. Even innocent bystanders were not immune -- Nathan lost his own scholarship because he was wrongly identified by the FBI as Ira's relative.

From Murray's perspective, "Eve did not marry a Communist; she married a man perpetually hungering after his life." Ira was lost, and in the end Murray is guilt-ridden by his inability to protect Ira -- doomed after Strollo's murder and Murray knew it:

> ". . . The bad ideas and the naïve dreams. All *his* romances. His passion was to be someone he didn't know how to be. He never discovered his life, Nathan. He looked for it everywhere -- in the zinc mine, in the record factory, in the fudge factory, in the labor union, in radical politics, in radio acting, in rabble-rousing, in proletarian living, in bourgeois living, in marriage, in adultery, in savagery, in civilian society. He couldn't find it anywhere." (319)

Murray's judgment about his brother's politics lacks much of the careful analysis which he brings to literature, philosophy, and psychology. Calling his own politics local and not at all concerned with "the fate of the world" (12). Murray's activism is rooted in the teacher's union and community -- for improved working conditions and better schools in Newark. Interestingly, Murray never comments on those larger inequalities on which capitalism is based and which haunted and drove Ira to the CP. Roth allows Murray to see Ira's politics as far-fetched idealism and to fault him for his blind adherence and "unthinking" allegiance to party program, but to still admire Ira's "willfulness" and certainty:

> "But that was all political stuff. And that was not sharp thinking either. It wasn't 'thinking' at all. The pseudoscientific Marxist lexicon, the utopian cant that went with it -- dish that stuff out to someone was unschooled and ill educated as Ira, indoctrinate an adult who is not too skilled in brainwork with the intellectual glamour of Big Sweeping Ideas, inculcate a man of limited intelligence, an excitable type who is as angry as Ira. . . . But that's a subject all its own, the connection between embitterment and not thinking" (60)

Murray realizes that he can't talk politics with Ira. He tried once in 1946 on a visit to Ira and O'Day in Calumet, but it led to huge argument and a year of no contact. Murray is clearly anti-Party and anti-Stalin, just not rabidly so:

> "Ira swallowed the dialectical justification for Stalin's every villainy. . . . He managed to squelch his doubts and convince himself that his obedience . . . was helping to build a just and equitable society in America. His self-conception was of being virtuous. By and large I believe he was -- another innocent guy co-opted into a system he didn't understand. Hard to believe that a man who put so much stock in his freedom could let that dogmatizing control his thinking. But my brother abased himself intellectually the same way they all did. Politically gullible. Morally gullible. Wouldn't face it." (181-82)

Murray was a militant within the union and was caught up in the red scare both for that activism and his brother's notoriety. In 1955, Murray was dismissed on the ruse of not cooperating with a HUAC committee, and was forced to take up selling vacuum cleaners while he fought for his re-instatement which he won some six years later. But he was not further radicalized by his dismissal or six-year struggle for re-instatement. Murray perfectly well understood that the anti-Communist terror cleansed the unions of both radicals and activists. And yet, Murray's sympathy for his brother's commitment to social justice is also clear, and he applauds Ira's activism. After all, Murray is a social democrat who understands that the red scare was an attack on those values of equity and social justice.

> What does it mean 'a revolution'? It means revolution. He took the rhetoric seriously. You can't call yourself a revolutionary and not be serious in your commitment. It was not something fake. It was something genuine. He took the Soviet Union seriously. At AFTRA, Ira meant business. (272)

In 1952, after Eve's book appears, Ira becomes the face of the communist menace rather than the voice of the Abe Lincolnesque Iron Rinn of the radio soap opera "The Free and the Brave." He drops into a steep depression and Murray worried that Ira might really kill Eve. Murray's concern for Ira was linked both to the dysfunctional marriage to Eve and to the growing menace of the red scare as the Korean War began -- the intersection of the public and the private which Murray believes did indeed kill Ira. Murray's version focuses mainly on Ira's marriage and psychological life, the part that Nathan, as a teenager, could not see or even understand. Murray reports to Nathan that he attempted to calm Ira by trying to equate their two very different "civilizing" paths out of the tenements of Newark:

> My civilizing path was books, college, teaching school, yours was O'Day and the party. I never bought your way. I *opposed* your way. But both ways were legitimate and both worked. But what's happened now, you don't understand either. They've told you that they've decided that Communism is not a way out of violence, that it is a program *for* violence. They've criminalized your politics and in the bargain, criminalized you. . . . (294)

Murray says that he also contacted O'Day and tried to enlist his support. But according to O'Day, Ira was a fake, too easily bought off by bourgeois pleasures and materialism, not a real communist. After devoting years to Ira's education, O'Day sees Ira as a traitor, a

betrayer of the Party and perhaps even a "stoolie": "Betrayed his revolutionary comrades and betrayed the working class. Sold out. Bought off" (288-89) Not only does he refuse to help, O'Day warns Murray if he should ever run into Ira, "there will be blood on the bricks" (289).

In large measure, Murray agrees. CP membership does not disturb Murray and he does not condemn it. The key to Ira's destruction was "his private life" not "imperialist capitalism" (87). Murray could understand his brother's idealism, anger, and guilt, but not his self-absorption and vanity. For Murray, the tragic mistake that was his marriage to Eve was his downfall. He calls Eve's book a fiction. "As told to" meant that the Grants "dreamed" it up as part of the plan to get Blyden Grant into Congress on the issue of the communist menace in broadcasting -- the same kind of red-bating that got Nixon and others elected in this era. His domestic crisis or more accurately, domestic warfare, collided with cold war anti-communism which the Grants exploit maliciously. Murray calls Eve's claim of spying ludicrous. He says Ira and script writer Artie Sokolow were propagandists and "publicity agents," not espionage agents: "Even your hero Corwin -- propagandist for an idealized American democracy. . . . These guys were cheap propagandists, against which the only laws are aesthetic, laws of literary taste." (272)

Ira is portrayed as a sentimentalist who is viscerally and passionately indignant about the inherent inequalities and injustices of America. But Ira is a man whose psyche is damaged. According to Murray, Ira has struggled all of his life to control his wild rage and anger. Unfortunately, Ira's demons are released once again when the professional anti-communists co-opt Eve and make him the public symbol of the Soviet menace. In a 1998 interview, Roth commented on Ira's contradictory nature:

> . . . He's endlessly struggling to realize his passions and to escape his damage. And to change whatever and whoever he can to make the world accord with his utopian vision, and to do this he tries whatever is at hand. So he has tremendous appetite for life. . . .9

Roth chooses to explore the explosive violence that is central to the postwar American experience. The past that visits Nathan he converts into personal, classic tragedy. Ira, Murray and O'Day, each in their own way, become victims. In the end, the novel's central characters embrace a blend of classical and Shakespearean fatalism mixed with existential solipsism. They are loners and individualists who reject activism. And yet, it should be emphasized that what nourishes their admiration for Ira and O'Day is the optimism and humanistic values of the Red Army Chorus, *On a Note of Triumph*, and *Citizen Tom Paine* -- art which valorizes social struggle.

However, as I suggested at the outset, Roth does not reflect deeply enough on how his own sympathetic rendering of the victims of the red scare is still haunted by fifty years of anti-communist harangue. In trying to understand Ira's destruction, Nathan is not willing to consider that the red scare was far more than "theatre," that the cold war was indeed a political and economic policy consciously constructed to assert an American imperial hegemony. This has been known for the last quarter century, though the interpretation itself continues to be shaped more by cold war mythology than rational research. Despite the tensions and discord among the American ruling elite (from the liberals to the ultra conservatives) anti-Communism is a bedrock of U.S. foreign and economic policy. Indeed, the idyllic notion that even the so-called "good war" was fought primarily over moral principles of anti-fascism is in large measure mythic.10

Nathan has not surrendered the liberal premise that the United States among all imperial powers operates in the world on the basis of moral principles. Both Nathan and Murray agree that the destruction visited on several thousand American unionists, radicals, and CPers was a horror. But on the scale of destruction that is American "cold war" legacy it was miniscule. In the summer of 1950 when Nathan turns away from Ira, part of that retreat was in reaction to Ira's harangues about the violence of American reaction in Korea and the real possibilities of atomic warfare. As Nathan contemplates Ira's obliteration, lies and deceit are represented as strictly personal matters. The possibility that lies and myth-making are requirements, that war-making is an instrument of the American imperial strategy, and that the inherent socialist critiques of capitalism might be valid are not part of Murray's or Nathan's interpretation. For example, competent scholars now understand that the Korean conflict, the so-called "unseen" war was very far from "just." In Bruce Cumings's monumental two-volume study of the origins of the Korean war, he notes the early occupation of Korea seemed benign in that anti-fascist spirit of 1945:

> "The policies reflect American assumptions about people in countries like Korea, assumptions so basic as to be largely unacknowledged, so central and universal as to need no statement: that American views on society and the good life are those of all peoples; that Americans had the right to remake Korea in their own image; that American motives are beyond question; American good intentions, good will, and blithe spirits, exemplified by the gum-chewing G.I. with a candy bar . . . were recognized and liked by the Koreans. . . .11

By 1952, Cumings argues that the limited and unseen war had decimated northern and central Korea and was as genocidal and violent as Vietnam would ever become with more than two million civilians killed (in proportional terms, as he notes, a greater loss of life than Soviet casualties in World War II). Furthermore, Cumings believes that these wars should be viewed as "an American holocaust visited upon the Korean and Vietnamese peoples":

> ". . . the Siberian winter descended upon a Korea and a United States both peering into an appalling abyss, reflecting back to Koreans the true audacity and peril of their attempt at self-determination after liberation from Japan, and to Americans the full measure of their aleatory pursuit of global hegemony."

For Cumings, Korea was, in fact, a "civil and revolutionary war, a people's war" that was to be contained and thwarted by a new American foreign and economic policy -- policy that was consciously crafted to maintain American dominance and to contain, weaken, and limit the Soviet Union. It was a battle plan to create the national security state to protect the U.S. "homeland" and, as importantly, American economic interests around the world.12

For the ruling elite of the United States, as made clear in the most important (but classified at the time) policy statement of the cold war, the National Security Council report 68 (NSC 68), the Soviet Union (and then China) was a nation "animated by a new fanatic faith, anti-thetical to our own" and which intend "to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world . . . involving the fulfillment or destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself."

> "The whole success of the proposed program hangs ultimately on recognition by this Government, the American people, and all free peoples, that the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake."13

In sum, while both Murray and Nathan see the destruction of Ira as tragic and perhaps fated, the new doctrine included very deliberate judgments that the threat posed by Soviet communism required intense "domestic" security against potential "sabotage, subversion, and espionage." Murray has lived with the red terror and its aftermath for forty years including the last two decades as an exile in the Arizona desert. His judgment is that among the thousands who were attacked and destroyed by the red scare, Ira's annihilation was unique, "I don't remember anybody else being brought down quite the way that Ira was" (3). Perhaps, the rage they both express is too narrowly directed at the personal viciousness of the "McCarthyites" whose destructiveness seemed without limits and whose goals were power-mongering and self-aggrandizement, with Nixon just the most ruthless and corrupt exemplar, though the easiest of targets.

At the heart of this novel is not just Ira and his politics, but Murray's turmoil in making sense of his brother's short, disturbed life and Nathan's struggle to impose an order on Murray's world and his own memory of it. In retrospect, Nathan remains astounded at the depth and pervasiveness of the witch hunts of the cold war -- disturbed by the depth of immorality. Throughout the novel as both Murray and Nathan consider Ira's indignation at the inequities of the world, Roth has his narrators also question the underlying myths of cold war and asks the reader to consider the invidious imperialism at its heart.

Notes

1 Perhaps the most popular expose of so-called hidden Communist "infiltration" of America was Herbert Philbrick's best-selling *I Led Three Lives: Citizen, "Communist," Counterspy* (1952), later to become a popular TV show. Philbrick, an FBI agent, was alarmed to discover people he least expected were communists. The fear and uncertainty about who might be in the Party (friend, relative, neighbor) helped to fuel the red scare paranoia.

2 It is the middle novel of what Roth calls a "thematic trilogy" of the memorable moral horrors and "debacles" of his time: Vietnam (*American Pastoral*, 1997), McCarthyism (*IMC*, 1998), and Clinton's impeachment (*The Human Stain*, 2000). Mostly written in Roth's usual style, the trilogy blends innovative literary realism with "high" formalist tradition. In an interview, Roth was asked if the trilogy is a "report card" on America:

> That's a question worth asking, but not of me . . . I just wanted these historical debacles to enter into and pass through the characters -- I just wanted to find out what that would be like. Mostly I wanted to find out what a novel would have to be like in order not to be a report card about America but a work of fiction about America. [Interview with Charles McGrath, "Zuckerman's Alter Brain." *The New York Times*. 7 May 2000: http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/05/07/reviews/000507.07mcgrat.html.

The novel's title is taken from a classic Hollywood anti-communist movie of the same name (released in 1949 as *The Woman on Pier 13*) in which the communists are likened to ruthless gangsters and cold-blooded murderers. (For background on film and other mass media's conscription into the red scare, See Richard A. Schwartz. *Cold War Culture: Media and the Arts 1945-1990*. New York: Facts on File, 1998; and also Michael Barson and Steven Hiller. *Red Scared: The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001.)

Roth doubles up on the title when he names the "tell all" written by Eve Frame, Ira's wife and "framer," *I Married a Communist*. As the "ear of history" and after a fifty year hiatus, Nathan dedicates his labors to writing a very different "tell all" -- something more honest and truthful.

3 The novel was widely reviewed and generally panned with Roth called a failed "political" novelist. John Leonard, in *The Nation*, savaged Roth for his droll writing and solipsistic narcissism. In this work, Leonard said, Roth failed as a political novelist because he composed a book Leonard claims that has no place in the long line of worthy American social protest fiction -- a rant with no believable characters and little sympathy for the ideals of radicalism. (John Leonard, "Bedtime for Bolsheviks." Rev. of *I Married A Communist* by Philip Roth, *The Nation* 16 Nov. 1998: 26+.)

In the daily *NYT*, Michiko Kakutani said the novel's "view of the world remains hogtied to a narrow personal agenda. . . . The result a wildly uneven novel that feels both unfinished and overstuffed. . . . It may masquerade as a parable about America in the 1950's and the wages of McCarthyism but it's actually a smaller, less ambitious work. . . ." The Sunday book reviewer, Robert Kelly, a bit more positive, saw the power of the work in the haunting ". . . isolation in which each character, not just Ira, stands in history." But is clear that central character's failing is not just personal but most importantly, political. Kelley makes clear is own anti-communist credentials; ". . . while that compassionate concern for others that is radical to the Marxist world view gives way in him to murderous revenges. Ira, in his own small way, seems to come to represent the Stalins of our century." [Michiko Kakutani, "Manly Giant vs. Zealots and Scheming Women," *New York Times*, 6 October 1998: C 7. Robert Kelly, "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been . . . ," Rev. of *I Married A Communist* by Philip Roth, *The New York Times Book Review* 11 October, 1998: 6-7.]

On the right, Hilton Kramer's short review in the *Wall Street Journal* called it a "dour, unforgiving novel" that is full of both "moral indignation" and liberal "guilt." But a novel that he said does not approach Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, "the period's primary cultural monument." The book is ". . . an unrelievedly grim narrative of the betrayals and bad faith that are inevitable in any serious account of the McCarthy era but are here often elevated to a chronicle of the grotesque." [Hilton Kramer, "A Witchhunt Close to Home," Rev. of *I Married A Communist* by Philip Roth, *Wall Street Journal* 9 Oct. 1998, Eastern ed.: W. 8.] In *The New Republic*, James Wood labeled the two communist characters "ideologue" and "autodidact" (standard anti-communist epithets) -- men who "can express themselves only through a melodrama that is both angry and lachrymose." Wood called Roth's language "sentimental," "vulgar," and "insufferable," and he accused Roth of sentimentalizing anger and never going beyond the surface of it. The end result is a failed political novel, not a modern day *Sentimental Education*. At end of the review, Wood negated Roth's entire imaginative project in this work: The novel, he wrote, "is only an essay about politics, and a rather conventional one." [James Wood, "The Sentimentalist." Rev. of *I Married A Communist* by Philip Roth, *The New Republic* 12 October 1998: 38+. In sharp contrast, it is interesting to note that Wood saw Roth's

evocation of maniacal nihilism in Mickey Sabbath, the central character of *Sabbath's Theatre* (the novel previous to the trilogy), as a *tour de force* of contemporary fiction. James Wood, "My Death as a Man," Rev. of *Sabbath's Theatre* by Philip Roth, *The New Republic* 23 October 1995: 33+.]

On one level these dismissals may be yet another measure of the legacy of anti-communism where any questioning of central tenets is marginalized as naiveté, heresy or just "bad" writing.

4 All quotes from hard cover edition: *I Married A Communist*. New York: Houghton-Mifflin 1998.

5 Norman L. Corwin, *On A Note of Triumph*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945: 49.

6 James S. Allen, *Who Owns America?* New York: New Century, Publishers, 1946: 46. This is the same social protest and muckraking tone of the widely read Gustavus Myers's *The History of the Great American Fortunes* (1910) and Matthew Josephson's *The Robber Barons* (1940).

7 National Education Department Communist Party, *Theory and Practice of the Communist Party: First Course*, New York: New Century Publishers, 1947: 25, 41 and 47.

8 Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd. Ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996: 2-3. For contemporaneous popular accounts of the evil and threat of Soviet communism, see also James Burnham, *The Struggle for the World*, New York: The John Day Co, 1947, and Walter Lippman, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S, Foreign Policy*, New York: Harper, 1947.

9 Houghton Mifflin Publishers, Int. with Philip Roth, on-line: <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/catalog/authordetail.cfm?textType=interviews&authorID=618>.

10 See Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945*, New York: Vintage, 1968 and Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and the United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954*, New York: Harper, 1972.

11 Bruce Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War v. 1, *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981: 443-44

12 Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean* v. 2, *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990: 772-74 and xviii. See also Marilyn B. Young, "Sights of an Unseen War," rev. of Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, v. 2, Diplomatic History, 17:3 (Summer, 1993):495-502.

13 "NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68-1.htm>.