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Philip Roth's Radio Novels: Tuning in to *I Married a Communist* and *The Plot against America*

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The first book that Philip Roth ever bought wasn't a novel, or a collection of short stories, or a volume of poetry, but the script of a radio drama, Norman Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph*.[1] Commissioned to mark the end of World War II, Corwin's play was first broadcast on the CBS network on VE Day, May 8, 1945, attracting an estimated audience of sixty million listeners. A twelve-year-old Roth was among those tuning in; half a century later, the author would recall hearing Corwin's commemorative masterpiece as "one of the most thrilling experiences of my childhood."[2] By popular request, a repeat broadcast followed on May 13, while Simon and Schuster rushed the script into print, and Columbia Records released the program on six twelve-inch 78 rpm records with album notes heralding Corwin as "one of the most eloquent, vigorous and tireless exponents of the cause of liberation," confirming his status as radio's unofficial poet laureate.[3]

Corwin's drama is a paean to the ordinary GI, the "little guy" who beat "the brownshirt bully boys" against the odds and was returning home a national hero.[4] Written in a grand yet colloquial style, *On a Note of Triumph* captures the era's sentimental civic culture—what Michael Denning describes as "the extraordinary flowering of arts, entertainment, and thought based on the broad social movement that came to be known as the Popular Front."[5] Radio played a central role in this "cultural front," Denning shows, and Corwin's play epitomizes what radio historian David Goodman calls the "pluralist promise" of the medium itself: the idea that radio's "peculiarly intimate and national address" held a transformative democratic potential, even as it was also "an irresistible symbol of the dangers associated with mass-mediated politics."[6]

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In *I Married a Communist* (1998), a novel chronicling the rise and fall of a radio actor during the McCarthy era, Roth's longtime narrator Nathan Zuckerman recollects that the script of *On a Note of Triumph* was also "the first hardcover" that he "owned outright rather than borrowed on my library card" and vividly remembers the imaginative pull the radio had on him as a boy.[7] Now in his sixties, Nathan recalls listening to the VE Day broadcast and hearing in Corwin's "poeticized vernacular" (38) the "voice of the common man's collective conscience" (41). Nathan reflects that *On a Note of Triumph* amounted to "a linguistic distillation of the excited feelings of community" that the war inspired: "You flood into America and America floods into you. And all by virtue of being alive in New Jersey and twelve years old and sitting by the radio in 1945" (39).

On a Note of Triumph was arguably the pinnacle of the golden age of network broadcasting in the United States, the period from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s. It was a period defined, on the one hand, by artistic and technological innovation and, on the other, by the exponential growth in the popularity and influence of the medium, as radio became part of the texture of American daily life.[8] In the hands of politically progressive auteurs like Corwin, Archibald MacLeish, Arch Oboler, and Orson Welles, radio drama emerged as a "new cultural form," Jeff Porter notes, combining modernist experimentation with a populist leftist commitment to the idea of public art and inaugurating a "literary turn" in broadcasting culture away from commercial staples such as daytime soap operas.[9] But the sea change was not restricted to prestige drama. Popular entrainment genres such as comedy and detective shows flourished and became more technically sophisticated; Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats transformed the way politicians reached citizens; and panel discussion programs attempted to engage with topical political debates by staging "town meetings of the air."[10] Live rolling coverage of national and international events—from the Lindbergh kidnapping trial to the Munich crisis—saw the invention of broadcast news as a genre and the emergence of the newscaster as a cultural archetype, while political commentators became trusted, influential, and controversial interpreters of current affairs.[11]

In different ways, all these program formats sought to reckon with the artistic and civic implications of radio's apparent ability, as Jason Loviglio puts it, to "conjure a new social space," a space in which the line between the personal and the political, the local and the national, could be redrawn.[12] When the presenter of NBC's *America's Town Meeting of the Air* began each show with the greeting, "Good evening, neighbors," the suggestion was that "radio could make neighbors of the entire nation"—a comforting idea during a time of rapid urban expansion, increasing immigration, and political transformation.[13] Elena Razlogavoa suggests that "Americans looked to radio not only to

reflect but to resolve some of the tensions they felt about big institutions, the location of social power," and even "the future of . . . democracy."[14] Such tensions were widespread, for while the period witnessed the emergence of the civic culture celebrated by Denning and Corwin, radio's rise also coincided with changes in the social, political, and economic order about which many Americans were apprehensive. The structural transformations wrought by the New Deal shaped the literature of time, according to Michael Szalay and Sean McCann, who trace how writers responded to the reconfiguration of the relationship between citizens and the "newly forming welfare state apparatus."[15] These critics chronicle how optimism over the New Deal promise of social security in the 1930s gave way in subsequent decades to skepticism toward bureaucratic institutions and mistrust of "big government" as what McCann calls "the contradictions and ironies" of New Deal liberalism began to emerge.[16]

While Szalay and McCann analyze the literary manifestations of what the former labels "New Deal modernism," it was on the radio that the period's politics were most intensely contested. "Radio's invisible national reach and its galvanizing universal and simultaneous address became the perfect symbol of national unity," Loviglio explains, especially during the war years; but he also notes that radio was "an apparatus that dissolved and then reconstituted the distinctions between public and private and that fractured these vague terms into their often overlapping, contradictory parts."[17] On the one hand, radio promised to be the medium through which Americans could make sense of the era's transformations; when FDR proclaimed in his second inaugural address in 1937 that "out of the confusion of many voices" a political leader must emerge who "can voice common ideals," he was imagining a form of democratic representation fit for the airwaves.[18] On the other hand, what Debra Rae Cohen describes as the "paradoxical uncanniness of its intimacy and omnipresence" raised fears that radio might undermine civic discourse and that it might deepen rather than heal social division.[19]

In their 1935 study *The Psychology of Radio*, Gordon Allport and Hadley Cantril described radio as "preeminent as a means of social control," echoing widespread worries that it could become a tool of authoritarianism rather than democracy, suited more to the voice of a dictator than of the people.[20] If radio could be the vehicle of Corwin's warmly collectivist folk politics or the "redemptive common expression" of Roosevelt's statism, it might also carry voices of a more darkly coercive tone.[21] To different extents, the new program formats that flourished in this period all contended with these two sides of radio's potential, registering apprehension as well as excitement regarding its capacity to imagine communities, create complex publics, and reconfigure national life. Something of this ambivalence is also registered in Nathan's feeling, when listening to *On a Note of Triumph*, of being "flooded" by America.

Born in 1933, Roth grew up during radio's heyday. He remembered his family's radio set— an Emerson console that stood in the living room—as the "entertainment and information center" of his Newark childhood home, "through which everything came that was outside our house, outside our lives."[22] It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that allusions to popular radio shows and personalities should crop up throughout his fiction.[23] My focus here, however, is on two novels with a deeper connection to the radio. *I Married a Communist* and *The Plot against America* (2004) belong to a run of historical novels produced relatively late in Roth's career that are widely recognized as representing a "national" turn in his work and are celebrated for their examination of "America's transformation during the postwar era."[24]

Roth himself suggests that these books reveal "something that had never been freed up in my work before," namely, the subject of "the joining of the public and the private."[25] Yet *I Married a Communist* and *The Plot against America* are rarely written about together, most likely because the former is classified as a "Zuckerman book" and usually discussed as part of the "American trilogy"—along with *American Pastoral* (1997) and *The Human Stain* (2000)—while the latter is categorized as a "Roth book," because its protagonist-narrator shares the author's name.[26] Furthermore, *I Married a Communist* is usually treated as a work of relatively straightforward historical realism, while *The Plot against America* is an alternate history, or "uchronia," to use Roth's preferred term.[27] But there are some striking similarities between the novels that suggest they might be productively paired. Both are predominately set in the 1940s, in the Weequahic section of Newark where Roth grew up, and focus, respectively, on (anti)communist politics in the immediate postwar years and (anti)fascist politics in the lead up to and early years of the war. Both are also bildungsromans of a sort: *I Married a Communist* covers Nathan's adolescence as he recalls it from the perspective of late middle age, while *The Plot against America* concentrates on "Philip" between the ages of seven and nine, as recalled some decades later, presumably in the early 2000s. Both also share a colorful cast of supporting characters, including zealous union officials, local Jewish gangsters, tough Italian neighbors, and large-hearted liberal fathers.

And both novels tune in to the radio. In *I Married a Communist*, we hear Corwin's demotic poetry most insistently; in *The Plot against America*, it is the rapid-fire delivery of gossip columnist turned political commentator and radio host Walter Winchell that resounds loudest. Both novels are also saturated in famous radio sounds, from Paul Robeson's rendition of "Ballad for Americans" to FDR's "intimate" addresses to Father Coughlin's incendiary sermons. However, radio is not just a central part of the history these novels tell but central to *how* they tell it—which is to say that Roth is interested

in radio as a medium and not just a theme.[28] In calling *I Married a Communist* and *The Plot against America* Roth's "radio novels," I mean to draw attention to how these works engage with and indeed borrow from the aesthetics of golden age radio, especially the antifascist allegories, political dystopias, and historical dramas that emerged as crucial genres for auteurs, as well as with broadcast news and Corwin's pageantry dramas. I also mean to draw attention to how these novels explore radio's role in imagining and mediating midcentury civic life in America.

I argue that these "radio novels" explore the "joining of the public and the private" that Roth suggests his later historical fictions take up as their central theme by engaging with the medium through which this intersection was being interrogated in this period. In these novels dealing ambitiously with American history, Roth is drawn aesthetically to radio's capacity to speak to and of the nation, a capacity he also sought to cultivate in his fiction of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Having grown up during the Roosevelt presidency, Roth is also drawn politically to the ideals of democratic collectivism and national unity espoused on the airwaves, in different ways, by the New Deal and Popular Front. But he is likewise mindful of both the aesthetic and political limits of the world imagined on and by golden age radio, and his radio novels also examine the medium's power to distort public discourse and corrupt democratic ideals. More so than critics have so far appreciated, these novels reflect not only Roth's deep reading in the political history of the 1930s and 1940s—which he himself highlighted by including a reading list of historical sources in *The Plot against America*'s postscript—but also his deep listening in the period's broadcast history.

"A book of voices"

I Married a Communist is the story of Ira Ringold, aka Iron Rinn, a radio actor blacklisted after he is exposed as a communist; it is also an account of Nathan's adolescence, including his friendship with Ira. The novel has been overlooked by critics in comparison with the other volumes in the American trilogy, its depiction of McCarthyism dismissed as narrow in comparison to Roth's exploration of Vietnam-era radicalism in *American Pastoral* and Clinton-era cultural politics in *The Human Stain*.[29] But, as Aimee Pozorski suggests, the book is "not simply another novel about the red scare."[30] Rather, *I Married a Communist* offers a nuanced portrayal of the Popular Front—the loose alliance of the antifascist left that flourished in the United States in various guises from the early thirties to the start of the Cold War. Denning has argued that the Popular Front was not just a political coalition but a cultural style that permeated mainstream American arts and media. In Hol-

lywood, on Broadway, on the airwaves, and in literature, writers and performers allied or sympathetic to the Popular Front crafted the movement's "unashamedly demotic" and sentimental aesthetics, Michael Kazin writes, reinfusing "the national culture with an anti-authoritarian, pluralist spirit that soon became ubiquitous."[31]

Progressive writers were particularly attracted to the democratic potential of radio as an emerging medium that could attract a mass audience. Radio broadcasting became "the site of the left's greatest success in the culture industry," Denning writes, as well as some of its boldest artistic experiments.[32] In particular, sustaining programming—that is, programming that does not have a commercial sponsor—provided a platform for progressive writers. CBS's *Columbia Workshop* commissioned scripts from politically left-leaning literary artists like Stephen Vincent Benet, Arthur Miller, and Dorothy Parker, and the radio auteurs—Corwin, MacLeish, Oboler, and Welles—all honed their craft on the program, creating experimental "dramas of space and time" while developing a sophisticated technical grammar in their work.[33] "Writers were encouraged to compose for the ear," Porter observes, "to experiment with new conventions, and sound designers were urged to work with new techniques."[34] The *Workshop* also took its "sustaining" remit seriously, aiming to "tutor American listeners in the skills needed to appreciate a complex kind of radio storytelling" through educational lectures that aired before the main drama, covering topics such as advances in microphone technology, principles of acoustics, and the creation of sound effects.[35] The most innovative *Workshop* plays—such as MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* (1937)—combined this attention to the medium with modernist aesthetics and a progressive sensibility to expand the possibilities of radio as a democratic art form.[36] Beyond the *Workshop*, left-wing writers worked on sustaining and commercial programs combining drama with other genres that emphasized different facets of the Popular Front cultural style. In 1939, for example, Corwin began directing *The Pursuit of Happiness*, a variety show he conceived of "as an opportunity to celebrate a multiethnic . . . workingman's democracy."[37] The show featured short, politically inflected biographical portraits that recast figures from American history as progressive champions, tracing a line of connection from their heroic travails to the contemporary struggles of ordinary people. Left-wing revisionism was also evident in the program's showcasing of folk and blues as styles of working-class American music: Paul Robeson's performance of "Ballad for Americans," a "folk ballad revision of American history" that became "the Popular Front's unofficial anthem," was the show's most famous musical moment.[38]

I Married a Communist offers a warm and surprisingly detailed evocation of this "cultural front," revealing Roth's interest in the period to be as much aesthetic as it is political. Nathan grows up reading the popular left-wing historical novels of Howard

Fast, which retell American history as a working-class revolutionary struggle, echoing the revisionary perspective adopted by progressive radio historical dramas of the period.[39] Through his friendship with Ira, Nathan gains entry into a left-wing intellectual milieu and the world of progressive broadcasting; he even gets to meet Robeson at a Henry Wallace rally ("Don't lose your courage, young man" [33], Robeson tells him). Nathan's early ambition is to become a "radiowright" himself, and he is familiar with the work of Oboler, Hilman Brown, William N. Robson, and others connected to the *Workshop* crowd (127). But his biggest influence is Corwin. In an extended passage, an older Nathan looks back on the experience of first hearing *On a Note of Triumph* as a boy, offering a close reading of the play replete with lengthy quotations from the script. He provides a genealogy for the play's vernacular, lyrical style, citing Clifford Odets's and Maxwell Anderson's efforts to "forge a recognizable native idiom" (38) for the theater in the 1920s as precursors. Stylistically, Nathan writes, Corwin combines "the rhythms of ordinary speech with a faint literary stiltedness to make for a tone" that seemed to him as boy to be "democratic in spirit and heroic in scope" (38). Formally, Nathan continues, the play is "loose, plotless," and "experimental," the "verbal counterpart of a WPA mural" (38).

"Murals and polemics" is how Corwin categorized his own work.[40] Drawn to what he called the "space-annihilating properties" of radio, Corwin created panoramic compositions that often combined the two major styles of golden era radio dramaturgy, the "intimate" and the "kaleidosonic," each of which allowed for a different kind of audience interpellation.[41] In the intimate style, the listener is positioned close to a central character with whom they are encouraged to empathize. Intimate drama tends to take place in deep space—that is, in a few carefully delineated locales—and listeners are introduced to a series of voices belonging to individual characters whom they come gradually to know. By contrast, in kaleidosonic drama, the listener's "audioposition" is not fixed to a single character; instead, the focus is on masses of people, and the action shifts rapidly and shallowly across space and time.[42] The intimate and kaleidosonic offer different ways, Neil Verma explains, to "distribute and collect voices" and so different ways to conceive of civic identity; they might be said to delineate modes of empathic proximity and egalitarian collectivity, respectively.[43] As in his other "heteroglossic" commemorative pageantry dramas—such as *We Hold These Truths* (1941), which I discuss in the next section—*On a Note of Triumph* shifts between these two styles and so creates a "hybrid" that evokes empathy while summoning a vision of national community.[44] In an early kaleidosonic sequence, for example, Corwin's microphone lets the listener hear reactions to the news of the war's end across the country and around the world.[45] The sequence culminates with the incoherent din of crowds celebrating in Times Square, Pic-

cadilly, and Nevsky Prospect; the noise gradually grows louder until the narrator directs the listener to "take your good ear out of low range" above the "clamor" and "listen for a modest voice, as sensible and intimate to you as the quiet turning of your own considered judgment." As the noise of the crowd recedes, we hear the closely miked, intimate voice of "the conqueror," Corwin's everyman GI.[46]

This address, Nathan reflects, created the impression that "history had been scaled down and personalized," that America had "been scaled down and personalized," and incited in him a powerful urge to "partake of the national character": "There, amazingly, was *soul* coming out of a radio" (41, emphasis in original). Corwin's drama thus excitingly manifested radio's ability to transform and indeed "annihilate" space and to reconfigure the boundary between the public and the private, and so offer a celebratory vision of democratic citizenship. The story of Ira's involvement with the Communist Party will in part be the story of the political dangers of subsuming the individual into the collective, such that the novel ultimately warns that Corwin's "scaled down" sense of history is a distorted political perspective. But, in his tribute to *On a Note of Triumph*, Roth also celebrates the play's demotic aesthetics and the imaginative possibilities of radio's intimate yet universalizing address. Nathan's own early efforts at writing Corwinesque "dialogue plays" (33) for the radio certainly reveal the artistic shortcomings of the Popular Front cultural style and the intellectual limitations of its political agenda. One such attempt, entitled *The Stooge of Torquemada*, is a comically derivative and formulaic intimate historical drama featuring an everyman narrator who parrots a workingman's argot that Nathan amalgamates from listening to Corwin and to Ira. Nathan in fact is not the first Roth character to have imitated the poet laureate of radio; Alexander Portnoy also recalls attempting to write a "prose-poetry" play "inspired by my master, Norman Corwin," with the mock–Popular Front title *Let Freedom Ring!*.[47] But while in *I Married a Communist* Roth pokes fun at Nathan's youthful political and literary naivety, he also takes seriously what Nathan at one point describes as the "conjuring power" (38) of Corwin's demotic play and of the radio itself. That is to say, Roth explores whether his novel might borrow from and recapture something of the exciting promise of Popular Front radio drama while also critiquing its political outlook.

Nathan is brought into the world of radio through his friendship with Ira, to whom he is introduced by his high school English teacher, Murray Ringold, Ira's less combustible older brother. Ira makes his living as an actor on "*The Free and the Brave*—a popular weekly dramatization of inspiring episodes out of American history—impersonating people like Nathan Hale and Orville Wright and Wild Bill Hickok" (18). The show appears to be a fictionalized version of the historical drama anthology *Cavalcade of*

America, broadcast on CBS and then NBC from 1935 to 1953.[48] Sponsored by the DuPont company, *Cavalcade* was a "patriotic" series that retold historical events that "celebrated individualism" and emphasized the "benevolence of big business," focusing on acts of heroic self-reliance rather than collective struggle.[49] In the lead up to and during the war, however, *Cavalcade* "inadvertently provided an opportunity" for left-leaning writers to "reorient conventional accounts of American history to highlight ordinary people's contributions to popular democracy and dissent."[50] The show's writing team "included a roster of radicals" such as Maxwell Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Benét, and Miller. Despite the regulations imposed by DuPont, these progressive writers still managed to "interject a progressive framework" to the show, much as they did on the *Workshop* and *The Pursuit of Happiness*.[51]

Progressive *Cavalcade* writers sought to make American history speak to a contemporary Popular Front articulation of class struggle, and the figure who provided the most useable past for them was Abraham Lincoln, who was featured regularly on the show.[52] The Republican president became "an historic emblem of the times" and a "hero of the left" in this period, from Carl Sandburg's biography to Robert Sherwood's play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* to Millard Lampell's folk cantata for the radio "The Lonesome Train" and countless other historical reinterpretations.[53] Ira first comes to the attention of one of *The Free and the Brave*'s progressive writers because of his portrayals of Lincoln at conventions run by the Committee of Industrial Organizations and on a radio show put out by the union for electrical and radio workers, in which Ira brings "Lincoln to the masses by speaking every word so that it made good plain sense" (44). As a boy, Nathan listens to *The Free and the Brave* each week and gets to see Ira perform as Lincoln when Murray arranges for the actor to visit his high school. Shortly afterward, Nathan meets Ira in person, but his uncanny physical resemblance to Lincoln means that it is hard to tell where his theatrical persona ends and his real self begins. Speaking to the radio actor, Nathan feels as though he is addressing a "trinity of Iras": "the patriot martyr of the podium Abraham Lincoln, the natural, hardy American of the airwaves Iron Rinn, and the redeemed roughneck from Newark's First Ward Ira Ringold" (23). Both on and off the air, Ira talks in a version of Corwin's poeticized vernacular, a combination of "Ringoldisms," "Marxisms," and "Lincolnisms" (45).

The narrative of Nathan's adolescent friendship with Ira continues to blur the line between the real world and the world of the radio; often, their scenes together feel more like a radio play than a realist novel, closer in style to an episode of *Cavalcade* than serious historical fiction. If Ira has literally stepped out of a radio drama, then many of the characters to whom he introduces Nathan also speak as though they were on air. The

scenes in which Nathan recollects his time with Ira are structured in what we might describe as an intimate style: they take place in deep space and stay close to Nathan's point of view, and the reader is introduced to a series of voices in succession. As in Corwin's dramas, these voices sometimes belong to representative characters, stand-ins for a particular demographic who talk in long monologues characterized by the conventions of radio drama as much as of fiction. We hear from Corwinesque "little guys," including a taxidermist and a miner, who share politically inflected life history: the taxidermist recalls going hungry "during the Depression. . . . We ate possum, woodchucks, rabbits" (196), while the miner describes how his father was injured in the collapse of a mine before unionization and workers' compensation (202). Ira also introduces Nathan to Goldstine, an old army buddy once sympathetic to the Communist Party but now a factory boss who warns Nathan that "capitalism is a dog-eat-dog system" (95).

In one sense, Nathan's role in these scenes is that of the aspiring young radical radiowright gathering material; Ira suggests that he could "write a radio play . . . based on taxidermy alone" (194), and he in fact does pen one called *The Old Miner* (201). But his role is also that of a "sounding board" (96), as he describes his position in the Goldstine scene, listening to and reflecting the voices around him; or even, we might speculate, that of a radio microphone, capturing these different voices to produce a narrative attuned to what Roth elsewhere calls "the inner ear"—a novel to listen to.[54]

Roth's engagement with radio aesthetics takes another turn in the novel's narrative frame. Unlike *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*, *I Married a Communist* is not narrated by Nathan alone but in "tandem" with Murray.[55] In a series of conversations, Nathan and his former teacher pool together what they know of Ira's story, ninety-year-old Murray sharing his own perspective on his brother's past and in the process recontextualizing Nathan's memories of his youthful relationship with the radio star. Murray's contributions to the narrative are reported as direct speech, presented in quotation marks. There are of course literary precedents for this method of storytelling—Roth often spoke of rereading Conrad in later life—but the novel's conversational form clearly recalls Nathan's dialogue radio plays. Murray's talk also shares the aural texture of golden age radio voices. In her discussion of the novel, Claudia Roth Pierpont criticizes Murray's dialogue as "stiff and oddly literary," but this description in fact inadvertently recalls Nathan's characterization of the "faint literary stiltedness" (38) of Corwin's style.[56] Like Corwin's lyrical vernacular, Murray's dialogue combines the poetic with the colloquial ("We'd already had a lulu of an argument" [177]), while his predilection for "doing all the voices" (314) when performing scenes from *Macbeth* in the classroom brings to mind the Shakespeare adaptations that were a mainstay of the *Columbia Workshop*.[57] It is no

wonder, then, that, "listening in the black of a summer's night to a barely visible Murray," Nathan is reminded of "listening to the bedroom radio when I was a kid ambitious to change the world" (320-21).

But if Murray's voice has a similar "conjuring power" as the voices Nathan heard on the radio as a boy, the political implications of his listening to Murray's voice are quite different from those of his listening to Corwin's "little guys," and the kind of history Nathan hears from his old teacher is quite different from the kind he heard on *The Free and the Brave*. Growing up, Nathan has a keen awareness of his immediate surroundings; he locates himself within what he calls his neighborhood's "institutional nexus" of hospital, library, and school and is attuned to the "metronome of daily neighborhood life" (17). But the "dramas of space and time" he hears on the airwaves begin to reconfigure his perception of the connection between the local and the national, the public and the private. Popular Front egalitarianism—translated by Corwin and mediated by radio's intimate yet universalizing interpellation—offers him a vision of "brotherhood" (95) and thus a different sense of his place in the world.

By contrast, Murray's voice stays oriented to a local scale and rooted in a strong sense of place. Murray tells Nathan that his "political beliefs were pretty localized," more "sociological" than ideological and more concerned with "the fate of the community" (12) than with the fate of the world and so at odds with his brother's "inflated" revolutionary internationalism. Like the taxidermist and miner, Murray describes his work, which included organizing for the Newark teacher's union, and the political persecution he experienced because of his activism. His historical perspective is also "pretty localized" and sociological, full of colorful reminiscences about life in Newark's old Italian First Ward, where he and Ira grew up, members of the neighborhood's only Jewish family.[58] When he turns to consider national history, he also does so in such a way as to realign the private and the public, describing the McCarthy era as one in which "more acts of personal betrayal" (264) were committed than in any other period of American history. "In using Murray as a co-narrator," Robert Chodat writes, "Roth implies a particular conception of what it means to be a person, to have a particular identity, and to express or enact this identity as a member of a modern civic community."[59] Rather than the voice of a Corwinesque representative character, Murray's is the voice of a specific individual shaped by a distinct set of historical circumstances whose perspective concentrates on a set of personal ties forged in a particular place. The narrative structure of the novel thus manifests at once an homage to the "conjuring power" of Corwin's radio dramas and a critique of the sentimental egalitarianism that underpinned them; in this updated iteration of Nathan's early dialogue plays, Roth stages a different kind of democratic talk.

As he grows accustomed to Murray's voice, Nathan also begins to hear sounds beyond the turmoil of political struggle, beyond even the human realm. In an unusual passage, Nathan and Murray sit together after listening to a recording of the Russian folk song "Dubinushka" played by the Soviet Army Chorus and Band:

> When "Dubinushka" was over, Murray was silent and I began to hear once again everything I had filtered out while listening to him talk: the snores, twangs, and trills of the frogs, the rails in Blue Swamp, the reedy marsh just east of my house, *kuck*-ing and *kek*-ing and *ki-tic*-ing away, and the wrens there chattering their accompaniment. And the loons, the crying and the laughing of the manic-depressive loons. . . . A raccoon twittered in the nearby woods, and, as time wore on, I even thought I was hearing the beavers gnawing on a tree back where the woodland tributaries feed my pond. Some deer, fooled by the silence, must have prowled too close to the house, for all at once—the deer having sensed our presence—their Morse code of flight is swiftly sounded: the snorting, the in-place thud, stamping, hooves pounding, the bounding away. Their bodies barge gracefully into the thicket of scrub, and then, subaudibly, they race for their lives. Only Murray's murmurous breathing is heard, the eloquence of an old man evenly expirating. (75)

As it moves into the present tense, the passage achieves something like the immediacy of aural experience; we are compelled to listen. But we are also made to feel that this verbal soundscape may well have been crafted with techniques borrowed from radio dramaturgy. Those animal noises, for instance, might only be studio sound effects, while the sense of depth created in this nighttime world might just be the product of the kinds of tricks of microphone placement explained to audiences of the *Columbia Workshop*'s educational lectures. That there might be technical mediation at play is hinted at in the allusion to Morse code.

Drawing attention to the sonic texture of his writing, Roth also gestures here to the novel's broader preoccupation with radio's complex mediation of intimacy and publicity. Taking the form of a conversation between a former teacher and his former student, Roth's updated version of Nathan's youthful dialogue radio plays offers an education in the importance of listening closely. "When I ask myself how I arrive at where I am," Nathan reflects, "the answer surprises me: 'Listening,'" and suggests that, "whatever the reason, the book of my life is a book of voices" (222). But, as Robert Chodat notes, "which of these voices are public, which voices are private, [and] which voices evolve from one into the other" remains an open question in the novel, and one that Roth pursues by drawing on what Loviglio describes as the "mobility of radio voices"—their ability to travel "between the intimate worlds of domesticity, solitude, and one-on-one conversation,

and the public world of politics, sociability, and mass communication."[60] As a politically naive adolescent, Nathan is much taken with the sound of Corwin's evocation of national community, but as an older and politically chastened man he suggests we might need a more discerning ear to hear the often ambiguous ways in which private and public life resonate with one another.

"Good Evening Mr. and Mrs. America, and all the ships at sea"

Like *I Married a Communist*, *The Plot against America* is set in 1940s Newark, and, like the adolescent Nathan, the young Philip at the center of the novel is a boy with a strong feeling for place. "A child of my background had a sixth sense in those days, the geographic sense," the adult Philip, the novel's unobtrusive narrator, reflects, "the sharp sense of where he lived and who and what surrounded him."[61] At seven years old, "the extreme edge" of Philip's "known world" lies "about eight miles" (2) from his family's home on Summit Avenue, in the predominately Jewish Weequahic section of the city. His understanding that "our homeland was America" (5) is similarly circumscribed, and his conception of national identity is shaped mostly by his beloved stamp collection, which offers a mythic depiction of American history similar to that promulgated on *Cavalcade of America*.[62] *The Plot against America* is, Jeffrey Severs notes, "at once Roth's most global book and his most parochial," as the rise of aviation hero and fascist sympathizer Charles Lindbergh to the presidency and the terrifying immediacy of international events radically disturbs Philip's childish sense of scale and of his place in the world.[63]

The use of a child's perspective emphasizes the fear and alienation felt by the Jewish American community, accentuating the contrast between their minority status and the vast scope of the historical forces in which they are enmeshed. But it also creates certain narrative difficulties. Owing to Philip's small-scale perspective his frame of reference is restricted and his involvement in and understanding of larger events is limited. Roth's solution is for Philip to become aware of the world outside through the family's radio and especially through the news bulletins to which his parents listen nervously throughout the novel. It is over the airwaves that the global and the parochial intersect in the narrative, in ways that are frightening to Philip and to the Jewish community. In *I Married a Communist*, the radio is the medium of an inspiring evocation of national community; in *The Plot against America*, the radio connects Philip and his family to a far more alarming national and international political scene. In an interview, Roth remarks that "history comes into the living room" in the book; we might add that history comes into the Roths' living room through their radio.[64]

The radio thus acts as a kind of narrative prosthesis in the book, supplementing Philip's childish perspective and extending his narrative purview. As other readers have noted, prosthesis is a trope throughout the novel.[65] Philip's cousin Alvin signs up to fight in WWII for the Canadian army and comes back home with his leg amputated below the knee. Because Alvin is an orphan, Philip's parents offer to take him in while he recuperates, and Philip, silently terrified, reluctantly helps to bandage and dress his cousin's "stump" (137). Later, the Roths take in another orphan, a neighbor boy called Sheldon; the novel closes with Philip feeling that this parentless and friendless boy is another "stump" and that "I was the prosthesis" (362). The prosthesis conceit reappears when Philip unwillingly tries on a clunky, malfunctioning hearing aid belonging to another local kid, Joey. Philip recounts how "Joey clipped the microphone case to my shirt and dropped the battery into my pants pocket and, after he checked all the wiring, left it to me to insert the modelled earpiece" before he "gleefully turned the dial" (345). The description makes it seem as though Philip is being kitted out to be roving radio reporter, and the analogy to radio is reiterated when Joey begins "to turn the dial again" and Philip hears "water running into a bathtub—and I was the bathtub. Then he spun it vigorously—and there was thunder" (346). The syntactical similarity between "I was the bathtub" and "I was the prosthesis" links these nightmarish moments of prosthetic transformation. The passage also connects the idea of prosthesis with a different kind of artificial replacement: the rumble of thunder Nathan hears resembles the sort of sound effect heard on many a golden age horror or mystery show. That he recounts that he hears thunder rather than a noise that sounds like thunder points to the novel's broader exploration of the radio's ability to blur the boundary not only between the public and the private but between reality and fiction.

The importance of radio voices is foregrounded early in the novel. Like every other Jewish family on their block, the Roths are ardent New Dealers, and Philip gives a sense of the power of interpellation that Roosevelt's voice carried in the thirties and forties in his reference to Roosevelt's "confidently intoned upper-class enunciation" (28) in his 1940 Democratic Convention speech. He observes that "there was something about the inherent decorum of the delivery that, alien though it was, not only calmed our anxieties [about the rise of Lindbergh] but bestowed on our family a historical significance, authoritatively merging our lives with his as well as the nation" (28).

By contrast, Lindbergh delivers his antisemitic isolationist "radio speech" in Des Moines in "a high-pitched, flat, midwestern, decidedly un-Rooseveltian American voice" (29-30). The difference between their voices echoes debates in the late thirties and forties regarding radio's impact on democratic politics, prompted in part by the Roosevelt admin-

istration's experiments in broadcasting, particularly the president's fireside chats.[66] The fireside chats, through which Roosevelt explained policy decisions and discussed issues of the day in an intimate and direct manner, allowed citizens to hear their president in a new way; to many listeners, Roosevelt's delivery sounded familiar, conversational, and natural—even though the "chats" were in fact the result of much technical preparation, careful scripting, and vocal training.[67] "Listening to the President speak, often in their own home," Bruce Lenthall writes, "Americans reconstructed the abstract and distant public sphere of national politics in terms of comfortable and familiar private relationships."[68] For the Roths, as for many families in the thirties, Roosevelt's is the reassuring voice of paternal statism; in his radio performances, FDR articulated the promise of collective security that, as Szalay suggests, was a pillar of New Deal liberalism. But critics warned that a mass-mediated politics was open to manipulation and that the radio was more likely to be a tool of propaganda than of participatory democracy—a theme explored in Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), often cited as a model for *The Plot against America*.[69] Roth revises the terms of the debate slightly by making Lindbergh a figure devoid of the kind of Hitlerian charisma common in these discussions; rather, his "undistinguished voice" (53) indicates that "straight-talking Lindy" (30) represents something perhaps even more insidious, because he is more difficult to listen to critically owing to his "affable blandness" (262).[70]

Roth's decision to cast the aviation hero as the novel's fascist-sympathizing president was apparently prompted by a throwaway remark made by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in his memoir that some isolationist Republicans had wanted Lindbergh to run against Roosevelt in 1940; Lindbergh also "chose himself" for the role, Roth notes, because of his long record of antisemitism and involvement with the America First committee.[71] But there is another reason why "Lindy" fits the bill for a novel set in the radio age. Philip mentions that the kidnap and murder of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's baby son in 1932 and the subsequent trial and conviction of Bruno Hauptmann for the crimes in 1935 "transformed" the pilot "into a martyred titan comparable to Lincoln" (6). While Lindbergh's story became a national tragedy, the murder trial also became a "turning point in radio news."[72] Hauptmann's prosecution, the first nationally broadcast murder trial in America, represented a "milestone in the culture," Neil Gabler states: "Thereafter, the media would be as much participants in an event as reporters of it, shaping and sensationalizing on a new scale and turning events into occasions, national festivals."[73]

At the center of the Lindbergh media circus was a journalist with a history of sensationalism, Walter Winchell. Rising to fame in the 1920s as a gossip columnist, Winchell began appearing on the radio in 1930 and two years later secured a contract

with NBC and a sponsorship deal with Jergens hand lotion for his own weekly show. Winchell's *Jergens Journal*—to which Philip's family and their neighbors loyally tune in every Sunday evening—was a surreal concoction of Broadway gossip, Washington intrigue, muckraking, and hard news stories. The "Lindbergh snatch" was the perfect story for Winchell's show because it was dramatic and gruesome and featured celebrities; he rapaciously covered the hunt for the killer (even taking credit for sharing information that led to Hauptmann's arrest) and attended every day of the trial in Flemington, New Jersey, a little less than an hour southwest of Summit Avenue.[74] "Winchell's bizarre blend of the most serious news stories and the most trivial gossip," Gabler notes, offered "a far more accurate objective correlative for the modern world in which his listeners lived than the hierarchical facts in respectable newspapers."[75] The casting of Lindbergh and Winchell as central voices in the novel thus gestures to this longer media history of the cross-contamination of politics, gossip, and celebrity culture, a theme also at the center of *I Married a Communist*. Murray tells Nathan that the only thing that could have improved sales of a memoir written by Ira's bitter ex-wife exposing him as a communist would have been "having Winchell's name on the jacket" (271).

But throughout the thirties Winchell also increasingly turned his attention to international politics and gained a reputation as "the most rabid anti-Hitlerite in America," warning of the dangers of fascism "far earlier and with far more prescience than all but a few political pundits."[76] In the process, he became an ardent Roosevelt supporter and even a confidante of the president.[77] On air, however, Winchell's radio style was the "polar opposite" of FDR's.[78] He averaged two hundred words per minute and spoke an octave above the pitch of his normal voice, and his "breakneck" staccato was shot through with colorful Broadway slang, a style Roth has fun imitating in the novel.[79] The form of Winchell's show—which he began each week with the greeting "Good Evening Mr. and Mrs. America, and all the ships at sea"— had theatrical qualities, evident, for example, in its use of sound effects. Philip remembers how each newsflash was accompanied by the "renowned Winchell radio trademark—the clatter of dots and dashes sounding over the telegraph ticker and signaling in Morse code (which Sandy had taught me) absolutely nothing" (228). Winchell, he remarks, represented "our belligerent voice of protest" (225) against the rise of Lindbergh; if listening to Roosevelt calms the anxieties of the Jewish residents of Summit Avenue and makes them feel intimately merged with the president and the nation, then listening to Winchell confirms some of their worst fears and makes them feel part of an embattled enclave.

When Winchell first speaks out against Lindbergh on his show, it is a warm summer night, and so Philip can hear through an open window "the red-hot blast of Winchell

himself issuing from all the houses on the block" (228), and the "applause erupt[ing] from across the alleyway, as though the famous newsman weren't walled off in a radio studio . . . but were here among us and fighting mad, . . . lambasting Lindbergh from a microphone atop the oilcloth covering on the kitchen table of our next-door neighbor" (19). Not a genteel fireside chat, then, but a rowdy (and Jewish) domestic shouting match. Winchell is therefore an ambiguous figure of radio's unpredictable power in the novel. On the one hand, he is the scourge of the political establishment, bluntly revealing the hypocrisies of those in high office, but on the other, he is a populist rabble-rouser playing on the fears of a marginalized demographic group. In this regard, he is something of a prototype of the shock jockeys and divisively partisan media personalities of later decades and a warning of how easily division can be sown in a mass-mediated democracy.[80]

After the Lindbergh kidnapping, the next milestone in the history of radio news was the 1938 Munich crisis. Garnering rolling coverage across the major networks, the crisis marked the moment that radio overtook newspapers as the most trusted source of information among ordinary Americans, especially concerning international affairs. As the renowned radio announcer H. V. Kaltenborn put it, radio "became of itself one of the most significant events of the crisis."[81] Broadcast news coverage not only reshaped Americans' understanding of their relation to the "European" war but, more broadly, also reconfigured the listening public's conception of its relation to history: as one commentator, James Rorty, observed, "For the first time history has been made in the hearing of its pawns."[82] Listening to news bulletins describing the rise of Lindbergh, Philip experiences a comparable shift in his understanding of the world around him. In school, the subject of history seemed "harmless" because "everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable" (113). In contrast to this printed record of history's orderly progress, the radio articulates a sense of history as the "relentless unforeseen" (114).[83]

The Munich crisis intensified debates regarding mass-mediated democracy and the potential dangers of radio's ability to rouse panic and fear as well as inform the public. Radio dramatists employed the conventions of radio news coverage to engage with these debates and to question the authority invested in the voices of broadcast news. As is well known, Orson Welles's *The War of the Worlds* was so effective in its co-optation of the formal features of news broadcasting that around a fifth of the program's listeners mistook the dystopian science-fiction dramatization for a real news bulletin announcing a Martian invasion.[84] Broadcast the night before Halloween in 1938, Welles's drama made use of flashes, live reporting, an announcer, expert testimony, and "witness" interviews, all of which his audience had become familiar with through the reporting on the Munich crisis, which had concluded the previous month. The effect of the broadcast

was mass confusion and terror. "All over the United States people were telephoning newspapers to ask what they should do," Erik Barnouw writes, while "police stations were also swamped with calls."[85] Many people "rushed into the streets" or "left their homes to escape disaster, some in the direction of Canada."[86] "The reaction was particularly strong in New Jersey," Craig Douglas notes, "where Welles had set his drama."[87] As the hysteria subsided, pundits and the public addressed the wider significance of the broadcast. Journalist Dorothy Thompson—alluded to on multiple occasions in Roth's novel (56, 176, 265)—called the episode "the news story of the century—an event which made a greater contribution to an understanding of Hitlerism, Mussolinism, Stalinism, anti-Semitism, and all other terrorisms of our time than all the words about them that have been written by reasonable men."[88] Playing with "radio's emergent codes to blur the line between fact and fiction," Welles's drama "problematized the purpose of radio at a critical moment in its young history."[89]

In evoking a wider political context, *The War of the Worlds* was of a piece with other antifascist allegories of the period. In Arch Oboler's *This Precious Freedom* (1940), for example, John Stevenson, an American businessman, returns from a vacation to find his hometown occupied by a fascist fifth column. Stevenson—played by Raymond Massey, known to audiences for his portrayal of Lincoln in Robert Sherwood's film—is interrogated and tortured before he acknowledges to himself that the isolationist position he adopted during the rise of European fascism amounted to complicity with those who were now his oppressors.[90] More experimentally, Archibald MacLeish's verse play *The Fall of the City* combined formal conventions of news broadcasting with elements of classical tragedy. The drama centers on an enslaving conqueror's arrival in a nameless city before whom citizens hysterically rush to prostrate themselves, only for the ruler to be revealed as an empty suit of armor. "The people invent their oppressors," the play concludes, an idea that Roth also explores in the rise of the hollow, bland Lindbergh.[91] The drama unfolds as a live newscast, conducted by an "on the spot" announcer—played by Welles—who directs the listener's attention by pointing his microphone toward the action. "MacLeish had taken the very structure of radio and turned it into a narrative device," Lenthall observes, creating "a model that would intrigue radio artists for the remainder of the era"—not least Welles himself.[92] While *The War of the Worlds* was similar to these antifascist allegories, it also borrowed from the "news-dramatizations" of the early thirties that had been popular before the advent of live reporting. On shows like *The News Comes to Life*, *Eye Witness*, and, most famously, *The March of Time*—on which Welles often appeared—actors impersonated world leaders such as Roosevelt and Mussolini to "recreate" the news, "blending reportage and melodrama" and blurring the line between fact and fiction in a way reminiscent of Roth's ventriloquisms of real historical figures.[93]

In exploring antecedents for Roth's experiment in uchronia, critics have overlooked the similarities between his genre experiment and the antifascist allegories of the period and have neglected the context of the transformation of radio news programming in the thirties and forties. There is perhaps even a nod or two to Welles's New Jersey drama of Martian invasion in Roth's Newark alternate history. Throughout the novel, Roth weaves reports and transcripts of real radio broadcasts—such as Lindbergh's Des Moines speech—with invented ones. The first of these fabrications is the broadcast of the 1940 Republication Convention at which Lindbergh is nominated as the party's presidential candidate. On the "muggy" (14) summer night of the convention, Philip and Sandy are in bed, but through their open window they can follow "the proceedings being aired over our living room radio and the radio playing in the flat downstairs and . . . the radios of our neighbors to either side and across the way" (15). As the convention reaches its conclusion and Lindbergh receives the nomination, Philip writes that a mood of "anger" and "terror" carried "every last family on the block out into the street at nearly five in the morning. Entire families known to me previously only fully dressed in daytime clothing were wearing pajamas and nightdresses under bathrobes" (16).

The scene captures the coercive power of radio to transform a listening public, the neighbors' nightclothes emphasizing the sudden vulnerability of the Jewish community and giving a nightmarish unreality to the episode. There is perhaps a childish irrationality to their reaction, recalling the scenes of mass panic prompted by *The War of the Worlds*; like some of those who heard Welles's drama, some of the Roths' neighbors head to Canada to escape the "invasion." Later, Philip is "listening on our living room radio to the final innings of the fifth game of the World Series" when the broadcast is interrupted "by a voice with that finely articulated, faintly Anglicized diction prized in a network new announcer" (272) with a newsflash on the assassination of Winchell, which leads many of his neighbors to again rush from their houses. The scene recalls the famous transition near the beginning of Welles's drama in which the broadcast of a music performance from "the Meridian Room in the Hotel Park Plaza" is halted by a "special bulletin" on "disturbances occurring on the planet Mars."[94] As Barnouw notes, the chaos that *The War of the Worlds* caused had "one immediate effect on broadcast policy. Interruptions for fictional news bulletins became taboo in broadcast drama."[95] Like Roth's novel, antifascist allegories of the period explored radio's potential to spark fear and spread misinformation. As Roth repeatedly stresses, his novel is less about fascism in America than about the Jewish community's fear of its possibility—a fear shaped and sometimes stoked by what they heard on the radio.

Like the left-leaning allegories of the thirties and forties, Roth's novel is also a drama of citizenship and of the kinds of critical skills needed by citizens to negotiate the

public sphere, not only in politically uncertain times like those imagined in the book but more generally in a mass-mediated democracy. A paradigmatic lesson in civic pedagogy occurs when, rather unexpectedly, the Roths take a family vacation to Washington, D.C. only six month after Lindbergh has been elected President. The Roths' trip amounts to an example of what Lauren Berlant calls "a particular national plot," the "pilgrimage to Washington" that citizens make in an attempt to "grasp the nation in its totality."[96] On the one hand, the capitol's monuments seem to promise and allow for this simplistic form of civic identification, but, on the other, the city also forms a more complex "place of national *mediation*, where a variety of nationally inflected media come into visible and sometimes incommensurate contact," refusing any straightforward interpretation. In this plot, visiting the capitol becomes a disciplining "test of citizenship competence" that "makes pedagogy a patriotic performance."[97]

Berlant's analysis surveys iterations of this plot in film and television, including perhaps the definitive example, Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). But another famous version of the pilgrimage occurred on the radio. Norman Corwin's *We Hold These Truths* was a commemorative pageantry drama commissioned to mark the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights.[98] The play was broadcast on December 15, 1941, and its celebration of the nation's struggle for liberty took on new significance in light of the attack on Pearl Harbor eight days earlier. Featuring an all-star cast—including Welles—and concluding with a live address by President Roosevelt, the broadcast attracted an audience of around sixty-three million listeners. Jimmy Stewart—who also starred in Capra's film—narrates the action, taking the listener first to the nation's capitol building, a place where Americans "send their voices, and their votes."[99] Listeners are intimately positioned beside "the tourist" as he visits the capitol's landmarks; as we move from the Washington Monument, to the Lincoln Memorial, and then the Library of Congress, "the built environment itself begins to speak," Verma suggests: "Inscriptions on edifices fade in and out as we move closer and recede" from each landmark.[100] At the end of the scene we are close enough to hear the tourist reverentially read the words of the Constitution to himself as he quietly contemplates the text in the Library of Congress. Suffused with "New Deal rhetoric" and Popular Front sentimentality, Corwin's pageant offered a "mystical vision of citizenship" as the country stood on the brink of war.[101]

The Roths visit the capital hoping for a comparably reassuring confirmation of national identity in a moment of crisis. But they receive a lesson in civic pedagogy quite different to the one enacted by *We Hold These Truths*. They follow a similar itinerary as Corwin's tourist, organized for them by a tour guide who acts as a kind of narrator during their trip. After visiting the Washington Monument, they have a brief moment

of sublime civic identification of the kind required of a pilgrimage to the capitol when they stand before the Lincoln Memorial, Philip seeing in the president's visage "the face of God and the face of American all in one" (63)—recalling Nathan's feeling that he is addressing a "trinity of Iras" when he first meets his Lincoln-esque hero. Herman Roth is not Corwin's reverential tourist, however, but an engaged and opinionated citizen, one who speaks back to his national monuments. "When you think of what this country does to its greatest presidents . . ." (64), Herman says ruefully, standing at the base of the statue. As he continues to lament what has happened to his country since Lindbergh took office, another tourist calls him a "loudmouth Jew" (65). And so at this symbolic site of civic interpellation, Herman's voice is heard as not that of a citizen but an outsider. Herman tries for the sake of his sons to stick to the pilgrimage script and read aloud from the Gettysburg address, but a different kind of civic pedagogy has clearly been enacted. "What just happened?" Philip later asks his older brother, Sandy. "Anti-semitism" (69), Sandy replies.

"The godlikeness of having an ear"

In *The Ghost Writer* (1979), Nathan Zuckerman is a fledgling writer seeking the approval of his literary hero, E. I. Lonoff, who tells him that he has "the most compelling voice I've encountered in years." "I don't mean style," the older writer continues; "I mean voice: something that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head."[102] Such a quality has often been ascribed to Roth's work itself. "Although the style and content of Roth's fiction is extraordinarily diverse," David Brauner writes, "there is always audible a distinctive voice: irreverent yet earnest, questioning yet authoritative, subtle and nuanced yet powerful and passionate."[103] Critics have suggested myriad sources for and possible influences on this voice, from Saul Bellow to Lenny Bruce; here, I have suggested that Roth's voice has been shaped by the voices that he heard on the radio. From the radio, Roth learned how voices can compel, beguile, and provoke a listener's imagination, and he found radio well suited to the political and historical work he undertook in his later fiction. Golden age radio voices moved across and between the spheres of personal and political life, connecting the individual and an imagined national community in new, exciting, and sometimes disturbing ways; Roth's later fiction similarly seeks to "write the individual into the fabric of history" and explore "the tension between the individual capacity for self-determination and the deterministic forces of history."[104]

In the popular and innovative radio programming of the period in which these historical fictions are set, Roth encountered radio writers harnessing the capacities of their

fledgling medium to conjure news kinds of imaginative spaces—"theaters of the mind," in Verma's evocative phrase—that could be by turns realistic and fantastic and that could allow for new kinds of storytelling addressed to a simultaneously intimate yet expansive audience. Roth looked to the radio to push his own, rather hoarier medium, the realist novel, beyond its usual generic limits. In *I Married a Communist* he writes an homage to the demotic aesthetics of Norman Corwin's pageantry drama that, in its narrative structure, also resembles a kind of dialogue radio play. In *The Plot against America*, meanwhile, he writes an alternate history as it is heard by a young boy sitting by his family's radio, drawing on the antifascist allegories and experiments in news broadcasting that were shaping (and distorting) Americans' sense of the world around them in the late thirties and early forties. Like Nathan Zuckerman, I argue, Roth got to where he was going by listening—a surprising conclusion to reach about such a loquacious writer. Roth honed his ear for the possibilities of voice by listening to the radio. "The godlikeness of having an ear!" Nathan exclaims in *I Married a Communist*. "How deep our hearing goes!" (321).

Notes

1. See Claudia Roth Pierpont, *Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 21.
2. Ibid.
3. Quoted in David Ossman, "The Odyssey of Me and Norman Corwin," in *Anatomy of Sound: Norman Corwin and Media Authorship*, ed. Jacob Smith and Neil Verma (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 2016), 212.
4. Norman Corwin, *On a Note of Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 9, 10.
5. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996), xvi.
6. David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 181; Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxv, xix.
7. Philip Roth, *I Married a Communist* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 40.
8. As Jeff Porter notes, "Between 1930 and 1940, the number of radios in the United States grew by more than 100 percent. . . . By 1941, more families were equipped with radios than with cars and telephones. . . . Listeners tuned in, on average, for five hours a day" (*Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2016], 2).
9. Ibid., 10.
10. Loviglio argues that "the Fireside Chats proved to be the ideal medium for Roosevelt to articulate the New Deal's rearrangement of public and private spheres in American life" (*Radio's Intimate Public*, 8). See also David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest: *America's Town Meeting*

of the Air," in *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007), 44-60.

11. See Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004), 161-98.
12. Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public*, xiv.
13. Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 46.
14. Elena Razlogavoa, *The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2.
15. Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), 18; Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).
16. McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 36.
17. Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public*, xix, xvi.
18. Franklin D. Roosevelt, quoted in McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 6.
19. Debra Rae Cohen, "Modernism on Radio," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 582.
20. Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport, *The Psychology of Radio* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), vii.
21. McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 32.
22. Philip Roth, "No Books in Our House," *Web of Stories* interview, https://www.webofstories.com/play/philip.roth/46.
23. Roth's first novel, *Letting Go* (1962), is often described by critics as "Jamesian," yet when narrator Gabe Wallach is unwell and bedridden, he holes up with Ma Perkins rather than Isabel Archer, tuning in to "only the most ancient programs" about "old ladies selling lumber yards" or other daytime serials featuring "those same luckless couples who had struggled through my childhood—for then too a radio glowed beside my convalescent's bed—and who turned out to be struggling still" (270-71). *The Great American Novel* (1973) is an homage to another radio sound of Roth's childhood—baseball—while in *The Ghost Writer* (1979), a young Nathan Zuckerman is struggling to break free of his well-meaning but overbearing father, a civic-minded man who keeps "an unbroken series of transcripts of *American Town Meeting of the Air*" (80). *Deception* (1990) is a "minor, radio play-like novel," as Benjamin Taylor puts it, composed entirely of pillow talk between two lovers (*Here We Are: My Friendship with Philip Roth* [New York: Penguin, 2020], 143).
24. Matthew Shipe, "Exit Ghost and the Politics of 'Late Style,'" *Philip Roth Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 191. On the idea of a "national turn" in Roth's later fiction, see Brian Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 161-203.
25. David Remnick, "Philip Roth at 70," dir. Deborah Lee, BBC4, May 7, 2003.

26. On the various groupings of Roth's works, see Pia Masiero, *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011), 1-5.
27. See Roth, "The Story behind *The Plot against America*," *New York Times*, September 19, 2004.
28. I borrow this phrase from Tom McEnaney's fascinating book *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2017), 6.
29. See, for example, Michiko Kakutani, "Manly Giants vs. Zealots and Scheming Women," *New York Times*, October 6, 1998.
30. Aimee Pozorski, *Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later Works (1995-2010)* (London: Continuum, 2011), 67.
31. Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 158.
32. Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 91.
33. Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 34.
34. Porter, *Lost Sound*, 42. See also Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), 175-206.
35. Porter, *Lost Sound*, 49.
36. Lenthall, *Radio's America*, 180-81; Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 49-56.
37. Judith E. Smith, *Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy, 1940-1960* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 18.
38. Smith, *Visions of Belonging*, 19; David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2008), 115.
39. On Fast, see Andrew MacDonald, *Howard Fast: A Critical Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), and Priscilla Murolo, "History in the Fast Lane: Howard Fast and the Historical Novel," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1986), 53-66.
40. Quoted in R. LeRoy Bannerman, *On a Note of Triumph: Norman Corwin and the Golden Years of Radio* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1986), 39.
41. Norman Corwin, *Years of the Electric Ear: Norman Corwin Interviewed by Douglas Bell* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 71. The terms "intimate" and "kaleidosonic" are Verma's; he outlines the properties of these styles in *Theater of the Mind*, 57-72.
42. On audioposition, see Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 35.
43. Neil Verma, "Radio's 'Oblong Blur': On the Corwinesque in the Critical Ear," in *Anatomy of Sound*, 48.
44. Jacob Smith, "Norman Corwin's Radio Realism," in *Anatomy of Sound*, 105; Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 74.
45. See Smith, "Norman Corwin's Radio Realism," 105.
46. Corwin, *On a Note of Triumph*, 17, 18.
47. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969; repr. London: Vintage, 2005), 169, 170. David Gooblar also notes that Nathan is not the first Roth character to imitate Corwin (*The Major Phases of Philip Roth* [London: Continuum, 2011], 167fn12).

48. For a detailed account of the program's history, see William L. Bird Jr., "*Cavalcade of America*," in *Encyclopaedia of Radio*, ed. Christopher Sterling (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), 487-90. Bird notes that "in fall 1940, the *Cavalcade* presented the story of "Wild Bill Hickok" woven around a ballad composed and performed by Woody Guthrie" (490).
49. Eric Christiansen, *Channeling the Past: Politicizing History in Postwar America* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 54.
50. Judith E. Smith, "Radio's 'Cultural Front,' 1938-1948," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 214.
51. Ibid., 215.
52. Bird notes that "of the 750 *Cavalcade* radio programs broadcast from 1935 to 1953, biographical treatments of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln led the list (15 programs each)" ("*Cavalcade of America*," 489).
53. Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, 25; Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), 33. See also Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 342-46.
54. Roth, "The Inner Ear," *Web of Stories* interview, https://www.webofstories.com/play/philip.roth/159. "I was the sounding board, the straight man, the fuse on the bomb" (96), Nathan writes, suggesting he is a kind of channel or conduit for Ira and Goldstine's argument. A sounding board is also used to reflect and direct voices from a stage, according to the *OED*.
55. "Tandem" is Roth's own term for the narrative structure; see Roth, "*I Married a Communist* Interview," 1998, http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/roth/conversation.shtml.
56. Pierpont, *Roth Unbound*, 234.
57. See Porter, *Lost Sound*, 32.
58. Much of Murray's local knowledge is drawn from Michael Immerso, *Newark's Little Italy: The Vanished First Ward* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997), which Roth cites as a "primary source" in the novel's front matter.
59. Robert Chodat, "Fictions Public and Private: On Philip Roth," *Contemporary Literature* 46, no. 4 (2005): 690.
60. Chodat, "Fictions Public and Private," 717; Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public*, xvi.
61. Philip Roth, *The Plot against America* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), 212.
62. On Philip's stamps, see Daniel Grausam, "After the Post(al)," *American Literary History*, 23, no. 3 (2011): 625-42.
63. Jeffrey Severs, "'Get Your Map of America': Tempering Dystopia and Learning Topography in *The Plot against America*," *Studies in American Fiction* 35, no. 2 (2007): 227.
64. Jeffrey Brown and Philip Roth, "*The Plot against America:* Author Philip Roth to Continue Pushing Envelope," November 10, 2004, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/the-plot-against-america-author-philip-roth-to-continue-pushing-envelope.
65. See, for example, Grausam, "After the Post(al)," 629-30.

66. On opposition to Roosevelt's broadcasts, see Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000), 228-33; for broader concerns—from Adorno and others—about radio's role in political culture, see Lenthall, *Radio's America*, 143-73.
67. See Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public*, 138-39fn18. According to Grace Mully, Roosevelt's private secretary in the early 1940s, "When it was discovered that a small gap between Roosevelt's front teeth produced a slight whistle on the air, he had a special removable dental bridge made, to be worn only during the broadcasting of the chats" (139fn18).
68. Lenthall, *Radio's America*, 93.
69. See, for example, Christopher Vials, "*What* Can Happen Here? Philip Roth, Sinclair Lewis, and the Lessons of Fascism in the American Liberal Imagination," *Philip Roth Studies* 7, no. 1 (2011): 9-26.
70. On the charismatic voice of dictatorship, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 129.
71. Roth, "The Story behind *The Plot against America*." In his memoir, Schlesinger recalls how he came, "quite by accident," to hear Lindbergh's famously openly antisemitic Des Moines speech "on a car radio—the high-pitched voice, the righteous messianic tone. . . . It was all rather scary" (*A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917-1950* [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002], 255-57. On Lindbergh's politics, see Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
72. Douglas, *Listening In*, 170.
73. Neal Gabler, *Walter Winchell: Gossip, Power, and the Culture of Celebrity* (1994; repr. London: Picador, 1995), 213.
74. See Douglas, *Listening In*, 168-70; Gabler, *Walter Winchell*, 205-13.
75. Gabler, *Walter Winchell*, 217.
76. Gabler, *Walter Winchell*, 196, 195.
77. See Craig, *Fireside Politic*, 222.
78. Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 48.
79. Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 28. See also Douglas, *Listening In*, 169, and Craig, *Fireside Politics*, 222.
80. More speculatively, Roth's portrayal of Winchell also brings to mind the career of Huey Long, the populist governor of Louisiana who often took to the airwaves in the 1930s to denounce corporate greed and political hypocrisy. See Mark McGurl, "Making It Big: Picturing the Radio Age in 'King Kong,'" *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 415-55.
81. H. V. Kaltenborn, *I Broadcast the Crisis* (New York: Random House, 1938), 3.
82. James Rorty, quoted in Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: 1933-1953*, vol. 2 of *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 83.
83. Relatedly, Grausam argues that the novel offers "a defense of a particularly postal print culture as the place where history can take place and historical memory can be preserved" ("After the Post(al)," 630).

84. See Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 87-88.
85. Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 87.
86. Porter, *Lost Sound*, 77.
87. Craig, *Fireside Politics*, 232.
88. Quoted in Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 88.
89. Porter, *Lost Sound*, 74.
90. See Arch Oboler, *This Precious Freedom*, October 11, 1940, https://www.oldtimeradiodownloads.com/drama/everymans-theater/this-precious-freedom-1940-10-11.
91. Quoted in Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 52.
92. Lenthall, *Radio's America*, 180, 196.
93. Smith, *Visions of Belonging*, 12. See also Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 66.
94. Orson Welles, *The War of the Worlds*, October 30, 1938, http://sounds.mercurytheatre.info/mercury/381030.mp3.
95. Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States: Volume 2*, 88.
96. Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 26, 25.
97. Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 25, emphasis in original. In "Philip Roth's Human Stains and Washington Pilgrimages" (*Studies in American Jewish Literature* 23 [2004]), an article that appeared before *The Plot against America* was published, Jeffrey Charis-Carlson discusses "failed Washington pilgrimages" in Roth's earlier historical fiction (105).
98. See R. LeRoy Bannerman, *Norman Corwin and Radio: The Golden Years* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1986), 73-92.
99. See Verma, *Theater of the Mind*, 78.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., 77.
102. Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer* (1979; repr. London: Vintage, 2005), 72.
103. David Brauner, *Philip Roth* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 2007), 2.
104. Derek Parker Royal, "Pastoral Dreams and National Identity in *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*," in *Philip Roth: New Perspective on an American Author* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 186; Brauner, *Philip Roth*, 148.