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### Cover Page Footnote

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## A Rothian Analysis of Walt Disney's *Pastoral Symphony*

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### **Abstract**

Through the use of music, visualization, and the written word, artists, of all mediums bring beauty and depth to a cold, factual world. These masterpieces, at the hands of academia, can be interwoven and used to create new works, stories, or even political statements. Philip Roth, a primary author among scholars of Jewish-American literature, uses his writing to comment on the struggles faced by the Jewish community in America. Many of Roth's novels, including *Goodbye, Columbus*, *American Pastoral*, and *The Plot Against America* explore the importance of Jewish identity and livelihood among the Jewish communities of Newark, New Jersey. However, Roth's work does not exclude the non-Jewish, or goyim, from identifying or parallelizing their artistry with Roth's themes and characters. A prime example is a 1940 creation of Walt Disney, the forerunner for animation and film, called *Fantasia*. Through this film, Disney creates a never-before-seen collaboration of visual artwork and musical compositions. This paper directly explores the connections between Disney's animation and Roth's literary works. There are direct connections between the featurette Pastoral Symphony, Rothian themes, and Jewish-American culture.

*Keywords:* Philip Roth, Walt Disney, *Fantasia*, Jewish Literature, English Language and Literature, Film and Media Studies, Religious Studies, Rothian, American Dream, Idealism, Diaspora

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Through the use of music, visualization, and the written word, artists, of all mediums bring beauty and depth to a cold, factual world. These masterpieces, at the hands of academia, can be interwoven and used to create new works, stories, or even political statements. Philip Roth, a primary author among scholars of Jewish-American literature, uses his writing to comment on the struggles faced by the Jewish community in America. Many of Roth's novels, including *Goodbye, Columbus*, *American Pastoral*, and *The Plot Against America* explore the importance of Jewish identity and livelihood among the Jewish communities of Newark, New Jersey. However, Roth's work does not exclude the non-Jewish, or goyim, from identifying or parallelizing their artistry with Roth's themes and characters. A prime example is a 1940 creation of Walt Disney, the forerunner for animation and film, called *Fantasia*. Through this film, Disney creates a never-before-seen collaboration of visual artwork and musical compositions.

Even before Philip Roth published his first novel, Disney was using different mediums of art to create new stories and messages. While many of Disney's animations in *Fantasia* are nonsensical and do not follow a structured storyline, *Pastoral Symphony*, the sixth featured animation, is one of the few that provides the audience with a definite tale. *Pastoral Symphony's* animations are based on Ludwig von Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 "Pastoral" and follow the lives of Greek mythological creatures and their time in the idyllic pastoral of Mount Olympus. This particular featurette, while focusing on Greek creations, correlates with Philip Roth's written works. Some academic scholars, such as Andy Connolly, author of "Posthumous Roth: Reflections on the Dilemmas of Historicizing Philip Roth's Fiction", warn against the uses of Roth's fiction to draw conclusions about different aspects of politics and art. Connolly states, "there may be a greater burden on scholars to engage critically and responsibly in the years ahead to any further extension of resent tendencies to overly politicize [Roth's] fiction"

(Connolly 7). While Connolly's position may hold for current political events, the use of Roth's work to analyze *Pastoral Symphony* provides unique insights on the albeit unintentional messages in Disney's animation. Philip Roth's ideologies and storylines can be used to analyze Walt Disney's *Pastoral Symphony*. The mythological creatures and characters featured in Disney's animation, when viewed through the Rothian lens, represent themes, such as Jewish Identity and Jewish Persecution, and certain characters found in Roth's publications.

The Rothian deconstruction of *Pastoral Symphony* produces three sections of analysis: The Jews, Jewish Persecution, and the Jewish Relationship with God. The Jews directly correlate with the mythological creatures (unicorns, fauns, pegasi, and centaurs) featured in Disney's animation. Jewish Persecution is displayed through the antagonistic actions of Zeus and Vulcan. Finally, through the depiction of a trumpeting centaur and a rainbow, the Jewish Relationship with God emphasizes the importance of religion to the Jewish Identity.

*Pastoral Symphony* opens with the introduction of Greek mythological creatures, including, in order of appearance, unicorns, fauns, pegasi, and centaurs. These characters individually represent different characters and themes of Roth's writings; however, when observed as a whole community, these fanciful beings represent the, once peaceful, Jewish nations. Despite their difference in species, or, rather, nationality, the mythological creatures all live peacefully together as one united group. To properly analyze the role of the creatures under the Rothian lens, one must look at each creature separately in the context of *Pastoral Symphony*. Due to the lacking presence of the fauns and unicorns in Disney's animation, these two subgroups are omitted from the singular analysis. Rothian themes and characterizations are best seen through the pegasi and centaurs. Specifically, the pegasi featured in *Pastoral Symphony* represent the ideal Jewish family and Rothian archetypes of the Jewish mother and father.

When first introduced to the storyline, the pegasus mother watches her older children flutter about their nest in a nearby tree. She sits patiently and warms her youngest pegasus son who is still unable to fly. The pegasus mother gently guides and teaches her son the art of flying, for it is the ability to fly that makes a good pegasus. Once he grasps the basics, the pegasus mother, father, and children drift down to a lake to swim leisurely. The Pegasus family properly models the ideal Jewish family. Each member serves a specific role – the mother, a nurturer; the father, a protector; and the children, the followers – and each member acknowledges the importance of their role lest the family, lest the idyllic pastoral fall apart.

In Roth's novels and short stories, the families are rarely portrayed as the pegasi. While the heads of the household may wish for such obedience and peaceful cooperation in their children, Roth points out that in a realistic environment, when one is subjugated to general life, the family structure is often corrupted. A prime example of the corrupted ideal Jewish family is found in Roth's *The Counterlife*. In this novel, Roth, via Nathan Zuckerman, a recurring character in Roth's canon, explores the different possibilities for the lives of Nathan and his brother Henry. Scholarly author, Matthew Wilson, in his "Fathers and Sons in History: Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*" explains the fallacy of an idolized family structure through a character analysis of Henry. Wilson states, "Henry has demonstrated ... that when pushed far enough [life balance is] more than potentially irreconcilable, especially when the secular American Jewish family finds it impossible to follow their father into being what his wife scathingly calls 'an authentic Jew'" (Wilson 49). The ideal Jewish family cannot exist if there are strife and rebellion from the children. For the ideal family structure to exist, all members of the family must respect their assigned roles. The Pegasus family is a perfect model for this family structure; however,

according to Rothian ideology, the pegasi, in their blind perfection, are susceptible to lifetime disaster.

Many of Roth's written works focus on the importance of the father figure in the Jewish family. While most of Roth's portrayals of the father-child relationship include rebellion, there are a chosen few, such as *The Counterlife* and *Patrimony*, that take time to appreciate the role of the Father. In *Pastoral Symphony*, the pegasus father represents the Rothian paternal archetype. The pegasus father, unlike the pegasus mother, serves his children through tough life lessons. The father guards the family, keeps them safe, but neglects to show true affection to the children. Wilson, in a quote from Roth, discusses the importance of Father Zuckerman to Henry and Nathan: "kitchen table in Newark happens to be the source of your Jewish memories, Henry – this is the stuff we were raised on" (Wilson 48, Roth 138). Without their father and his familial teachings, the Zuckerman brothers would have nothing. They would not have a basic understanding of their family, lifestyle, or Jewish heritage. Many other fathers, such as Lou Levov and Seymore Levov, featured in Roth's *American Pastoral* are the embodiment of the Rothian parental archetype. For the pegasus father, despite the lacking affection, he serves his children through wisdom and strength.

The pegasi are only one aspect of *Pastoral Symphony* that can be equated to Rothian archetypes. The centaurs, creatures of human and horse, represent the ideology of the ideal Jew, the socioeconomic status of Jews in Rothian literature, and provide a direct relation to the aforementioned Seymore "Swede" Levov.

Unlike the pegasi, the centaurs are waited upon by the other members of the Jewish community, the fauns and unicorns, to guide them and aid them in personal preparation for what appears to be a courting ceremony. The centaurettes, as they are called in *Fantasia*, use the help

from the fauns and guidance from cherubs to beautify themselves for the men. The centaurs featured in *Pastoral Symphony* are the crème a la crème of Jewry. However, in Disney's original animation, an African-inspired centaur, named Sunflower and later cut from late-twentieth-century revisions, served as a handmaiden to the centaurettes. The idea of the ideal Jew is not properly understood without Sunflower's presence. In Rothian literature, specifically in Roth's first novel, *Goodbye, Columbus*, the African American community is viewed as lesser, or subservient, to the Jewish community.

Neil Klugman, the protagonist of *Goodbye, Columbus* spends most of the novel scorned by his lacking social status in Newark; however, he redeems his own feelings through the exploitation of an African American patron of the local library where Neil works. Neil sees this child as beneath him and validates his morals by giving him special treatment and access to the art books in the library. On page 48 of *Goodbye, Columbus*, Roth writes, "and so I was able, not without flushing once or twice, to get the book back in the stacks. When the colored kid showed up later in the day, it was just where he'd left it the afternoon before" (Roth 48). Neil Klugman uses this child to feel better about himself, and, through his acts of common decency, attempts to rectify his moral and socioeconomic dilemmas.

Philip Roth faces criticism in the area of racism and his treatment of African Americans in his writings; however, Roth's portrayal of the Judeo-African relationship is historically accurate. During World War II, the news reports from the southern states gave great sympathy to the Jewish struggle in Europe against Hitler. Ironically, many of the southern authors did not recognize their own hypocrisy in rebuking Hitlerism while maintaining the Jim Crow Laws. Dan J. Puckett, author of "Reporting on the Holocaust: The View from Jim Crow Alabama" and Christopher E. Koy, author of "Half-Jew, Half-Gentile: The 'Very Very Screwed Up' Child in

the *Family Carnovsky* and *American Pastoral*, discuss the social status of Jews in America during this time. Puckett states, “Nazi-directed persecution prompted the editors of the *Birmingham Age-Herald* to express support for the Jews, stating that ‘the Jewish race has done more to further the common good of humanity than all other races combined ... The measure of our obligation to the Jews is unpayable’” (Puckett 220-221). While this one statement from a southern newspaper does not accurately depict the view on Jewishness as a whole, the statements made in support of the European Jews created a sense of belonging and acceptance in America. This editorial support, along with the influx of Jewish immigrants, built the Jewish communities, and, subsequently, further squandered the African American people.

While the centaurs as a whole represent the ideal Jew and the prolific social status of the Jewish community, one particular centaur featured in *Pastoral Symphony* directly relates to Seymour “Swede” Levov, the main character found in Roth’s *American Pastoral*. After the centaur courting ceremony, there are two centaurs left alone, without a mate. These centaurs are despondent and refuse to act for themselves. They eventually need the intervention of the cherubs to find happiness. These two centaurs, though they find happiness in the idyllic pastoral of *Pastoral Symphony*, are models for the indecisive Levov.

Throughout the novel, Swede Levov is tortured in his attempts to acquire the American Dream. Each time Levov believes he has attained his personal pastoral, Life rips the proverbial carpet out from under him and places him on a new, more unforgiving path. Eventually, once his daughter is found after years of hiding in the terroristic underground, Swede Levov finds himself unable to make a finite decision regarding his personal wants and needs. As Roth states, through Swede’s brother, Jerry, “‘everybody has always let you slide through. And that is why, to this day, nobody knows who you are. You are unrevealed – that is the story, Seymour, *unrevealed*.”

That is why your own daughter decided to blow you away. You are never straight about anything and she hated you for it. You keep yourself a secret. You don't choose *ever*” (Roth 276). Swede Levov constantly laments for the ill fate that befalls him throughout the novel. While other characters, such as Jerry; Merry, his daughter; and Dawn, his wife, try to shake him into understanding, he cannot grasp the concept of self-actualization. Philip Löffler, a Rothian scholar and author of “Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (1997)” comments on the deplorable character of Swede Levov. Löffler states, “all the Swede can do is solemnly lament that it ‘was beyond understanding ... how he and Dawn could have been the source of [Merry and her destruction]. How could their innocent foibles add up to this human being’” (Löffler 392, Roth 238). Swede Levov refuses to accept his inactions as reasonable explanations for the turmoil in his life. For the centaurs in *Pastoral Symphony*, happiness is the work of cherubs. Life, unlike the idyllic cherubs, refuses to reward the lukewarm, the stagnate.

The primary half of *Pastoral Symphony* focuses on the peaceful life of the mythological creatures; however, Rothian cynicism finally rears its head when the persecution from Zeus and Vulcan arrives. Zeus and Vulcan throw lightning bolts at the creatures and create horrible rains upon the idyllic pastoral. Under the Rothian lens, Zeus and Vulcan represent Charles Lindbergh, a character found in *The Plot Against America*. Roth's pseudo-history introduces the fictional presidency of Lindbergh in America. While in office, Lindbergh nationalizes anti-Semitism and starts relocating Jewish communities.

The characters featured in *The Plot Against America* intrinsically know that if they move, disaster will occur. Regarding the governmental influence upon the American citizens in *The Plot Against America*, Roth writes, “my dear little boy, do you see the New Jersey map? Do you see these pins in the map? Each one represents a family chosen for the relocation. Now look at

the map of the whole country. See all the pins there? Those represent the location to which each New Jersey family has been assigned. Making these assignments involves the cooperation of many, many people..." (Roth 216). The institutionalized hatred for Jews found in Roth's fictitious America mirrors the effects of Hitlerism in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied countries. The characters of Zeus and Vulcan use their power to persecute the mythological creatures, the Jews, for personal gain and entertainment. The gods' actions against the idyllic pastoral community is a direct attack on the Jewish community and, according to Debra Shostak, author of "The Diaspora Jew and the 'Instinct for Impersonation': Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*", denies legitimacy to the "other" (Shostak).

The mythological creatures, lost in the storm of persecution, are sent into a Diaspora that mimics the reality of Jewish history. The "home is broken" (Shih, "No Place to Fix Identity"), and the Jewish community, the idyllic pastoral is destroyed. Instead of reuniting immediately to rectify the persecution and injustice against them, the mythical creatures accept their persecution as a way of life. Emily Miller Budick, author of "Philip Roth's Jewish Family Marx and the Defense of Faith", agrees with the Jewish acceptance of persecution through Roth's novella, *Defender of the Faith*. Budick states, "the Jews, it would seem, are their own worst enemies, hopelessly committed to the defense of one faith or another, to their own destruction" (Budick 66). After the community disperses, individuals and separated families are forced to work their way together again. The Jewish community and the mythological creatures are forced to live and accept this new life of separation. They live in the Diaspora.

Roth's *The Plot Against America* explores the ideal of balancing authentic Jewishness with the diasporic way of life. While Jews align themselves with the state of Israel, some refuse to return to the old ways. For characters such as Sandy Roth in *The Plot Against America*, The

United States is home; however, for Sandy, the persecution and anti-Semitic nature of his homeland cause strife in the family dynamic. Roth states, through Sandy's father, "if you want to go live in Kentucky instead of here, I'll drive you down to Penn Station and you can catch the next train out." (Roth 230-231). The general view of the Jewish Diaspora is negative. The Jewish people were forced out of their homes and into new countries, cultures, and customs. In Roth's work, the quest for personal identity and Jewish identity stem from the Diaspora and the lostness of Jewry.

Jewish communities are typically led by a Rabbi of a local temple. In *Pastoral Symphony*, Bacchus, the god of wine, serves the rabbinical role. During the persecution, Bacchus is tormented and is swept up in the Diaspora with his community. However, instead of taking shelter and waiting for the persecution to cease, Bacchus spills wine everywhere and basks in his alcohol. Bacchus' character correlates with the lost identity of Jewish Rabbis and their yearning to regain the homeland of Israel. In Roth's work, the Rabbinical control and influence on a community are seen in the novella, *Conversion of the Jews*, and the novel, *The Plot Against America*. Instead of alcohol, Rothian Rabbis bask in religion, conformity, and the idolizing of Jewishness. For Joshua Shanes, author of "Yiddish and Jewish Diaspora Nationalism", the Rabbis' hyper-focus on logistical religion and nationalism has detrimental effects on the Jewish community. Shanes states, "[Simon] Dubnow had argued that, although one need not be religious to be a Jew, conversion to another religion certainly excused one from the nation. [Chaim] Zhitlowsky was the supreme secularist, arguing that as long as one continued to speak Yiddish and participate in Yiddish culture, it made no difference what religion one practiced" (Shanes 181). This confusion from Rabbinical leaders provided the separation necessary for Jews to grow in a new definition of separation and nationalism.

The Diaspora need not be a source of tribulation for the Jewish community. Roberta Rosenberg, author of “Jewish ‘Diasporic Humor’ and Contemporary Jewish-American Identity” focuses on a new definition for the Diasporic Jew. In her article, Rosenberg features the work of Maera Shreiber in which morphemes of “Diaspora” translate to “to sow” (113). Rosenberg states, “in creating [a] dualistic reinterpretation of ‘diaspora’ ‘with its promise of replanting, rerooting, and subsequent growth,’ Shreiber disengages ‘diaspora’ from suffering and argues that this new more positive diaspora ‘may be gaining momentum’” (Rosenberg 113, Shreiber 275). This reunion of Judaism into a beautiful new definition is seen at the end of *Pastoral Symphony*, after the persecution of Zeus and Vulcan, the mythological creatures are able to once again live in peace. After searching for one another, they find their community once more and bask in the glory of the idyllic pastoral.

The final scene of *Pastoral Symphony* and the final section of the Rothian analysis pertains to the religious relationship to the Jewish people and the mythological figures of the pastoral. After the persecution, a centaur blows a horn to alert the others that all is safe. Once all the creatures are reunited, they watch a rainbow pass by to signify peace, purity, and happiness in the pastoral. These two aspects of *Pastoral Symphony*'s end relate to common archetypes and symbols found in western Abrahamic religions. The centaur with the horn represents the character of the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel is often depicted with a trumpet as he is the herald of the Lord and, in the Jewish tradition, was the messenger sent to Daniel. The second depiction of Jewish tradition is the rainbow. The rainbow stands as God's symbol of peace and covenant with the Jewish people. In chapter nine of “Genesis”, God states,

“This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the

clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Genesis 9: 12-16).

While this particular section does not relate directly to Roth’s work, it does relate to his subject matter. The ideals and beliefs of the Jewish people were crucial to the creation of Roth’s novels, and without them, Roth would never have been able to create such extensive artwork. The Jewish people and the mythological creatures of the idyllic pastoral recognize the covenant and the peace that is guaranteed them for enduring persecution and tribulation. This ending of *Pastoral Symphony* attests to the Jewish belief of God’s greatness and love for his people.

Walt Disney’s *Pastoral Symphony*, an animation short featured in his 1940 film, *Fantasia*, directly correlates with many of the ideologies, characters, and themes featured in Philip Roth’s literary works. As a producer of Jewish-American literature, and as an active critic on various social constructs, Roth provides his audience and literary scholars with the information necessary to recognize Jewish struggles and ideals in all works of art. Artwork is fluid, malleable. The very nature of art allows it to press and rub against other masterpieces to create something new. Just as Walt Disney created a visualization of music composition, Roth creates the opportunity for scholars to analyze art, politics, and life through his ideologies.

*Pastoral Symphony* depicts a beautiful ancient Greek landscape that, when observed through the Rothian lens, provides insight into the fallacies of Jewish idolatry. The ideal Jewish family, the ideal Jew, nor the ideal Rabbi exist; however, the threat of persecution is real. By

observing a secular work of art through a Rothian and Jewish perspective, audiences and scholars may learn from the past and from the social critiques of active artists. The analysis of *Pastoral Symphony* is not just an exercise in academic ability, but an opportunity to recognize the injustices, ideologies, and archetypes that still exist in the modern world.

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