

**CONSPIRACY AND
BETRAYAL IN THE
SHADE OF McCARTHY'S
AMERICA: PHILIP
ROTH'S *I MARRIED A
COMMUNIST***

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Abstract

Philip Roth's novel *I Married a Communist* depicts McCarthyism through Ira Ringold's story. Roth uses one of the most controversial political periods of America to create a plot based on betrayal and conspiracy. Linda Hutcheon states in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that historical fiction is "that which is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force." The intention of this article is to analyze how Roth gives shape to Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction. Roth establishes a parallelism between fiction and McCarthy's methods, to implement fear in American society and, through conspiracy, manipulate it. *I Married a Communist* is a fiction of history, a novel that introduces the rise and fall of the media star, Ira Ringold, as a victim of a conspiracy theory that takes

Resumen

La novela de Philip Roth *I Married a Communist* ilustra el periodo político dirigido por el senador McCarthy a través de la historia de Ira Ringold. Roth utiliza uno de los periodos más controvertidos de Estados Unidos para crear una trama basada en la conspiración y la traición. Linda Hutcheon afirma en su libro *A Poetics of Postmodernism* que la ficción histórica es "that which is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force." La intención de este artículo es analizar como Roth da forma a la definición de Linda Hutcheon acerca de la ficción historiográfica. Roth establece un paralelismo entre la ficción y los métodos empleados por McCarthy para implantar el miedo en la sociedad americana y, por medio de la conspiración, manipularla. *I Married a Communist* es una ficción de la historia, una novela que nos presenta el alzamiento y la caída de la estrella mediática, Ira Ringold, como víctima de una teoría conspiratoria que le lleva a la paranoia y a su propia

him to paranoia and destruction.

destrucción.

Key Words: American Literature,
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Palabras clave: Literatura
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The 1950s was a complicated and scary decade for the United States. It was a period of anti-Communist tensions and suspicion provoked, among several factors, by the Cold War. Communism, on the eyes of some politicians, was threatening the values and principles in which American society was built. Those statements were supported by a political figure whose voice rose with a lot of strength: Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy. He started a huge campaign against Communism, its victims considered it to be based on manipulation, paranoia, lies, conspiracy, and treason. On the other hand, McCarthy and his party believed it was a way of protecting Americans from those who wanted to destroy it. Senator McCarthy became a media man and a feared figure since he dedicated his political career to persecute supposed Communists. Also, it could be argued that he elaborated complex plots, with the help of the members of his party, in order to accuse certain people of un-American activities. Most of them belonged to the artistic, literary and cultural world, that is, those who had a direct and very influential contact to the American community. In this sense, these different plots became a way of creating a bigger one which would allow him to manipulate American public life and, therefore, control the private lives of Americans. This is what Philip Roth is trying to depict in his novel *I Married a Communist*. He describes in his novel the fame and decadence of the radio star Ira Ringold in the 50s. One of the aspects that this novel deals with, and that it will be treated in this study, is how McCarthy and his political procedures destroyed the life of the intellectual and artist Ira Ringold. Together with this, Roth depicts the America of the fifties and the feeling of paranoia experienced by Americans. In this article, my intention is to analyze the themes of conspiracy and betrayal in Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist* as a way of constructing fictional plots. Thus, I would argue that Roth compares these two themes with McCarthy's political methods as a mean to control the public and private lives of Americans during a concrete period of their history.

I Married a Communist can be analyzed as a novel that deals with the idea of paranoia, conspiracy, and treason. In order to support this interpretation, the novel has to be analyzed from the perspective of its historical context, that is, McCarthy and his well-known Communist hunt become very relevant in this sense and a point that supports the plot. The narrator of the story, Nathan Zuckerman, transcribes the story Murray Ringold, his old teacher and friend,

tells him about his brother, Ira Ringold. In this way, the reader gets an idea of Ira through the eyes of Nathan who, during a period of the narrative, Nathan believes Ira is a hero. On the contrary, Murray shows a very different version of his brother, that in which the reader learns the decline of this radio star as a consequence of McCarthyism. Ira, a Communist Party member, is a radio star who has found in Communism and acting a new life. He is married to the famous actress Eve Frame and both protect each other from the ghosts of their pasts. They seem to live a perfect American life but both hide a horrible secret. Whereas Ira performs the role of the perfect liberal, sympathetic and open-minded Communist, he hides a very violent aspect of his personality that, in the past, pushed him to perform some criminal deeds. Likewise, Eve hides her Jewish identity as a horrible stain and transforms this complex into an anti-Semitic attitude, a behavior appropriate to the upper class and sophisticated life she wants to live as a famous Hollywood actress of that time. The relationship between them starts to get worse when the political and social situation becomes a threat to their professional careers. Eve betrays Ira and denounces him to public opinion writing an autobiography in which she accuses her husband of Communist activities. The novel is a story inside another story which can be considered a story that is making history. Ira's life could be interpreted as a representation of the American History of the 50s, it helps to give a different vision and becomes a picture of McCarthy's hunt that will be told through the eyes and voices of Murray and Nathan.

Senator McCarthy's political life started after the 9th of February of 1950, the day he gave a speech to a small group of Republicans in Wheeling, Virginia. In that speech he accused the American government of harboring 250 Communists. His stroke of luck arose when instead of becoming just an anecdote in an insignificant gathering among Republicans, the media started to translate his words into headlines, something that provoked the angry replicas of the Democrats. In his book *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare*, Albert Fried defines McCarthyism as "the great red scare it unloosed on America, or, if one prefers, that America unloosed on itself" (1997:8). He also states that the red scare served to legitimate and enforce national consensus. Since the beginning, the media became McCarthy's most powerful tool. Firstly, as an involuntary force that pushed him towards the centre of controversy but later, as the perfect place where his daring words became persuasive and threatening. In 1947 Joseph McCarthy went to the famous radio program called "Town Hall Meeting for the Air." He was invited to participate in the debate "Should the Communist Party Be Outlawed in the United States?" His thesis to support an affirmative answer starts with the following statement:

The Communist Party might well be compared to a huge iceberg in a shipping lane. The most dangerous part of the iceberg is under water and

invisible and you can no more bring the underground communist organization up to the surface then you can cause that huge iceberg to float upon the face of the sea. (1997:76)

As William F. Buckley states in his book *McCarthy and his Enemies*, McCarthy's methods were based on trying not to give evidences but propose ways of acting to prevent the possible destruction of America caused by the Communist Party (1997:99). Two of the most important pillars of McCarthy's theory are the media, as the baton to organize and control public and private life, and the threat to American integrity, as a conviction he tries to engrave in the minds of the Americans. In his speech in the radio program, he accuses the Communists of being totally dedicated to the destruction of America and of being loyal to a foreign nation. In relation to this, it can be stated that one of the tools used by McCarthy to consolidate his ideas and consequently carry out with his political regulations is suspicion. Nevertheless, in order to make suspicion viable it is necessary to transform it into a plot that is supported by a strong argument. Thus, McCarthy uses the idea of the destruction of American integrity and with it of the American dream to justify and, in a way, to transform suspicion into a fearsome theory.

One of the most important targets for McCarthy was to try to control the private through the public. This is the reason why he started to investigate the group of the intellectuals. During this period, the hiring of experts and intellectuals to control the public and private affairs became very popular in the American government. This practice gave intellectuals, who were in most of the cases also ideologists, a power that created at the same time a feeling of suspicion and threat. Experts worked in the shade of politicians who started to feel they had less control and knowledge about what was happening. Thus, the enemy was not only outside but also inside, making the pillars of the American society tremble. In his essay *On the Popularity of the Intellect* Richard Hofstadter states that "the appeal of Communism during the 1930s was stronger among intellectuals than among any other stratum of the population" and that faith in Communism led to espionage (1963:40). On top of this, Hofstadter discusses about McCarthy's methods and concludes that these became the strong means by which he could reinforce and infiltrate his political ideology into the ordinary life of Americans. Regarding this, Hofstadter states:

To McCarthy's true believers what was really appealing about him were his methods, since his goals were always utterly nebulous. To them, his proliferating multiple accusations were a positive good, because they widened the net of suspicion and enabled it to catch many victims who were no longer, had never been, Communists; his bullying was welcomed because it satisfied a craving for revenge and a desire to discredit the type of leadership the New Deal had made prominent. (Hofstadter 1963:41)

Intellectuals, Communists or not, were using the same methods but in the case of *I Married a Communist* the protagonist is concretely using the same weapon: mass media. The media star has the power to transmit values and convictions that can change the mind and lives of the public. This is more dangerous if the media star has strong political views that go against what was considered, at that specific moment of history, the integrity of American society. Media, as a product of modern industrial society, which sometimes is politically biased, has the power to destroy, at least temporarily, the social class barriers. Accordingly, a feeling of union and common interests emerges in society. In these terms, the figure in charge of making this connection is the artist, in this case, the media star. It is the bridge between the values established by the government and the people. The star is the communicator and the person with whom the crowd identifies. The conflict arises when the star is an ideologist and a person who does not agree with the political and social values that he is supposed to transmit. If McCarthy's conspiracy theory is sustained by suspicion and paranoia, one of the ways to make it effective is through betrayal. It is the engine of McCarthy's plan and one of the themes that Roth uses to build the plot of his novel. In his essay 'Purity is Petrefaction: Liberalism and Betrayal in Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist*' Anthony Hutchison also considers betrayal one of the most important topics of the novel. Actually, he states that "Betrayal, in fact, is central to the novel's understanding of ideology and the idea of political commitment as they find expression within the story's historical context" (2005:318). Also, in her book *Philip Roth-Countertexts, Counterlives* Debra Shostak considers betrayal central in Roth's narrative and states that "the substance of the narrative that is *I Married a Communist* is the history of Ira's betrayals and self-betrayals" (2004:254). Also, Shostak talks about the "history of Ira's betrayals". This statement is supported by Roth's narrative technique. He chooses Nathan Zuckerman as narrator, listener and witness of a past he is transcribing in the text. Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, makes an analysis of the relationship between history and fiction and she asserts: "Narrative is what translates knowing into telling and it is precisely this translation that obsesses postmodern fiction" (1990:121). She defines the postmodernist technique that makes of history a source and frame for fiction as historiographic metafiction. Both are cultural sign systems, ideological constructions which join in one of its main aims: history is a kind of fiction that brings back a past in which the individual tries to fill in the gaps and understand the society he is currently living in. At the same time, it helps him build up an identity that is conditioned by the past that shapes the present. Hutcheon defines historical fiction "as that which is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force" (1990:113).

If one of the topics of the novel *I Married a Communist* is the story of Ira's betrayals, a way to explain and understand it is by the fact that the public and the private worlds overlap in this narrative. As I have mentioned before, Roth chooses the storytelling as his narrative technique. Nathan is the listener and transcriber of Murray's testimony about his brother Ira. In this sense, with his writing Nathan is making Ira's history. Apart from this, both Nathan and Murray make Ira participate in one of the most important periods of American history. Nathan, as the narrator, is giving his perspective about one concrete period of American history through Ira's experiences:

Murray in turn, told me everything that, as a youngster, I didn't know and couldn't have known about his brother's private life, a grave misfortune replete with farce over which Murray would sometimes find himself brooding even though Ira was dead now more than thirty years. 'Thousands and thousands of Americans destroyed in those years, political casualties, historical casualties, because of their beliefs,' Murray said. 'But I don't remember anybody else being brought down quite the way that Ira was. It wasn't on the great American battlefield he would himself have chosen for his destruction. Maybe, despite ideology, politics, and history, a genuine catastrophe is always personal bathos at the core. Life can't be impugned for any failure to trivialize people. You have to take your hat off to life for the techniques at its disposal to strip a man of his significance and empty him totally of his pride.' (Roth 1998:3)

Bringing the past to the present, he is in a way remodeling American identity. Ira, as an outsider, deconstructs with his story the idea of the hero that achieves the American dream. In fact, Ira is described as a fallen hero victim of the neat political techniques which divested him of his most powerful artistic skills, his strong personality and of course, as the text says, his pride. Yet, this fragment also points out the idea that his defeat not only takes place "on the great American battlefield", but it can also be interpreted as a failure in his private life. Thus, he becomes a loser both in his public and private lives. In relation to this, Ira's story-history is centered on a secret and it is the essence of Murray's testimony. As the narrative is considered the collision between the public and the private, the secret is divided into these two worlds. In other words, the public secret, his affiliation to the Communist Party, condemns him to blacklisting and destruction. On the other hand, his private secret, the murder of the Italian anti-Semitic worker during his youth, justifies his enrolment to the Communist Party and the opportunity to become a different person distanced from his tortuous past. Both explain those gaps that exist in his story and, at the same time, encourage the writing of it. In relation to this, Debra Shostak states: "The secret is the sin; the secret is the motive for and kernel of narrative; the secret is what makes the subject more than an object in someone else's narrative; and the secret is what imparts meaning to history" (2004:240).

According to Luckács, in Linda Hutcheon's words, "the historical novel could enact historical processes by presenting a microcosm which generalizes and concentrates" (1990:113). This is what Roth's novel represents. Roth establishes a parallelism between his narration and McCarthy's era. Ira, in many occasions, is McCarthy's reflection, and, the narrative structure can be considered a long testimony of which Nathan and Murray are the witnesses. In terms of Lukács's definition of the historical novel, the protagonists of historiographic metafiction are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history (Hutcheon 1990:113-14). Ira fits perfectly this description. So, Ira's life, as it is described in the novel, can be seen as a return trip from the lowest levels of society to the top of the hill, in order to live there temporarily the American dream. Previously, Ira and his brother lived the economic crisis of 1929 and the following tragic years. Both found shelter in different places, and in the case of Ira, he enrolled the Communist Party, after meeting his mentor and hero Johnny O'Day. Contrary to Ira, Murray chose a tranquil life immersed in his studies:

If you're orphaned as early as Ira was, you fall into the situation that all men must fall into but much, much sooner, which is tricky, because you may either get no education at all or be oversusceptible to enthusiasm and beliefs and ripe for indoctrination. Ira's youthful years were a series of broken connections: a cruel family, frustration in school, headlong immersion in the Depression –an early orphaning that captured the imagination of a boy like me, himself so fixed in a family and a place and its institutions, a boy only just emerging from the emotional incubator; an early orphaning that freed Ira to connect to whatever he wanted but also left him unmoored enough to give himself to something almost right off the bat, to give himself totally and forever. (Roth 1998:216)

These seem to be the circumstances that take Ira to Johnny O'Day's world and his Communist ideas. Communism seemed to represent the utopian world Ira needed to escape to and where all his traumas found refuge. Some lines after, Murray tells that "What O'Day's room represented was discipline, that discipline which says that however many desires I have, I can circumscribe myself down to this room" (Roth 1998:227). In the context of the Communist Party and its meetings, Ira finds in that space the opportunity to perform the great role of his life, the door to popularity. His performance of Abraham Lincoln in the party goes beyond what he could think of, causing such an impact in the media, that he becomes a radio star of the program *The Free and the Brave*. The possibility of performing the role of such an important American character in a public media allowed Ira to be identified by his public with what that important figure represented: the American identity. As a result, Ira was playing with McCarthy's most powerful tool: the media. Ira is the outsider who

represents and defines American identity but without deleting his past and origins:

What do you think the Abe Lincoln act was about? Putting on that stovepipe hat. Mouthing Lincoln's words. But everything that ever tamed him, all the civilizing accommodations, he shed, and he was stripped right back to the Ira who'd dug ditches in Newark. Back to the Ira who'd mined zinc up in the Jersey hills. He reclaimed his earliest experience, when his tutor was the shovel. He made contact with the Ira before all the moral correction took place, before he'd been to Miss Frame's Finishing School and taken all those etiquette lessons. Before he went to finishing school with you, Nathan, acting out the drive to father and showing you what a good, nonviolent man he could be. Before he went to finishing school with *me*. Before he went to finishing school with O'Day, the finishing school of Marx and Engels. The finishing school of political action. (Roth 1998:123)

Under Lincoln's mask, which is the key to the American dream world of fame and success, lives the worker, the Communist man who lived humbly but also, the violent man result of the economic and social calamities he went through. With this character Roth argues the implications of being an American in the figure of an outsider who achieves the American dream temporarily and contributes with his work to American culture. In this context, it can be stated that Nathan not only is listening and writing Ira's story, but through it, he is shaping his own identity. Reconstructing the history of his environment and those who belong to it, Nathan is writing his own history and identity making of his life "a long speech I've been listening to" (Roth 1998:222). He describes his life as a "book of voices", a book full with voices of the other. Debra Shostak asserts in relation to this that "one can only know the other by reconstructing his past, and one can only know oneself as a deformation of the other" (2004:232).

Ira's position in society and his importance in the media are what enable him to influence and partially control American society. Media transforms him into a model everybody wants to be and someone who can change people's way of thinking. Ira is progressively playing an important part in a possible change of American society since his work is a threat to McCarthy's political values. Again, Ira and McCarthy are reflections of the same mirror. I would argue that Ira was not totally aware of his influence on the public or at least that was not his aim at the beginning. He enjoyed his work as an actor, apart from his political ideas. On the contrary, McCarthy used media as a way to get in the American homes and change their minds with his political messages. In her book *Power and Paranoia* Dana Polan analyzes paranoia as a historical activity in the way Richard Hofstadter uses it, to talk about American history in terms of "paranoid style in American life". She states that "paranoia is only one social practice among many" and concludes that "paranoia may be a condition to

which power and knowledge are responses-fearful retreats to hoped-for position of security and reestablished authority” (1986:15). From this perspective, in order to maintain this security and reestablished authority that Dana Polan talks about, it could be argued that it is necessary to create suspicion and fear. This would maintain population alert and committed with the cause of fighting against those who are trying to destroy the American way of life:

Ira leaned back in his chair, raised his arms so that his huge hands were interlaced behind his neck, and, his contempt undisguised, said-though not to our host but, so as to gall him to the utmost, pointedly to me –“You know one of life’s best feelings? Maybe *the* best? Not being afraid. The mercenary schmuck whose house we are in-you know what his story is? He is afraid. That’s the simple fact of it. In World War II Erwin Goldstine was not afraid. But now the war is over, and Erwin Goldstine is afraid of his wife, afraid of his father-in-law, afraid of the bill collector – he is afraid of everything. You look with your big eyes into the capitalist shop window, you want and you want, you grab and you grab, you take and you take, you acquire and you own and you accumulate, and there is the end of your convictions and the beginning of your fear. (Roth 1998:96)

Undoubtedly, Ira relates fear with American capitalism and specifically with consumerism as a way of hypnotizing population and accordingly, a method to control society. Also, this compulsive activity could be interpreted as one of the techniques to make people forget about themselves and their principles in order to, as Murray says at the beginning, “strip a man of his significance” (1998:3). In this sense, Ira illustrates not an individual but an automaton, a puppet in the hands of McCarthyism.

With the aim of constructing the atmosphere of the McCarthy area, Roth presents a plot in which paranoia plays a very important role. Likewise, he introduces it together with suspicion as its immediate consequence and in relation to the other, that is, this combination of feelings is always projected to the other, the stranger that interacts with the characters in society. In the novel, it is evident that suspicion is represented by McCarthy’s hunt of Communists and individuals who were developing any kind of un-American activities. One of those suspects is Ira, who was blacklisted since the beginning of the anti-Communist operation carried out by McCarthy. Ira concludes on this respect “‘I can go back to the Midwest. I can work in the mills. And if I have to, I will. Anything but to become a rabbit like this guy. That’s what you now are politically,’ he said, looking at last at Goldstine –‘not a man, a rabbit, a rabbit of no consequence’” (Roth 1998:96). It seems that Ira is unconsciously foreshadowing his future because, although he shows himself strong against the network of fear and paranoia that he so eagerly confronts, Murray tells how he is condemned to end his life as the rabbit he describes previously:

When I would get home from school I'd help him dress; every afternoon I'd force him to shave and I'd insist on his going for a walk with me down Bergen Street. Could any city street in America have been friendlier in those days? But Ira was surrounded by enemies. The marquee on the Park Theatre frightened him, the salamis in Kartzman's window frightened him—Schachtman's candy store frightened him, with the newsstand out front. He was sure every paper had his story in it, weeks after the papers had finished having their fun with him. (Roth 1998:284)

The topics of paranoia, fear and suspicion go one step further in the novel in relation to what Roth describes as Ira's and Eve's secrets. It could be argued that Roth is making a comparison between the way he is writing the different plots of his novel and McCarthy's conspiracy theories against Communists. In this case, the connection is the use of paranoia and suspicion to create successful stories that will condemn the protagonist and other characters. In other words, suspicion is possible due to a series of plots created by McCarthy's commission in order to justify persecution and condemnation of Communists. Nevertheless, the novel presents a turn in its narrative structure when Murray tells Nathan how his brother killed an anti-Semitic Italian worker in a fight. Once this episode is presented, Ira occupies another place in the eyes of the reader; he is not only the victim, now he is also the executioner. From this point of the novel, Ira is an admired star and a victim who suffers from uncontrolled rage attacks. Now, Roth creates suspicion in the reader; Ira is not any more the trustworthy rebel who is fighting for a better world, he is a murderer as well. On the one hand, these violent episodes can be explained by Ira's turbulent and conflictive life. On the other hand, it is unavoidable to relate his emotional instability to his affiliation to the Communist Party and its violent performances. Accordingly, it is easy for the reader to associate this kind of violent behavior with the whole group and this encourages its wary atmosphere. Indeed, I would argue it is a way the writer uses to position the reader in the perspective of the hunter and to doubt the credibility of the testimony which, in the end, becomes a great part of the novel. The same happens to Eve and her obscure past. In her case, she has transformed her Jewish identity into a complex she can hardly bear. Then, she creates a new role for herself in order to disguise her Jewish origins. Murray explains this in these terms:

'It was sickness', Murray said, 'that aversion she had for the Jew who was insufficiently disguised. She could go along parallel to life for a long time. Not in life-parallel to life. She could be quite convincing in that ultracivilized, ladylike role she'd chosen. The soft voice. The precise locution. Back in the twenties, English Genteel was a style that a lot of American girls worked up for themselves when they wanted to become actresses. And with Eve Frame, who was herself starting out in Hollywood then, it took, it hardened. English Genteel hardened into a form like layers of wax—only burning right in the middle was the wick, this flaming wick that

wasn't very genteel at all. She knew all the moves, the benign smile, the dramatic reserve, all the delicate gestures. But then she'd veer off that parallel course of hers, the thing that looked so much like life, and there'd be an episode that could leave you spinning.' (Roth 1998:53)

Eve's experience with McCarthy's plot is completely opposite to the one lived by Ira. Whereas he is, in a way, a victim who becomes unavoidably the "rabbit," Eve is the executioner collaborating with McCarthy's intrigue and therefore writing her husband's sentence to death. At the end of the novel, Murray says about Eve: "Eve could transform a personal prejudice into a political weapon by confirming for Gentile America that, in New York as in Hollywood, in radio as in movies, the Communist under every rock was, nine times out of ten, a Jew to boot" (Roth 1998:274). Thus, Eve erases any clue of suspicion in her life, including her husband for the sake of her identity and popularity as a Hollywood actress. In a way, she can be considered a survivor since she is fighting to preserve the identity she has created for her.

Consequently, one of the most evident contradictions in the novel is Ira's marriage to Eve Frame. Their lives meet at some point to create an intense but at the same time fragile union that will end up with Ira's destruction and Eve's misery and guilt feelings. Ira, as a member of the Communist Party, leaves his past and convictions behind to marry a Hollywood star, a symbol of hypocrisy and ostentation. In the novel, Roth, through Murray's wife's words, explains why this marriage could be possible:

'Love', says Doris, 'love is not something that is logical. Vanity is not something that is logical. *Ira* is not something that is logical. Each of us in this world has his own vanity, and therefore his own tailor-made blindness. Eve Frame's is Ira's.' (Roth 1998: 83)

In my opinion an intense passion exists between Ira and Eve, in spite of the social and political differences. In fact, it can be said that there is an illogical love relationship that finally will turn into a failure due to their social influences and the burden of their pasts. However, in spite of all those evident differences, there is an obvious connection: they both represent the other, Ira as a poor social worker who becomes a Communist and Eve, as a Jewish woman who tries to hide her identity for obvious reasons. Also, it can be interpreted from another perspective. Murray tells Nathan that the main reason why Ira marries Eve is because her social world is a way of leaving behind that violent part of his identity. Especially, it became a way of being protected from McCarthy and blacklisting; he is untouchable in Eve's shade. But there is a character that lets paranoia and conspiracy get in their relationship: Sylphid, Eve's daughter, forces her mother with emotional blackmail to abort Ira's son. That is the moment when Ira loses all his protection, and treason plays its most important role in the novel since Eve gives up Ira's love for the benefit of her daughter's

love and protection. Eve moves forward and uses McCarthy's red hunt to betray Ira denouncing him in her autobiography titled *I Married a Communist*. She writes her revenge against Ira, also a revenge against that "ultracivilized, ladylike role she'd chosen" (Roth 1998:53) and that parallel life she was trying to live:

Because as an American actress I have sworn myself to fight the Communist infiltration of the entertainment industry with every fiber of my being. Because as an American actress I gave a solemn responsibility to an American audience that has given me so much love and recognition and happiness, a solemn and unshakable responsibility to reveal and expose the extent of the Communist grip on the broadcasting industry that I came to know through the man I was married to, a man I loved more than any man I have ever known, but a man who was determined to use the weapon of mass culture to tear down the American way of life [...]. Iron Rinn exploited me. Iron Rinn married me better to infiltrate his way into the world of American entertainment. Yes, I married a Machiavellian Communist, a vicious man of enormous cunning who nearly ruined my life, my career and the life of my beloved child. And all of it to advance Stalin's plan for world domination. (1998:244-45)

Ira's condemnation is provoked by Eve's fear and she writes this testimony in spite of her love towards her husband. Rather than being moved by a moral feeling, Eve denounces Ira as a way to protect herself, her family and her hidden Jewish identity. It can be stated that she is terrified of losing her life as a star and the fake identity she has created for herself. In this context, the character of Eve can be understood as the illustration of the traitor or stool pigeon who is capable of inventing a story in order to save her life. Yet, in my opinion, these plots were always created from reality or, in other words, they are a deformation of it. In this sense, Roth shows how far some figures of the period were ready to avoid the total elimination of their lives and careers. One of the most remarkable things of McCarthy's era was the ability to erase the participation in society of some famous figures of the time. This can be explained as a way of deleting their lives since most of these celebrities became anonymous people without profession after the hunt. This is the point where Ira gets but, before that, it is essential to have a character like Eve to organize the plot. In relation to this, Murray talks to the narrator about revenge and its relation to betrayal: "Nothing so big in people and nothing so small, nothing so audaciously creative in even the most ordinary as the workings of revenge. And nothing so ruthlessly creative in even the most refined of the refined as the workings of betrayal" (Roth 1998:184). In this sense, these memories reflect other methods of McCarthyism. It can be said that, in order to work, paranoia and suspicion are based on interpretation and, in a way, they are based on fiction. This is the reason why Murray talks in terms of creativity when he refers to revenge and

betrayal. This creativity is used to invent plots that will support the different accusations and, in this case, the fiction of Eve's autobiography. Many of the HUAC accusations were founded on assumptions which, in some cases could be described as exaggerations and distortions. An example of this is the recorded testimony of the poet Langston Hughes. The committee, in an attempt to investigate the writer, tried to interpret his book of poems *Scottsboro Limited* (1932) as a text full of Communist messages.⁴ Similarly, Eve accuses Ira of trying to infiltrate through mass culture Stalin's plan for world domination, a lie she can hardly support with her own words.

Betrayal, in the context of this novel, can be considered a consequence of the paranoid atmosphere lived in America during a period of the 1950s and an attitude that marked some of the relationships among American celebrities. Anthony Hutchison asserts in his essay that "Ideas of betrayal as they relate both to literal and metaphoric understandings of fatherhood or the notion of maintaining a legacy more generally are established in a number of other ways in *I Married a Communist*" (2005:321). Although at the beginning of his article he relates betrayal to ideology and political commitment, he also interprets the idea of betrayal as a depiction of fatherhood. In this sense, he analyses the relationship between Nathan and Murray, Nathan and Ira and also Ira and Johnny O'Day as a figurative relation of father and son which brings a political consciousness. I would argue that more than a metaphorical conflict of fathers and sons, there is a relation of admiration that consequently causes feelings of betrayal. I agree with Hutchison in the connection he establishes between betrayal as the result of political awareness and admiration but, in the case of my analysis, I will study betrayal only as a way of manipulating society and as reflection of the American hypocrisy of the time. In this context, with her testimony, Eve has destroyed Ira but she has protected herself from any attempt of Ira to reveal her Jewish past. Ira has no credibility and turns into an anonymous person. In my opinion, and I think Roth shows this through Eve, one of the most terrible things that can happen to a celebrity is to be forced to remain anonymous. This is Ira's sentence to death and one of McCarthy's tools to spread panic and stop any kind of un-American activity. At this point of the novel betrayal takes two directions. Eve betrayed Ira but Ira has betrayed himself too. Ira is a traitor at the eyes of the reader and for Nathan once both learn Ira's murderous past. I would suggest that Ira is also a traitor to the Communist principles he defended. His famous life and his marriage with a Hollywood celebrity go totally against everything Johnny O'Day, his Communist mentor, taught him: live a modest life dedicated to ideology and

⁴ NPR: Testimony of Langston Hughes:
<http://www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2003/may/mccarthy/hughes.html>

Communism. This is the reason why O'Day does not want to help Ira after the publication of Eve's memoirs. Betrayal defeated Ira and the character he had created for himself. Murray says in relation to this:

'All those antagonisms,' Murray said, 'and then the torrent of betrayal. Every soul its own betrayal factory. For whatever reason: survival, excitement, advancement, idealism. For the sake of the damage that can be done, the pain that can be inflicted. For the cruelty in it. For the *pleasure* in it. The pleasure of manifesting one's latent power. The pleasure of dominating others, of destroying people who are your enemies. You're surprising them. Isn't that the pleasure of betrayal? The pleasure of tricking somebody. It's a way to pay people back for a feeling of inferiority they arouse in you, of being put down by them, a feeling of frustration in your relationship with them. Their very existence may be humiliating to you, either because you aren't what they are or because they aren't what you are.' (1998:262)

Elaine B. Safer questions the meaning of betrayal in the novel. She justifies the behavior of some of the stool pigeons of the McCarthy era arguing that "the betrayers, in the strict meaning of the word, were only those who did give names of real Communists. In other words, many of these people were not libeled. Some certainly were, but then that is not betrayal anymore. It is libel" (2006:114). In terms of a definition for the concept of betrayal, power, superiority and domination can be considered its most important aims. Betrayal implies, in this case, a means to condemn the central character, Ira, to a total destruction of his life and self. In the context of the novel and McCarthyism, it is not just libel; it is the erasure of someone else's life to gain a better social place. Betraying Ira, Eve was reassuring her place in society, prestige and protection in her career. In detriment of the other, she becomes the savior of the American Dream but, at the same time, the image of a fake and destructive side of the America of the 1950s.

I Married a Communist is a story of history. It is a novel that shows how history, depending on the moment, could be written through fiction. In order to illustrate this, Roth chooses McCarthy's era as a way to create a plot sustained by conspiracy, paranoia and betrayal and whose ultimate victim is its central character, the radio star Ira Ringold. The novel becomes a long testimony, life stories or memories that resemble those McCarthy used to persecute and imprison Communists. Moreover, those were personal stories that, for a long time, wrote American history. Roth establishes a parallelism between Ira and McCarthy as media stars but shows them in different paths of history, indeed in opposite situations that take them to the same end: victims of the American system. The comparison between story and history, Ira and McCarthy, confronts the public and the private in a novel where the barriers of genre are totally blurred. Secrets, conspiracy and paranoia are the strings of a system that survives due to betrayal. McCarthy's great performance as the main actor of the

American theatre was shared with Ira in a moment in which American history was full of fiction.

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