I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?

_The Merchant of Venice_

The tradition of anti-Semitic literature had perhaps paved the way for Shakespeare’s creation of avaricious Shylock. But even Shylock reveals his humane feelings at a pivotal point in the play in response to Jessica’s action. The scenario in America presents the racial prejudice against the Jews who truly sought shelter in the adopted land. America projects an image of safeguarding all the immigrants. But in reality anti-Semitism runs deep in the national psyche.

With the passage of time, anti-Semitism has taken different dimensions and the Jewish Americans are victims of the racial discrimination. The term
‘Semite’ refers to the group of people who speak semitic languages especially Hebrew and Arabic. Anti-Semitism is hostility towards the semites whether it is Jews or Arabs ranging from mild antipathy to a violently expressed hatred. It has existed to some degree wherever Jews have settled in the diaspora. In the classical world religious differences were the primary basis for anti-Semitism. Judaism’s rejection of idol worship was little understood and the refusal of Jews to participate in the emperor worship was seen as lack of patriotism. To the early Christians, the Jews were the crucifiers of Christ, an allegation that for centuries was the justification for anti-Semitism.

There were periodic persecutions, massacres and expulsions of Jews until the eighteenth century. Enlightenment ushered in Europe a new religious freedom. When nationalism of the nineteenth century swept Europe, the basis of anti-Semitism shifted from religion to racial pride and gained a new respectability and much popular support. In Germany in the late nineteenth century, anti-Semitism became an organized movement, part of the programme of some political parties. Concerted efforts were taken to disenfranchise the Jews. The German anti-Semitism was beset with factionalism and with financial and other scandals.

In tsarist Russia a medieval form of anti-Semitism continued as an integral part of imperial policy. Since the late eighteenth century, Jews had been confined to a huge territory in the western provinces known as the Pale of
Settlement. In 1882 there was widespread anti-Semitic rioting followed by legislation that confiscated the rural holding of the Jews.

The storm of anti-Semitic violence let loose by the triumph of Adolf Hitler in 1933 not only reached a terrifying degree in Germany but inspired a worldwide anti Jewish movement unequalled in modern history. Anti-Semitism was spread in France by the Cagoulards, in Hungary by the Arrow Cross, in England by the British union of Fascists and in the United States by the German American Bund and the Silver Shirts.

The novelty of the Nazi brand of anti-Semitism was that it crossed class barriers. The idea of Aryan racial superiority appealed to the masses as well as to the economic and hereditary elite. In Germany, anti-Semitism became official government policy taught in the schools and elaborated in scientific journals and by a highly effective organization for international propaganda. The deportation of the poorer Jews into the western countries increased anti-Semitism outside Germany.

Anti-Semitic prejudice lies hidden in the American scenario and the immigrant Jews became the silent victims of the inhuman treatment of the dominant whites. *The Plot Against America* was the outcome of the suppressed creative impulse of Philip Roth who wanted to paint a true picture of the condition of Jews in America. The emotion that predominates this novel is fear, “Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is
without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn’t been president or if I hadn’t been the offspring of Jews” (1).

The whole narrative begins with the word fear and ends with a chapter entitled ‘Perpetual Fear’. The novel is not a theoretical essay on anti-Semitism. But it presents an alternate history of the United States during the years 1940-42. Roth uses this logic to the 1940 presidential election to suggest that the definition of the United States as the country that fought and defeated the Nazis and ignores the currents of fascism and anti-Semitism running through American life in the 1940s. Roth presents his fictional alternate history as a true history that takes into account historical possibilities in addition to actual events.

As Roth has told Jeffrey Brown, the idea for the novel came from a single line in a book by historian Arthur Schlesinger, stating that some Republicans in 1940 had considered nominating Lindbergh for President. Roth’s eye landed on that sentence and in the margin he wrote, “What if they had?” He asserts: “What if they had nominated Lindbergh? And that just started my wheels spinning. And you can see how, because immediately you have to . . . you have to answer that question. And the answer to that question is dense, it is not one line. “What if they had?” (Brown, Interview).

An insight into the details of Lindbergh would serve as an appropriate framework for unravelling the anti-Semitic impulses hidden in the American scenario. Charles Augustus Lindbergh was an American aviator, author,
inventor, explorer and social activist. He was born on February 4, 1902 in Detroit to Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Sr, a lawyer who also served as a Congressman from Minnesota from 1907 to 1917. Lindbergh studied mechanical engineering at the University of Wisconsin. In 1924, Lindbergh was enlisted in the United States Army and trained as an Army Air Service Reserve Pilot. He later worked as an airmail pilot, flying back and forth between St. Louis and Chicago.

On May 20, 1927, Lindbergh attained an instantaneous world fame as the result of his Orteig Prize – winning first solo non-stop flight across the Atlantic Ocean. He persuaded nine St. Louis businessman to help him finance the cost of his first plane. So he named the plane ‘the Spirit of St. Louis’. Lindbergh’s heroic flight thrilled people throughout the world. He was honoured with awards, celebrations and parades, including the Distinguished Flying Cross Medal from President Calvin Coolidge. Less than two months after Lindbergh had completed his historic flight, he published his first book ‘We’ about his transatlantic flight. The title referred to Lindbergh and his plane. He dedicated much of his time in promoting the field of aviation.

During a trip to Latin America, he met Anne Morrow in Mexico whom he married in 1929. Their first child Charles Augustus Lindbergh, Jr. twenty months old was kidnapped and murdered from their home in New Jersey in 1932. The crime made headlines around the world. It was referred sensationally by the press of the time as ‘The crime of the century’. Bruno Hauptmann, a
carpenter was arrested for the crime. To escape the constant media attention, the couple secretly decided to go into voluntary exile in Europe. Around this time, Lindbergh did some scientific research, inventing an early type of artificial heart with a French surgeon.

While in Europe, Lindbergh was invited by the governments of France and Germany to tour the aircraft industries of their countries. Lindbergh was especially impressed with the highly advanced aircraft industry of Nazi Germany. In 1938, Herman Goering, a high Nazi official presented Lindbergh with a German medal of honor. Lindbergh’s acceptance of the medal caused an outcry in the United States among critics of Nazism.

Lindbergh and his family returned to the United States in 1939. In 1941, he joined the American First committee, an organization that opposed voluntary American entry into World War II. He became a leading spokesman for the committee. He criticized President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s foreign policies. He also charged that British, Jewish and pro-Roosevelt groups were leading America into war. Lindbergh resigned his commission in the Army Air Corps after Roosevelt publically denounced him. Some Americans accused Lindbergh of being a Nazi sympathizer because he refused to return the medal he had accepted.

These facts created a perpetual fear in Philip Roth. The thought of Lindbergh being a Nazi Sympathizer, provoked Philip Roth to think what would be the condition of Jews, if Lindbergh became the president of America.
This made him to write the fictional alternate history *The Plot Against America* revealing the anti-Semitism against Jews, in the backdrop of the unseen real events of racism and discrimination in America.

Lindbergh’s name was a loaded name for Roth. He was aware of Lindbergh’s history, isolationism. The first thing he wanted to imagine was what it would have been like, if an isolationist had been elected president. Lindbergh was famous for anti-Semitic remarks he had made during his times as spokesman for America. Roth realized that Lindbergh would be a threat or a menace to American Jews.

The technique of presenting alternate history is not something unique to Philip Roth. Writers like Daniel Quinn, Shane Johnson, Murray Davies, Robert Silverberg, Robert Conroy, Stoney Compton, Harry Turtledove have contributed to this form by presenting imaginary rendering of historical facts. In the novel’s alternate history, Franklin D. Roosevelt is defeated in his third bid for the presidency by the famed aviator Charles Lindbergh, who historically is an anti-Semite, isolationist and white supremacist. Within the first two years of his presidency, Lindbergh institutes a series of policies to reflect the rising tide of global fascism, signing nonaggression pacts with both Germany and Japan. Philip Roth looks at history through the lens of his small family. He opines, “I think it is the novelist’s way, I think that decision was made for me when I became a writer, that is to see history through the lives of ordinary people” (Brown, Interview).
In the novel, Lindbergh’s presidency is filtered through the dialogue and conflicts among a young Philip Roth, his family and their Jewish Community in the Weequahic section of Newark, New Jersey. Roth has depicted his own family in the 1940s: Father Herman, Mother Bess, Brother Sandy and himself as a young boy. In fact, Roth called his work a false memoir. According to him:

So it is an act ... it appears to be an act of memory, but it is a false memoir. I had a little slogan I would use with myself when I was writing this book, and from-if you want more falsification–I said to myself whenever I got stuck, which was frequently “Don’t invent, just remember”. (Brown, Interview)

In the novel he integrates the true history of his life into the false chronicle of a Lindbergh administration. By 1940, Jewish immigrants have been living in the United States for three generations and they feel secure in their adopted country. Israel did not exist for them and America seemed like the one safe haven for Jews who had escaped Europe’s anti-Semitism.

The story in the novel takes place over a period of young Philip’s life when he is a seven year old third grader. Once when a stranger appeared collecting money for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Philip thinks to himself that “We’d already had a homeland for three generations” (4). This shows the little boy’s innocent sense of security which is short lived, “Our homeland was America. Then the Republicans nominated Lindbergh and everything changed” (5).
Roth links his imagined history of American anti-Semitism to the true history of American racism against blacks. He first connects anti-Semitism to racism in the description of the winning poster of Philip’s older brother Sandy draws for the Arbor Day poster contest in school. Roth openly acknowledges that Jews are not only the minorities who have been discriminated against in America. Philip’s role as Sandy’s model for his drawing of the African American child suggests a kinship between Jews and blacks as victims of discrimination. The Plot Against America does not merely imagine what would have happened if America had become a fascist, anti-Semitic and isolationist state. The novel claims that America was such a state to some degree and that this aspect of history has to be ignored while limiting the definition of historical truth to a factual chronicle of events and outcomes.

The experience of the seventy-year old Philip Roth who narrates this self-conscious passage, evokes his childhood fear of what was at the time an uncertain future, the novel’s conversion of America’s harmless history into a terrifying world:

And as Lindbergh’s election couldn’t have made clearer to me, the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as ‘History’, harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as
inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic. (113-14)

According to Coetzee, “The Plot Against America is a history book but of a fantastic kind, with its own truth, the sort of truth Aristotle had in mind when he said that poetry is truer than history” (6). The story introduces three distinct Philip Roths: the historical Roth, who fulfills the role of implied author; the fictional projection of Roth who narrates the novel from the present day; and the child Roth, who acts as the novel’s protagonist. Thus, The Plot Against America introduces the multiplication of selves described in The Counterlife.

Roth’s metafictional autobiography The Facts is a counter text against his novel The Plot Against America. Contradicting the opening of The Plot Against America, in which the young Philip’s fear is aroused by President Lindbergh at home, the first chapter in The Facts “Safe at Home” begins: “The greatest menace while I was growing up came from abroad, from the Germans and the Japanese, our enemies because we were American” (20). Roth’s fear does not emanate from overseas, and it has nothing to do with his being Jewish. Roth in the sixth chapter ‘Their Country’ in The Plot Against America reveals that America is no longer their homeland. While in The Facts Roth proclaims that in real life he never felt excluded from his country. He explains that such a feeling of exclusion will definitely originate in an America fraught with anti-Semitism. Just as the Swede is crushed by the anti-Vietnam war movement, Ira
Ringold is brought down by proto McCarthyism and Coleman Silk is victimized by America’s racist past, the Roth family is nearly torn apart by the anti-Semitism of Lindbergh’s administration.

Lindbergh’s nomination in the novel’s alternate history appears to bring about the fascist anti-Semitic counter America that victimizes the Roths. For example: he discusses the “… unadvertised quotas to keep Jewish admissions to a minimum in colleges and professional schools and of unchallenged discrimination that denied Jews significant promotions in the big corporations” (11). Roth had earlier described these quotas in The Facts because in real life, they made it difficult for his father to advance his position at metropolitan life.

Roth puts anti-Semitism and racism into perspective during the Roth’s trip to Washington DC. Roths were thrown out of the Douglas Hotel because they were Jewish. They were welcomed to the second-rate accommodation by an African American and this suggests that African Americans have long been treated as second class citizens. The Plot Against America’s alternate history places Jews in a similar situation. So the novel acknowledges that blacks had to endure a harsher history of mistreatment in America than Jews.

Surviving in the adopted country entails different problems. Roth’s father Herman Roth is a man of sterling qualities who possesses intense loyalty to the ideals of the democracy. He does his best to protect his family from the gathering storm. But in order to keep them in relocation from their native Newark, he has quit his job selling insurance and takes night work lugging
crates in the produce market. The sight of his father’s powerlessness against the
state is responsible for the breakdown in Roth. This leads to his delinquency
and alienation which finally ends up with his fleeing home to seek protection in
a Catholic Orphanage. Each member of the family responds differently. The
son’s reaction when he sees his father breaking down is noteworthy:

A new life began for me. I had watched my father fall apart, and I
would never return to the same childhood. The mother at home
was now away all day working for Hahne’s, the brother on call
was now off after school working for Lindbergh, and the father
who’d defiantly serenaded all those callow cafeteria anti-Semites
in Washington was crying aloud with his mouth wide open,
crying like both a baby abandoned and a man being tortured,
because he was powerless to stop the unforeseen. (113)

Roth’s fear that America is fracturing into two distinct nations after
Lindbergh’s nomination becomes fact during his trip to Washington. While
visiting the Lincoln Memorial, Herman Roth laments the assassination of
Lincoln and then overhears an elderly woman praising Lindbergh. As Herman
Roth addresses the schism between Lindbergh’s and Lincoln’s respective
Americas, a man immediately confronted Herman calling ‘a loudmouth Jew’.
The woman proclaims that she would give anything to slap his face. This
shows the division of America into Lindbergh’s fascist state characterized by
discrimination and violence and Lincoln’s democratic republic described by
Herman as a free country in which all men are created equal. Herman Roth’s summation of the situation faced by Jews in Lindbergh’s America expresses the schism in the national identity of the now-divided United States. “They live in a dream and we live in nightmare” (76). In Thomas Jefferson’s assertion, the concept of American Dream and American Nightmare are as follows:

American Dream is that all men are equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. American Nightmare exhibits a split nation in which certain people have access to these inalienable rights while others are treated as aliens. (729)

The difference between the two Americas figured as dream and nightmare is clearly shown when Philip’s brother Sandy reveals his experience in Mawhinney’s tobacco farm in gentile America. Sandy goes for apprenticeship with a Kentucky farmer under the auspices of a scheme called “Just Folk”. A talented young artist, he returns with a portfolio of animal sketches – and a sudden enthusiasm for waspish, heartland values. As Morrison has stated:

He is co-opted by the OAA (the Office of American Absorption) to encourage other Jewish city boys to follow his example – and does it so well that through his aunt, Bess’s sister Evelyn (whose boyfriend, Rabbi Bengelsdorf, is a passionate supporter of Lindbergh), he is invited to a reception at the White House. A
fierce row ensues, with Herman refusing Sandy permission to attend and Evelyn and the rabbi defending Lindbergh as a freely elected democrat who has exhibited not a single inclination towards authoritarian rule. (Review)

Mr. Mawhinney is depicted as a settler, conqueror, builder, governor, legislator and owner whereas Herman is only a Jew. This clearly shows that Mr. Mawhinney reveals the enormous disparity between the rights enjoyed by the Christian beneficiaries of the American Dream and Herman reveals the Jewish victims of the American Nightmare. The American norm of good, clean hard working Christian millions are also revealed as murderous slaveholders who “subjugated the Indian and enslaved the Negro and emancipated the Negro and segregated the Negro” (93).

The narrative technique of Roth is exemplified here. His decision to relate this information in a run-on sentence explains the tremendous extent of the domination of white Anglo - Saxon protestants hold over other ethnic groups in the United States. The novel’s central subject not only constitutes the marginalization of Jews, but also slavery, the extermination of Native Americans and racial segregation. The comparison between Herman and Mr. Mawhinney shows the disparity between the partakers of American Dream and sufferers of the American Nightmare.

One of the ways, Roth keeps *The Plot Against America* from developing into political allegory is his propensity to concretize broad political
developments by displaying their effects of the experiences of his family. The relationship between the fragmenting of the nation into multiple Americas and Roth’s struggle to keep their family from fragmenting is shown in a comparison of orphans to disenfranchised Jews in Lindbergh’s America.

The connection between, being a disenfranchised member of a divided America and being an orphan is established during an argument between Herman and Bess Roth. The office of American Absorption passes the Homestead 42 act:

… which is designed to give emerging American families a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to move their households, at government expense, in order to strike roots in an inspiring region of America previously inaccessible to them. Homestead 42 will provide a challenging environment steeped in our country’s oldest traditions where parents and children can enrich their Americanness over the generations. (204-05)

Roth’s mother Bess urges his father Herman to move the family to Canada but he refuses. Young Roth experiences something different being an orphan in an America that now belongs to the gentiles. Roth’s fear lead him to hatch various unsuccessful schemes to regain his lost sense of security. His first enterprise is to get on the bus with his friend Earl Axman and follow Christians home. Roth explains that “we never followed anybody we thought was Jewish. They didn’t interest us. Our curiosity was directed at men, the adult Christian
men who worked all day in downtown Newark” (116). Roth’s sense of exclusion, arises from his belief that he is an outsider living in a Christian nation. This represents an aspect of American life – the alienation and anxiety Jewish Americans experience on a daily basis that has been excluded from factual histories of the United States, but which Roth has manifested in his counter histories. When Homestead 42 threatens to relocate the Roths to Danville, Kentucky and the dispute between Sandy and Roth’s parents over the danger to American Jews posed by Lindbergh’s administration, Roth hatches his second scheme. He plans to run away from home disguised as Seldon Wishnow.

Roth compares his adoption of Seldon’s persona to his adventures following Christians, which were motivated by his desire to make himself invulnerable to the threats posed by living in Lindbergh’s anti-Semitic America. Roth wants to extricate him from the historical menace of Lindbergh’s presidency, since the effects of the new administration are felt by Roth exclusively through the increasing dissolution of his family. This dissolution consists of Alvin’s loss of leg, which causes him to become a petty criminal and move away, Sandy’s participation in the Just Folks program which cause a temporary rift with his family, Aunt Evelyn’s marriage to Rabbi Bengelsdorf.

Two of the Roth’s broken familial bonds can be described to the influences of history. Alvin’s rift with his family can be traced to the lost leg he
suffers fighting against Hitler to protect America against fascism. As Coetzee has rightly stated:

Alvin the twenty one year old boy is an orphan in the true sense of the word. He runs off to join the Canadian Army and fight the Nazis. After losing a leg ingloriously, he returns to Newark in a wheelchair and with the medal and rage against all and sundry. He descends into a life of crime; his anti fascist past is dismissed as a foolish escapade. Scarred more deeply than either of the brothers, Alvin is in the book to give a sobering reminder of what real history can achieve in the way of destroying lives. (6)

Roth breaks his relationship with Aunt Evelyn because she and her husband support Lindbergh. Yet they are described as the result of being parentless. Thus, Roth suggests that losing one’s parents is as dangerous as losing one’s country because in both case, one becomes rootless. Philip’s attempt to escape his roots is therefore doomed from the beginning. His Jewish identity cannot be erased from anti-Semitism.

Roth depicts counter – history of America in which Lindbergh becomes president, Jews are subjected to Homestead 42, Walter Winchell’s candidacy sparks riots, the first American pogrom takes place and Winchell is assassinated. Roth then revolves the entire historical plot of the novel in less than thirty pages fiction posing as a collection of excerpts from the Newark Newsreel archive. According to the story they tell, Lindbergh disappears during
a solo flight, Wheeler becomes president and declares martial law; Jewish conspiracy theories are concocted; riots and pogroms break out; Rabbi Bengelsdorf is arrested; Anne Morrow Lindbergh is detained as a mental patient and delivers a speech that dissolves the Wheeler presidency; F.D. Roosevelt is elected president; the Japanese attack Pearl Harbour and the United States enters World War II.

The final chapter titled ‘Perpetual Fear’ is designed to display the fallout of Lindbergh’s presidency and the effects of the Holocaust on American life. The chapter focuses on the tragic fate of Seldon Wishnow. Because of Philip’s intercession, Seldon and his mother have been forced to move to Kentucky by Homestead 42. If the majority of Roth’s novel examines the effects of American history on families and individuals, the plot concerning Seldon connects the American experience to European history. Roth and his Jewish characters are haunted by feelings of guilt, inadequacy and inauthenticity with regards to Holocaust victims and survivors whom they consider to be the only real Jews. Philip’s attempt to become Seldon, the novel’s American representative of European Holocaust survivors, demonstrates the incredibility of the Holocaust from Jewish American history.

Philip represents American Jews who were spared from the Holocaust. His obsession with Seldon represents the perpetual cycle of guilt and fear that haunts American Jews, without which no true history of the United States is complete. Content with depicting the Holocaust’s place in the Jewish American
consciousness, Roth goes a step further. He links the actions of the novel to the entire history of anti-Semitism by evoking the 1913 case of Leo Frank, a Jewish pencil factory manager who was convicted of raping and murdering his employee Mary Phagan. The episode suggests that just as the history of anti-Semitism that fuels *The Plot Against America’s* alternate history goes back centuries, so will its effects linger for centuries to come.

Until *The Plot Against America*, memory of the Nazi genocide played a little role. With the attacks of September 11, 2001, it appears that Holocaust consciousness in American life has entered a new phase. The novel is a competitive attempt to displace historically verifiable American racism against African Americans by overstating the significance of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in United States history. As Parrish says:

*The Plot Against America* draws on the memory of the Holocaust in order to examine his own sensibilities as a Jewish writer. An elaborate historical fantasy and fictional autobiography, Roth reimagines his childhood from the premise that Charles Lindbergh, and not Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was elected in 1940.(139)

One of Roth’s greatest strengths is the ability to craft a provocative ending, and the beautifully paced concluding pages of *The Plot Against America* can stand with his finest work. In 1942, as the country falls into riot, Herman and Sandy Roth make a four–day trip to rescue a former neighbour, a
drive to Kentucky and back of 1,500 pre-Interstate miles, with Sandy reading
the road map by flashlight and his father, “who had never fired a shot in his
life”, sitting at the wheel with a loaded pistol in his lap. The trip “Was the
adventure of Sandy’s lifetime”, and for Herman “His Guadalcanal, I suppose,
his Battle of the Bulge”. According to Gorra:

Those words tell us we have returned to a world in which the
Battle of the Bulge did happen that without cancelling anything,
we have come back to a history we recognize. I would not say
how the country emerges from the Lindbergh years, except to
note that it requires a carefully planned *dues ex machina*. That
narrative machinery is the very opposite of reassuring; and it
roots a national emergency in the family drama of the President
himself. In one of his books, Philip Roth – or is it Zuckerman? –
claims that New Jersey’s biggest successes are the people after
whom the highway rest-stops are named. (22)

Even though Lindbergh’s reign has come to an end and American
history seems to have gotten back on track, the individual lives destroyed by
the fascist administration cannot be repaired. The purpose of Roth’s novel is to
disrupt the reader’s sense of the contents and nature of American history. The
various plots against America describe the perceived Jewish plot against the
nation or the fascist plot that overruns the country. By self – consciously
rewriting the story of America, Roth teaches that despite the victories of the
past, one can never rest secure because definitive history, like all true histories, remains perpetually unwritten and myriad.

The ‘plot’ in the title refers to the story spun out of Roth’s imagination, to the enduring anti-Semitic accusation of how Jews plot against their host societies and to the fascist plot against America that is grounded in history but given a fictional twist in his autobiographical novel. The ‘plot’ can also refer to the plot against America’s Jews and ultimately a plot against the American republic. J.M. Coetzee, opines “The plot of Roth’s title is meant to achieve and at the level of the imaginary, does achieve to expel Jews from America” (2).

The novel is not a book of fear or hope, it is an optimistic book. As the novelist has stated “It imagines something that did not happen … could it have happened? And the answer is, sure, it could have happened, but it didn’t happen, which tells you a lot about the country, this country” (Brown, Interview). It is an American dystopia. The dystopian novel is usually set in the future, a future toward which the present to be tending. George Orwell’s 1984 is a classic dystopian novel. It looks forward to 1984 from the perspective of a 1948 in which the threat of total control seems ominously strong. Roth has to provide two parallel strands, the imaginary Lindbergh years and the real history.

In The Plot Against America Roth uses an uncharacteristic generic mode, the science fiction form of alternate history, to problematize any formal distinctions between fiction and history. In different ways he incorporates a
variety of texts into the fabric of his own fiction, especially through the means of meta fiction and intertextuality. Instances of intertextuality are Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. A unique post modern feature of the narrative structure in this novel is the title of the nine chapters. Each chapter is compartmentalized chronologically by specifying the month and the year in order to point out the time of the incidents. In addition to this, each chapter has got another major title. Roth appears at his best in the following astonishing feat of captions: June 1940 – October 1940, Vote for Lindbergh or Vote for War; November 1940 – June 1941, Loudmouth Jew; June 1941 – December 1941, Following Christians; January 1942 – February 1942, The Stump; March 1942 – June 1942, Never Before; May 1942 – June 1942, Their Country; June 1942 – October 1942, The Winchell Riots; October 1942, Bad Days; October 1942, Perpetual Fear. The post script serves as a true historical backdrop for the entire narration which gives different dimensions to the interpretation of the novel.

The tone of narration adds to the intensity of arguments. The dignity, the formality, and the hint of academic reserve produce two vibrating timbers. The timber of the explosive anger and husky pathos move in parallel lines. As Berman has stated:

> The anger is political, refreshing in its pealing clarity – an anger at fascism and at anti-Semitism. And then the anger gives way to the anxieties of a little boy, overwhelmed by childhood fears,
trying to make sense of events with a knowledge of the world that comes from his stamp collection and from bedtime whispering with his brother and cousin Alvin—a boy who cannot begin to understand why the name “Lindbergh” has begun to turn his household upside down. (3)

One of the Roth’s talents is the ability to spin the decibel dial as he writes dialogues, his little boys emit thin little sounds, and the father in his humbleness emits a slightly louder tone, and cousin Alvin a shriekier one. In this fashion, the tones ascent in volume until, at last, Franklin Roosevelt addresses an anti-Lindbergh rally at Madison Square Garden. Roosevelt sonorously declaims, in syllables so majestic that only dashes will suffice, “We-choose-freedom!”.

In *The Plot Against America*, Roth is a past master in the use of various narrative devices. He has written alternate or speculative histories before, such as in *The Ghost Writer* (1979) or the story ‘I’ve Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting’ or, ‘Looking at Kafka’ (1973), but never outside of the realm of a character’s imaginings. He has taken on very contemporary political issues before, most notably his scathing rendering of Richard Nixon in *Our Gang* (1971) but not without the distancing mask of satire. And perhaps most significantly, *The Plot Against America* is one of the few works of fiction to be narrated or focalized through the perspective of a young boy. Not since the 1950s, he has chosen to write through the eyes of anyone younger than a
college-bound teenager. It is this choice of a younger narrative voice, one unsure of the political levity of his times that gives the novel its poignancy and a sense of historical urgency. Yet in other ways, *The Plot Against America* is representative of what the novelist has been doing over the past fifteen years. Roth once again turns to twentieth-century American history as his narrative backdrop. The success of *The Plot Against America* is twofold, Roth’s willingness to take on and retextualize a heroic American icon, and the perceived relevance of the novel’s themes to its current and socio-political contexts.

The tradition of phantasmagoric picture of United States whose every promise has been turned upside down, is revealed in works such as Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908), Nathaniel West’s *A Cool Million* (1938) and Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935). The classic among these is *It Can’t Happen Here*. The very title of Lewis’s novel entered long ago into the American language, a sardonic phrase, mocking the sweet naïfs who persist in believing that evil dwells anywhere but at home. He uses Philip Roth as his protagonist, a fictional construct who nonetheless shares with the living author an almost identical physical appearance, demeanor, and background. The novel could be called a counter history, a point-counterpoint chronicle that calls to mind, Roth’s post-modern tour de force. One of the things that make *The Plot Against America* so striking is Roth’s handling not only of American history, but of America’s heroic icons, most obviously Charles Lindbergh. This isn’t the kind of alternate history found in much science fiction, where the emphasis
is placed on the political events themselves, where grand characters march across the pages and immovable forces slowly unfold the text of history. In this novel, Roth is concerned with how American subjects, individuals as well as political ideas, have been given iconic status through a variety of texts: newspaper accounts, cinematic newsreels, gossip columns, history textbooks, congressional legislation, and literary narrative. Roth indirectly demonstrates how constructed these identities are by retextualizing American history and, more specifically, the Norman Rockwellesque ideal of American identity as embodied in Charles A. Lindbergh. As in the earlier novels such as *The Ghost Writer* and *The Counterlife*, the thematic emphasis is placed on post-modern constructions of the individual subject. They are realistic novels in the guise of a memoir, functioning within a traditionally science fiction mode, containing biographical chronologies as well as historical documentation. Through its play within these narrative forms, *The Plot Against America* brings together many of the novelistic tendencies found throughout his work. It combines the emphasis on post-modern identity and genre strategies.

By directly linking post-modern assumptions of identity to a profound awareness of historical contingency, Roth has written what the scholar Linda Hutcheon has termed historiographic metafiction, a type of writing that is not only highly aware of itself as constructed narrative, but one that also foregrounds the fictional qualities of historical representation.
As an example of science fiction, this is a better narrative mode than alternate history, a specific form of science fiction writing, to foreground the interplay between historical fact and narrative fabulation. Roth is well-known for his labyrinthine textual play between fact and fiction. At the same time the author once declared in an interview that ‘Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness are my two closest friends’. Such a narrative stance, one that holds out for multiple possibilities of tone and interpretation, brings to mind the kind of ambiguity found in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Henry James, and William Faulkner—an august literary lineage, and one with which Roth is finding himself ever more closely associated. Coetzee has aptly stated:

The Plot is not a book about the incubation of the writer’s soul. Nowhere does Roth invoke the trope of the artist as a wounded being whose wound becomes the source of his art. The only answer that seems to make sense of the Lindbergh scar is that the scar is Jewishness itself, but Jewishness of a particular etiology: Jewishness as an outsider’s idea—and a hostile outsider’s at that—of what it is to be a Jew, forced upon the growing child too early, and by means that, while they might not be extreme in themselves, might easily—the 1940s, the quintessential time of the unforeseen, provide proof aplenty—become extreme. (4)
Through the medium of newsreels and radio programmes, Roth presents a vision of world based on hatred and suspicion, a world of them and us. It turns him from a Jewish American into an American Jew, or in the eyes of his enemies just a Jew in America. In waking him up to “reality” too early, it strips him of his illusions. A Jew, in their view, can expect no home on earth but in the Jewish homeland. The novel does not present the modern age as the scenes or characters do not correspond to the events of our time. Roth has surveyed the modern horizon, gathered the sights and rearranged them in a 1940 kaleidoscope. This novel invites comparison with a lyrical album of the New York street scenes called *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold. Gold chronicles the adventures of a little Mickey Gold, from ages five to twelve as viewed in sorrowful retrospect by his adult self. Gold wanted to write a mythology of Jewish suffering, set for once in America, just as Babel had done in the Ukraine. He wanted to fashion a myth out of the Lower East side and its immigrant sufferings, a myth about social conditions so brutal and degrading that out of sheer misery the tenements themselves grow with pain.

Roth has mythologized his own childhood roaming the Jewish streets of Newark and discovering the humble status of his beloved father, Herman an ordinary man overwhelmed by the powerful social forces and anti-Semitism and by his superior. Roth’s mythology of Jewish suffering reminds us of the statement in *Jews Without Money*:
Recently groups of anti-Semitic demagogues have appeared in this country. They are like Hitler, telling the hungry American people that capitalism is Jewish, and that an attack on the Jews is the best way of restoring prosperity. What folly!... And there are signs that this oldest of swindles will grow in America. (3)

The analysis of the chapter has helped to arrive at the conclusion that behind the facade of melting pot image of America, the immigrant population reel and suffer under the inflicted tortures of racial humiliation. The lives of the Jews are in a constant state of fear, anxiety and insecurity as illustrated through the arguments in this chapter. The framework of postmodernism has helped to pinpoint the unique creative potential of the novelist. To cite some examples – the science fiction form of alternative history, intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, narrative *tour de force* through newspaper accounts, newsreels, gossip columns and history text books.

The next chapter based on the novel *Indignation* aims at analyzing the havocs wrought in the life of an adolescent hero. His story of hardship is based on anger, the evil passion that dominated the protagonist’s life at crucial moments.
Works cited


